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ABSTRACT

A study examined the outcomes of dialogue journal writing from the perspectives of undergraduate teacher education students. Eighteen undergraduate students in a language arts methods course corresponded with 28 fifth-graders. Data included whole class discussions with the teacher education students, formal interviews, and written self-reports. Preliminary data analysis indicated that dialogue journals can help in the development of classroom teachers. They allow the education student to: (1) enter the personal lives of children; (2) respond to children's concerns; (3) talk "authentically" with children and listen "authentically" to children; (4) balance process/product and content/mechanics in writing; (5) model the writing process for students; (6) identify specific areas in which students need instruction and guidance; (7) adapt to and plan for individual differences; (8) provide concrete encouragement for reluctant students; (9) recognize the natural curiosity, openness, and honesty that characterize most children; and (10) see the "whole child." The next phase of the research process is three-fold: continuation of data collection with new students; incorporation of results into the ongoing use of dialogue journals in the college classroom; and expansion of the project to include elementary school students in an urban setting. (Sample questions used in data collection and an appendix of categories, sub-categories, and sample data are attached. (Contains 16 references.) (RS)

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ENTERING THE WORLDS OF CHILDREN:
USING DIALOGUE JOURNALS
IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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Using Dialogue Journals in Teacher Education

The National Council of Teachers of English

1993 Annual Convention - November 19, 1993

Introduction

Numerous definitions of "dialogue journals" have appeared in the literature and in professional conversations during recent years. Therefore, it may be helpful to begin with two statements that capture this author's notion of the nature and intent of the dialogue journal process. First, Staton (1987) offers the following definition:

A dialogue journal contains a genuine conversation, written rather than spoken, a means by which individual students at any age can carry on a private discussion with the teacher. ... The distinguishing characteristics of dialogue journals are their *interactive, functional* nature, and the creation of mutually interesting topics. Such dialogues occur on a daily or regular basis throughout the school year, extending the conversation across time for purposes of communication, self-understanding, negotiation of the classroom relationship, and problem-solving. (p. 49)

Tompkins (1990) further emphasizes that:

[dialogue journals] are interactive, conversational in tone, and provide the opportunity for real student-teacher communication. ... Students write informally to the teacher about something of interest or a concern, and the teacher responds. Students choose their own topics for writing and usually control the direction that the writing takes. (p. 39)

A variety of research findings support the use of dialogue journals as a means of encouraging students' thinking (e.g., critical thinking, problem

solving, analytical skills, and decision making) and writing (e.g., fluency, mechanics, enjoyment of writing, awareness of audience and purpose).

The benefits of using dialogue journals in the classroom have been described in various ways (see Bode, 1989; Staton, 1987; and Tompkins, 1990). More research is clearly needed to determine the specific skills and writing behaviors that can be facilitated through the process of written dialogue between teacher and students or student and student.

It was with the belief that dialogue journals provide a powerful means for enhancing children's thinking and communicating skills that this researcher has modeled this process in a Language Arts Methods classes for a number of years. This has taken place in a variety of ways. On some occasions, pre-service teachers have been asked to exchange journals with one another, usually on a weekly basis. During other semesters, students have corresponded with the course instructor in this manner. In the second instance, the content of the journals related mostly to issues discussed in class, questions arising from readings or from field experiences, reflections on teaching, and the like.

During the Fall 1992 semester, the dialogue journal process was implemented in a different way. Students in the undergraduate Language Arts Methods class maintained a weekly written dialogue, via journal exchange, with fifth grade students from an elementary school approximately 15 miles from campus.

The project was initiated as a result of discussions between the fifth grade classroom teacher and the university teacher / researcher. The original objectives were twofold: (1) to provide a real audience with whom fifth graders could conduct an on-going written exchange, and (2) to model the dialogue journal process for students in the Language Arts Methods / Techniques of Teaching class.

In the undergraduate elementary education program at the researcher's institution, students enroll in a "block" of methods courses during the semester before student teaching. This professional block includes a field based component along with work in the college classroom. Therefore, students enrolled in the Techniques of Teaching class would be simultaneously enrolled in the Language Arts Methods class with the same instructor (as well as other methods courses with other instructors). This format provides opportunities for integration of content across courses. For many students,

this semester represents the first actual classroom experience of any intensity or duration.

The dialogue began on the first day of school for the fifth graders, who wrote introductory messages in spiral-bound notebooks which were delivered to the university. The process then continued on a weekly basis throughout the semester.

The journals immediately proved to be an exciting and beneficial experience for the college students as well as the fifth graders involved in the project. College students and fifth graders were equally anxious and excited each week as they received the latest installment from their journal partners.

The journal exchange continued through the semester. The experience culminated in a visit to the school, which included a party and a writing experience in which journal partners collaborated in the writing of stories that were shared at the end of the afternoon.

Early in the semester, it became apparent that the journals were providing undergraduate students with insights that extended beyond the writing process itself and, indeed, beyond the original objectives for the activity. As these students interacted with their fifth grade partners, they first noticed how the journal entries became more elaborate and rich with each week. The fifth graders shared information, told stories, and asked questions that served to reveal the nature of their day-to-day lives as children and as students. The writing process provided a rich source of information upon which to base classroom discussions about teaching, learning, language development, communication, and other topics.

A search of the literature revealed that little attention has been devoted to the use of dialogue journals in teacher education. Ford (1990), Phelps (1992), and Stephens and Reimer (1990) have provided some insights into the writing process as a way to develop pre-service teachers' understandings of children and their writing practices. Others (see Bean & Zulich, 1989; Hennings, 1992) have explored the usefulness of dialogue journals which are maintained between the college professor and pre-service (or in-service) teacher. More research is clearly warranted in this area. In addition, an investigation of dialogue journals could contribute to existing research in a number of other areas such as teachers' beliefs (Pajares, 1992), teacher growth (Kagan, 1992), and student-teacher discourse (Englert, Raphael, & Anderson, 1992; and Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

As the aforementioned additional benefits of the written dialogue became apparent, the researcher decided to undertake a more in-depth investigation. The dialogue journal project continued during the following semester (Spring 1993, with the same fifth graders, but a group of different Language Arts / Techniques of Teaching students), a more deliberate collection of data was undertaken, specifically related to the outcomes of dialogue from the perspectives of the undergraduate teacher education students. The next section of this paper represents an overview of that process. It is followed by a summary of preliminary findings and some ideas about future directions and applications.

Data Collection And Analysis

This is a qualitative research study in progress. The first phase of research was completed in May of 1993. During the Spring 1993 semester, data were collected in the form of (1) whole class discussions with students, (2) formal interviews with students, and (3) written self-reports. The following exploratory (hypothesis-generating) questions were considered:

1. Through their written dialogues, what do pre-service teachers learn about how children think and communicate?
2. What specific effects do dialogue journals have on pre-service teachers' present beliefs and developing views of literacy, children, writing, and teaching?

Each of the data collection methods is discussed separately in the following:

1. Discussions - The Techniques of Teaching / Language Arts Methods class met each Thursday for a 5-hour class session. Each session consisted of responding to the latest journal entries from the fifth graders. There were 18 undergraduate students corresponding with 28 fifth graders. Following the writing, the entire class discussed the journal process, with specific attention to insights gained about children's thinking and communication.

2. Formal interviews - In individual meetings (conducted by assistants), the undergraduate students were asked to share what they have learned in the process of maintaining a dialogue with a specific fifth grade student. A standard set of questions was used to derive similar types of information from each student (see Appendix A).

3. Written reports - Students were asked, at mid-semester and again at the end of the semester, to provide an open written reflection upon what they have learned as a result of the dialogue journal process. The mid-semester response was in the form of a free-write, while the end-of-semester reflection consisted of responses to specific open-ended questions (see Appendix A).

The content of the journals themselves was not included in the analyses. At the outset, students (both college and fifth grade) were assured of the confidentiality of their dialogue. This was determined (by the classroom teacher and university researcher) to be a necessary condition for a truly open and authentic exchange between student and teacher (in this case, pre-service teacher).

Data collected during the Spring semester were analyzed to determine theoretical categories and to generate hypotheses regarding the nature and effects of the dialogue journal experience in a teacher education setting. The overall research and analysis process was carried out according to guidelines for qualitative inquiry outlined by Brause and Mayher (1991), Glaser and Strauss (1967), Hutchinson (1988), and others for the development of grounded theory.

Data analysis and interpretation proceeded according to the following steps:

1. Coding of transcripts and written responses;
2. Organization of narrative samples into categories related to the research questions;
3. Further coding to identify sub-categories;
4. Development of an integrative outline representing the overall "sense" of the data collected and analyzed;
5. Interpretation.

At each stage of analysis, categories were refined, expanded, combined, or eliminated, depending upon the meanings and logical connections that emerged during the process. This is a process that one might refer to as "taking apart the story and putting it back together."

Data continue to be collected as the dialogue journal process has proceeded through the Fall 1993 semester. The process of analysis, category refinement, and interpretation will continue with this expanding narrative data set.

The ultimate intent of this study is to create a theoretical base from which additional inquiries can proceed. As viable hypotheses arise and are tested against emerging data, the dialogue journal process will be examined for its potential contribution to the improvement of students' understandings of children's thinking and communication processes.

Findings

The written responses and interview transcripts reveal a wide variety in pre-service teachers' ideas and reflections about the thinking and communicating of fifth graders, about writing, and about teaching. The coding procedure resulted in a number of categories corresponding to each of the two primary research questions. Final categories were established only if a significant number of statements could be associated with the category label. Further, no statement was assigned to more than one category. (A statement is defined as a complete thought and usually consists of two or more sentences, sometimes considerably more.) Of the categories discussed below for both research questions, using data from the first research sample only (Spring 1993, N = 18), *Content* is represented by the greatest number of statements (108 total) while *Modeling* is represented by the least number of statements (8 total). The average number of statements per category (for the first research sample only) is 32. During the coding and categorizing process, isolated and irrelevant statements were removed from the data set. Subsequent data collection has resulted in additional examples being added to each category, but, so far, no change in the categories themselves. The specific categories, along with narrative examples of each, are included in Appendix B. It should

be noted that Appendix B contains selected examples for each category, chosen to represent the complete data set.

Question 1: Through their written dialogues, what do pre-service teachers learn about how children think and communicate?

The data corresponding to the first question were organized into five major categories, namely Content, Level, Technique, Motivation, and Personal Reactions. In other words, as the pre-service teachers described what they learned about children during the dialogue journal process, they tended to emphasize these five areas, which are defined below and exemplified in Appendix B.

- a. The *Content* category represents students' comments related to what their partners wrote about.
- b. Statements in the *Level* category reflect the need to adapt communication to the student's level. Also, comments related to the characteristics of fifth graders' writing (i.e., high or low level) were also included in this category.
- c. The *Technique* category contains statements regarding the mechanical aspects of children's writing (e.g., grammar, spelling, and penmanship). This category includes pre-service teachers' reflections on the balance of process and product in children's writing.
- d. The pre-service teachers experienced varied degrees of motivation (to write) on the part of the fifth grade partners. These reactions are included in the category called *Motivation*.
- e. Finally, the pre-service teachers frequently discussed the personal connections they felt (or failed to feel) between themselves and their partners. The *Personal Reactions* category contains statements of this type.

Question 2: What specific effects do dialogue journals have on pre-service teachers' present beliefs and developing views of literacy, children, writing, and teaching?

Responses related to the second question were organized into the following five categories: Beliefs, Modeling, Applications, Benefits, and Special Considerations.

- a. The *Beliefs* category includes statements regarding pre-service teachers beliefs about the characteristics of fifth grade children.
- b. During the writing process, many of the college students realized their role in modeling good writing practices for children. Comments of this type were placed in the *Modeling* category.
- c. When pre-service teachers discussed how they would apply what they had learned (from the dialogue journal process) in their own classrooms, their statements were included in the *Applications* category.
- d. The *Benefits* category contains comments related to the benefits of dialogue journals for both teachers and students.
- e. The college students sometimes expressed concerns or reservations about certain aspects of the dialogue journal process. Statements of this kind were placed in the *Special Considerations* category.

Conclusion

It is apparent from the findings that, through the dialogue journal process, pre-service teachers do, indeed, acquire new insights into the thinking and communicating of children and that they do develop new understandings and beliefs with respect to literacy, children, writing, and teaching. Specifically, to summarize and synthesize the ten categories of

responses described above, dialogue journals can help developing classroom teachers to:

1. Enter the personal lives of children; deal with issues of closeness vs. professional distance; recognize the magnitude and scope of challenges children bring to school;
2. Respond to children's concerns, both personal and scholastic;
3. Talk "authentically" with children and listen "authentically" to children;
4. Balance process / product and content / mechanics in writing;
5. Model the writing process for students;
6. Identify specific areas in which students need instruction and guidance;
7. Adapt to and plan for individual differences;
8. Provide concrete encouragement for reluctant students;
9. Recognize the natural curiosity, openness, and honesty that characterize most children;
10. See the "whole child"; understand how multiple dimensions of children interact with and affect the learning process across time.

The next phase in the research process is threefold:

1. Data will continue to be collected during the current school year (1993-94) and into next year (1994-95). In addition to the Language Arts Methods class, the dialogue journals have been used with a freshman class of Education majors. This will be repeated in the Fall of 1994 and accompanied with systematic data collection. The responses of this group may provide for

some interesting comparisons and lead to some insights related to the development of pre-service teachers during their college years.

2. The researcher will seek ways to incorporate the results of this study into the on-going use of dialogue journals in the college classroom. The challenge becomes how to provide a more intentionally structured dialogue journal experience to encourage students' thinking and reflection around the issues identified in this study.

3. The project will be expanded to include elementary school students in an urban setting. Plans are underway to form a dialogue partnership, via electronic mail, with students in an urban school approximately 75 miles from campus.

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APPENDIX A
SAMPLE QUESTIONS USED IN DATA COLLECTION

Directions for Freewrite

Please share, in writing, some of your thoughts about the dialogue journals we are exchanging with the 5th graders from Franklin Central School.

This is a "structured freewrite", so you can write about anything you want related to dialogue journals.

The questions below are just suggestions to help you generate ideas. You do not have to answer most or all (or any) of these questions.

Please do your writing on a separate sheet of paper. Include your name and today's date. Thanks!

Questions to provoke thought

What kinds of things does your partner write about?

What do you write about?

What questions do you ask?

How would you describe your partner's writing? What about content? Writing style? Sentence structure? Grammar? Spelling? Handwriting?

What has been surprising or unexpected about what your partner has written to you?

What are you learning about the thinking and communicating of 5th graders?

More specifically, what are you learning that could to apply to your own classroom practice?

What questions do you have?

What are you looking forward to (anticipating) in the next communication you receive from your partner?

As a classroom teacher, what benefits do you see in using dialogue journals?

What possible drawbacks or negative aspects can you perceive?

Are there specific examples you'd like to share (paraphrase)?

Sample Interview Questions

What kinds of things does your partner write about?

What do you write about?

What questions do you ask?

How would you describe your partner's writing? [Probing questions: What about content? Writing style? Sentence structure? Grammar? Spelling? Handwriting?]

What has been surprising or unexpected about what your partner has written to you?

What are you learning about the thinking and communicating of 5th graders?

More specifically, what are you learning that could to apply to your own classroom practice?

How would your communication be different with (younger or older) students?

What questions do you have?

What are you looking forward to (anticipating) in the next communication you receive from your partner?

As a classroom teacher, what benefits do you see in using dialogue journals?

What possible drawbacks or negative aspects can you perceive?

Are there specific examples from your journal that you'd like to share (paraphrase)?

[Probing questions based upon open-ended responses: Request elaboration, clarification, specific examples from journal writing, etc.]

Post-Survey

Name _____

What kinds of things did your partner write about?

What did you write about?

What have you learned about the thinking and communicating of 5th graders?

More specifically, what have you learned that could be applied to your own classroom practice?

Use the back of this sheet for any other comments you have about the dialogue journal process.

APPENDIX B
CATEGORIES, SUB-CATEGORIES, AND SAMPLE DATA

The ten categories represented in the data are arranged according to the research questions (five categories for each of the two questions). Each category name is followed by a number in parentheses, which represents the total number of statements representing that category in the original data set (Spring 1993, N = 18). Further, each sample statement is followed by a letter code in parentheses, which refers to the source of the quotation, as follows:

- (F) - Freewrite (open reflection), conducted at mid-semester;
- (I) - Interview (semi-structured), conducted between mid-semester and the end of the semester;
- (PS) - Post-Survey (written response to open-ended questions), conducted at the end of the semester.

Question 1 - Through their written dialogues, what do pre-service teachers learn about how children think and communicate?

CONTENT (108)

5th graders write about:

- school
- birthdays
- boyfriends
- sad things (e.g., death)
- house
- animals (pets and farm)
- sports
- family
- friends
- cars
- clothes
- hobbies and interests
- vacations
- likes and dislikes
- physical appearance
- answers to questions asked
- self
- whatever is on their minds
- personal things
- upsetting things
- material things
- hobbies

"My partner writes a lot about sports and her pets. I thought it was cute and a little surprising, but my partner said that she has a boyfriend (5th grade). Also, she said she likes boys because she can't help herself. ... She explained that she hates Math. "It's stupid" It is really a shame because most girls are shied away from Math and Science by teachers, parents, etc. I was really hoping I would hear that she liked Math." (F)

"My partner talked about sports. ... I tried to write back to him on his level and his interest. ... I hope when [he] writes back it's not only about sports because I used up all my sports stories before and that means in order to communicate next time I'll have to watch ESPN." (F)

"She wrote about her family and she wrote about that her brother was killed in a car accident, and about her boyfriend. And I wrote back about my boyfriend and about my family, just basic things. I was surprised when she told me that she had two sisters and a brother and she went into details about how he was killed in a car accident. I was kind of surprised that she didn't even know me and she wrote about it. She wrote that like the second time. ... I was like "OH, MY GOD!" I was shocked when I read it." (I)

"Since I was here [at college], they both really asked about materialistic things, like what kind of car I have, and then they were just curious about what I looked like then, if I had a boyfriend. I was surprised that there weren't many things about what type of person I am. They are still just at the level where it's just finding out about materialistic things." (I)

"The child told me that he didn't like school. I find that a lot of children don't like school. I think the teacher should try and make it more interesting. Because, for some reason, if the children really don't like school, then that way they don't learn. I think if they are more interested in it, then they will learn more." (I)

"The first entry that I got this child told me that he wanted to get an earring, and I thought that was a little surprising for a fifth grader, but I guess, nowadays, I guess it's not such a big deal for a guy to get an earring in fifth grade." (I)

LEVEL (25)

When communicating with 5th graders, it is necessary to:

- think about what I say

"I am learning that before I write, I have to think if [my partner] will understand the words that I chose. I have to adapt to his age level. He seems pretty intelligent from what I can tell though." (F)

- adapt

"I've learned that I have to write more on their level and that I have to change the way I write to show I understand my writing." (I)

- try to get a "true picture", rather than assume

"I'm learning at the level that they are thinking, you're getting to see in the mind of a fifth grader rather than having to make an assumption and never getting a true picture." (I)

Characteristics of the writing of 5th graders:

- high level of writing

"I learned that they know a lot more than I expected. Also, I was surprised about how much he wrote." (PS)

"They are extremely smart. My partner wrote very neatly with correct spelling and cursive writing. Very bright class." (PS)

- low level of writing

"Unfortunately, each question I ask, she answers in one, simple sentence." (F)

"They communicated very simply. Their sentences were brief and to the point. They really did not elaborate on anything they wrote about." (PS)

"Communication is somewhat shallow. She didn't write as well as I had expected." (PS)

"I was surprised at the level of my partner. I thought it was really low for a fifth grader. ... My partner answered only selective questions and many times didn't

answer any. I thought that a boy writing to a boy would excite him more to write about things that he wouldn't talk about to a girl, but it didn't." (PS)

- content: openness, profound thoughts, maturity

"Fifth graders are funny at times. They will say anything that is on their mind. I also learned though at times they can be very profound." (PS)

"Fifth graders are approaching maturity. They want to be grownups, but they are not." (PS)

TECHNIQUE (39)

- good

"Her writing skills aren't bad, and she gets her thoughts across in a clear and concise way. Her spelling was good for the most part and she expressed herself well. I look forward to communicate to her in the future." (F)

"His penmanship is legible, he writes in script. His spelling is surprisingly good." (F)

"He writes well. All of his spelling and grammar has been correct from what I read so far. His handwriting is pretty neat considering his age." (F)

"She writes very neat, she spells correctly. Like once in awhile she will like misspell a word. She writes in complete sentences, and she doesn't write short sentences; she writes like a lot of information in her sentences." (I)

- not so good

"The child that is writing to me is a very poor writer. His thoughts are unorganized and his grammar, spelling and handwriting are poor as well." (F)

"I thought that my fifth grader would have a better grasp on spelling. It is an extreme weakness for her." (F)

"She has very poor spelling. ... I hope that I will be able to help my classroom with better spelling skills." (F)

"Well, my handwriting is atrocious and I'm twenty years old, but hers, she wrote in script but it wasn't very good." (I)

- content vs. mechanics

"[Her] handwriting needs practice but the content of her writing is sound. Her spelling and grammar are not perfect but they are good." (F)

"I'd say the content is pretty good, the style is pretty good, the grammar and spelling they are about average, they could use some improvement but i don't think they're really doing it for their spelling it's just for fun, she's not a bad speller." (I)

"The content's good, I mean he definitely gets the point across. And his grammar is, I mean, decent; there's no big problems that you notice. He just has sloppy handwriting, but then so do I, so it's..." (I)

"His handwriting is messy; he seems to have his ideas all right, he tries to spell words, he's come up with complicated words that he sounds out I would guess and he writes them down. Sentences seem grammatically fine, I don't read any sentences and say all right this what, I don't have to kind of figure out what he's trying to say, except if it's a word he tried to spell out. I mean I can understand what he's writing." (I)

- development / individual differences

"Her first journal writing was one sentence per line, but when she responded to me this second time it was in paragraph form." (F)

"The first journal entry of my partner seemed messy. The handwriting improved on the second entry. The messiness I think came from an attempt to spell words that he did not know how to spell. On the second entry the words were neater and spelled correctly." (I)

"They are very different, one is very neat in script, I remember she is the one who said she likes reading a lot. The other one is very, I think she writes in script but I wrote back to her in print just so that she can read it because I can't tell like how far along she is. She inverts a lot of letters, a lot of times I kind of like have to decode it, it's just that it's hard. But once you figure it out, it's really cute." (I)

MOTIVATION (12)

5th graders:

- write a lot

"I was amazed about how much he wrote. I only expected him to write a few sentences but he wrote a whole page." (F)

- write little

"My partner hasn't had much to say so far. I've asked him several general questions but he didn't answer them. My partner has talked about basketball and football so far. ... I think my partner can communicate well but seems shy. Maybe during the semester he will begin to write more. I have told him a lot about myself in hopes that he will open up more. In the next entry I hope my partner will answer questions I have asked." (F)

Q: "What are you looking forward to in the next communication that you will receive?"

A: "Two sentences."

Q: "More information?"

A: "Yeah!" (I)

PERSONAL REACTIONS (25)

- looking forward to responses

"I was upset that I didn't receive a journal today. I keep trying to figure out why she didn't write back. Was I not interesting, did I not ask the right questions, and did I write something she didn't like? I really hope she writes back next week because I enjoyed answering her letter." (F)

"I like the idea of corresponding in a dialogue journal. It's exciting to receive a response from somebody. I was a little upset this week when Andrew didn't write back. I would love to correspond with someone my own age, it would be really fun." (F)

- becoming acquainted

"I would like to get to know a little about his personal and family life. I hope his letters become longer throughout the semester." (F)

"She acted like my friend and was mature when she wrote." (PS)

- gender identification

"She was very excited that I was a girl because she didn't want another boy for a partner." (F)

"I thought he would write more, I thought since I'm a boy and he's a boy, he would have been more excited. I thought he would more excited, maybe he is and he just doesn't write as much. I thought he would come back expecting a girl and think 'Ahh, I got a guy all right!'" (I) "I thought that a boy writing to a boy would excite him more to write about things that he wouldn't talk about to a girl, but it didn't." (PS)

- expectations

"[I'd like] more detailed information and more information period. Just maybe he's guarded, like he doesn't like to talk about himself or show about himself, maybe his mother told him not to tell too much about himself. My mother tells me that." (I)

"I always give him like five or six answers and he'll answer one or two of them and it always kind of ends with, uh, I don't have too much to say today or something like that. So I feel kind of bad I'm waiting for all these questions and I'm waiting for something to happen here where he just goes nuts and writes. And it hasn't happened yet so I'm waiting for that, it's kind of tough to write back. ... I don't want to get repetitive, asking him the same questions over and over." (I)

Question 2 - What specific effects do dialogue journals have on pre-service teachers' present beliefs and developing views of literacy, children, writing, and teaching?

BELIEFS (14)

5th graders:

- are curious

"They are very curious, they ask questions, I guess that's what most of their entries are questions and answers, as far as responding to questions I write they are not very forward with that, they still hold back." (I)

- are open

"[They] let you in on so many things. Like, somebody had a girl who's sister died in an accident, and she wrote that right away and I was surprised that she able to do that, I guess because she is younger she could say it easier and it comes out quicker, these personal things." (I)

- communicate well / ask good questions

"She can communicate very well. She knows how to ask questions. She knows that, even though we're different ages, the questions aren't so, like, easy ... They're like questions that basically anyone could answer, not just on the level of kids." (I)

- are blunt

"[When they] want to ask something, they just say it or ask it; you know they are pretty blunt." (I)

- do not always elaborate without encouragement

"They write straight and to the point, they don't elaborate on anything, they don't go into great detail." (I)

- think a lot

"They do have a lot going through their minds, they do think a lot, and they do have their own interests and they are developing their own personalities that way. They know what they like and don't like." (I)

- don't have much on their minds

"He'll answer my questions if I ask him certain questions. I just think that right now, he's just at a stage in his life where he doesn't really care about anybody except for what he's doing after school, and I think that's the way it should be. He doesn't have, like, worries or concerns." (I)

MODELING (8)

- passive modeling

"I think she used my writing as a "role model" to her writing." (F)

"It was funny the first time she wrote me, it was kind of messy and not in any order and then the second time she wrote she like copied my style of writing. It was it kind of neat and more paragraphs and sentences and stuff, with periods and grammar." (I)

"She started copying my writing style, such as sentences, etc." (PS)

- active modeling

"I think that when writing in journals to any grade level it's important to write about what they are interested in to help elaborate their writings. I keep trying to ask questions about her and her hobbies to help me when writing back." (F)

APPLICATIONS (18)

- how to communicate

"You have to learn how to answer questions more carefully maybe, to maybe not ask question that are too personal, or just something that, the professional way I guess, that the best way to describe it." (I)

"I can imagine, like for this child that must be extremely frustrated because I started writing and my first couple passages were long and when I realized that he wasn't responding I tried to write two line responses to him because I don't want to frustrate him and ask him all these questions that he can't answer." (I)

"I think that students need some kind of affection, especially if they do not receive any at home. The teacher should be a friend when necessary, but must maintain their relationship as a teacher as well." (PS)

- areas to emphasize

"I'm probably going to try and emphasize spelling a bit more, I mean she is a fifth grader and she is not spelling too well. I would probably emphasize more writing, more penmanship, more practicing." (I)

"There are some very poor fifth grade writers, and some need to be worked with more." (I)

- specific practices

"I would like to have the children write down and then I could respond to them, and have the children write journals in between themselves and then respond to each other." (I)

"I would definitely use the journals. I think it is a very good activity to get them to write and give them a chance to write for an audience, not just for themselves or for a teacher to grade, to actually write to a person and make contact get responses. And to use their inventive spelling, because sometimes, like I said, they don't know how to spell something but they know if they can write they can get a message across." (I)

"I think this would be a very good idea for my classroom, either to have them write back and forth to each other or have them write to me or have them write to other classes and maybe like have pen pals sort of and then I guess by doing this you learn a lot more about the students." (I)

"I would want to have different kinds of journals, different kind of letter writing, because I think you can get a lot from most of the responses, knowing that you are sending something out and that someone is actually paying attention to it, that it's important." (I)

- assessment

"I think it is a good way to evaluate their writing skills and if they need practice on writing and spelling and all those things." (I)

"Dialogue journals] are also a good informal assessment technique." (PS)

BENEFITS (58)

- helps pre-service teachers develop understandings

"[The journal process] prepares you for the attitudes and the way of life of the students before you actually get to a classroom." (I)

- provides information about the child

"It lets the teacher know a little more about what's going on with the child. In their writings, students can express any concerns they may be having." (F)

"It helps communicate feelings to the teachers from the students, because a lot of times teachers don't know what their students are thinking. There's no reason to play a guessing game just to find out." (I)

"It is a good way of getting information from students. A way of getting to "really" know your students, personally." (PS)

- fosters enjoyment of writing

"Since they are allowed to write whatever they want, they are more likely to enjoy it. I would do this in my classroom." (F)

"It helps them with just writing. I mean no-pressure writing; you just sit back and write what you're feeling. You're writing to a friend, it's not graded. They don't worry about it and that's the big thing; students don't want to write because they think 'Uh, I'm going to get graded on this', and they maybe focus more on getting the spelling right and having everything grammatically perfect and you get boring sentences, 'I went to the store', and no one tries new words, and this way they can do whatever they want." (I)

"It encourages children to write about things that they like. This helps to develop a positive attitude toward writing." (PS)

- facilitates improvement in students' writing

"Through practice, students are able to refine their ideas. Through observation of and interaction with other writers, students are able to develop new techniques, acquire a unique style, and refine both their writing and thought processes." (F)

"It gives them also a chance to practice their writing in an unrestricted environment, and they aren't going to be like "Oh, my god, I have to write good because I'm getting graded on it". It gives them a little practice with their writing." (I)

"I think that journal writing is an important part of language arts and helps to develop motor skills and perhaps spelling, vocabulary and other writing skills." (PS)

- helps the student to know the teacher

"The student would feel more comfortable around the teacher, to have a better relationship, and to understand the teacher on a more personal level." (I)

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS (9)

- getting too personal

"If I were to have it with each of my students, it might be a negative, if they started to ask questions that were too personal, kind of on that line. Some questions are too personal that the students aren't supposed to know about the teacher." (I)

"I guess if someone had a serious problem and they were writing to another student. I mean if something was wrong at home, like if they were being, God forbid, abused or something and telling another 5th grader." ... I think that's a problem. But if it's just, like, about school and you're having a problem with your best friend, or you don't like the desk you're sitting in, because that's what fifth graders complain about. Or you didn't have enough time for lunch, then that's fine; but if it's a serious problem and they're using this to talk to somebody, then I think that's a problem." (I)

- taking time

"It takes up some time but I think that it is beneficial. It takes up time because it's their time to write and it's free writing." (I)

- considering individual differences

"The kids would have to be sure to be given enough time to do it because some kids can't work as quickly as someone else and, too, if a child was matched with a child who wrote real, real well, it might intimidate them, so the teacher might want to be sure that their abilities were around the same." (I)

"While the other children are getting something out of it, some of them won't at all. You can't really force the child to write in the journal. It has to be something they enjoy." (I)