

Abstract of doctoral dissertation by Beverly Nordberg: **Descriptive Case Studies of Basic Writers in Grades 4 through 8 in a Writing Center Setting** (1986)

Results of recent state and national writing assessments disclose that a substantial proportion of students in the upper elementary grades are not able to write proficiently on a variety of writing tasks. Furthermore, dislike of writing grows as students progress through the grades.

In order to provide a profile of these basic writers, with a broad base for understanding various aspects of their work, this study used descriptive case study techniques to examine twenty subjects in grades four through eight in a writing center setting. Four questions provided a framework for the studies. First, what were the composing processes of these basic writers? Second, what do established criteria show about subjects' written product? Third, how do students' interests and attitudes relate to their composing? Fourth, what are parent attitudes and values about writing?

Students composed two writing samples, a narrative and a non-narrative. Detailed observations and student conferences provided data on their composing processes. Assessment of the writing processes included criteria related to fluency, content and structure,

language style and usage, and mechanics. Student and parent attitudes were investigated through interviews, observation, and a student attitude inventory. Patterns were selected for which there was substantial evidence generated by the data, to provide a profile of these young writers.

Findings disclosed three patterns in students' composing behavior: automaticity of skills caused caused problems for some writers; prewriting and planning techniques were poorly utilized; and and narrative writing was more interesting and successful than non-narrative writing.

Assessment of writing products showed that students' composing processes affected their final product, and that subjects' writing development lagged as they progressed from grade four to grade eight.

Two patterns emerged from data gathered on students' interests and attitudes. Writing apprehension increased as students moved through the grades. Also, students were able, despite sometimes poor performance, to show objective knowledge of writing skills, and to make perceptive comments about their own work.

In data gathered to answer the fourth question, parents' views reflected both pragmatic needs for improvement of their child's writing, and awareness of the psychological aspects of the need for a positive self-concept.