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## Connecting Writing to Life: The Effects of Place-Conscious Education on Writing in a First Grade Classroom

Tara P. Dietrich

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CONNECTING WRITING TO LIFE: THE EFFECTS OF PLACE-CONSCIOUS  
EDUCATION ON WRITING IN A FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM

by

Tara P. Dietrich

Bachelor of Arts  
Columbia College, 1998

Master of Arts  
University of Charleston, 2001

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Accepted by:

Suha Tamim, Major Professor

Linda Silvernail, Committee Member

Leigh D'Amico, Committee Member

Jin Liu, Committee Member

Cheryl L. Addy, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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## DEDICATION

Without a doubt, this was the easiest page to write. To my best friend and husband, Chuck. Without your never-ending support, this journey would not have been possible. I cannot thank you enough for always being by my side and helping me get through the moments when I thought that I had nothing left to give. I will be forever grateful.

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Thank you to each student that I have had the privilege of teaching over the past 24 years, I hope that I have touched your lives as much as you have touched mine. You have been an inspiration.

## ABSTRACT

This study describes a problem of practice encountered in a first-grade class in the southeast. Students exhibited negative attitudes during the writing process. Because of this, the quality of their writing suffered. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between attitudes and writing achievement in a first-grade class using place-conscious education. Additionally, this study was also built upon the social constructivism learning theory. To address the problem of practice, the researcher conducted a mixed-methods action research case study to analyze the effects of place-conscious education on students' attitudes and proficiencies on writing. The study was guided by two research questions: How will place-conscious education impact students' writing proficiencies? and What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education? The results of the study indicated that students' attitudes and perceptions regarding writing increased after implementing place-conscious education. Additionally, overall class writing proficiencies also increased post-intervention. An action plan and future research are included based on this action research study.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Recently, after attempting to collect a beginning-of-the-year writing sample from my first-grade students, I witnessed the struggle that many experienced when attempting to complete a basic writing prompt. In fact, many had given up before I had even finished explaining the assignment. My class became disengaged as soon as they heard the word “writing.” A few students started to ask me question after question to avoid writing. Several started to loudly complain. I began to question my approach to writing and wondered to myself, “Where did it go wrong?” It became clear to me that the traditional writing process that I had used for many years to teach young writers was no longer effective. As months went by in the school year, I continued to notice that conventional writing strategies such as utilizing graphic organizers and assigning writing prompts were met with negative attitudes and learned helplessness from my young students. Grammar and mechanics also continued to be a struggle and the bare minimum was thoughtlessly turned in as complete. Through their behaviors and comments, my students communicated to me that they were unmotivated and disconnected during the writing process.

While attempting to collect the writing sample, I realized that my class had developed negative attitudes toward writing. Writing had become a stressful and disconnected experience for them, and they viewed it to be work. My students showed

little interest in writing and actively resisted writing activities by misbehaving, displaying off-task behaviors, and verbalizing their frustrations. As soon as we would begin an independent writing activity, students would say “I’m done” or “I don’t know how to write”. They also struggled to make personal connections with their writing. I realized that I had to figure out a way to create meaningful writing experiences for them. It also inspired me to change my own approach and mindset toward writing. Instead of grumbling about how unmotivated my students seemed to be, and placing blame on them, I began to ask myself what I could do to motivate them. This is when my journey toward writing reform began.

Improving student attitudes and the quality of writing during the writing process is a desire of countless teachers across the country. Studies have revealed several explanations for the lack of motivation and below-average scores on high-stakes tests in students’ writing across the nation (Wright et al., 2020). Many students lack the inspiration and intrinsic motivation to write meaningful essays or stories. The sentences that they do write often contain numerous grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors and little thought is given to the editing and revising processes (2020).

Across the nation, there has been a noticeable decline in attitudes regarding writing and writing proficiencies among students. This deterioration can be linked to changes in academia and changes in society (Carter & Harper, 2013). More specifically, teachers have also reported that they have seen a drop in vocabulary, grammar, writing and analysis (Westin, 2013). Dunn (2011) identified that most struggling writers do not utilize a systematic writing strategy when attempting to manage the writing process. Additionally, Wasik and Hindman (2015) explored the vocabulary gap that exists

between children in poverty and middle-income peers. The National Survey of Student Engagement (2008) concluded that the amount of student writing was positively correlated with their level of engagement. The more time students spent engaged in writing, the more they participated in collaborative learning and richer learning experiences. The intervention that I propose is to integrate place-conscious education into the first-grade writing curriculum.

### **Problem of Practice**

After considering the struggles and frustrations that my students exhibited while attempting to complete writing assignments, my problem of practice was that my students displayed poor attitudes during the writing process. Because of this, the overall quality of their writing was below the grade level standard. I needed to find an approach to teach writing that my students would find engaging and motivating in order to improve their attitudes as well as the quality of their writing.

Writing was an abstract concept that was not relevant or connected to my students' lives. Producing one complete sentence that was punctuated correctly was a daily struggle. Students who were considered average to above-average also demonstrated weak writing skills. I knew that the methodology that I used to teach writing was no longer appropriate. I recognized that I needed to implement an intervention that would improve student attitudes which would increase their chances of becoming successful writers in school and beyond.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This action research study is grounded in two primary theories: social constructivism learning theory and place-conscious education. Place-conscious education is also referred to as place-based education (PBE).

### **Social Constructivism**

Social constructivism is the guiding theoretical framework for this study, which is grounded in constructivism. This theory contributed to the study and to my views on student learning, collaboration, and attitudes. Social constructivism emphasizes motivation, affect, and social influences as components of writing (Hodges, 2017). This theory originated from the work of Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1980) theorized that children learn about the world around them from more knowledgeable others (MKOs). MKO's can be other students, teachers, or authors. Linguistics researchers further developed sociocultural theory to emphasize the significance of language to social and cultural interactions. Previously, writing was considered a solitary activity. The sociocultural theory supports writing as a social and collaborative act. Less sophisticated writers can benefit from more developed writers (Prior, 2006). Strategies that are supported by the social constructivism theory are collaboration, conferencing with mentors, and establishing relevance (Hodges, 2017).

An important principle of social constructivism is the belief in self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is based on social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura (Vanhaltren, 2016). Self-efficacy provides the foundation for motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment (2016). Additional strategies that incorporate social constructivism are modeling writing, providing student choice in prompts, and providing authentic feedback.

There are several common ways that social constructivism can be utilized in the classroom. Students can be arranged in group layouts that encourage social interactions. Guests can also be invited into the classroom so that students can learn from real-life experts. This encourages social interactions between learners and community members. Additionally, students can be exposed to various cultures by inviting parents and community experts into the classroom to collaborate on lessons and activities.

### **Place-Conscious Education**

American educator and philosopher John Dewey established his educational philosophy in the foundations of place-conscious learning more than 120 years ago (Anderson, 2017). Dewey believed that public schools should prepare citizens to serve their communities, care for their land and run their government (2017). Many of Dewey's beliefs are embedded in place-conscious principles. Place-conscious education is a key component in learner-centered school transformation (Vander Ark et al., 2020). Place-conscious education immerses students in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities, and experiences (2020). These experiences are used as a foundation for other subjects across the curriculum such as language arts and social studies. Place-conscious education can be simply defined as “anywhere learning that leverages the power of place to personalized learning.” (Vander Ark et al., 2020, p. 2).

Through place-conscious education, students can construct new knowledge based on the experiences and knowledge that they have within their own world. Place-conscious education focuses on the relationship of culture and nature that shape communities (Brooke, 2003; Gruenewald, 2003; Smith & Sobel, 2010). Place-conscious education makes sense to children because it builds upon their prior experiences and

makes use of the space around them. It effectively teaches by connecting the students' local culture and history to the larger world around them (Ross, 2013). This relates to the problem of practice in this study because it makes classroom lessons meaningful and relevant to students. Because of this connection, attitudes about writing increase within the context of the classroom.

Smith (2002) believes that the students' experiences can be organized around thematic patterns. These thematic patterns were found in children's literature that was incorporated into the classroom. These units were situated in the context of community life and involves active student participation. Students made personal connections within the literature that reached beyond the classroom, their community and to the greater world. By establishing a personal connection to the literature, students became engaged, and their writing proficiency increased. Place-conscious education focused on emphasizing community connections among students. These connections made each thematic unit relevant to students' everyday life.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how place-conscious education would impact students' writing proficiencies and what students' attitudes were regarding writing pre- and post-intervention. This pedagogy supports the use of children's literature to build upon prior experiences, make meaningful and relevant connections to the community, and connect to local and world culture. Children's literature was incorporated into five thematic units that incorporated community, cultural studies, nature studies, real world problem solving, internship and entrepreneurial opportunities (Szabo & Golden, 2003). Relevant field experiences were also integrated into the place-



conscious education curriculum. One of the most consistent findings in educational research shows that the more time students are actively engaged during instruction, the more they will learn (Gettinger & Ball, 2007).

Attitude can be described as a person's evaluation of an entity and the sum of their beliefs (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). In psychology, attitude can refer to a set of emotions, beliefs and behavior toward a particular object, person, thing, or event (Cherry, 2022). For the purpose of this study, attitude means the emotions and behavior observed when students participated in writing using place-conscious education as the framework.

### **Research Questions**

This action research study will ask the following questions:

RQ1. How will place-conscious education impact students' writing proficiencies?

RQ2. What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education?

### **Researcher Positionality**

According to Herr and Anderson (2015), positionality means asking the question, "Who am I in relation to my participants and my setting?" (p. 37). In this study, I was the teacher who conducted the research in my own classroom. My positionality was that of an insider. I was the researcher studying my own self and practice. I enlisted my students as participants in the study. Since I was in a position of authority over participants, I was cautious that this did not impact how my students behaved when I was collecting data. I did not want students to answer or act a certain way because they were trying to answer "correctly."

I am a White female who grew up in the Mid-Atlantic region on the east coast of the United States. I began my career as an elementary teacher in 1998. I taught for four years in a small, private Christian school which was in a small town in the southeast. In 2002, I began teaching in a rural Title I public school. Most of the students, 99%, were African Americans living in poverty. Many of the students were considered at-risk and read below grade-level. I taught third grade at that school for nine years. I resided in the school community for five years. My teaching experiences at this school taught me the value of getting to know my students and building meaningful relationships. I took the time to get to know their interests and problems and learn more about their home life. Through this experience, I challenged myself to meet the needs of every student through differentiating instruction. Forming relationships and building a sense of community was especially important to do with students living in poverty and/or broken homes. After learning more about my students, I was able to incorporate some of their interests and knowledge into personalized lessons. Because of relocating, I transferred to another elementary school within the same district. This school was also classified as Title I, but the poverty level was not as widespread as in my former school. Approximately 60% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The student population was also more diverse with the ethnicity being 60% African American, 30% white and 10% Asian. The school pulled from several neighborhoods and was located in a suburb of a large southeastern city.

Currently, I teach first grade in a rural elementary school located within 25 miles of a major city in the southeast. Many of the students are from a low socioeconomic

background. The student population is 85% White, 10 % Hispanic and 5% African American. I teach all subjects in a self-contained class.

Because of my extensive experience teaching in Title I schools, I understand the importance of mastering proficient writing skills. Being able to effectively communicate when writing affords students many opportunities regardless of the path that they choose after high school.

### **Methodology**

An action research mixed-methods approach was used in this study. The quantitative data used descriptive statistics to help determine the impact of the intervention on writing proficiency. The qualitative data helped me to understand how students interpret their past writing experiences and the meaning that they attribute to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Action Research**

The purpose of this study was to explore how place-conscious education would impact students' writing proficiencies and what students' attitudes were regarding writing pre- and post-intervention. Children's literature was used to inspire students by forming connections to the local community. Action research was appropriate for this study because it is a personal research method, and it is intended to improve practice within the classroom (Efron & Ravid, 2013). By using action research, this study had a significant impact on my day-to-day teaching practices in a timely manner. The design of the action research model makes it ideal to implement new findings and test for effectiveness. Action research plays an important role in the self-analysis of teaching methods and procedures (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

One unique aspect of action research is the relationship that the researcher has to their setting and the participants in the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Action research enables teachers to become the researcher and study their own practices within their classroom. The teacher seeks to find solutions to problems or events that they self-identify. According to Efron and Ravid (2013), the researcher's goal is to improve their practice, foster their professional growth by understanding their students, solve problems and/or develop new skills. Action research offers a local (personal) prospective that other research methods cannot provide (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

### **Research Design**

This case study utilized a mixed methods data collection approach. Students engaged in place-conscious education to help strengthen writing proficiencies and attitudes during the writing process. This study was grounded in the ideology of social constructivism.

The children's literature chosen was based on Gregory Smith's (2002) five thematic patterns that engage in place-conscious education. Place-conscious education helps children make connections between school and their lives so that they feel like valued community members. Once a text-to-self connection is established, students were more likely to become intrinsically motivated. The books were used to engage students in conversation and make personal connections to the literature.

### **Data Collection**

Quantitative data were collected using an attitude survey and narrative writing samples. The attitude survey was administered at the beginning of the six-week intervention period and again at the conclusion of the intervention. The survey was

created to measure the participants' attitudes regarding writing. A three-point Likert scale was used for scoring. Students were able to choose from three answer choices for each question. Emojis were utilized for a pictorial representation to help students understand the three ratings. The emojis used were: 😊, 😐, and 😞. Pre and post-writing samples were collected to gather additional quantitative data. They were scored using the district-adopted first-grade narrative writing rubric. The writing rubric had 10 categories with scores ranging from one to four in each category. A score of four indicated that the participants' thoughts and ideas were above grade level, and a score of one indicated that ideas and thoughts were below grade level.

Qualitative data were collected through journaling and semi-structured interviews. Observations were recorded daily in a researcher's journal to document dialogue, observations, and behaviors during and after writing lessons. Semi-structured interviews consisted of seven open-ended questions based on the attitude survey. I used purposive sampling to form a smaller group of students to participate in the interview. Out of the 19 students in my class, I chose five to interview. These five students were selected due to their reluctance to participate in writing activities, pre-intervention writing samples, and variations in gender and race. The students interviewed scored below grade level on the pre-intervention writing samples.

The data were used to determine how place-conscious education impacted students' writing proficiencies and what student attitudes were regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education. The intervention occurred for 30-40 minutes, over a six-week period.

## **Setting and Participants**

This action research study took place in a rural Title I elementary school that serves kindergarten through fifth grade. Approximately 550 students attend the school. The school is located 25 miles outside of a large city in the southeastern part of the United States. The participants in the study were members of a heterogeneously grouped first-grade class. There were 19 participants in the study: two African American females, nine White males, six White females, and one Hispanic male, and one Hispanic female. The participants were six and seven years old. English was the primary language for 17 students, and Spanish was the primary language for two students. They were both fluent English speakers.

## **Data Analysis**

RQ1 (*How will place-conscious education impact students' writing proficiencies?*) will be aligned to the writing samples collected. Research question RQ2 (*What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education?*) will be aligned to the writing attitude survey, semi-structured interviews, and observations recorded in the researcher's journal.

The writing samples and writing attitude survey were used to collective quantitative data, and the semi-structured interviews and the researcher's journal were used to collect qualitative data. Using a variety of data collection methods enables the researcher to construct a layered and contextual understanding of topics (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

The writing samples were scored using the first-grade narrative writing rubric and the writing attitude survey was analyzed using a three-point Likert scale. For the purpose

of this study, writing proficiency is defined as the degree to which you can perform a writing skill. A rating scale of 1-4 was used to rate each category on the rubric. A score of 1 indicated below-grade level; 2 indicated approaching grade level; 3 indicated on-grade level, and 4 indicated above-grade level proficiencies. The semi-structured interviews were coded for reoccurring themes, patterns, and common ideas. The coding focused on patterns or themes that were related to the purpose of the study and research questions. The pre- and post-intervention data were compared to each other to determine the change in student attitudes and proficiencies after the six-week place-conscious education unit.

### **Significance of Study**

This study was significant because students are evaluated using high-stakes testing, and their ability to write and communicate in a formal way is critical to academic success. Not only do students need to acquire basic writing skills to be successful in school, but they also need to be proficient writers when they enter the job field. They will need to be able to accurately fill out job applications, answer emails and correspond with co-workers with minimal errors. Being able to express oneself through writing is a vital skill that students will use throughout their school career and later in life when they get into the “real world”. The ability to effectively communicate through writing establishes credibility in school and beyond.

Place-conscious education brings the curriculum to life for students. One of the guiding values of place-conscious education is that it encourages authentic learning (Anderson, 2017). Children learn best when participating in authentic learning experiences that are closely tied to their own experiences and community. Place-

conscious education can improve student achievement and enhance student connections to the community. One way to keep students engaged in school and to become a vested partner in their own learning is to make education more relevant to their personal experiences. Place-conscious education can facilitate this connection.

### **Limitations of Study**

An important component of this study was to determine the attitudes that students have when they are engaged in the writing process. There are challenges when trying to obtain data that measures intrinsic attitudes from first-grade students because of their young age. Also, young students tend to answer questions to please the interviewer. Students were encouraged to answer the questions according to how they feel, not how they think I wanted them to answer. They were also reminded that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions.

Additionally, Smith (2002) recommended a list of 40 books to assist in teaching the five thematic units of place-based curriculum. It would cost approximately \$343.00 to purchase the books recommended on the list. The upfront cost of purchasing the books may be unrealistic for some. If purchasing the entire list of books is not feasible, many of the titles can be found in the school and public libraries and online in digital format. Many of the books are also available on the EPIC reading site. Teachers may also wish to establish a Donors Choose project to assist in funding this intervention.

The impact of Covid-19 has been felt around the world. It still had a major impact on educational practices two years after the initial outbreak. A key component of place-conscious education is getting students actively involved in their communities. Covid-19 has limited the amount of field experiences that students can participate in



because of restrictions and social distancing. It also restricted visitors coming into the school. To compensate for this, students explored micro-communities within their school and participated in virtual field experiences.

Being the only adult in the classroom also caused limitations to the study. At times, I was not able to concentrate on taking notes and observing behaviors and recording conversations because students would require my attention. It would be beneficial to the study to have two adults in the room so that I could concentrate on observations and taking notes. I would often take notes directly after class.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized over five chapters. Chapter one introduces the problem of practice, provides an overview of the guiding research and theoretical framework, and provides a glossary of terms used throughout the study. Chapter two includes the literature review which provides a foundation of knowledge for the research topic and identifies the possible need for additional research. Chapter three contains the methodology and research design of the study. Chapter four includes the data and data analysis. Chapter five includes an analysis of the findings from the study. Recommendations and implications are also discussed.

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Child-centered approach.** The beginnings of constructivist pedagogy can be traced back to Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788).

**Constructivist learning theory.** A theory that believes that understanding is built through our past experiences which are place-bound (Szabo & Golden, 2016).

**Five-step writing process.** This is a traditional approach to writing. The writing process is broken down into five systematic steps: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.

**More knowledgeable others (MKO).** This refers to a person who is more knowledgeable or is working at a higher level than the learner in respect to a particular concept and is a component of Vygotsky's (1896-1934) sociocultural theory.

**Place-conscious education (AKA: Place-based education).** An educational framework that focuses on the relationship between culture (family, local culture, and local history) and nature that shape communities. It builds upon prior experiences and makes use of the spaces around students. (Szabo & Golden, 2016)

**Social Constructivism.** A theory and process that emphasizes motivation, affect, and social influences as factors of writing (Hodges, 2017). This theory originated from the work of Vygotsky (2017).

**Student engagement.** The degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students demonstrate when they are learning or being taught. (Glossary and Great Schools Partnership, 2016).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two begins by reviewing the problem of practice which provides the purpose for this study. It also discusses the theoretical framework which establishes a thorough knowledge of relevant literature related to the intervention and the problem of practice. The historical perspectives presented provide a context for the significance of the problem of practice.

The purpose of this study was to explore how place-conscious education would impact students' writing proficiencies and what students' attitudes were regarding writing pre- and post-intervention. Teachers must strive to find a way for students to feel valued and connected to their writing experiences within the classroom. Often, there is an assumption made by teachers that students should enter the classroom with a positive attitude and excited to write. If students do not exhibit the expected behavior, they are often labeled as unmotivated, or having a poor attitude. When teachers blame students for being unmotivated, they are placing the deficit and responsibility onto the students. Seth Godin (2016), American entrepreneur, author, and public speaker states:

If you want people to become passionate, engaged in a field, transformed by an experience -- you don't test or lecture them and you don't force them. Instead, you create an environment where willing and caring individuals can find an experience that changes them.

Teachers should create an environment within the classroom in which students are motivated, inspired and personally connected to the writing process.

This study focuses on teaching writing using thematic literature units which will engage students in place-conscious education. Many students lack the inspiration and desire to generate authentic written compositions. Because of this, teachers must seek out a way to create authentic writing experiences for students. Utilizing thematic literature units concentrated on place-conscious education allows teachers to connect classrooms to the lives of their students (Brooke, 2003). Place-conscious education allows students the opportunity to connect their unique experiences to their written compositions at school.

These personal relationships help children make genuine connections between school and their lives. The community-family-school connection confirms to students that their family and cultures are valued and an important part of their unique story (Vander Ark et al., 2020). After repeatedly witnessing the struggles and frustrations that my students experienced when attempting to write stories in class, it became apparent that my problem of practice was that my students exhibited negative attitudes when completing writing assignments. As an effect of their attitudes regarding writing, the overall quality of their writing was weak. I needed to find a way for students to make personal connections to what they were writing about so that their attitudes and quality of writing would improve.

This study was designed with the purpose of building positive attitudes for writing by fostering a connection between students' unique experiences using place-conscious education. It was also designed with the goal of implementing place-conscious education

to meet the needs of diverse learners so that they would become engaged in the writing process.

Five thematic literature units were used to engage students in place-conscious education curriculum (Smith, 2002). The five units were: cultural studies, nature studies, real-world problem solving, internship and entrepreneurial opportunities, and induction into the community process (Szabo & Golden, 2016). The themes emphasized community and cultural experiences and encouraged student engagement. The thematic patterns helped students connect individual communities, cultures, and families to the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

This action research study seeks to answer the following questions:

RQ1. How will place-conscious education impact students' writing proficiencies?

RQ2. What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education?

### **Chapter Organization**

The organization of chapter two begins with the theoretical framework that grounded the problem of practice and intervention. Learning and curriculum theories that were aligned to the research problem were also reviewed. The historical perspectives that contextualize the problem of practice are described. The historical theories that underscore the problem of practice and intervention are recognized. Following the historical perspectives, related research that compared different points of view and different research outcomes are considered. Chapter two ends with a summary of the literature reviewed.

## **Literature Review Methodology**

When conducting the literature review for this study, I used the university's library which was available online. From the library, I accessed the database ERIC (ProQuest) to perform searches. I uploaded articles that were relevant to my study to the database Mendeley Reference Manager. I also reviewed several dissertations that concentrated on writing, attitudes, engagement, and children's literature. Additionally, I studied six textbooks that have been written about place-conscious education. The books covered such topics as connecting classrooms and communities, teaching using the local, bringing school to life and exceeding standards through local investigations.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This action research study is grounded in two primary theories: social constructivism learning theory and place-conscious education. The two theories are discussed in further detail below.

The social constructivism learning theory emphasizes knowledge construction rather than the transmission and recording of information from others (Applefield, et al., 2016). Learners make sense of new learning experiences by relating them to what they already know or have experienced. New learning is built upon past experiences. The social constructivism learning theory emphasizes the active construction of knowledge through social and cultural relationships (Fernando & Marikar, 2017). Place-conscious education is intended for students to learn about their immediate surroundings by "capitalizing on their lived experiences" (Knapp, 2015, p. 278). It provides opportunities for teachers to consider those students who may feel irrelevant to the world around them and recognize their value in the world (2015). While partaking and contributing to the

learning opportunities that are all around them, students will recognize and share the value of their neighborhoods, community, school, families, and cultures with others. Social constructivism linked with place-conscious education will assist marginalized students to feel empowered and valued in the school setting. When students feel appreciated and respected as part of the class community, attitudes improve.

### **Social Constructivism Learning Theory**

The social constructivism learning theory emerged as a predominant theory in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the behaviorist cognitivists learning theories (Mills, 2007). Jean Piaget (1977) and Lev Vygotsky (1978) are recognized as the most influential developmental psychologists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their earlier studies on cognitive development laid the foundation for the constructivist learning theory (Golder, 2018). Social constructivism focuses on the social aspects of learning and concentrates on community building and relationships. Constructivists view learning as a process, not a product (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2000).

Social constructivism is relevant to the problem of practice in this study because it is a child-centered approach to learning that builds upon prior knowledge, is meaningful and relevant, and connects the students' culture to the larger world (Mills, 2007). Activating prior knowledge impacts the way that students make meaning of instruction. One of the goals of the student-centered classroom is to recognize the prior knowledge, beliefs, and skills that students bring to the classroom. These elements help increase positive attitudes and promote engagement and motivation within the students (Al-Hendawi, 2012).

Social constructivism emphasizes motivation, attitudes, affect, and social influences as components of learning (Hodges, 2017). This theory also highlights the importance of the social aspect on learning and recognizes that the teacher plays an important role as the facilitator of students' learning. Teachers who embrace social constructivism will incorporate active and engaged learning practices into the curriculum such as experiential learning, inquiry based, problem-based learning, and peer collaboration (Golder, 2018).

Social constructivism has two major principles. The first principle states that cognitive development is limited within a certain age range. The second principle maintains that to develop a person's cognitive ability fully, social interaction is required. Within those principles, Vygotsky incorporated three themes: social interaction, the more knowledgeable other (MKO), and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Beck & Condy, 2017).

Social constructivism promotes social interaction as a key factor in cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) believed that cognitive and human development is a result of the interaction between the person and society. He thought that learning takes place through the social interactions between teachers and peers in the classroom. These social interactions should be facilitated by the teacher. Strategies that incorporate social interactions are modeling, providing student choice, and providing authentic feedback (Prior, 2006). Additionally, students are arranged in group layouts that encourage social connections. Guest speakers are invited into the classroom so that students learn from real-life experts. This encourages social interactions between learners and experts. To



encourage cultural awareness, parents should also be invited into the classroom to collaborate on activities and share aspects of their culture and experiences (Mills, 2007).

Children learn about the world around them from more knowledgeable others (MKOs) (Vygotsky, 1980). MKO's can be other students, teachers, or authors. Social constructivism supports writing as a social and collaborative activity.

The ZPD occurs when the MKO provide the student with just the right amount of guidance and support (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD is when a more knowledgeable student can assist other students by guiding them through a task. The task, which is slightly above their ability level, can be successfully completed with the help from the MKO. Ideally, the student should not be able to complete the task or activity independently or depend too much on the MKO. There should be a balance between the task being too easy or too hard when completed independently.

### **Place-Conscious Education**

Building on the social constructivism learning theory that students learn best by constructing their own knowledge and making connections, place-conscious education gives students the opportunity to insert their culture and experiences into the curriculum (Anderson, 2017). Place-conscious education is an old concept with a revised label. It takes advantage of learning opportunities that are local, and students are afforded opportunities to learn as much as possible outside of the classroom walls. Students make sense of place by making meaningful connections to the areas around them (Knapp, 2005). When students have a sense of their place in the world, they can then learn about concepts and places which are more abstract and farther away (Vandor Ark et al., 2020).

Because students are learning in an environment that is relevant to their personal stories, learning becomes meaningful and relevant.

When implementing place-conscious education, teachers move the focus away from themselves and their own perceptions and onto the perspectives of students. Students are provided opportunities to connect and relate to their local communities. These personal connections help students unite with their community, environment, and each other (Anderson, 2017). Place-conscious education also naturally incorporates diverse perspectives into the curriculum.

The objective of place-conscious education is to help raise citizens who understand the connections between community and the people who live, work, and play within the community (Anderson, 2017). Place-conscious education seeks to extend the classroom out into the community. The interdisciplinary curriculum revolves around five themes which are: environment, culture, community, economics, and governance (Anderson, 2017).

At the heart of place-conscious education are authentic investigations within the local community (Demarest, 2015). Within the community, partnerships are developed among locals, community organizations, businesses, teachers, and students. Local questions drive the curriculum and various educational principles such as community as the classroom, learner-centered, inquiry based, local to global, design thinking and interdisciplinary curriculum lead to meaningful student outcomes. Place-conscious education naturally encourages questioning, thought-provoking responses, and higher-level thinking (Vandor Ark et al., 2020). Teachers who engage their students in place-conscious education are consistently seeking ways to creatively solve local challenges.

The structure of local investigations is typically linked to inquiry-based and exploratory theories. Time is scheduled for students to discover, experiment, and investigate (Demarest, 2015). The teacher serves as coach and facilitator. When students work together to solve problems in the community, they collectively create a new image of the neighborhood and schools. Local learning gives students the opportunities to “learn history better, understand poetry, conduct scientific inquiry, and express themselves through artistic mediums, personal expression, and civic engagement” (Demarest, 2015, p. 18). When students participate in place-conscious education, they are personally connected to the questions and assignments and are engaged in the problems and the solutions (Smith & Sobel, 2010). Students are intellectually challenged and have meaningful interactions with familiar people and relevant places.

Students can construct new knowledge based on the experiences and knowledge that they have within their own world. Place-conscious education focuses on the relationship of culture and nature that shape communities (Brooke, 2003; Gruenewald, 2003; Smith & Sobel, 2010). Place-conscious education makes sense to children because it builds upon their prior experiences and makes use of the space around them. It effectively teaches by connecting the students’ local culture and history to the larger world around them (Ross, 2013). This relates to the problem of practice in this study because it makes classroom writing assignments authentic, meaningful, and relevant to the student. Because of this connection, attitudes increase within the context of the classroom.

Smith (2002) believes that student experiences can be organized around five thematic patterns that currently exist in educational settings. The five thematic units are:

cultural studies, nature studies, real world problem solving, internship and entrepreneurial opportunities, and induction in the community process. The units are situated in the context of the community life and involve active student engagement. Students make personal connections within the literature that reaches beyond the classroom and into the community.

Through the implementation of place-conscious education, personal connections are established using children's literature and participating in authentic experiences. By establishing these connections, students become more engaged in the writing process and their attitudes increase.

One of the interesting features of place-conscious education is that it can interconnect societal issues and topics. Becoming active members of the community lends itself to social justice. Social justice issues can be examined, discussed, and addressed in many of the units. Place-conscious education has the unique ability to interconnect some of the world's most complex issues such as systems, cycles, changes over time and community (Demarest, 2015).

Issues of the environment, social justice, and the economy are grounded in place-conscious education. When exploring social justice in the local community, students are encouraged to build background knowledge before heading out into the community to think about who benefits and who does not in certain situations. Students can also examine injustices in history, stories, and their own lives to appreciate what they are looking for in the local community (Demarest, 2015).

Learning from our mistakes in history allows us to avoid similar injustices in the future. Incorporating community members into schools is essential to address social

justice issues (Vandor Ark et al., 2020). When students examine what is happening in their own community on a closer level, they begin to problem solve to figure out ways to help those in need within their community. When community engagement is activated, local problem solving begins to take place. Throughout the place-conscious education intervention, differences are embraced and celebrated. Place-conscious education not only improves academic achievement through increased engagement and the building of positive attitudes, but it also has the potential to improve social justice issues (Vandor Ark et al., 2020).

### **Historical Perspectives**

The methods that have been used to teach writing in American schools has been shaped by numerous external influences. Social and demographic changes, research, and teacher movements have all played a part in the writing pedagogy that has influenced writing curriculum in America (Yancey, 2009). Up until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, composition writing was only taught in high school (2009). Elementary schools taught letter formation, spelling, and handwriting. In 1873, Harvard University began the trend of requiring a writing sample as part of the admissions process (Richardson, 2008, as cited in Yancy, 2009). Soon other colleges followed. Because of this, high schools began to focus writing instruction on preparing students to fulfill this new college entrance writing requirement.

Entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century, writing continued to hold a place in the secondary curriculum. In 1966, the Dartmouth conference brought American and British English specialists together (Sublette, 1973). Following this conference, both countries invested in research studies focusing on writing. Through these studies, educators found that

students needed to be supported through the writing process, and writing should be taught at the elementary level. Sublette (1973) believed that learning to write helped students learn to read and learning to read helped students learn to write.

In 1974, the National Writing Project began the first writing professional development movement in the United States (Whitney & Friedrich, 2013). The National Writing Project continues to impact writing curriculum, pedagogy and instruction in the United States as well as abroad.

By the 1980's, process-oriented instructional approaches such as the five-step writing process introduced by Donald Graves became popular (Wyse, 2019). The *Writing to Learn* and *Writing Across the Curriculum* movements have used writing as a tool for learning in all fields of study. Unfortunately, standardized writing tests indicated that minority students were scoring lower on those tests. George Hillocks's (1986) meta-analysis of these studies revealed that the strategies leading to the most significant gains in student writing provided students with clear and specific objectives, and opportunities to work together to solve writing challenges.

Since the launch of No Child Left Behind, the emphasis on high-stakes testing has greatly influenced the way that writing is taught (Brown et al., 2011). To ensure high test scores and high marks on school report cards, teachers have moved away from writing instruction that students find interesting and engaging (Brown et al., 2011). These proven methods include student choice, publishing, and authentic assessments. Policy and high-stakes testing have resulted in sterile writing instruction that has caused students to develop negative attitudes toward writing.

## Related Research

The writing process is complex. It can be overwhelming to any student; especially those who may already feel disengaged in school. Because of this, many students dislike writing. This dislike often shows itself in negative attitudes in the classroom. Multiple skills come into play when we ask students to write such as handwriting, spelling, grammar rules, activation of prior knowledge, remembering genre conventions, knowing their audience, understanding the purpose, and organizing ideas (Grunke, 2019). Many students view writing as one of the most demanding activities that they are required to complete throughout the day. Because this, many students have negative attitudes when required to write in school.

Students often lack the motivation and engagement required to complete complex writing tasks. In fact, the motivational piece is the component most often missing from writing intervention programs (Grunke, 2018). Motivating students to *want* to write is not a feat easily accomplished. Students must become passionate about the topic that they are writing about. This recipe for intrinsic motivation is something that all teachers are searching for. How do we inspire our students to *want* to put pencil to paper and write? How do we fill them with the *desire* to want to write multiple sentences to form a paragraph in the age of technology, emojis and acronyms?

As part of the National Writing Project's three-year Rural Voices, Country Schools program, research on writing using place-conscious education was gathered in the book Rural Voices (2003). The classroom stories and research that was included in the book were gathered between 1997-2000. The theme of the book was that teachers are

local educational experts who are able to design effective local curricula. The project connected student's literacy to the world around them.

One teacher who participated in the three-year study, wanted students to have the opportunity to think, write, and interview others to help them understand their sense of place. Matt, a student who was profiled in the study, had a migratory view of place- he wanted to move away as soon as he was able to. At the beginning of the study, he did not understand the importance of getting to know his place because he did not think that he needed to be connected to it since he would be leaving after high school. By the end of the school year, and the end of the place-conscious study, he had a deep connection to his sense of place because of the writing assignments that were attached to his place. Matt wrote about his family, favorite places, and the local gas station.

His teacher connected her students to their place by creating writing themes throughout the year. Themes used throughout the project were Family and Heritage, Town and Community, and Connecting with Future Generations (Brooke, 2003). At the completion of the place-conscious writing project, students realized that their writing had a profound impact on them. They recognized and valued their family heritages, understood the character of their local town and community, and saw themselves as contributing members of rural Nebraska.

In 1995, the State Education and Environment Roundtable (SEER) focused on researching the academic benefits of an environmental based education for grades K-12. In 1998, SEER published its findings on the academic and behavioral benefits of using the environment as a context for learning. A report, *Closing the Achievement Gap: Using*



*the Environment as an Integrating Context (EIC Model)*, was completed in collaboration with SEER's original 12-member State Departments of Education (SEER, 1998).

The study examined 40 schools that had been using the environment to teach science, history, social studies, English/language arts and math. Data were collected during site visits, teacher surveys, and interviews of students, teachers, and administrators. The results included in the *Closing the Achievement Gap* (SEER, 1998) report concluded that EIC students scored higher on standardized tests in all areas. Discipline and classroom management problems were reduced and there was a measurable increase in student engagement and motivation for learning and an increase in pride and ownership in student accomplishments (SEER, 1998).

Rahmat's (2014) case study on the social constructivism learning theory using movies and collaborative writing was applied in an English Second Language (ESL) classroom. The social constructivism learning theory used authentic tasks which were meaningful to students as opposed to irrelevant writing tasks which students could not relate to. In this case study, movies were shown to motivate and excite students to write. The collaborative writing process was used to enhance students' writing and to lower anxiety. The study used Vygotsky's (1980) three major themes of learning in social contexts. The first theme, social interaction, states that social learning precedes development. Vygotsky believed that a child must first learn socially, and then learn individually. The second theme, more knowledgeable other (MKO) believes that a person learns from another person who has a higher ability level. The third theme, Zone of Proximal Development states that learning occurs in this zone. This is in between the student's ability to work with guidance and their ability to work independently.

Collaboration within the classroom supports student development because they are working within the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1980). When students are partnered with a more knowledgeable student, they always managed to complete the task at hand successfully (Nurfaidah, 2018). Ammar and Hassan's (2018) study indicated that collaborative dialogue benefits both learners- high and low. Teachers should take on the role as facilitator and assist students by providing appropriate scaffolding techniques. Social interactions benefited all parties while learning to write while collaborating with a partner.

Vygotsky's social constructivism learning theory is rooted in the belief that the process of teaching and learning to write should take place within a social context. Scaffolding in teaching to write and peer collaboration are grounded in his theory. Through the social constructivism learning context, teachers facilitate the learning of others by helping them reflect upon their past experiences. Additionally, Vygotsky's theory is learner driven as opposed to teacher driven. Students decide what they want to further investigate.

Brown et al. (2011) investigated a National Writing Project Young Writer's Camp for students in grades four through twelve. This study analyzed how campers' initial attitudes and writing experiences changed over the course of the two-week camp. Pre- and post-camp surveys were used to compare students' attitudes towards writing. The findings of this study indicated that teachers have moved away from foundations of writing instruction which showed a positive effect on the quality of student writing. Because of this change, students had negative attitudes towards writing.

Interestingly, this study recognized that children are born with the desire to write. Children demonstrate this desire by writing on walls, sidewalks, and coloring books (Graves, 1983, as cited in Brown et al., 2011). Young children want to write. However, the way that writing is taught in schools, stifles their identity and creativity. Self-expression and creativity are often suppressed. In fact, the lack of engagement and motivation causes attitudes towards writing to generally worsen as students move grade to grade (Brown et al., 2011).

The two-week writing camp focused on developing student engagement with writing. The writing tasks were authentic, and each student published a piece of writing by the end of the camp (Brown et al., 2011). The two-week camp recognized that writing needs to be purposeful and fun. When these components are present, students become engaged in the writing process.

To measure student attitudes, pre- and post- attitude test was designed to measure the change in campers' attitudes because of the camp. Ten statements were chosen from the Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) (Brown et al., 2011). The study was administered on the first day and the last day of camp to all campers. Participants selected a response based on a five-point Likert scale. The results from the study indicated a positive change in attitude when students were surveyed at the end of the camp.

Bulut (2017) noted that there are several variables that can influence writing achievement. These include cognitive, affective, or physical factors. However, the most important affective factors affecting writing achievement are attitude and self-efficacy. Bulut (2017) studied the effects of writing attitude and self-efficacy beliefs on the

achievement of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. The study noted that there was a positive and high correlation between writing attitude and writing self-efficacy. It also found that there was a positive and high correlation between writing self-efficacy and summary writing. The study concluded that while there are several factors that can contribute to writing achievement, attitude and self-efficacy directly and significantly influence writing.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature and research related to social constructivism learning theory and place-conscious education which grounds the problem of practice of this study. This chapter also contextualized topics on writing and attitudes within a historical framework. Relevant research and literature were examined that related to the problem of practice. Social constructivism, including the social development theory and place-conscious education were examined and aligned with the theoretical framework of the study. The two theories have contributed to the study and to the researcher's pedagogy on student writing proficiencies and attitudes.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Chapter two provided a review of the literature and the theoretical framework that supports this action research study. Chapter three describes the research methodology used to answer the two research questions relating to the writing intervention that took place over a six-week period in a first-grade classroom.

This action research study was developed based on my personal experiences teaching writing in an elementary classroom and prior research studies. Social constructivism is the foundational theory guiding this study. From this theory, a place-conscious education intervention was developed to improve student attitudes and writing proficiencies, believing in the guiding principle that knowledge is constructed through students' past experiences (Szabo & Golden, 2016).

#### **Problem of Practice**

Students expressed negative attitudes during the writing process. As a result, the overall quality of their writing suffered. Writing samples collected from my first-grade class suggested that students lacked the inspiration and desire to write meaningful, well-constructed sentences. Students were often disengaged from the writing process and put forth little effort when completing writing assignments. Teacher observations and benchmark data from the 2021-22 school year determined that many first-grade students exhibited weak writing skills and were becoming increasingly disengaged from the

writing process. After the 2021 fall writing samples were collected, 80% of students were unable to construct a sentence without major content errors that interfered with the meaning. The results from the preliminary writing sample indicated that students lacked the basic writing skills required to meet the grade level standard for the first grade. Students were entering first grade as unmotivated writers and because of this, they were writing below the grade level standard. Current writing programs and strategies being utilized to teach writing were not meeting the needs of first-grade students.

The purpose of this mixed methods, action research study was to determine if implementing place-conscious education would positively impact student attitudes as well as increase writing proficiencies.-This study will examine the following questions:

RQ1. How will place-conscious education impact students' writing proficiencies?

RQ2. What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education?

### **Research Design**

Action research is a personal research method and is intended to improve practice within the classroom (Mills, 2018). By using action research, this study had a significant impact on day-to-day teaching practices in a timely manner. Action research plays an important role in the self-reflection of teaching methods and procedures. A result of utilizing action research is that it allows teachers to increase the predictability of what transpires in their classroom (Mills, 2018). Action research also helps teachers focus on student learning. Action research findings are meaningful to teachers because they have self-identified focus areas within their own classroom, and it allows the opportunity to embrace a problem-solving philosophy (Mills, 2018). Additionally, action research

empowers teachers in several ways. First, it helps teachers make informed decisions about their practice. It can also facilitate linking prior knowledge to new knowledge. Teachers learn from classroom experiences and asks questions to systematically find answers (Mills, 2018), The cyclical design of the action research model makes it ideal to implement new findings and test for effectiveness.

A mixed methods approach was utilized when this study was conducted. The mixed methods design analyzed qualitative and quantitative data (Creamer, 2018). In combination, the data collected from the mixed methods study provided a better understanding of the research problem. This study focused on the analysis of my first-grade class. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed from attitude surveys, writing samples, semi-structured interviews and observations recorded in my researcher's journal. Validity was enhanced using a mixed methods approach through triangulation (Creamer, 2018). Triangulation used multiple types of data points and was the foundational construct of this mixed methods research study (Creamer, 2018).

### **Setting**

The public elementary school where the research study took place is situated in a large school district which serves 27,300 students. There are 17 elementary schools within the school district. The elementary school is a rural Title I school that serves kindergarten through fifth grade. Approximately 550 students attend the school. The demographics of the student population are 70% Caucasian, 16% Hispanic, 7% African American.

The elementary school is located 22 miles outside of a large city in the southeastern part of the United States. The major industries in the area include the

military, state government and a large university. The research study took place in a self-contained, heterogeneously grouped first-grade class. It was conducted over a six-week period. Students received the intervention during school hours for a 30-40-minute period each day. The intervention was integrated into the science and social studies instructional block.

### **Sample**

Because the goal of the study was to examine the effects of place-conscious education on first-grade students' writing attitudes and proficiencies, all students in my homeroom were included in the study, totaling 19: nine White males, four White females, four Hispanic females and two African American females. The ages of the participants were six and seven years old. Seventeen students spoke English as their first language, and two students spoke English as their second language. Two students spoke Spanish as their first language at home. Both students were fluent English speakers. Five students received speech services for 60 minutes per week.

### ***Profiles of Student Participants Included in the Qualitative Sample***

To gain a more in depth understanding of the effectiveness of place conscious education on writing and attitudes, I used purposive sampling to form a smaller group of students to interview. Out of the 19 students in my class, I chose five to interview individually. These five students were selected due to their reluctance to participate in writing activities, pre-intervention writing samples, and variation in gender and race. The students interviewed scored below grade-level on the pre-intervention writing samples using the writing rubric. The five interviewees consisted of three females and two males. The sample population included three White students, one Hispanic student and one



African American student. The Fountas and Pinnell Text Level Gradient, also referred to as guided reading levels, was the reading level system used to evaluate the participants in this study. The text level gradient ranges from level A (beginning of kindergarten) to level Z+ (high school to adult). Grade level goals for kindergarten range from levels A-D; first-grade ranges from levels D-J; second-grade ranges from levels J-M and third-grade ranges from levels M-P. The five students who were interviewed had reading levels that ranged from C to M in the spring of 2022. A brief profile is included below of the students who were interviewed. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the students.

***Katie.*** Katie is a Caucasian female who entered first grade as a beginner reader (Level A). Her current Fountas & Pinnell reading level is an instructional C. Level C indicated that Katie was reading on a kindergarten level and was significantly behind most of her peers. Katie attended K-5 at the same school. She is well-adjusted and enjoyed school. Katie is helpful and eager to please. She has a strong work ethic and is always willing to work hard to improve her literacy skills without complaining. Katie received speech services twice a week from the school speech pathologist. She is also served for 30 minutes per day by the Reading Recovery teacher. Katie has a difficult time paying attention and is easily distracted. While she had demonstrated growth this year, she has not made adequate progress. Katie lives with both of her parents. Katie enjoys writing and drawing pictures. However, she has difficulty writing complete sentences and struggles to put her thoughts on paper.

***Alexis.*** Alexis is a Hispanic female who entered first grade on a reading Level D. She had recently moved from out-of-state with her family. English is her second language

but she did not receive services from the school's English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher. Her language skills were monitored twice a year. She is a fluent English speaker. Alexis lives at home with her mother and two siblings. Her mother does not speak English. Alexis is reading on a Level H, which put her slightly below the end of the year target of Level J. She is very helpful and eager to please. She enjoys drawing and is very creative. While Alexis complied with rules and procedures and engaged in writing assignments, she would often go off topic and write about irrelevant topics.

**Tom.** Tom is a Caucasian male who began first grade as a beginner reader (Level A). Tom is currently reading on an instructional Level F. He is a very reluctant learner and does not enjoy school. He often becomes frustrated in class and refuses to complete assignments. Tom lives with his mother and father, and they are very involved in school activities. They are supportive and often check on Tom's progress. Tom is very impulsive and had difficulty completing tasks independently and maintaining focus for sustained periods of time. He received reading services from the Reading Recovery teacher for 30 minutes each day. Tom is reading below grade level.

**Cathy.** Cathy is a biracial female who began the first grade as a beginner reader (Level A). She is currently reading on an instructional Level F. Cathy is served by the Reading Recovery teacher for 30 minutes each day. She is very emotional and would often come into the classroom in the morning crying. She did not like school and often verbalized her dislike. Cathy lives with her mother but spends a lot of time with her grandmother. Her father is not in her life on a consistent basis, and she is often upset about that. Cathy avoids reading and writing and tries to get out of completing her

literacy assignments. She has been referred to the school counselor for mental health issues. Cathy has trouble making friends and does not get along well with her peers.

**Jason.** Jason is a Caucasian male. He entered the first grade reading on a Level J. He lives with his mother and sister. His father is incarcerated, and he has little contact with him. Jason is easily distracted and has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). He does not take medication for ADD. Jason has a difficult time staying on task and often forgets what he is doing. He is very impulsive. Jason is loud and rambunctious in class. Jason enjoys reading and reads books in his spare time. He has an extensive vocabulary and is knowledgeable on a variety of topics. Jason is friendly and gets along well with his classmates.

### **Intervention**

During the data collection period, March-April 2022, first grade students took part in place-conscious education. The principles guiding place-conscious education were used to drive writing practices in the classroom. A belief of place-conscious education is that the community is the classroom. This allows writing to happen anytime and anywhere (Vander Ark, et al., 2020). Community as the classroom is a core principle of place-conscious education and reminds us that students desire relevance for learning to be meaningful (Vander Ark, et al., 2020). This intervention made the writing process relevant to students, their community, and the world around them.

The intervention consisted of the participants exploring five thematic units (cultural studies, nature studies, real world problem solving, internship and entrepreneurial opportunities, and induction into the community process) identified by Smith (2002) found in children's literature that engages students prior to writing. First, I

read aloud a children's book and then we discussed it. Students had the opportunity to converse and made observations about the book. Discussions focused on prior knowledge and connections made between the book and themselves and their community. Before, during and after the book was read aloud, questions were asked to engage students in place-conscious education. Sample questions are provided in Table 3.2. This provided me the opportunity to connect the classroom to the lives of my students (Szabo & Golden, 2016). Students were given the chance to respond to the text through journaling. This provided students with an authentic writing experience that was relevant to their classroom and communities. Students were motivated to respond to the literature because they felt a connection to the text that was shared aloud. The connections were made through similar community and cultural themes rooted in each book. Students were more likely to eagerly engage in the writing activity because prior knowledge was activated.

The format for each week followed a systematic approach. The format was based on a five-day school week. Adjustments were made to accommodate changes in the weekly schedule.

Each Monday began with a read-aloud that focused on the week's objective. I encouraged and promoted discussions about the book, pictures and illustrations featured in the book and how it related to the weekly objective. The weekly writing theme was pre-typed and cut out. Students glued it into their writing journals so that valuable class time was not wasted. The class discussed the place-conscious education theme for the week. It was also posted on the board so that it served as a visual reminder throughout the week.

On Tuesday, I used chart paper and created a word-web poster that featured relevant vocabulary words for the week. It was displayed on the board, and I added to it throughout the week. After the word-web poster was created, students were encouraged to turn and talk and discuss the book, thoughts, and ideas with classmates. I allowed 7-10 minutes for constructive conversation. During this time, I circulated to assist students and join in discussions when appropriate. I referred to the book that was read aloud to promote discussions. Students began to write in their notebooks using the writing prompt to direct their writing. Collaboration was encouraged among classmates. Students were able to move freely around the classroom and work with a partner or partners that they chose.

On Wednesday, students continued to write in their notebooks using the writing prompt to guide their thoughts and ideas. Before asking students to engage in writing, I began with discussions and allowed students the opportunity to participate and share their connections with the book and to their community. I let students take the opportunity to turn and talk with their neighbors before they began to write.

Thursdays were used to incorporate guest speakers, videos, research, Zoom meetings and other community outreach activities. The place-conscious unit was designed to incorporate authentic aspects of the community each week to engage and motivate students. This was an important element to the intervention and was not skipped. These experiences were scheduled at the beginning of the unit. Some activities required permission obtained from administration and parents. A valuable component of place-conscious education is genuine experiences that take students out of the classroom and into their local community or bring the local community into the school.

Friday began with discussions of the previous day's activities. Discussions were promoted to let students share their thoughts and feelings. I continued to add to the word-web poster and reviewed the words that were on the poster. This helped spark connections to previous discussions and vocabulary. Again, 7-10 minutes were provided for students to turn and talk with their classmates. Students were allowed the opportunity to finish their writing for the week. Students also let classmates read their writing and provided each other with suggestions and feedback. Students were provided with the opportunity to share their writing journals with the class if they chose.

The table below outlines the weekly integration of place-conscious education in a first-grade classroom. See Table 3.1 below for Unit 1 *Examining the Community* overview.

The specific outcomes expected from the intervention as related to the problem of practice were to improve attitudes toward writing and increase writing proficiencies. Using children's literature provided a social context for writing and created meaningful classroom writing activities within the framework of place-conscious education.

**Table 3.1** *Unit 1 Examining the Community*

Timeline	Objective	Children's Literature	Connection to Place	Writing Activity	Community Outreach
Week 1	The student will (TSW) learn about community helpers.	<i>What is a Community?</i> R. Rissman and S. Smith	Discuss jobs found in the community (mail carrier, teacher, dentist, doctor, fire fighter, police officer, etc.)	Take a walk outside of the classroom. What did you see that was interesting? What are some of the things that you observed?	Invite a community helper to speak to the class as a guest speaker.
Week 2	TSW explore community projects.	<i>Community Soup</i>	Discuss potential	Create a brief survey to send to parents or	Visit a local farm that grows crops or

		A. Fullerton	community projects.	community members to discover community needs. Post results in the classroom or in the larger school space.	have the farmer bring the crops to school to discuss with students.
Week 3	TSW examine volunteer opportunities in their community.	<i>Can We Help? Kids Volunteering to Help Their Communities</i> G. Ancona	Discuss ways we can help volunteer in our community.	Think about a time that you needed help. Draw a picture or write about it.	Research local agencies that help people in need.
Week 4	TSW investigate their local communities.	<i>On the Town: A Community Adventure</i> J. Casely	Discuss people and places in the community.	What adventures have you had in your community?	Take a walk around the school neighborhood.
Week 5	TSW understand where they are in the world.	<i>Where Do I Live?</i> N. Chesanow	Discuss geography. Discuss neighborhood, towns, state, etc.	Describe your bedroom. House. Neighborhood. How does it make you feel? Draw a map of your bedroom	Visit a town park in your neighborhood with an adult at home.
Week 6	TSW examine the local community.	<i>My Neighborhood: Places and Faces</i> L. Bullard	Discuss how we can make a new neighbor feel welcome.	Have you ever been the new kid on the block? How did you feel?	Research neighborhood activities that are available in your town.

The questions connected to the literature actively engaged students and activated prior knowledge and connections. Before, during and after reading, questions were asked to engage students in place-conscious education. Table 3.2 below shows questions that were used to engage students in place-conscious education before, during and after reading selected children's literature.

**Table 3.2** *Questions that Engage Place-Conscious Education*

Prior to Reading	During Reading	After reading
How does the cover of the book make you feel?	What do you think will happen next?	Where was the setting?
Have you ever ____?	Where will they go now?	Have you ever been somewhere like this before?
What do you think the story will be about? How do you know?	What should she/he do next? What would you do?	What did you like about it?
What's your prediction?	Has this ever happened to you?	What was your least/favorite part?
Who or what do you see on the cover? Does it remind you of anything?	Does this remind you of something?	Did the character or setting make you think of someone that you know?

Students used collaborative writing, conversations, and journaling while participating in the writing process. Authentic writing experiences were created to connect the classroom to the community. The community was brought into the classroom via field experiences, guest speakers, virtual Zoom meetings, and videos.

The table below outlines the weekly integration of place-conscious education in the first-grade classroom. See Table 3.3 below for the weekly lesson plan template.



**Table 3.3** *Place-Conscious Weekly Lesson Plan Template*

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Weekly Lesson Template	Read-aloud	Create word-web anchor chart with vocabulary words	Whole group discussion about book	Community outreach (guest speakers, Zoom meetings, videos, research, etc.)	Whole group discussions
	Discuss weekly writing prompt		Turn and talk		Turn and talk
	Turn and talk	Turn and talk time	Journaling with illustrations		Journaling with illustrations
		Journaling with illustrations			Share time

Using children’s literature provided a social context for writing and helped facilitate meaningful writing activities within the place-conscious education framework.

Field trips and community activities were an important component to implementing place-conscious education. Table 3.4 shows the monthly community outreach plan that was integrated into the place-conscious curriculum.

**Table 3.4** *Community Outreach Plan*

Month	Community Outreach/Experience
March	Career Day
April	Strawberry Farm

### Data Collection Instruments

To determine the effectiveness of the intervention, multiple sources of data points were collected. Data were collected during the second semester of the 2021-22 school year. Various quantitative and qualitative data sources were collected to thoroughly

understand students' attitudes and feelings toward writing and to determine writing proficiencies. Data collection instruments included pre- and post-writing attitude surveys, pre- and post-writing samples, researcher's journal to record observations, and semi-structured interviews.

### **Quantitative Instruments**

Quantitative research allows the researcher to maintain a neutral and objective position to ensure valid scientific findings (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The number of variables is limited. Two quantitative data collection methods were used in this study to determine the effects of place-conscious education on writing in the elementary classroom. A pre- and post-intervention writing attitude survey was administered to gather data on student attitudes regarding the writing process. Additionally, pre- and post-intervention writing samples were collected during the study. A district-adopted writing rubric was used to score the writing samples.

#### ***Writing Attitude Survey***

Surveys can provide a large amount of information very quickly (Mills, 2018). An attitude survey was administered twice to each student. The survey was administered at the beginning and end of the six-week data collection period. I developed the survey and it consisted of eight questions. The survey was created to measure the participants' perceptions and attitudes regarding writing. A three-point Likert scale was used for scoring. Because of the young age of the participants, emojis were utilized for a pictorial representation to help students better understand the three ratings. The emojis used were:

😊, 😐, ☹️. Students were able to choose from one of the three emojis (Appendix A).

### ***Writing Rubric***

Student writing samples were scored using the district-adopted first-grade narrative writing rubric. The rubric was comprised of 10 categories with possible scores ranging from one to four in each category (Appendix B). A score of one represented the lowest score, and a score of four represented the highest score. A score of four indicated that the student was writing above grade-level, three on grade-level, two or one indicated that the writing was below the grade-level standard for that category.

Pre-intervention writing samples were collected to gather baseline data regarding students' writing proficiencies. Post-intervention writing samples were collected to determine the effects of place-conscious education on the writing process in the elementary classroom. The first writing sample was collected in March 2022 during week one of the six-week data collection window. The second writing sample was collected at the end of the six-week intervention. At the beginning of the intervention, students were given a prompt and asked to write about it. Post-intervention, the students were read a place-conscious book about communities. Students were then engaged in discussions and dialogue that connected the literature to their place. Students then wrote about their community. The writing prompts were not timed, and I did not provide assistance.

### **Qualitative Instruments**

To better understand how my students interpreted and constructed their writing experiences and the meaning that they attributed to them, individual semi-structured interviews and a researcher's journal were utilized to collect qualitative data. When conducting research, interviews are necessary when we cannot observe feelings or how people interpret past events (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). A researcher's journal allows

the researcher to document dialogue, activities, people, and physical components of the classroom without removing the student from the classroom environment (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

### ***Researcher's Journal***

The act of observation “refers to looking at a setting purposely” (Efron and Ravid, 2013, p. 86). In the classroom setting, observations are unique because they allow the researcher to become aware of students’ nonverbal behaviors such as gestures and body language (as cited in Efron and Ravid, 2013). Using direct observations as a data collection strategy is common in the field of education. Teachers conduct informal observations daily to drive instruction and monitor the effects of teaching. Action research allows researchers to utilize this process as a qualitative collection technique (Mills, 2018). Observations record behaviors as they happen (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Observations were conducted daily during the six-week data collection period. Observations were recorded in the researcher’s journal during and after lessons (Appendix D).

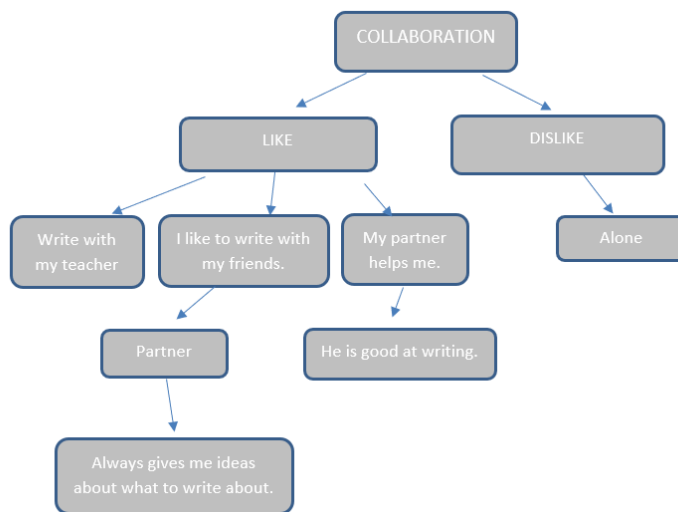
### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students during week six of the data collection timeline. Semi-structured interviews were less formal and featured open-ended questions. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured questions allowed me to have flexibility with the interviewees.

The semi-structured interview consisted of seven prepared open-ended questions based on students’ thoughts, feelings, and attitudes on writing (Appendix C). I interviewed each student individually. Students were interviewed once at the completion

of the six-week unit. The interviews were transcribed simultaneously as students were verbalizing their responses. The transcripts were analyzed to discover broad patterns that helped answer the research questions (Mills, 2018).

To find patterns in the semi-structured interviews, I began the process by using open coding. Open coding allowed me to break the data down into smaller parts and create “codes” to classify them. After I initially coded the data, I used axial coding to make connections between the codes. By making connections, I was able to organize the codes. Figure 3.1 shows a page from my interviews after axial coding was used to display the validity and trustworthiness of my coding.



**Figure 3.1** *Coding from student interviews- Collaboration pattern*

Below, Table 3.5 includes the research questions, the data collection instrument, and data collection type.

**Table 3.5** *Research Questions and Data Collection Instrument and Type*

Research Question	Research Question	Data Collection Instrument	Data Collection Type
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RQ1	How will place-conscious education impact students' writing proficiencies?	Writing samples	Quantitative
2	What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education?	Interviews	Qualitative
		Observations	Qualitative
		Attitude Surveys	Quantitative

### Data Collection Timeline

Data collection began in March 2022 and continue for six weeks ending in April 2022. The data timeline in Table 3.6 below includes the dates of data collection and the activity.

**Table 3.6** *Data Collection Timeline*

March 2022	The researcher collected initial writing samples from each student to establish baseline data.
March 2022	The researcher administered the writing attitude survey to each student to establish baseline data.
March-April 2022	The researcher conducted daily observations and recorded them in a researcher's journal when students were writing in class.
April 2022	The researcher collected writing samples after the intervention had been implemented for six weeks using a read aloud about communities prior to asking the students to write. The students were then asked to write about their communities.
April 2022	The researcher administered the final writing attitude survey to each student at the conclusion of the six-week data collection period.
April 2022	The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with five students at the conclusion of the six-week data collection period.

## **Data Collection Methods**

There were four data collection methods used in this study. The four methods used were: writing attitude surveys, writing samples, semi-structured interviews, and researcher's journal.

## **Quantitative Instruments**

The writing attitude survey and the writing samples were used to collect quantitative data. Data from the pre- and post-intervention writing attitude surveys and writing samples were compiled.

### ***Writing Attitude Survey***

A writing attitude survey was administered pre- and post-intervention. The survey was administered to each student individually in the classroom. The survey was read to the students. Pre- and post-survey scores were compared. This helped determine the effectiveness of the intervention. The survey was created and retrieved from Google Forms. I designed the writing attitude survey myself using questions that related to RQ2: *What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education?* Questions were designed to show if students had a positive or negative attitude regarding writing. I chose to use only eight questions because of the young age of the participants. Emojis were used to correlate with the text answers so that students could relate to the feelings that the emojis projected. Before the survey was administered to students, it was peer-reviewed. I chose two teachers on my grade-level to read the survey questions and provide feedback regarding the relevance of the questions and how they were worded.

### ***Writing Rubric***

During the beginning of the six-week data collection window in March 2022, a writing sample was collected using a writing prompt. The pre-intervention writing prompt stated: *Tell me something that you are good at doing*. The writing samples were scored using the district-adopted first grade narrative writing rubric. No assistance was provided to the students. Following the end of the data collection period, a book was read to the students about communities. The post-intervention writing prompt stated: *Tell me something that you know about your community*. The same first grade narrative writing rubric was used to score the post-intervention writing samples. The writing rubric has been adopted and used in the district for five years. It was created by the same company that published the ELA curriculum that is used in the district. The rubric had 10 categories with each category having a point range from one to four. The rubric's total value was 40 points. Since the rubric was designed by the same publishing company that created the ELA materials used in the district, the categories are aligned with their writing program.

### **Qualitative Instruments**

Semi-structured interviews and a researcher's journal were used to collect qualitative data. The semi-structured interviews contained seven questions that used similar language as the writing attitude survey. I wrote observations from the writing lessons in my researcher's journal. I jotted down brief comments during the lesson, and more lengthy notes after the lesson when more time was available.

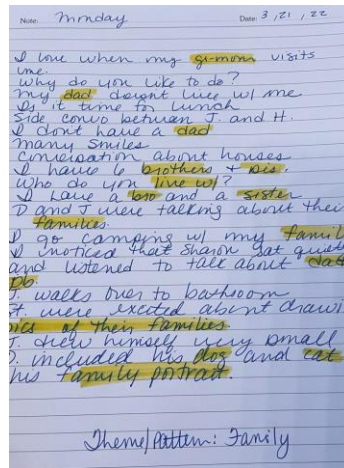


### ***Semi-Structured Interviews***

The semi-structured interviews took place in April 2022 at the end of the six-week data collection window. Questions that were used for the interview were based on the study's research questions. The questions were designed to measure student attitudes about the writing process. The interviews were simultaneously transcribed and analyzed. Each interview was very brief and only took about five minutes per interview. Coding was used to identify common patterns throughout the interviews.

### ***Researcher's Journal***

After the first week of the data collection window, I began to record observations in my researcher's journal. Observations were recorded daily. Descriptive notes were used so that I could record students' thoughts, feelings, and attitudes during the writing process while it is fresh in my mind. The physical setting was described, and the participant's activities and events that took place and conversations were documented verbatim (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Observations focused on issues directly related to the study. Students' mannerisms, gestures, and interactions among classmates and dialogue was the focus of the observations (Efron & Ravid, 2013). I used coding to find themes and patterns in my researcher's journal. After coding the data in my journal, I looked for connections between the codes. I used colored highlighters to indicate different patterns that I found my notes. The patterns which emerged were helping, family, maps, and neighbors. Figure 3.2 is a page out of my researcher's journal that has been color coded to identify a theme or pattern.



**Figure 3.2** Color Coded Researcher's Journal

## Data Analysis

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to data collection. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and evaluated throughout the study with the goal of answering the two research questions.

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

The writing attitude survey was analyzed using a three-point Likert scale. The writing prompts were scored using the district-adopted narrative writing rubric. The pre- and post-test data were compared to each other to determine the change in scores after the six-week place-conscious education unit. If there was an increase, that indicated that place-conscious education had a positive effect on attitudes and increased writing proficiencies.

### *Qualitative Data Analysis*

The goal of qualitative data analysis is to make sense of the data and organize it by looking for themes, categories, and patterns (Hatch, 2002; Shank, 2006). Interviews and observations were analyzed through coding answers. Patterns that were established were also noted. Interview responses were transcribed into Google Docs.

## **Rigor and Trustworthiness**

When collecting data, it is important for researchers to ensure the quality of their data (Mertler, 2020). Invalid data can lead to inaccurate and misleading results. The following actions were taken to ensure rigor and trustworthiness. I am aware that personal feelings and presence in the research setting may impact the research. Measures were taken to monitor biases and remain subjective. In this study, my positionality is that of an insider.

The writing samples were scored using the district-adopted first grade narrative writing rubric. The rubric specifies how to assess the quality of student writing. A four-point system was used for each of the 10 categories.

The writing attitude survey used a three-point Likert scale for each question. Scales are used to measure attitudes (Mills, 2018). There was a total of eight questions. Attitude scales allow researchers to determine “what an individual believes, perceives, or feels” (Mills and Gay, 2016, p. 164 as cited in Mills, 2018). By assigning point values to a student’s attitude, you can infer whether the student felt positive or negative about the effect of writing (Mills, 2018). The writing attitude survey was reviewed by two other first-grade teachers. I strengthened the credibility of the study by interacting with other first-grade teachers. Professionals in education were able to reflect and provide insights throughout the research process (Mills, 2018).

Peer debriefing is essential to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative data (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Prior to, during, and after the study, I shared the process and data collection instruments with my university advisor. The sessions provided the opportunity

to examine the data through more than one perspective. I was provided with feedback that helped me reflect on the interpretation of my findings.

Triangulation was achieved by using various data points such as surveys, writing samples, observations recorded in the researcher's journal, and interviews. Researchers should not rely on one data source when collecting data (Mills, 2018). The strength of educational research relies on collecting data in many ways, instead of just one source. Teacher researchers should use a variety of data collection instruments over an extended period (2018).

Prior to the action research study, I sought approval from my university's Instructional Review Board (IRB). Approval was also sought from the school district and the principal of the elementary school where I am employed as a classroom teacher. Parents provided informed consent at the time of the study. Parents of participants were informed that this was a confidential study that will follow ethical guidelines. Participation in the study was voluntary. Pseudonyms were used for the school and participants to protect their privacy. All journals and notes were kept private and locked in the classroom. Data saved on my laptop was password protected.

## **Summary**

This action research study centered around the problem of practice that I encountered while teaching writing to first grade students. Students were often disengaged from the writing process and had poor attitudes when it came time to write. To improve my practice and to motivate students, I wanted to find a way to teach writing that would excite and engage students. Place-conscious education was the intervention chosen by me to implement in my classroom for six weeks. I chose this intervention

because its guiding principle is to get students into their communities so that they can experience the world outside of the school building. Place-conscious education connects learning to communities. It creates bonds, personalizes learning, builds social capital, and promotes contribution. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect data. Quantitative data was collected using writing attitude surveys and writing samples. Qualitative data was collected using a researcher's journal to record my observations and semi-structured interviews.

This chapter took a closer look at the methodology used to conduct the study. The setting, participants, intervention, and data collection tools were discussed in depth. Additionally, ethical considerations were examined. Several steps were employed to ensure validity and rigor within the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### **Overview of Study**

This action research study was designed to address the problem of practice that I encountered teaching writing to my first-grade class. When asked to write, students were not engaged in the writing process and had negative attitudes. Because of this, the quality of their writing suffered. Many of my students lacked the inspiration and positive attitudes to write meaningful compositions. They were not interested in writing, and they did not feel connected to the writing topics and assignments. I realized that I needed to find an approach that my students would find engaging to improve their attitudes regarding writing. I attempted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How will place-conscious education impact students' writing proficiencies?

RQ2. What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education?

This study is meaningful because our current educational system evaluates students using high-stakes testing. Because of this, students' ability to write and communicate is critical to their academic success. Place-conscious education brings the curriculum to life for students. A place-conscious curriculum can improve student achievement by enhancing the connection between students and their community. It can also facilitate connections between writing, motivation, and attitudes. These real-world

connections make it an ideal approach to integrate the curriculum as opposed to teaching segregated subject areas.

Place-conscious education is the process of utilizing the local community and resources to help teach concepts in all subject areas (Sobel, 2013). There is an emphasis on hands-on, real world learning experiences. This leads students to develop stronger ties to their community and become active, contributing citizens.

There are several core principles that support place-conscious education and the importance that it can have on a child's education. First, the local community should serve as the classroom. Local and regional experts, experiences and places are part of the community as the classroom. Learning should be learner centered and inquiry based. Students should ask questions, make predictions, and collect data to better understand the community and world. Learning should be local to global. Elementary students should learn about the world outside of their classroom door before they learn about broader topics. Students should attempt to make a positive impact on their community through volunteering and service-learning projects. Finally, the curriculum should be interdisciplinary where all learners are challenged and held accountable for their learning (Vander Ark et al., 2020).

This intervention consisted of exploring five thematic units found in children's literature to engage students prior to writing activities. Students listened to and discussed a children's book based on one of the five units. Students had the opportunity to discuss and make observations about the book. Discussions were focused on activating prior knowledge, making connections within the book, and making connections within their community. Students were given the opportunity to respond to texts through journaling.

This created authentic writing experiences that were relevant to their lives and helped them make genuine connections to their community.

## **Findings**

To determine the effectiveness of the intervention, multiple sources of data points were collected. Data were collected during the second semester of the 2021-22 school year. Data collection instruments include pre- and post-intervention writing attitude surveys, pre- and post-intervention writing samples, semi-structured interviews, and a researcher's journal. This section describes the quantitative and qualitative data collected during the six-week intervention period through the pre- and post-intervention writing attitude surveys, the pre- and post-intervention writing samples, observations, and semi-structured interviews.

### **Quantitative data**

Quantitative research tests objective theories by examining the relationship among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The writing attitude surveys and writing samples data will be presented first.

#### ***Writing Attitude Survey***

The intervention using place conscious education lasted six weeks beginning on March 24, 2022, and ending on May 16, 2022. Nineteen students took the writing attitude survey prior to the intervention to collect baseline data.

For the pre- and post-intervention writing attitude survey, a total of eight items were used to measure students' attitudes toward writing. The survey was administered using Google Forms. Students were called to a table in the back of the room and were

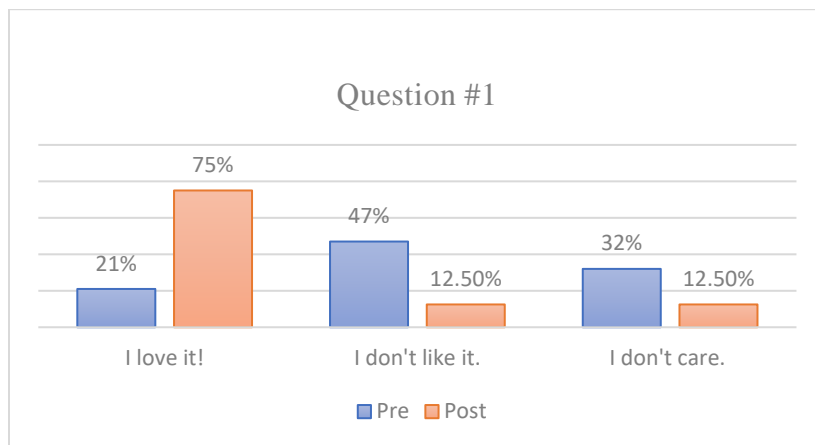


administered the survey individually. Due to the participants' age, the survey was read to them.

For four of the questions, *Yes/No* answer choices, as well as a neutral option of *I don't care* were the answer choices. Questions #5, #6, #7, and #8 had *Yes/No* answer choices. Question #2 included the answer choices of *I love it!*, *I don't like it.* and *I don't care.* Questions #3 and #4 included the answer choices of *I would love to!*, *I don't want to.* and *I don't care.* One question included *Easy* or *Hard* as an answer choice. The wording of the answer choices was chosen because it related to the emojis used for each answer choice. For example, the emoji used for the highest possible rating used hearts to indicate a strong, positive reaction 😊. The answer choice that correlated with the heart emoji used love in the answer stem. Close ended questions such as *Yes/No, I love it!* or *I don't like it* help younger students arrive at their responses quickly and efficiently. The questions can be easily answered by the participants. Considering the young age of the participants of this study (six years old), close ended questions were the most appropriate and effective options. Questions were worded in such a way so that students would be able to express their attitude for writing by answering *Yes/No, I love it,* or *I don't like it.*

**Likert Scale Questions.** The writing attitude survey used Likert scale questions with each question having a possible rating of 1-3. Answers which demonstrated a positive attitude were rated with a numerical score of 3. Answers which demonstrated a negative attitude were rated with a numerical score of 1. Answers which exhibited a neutral attitude were rated with a numerical score of 2. The highest total numerical score possible was 24 and the lowest score possible was eight. The higher the score, the more positive attitude students had toward writing.

*Question 1: Do you enjoy when it's time to write in class?*

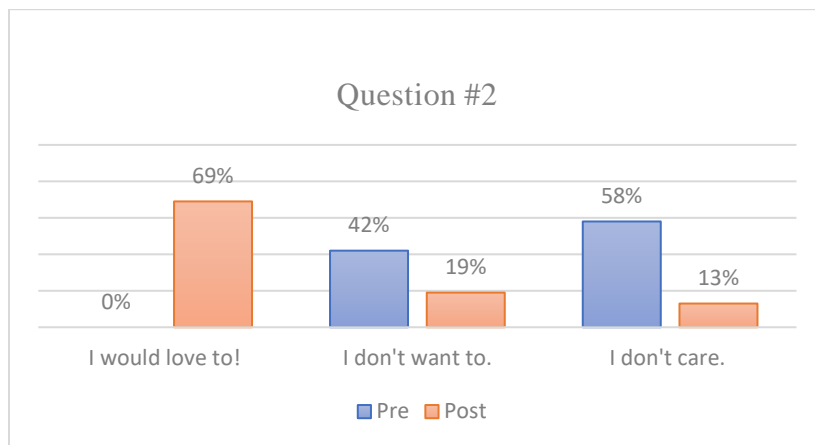


**Figure 4.1** *Question #1: Writing attitude survey*

As shown in Figure 4.1 above, prior to the intervention, only 21% of students indicated that they enjoyed writing time in class. Additionally, 32% of students felt neutral about writing time in class and 47% of students felt less engaged when it was time to write. On the post survey, the percentage of highly engaged students climbed to 75%. In addition, 12.5% remained neutral about writing time, and 12.5% indicated that they were less engaged during writing.

There was an increase of 54% in the number of students who felt highly engaged when it was time to write in class after the intervention. This increase could be supported by the excitement and connection that students felt when writing about topics that they authentically experienced while being immersed in place conscious education. After the intervention, they looked forward to the block of time in class that was devoted to writing and were eager to share their experiences. Additionally, the percentage of students who felt neutral about writing dropped 19.5% after the intervention. The students who felt less engaged dropped by 34.5% following the intervention.

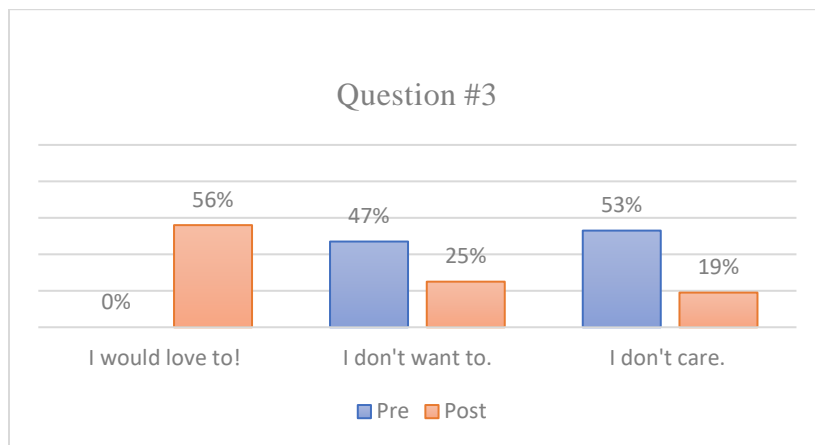
*Question 2: Would you like to keep a journal in class and write in it every day?*



**Figure 4.2** *Question #2: Writing attitude survey*

As shown in Figure 4.2 above, prior to the intervention, 0% of students wanted to engage in keeping a journal in class. Additionally, 58% of students had a neutral attitude toward keeping a journal, and 42% of students indicated that they did not want to keep a journal in class. On the post-intervention survey, 69% of students revealed that they would like to keep a journal in class. The neutral reply went down to 12.5%, and the less engaged response of choosing not to keep a journal went down to 19%. These responses are telling because they show an increase in the highly engaged response of choosing to keep a journal to 69%. By the end of the intervention, students may have changed their mindset regarding keeping a journal because they no longer viewed writing as work and just another assignment in class. Their writing journal became a personal artifact that they enjoyed using in class to capture their thoughts regarding various places that were discussed or explored during the intervention.

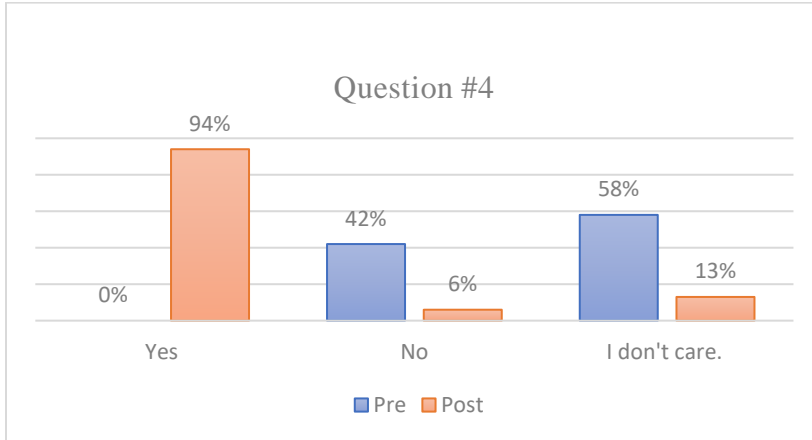
*Question 3: Would you like to write books in class?*



**Figure 4.3** *Question #3: Writing attitude survey*

As shown in Figure 4.3, students showed 0% interest in writing books in class pre-intervention, 53% of students had a neutral response about writing books in class, and 47% were less engaged and indicated that they did not want to write books in class. Post-intervention, 56% of students were highly engaged and indicated that they wanted to write books in class. This is a 56% increase compared to pre-intervention results. The neutral category decreased to 19%, and the less engaged category decreased to 25%. This shows that there was a decrease in students in the neutral and less engaged category, and a large increase in the highly engaged category. These results indicate that students may have been positively influenced by the substantial amount of children's literature books that they were exposed to throughout the intervention. Also, students may have come to understand that their lives and experiences were valuable and worthy of writing about.

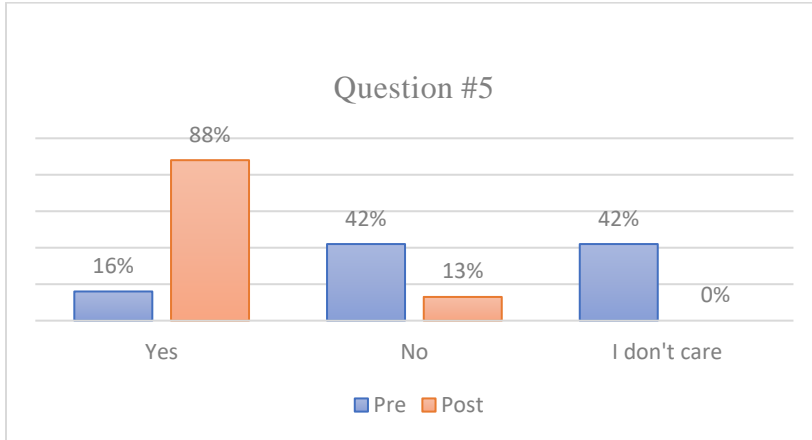
*Question 4: Would you like to become a better writer than you already are?*



**Figure 4.4** *Question 4: Writing attitude survey*

In Figure 4.4 above, the pre-intervention data indicated that 0% of students were interested in learning how to become a better writer. The 'No' category showed that 42% of students were not interested in becoming better writers, and 58% surveyed did not care about becoming better writers. Post-intervention, 94% of the students indicated that they wanted to become better writers. Additionally, 6% surveyed chose no and 0% indicated that they did not care. The increase in students who indicated that they would like to become better writers increased 94%. This sizable increase suggests that students were interested in expanding their knowledge and skills regarding writing post intervention. Notably, 94% of students moved from the 'no' and the 'I don't care' category to the 'yes' category. This shows a dramatic change in students' attitudes toward writing, and their motivation to become better writers.

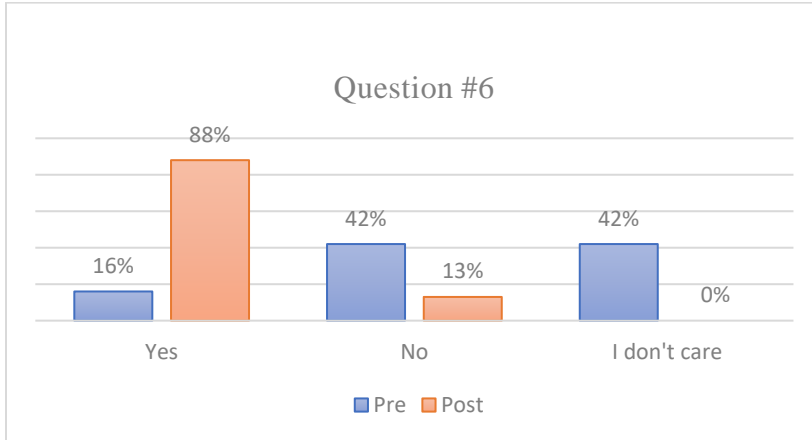
*Question #5: Would you like to have more time to write in class?*



**Figure 4.5** *Question 5: Writing attitude survey*

In Figure 4.5, the pre-intervention data indicated that 11% selected, yes, they would like more time to write in class. The *no* category showed that 47% of students were not interested in more time to write in class, and 42% surveyed did not care about having more time to write in class. The post-intervention data revealed that 94% of the students desired more time to dedicate to writing in class. Additionally, 6% surveyed chose *no* and 0% chose *I don't care* for more time to write in class. Students who indicated that they would like to have more time to write in class increased 83%. This increase suggests that students wished to have more time to write because they did not have enough time provided in class to write about their experiences. There was an impressive shift from students in the *no* and *I don't care* categories to the *yes* category. Post-intervention data indicated that 83% of students moved from the *no* and the *I don't care* category to the *yes* category. This reveals that students had a tremendous shift in their attitudes regarding writing, and desired to spend more time doing so in class.

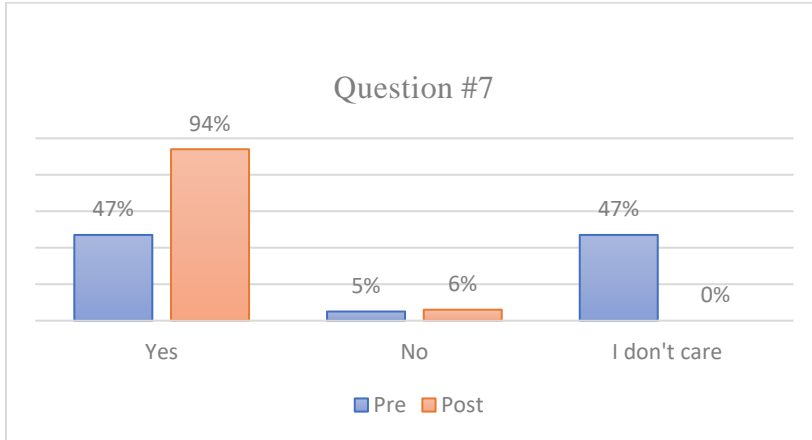
*Question #6: Do you look forward to writing time each day?*



**Figure 4.6** *Question 6: Writing attitude survey*

In Figure 4.6, the pre-intervention data indicated that 16% selected, *yes*, they look forward to writing time in class each day. The *no* category showed that 42% of students did not look forward to writing time, and 42% surveyed selected *I don't care* about writing time in class. The post-intervention data revealed that 88% of the students looked forward to writing time in class. Additionally, 13% surveyed chose *no* and 0% chose *I don't care* about writing time in class. Students who indicated that they looked forward to writing time in class increased 72%. This increase suggests that students looked forward to writing time in class because they wanted to write about their personal experiences. There was an impressive shift from students in the *no* and *I don't care* categories to the *yes* category. The data revealed that 71% of students moved from the *no* and the *I don't care* category to the *yes* category. This reveals that students had a tremendous shift in their attitudes regarding writing and looked forward to writing time in class.

*Question #7: Do you like to write with a partner?*

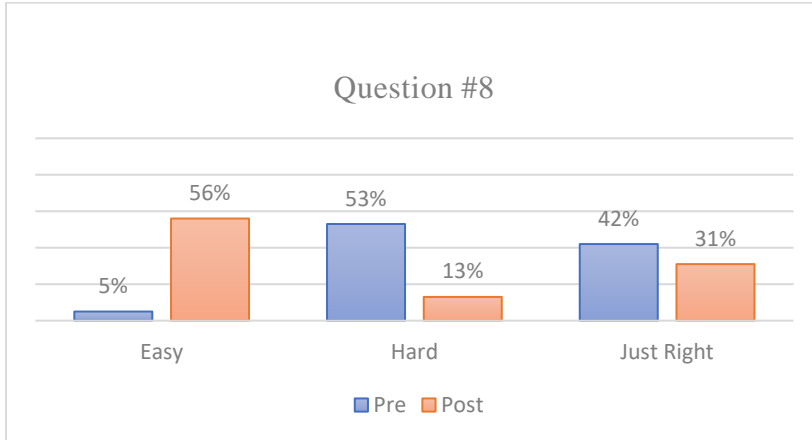


**Figure 4.7** *Question 7: Writing attitude survey*

In Figure 4.7, the pre-intervention data indicated that 47% selected, *yes*, they like to write with a partner. The *no* category showed that 5% of students did not like to write with a partner, and 47% surveyed selected *I don't care* about writing with a partner. The post-intervention data revealed that 94% of the students enjoyed writing with a partner. Additionally, 6% surveyed chose *no* and 0% chose *I don't care* about writing with a partner. Students who indicated that they enjoyed writing with a partner in class increased 47%. This increase suggests that students enjoyed writing with a partner because they can share their experiences with them. There was an impressive shift from students in the *no* and *I don't care* categories to the *yes* category. The post-intervention data showed that 46% of students moved from the *no* and the *I don't care* category to the *yes* category. This reveals that students had a remarkable shift in their mindset regarding writing and looked forward to writing in class and sharing their experiences with their classmates.



*Question #8: Do you find writing easy or hard?*



**Figure 4.8** *Question 8: Writing attitude survey*

In Figure 4.8, the pre-intervention data indicated that 5% of students considered writing to be *easy*. It also showed that 53% of students considered writing to be *hard*, and 42% considered writing to be *just right*; not too easy and not too hard. The post-intervention data revealed that 56% of the students considered writing to be *easy*. Additionally, 13% surveyed considered writing to be *hard*, and 31% indicated that writing was *just right*. This data shows that post-intervention, there was a 51% change in students considering writing to be *easy*, meaning that they did not struggle or become frustrated while participating in the writing process. The percentage of students who indicated that writing was *hard* decreased by 40%. While the percentage of students who felt that writing was *just right* dropped 11%. The data also shows that 51% students shifted to the *easy* category. The large shift from students indicating that writing was easy, shows that students no longer regarded writing as a chore or another assignment to complete during class. They felt successful while writing and enjoyed the process.

The quantitative data collected using the writing attitude survey indicated that there was a positive impact on students' attitudes towards writing following the

intervention. After answering eight questions on the writing attitude survey, student answers indicated that they had a higher level of engagement towards writing following the implementation of place conscious education.

Table 4.1 illustrates the quantitative data collected for pre- and post-intervention demonstrating that 18 out of 19 students had a positive increase in their attitude towards writing at the completion of the intervention. Additionally, one student's attitude score remained the same. The pre-intervention minimum score was 9 and the maximum score was 19. The post-intervention minimum score was 14 and the maximum score was 24.

**Table 4.1** *Pre- and Post-Intervention Data for Writing Attitude Survey*

<i>Student #</i>	<i>Pre intervention Score</i>	<i>Post intervention score</i>	<i>Difference between pre and post intervention score</i>
#7	9	23	+14
#5	9	22	+13
#1	9	19	+10
#4	13	22	+9
#9	11	20	+9
#15	9	17	+8
#13	14	21	+7
#14	17	24	+7
#3	18	24	+6
#2	9	15	+6
#8	16	22	+6
#12	18	24	+6
#6	16	21	+5
#19	18	23	+5
#16	10	15	+5
#17	18	22	+4
#10	19	22	+3
#18	11	14	+3
#11	17	17	+0
Class Mean	13.74	20.37	+6.63

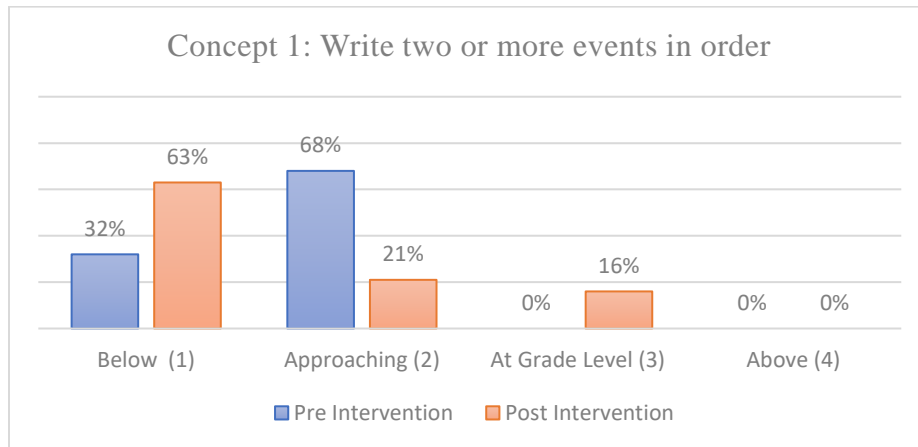
The data in Table 4.1 indicates that students' attitudes towards writing increased 6.63 points from pre- to post-intervention. Notably, eight students scored above the class mean and increased their attitude toward writing seven or more points.

**Pre-Intervention Writing Sample.** Writing samples were collected from each student prior to the intervention. The writing sample data were used to answer the research question “How will place-conscious education impact students’ writing proficiencies?” A narrative writing prompt was assigned to each student. Students were directed to write a “small moment” story. A small moment story follows the Teachers College Writing Workshop model that allows students to write about something that is important to them that has happened in their life. A personal narrative writing rubric (Appendix A) based on the state standards and the Lucy Calkins writing model was used to score each writing sample. This rubric scores ten concepts based on the state standards and scores each concept from 1-4. (Below grade level-1; approaching grade level-2; at grade level-3; Above grade level-4.) Based on this rubric, the highest score possible was 40 points and the lowest score possible was 10 points. The writing rubric was research-based and developed by the Teachers College at Columbia University (Calkins, 2022).

#### ***Personal Narrative Writing Rubric***

As shown in Figure 4.9 below, pre-intervention data for writing two or more events in order indicated that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 68% scored in the approaching category and 32% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 16% scored in the at grade level category, 21% scored in the approaching category 63% scored in the below grade level category.

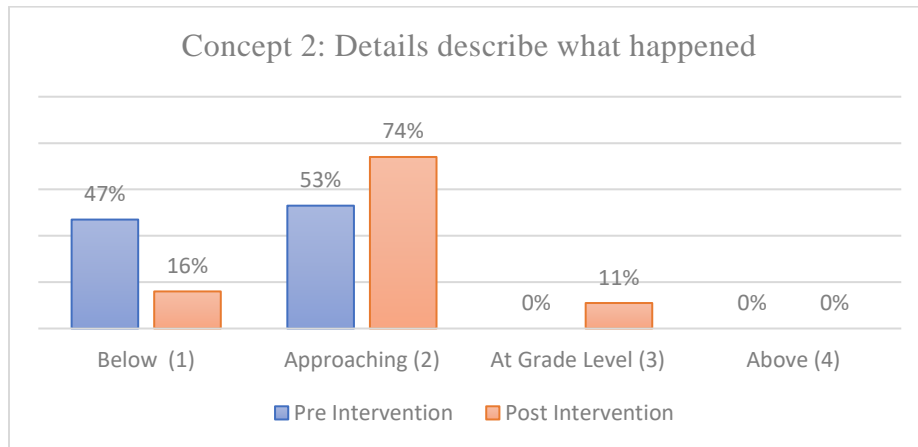
*Concept 1: Write two or more events in order*



**Figure 4.9** *Concept 1: Personal narrative writing rubric*

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category increased 16%. The approaching grade level category showed a decrease of 47%, and the below grade level category showed an increase of 31%. Notably, 16% of students moved to the at grade level category. This 16% increase of students performing at grade level shows that these students were able to elaborate on the events that they wrote about in their small moments stories and reflected upon their personal experiences that they related to during the place-conscious education units of study. The increase in students in the below level category indicates that during direct instruction mini lessons, recalling two or more events was not emphasized. Many students only recalled one event and elaborated on that event, instead of recalling two or more. According to the rubric, students needed to recall two or more events to receive full points for that category.

*Concept 2: Details describe what happened*



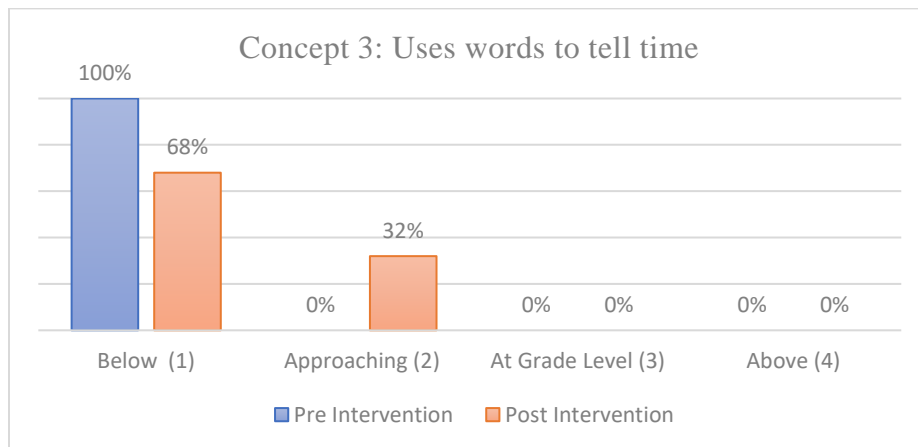
**Figure 4.10** *Concept 2: Personal narrative writing rubric*

As shown in Figure 4.10 above, pre-intervention data for concept two on the writing rubric included using details that described what happened during their small moment story. This data shows that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 53% scored in the approaching category and 47% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 11% scored in the at grade level category, 74% scored in the approaching category 16% scored in the below grade level category.

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category grew 11%. The approaching grade level category showed an increase of 21%, and the below grade level category decreased by 31%. The decrease in students in the below level category post-intervention indicated that there was a high percentage of students who moved to the approaching category. Students were able to include details that described what happened and that were relevant to their story. Place conscious education provided the opportunity for students to participate in an experience

that they could authentically recall in their writing. For example, many students wrote about their experiences when visiting the local strawberry farm in their small moments (narrative) writings.

*Concept 3: Uses words to tell time*



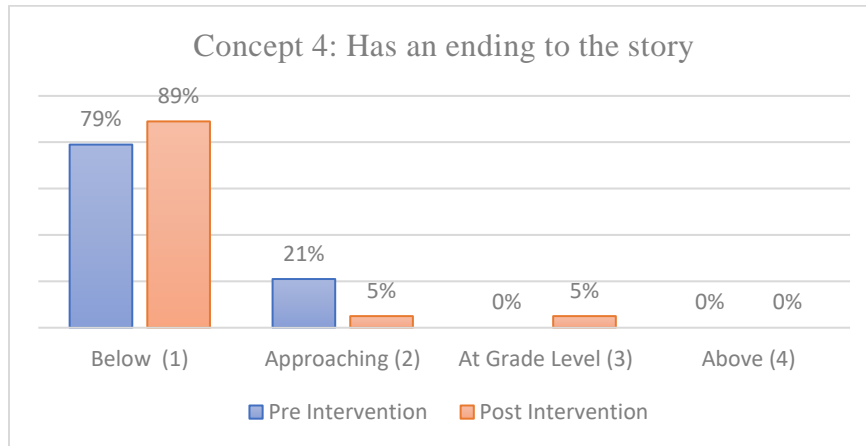
**Figure 4.11** *Concept 3: Personal narrative writing rubric*

As shown in Figure 4.11 above, pre-intervention data for concept three, uses words to tell time, indicated that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 0% scored in the approaching category and 100% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 32% scored in the approaching category 68% scored in the below grade level category.

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category also remained at 0%. The approaching grade level category showed an increase of 32%, and the below grade level category had a 32% decrease. The 32% increase in the approaching category signifies that student had limited use of temporal words and phrases to signal event order such as first, next, then, and last. This 32% change showed an improvement from students showing no use of temporal words.

When these students remembered details from their narrative stories, they were able to use phrases such as first, next, then, and last to put the events of their story in order.

*Concept 4: Has an ending to the story*



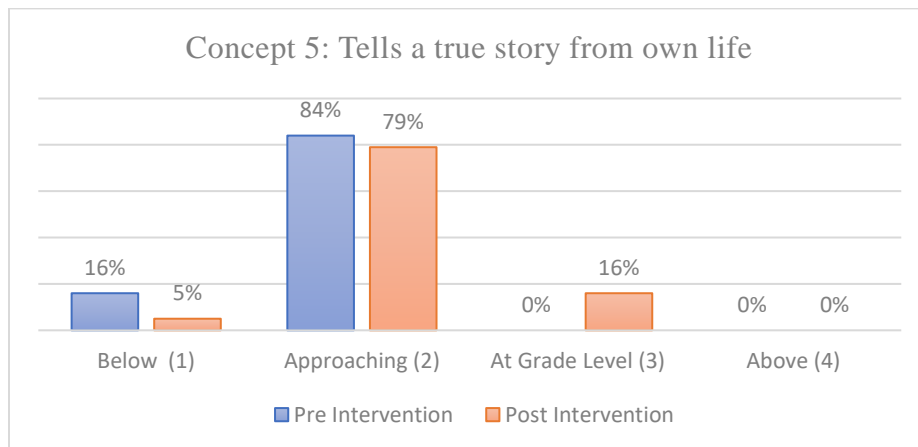
**Figure 4.12** *Concept 4: Personal narrative writing rubric*

As shown in Figure 4.12 above, pre-intervention data for concept four, has an ending to the story, indicated that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 21% scored in the approaching category and 79% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 5% scored in the at grade level category, 5% scored in the approaching category 89% scored in the below grade level category.

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category increased by 5%. The approaching grade level category showed a decrease of 16%, and the below grade level category increased by 10% change. The 5% increase in the at level category indicated that students were able to provide a sense of closure to their story. There was an increase of 10% in the below level category. This indicated that students were not able to provide closures to their story. This is a

common issue with young writers. They often end their stories without providing a formal conclusion. However, post-intervention, 5% of students were able to provide a sense of closure to their narratives.

*Concept 5: Tells a true story from own life*



**Figure 4.13** *Concept 5: Personal narrative writing rubric*

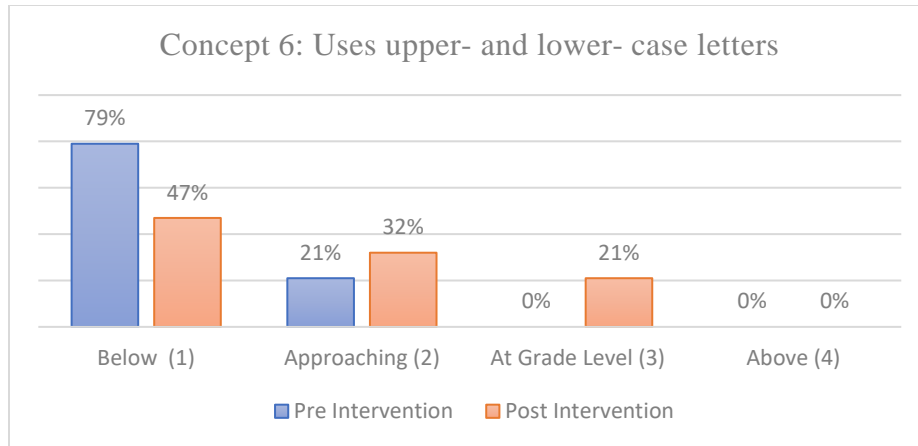
As shown above in Figure 4.13 above, pre-intervention data for concept five, tells a true story from own life, indicated that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 84% scored in the approaching category and 16% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 16% scored in the at grade level category, 79% scored in the approaching category 5% scored in the below grade level category.

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category increased by 16%. The approaching grade level category showed a decrease of 5%, and the below grade level category decreased by 11% change. The 16% increase in the at level category indicated that students were able to support and recall information from their own experiences to answer questions. There was a slight



decrease of 5% in the approaching category. The decrease in the below grade level category demonstrated that students were able to move up to the next category by using supporting details from events that they have directly encountered during the intervention.

*Concept 6: Uses upper- and lower- case letters*



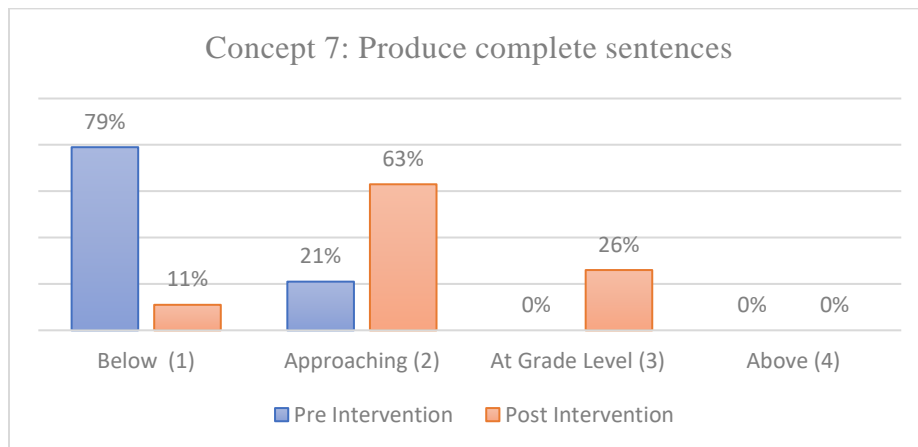
**Figure 4.14** *Concept 6: Personal narrative writing rubric*

As shown above in Figure 4.14, pre-intervention data for concept six, uses upper- and lower- case letters, indicated that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 21% scored in the approaching category, and 79% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 21% scored in the at grade level category, 32% scored in the approaching category 47% scored in the below grade level category.

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category increased by 21%. The approaching grade level category showed an increase of 11%, and the below grade level category decreased by 32%. The below grade level category showed the largest decrease from pre- to post-intervention.

This indicated that 53% of students consistently capitalized the first word in a sentence most of the time and capitalizing proper nouns. The use of proper nouns, such as the names of people and places, were commonly encountered throughout the intervention.

*Concept 7: Produce complete sentences*



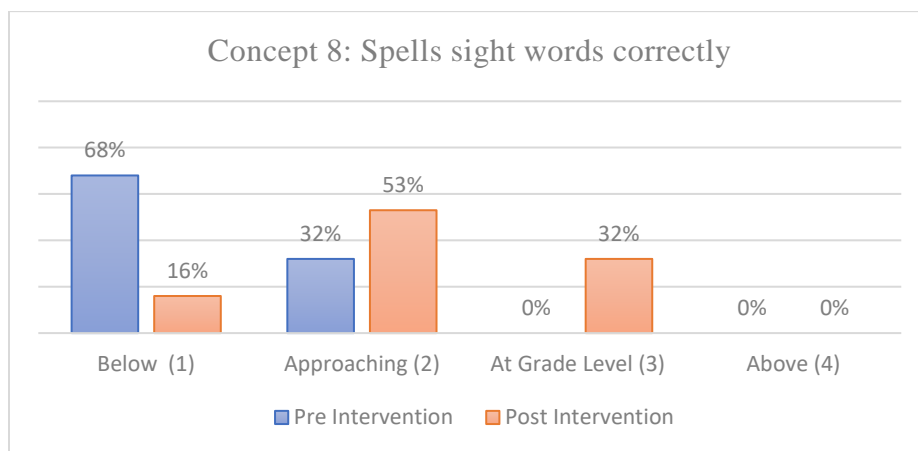
**Figure 4.15** *Concept 7: Personal narrative writing rubric*

As shown above in Figure 4.15, pre-intervention data for concept seven, produces complete sentences, indicated that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 21% scored in the approaching category and 79% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 26% scored in the at grade level category, 63% scored in the approaching category 11% scored in the below grade level category.

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category increased by 26%. The approaching grade level category showed an increase of 42%, and the below grade level category decreased by 68%. The below grade level category showed the largest decrease from pre- to post-intervention. This data indicated that 89% of students were either approaching grade level or at grade

level producing complete sentences. A primary focus during the intervention was to make writing a collaborative process in the classroom. The collaborative writing process increased peer interaction and conversations which helped students generate complete thoughts and sentences. The collaborative process allowed students to help each other get their ideas on paper. Students were able to read each other's sentences and provide constructive feedback.

*Concept 8: Spells sight words correctly*



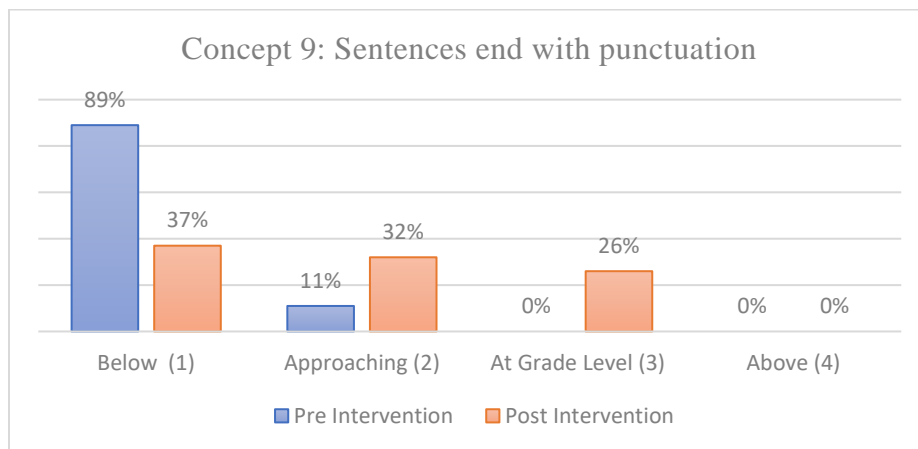
**Figure 4.16** *Concept 8: Personal narrative writing rubric*

As shown above in Figure 4.16, pre-intervention data for concept eight, spells sight words correctly, indicated that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 32% scored in the approaching category and 68% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 32% scored in the at grade level category, 53% scored in the approaching category 16% scored in the below grade level category.

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category increased by 32%. The approaching grade level category

showed an increase of 21%, and the below grade level category decreased by 52%. The below grade level category showed the largest decrease from pre- to post-intervention. This data indicates that 84% of students were either approaching grade level or at grade level spelling sight words correctly. They were able to apply conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and frequently occurring irregular words. Throughout the intervention, students were provided with an alphabetical chart listing common sight words. Common vocabulary words that were used throughout the thematic units were also posted in the classroom. During conversations during writing, peers were able to help each other spell words and point out words that were located in the classroom.

*Concept 9: Sentences end with punctuation*



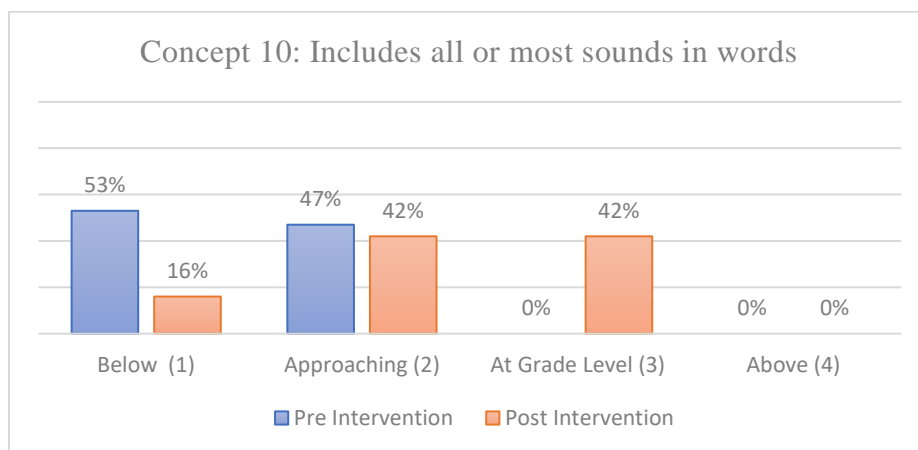
**Figure 4.17** *Concept 9: Personal narrative writing rubric*

As shown above in Figure 4.17, pre-intervention data for concept nine, sentences end with punctuation, indicated that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 11% scored in the approaching category and 89% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 26% scored in the at grade

level category, 32% scored in the approaching category 37% scored in the below grade level category.

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category increased by 26%. The approaching grade level category showed an increase of 21%, and the below grade level category decreased by 52%. The below grade level category showed the largest decrease from pre- to post-intervention. This data indicated that 58% of students were either approaching grade level or at grade level ending sentences with the correct punctuation. During the intervention, it was noted that students were able to notice where to put ending punctuation when they read their stories out loud to each other. Reading orally helped students recognize the natural pause at the end of sentences when it may have gone unnoticed when reading silently to themselves.

*Concept 10: Includes all or most sounds in words*



**Figure 4.18** *Concept 10: Personal narrative writing rubric*

As shown above in Figure 4.18, pre-intervention data for concept 10, includes all or most sounds in words, indicated that 0% of students scored in the above grade level category, 0% scored in the at grade level category, 47% scored in the approaching

category and 53% scored in the below grade level category. Post-intervention data indicated that 0% scored in the above grade level category, 42% scored in the at grade level category, 42% scored in the approaching category 16% scored in the below grade level category.

There was no change in the above grade level category which remained at 0%. The at grade level category increased by 42%. The approaching grade level category showed a decrease of 5%, and the below grade level category decreased by 37%. The below grade level category showed the largest decrease from pre- to post-intervention. This data indicated that 84% of students were either approaching grade level or at grade level including all or most sounds in words. Students could spell simple words correctly and spell untaught words phonetically. Additionally, the at grade level category showed the largest increase of 42%. These students were able to spell untaught words phonetically by applying rules and principles to unfamiliar words.

Table 4.2 below, includes the pre- and post-intervention data for the personal narrative writing samples. The scores were based on a 40-point system. There were 10 concept categories included in the writing rubric. Each category utilized a 1–4-point scale. The lowest possible total writing score was 10 and the highest possible score was 40. The pre-intervention class mean was 13.36 and the post-intervention class mean was 18.10. There was an increase of +4.74 points between pre- and post-intervention data.

**Table 4.2** *Pre- and post-intervention data for personal narrative writing samples*

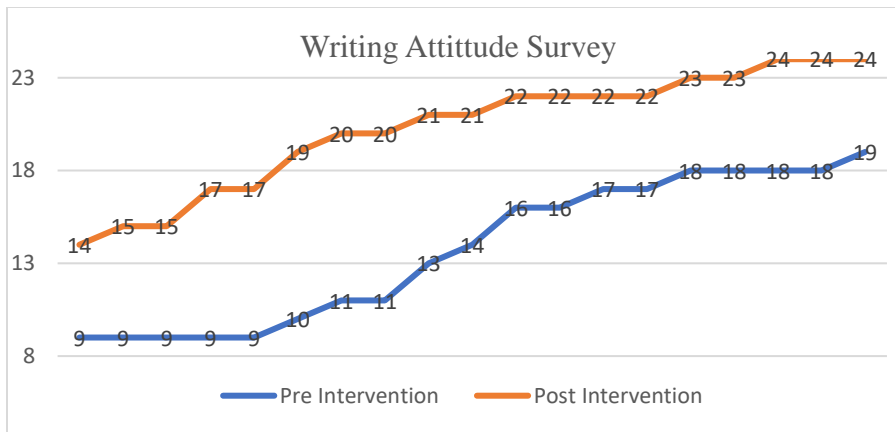
<i>Student #</i>	<i>Pre-intervention scores out of 40</i>	<i>Post-intervention scores out of 40</i>	<i>Difference between pre- and post-intervention scores</i>
12	13	26	+13
14	11	23	+12
6	11	20	+9

2	13	20	+7
7	11	18	+7
8	16	23	+7
13	14	21	+7
5	10	16	+6
15	13	19	+6
9	11	16	+5
18	14	18	+4
19	14	18	+4
11	14	17	+3
17	14	18	+3
4	14	17	+3
10	14	16	+2
3	18	16	-2
16	15	12	-3
1	14	10	-4
Class Mean	13.36	18.10	+4.74

### Summary of Quantitative Data

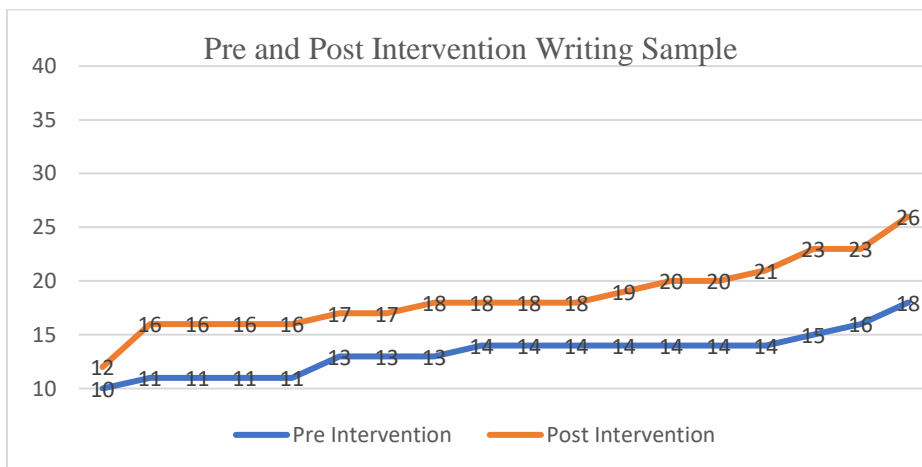
The quantitative instruments used to collect data were a pre- and post-writing attitude surveys and pre- and post-writing samples. These data collection instruments provided insight on students' attitudes on writing and their writing proficiency pre- and post-intervention.

Figure 4.19 illustrates pre-intervention writing attitude survey scores in blue. Post-intervention attitude survey scores are shown in orange. As indicated on the line graph, students' attitude survey scores increased post-intervention. Each student increased their writing attitude score post-intervention. This indicates that implementing place-conscious education increased attitudes regarding writing.



**Figure 4.19** *Pre- and post-intervention writing attitude survey scores*

Below, figure 4.20 shows pre-intervention writing sample scores in blue. Post-intervention writing scores are in orange. As shown on the line graph, students' writing proficiencies did increase post-intervention, but not at the same level as their attitudes regarding writing. There was a larger increase in attitudes compared to writing proficiencies as indicated by the writing samples collected.



**Figure 4.20** *Pre and post intervention writing sample*

**Writing Attitude Survey.** The writing attitude survey indicated that 18 students increased their attitude about writing post-intervention. Only one student remained the same. The overall class pre-intervention mean was 13.74 and the post-intervention was



20.37. The class had an overall increase in their attitudes regarding writing of +6.63. This indicates that place-conscious education increased students' attitudes towards writing. When students have memorable learning experiences, it is rooted in relationships and often associated with a place. This, coupled with student inquiry and relevant experiences, can create meaningful and memorable learning.

**Writing Samples.** The writing samples collected indicated that 16 students increased their raw score based on the narrative writing rubric and three students decreased their score. The overall class mean pre-intervention was 13.36 and the post-intervention mean was 20.37. The class had an overall increase of +6.63 points. Over half the class, 53%, increased their writing\_score by five or more points. Out of the three students who did not increase their score post-intervention, student #1 was reluctant to write the day the sample was collected. This student was on a behavior plan for managing Oppositional Defiant Behaviors. On the day that the writing sample was collected, he was emotionally shutdown. The other two students who did not increase their scores (#16 & #3) only decreased by a few points.

Additionally, several factors played a part in students' writing proficiencies not increasing as much as their attitudes. First, when they entered first grade, they were significantly below grade level in English Language Arts (ELA). Out of the class of 19 students, only four entered first grade on grade level for reading and writing. Secondly, this class was impacted by COVID the previous year. This group of students missed half of in-person instruction from their kindergarten teacher. Finally, this approach to teaching, founded in social constructivism, is a new teaching style for these students. It

often takes longer than six weeks for students to get used to a new teaching model and be able to appreciate the full effects of it.

Although the scores for the narrative writing sample did not increase as much as I had anticipated post-intervention, I still feel the intervention was a success. The narrative writing rubric used to score the writing samples was very broad in scope. Students had points deducted from their overall score on areas that were not heavily emphasized during the intervention. I was more concerned with their thoughts and ideas as opposed to conventions such as capitalization and punctuation. The intervention did improve their attitudes regarding write and the overall quality of their stories. Most students were able to construct a well-developed paragraph with supporting details. Concept two on the writing rubric indicated that post-intervention, students were successful at developing a paragraph with supporting details. Post-intervention scores showed a 31% decrease in the below category, a 21% increase in the approaching category, and a 11% increase in the at grade level category.

### **Qualitative Data**

This section describes the qualitative data collected during the six-week intervention period. Qualitative data can provide a closer look at students by analyzing their thoughts and feelings in a normal educational setting. The qualitative data collected in this study were aligned with the second research question: What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place conscience education. The qualitative data collection tools utilized were observations and semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the qualitative data reports the findings through observations and field notes using a researcher's journal and semi-structured interviews of five

participants. Patterns that emerged from the data highlight the whole learning experience of the participants. When analyzed together, patterns are valuable to help create a detailed picture of the collective experience of the participants.

### **Researcher's Journal**

When I began to analyze my researcher's journal, I looked for themes and patterns that I recorded from my observations. I used a highlighter to color code the patterns that I noticed. From the observations noted in my journal, I recognized three patterns that emerged after coding the data.

#### ***Pattern One: Helping***

The first pattern which emerged after coding the data was *helping*. During our conversations about our community, we talked extensively about helping others and community members who are there to help us. Students were able to extend this to themselves and their families, and they started to talk about how they help others and other times when they needed help themselves. I observed students getting excited when they wanted to share how they or someone in their family has helped others. Mandy said, "My mom is a nurse, and she helps people who are sick." This led to others wanting to share what their parents do for a living. There was excitement and energy in the room as students started sharing their parents' careers. When I redirected the conversation and asked them to think about a time when they needed help, they were able to easily recall a time when they asked others for help. Matt recalled a time when his friend helped him tie his shoes. Harry remembered when he had to help his sister put away clothes. Students were engaged in the conversations and eager to share. When it was time to write,

everyone had an idea and no one said, “I don’t know what to write about”. Some conversations that I heard during writing sounded like this:

- “I like to help my grandmother cut the grass.”
- “I help my mom clean the kitchen.”
- “Jennifer, remember when you helped me find the nurse’s office?”

Students were able to come together and have discussions whole group and with a partner. During writing, students continued the conversation about helping others. All students were engaged and on task. Students made the connection between community members who help and themselves.

### ***Pattern Two: Family***

The second pattern that emerged after I coded the notes in my journal was *family*. Many of the books that we read together in class discussed families. I was careful to select books that represented all types of families so that no one would feel like their family was different. Everyone in class seemed to enjoy talking about their families. When we talked about the family members who live in our house, I gave students a chance to turn and talk to their neighbor because they were so excited, they all started talking at once. Students took pride in their families and were eager to have conversations about them. I noticed that one of my shy students sat and listened to her partner share first. Then she said, “I love when my grandmother visits me.” This led to her telling her partner what she likes to do when her grandmother comes to visit. Other comments that I heard were:

- “My dad doesn’t live with me.”
- “I don’t have a dad.”

- “I have six brothers and sisters.”

Students were engaged and had positive attitudes. They were smiling and laughing. When it was time to write after our conversations, everyone was eager to draw pictures of their families including the dogs and cats. Students spread out on the carpet and began to sketch their families before they started to write.

### ***Pattern Three: Maps***

The third pattern that emerged from my coded notes was *maps*. When we were talking about where we live in the world, I noticed that students mixed up the meaning of town and state. Sharon said the name of our town when I asked her to name our state. Jake was eager to walk to the map on the wall and point to our state. Others followed him. Students had the opportunity to draw a map of their house and they were eager to get started. Students enjoyed getting onto Google Earth and finding their school and houses. Cathy even found her grandmother’s house and Dan located the town’s baseball field. Once students started pulling up local landmarks on Google Earth, the class seem to explode with enthusiasm and excitement. They were fascinated that they could find places that they were familiar with on their i-Pads. Some of the remarks that I heard were:

- “Where’s Disney World?”
- “How do I find my house?”
- “How do they get the streets inside of my i-Pad?”

Overall, the class was enthusiastic and eager to collaborate with their classmates who needed help using Google Earth. All students were participating in discussions and activities. Together, these patterns were saying that students were excited to learn more

about the community that they live in. Not only were they excited about the place that they lived, but they were also extremely interested in talking about their families. Place-conscious education provided a platform to integrate these conversations and interests into the writing curriculum.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

After data were coded, five patterns were identified. The first pattern was *Attitudes About Writing*. Students had mixed feelings about writing. The second pattern which appeared was *Working Together*. Most of the students interviewed enjoyed working with a partner when it was time to write and believed that working with a partner improved their attitudes. The third pattern to develop was *Generating Ideas*. Students revealed in their interviews that sometimes they had a difficult time thinking of topics to write about. Sometimes it was easy for them, and sometimes it was more difficult to think of a topic to write about. The fourth pattern noticed was *Explicit Teaching and Modeling*. All students interviewed found teacher modeling prior to writing themselves to be a valuable strategy. The fifth and final pattern was *Topics of Interest*. Students indicated what topics they liked to write about when prompted. Students preferred to write about animals, current topics of study, and food. Semi-structured interview responses allowed me to gain valuable insights on students' whole learning experiences.

#### ***Pattern One: Attitudes About Writing***

The first pattern to emerge during the coding process of the semi-structured interview was Attitudes About Writing. The students interviewed had mixed feelings when asked *How do you feel when you write?* Positive feelings reported were happy, excited, fun, and easy. Alexis stated, "I love to write with my friends every day."

Negative feelings described included scared, nervous, anxious, and tired. Jason said, “I feel nervous when I write because sometimes, I can’t think of the words.” Several students answered this question with one-word answers. The short responses limited the amount of data that could be coded.

### ***Pattern Two: Working Together***

The second pattern to materialize was Working Together. Out of the five students interviewed, only one indicated that they preferred to write alone. The other four students indicated that they like to write with a partner. They indicated that they like to write with a partner because their partners made them laugh, they valued their partners writing skills, and their partner helped them come up with ideas and spell words. Tom, a reluctant student, said, “I like getting ideas from David.” The one student who indicated that she liked to write alone had communication issues and felt self-conscious about talking to her peers. She had a difficult time communicating her thoughts verbally and English was her second language. I believe that she preferred working by herself to avoid having to communicate with her peers. She would lay on the carpet in the middle of the floor and illustrate her stories by herself. I do not believe that this was a social issue because she got along well with others and was well-liked.

Research supports that less sophisticated writers can benefit from more developed writers (Prior, 2006). Strategies that are supported by the social constructivism theory are collaborating on writing activities, conferencing with mentors, and establishing relevance (Hodges, 2017).

### ***Pattern Three: Generating Ideas***

The third pattern to emerge was Generating Ideas. Out of the five students interviewed, none of them indicated that it was easy to come up with ideas to write about. Several students said that it was hard to think of topics to write about. Jason said, “Sometimes I get confused when I have to think about things to write about.” Another student said, “They don’t have ideas in their brain.” Katie declared, “She doesn’t like to think about stuff because scary pictures pop up in her mind.” Another student said that it was hard to think of ideas to write about because they were easily distracted. The two students who indicated that it was “sometimes hard” to think of ideas, seemed to be in the middle. Sometimes they could think of topics to write about, and other times they could not think of ideas.

Place-conscious education provided the opportunity for relevant writing topics taking the guess work out of generating ideas. It made school relevant to students and integrated topics so that relevant connections were made to current events that students were experiencing.

### ***Pattern Four: Explicit Teaching and Modeling***

The fourth pattern noticed after coding data was Explicit Teaching and Modeling. All students interviewed preferred to watch me model writing before they were asked to write. Students liked to watch me write first because it got their mind ready for writing and they learned how to correctly write the letters by watching me. Several students indicated that modeling also helped them gather ideas to write about. Alexis wondered, “How do you write so fast?”



### ***Pattern Five: Topics of Interest***

The fifth and final pattern observed were Topics of Interest. Students indicated several topics that they like to write about. Students indicated that they like to write about what they are learning about. This directly aligned with place-conscious education because writing topics were integrated into the units of study. Students were writing about what they were experiencing and learning about in class. Students also said that they like to pick their own topics to write about as opposed to being assigned writing prompts. Several students indicated that they like to write about animals such as birds and foxes. Cathy remembered, “We saw the honeybees on the field trip. I could write facts about them. The queen bee does all of the work”. Food was another topic of interest as well as activities that we did that supported our field experiences. Jake mentioned, “I liked writing about strawberries after we went to the strawberry farm. I knew a lot more about them and could think of things to say. I drew the life cycle.”

### **Triangulation**

In a mixed-methods research design, triangulation is an approach used to ensure the validity of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation uses multiple data points to compare and cross-check the data. Doing so increases the credibility of the study.

Analysis began by looking at the quantitative data: the writing attitude surveys and the pre- and post-intervention writing samples. The results from the pre-intervention writing attitude surveys showed that the class had an average score of 13.74 on the writing attitude surveys. However, post-intervention the class average was 20.37. That shows an increase of +6.63 on the writing attitude surveys. This shows significant

improvement regarding their attitudes toward writing. Based on the attitude surveys, the data supported the claim that place-conscious education had a positive impact on student attitudes. Students were interested in local culture and enjoyed getting out into the community to explore their place in the world. The pre-intervention writing samples showed that they class had an average score of 13.36. Post-intervention the class average was 18.10. This showed growth in writing proficiencies of +4.74. The findings from the post-intervention attitude surveys and the post-intervention writing samples substantiate place-conscious education as an appropriate approach to use when teaching writing.

Because I wanted to analyze the data using a broad lens, I integrated the quantitative results with the qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews. I coded the semi-structured interviews looking for patterns and referred to observations recorded in my researcher's journal looking for evidence of positive student attitudes and willing workers during writing. I wrote in the researcher's journal every day during and after the lesson. I recorded conversations that I heard and attitudes and behavior that I noticed while students were working with partners. When I began to analyze the data, I coded the observations in my researcher's journal. My observations supported the use of place-conscious education in the writing classroom. Students were engaged and happy to write about experiences that they had in the community.

### **Summary**

Quantitative and qualitative were collected during this mixed-methods action research study for the purpose of answering the two research questions. I analyzed the quantitative data to see if there was a change in scores from pre- and post-intervention.

The quantitative data revealed that the pre-intervention writing attitude surveys compared to the post-intervention writing attitude surveys showed an increase of +6.63 points. The growth provided evidence that there was an increase in positive attitudes regarding writing post-intervention. I also used a narrative writing rubric to score pre- and post-intervention writing samples. The data showed an increase of +4.74 points post-intervention.

Qualitative data was collected to assist in answering the second research question. Based on my students' responses during the semi-structured interviews and observations recorded in the researcher's journal, I believe that place-conscious education is an effective intervention when teaching writing. The observations in my researcher's journal also indicated that student attitudes regarding writing were higher when compared to pre-intervention attitudes.

I determined that when students were emersed in place-conscious education in the classroom, the intervention had a positive effect on student writing proficiencies and attitudes. Writing proficiencies and attitudes were elevated post-intervention as measured by the data collection instruments used in this study. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the study.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLICATIONS

This chapter begins with an overview of the study, a discussion of the findings and an action plan. Reflections on the research and methodology will also be discussed, as well as limitations in the study. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

#### **Overview of the Study**

While teaching writing to first grade students, I noticed a reluctance to write and negative attitudes among students. Because of this, the overall quality of students' writing suffered. I conducted this action research study to determine the effects of place-conscious education on student attitudes and the quality of their writing. It was my goal to provide data that supports the use of place-conscious education within the writing classroom. Additionally, I hoped to begin conversations within my school and district that would encourage greater community involvement among students. I also wanted to create authentic writing experiences for my students and move away from the dependency of scripted, boxed curriculum.

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between attitudes and writing achievement in a first-grade class using place-conscious education. The intervention used in this study lasted for six weeks. During that time, first grade students were immersed in place-conscious education. The principles of place-conscious education were used to motivate and inspire writers in the classroom. The intervention

consisted of students closely examining their community using field experiences, experts from the community, and children's literature. These authentic experiences were then used as the basis for writing instruction in the classroom.

Data were analyzed from students' pre- and post-intervention small moments (narrative) writing samples using the district-adopted writing rubric. Data were also analyzed using writing attitude surveys, researcher's journal, and semi-structured interviews.

I identified the effects of incorporating place-conscious education in the writing classroom by reviewing pre- and post-intervention scores. The scores were analyzed to determine if place-conscious education had an impact on students' writing proficiencies, attitudes, and perceptions towards writing. A writing attitude survey was given at the end of the intervention to determine students' attitudes toward writing. I also used semi-structured interviews and a researcher's journal to help find themes and patterns from the study to help determine the success of the intervention. Multiple data sources provided triangulation within the study.

### **Research Design**

A mixed-methods triangulation design was used for this action research study. In this design, quantitative and qualitative data are given equal priority (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Both types of data are collected at the same time but analyzed separately. The quantitative and qualitative data are compared to determine if results are similar. The benefit of using a mixed-method design is to build on the interaction and strength that exists between quantitative and qualitative research methods (Mills, 2018). Additionally, action research encourages teachers to become continuous learners and develop a

reflective attitude which allows one to critically examine one's own teaching practices to improve or enhance them (Mills, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1. How will place-conscious education impact students' writing proficiencies?

RQ2. What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education?

### **Methodology**

I collected quantitative data using writing attitude surveys and writing samples. I collected pre- and post-intervention narrative writing samples before and after the intervention. Additionally, the writing attitude survey was administered pre- and post-intervention to each of the 19 participants in the study. The qualitative data consisted of semi-structured interviews and researcher's journal. Five participants were interviewed. These participants were chosen due to various ability levels and reluctance to write. Observations were recorded in the researcher's journal daily during the six-week intervention period. From the interviews and observations, coding was used to reveal patterns and themes found throughout the qualitative data.

### **Summary of the Findings with Connections to the Literature**

The summaries for each research question are described below and show the effectiveness of implementing place-conscious education to teach writing.

#### ***RQ1. How will place-conscious education impact students' writing proficiencies?***

To answer the first research question, I examined the quantitative data from the pre- and post-intervention writing samples. Writing samples were collected from each

participant in the study. The writing samples were scored using the district-adopted narrative writing rubric.

In 2003, rural elementary and secondary teachers published a book which included essays about their experiences participating in the Nebraska Writing Project. The book detailed place-conscious education projects and described the work that teachers did to support place-conscious education. Teachers described the development and implementation of writing programs that linked students to their local communities. Throughout the course of the project, Brooke (2003) noted that students showed increased writing proficiencies after being engaged in place-conscious education. Using children's literature to engage students in place-conscious education was identified as one of the key methods of connecting children to their communities. The principles that lay the foundation for place-conscious education were supported by the theory of social constructivism. Strategies such as collaboration, conferencing with mentors, and establishing relevance of topics were critical in fully developing cognitive ability (Beck & Condy, 2017).

The data collected and analyzed from the writing samples indicated that students did show an increase in their writing proficiencies post-intervention. While the class average revealed a +4.74 increase, it was not as much of an increase as anticipated. Students seemed to show greater improvement in the areas of content and ideas in their writing samples. Overall, the writing data revealed that there continued to be weaknesses in conventions, such as capitalizing the beginning of a sentence and using transitional phrases. While I had hoped that the overall class average would have shown a higher

increase, I am satisfied that the content and ideas of the writing samples had improved post-intervention.

***RQ2. What are student attitudes regarding writing prior to and after implementing place-conscious education?***

To answer the second research question, I began by analyzing the quantitative that was collected via the writing attitude survey. I surveyed 19 students, the entire class, using the writing attitude survey pre- and post-intervention. At the end of the intervention, the attitude survey indicated that place-conscious education was an effective approach to improve attitudes towards writing. Students indicated that they enjoyed when it was time to write in class and they would like to have more time dedicated to writing. This suggests that students had positive attitudes towards writing because they were requesting more time to devote to that activity. Additionally, the post-intervention survey data indicated that students looked forward to writing time each day. This was a tremendous shift from pre-intervention observations when students verbally expressed their dislike for writing when it was time to write in class.

Cunningham (2008) found that students had negative attitudes towards writing if they participated in low quality literacy environments such as scripted, commercial box curriculums. Students' attitudes became more positive towards writing with the increase in quality of the literacy environment such as participating in authentic experiences that were relatable. Cunningham (2008) also found that children's literacy development and attitudes were strongly related.

I also analyzed the qualitative data collected during this study to answer the second research question. First, I analyzed the observations that I recorded in my



researcher's journal. I recorded observations daily from conversations, comments, and behaviors that I witnessed during writing. At the conclusion of the intervention, I looked through my notes and searched for themes and patterns that were captured through my observations. The observations were coded, and they also showed the effectiveness of place-conscious education during writing. Students begged to write with partners during writing and would often ask me when it was time to write. I also noted that students were engaged and actively writing and that very few off-task behaviors were observed. What stood out to me the most was that students were excited to reflect on their field experiences in the community and would fill up their papers with memories and connections that they found meaningful. Writing no longer seemed to be a chore, but a fun activity that naturally flowed with what we were learning about. One student said it best when he declared, "This was the best day of my life!" after returning from a visit to the local strawberry farm.

Finally, I examined the five semi-structured interviews that I conducted which were analyzed and coded. The results from the interviews also showed that using place-conscious education to teach writing was effective through the patterns that were discovered. What clearly stood out the most from the responses was that students valued working with a partner and appreciated when I modeled writing during a mini lesson before they were sent off to write independently. When asked during the interview if they liked to write alone or with a partner, four out of five students said that they preferred to write with a partner.

The learning theory that grounded this study was social constructivism. Fernando and Marikar (2017) emphasized that social constructivism emphasizes the active

construction of knowledge through social and cultural relationships. Students' interview responses also support two themes that are supported by the social constructivism learning theory: the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Beck & Condry, 2017).

The MKO states that children learn about the world around them from more knowledgeable others. During the intervention, students were able to pair up and collaborate during writing. This collaboration provided the opportunity for students to assist other students. This aligns with the principles of the social constructivism learning theory. Students were in the ZPD when their partners guided them through a writing task. Interview responses indicated that students like to write with a particular partner because they were “good” at writing and because their partner “helps them spell words”. When analyzing the students’ answers regarding teacher modeling, all students indicated that they liked to watch me write before they were sent off to do so. Alston and Danielson (2020) found that when teachers model meta cognitive processes during writing, it supports students learning. Unfortunately, the data analysis in their study also indicated that only 4% of teachers model writing on a regular basis (Alston & Danielson, 2020). Their study found that teacher modeling was an explicit instructional strategy that supported and helped to develop cognitive literary practices when implemented with fidelity (Alston & Danielson, 2020).

The action plan and the next steps that I took are detailed below. The action plan consisted of five steps which includes collaboration with peers and administration, the acquisition of children’s literature and professional resources, the creation and sharing of

a community resource flyer, weekly newsletter blurbs and the implementation of a community outreach program.

### **Action Plan**

Since the conclusion of my study, I have reflected on the findings and will share the action plan and the next steps. The action plan is followed by implications for future research, improvements that could be made to the study, and a summary.

### ***Collaboration with Peers and Administration***

After conducting the intervention and considering the findings of the study, I shared the outcomes with my grade-level chairperson and then with the rest of my grade-level. I then communicated the results with my administration team at my school. I also had discussions with my literacy coach about the results of my study and the current writing program that we use. The current “district-adopted” program is a commercially produced boxed curriculum that is heavily scripted. Based on the data from my study, I suggested that teachers be allowed to “forget the script” of the current writing program and be granted the autonomy to bring the community into the classroom. I also discussed the importance of getting students out into the community as well. This year, due to a shift in administrators, we have been provided a 45-minute block of time each day that we can use as we see fit. This is a perfect opportunity to have students engage in projects that are community based. Our current writing curriculum is district mandated, so it is non-negotiable. It must be taught. However, teachers can use the 45-minute block of time to begin to investigate place-conscious education and see if it is a good fit for them and their students. Place-conscious education also integrates nicely with social studies and

science content and standards and can be worked into the daily schedule using the time allotted for that.

### ***Children's Literature***

In August, I met with the school media center specialist and discussed the children's literature that goes along with the place-conscious education themes. She made a list of books that could be purchased with library funds. Teachers could check out books that they wish to use in the classroom. I would also like to share professional books that teachers can use as resources that are available for check-out in the school library.

### ***Local Resource Flyer***

I put together a list of local resources in the community that could be explored that is available to all teachers at our school (Appendix E). Although our school community is small, there are a lot of resources and places to experience within a mile of our school. Many of our families have connections to these places as well. As a teacher, I appreciate when resources are readily available.

### ***Weekly Newsletter Blurbs***

Our administrative team does an excellent job of communicating weekly using newsletters called "Flight Plans". These are emailed to faculty on Sunday evenings. The faculty newsletter is a place where thoughts, ideas, good news, upcoming events and just about anything can be shared. I would like to suggest having a small corner of the newsletter dedicated to news from the community. This will help teachers stay informed about local events and be aware of local resources that may be integrated into the

classroom. It also provides teachers with small chunks of information as opposed to huge doses of information.

### ***Community Outreach Program***

I will invite community experts into our school monthly. They will come into our school and share something about what they do or teach us something about the community. Parents are invited to participate in this outreach program, but they must have a background check.

### ***Future Plans***

I would like to share with the faculty the findings of my study and let them know what I found most beneficial about using place-conscious education in the classroom. Since we just started a new school year, we are still having meetings about procedural issues. Before I share the findings with faculty, I think that it is important to first explain what place-conscious education is and how teachers can use it in the classroom. Teachers often come with a “what now” attitude when a new idea or concept is shared with them. I think that it is important that they realize that this is not one more thing that they must fit into the day, but a way that they can improve student attitudes and proficiencies in a fun and exciting way while still teaching the content.

Details of the action plan are outlined below in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1** Action Plan Timeline

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activities</b>
August 2022	Collaboration with peers, literacy coach and administration to discuss findings from study. Discussed using 45 minutes in the schedule to integrate place-conscious education.
August 2022	Met with media specialist and went over the list of children’s literature that we have in our library collection. She will order titles that are missing from the list. Provide media specialist with a list of

	professional development books on place-conscious education.
September 2022	Community flyer with local resources created and distributed to teachers within the school.
September 2022	Community outreach program begins with a visit from the local media specialist.
October 2022	Community news integrated into the weekly school newsletter.
October 2022	What is place-conscious education? Provide a brief professional development to faculty and staff.

## Reflection on Action Research

As expected, the data indicated that after participating in the place-conscious education intervention, attitudes and writing proficiencies increased. I anticipated this because students were engaged in new activities and were active participants in their learning. They got to participate in engaging activities that got them out of the classroom and into their community. Place-conscious education was so very different from the boxed curriculum that they were used to, that I was confident that they would become excited about writing.

I was surprised that their overall writing sample scores did not increase by more points. While writing proficiencies did increase, it was not substantial. However, I am not discouraged by this finding. I think that to be fully effective, the intervention needs to be much longer than six weeks. Also, the rubric that I used to score the writing samples was one that the district has used for five years, and it correlates with the current writing curriculum. It had 10 categories, and that may have been too many to include on one rubric. The content listed on the rubric was too much to cover in six weeks. To strengthen the study, I would design my own writing rubric that would better align with place-conscious education. I would also have fewer categories listed on the rubric.

During the semi-structured interviews, I would ask more probing questions to get more in-depth responses. Some of the students gave me one-word answers. I learned that students can be passionate writers, they just need to be given topics to write about that they feel connected to and enthusiastic about. Personally, my passion for teaching was rejuvenated because of this study. I learned about place-conscious education and am excited about bringing it to life in my school. My creativity has been reignited because of my research. I do not want to teach curriculum out of a box. I want to teach using real life experiences. I also feel fortunate that I was able to participate in my own action research study. It was so meaningful as a teacher to have the control to identify a problem that is unique to my own class and come up with a solution. The process has given me ownership over the curriculum that I use in my classroom and a solution to my problem of practice.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Based on my findings, I would like to further explore students' perceptions of themselves as young writers. Although I did ask general questions about attitudes and perceptions about writing when conducting interviews during my research study (Appendix B), I want to dig deeper to find out more about how students view themselves as writers. I would also like to phrase questions in such a way that they do not elicit one-word responses. Bradford and Wyse (2013) found that children as young as three years old have clear perceptions of themselves as writers. This gave me more confidence when considering the age of the students that I had interviewed. I was uncertain if I would be able to extract meaningful data from them using semi-structured interviews. To improve the quality of data that I collect during interviews, I would like to improve upon my

interviewing technique and develop the wording of the questions being asked so that they produce the best possible responses from the participants. Additionally, if I were to replicate this study, I would choose a larger sample size to interview.

Taking notes and journaling was a challenge in a live classroom with young students. If I repeated this study, I would video record several writing lessons throughout the unit so that I could gather more detailed observations. In an active classroom, a lot can be missed because of the number of students and conversations going on at once. There is a lot of movement and dialogue happening, especially when students are encouraged to talk and discuss their thoughts and ideas with their partners. Additionally, students may need help or attention during this time. Videoing the sessions would allow me to catch all the action and still tend to the needs of my students.

Finally, I would like to explore the direct correlation between writing attitudes and proficiencies. If I were to replicate this study, I would conduct the intervention for a longer period. An extended window between data collection cycles would provide the opportunity for a more significant change in the attitudes and proficiencies of the students.

## **Summary**

In chapter five, I answered the two research questions identified in my study and described my action plan. The data that I collected indicated that place-conscious education did improve student attitudes and writing proficiencies. This chapter also reflected on action research, discussed limitations to the study and considered implication for future research.



Writing is an extremely important component to the success of children. I became concerned about my problem of practice when it seemed to be getting harder and harder each year to get my students engaged in writing. For this research study, I wanted to find a way to make writing exciting for my students and not something that they dreaded every day. When I began researching a solution to my problem of practice, I stumbled across an article about place-conscious education. I had never heard of place-conscious education, but I was intrigued. The more I read about it, the more I liked it, and I thought that my students would like it too. What I especially liked about the theory was that it got kids into their communities and gave them a chance to see what great opportunities were at their fingertips. I remember as a student that I would get so excited anytime that we got to get out of the classroom and learn in a different environment. Young students still get excited when they go outside to read, or take a nature walk around the school property, or practice sight words on the sidewalk using chalk. I wanted my students to have those experiences and become excited about their learning more often, not just once or twice a year. While I have only begun to scratch the surface of place-conscious education, I am committed to continuing to implement it into my writing curriculum and other subject areas as well.

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## Appendix A: Writing Attitude Survey

2. Do you enjoy when it's time to write in class? \*

- ☐ 😄 I love it!
- ☐ 😞 I don't like it!
- ☐ 😐 I don't care.

3. Would you like to keep a class journal and write in it every day? \*

- ☐ 😄 I would love to!
- ☐ 😞 I don't want to!
- ☐ 😐 I don't care.

4. Would you like to write books in class? \*

- ☐ 😄 I would love to!
- ☐ 😞 I don't want to!
- ☐ 😐 I don't care.

5. Would you like to become an even better writer than you already are? \*

- ☐ 😄 Yes!
- ☐ 😞 No!
- ☐ 😐 I don't care.

6. Would you like to have more time to write in class? \*

- ☐ 😄 Yes!
- ☐ 😞 No!
- ☐ 😐 I don't care.

7. Do you look forward to writing time each day? \*

- ☐ 😄 Yes I do!
- ☐ 😞 No I don't!
- ☐ 😐 I don't care.

8. Do you like to write with a partner? \*

- ☐ 😄 Yes I do!
- ☐ 😞 No I don't!
- ☐ 😐 I don't care.

9. Do you find writing to be easy or hard? \*

- ☐ 😄 Easy
- ☐ 😞 Hard
- ☐ 😐 Just right

## Appendix B: Personal Narrative Writing Rubric

<b>Score</b>	
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Personal Narrative Writing Rubric

CCS / Concept	4 (Above Grade Level)	3 (At Grade Level)	2 (Approaching Grade Level)	1 (Below Grade Level)
W.1.3 Writes 2 or more events in order	Establishes a well-elaborated story	Recounts two or more appropriately sequenced events	Attempts to recount two appropriately sequenced events; missing information creates confusion	Fails to recount two sequenced events; includes irrelevant or unrelated events
W.1.3 Details describe what happened	Includes vivid details that describe what happened	Includes details that describes what happened	Includes few or irrelevant details to describe what happened	Insufficient or no details
W.1.3 Uses words to tell time	Uses many temporal words and phrases to signal event order	Uses several temporal words and phrases to signal event order	Limited use of temporal words and phrases to signal event order	No use of temporal words; or uses temporal words without events
W.1.3 Has an ending to the story	Provides clear closure	Provides sense of closure	Attempts to provide closure	Does not provide closure
W.1.8 Tells a true story from own life	Recalls information from own experiences to answer questions	With support, recalls information from own experiences to answer questions	With support, recalls some information from own experiences	Unable to recall information from own experiences
L.1.1 Uses upper- and lower-case letters	Capitalizes first word in a sentence, "I," and proper nouns correctly	Capitalizes first word in a sentence and "I"	Capitalizes first word in a sentence most of the time	Capitalizes inconsistently
L.1.1 Produce complete sentences	Produces, expands, and rearranges simple and compound sentences	Produces correct simple and compound sentences	Produces mostly correct simple and compound sentences	Produces mostly incorrect simple and compound sentences
L.1.2 Spells sight words correctly	Applies conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and irregular sight words	Applies conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and frequently occurring irregular words	Applies conventional spelling for most consonant and short-vowel sounds	Applies little to no sound/ spelling correspondence of consonants and short vowels
L.1.2 Sentences end with punctuation	Uses end punctuation correctly all the time and exclamations it to create excitement.	Uses end punctuation correctly all the time	Uses end punctuation correctly some of the time	Uses end punctuation incorrectly or not at all
L.1.2 Includes all or most sounds in words	Spells with learned spelling patterns with untaught words	Spells untaught words phonetically	Spells simple words phonetically	Spells few to no simple words phonetically

## Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What is your favorite subject in school?
2. Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?
3. How do you feel when you write?
4. What do you like to write about?
5. Do you like to write alone or with a partner?
6. Does it help you to watch your teacher write first before you write on your own?
7. Is it easy or hard to think of topics to write about?

## Appendix D: Notes from Researcher's Journal

**Week One Observations.** Week one focused on the first of five place-conscious education themed units *Examining the Community*. During the first day of the intervention, students were provided with a new writing journal. The journal had a space to draw at the top of the page and lines at the bottom to write sentences. Students were excited to receive their new writer's notebook and they were eager to use them. Most of the students excitedly opened their notebooks and wanted to draw in them right away. It was important to me to provide each student with a brand-new writer's notebook because it signified the beginning of intervention. The pages were also different than other notebooks that they have used because it had a space at the top of each page for a picture. The writer's notebook was something new and different. It was special and I wanted them to take pride in it.

In week one of the intervention, the focus of learning was learning about community helpers. I began the week with the read aloud *What is a Community?* This led to a discussion on community helpers and what they do to help us. The community helpers that were discussed were teachers, postal workers, police officers, firefighters, and doctors. An anchor chart was created listing the community helpers that were discussed in the book and in class. Students were eager to share the community helpers that were in their families. For example, Mandy shared that her mom was a nurse and worked at night. Michael shared that his mom helps take care of an elderly lady. Jennifer shared that her mom was a housekeeper at a local hotel. The students easily

made connections to the book and to themselves. It was apparent that everyone understood what a community helper does and how they are beneficial to the community.

To bring the community into the classroom, a local dentist office agreed to have a Zoom meeting with the class. The class was able to ask the dentist questions and they also received a 15-minute talk about what a dentist does and how they help people. Mandy asked how many teeth kids have, and Kennedy wanted to know if it hurts to get a filling. It is important to note that when it came time to do the writing part of the assignment, nine students chose a dentist as the community helper that they wanted to write about. I think this is significant because they identified with the community helper that they were able to see and interact with during the Zoom meeting.

When it came time to write, students were directed to draw a picture of their favorite community helper in their writing notebooks. After they drew the picture, they were asked to write about their picture. Students then worked with a partner to complete the writing assignment. As students were writing, they were engaged in the writing process. Relevant conversations were taking place and students were able to have discussions and complete their work at the same time. Matt and Harry referenced the anchor chart that was created several times to check their spelling. As I circulated around the room, students were eager to share stories about the people in their family who were community helpers.

**Week Two Observations.** During week two of the intervention, the focus of learning was exploring community projects. At the beginning of the week, the read aloud *Community Soup* was shared with the class. The read aloud kicked off discussions about farming, where we get our food and how certain animals are useful to us. This book also

opened a discussion about how the child in the book was different than the students at our school. This week coincided with our field trip to the local strawberry farm. Students got to go to the farm and learn about strawberries, honeybees, and other farm animals. They even got to ride on a hay wagon and pick strawberries out of the field. Of course, this was a very exciting trip for everyone. Since COVID has become our new normal, most students have not had a chance to go on a field trip. Many students had never been on a school bus. All of the experiences throughout the day were new and exciting for them. Students were happy, smiling, and excited about the trip.

The next day at school, we integrated our field trip experience into our writing assignment for the week. We created an anchor chart together. Students created one in their notebooks, and I did a large poster size chart to display in the classroom. For the writing assignment, students were asked to draw a picture and write about their favorite part of the field trip. Two students Amy and Jasmine created their own strawberry mini book. They included the four stages of the strawberry lifecycle. I was excited to see that both girls were engaged in the writing process without being prompted. Lauren created a book about strawberries and wanted to read it to me. Students also wrote about other subjects that they learned about on the field trip. Michael, Daniel, and Jennifer chose to write about honeybees. James and Lee wrote about milking cows. Harry, Dalton, and Mandy wrote about the hay wagon ride to the strawberry patch. As I circulated around the room, I heard relevant conversations such as my favorite part was riding in the hay wagon. I also heard students discussing how they were afraid of bees. Additionally, I heard several students say that it was their favorite field trip ever! I did not hear one student say that they did not have anything to write about. Students were able to come up

with topics to write about because they shared in a common experience that was relevant to their writing assignment.

**Week Three Observations.** During week 3, the focus of learning was examining volunteer opportunities in the community. At the beginning of the week, I shared the book *Can We Help? Kids Volunteering to Help Their Communities*. After reading the book, we considered times when we have needed help. Mandy said sometimes she needs help with her homework and her mother helps her. Dalton said that sometimes his grandmother needs help getting to the doctor. Amy said that her mom needs help cleaning the house because her mom works at night and has a lot of brothers and sisters. We then shifted our conversation to the community. Instead of thinking of ways that we may need help at home or at school, we started to discuss ways that our community may need help. I told the class that many homeless shelters have a need for socks, so one year we collected socks and donated them to the local shelter. Lauren added that she goes to the animal shelter to help her mom walk the dogs. Students seemed to have an understanding of empathy and were eager to help others. They immediately started talking at once and sharing ways that they could help others in the community.

The writing assignment for the week was for students to think about a time that you needed help and draw a picture. Students were enthusiastic about drawing and writing and seemed to have a positive attitude during writing time. James told his partner that he remembered when he needed help tying his shoe at school and another student helped him. Don remembered when he needed help finding the nurse and another classmate walked him to the nurse's office. Jennifer recalled a time that she needed help at home putting the dishes away and her older sister helped her. We followed this writing



assignment up with an extension activity. We decided to research local agencies in the community which may need our help. I contacted our school guidance counselor, and she reached out to the community nursing home. The manager at the nursing home said that many of the patients missed their families and wanted to receive letters. I relayed this message to my class, and we decided that we would write letters and make cards to send to the residents of the nursing home. Students were eager to participate in this activity. When they were told that some of the residents were lonely and missed their families, they decided that they wanted to cheer them up by writing letters and sending them cards. Students worked together to create greeting cards that would be sent to the residents of the local nursing home. Sharon said that her grandmother passed away and she wanted to cheer up another grandmother. As students were writing and I walked around the room, I also heard similar comments from students who were actively engaged in drawing pictures on their letters and designing cards.

**Week Four Observations.** This week, students were focusing on investigating their local communities. Students discussed adventures that they have went on in their community. They enthusiastically shouted out places that they have visited in their community. Mandy told the class about going to the local festival in the fall, Lee mentioned going to the grocery store with his mom, and James told the class about the time he went fishing at the lake with his grandfather.

The next day, we followed up our discussion about community adventures by taking a walk around the school. This prompted Kennedy to remember the time her parents took her to the park near her house. She told the class that they had a great time playing on the see-saws. Lauren mentioned that she lived close to the school and could

walk home. Dalton shared the story about playing in his backyard and catching tadpoles after school. Students had positive energy and seemed to enjoy getting outside. They were eager share their experiences that were personal to them.

The following day, students were asked to recall the adventure that they had in their communities and draw a picture at the top of the page. After they drew their picture, they could write about it on the lines below. Students picked their own writing partners and spread out around the room to begin the writing process. The first thing that I noticed was that students enjoyed writing with a partner. They especially liked choosing their own partner. When I moved around the room and asked them why they liked working with a partner, they told me that it helps them write better, their partners help them spell and they could read their stories to each other. Harry said that he liked hearing about his partner's adventure. Mandy and Lauren agreed that writing together was fun because they could talk to each other and help each other come up with ideas to write about. One student, Don, did not like writing with a partner and always preferred to work alone. I allowed him to work by himself and did not push the issue. Forcing him to work with someone could escalate negative behaviors.

Most students were able to get their drawings completed on that day. Some even moved onto writing sentences on the lines. The next day, as we continued the same writing prompt, I took the class outside to write. This was a new writing experience for most, and they all seem excited to get out of the classroom and go somewhere different to write. David sat with his partner on the sidewalk, and they picked up where they left from the day before. Both boys decided to write about a recent adventure to the local

strawberry farm. They referred to the anchor chart that we had made in class about our trip to the farm.

**Week Five Observations.** During week 5, the learning target was for students to understand where they are in the world. We began the week by reading *Where Do I Live?* This book focused on map skills and geography. It started with a small view of where they lived such as their bedroom and slowly went to a larger view with each page. Students are beginning to understand their place in the world. Most know that their town is a small part of their state, which is a small part of the country, etc. However, these concepts can be easily mixed up. When I asked students what the name of their town is, they sometimes say the name of their state instead. This takes practice and repetition. One of the principles of place-conscious education is for students to learn about what is closest to them first.

Prior to the writing lesson, I showed students how to look up their houses and school on Google Maps. They loved doing this and seemed fascinated when they recognized a place as it popped up on their i-Pad screen. This was an excellent way to show students where they are in the world, and they were very engaged doing this activity. I heard a lot of conversations and sharing happening during this time. They enjoyed showing each other their houses, and they took pride in where they lived.

Our writing prompt for the week was for students to draw a map of their bedroom and explain the map. I began by drawing a map of my bedroom under the document camera. After they watched me draw my map, then they went off with their writing partner and began to draw maps of their bedrooms. After they drew a map of their bedroom, I asked them to tell me about it. How did it make them feel? Michael quickly

drew his room and was sure to draw his gaming system and explain it to me. Don did not want to draw his room. He asked me if he could draw a map of the classroom, so he did. Kennedy drew a map of her bedroom and told me that she shared it with her sister and it's messy. As I worked my way around the room, students seemed proud to share where they lived and to tell me and their partners about it. It was also interesting to see what they valued in their room, because that is what they drew on the map and what they talked about the most. Students were happy and engaged during this lesson. It was difficult to get them to stop playing on Google Maps.

**Week Six Observations.** The learning target for week six was for students to closely examine their local community. I began the week with a read aloud from *My Neighborhood: Places and Faces*. We discussed how we could make a new neighbor or classmate feel welcome. We then started a discussion about who has ever been the new kid on the block. We talked about what that means and how it feels. Jennifer shared that it was her first year at this school. She had recently moved from another state in the southeast. She said that she felt scared the first day of school because she didn't know anyone, but she had made a lot of friends. Harry said that this was also his first year at this school. He was previously homeschooled and didn't know anyone at the school. He felt lonely and scared at first. Amy said that she moved from another state this year, but she did not feel nervous because her cousin also goes to this school, and she knew a few familiar faces. After our discussion, the class agreed that it is scary when you do not know anyone, and you are the new kid on the block. To make new people feel comfortable and welcome, you should do your best to talk to them and ask them if they need help. We also discussed that sometimes when you are new to a community, you











could reach out to see what activities the community has to offer new residents. One place that is a great resource for community activities is the local library. To connect our class to the community, I invited the local librarian from the public library to come into the classroom to discuss activities that are available for community members. With the help of our guest speaker, the writing assignment for the week was for students to research upcoming activities at the library and create a poster to help promote the activity. During the intervention, the library had several programs available. A reading bingo game was available for adults and children, mini movers play café, toddler time, Monday morning book club, pre-school story time and a master's gardener were just a few of the programs offered at the local library.

Students were eager to create a poster for one of the activities to hang up in the hallways at school. It helped that this group of students happened to be very artistic, so they enjoyed doing anything that had to do with coloring, drawing and being creative. Jazmine, Mandy, and Lauren chose to create a poster about the children's bingo contest activity. They told me that they picked this activity because they love to play bingo with their families. David and Michael chose to make a poster promoting the mini movers play I because they like to play games. David told me that he had been to the program before with his grandmother and it was a lot of fun. Students were able to use their i-Pads to look up information on each program from the library website. This helped with spelling and wording that could be used on the posters. The class was filled with willing workers with positive attitudes.

## Appendix E: Community Resources



The following list contain points of contact for local community resources. Click on the icon to visit the website.

Click	Business	Phone #
	Pelion Branch Library 206 Pine St.	803-785-3272
	Station 6- Pelion Fire Station (South Region) 940 Pine St.	(803) 389-3888
	Pelion Police Department 1010 Main Street	803-894-9712
	Shumpert's IGA 861 Pine St.	803-894-3132
	Pelion Corporate Airport 100 Airport Rd.	803-894-3535
	Don Pepe's Restaurant 7568 Edmund Highway	803-894-0048
	Post Office 739 Pine St.	800-275-8777
	Clinton Sease Farm 382 Olde Farm Rd, Lexington	803-730-2863
	Pelion Town Hall 611 Pelion Rd.	803-894-3535
	Eudora Wildlife Safari Park 219 Salem Ln., Salley	803-564-5358