



UDK 159.9

EDN MEIRDХ

<https://www.doi.org/10.33910/2686-9527-2022-4-4-435-446>

Research article

Identity texts and relationship to reading and writing in a 6th grade primary school class

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For citation: Renaulaud, C. (2022) Identity texts and relationship to reading and writing in a 6th grade primary school class. *Psychology in Education*, vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 435–446. <https://www.doi.org/10.33910/2686-9527-2022-4-4-435-446>
EDN MEIRDХ

Received 1 August 2022; reviewed 20 August 2022; accepted 20 August 2022.

Funding: The study did not receive any external funding.

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Abstract

Introduction. In a context of identity-based writing workshops, set in a 6th-grade primary school class (students were 12 years old at the time of the experiment) in Quebec City (Province of Quebec, Canada), the purpose of our research was to explore the extent to which the relationship to writing and reading, on one hand, and the writing skills, on the other hand, were going to evolve and in what way (positive, negative, no evolution). The type of texts proposed to the students are called “identity-texts”, that is to say autobiographical texts. Students were invited to write about their own life experience. Those contexts of writing production are supposed to provide a significant context to the activity of writing and therefore to play a positive role in the relationship to writing (Cummins, Early 2011). It is what we intended to explore in our research.

Materials and Methods. Semi-directed interviews were conducted with 10 pupils of the class, before and after the implementation of the workshops, during a period of four months, in a linguistically heterogeneous sixth-grade primary: French-speaking and non-French-speaking students. The interviews were analyzed in order to highlight the evolution of the relationship to reading and writing.

Results. Our results indicate that the relationship to reading and writing has largely evolved favorably and that the meaningful context has allowed the evolution of the students' writing and reading skills.

Conclusions. Therefore, we consider that writing identity texts should be promoted as they give the opportunity to pupils to develop not only their writing skills but also their taste and talent for writing, in a very significant manner.

Keywords: writing and reading skills, reading, relationship to reading and writing, identity texts, primary school students

Научная статья

УДК 159.9

Автобиографические тексты и отношение к чтению и письму у учащихся 6-го класса начальной школы

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Для цитирования: Ренолод, С. (2022) Автобиографические тексты и отношение к чтению и письму у учащихся 6-го класса начальной школы. *Психология человека в образовании*, т. 4, № 4, с. 435–446. <https://www.doi.org/10.33910/2686-9527-2022-4-4-435-446> EDN MEIRDХ

Получена 1 августа 2022; прошла рецензирование 20 августа 2022; принята 20 августа 2022.

Финансирование: Исследование не имело финансовой поддержки.

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Аннотация

Введение. В статье описывается влияние опыта написания автобиографических текстов на динамику отношения к письму и чтению, а также на динамику навыков письма среди учащихся начальной школы. Исследование проводилось в рамках семинаров с учащимися шестого класса (на момент эксперимента участникам было 12 лет) в городе Квебек (провинция Квебек, Канада) в течение четырех месяцев. Учащимся предлагалось подготовить автобиографические тексты, в которых они рассказывают о своем собственном жизненном опыте. В исследовании проверялась гипотеза о том, что создание автобиографических текстов повышает субъективную значимость деятельности по написанию текста, и, следовательно, играет позитивную роль при формировании отношения к письму (Cummins, Early 2011).

Материалы и методы. Были проведены полуинструментированные интервью с 10 учениками в лингвистически неоднородном классе, в котором обучались как франкоговорящие учащиеся, так и учащиеся, не говорящие по-французски. Интервью проводились до начала семинаров и после их окончания. Анализировалась динамика отношения учащихся к чтению и письму после того, как они подготовили тексты с описанием своего жизненного опыта.

Результаты исследования. Участие в семинарах оказало положительное влияние на отношение школьников к чтению и письму. В результате эксперимента также установлено, что использование лично значимого контекста для заданий на чтение и письмо способствует улучшению соответствующих навыков.

Заключение. В работе с учащимися начальной школы необходимо поощрять написание текстов-самоописаний, поскольку такая деятельность дает возможность учащимся не только совершенствовать свои навыки письма, но также развивать свой вкус и способности к письму, причем влияние опыта написания текстов-самоописаний на улучшение этих навыков весьма существенно.

Ключевые слова: навыки письма и чтения, чтение, отношение к чтению и письму, тексты-самоописания, учащиеся начальной школы

Introduction

The relationship to reading and writing, or relationship to the written form¹, can be considered

¹ Our research is based on the concept “rapport à l’écrit” which is difficult to translate from French. It encompasses the relationship of the student to reading and to writing but also relates to all cultural products related to the written form, and, as such, could also be translated as the global relation of someone to the written form. We will use “relationship to the written form” in this text, although we consider it does not give back entirely the meaning of the concept.

as all the meanings created by an individual in respect to reading and writing, including learning to read and write and using reading and writing skills. This relationship starts to develop as soon as the child comes in contact with the written form, even before it learns to read. It evolves during schooling and will be influenced by all the experiences lived by the student in relation to reading and writing, whether they occur in the context of school, family or social events.

In order to develop a favorable relationship to reading and writing, it is of foremost importance to offer meaningful and motivating learning contexts. This can lead students to invest themselves in their learning and develop their reading and writing skills and thus find a certain pride in it. The quality of the relation that will emerge from different learning environments and contexts will influence the relationship to the written form of each student. Moreover, living positive experiences in relation to reading and writing will enable the students to assert who they are, and this affirmation of their identity contributes to the development of their skills since identity and language are intertwined.

One of our hypotheses is that writing identity texts, also known as life stories, could influence the subjects' relationship to the written form because writing involves a large emotional and cognitive investment from the students. In this article we present some results of our doctoral research that we deem interesting because they show that certain teaching-learning situations can help develop a positive relationship to the written form (RWF²).

The relationship to the written form

The concept of the RWF finds its roots in the notion of relationship to writing developed by Barré-De Miniac (Barré-De Miniac 2000; 2002). Her work brought a new insight on the teaching of literacy, showing among other things that the teacher's relationship to writing influences that of the students. He also showed that students often have a difficult relationship to writing because of emotional reasons and not because they necessarily have difficulties with the learning process (Barré-De Miniac 2002; Chartrand 2006).

According to Barré-De Miniac, the relationship to writing refers to "conceptions, opinions, attitudes [...] but also values and feelings attached to writing, its learning and its uses" (Barré-De Miniac 2000, 13). The cognitive aspects linking the writer to writing are of course part of the relationship to writing, but the affective, cultural and social aspects also play an extremely important role. Building on the notion of relationship to writing developed by Barré-De Miniac (2000, 2002), Chartrand and Blaser conduct research on the reading and writing practices of secondary school students and their teachers and expand the notion by speaking of relationship to the written form (RWF), considering that reading and writing are intrinsically linked (Chartrand, Blaser 2008).

We adopt the definition of relationship to writing as formulated by Blaser, Lampron and Simard-Dupuis: "It is the set of meanings constructed by an individual with regard to writing, its learning and its uses; it is the result of complex and evolving interactions between the feelings experienced by the individual with regard to writing (affective dimension), the values he attributes to it (axiological dimension), his conceptions (conceptual dimension) and the judgments on his practices related to writing (praxeological dimension). The relationship to writing shapes the subject's attitudes towards writing and determines his or her practices, which, in turn, feed the dimensions of the relationship to writing" (Blaser, Lampron, Simard-Dupuis 2015, 52).

In our opinion, four dimensions of the RWF allow us to operationalize the concept (Blaser Lampron, Simard-Dupuis 2015) based on the subject's self-reports:

the affective dimension of the RWF deals with feelings and emotions about writing and is manifested in the investment of time, frequency, and energy that the subject deploys in reading and writing activities as well as in the affective interest in different genres of texts;

- 1) the axiological dimension relates to the values attributed to writing, in particular, in order to succeed at school;
- 2) the conceptual dimension refers to conceptions, ideas and representations about the nature of writing, its place in society, its functions in learning, particularly at school, and the reading and writing processes that they implement;
- 3) the praxeological dimension relates to writing and reading activities: what is read and written, the context, the manner (process and tools), the moment and the time invested in these activities.

The various dimensions of the RWF eventually highlight that students' difficulties are not always cognitive difficulties but rather an unhappy relationship with literacy. Indeed, research shows that students are often afraid to write (Chartrand 2006), mostly because they do not believe in their ability to succeed.

This led us to wonder what kind of writing students should do to try to influence their relationship with writing.

Identity texts

It is clear to us that imposing decontextualized themes makes the writing task difficult and meaningless. There is then a strong risk that writing will become, for many students, a trivial exercise without interest, and that they will associate writing

² In order to save space, we will use RWF to designate the relationship to the written form.

with “tedious exercise”, which cannot be beneficial in terms of learning, because without motivation, learning loses all meaning. Following Bucheton (Bucheton 1997), we believe that we have to create situations where knowledge is meaningful for the subject and allows for the construction of identity and cognitive development.

In this search for a genre of text to propose to the students, identity texts appeared to be the ones to use both because of what they allow us to reveal about the approaches and positioning of the writers and because they are based on a strong link between the subject and his or her production, which allows the students to find meaning in the activity. According to Cummins and Early (Cummins, Early 2011), identity texts are the products of creative work (or performances) carried out by students in an educational space orchestrated by the teacher.

They are written productions produced in teaching-learning contexts in multicultural classrooms. They aim to mobilize students around themes related to their life history. Through their identity dimension, these texts have a strongly affective aspect, since the themes proposed are related to the students’ experiences and encourage their expression.

This approach is particularly important for emigrant or recent immigrant students, as identity texts allow students to invest in producing texts that relate to various facets of their personal and family history, and school-family collaboration is often encouraged. By asking students to talk about their history with members of their family (parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, relatives, etc.), we create situations of intergenerational exchange that allow children to understand their history, and to put images and words on parts of their experience that they did not know or did not necessarily understand. This allows them to take a more distanced look at the reasons for their immigration and to make sense of it, which is fundamental for them to integrate well, to blossom and to put down roots in their new environment.

The process also makes sense for the French speaking native students, who also share their family history with each other. These writing workshops often reveal the extent to which children are unaware of their family history. Knowing this history also helps them to know themselves better and, thus, the writing activity becomes truly meaningful to them.

Writing is no longer an end in itself, an academic exercise, but becomes a means to talk about oneself, one’s life, one’s history and one’s family history. In order to encourage their creativity and motivation to write, students (especially allophone/plurilingual

students) are also invited to use their first language(s) or any other language they may have in their repertoire.

Depending on the production contexts, students may use multimodal forms to support their writing, such as drawings, videos, sound recordings, etc. (Armand, Combes, Boyadjieva et al. 2014). Anything meaningful and motivating is mobilized in these writing practices. As a result, they not only strengthen writing skills but also support motivation in a very powerful way (Cummins, Early 2011).

Rowell and Pahl have developed a notion close to that of identity texts and speak of “texts with sedimented identities”. According to them, the process of creating texts is “a process involving a sedimentation of identities in the text, which can thus be considered as an artifact that reflects, through its materiality, the previous identities of the meaning-making subject” (Rowell, Pahl 2007, 388). The researchers consider the text to be a constructed object that reveals important information about the one who “makes” the text, approaching the idea that writing is a creative work. Indeed, their research closely examines how texts come into existence. This metaphor of sedimentation evokes the long and complex process necessary for a text to emerge, with each text reflecting the experiential history or layered identities of its author. Rowell and Pahl view classrooms as living spaces in which students have many important experiences that are constitutive of the construction of their identity, and these experiences are mobilized (more or less consciously) in the writing process. By acknowledging and welcoming each student’s experience with respect and interest, teachers enable students to express themselves authentically, in a reassuring and caring learning context, according to the founding principles of intercultural pedagogy which aim to create communities of learners that are respectful of the particularities of each student. Moreover, other authors, such as Ada and Campoy (Ada, Campoy 2004), emphasize the ability of writing to transform the lives of not only students but also teachers, and even assert that writing contributes to building a more socially conscious and responsible society. Although they do not use the term “identity text”, their pedagogical approach to writing leads students to make connections between their personal lives and their identities. They consider that students can become true authors, and they speak of the “power of authorship”.

Research question

Research has thus shown that a favorable relationship to the written form is important for the development of literacy. It is thus important

to find out how we can bolster this relationship. We therefore chose to see to what extent the writing of identity texts, through a series of writing workshops, allows for a favorable shift in the students' relationship to writing.

Our research attempted to answer the question of what effects the writing of identity texts had on the students' relationship to writing in the context of workshops combining reading, writing and oral expression.

To do this, we designed writing workshops that were deployed over a period of four months with a class of sixth graders and their teacher.

Materials and methods

The intervention took place in a regular, but linguistically heterogeneous, primary school 6th-grade class composed of twenty-five students, ten of whom had an immigrant background. The workshops were conducted with the whole class for four months, from September to December, at a rate of two hours of workshops per week (i. e. 14 workshops), with the collaboration of the teacher. These workshops were structured around four stages : reading of biographical stories; autobiographical writing by the students; correction by the students themselves (supported by the researcher and the teacher), reading of the other's students texts. For our research, we selected five students from Quebec and three from immigrant backgrounds. We analyzed: four texts per student, i.e. thirty-two texts; sixteen semi-structured interviews with the students (eight at the beginning and eight at the end of the experiment) and two interviews with the teacher.

To design our interview guides, we used guides developed in other research contexts on language practices (Perregaux 2002) and on the RWF (Chartrand, Blaser 2008). We selected the relevant themes and adapted the content of the questionnaire to our research questions. The questions on the RWF deal with the affective, praxeological and conceptual dimensions of the RWF.

Our analytical approach is based on a content analysis method (Mucchielli 2006), which is essentially deductive and therefore starts from the conceptual framework, but is not closed to the emergence of new categories during the analysis. The choice of the deductive approach to begin the analysis seemed to us to be more appropriate and allowed us to construct an a priori reading grid that guided our analyses. We therefore proceeded to encode the interviews with NVivo, creating a tree of nodes (each node being a dimension of the RWF) and

were thus able to categorize the data, which subsequently allowed us to create tables in order to report the important data in a synthetic way, and consequently, to characterize the RWF for each subject. In this research, we analyzed: the affective dimension, the praxeological dimension and the conceptual dimension, the axiological dimension having been excluded because it seemed to us more difficult to approach with primary school students.

The affective dimension of the RWF seemed fundamental to us because the writing of identity texts (defined below) is likely to bring out emotions linked to life experience. The students were thus able to tell stories from their lives within the context of the proposed writing and this expression led to a reflection on the self, generated by the act of writing. In order to analyze the affective dimension, we took into account the students' interest in reading and writing. We have taken into account the students' feelings about reading and writing, as well as the amount of time invested in these activities and the timing, as these different elements are indicative of the students' interest in reading and writing.

The praxeological dimension relates to writing and reading activities, which can take place in the school setting but also in a family or social setting. We analyzed the praxeological dimension by looking at the students' reading and writing practices. To do this, we questioned them on different aspects: on the types of texts read and written, on the efforts they make in reading and writing, on the strategies they adopt when difficulties arise and finally on the difficulties encountered during these activities.

The conceptual dimension is related to the students' conceptions and representations of reading and writing. We wanted to understand how they considered reading and writing, what it meant to them and what it was for. We therefore explored the students' representations, through interviews conducted at the beginning and end of the experiment, and identified several functions related to reading and writing, which we then analyzed.

Results

In order to understand the nature of the evolution of the RWF for each subject, we present below very briefly some biographical and language data for each subject, as well as the evolution of the relationship to reading and writing, i.e. an analysis of the differences noted between the pre-experiment interview (Time I) and the post-experiment interview (Time II), in relation to the retained dimensions of the RWF, i. e. the affective, praxeological and conceptual dimensions.

Subject 1FL, French-speaking Quebecer

1FL is a francophone, his father is French and her mother is from Quebec. In terms of the affective dimension, reading presents a strong interest for 1FL. In the interviews, she states that she reads easily, regularly and for pleasure. Her curiosity brings her to make an effort to finish her stories. Over the course of the workshops, her relationship to reading remained constant, i.e. fairly high between Time I and Time II. Her reading habits have not been affected by the workshops, so there have been no consequences on the praxeological level. To her, reading is still a way to relax, to enrich her vocabulary and to make fewer mistakes. We can say that her relationship with reading was already very positive and that it has not changed.

As far as writing is concerned, the affective dimension plays an important role in 1FL and has consequences on the praxeological dimension: she only likes to write when the themes interest her and, often, at school, this is not the case. She writes with pleasure when the theme inspires her. However, the correction stage of the workshops seems very painful to her and tends to diminish her desire to write. Her interest in writing was affirmed during the workshops because she really appreciated the themes proposed and engaged herself enthusiastically in the writing activities. Thus, affectivity had an impact on her practice. As for the conceptual dimension, 1FL still considers that writing makes the imagination work and this element plays a role on her motivation to write, namely on the praxeological dimension. The workshops, especially the one on childhood memories, also allowed her to realize that writing could be used to remember things. On the basis of these analyses, we can say that her relationship to writing has evolved in a positive way during the workshops.

Subject 2MI, Colombian French-Spanish

2MI, born in Colombia, arrived in Quebec at a very young age where he was educated from kindergarten onwards. The family language is Spanish and 2MI is perfectly bilingual. He masters French like a French-speaking student. He speaks Spanish with his parents and French with his sisters. However, he uses both languages depending on the language situation and vocabulary needs.

His RWF, which we will describe as fragile, has changed little. It is clear that he needs to gain confidence in his abilities and needs to read and write more because the little practice he has in reading and writing does not allow him to improve. However, his RWF has changed in some aspects, even if only moderately.

In terms of the affective dimension, 2MI has little interest in reading. He rarely reads outside of school reading. After the workshops, even if he showed an interest in the proposed readings, he did not change his reading habits, neither at school nor at home. The affective dimension is consistent with the praxeological dimension: his interest is moderate, as are his practices. On the other hand, the conceptual dimension has changed a little. In addition to considering that reading helps to maintain his reading skills (at Times I and II), he believes at Time II that reading can facilitate writing. This realization can be attributed to the workshops. Indeed, the writing moments were always preceded by reading and discussions aimed at giving the taste for writing and finding ideas. We therefore believe that the conceptual dimension has been modified by the praxeological dimension.

In writing, 2MI has little commitment and no confidence in his ability to succeed in writing anything. He writes what is required in school, but during the workshops, he had a lot of difficulty reaching the objectives set. We were able to see that several elements hinder his commitment to writing: his lack of confidence in his ability to write, his fear of difficulties and mistakes, and his lack of ideas. The affective dimension therefore influences the praxeological dimension. On the other hand, he has changed conceptually. Indeed, he considers that the writing workshops allowed him to realize that his linguistic baggage was rich: he became aware of how lucky he was to be bilingual! In addition, writing had an effect on his conception of writing; he experienced the writing exercise as a liberating experience, an experience that felt good. For a student with writing difficulties, this awareness is valuable because it could perhaps lead him to engage more with writing. So we can say that even if the praxeological dimension has not changed, the conceptual dimension has changed, which may suggest that these reading and writing practices could change over time his RWF.

Subject 3YA, French-speaking Ivorian

3YA, born in the Ivory Coast, arrived in Quebec City two years before our research. His first language is French, which he speaks with his parents and brothers, but he speaks a Bamileke language from Cameroon with other family members. His RWF evolved during the workshops in terms of both reading and writing.

Indeed, in terms of the affective dimension, his taste for reading, which was moderate at Time I, was consolidated during the workshops. While he used to read only comics and manga, he started to read novels and to read more, just for pleasure.

The praxeological dimension has thus changed and the engagement in his reading practices shows a greater interest in reading, i.e. a change on the affective level. The conceptual dimension also changed as a result of the workshops. At Time I, he considered that reading was about learning words and improving certain aspects of reading (voice, intonation), and that outside of school, reading was useless. However, after the workshops, he mentioned that reading nourished the desire to read. Finally, practicing reading develops a taste for reading! The praxeological dimension is thus closely linked to the affective dimension. We can therefore say that his relationship to reading has evolved in a positive way.

As for writing, the affective dimension has been consolidated, he found that writing was “cool, pleasant and exciting”. He also became seriously involved in writing texts. The affective dimension thus produced effects on the praxeological dimension. He also spoke of the benefits of writing for him, saying that writing could relieve some difficult situations because it allowed him to distance himself from negative emotions. The affective aspect of writing is here clearly associated with the conceptual dimension. His relationship to writing has thus evolved positively in some ways, as has his RWF as a whole.

Subject 4CJ, Kirundi-speaking and French-speaking Burundian

4CJ, born in Burundi, arrived in Quebec City three years before the workshops. Just before his arrival, he lived in China for two years where he attended a French school. His mother tongue is Kirundi. At home, he speaks Kirundi and French with his parents and brothers. He speaks more Kirundi with his younger brothers and with other members of his family.

Following the workshops, we can say that 4CJ's RWF has evolved favorably.

In terms of the emotional dimension, his interest in reading is quite strong. He liked some of the readings because they allowed her to establish a link with his own experience, in particular a book on the life of a 12-year-old Moroccan child who immigrated to Montreal and who writes in her diary about all the changes she is experiencing and to which she must adapt. Having lived through a similar situation, 4CJ identified with this young girl and this certainly helped stimulate his interest. In addition, after the workshops, he says that he is making more effort in reading than at the beginning of the year. We believe that the interest in the themes proposed has encouraged him to read more. The affective dimension thus had an influence

on the praxeological dimension. If we look at the conceptual dimension, we see that it has also changed. Before the workshops, 4CJ considered that reading was useful to better understand what he is reading and to improve his reading skills. However, after the workshops, he thinks that reading helps him to learn to write. His conception of reading may have been modified since the writing activities were preceded by readings to introduce the students to a theme and make them want to write in turn. The conceptual dimension was thus modified by the practices, namely by the praxeological dimension. The relationship to reading has thus been improved.

In terms of writing, as with reading, 4CJ's interest was quite strong from the start. He found the workshops “cool” and wished they had lasted longer. He feels that he improved, tried harder than usual, and was successful. This sense of success certainly played a role in his engagement with the writing. Thus, we believe that the affective dimension had an effect on the praxeological dimension. As for the conceptual dimension, 4CJ considers that writing serves to improve himself in reading and writing. The conceptual dimension thus influenced the praxeological dimension, because by considering that reading and writing allows one to be better, he was motivated and fully engaged in these two activities. His relationship with writing, already rather positive, improved.

Subject 5TA, French-speaking Quebecer

5TA, is a French-speaking Quebecer and her family is French-speaking, even though English is a language present in the family given their years spent in Ontario. She therefore communicates easily in English when she is in a situation that requires it.

This student's RWF, which was already quite positive at the beginning, has evolved in an even more assertive way.

Indeed, on an emotional level, her interest, which was already strong, has been reinforced in the sense that she reads more regularly than before. Since reading is not difficult for her, she does not feel that she has made more effort even though she has read more. She does not perceive this greater investment as an effort since she reads for pleasure. The affective dimension is thus very much linked to the praxeological dimension. On the conceptual level, we also observe changes; she considers that reading allows her to learn, to improve her reading and to relax.

As for writing, her interest in the workshops has had an effect on her vision of writing. She sees writing as “enjoyable, important” and “rewarding”, especially in terms of lexicon. She also said that she

made more effort than usual, she applied herself a lot because she was motivated, but she did not write more. The link between the affective dimension and the praxeological dimension is again tangible in her case. As with reading, the conceptual dimension has changed. At first she saw writing as a way to get a job, but after the workshops, she says that writing is about learning and speaking truthfully about herself, something she had never really been asked to do in a writing context. Her relationship to writing is, like her relationship to reading, quite positive and has evolved.

Subject 6JA, Colombian, bilingual French-Spanish

6JA was born in July 2006 in Colombia and arrived in Quebec City two years before our workshops. Spanish is the family language because his parents are still learning French. 6JA took francization courses during his 5th year while being integrated in a regular class. At the time of the experiment (beginning of grade 6), he is practically bilingual, with some traces of his mother tongue. He is still in an interlanguage, especially in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary. According to his teacher, his level of French allows him to meet all school requirements without difficulty.

As a result of the workshops, this Spanish-speaking bilingual student's RWF has undergone a major change.

Emotionally, he already had a great love of reading, and this love has continued. A very good reader, he chooses texts with a certain difficulty in terms of language and context, such as informative comics intended for an adult audience or youth novels by Quebec authors. The link between the affective and praxeological dimensions is very clear for him. Conceptually, he reads to retain information and to satisfy his strong desire to learn; he is intellectually curious.

The workshops have allowed him to clearly affirm an interest in writing in French, which he really doubted at the beginning.

He realized that he was capable of writing, in French, much more than he thought. This gave him confidence and motivation, always accompanied by a desire to do well. By overcoming his fears, he has excelled himself and is very committed to his writing. He is a very diligent student in general and during the workshops, his efforts did not slacken between the beginning and the end of the experiment. The discovery that writing could be used to write about oneself, about one's experiences, had a major impact on him. At the beginning, he thought that writing was used to retain information and improve his writing skills, whereas after the workshops,

he clearly says that it is the fact of being able to talk about his experiences that touched him and motivated him to write. By expressing himself through writing, he realized that his thoughts were liberated and that, through the affirmation of his experiences, he found great satisfaction, even though he was writing in French. He realized that he was able to overcome his initial difficulties as a second language writer. He also writes outside of school, in Spanish and French, which indicates a definite interest in writing.

Even before the workshops, 6JA had a very favorable RWF in both reading and writing, but primarily in his native language, Spanish (he reads and writes in Spanish). But he did not seem capable of having the same rapport with French. He clearly doubted his ability to succeed in French. Over the course of the workshops, a shift occurred that really seemed to be related to his realization that he was quite capable of achieving the goals. He realized that his writing skills were quite strong, even in a second language. The affective dimension played a very important role and had consequences on his practice, i.e. on the praxeological dimension.

Subject 7LA, French-speaking Quebecer

7LA is a French-speaking Quebecer who loves to read and write.

Despite this, her contribution to writing has evolved. The changes are rather small but they are not negligible.

Emotionally, 7LA is a reader who loves to read and has enjoyed the readings offered during the workshops. She reads novels and comics and feels that she reads more than she did at the beginning of the year. The affective dimension is thus consistent with the praxeological dimension. She considers that she does not have difficulties in reading and therefore does not need to make more effort. Conceptually, she attaches great importance to reading because she says it helps her to live, which is not insignificant. This dimension is thus influenced by the affective dimension and her relationship to reading has remained strong.

As far as writing is concerned, 7LA also expresses a lot of enthusiasm. She finds it easy to come up with ideas but has a lot of difficulty with spelling, even though she says she has improved. Her fairly significant spelling difficulties do not affect her desire to write; she still states that she loves to write even though she dreads the correction period. Thus, we can say that the affective dimension, which is very strong in her, has a positive influence on the praxeological dimension. As for her conception of the usefulness of writing, it is also very much linked to the affective dimension, just like reading,

she says that it helps her to speak and especially to live. We can only note that her relationship with writing is always very positive. Despite the difficulties she has in spelling, which she tends to underestimate, the interest she had in the themes proposed enabled her to maintain her motivation; she really enjoyed writing during the workshops. For this very emotionally expressive student, it is important to maintain motivation because it is a powerful engine that allows her to invest in writing despite the great spelling challenges she faces.

7LA is therefore a student who shows great enthusiasm for reading and writing activities, and her RWF, which was positive, has clearly strengthened.

Subject 9JU, French-speaking Quebecer

9JU, a French-speaking Quebecer, was born in Quebec City. His mother, of Chilean origin, is Spanish-speaking but she speaks French with him, while teaching him Spanish. His father is a French-speaking Quebecer. This is the only subject where the RWF has evolved very little, or even negatively. We tried to understand the reasons for this, especially since there is a gap between what he says and what he actually does, which may seem paradoxical.

Emotionally, he says he likes to read a lot, in both interviews. However, in the final interview, he states that he no longer has time to read outside of school. Despite the fact that he says his interest is high, his reading practices have decreased and he found it difficult to read his own texts during the final reading circle because he did not want to reveal too personal elements. In this respect, we believe that the affective dimension did not move the praxeological dimension in the desired direction. Conceptually, although he believes that reading can be used for entertainment, he does not read more for that reason. His reading practices are not consistent with his conception

of reading, we assume that his motivation is not strong enough (conceptual dimension).

As for writing, he appreciated the weekly rhythm of the workshops and the duration of the workshops. The effort required once a week was sufficient to maintain his motivation. Thus, he did not feel overwhelmed by the writing demands. However, he has a somewhat unique relationship with writing. Although he says he enjoys writing, his enthusiasm is dampened by two aspects: writing hurts his hand and the correction period is “painful”. This has an effect on his motivation and consequently on his practices, namely on the praxeological dimension. He also feels that he is not good in French and this demotivates him, even though he has no particular difficulties. His affective dimension has strong consequences on the praxeological level; he tends not to make any effort for lack of desire. His relationship with writing is therefore, on the whole, rather negative. We cannot say that his RWF has evolved. Very moderate, not very enthusiastic, 9JU wrote and read by obligation in the context of school.

Evolution of the relationship to the written form of the 8 students

On the basis of the data analyzed, we can say that the writing of identity texts, which places the students in meaningful learning situations in writing, aroused the interest of the students and led to a positive evolution of the RWF of all the students, with the exception of one of them.

The table below (Table 1) shows the changes in the students’ relationship to reading and the next table (Table 2) shows the changes in their relationship to writing.

Overall, the workshops seem to have had a positive effect on the relationship to reading. Five out of eight students’ relationship to reading changed favorably, two maintained a very strong interest

Table 1. Evolution of the relationship to reading

Very positive trend	Positive trend, more moderate	No meaningful changes (already a very positive relation)	Downward trend
3YA (French-speaking Ivorian) 4CJ (Kirundi-speaking and French-speaking Burundian) 5TA (French-speaking Quebecer) 7LA (French-speaking Quebecer)	2MI (Colombian French-Spanish)	1FL (French-speaking Quebecer) 6JA (Colombian, bilingual French-Spanish)	9JU (French-speaking Quebecer, Spanish-speaking mother)

Table 2. Evolution of the relationship to writing

Very positive trend	Positive trend, more moderate	No meaningful changes (already a very positive relation)	No changes (rather negative relation)
1FL (French-speaking Quebecer) 3YA (French-speaking Ivorian) 4CJ (Kirundi-speaking and French-speaking Burundian) 5TA (French-speaking Quebecer) 6JA (Colombian, bilingual French-Spanish)	2MI (Colombian French-Spanish)	7LA (French-speaking Quebecer)	9JU (French-speaking Quebecer, Spanish-speaking mother)

and one experienced a weakening of interest, with his commitment to reading remaining low.

Each in their own way mentions either an interest in a new genre of text (either novels or comics, depending on the student), or a strong interest in discovering texts written by their peers, as it allowed them to get to know each other better. Subjects 3YA, 4CJ, 5TA and 7LA evolved into a very strong interest. For 2MI, the evolution was more moderate but it is real. 1FL feels that reading allows him to enrich his vocabulary, 3YA considers that he has developed his interest in reading, 5TA finds that reading is more relaxing and 7LA thinks that reading allows him to learn vocabulary and to live better.

As far as the relationship with writing is concerned, it has improved for all of the students, except for 9JU for whom this relationship was rather negative and has remained so. He wrote little and did not feel like getting more involved. On the other hand, for the other students, it either remained strong (7LA) or evolved favorably (1FL, 3YA, 4CJ, 5TA and 6JA). The affective dimension had positive effects on the praxeological dimension in that their interest in the writing topics made them want to engage in the writing tasks. For 2MI, even though his conception of writing changed (he sees writing as potentially liberating), it did not affect his practices. Thus, the praxeological dimension has not changed for him.

Discussion

We were able to see that writing identity texts had an influence on the students' engagement in writing, this engagement being indicative of their interest in the tasks requested. The links between interest, motivation and commitment appear clearly; these terms are close but not synonymous. Viau, in his research, defines academic motivation as

follows: a dynamic phenomenon that has its origins in a student's perceptions of himself or herself and his or her environment and that motivates him or her to choose an activity, to engage in it, and to persevere in its accomplishment in order to achieve a goal (Viau 1994).

We were able to observe that the writing of identity texts aroused the students' interest, which motivated them and consequently encouraged them to engage in the task. This is one of the strong points of our findings.

Indeed, out of eight subjects, six experienced a strong or increased interest in writing. With the exception of 2MI and 9JU, all other students described writing activities with a variety of adjectives, such as "cool, exciting, enjoyable, pleasant, original, important, fun, motivating, etc." Students talked about their motivation to write about themselves, and talked about how much fun it was to write about themselves truthfully and to share. Self-confidence and a belief in one's ability to succeed are very powerful motivators for learning. The words of 6JA are particularly eloquent in this regard; it was the awareness of his ability to succeed that motivated him enormously and gave him pleasure in writing.

Our data are corroborated by the teacher's observation that increased interest and engagement in writing was evident in most of the students in the class, including those not involved in the research, some of whom made significant progress. According to her, they became more confident in writing and most realized that they were able to write more and better than they thought they could.

In several students, we found that writing identity texts clearly revealed a situational interest, i. e. an interest linked to the situation at the time and which is not always maintained outside the proposed

context (Hidi 1990) and which is more linked to an emotional state aroused by the specific characteristics of a learning situation (Eccles, Wigfield 2002). This type of interest would be opposed to an individual interest which, for Eccles (Eccles, Wigfield 2002), corresponds to a relatively stable evaluative position of the subject towards certain domains. Despite these propositions by Hidi (Hidi 1990) and Eccles (Eccles, Wigfield 2002), we believe that the two are interrelated, as it is difficult to determine whether interest in a type of learning is “only” circumstantial or whether it will last longer insofar as the situation will have marked the student in his or her learning path and will therefore have more lasting consequences than one might have thought at the outset.

Several subjects said they were motivated by the nature of the texts requested. For example, 1FL said that in general, she did not like to force herself if the topics did not interest her, but during the workshops, she applied herself because the topics proposed were new to her and interested her. However, 9JU's interest in reading and writing, already weak at the beginning, did not change during the workshops. Although he does not have difficulty writing, he is not very motivated and his lack of interest seems clearly individual rather than situational.

We can say that the writing of identity texts had an effect on most students' interest in writing tasks. Interest increased in most cases, although this increase in interest did not systematically translate into an increase in time spent on writing but rather into greater effort. In addition, most students felt that they were not struggling, but more importantly, that they had succeeded in achieving their goals and producing quality texts. Indeed, students felt proud of their accomplishment (the whole reading-writing-discussion process) and happy to be able to show it (reading the texts produced). In our own research, but also in research conducted in Ontario

in an elementary classroom on identity writing (Cummins, Early 2011), teachers report that the classroom experience generated enthusiasm among students who discovered that they could be competent in writing.

Conclusion

Our research shows that writing identity texts is a powerful didactic tool for improving students' relationship with writing, and thus giving them a taste for reading and writing. Providing a meaningful context gives meaning to the act of writing. In such writing contexts, students' reflection allows them to think about their relationship with writing, to discover strengths they may not know they have or that they doubt, because students often do not trust themselves when it comes to writing.

Because of their intimate nature, writing these types of texts encourages students to talk about their experiences and to discover each other. In this way, a community of writers is created and, during the workshops, the students change their status: they become true authors.

We believe that these approaches to writing identity texts are not widespread enough in schools. They must be developed in regular classes because all students, regardless of their mother tongue and their life path, can benefit from them and develop a taste for writing.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest, either existing or potential.

Ethics Approval

The author reports that the study complied with the ethical principles for research involving humans and animals.

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