Students' Perceptions of "Fun" Suggest Possibilities for Literacy Learning: "You Can Be Entertained and Informed"

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Students' Perceptions of "Fun" Suggest Possibilities for Literacy Learning: "You Can Be Entertained and Informed"

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Abstract

Perhaps educators shy away from serious consideration of "fun" because the term is typically associated with the kinds of activities found on the playground rather than in the classroom. According to the first, third, and fifth-graders involved in this study however, different definitions of fun can be applied in different contexts and these definitions can be broad enough to include conditions specifically related to literacy activities. When these conditions are met, students do not regard reading and writing as work to be avoided, but rather, work to be embraced. Students revealed that fun motivates them to more willingly expend the effort necessary to read and write. Consequently, teachers should not only examine their own beliefs regarding the relationship between fun and learning, but should also engage in conversations with their students in an effort to make better use of the motivating power of "hard fun" in literacy learning.

What do you think of when you hear the word "fun?" Does reading make your list? What about writing? Do you associate writing with the word fun? Questions such as these point to broader issues regarding the nature of learning. For instance, should learning be fun? And if so, what, exactly, does fun look like in an academic setting? Much research exists which links learning to engagement (Baker, Dreher & Guthrie, 2000; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Teale & Gambrell, 2007)—but what

about fun? Are learning and fun related? And if so, how? While such questions have important implications for the classroom, the notion of fun has received relatively little attention in the literature regardless of its consistent appearance in the every-day language of students. Perhaps because of its less-than-academic connotation, many educators shy away from a serious discussion of the concept. However, its frequent manifestation in the vocabulary of students warrants it significant consideration. Consequently, this study explores the relationship between students' perceptions of fun and literacy learning.

My work was initially guided by two general research questions. First, I wanted to know how first graders' beliefs about reading and writing compared with the beliefs of their third and fifth-grade counterparts. Second, I was interested in the reasons first, third, and fifth-grade students gave for these beliefs. As the research progressed, however, I became interested in the notion that literacy activities could be, in students' opinions, categorized as either "fun" or "boring." Consequently, my focus sharpened—I wanted to gain insight into students' perceptions of these two descriptors as they related to literacy engagement.

Conceptual Framework

Guthrie (2004) explains that "researchers use the term engagement to encompass many meanings" (¶ 8). One such meaning considers readers' time spent on task. A second meaning of engagement refers to the strategic cognitive behaviors which allow readers to create meaning from text. Yet another meaning of engagement, as Guthrie (2004) explains, "emphasizes affect. In this case, such qualities as enthusiasm, liking, and enjoyment" come into play (¶ 8).

Teale and Gambrell (2007) highlight the affective aspect of engagement when they observe that engaged readers and writers use their literacy skills "for their own purposes, such as pleasure, engaging in social interchange, or satisfying curiosity" (p. 736). Goodman (1986) also underscores the importance of the affective aspect of engagement saying, "kids need to feel that what they are doing through language they have chosen to do because it is useful, or interesting, or fun for them" (p. 31). Arnold and Colburn (2004) corroborate, saying, "we think fun is a key word when it comes to early literacy" and, consequently, children should be given opportunities to experience "the joy of books" (p. 43). After all, as Compton-Lilly (2007) points out, "avid readers do not read to improve their ability to recognize sight words or to master phonics." Rather, they do so "because they are engaged

in an activity that is not boring. They become engaged in virtual worlds that are compelling and interesting" (p. 722). In regards to writing, Moffett and Wagner (1993) explain that young children "don't at first take up make-do writing primarily to communicate since they already can speak and they often can't read back their own writing." Rather, "they do it for fun...Letters are a new play medium" (p. 35). Smith (1982) also emphasizes the enjoyment factor, stating, "writing is something that everyone ought to be able to do and enjoy, as naturally as singing, dancing, or play" (p. 17).

The Demise of Fun

While Smith (1982) contends that writing is as enjoyable as singing, dancing and playing, he goes on to explain that

> like singing, dancing, and play, writing may be one of those activities that all children enjoy—and enjoy learning to do better—until, all too often, they become discouraged or disinterested because something happens to inhibit their free and natural expression. And that something that happens can often be associated with education or training; it results in a loss of spontaneity, a painful self-consciousness of "error," a reluctance to perform and learn because of a perceived inability to achieve certain extrinsic standards. (p. 17)

The work of Kear, Coffman, McKenna, and Ambrosio (2000) corroborates Smith's sentiment as they report that students' attitudes towards writing generally worsen as they move from grade to grade. The authors cite negative feedback, tedious writing assignments, and lack of choice as causes for this decline. Likewise, Shafer (2000) observes that the teacher-centered paradigm found in so many language arts classrooms "eventually makes the learner irrelevant because individual voices and goals become ancillary to those skills, those topic sentences that are supposedly paramount to a 'correctly' done essay" (p.30). Writing often becomes a tedious and painful process. Indeed, Nippold, Duthie, and Larsen (2005) report that the students in their research classified writing as one of their least preferred activities, alongside cooking, walking, and running.

Unfortunately, the outlook for reading is not much brighter. For instance, Wigfield et al. (1997) report that, across the elementary school years, students' interest in reading declines. Similarly, McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) report that, on average, students' attitudes towards both recreational and academic reading

"begin at a relatively positive point in Grade 1 and end in relative indifference by Grade 6" (p. 952). Wigfield (2000) contends that "many children come to school optimistic about their skills, excited about being in school, and eager to learn to read." He goes on to state, however, "these beliefs change for many children during the first few years of elementary school" (p. 141). Heins (1980) holds the routine of "school," with its basal readers, responsible for this change. She believes the "unexciting, bland, and flavorless prose" found in many classroom-issued reading materials dampen children's expectations and anticipations of the joy of reading (p. 261). Bean (2002) also implicates the educational system, stating, "schools often cling to badly outdated reading lists that convince adolescents that reading is boring and disconnected from their lives" (p. 264). Kraus's (2006) research corroborates this notion as she reports that the children with whom she worked "seldom, if ever, experienced the printed word as fun." Rather, "both in school and in after-school programs, reading was something you had to do rather than something you chose to do" (p. 414).

Can (and Should) Learning be Fun?

West (1994) reports that, while the children she interviewed felt both "work" and "fun" were important, "they clearly attached greater personal value to Fun" (p. 19). These students believed however, that their opinions existed in tension with those of their teachers: teachers, they believed, valued "work" over "fun." West (1994) explains that, consequently, "in the world of school Fun was seen as a stroke of good fortune—a happy circumstance which delighted them, but which they really had no right to expect" (p. 19). Apple and King (1990) report a similar tension between children's personal preferences and what they perceived to be valued by adults as the children in their research gravitated towards activities they categorized as "play," while their teacher emphasized the importance of activities they classified as "work."

Moffett and Wagner (1993) offer a possible explanation for this tension when they observe that "it's hard for life-long readers and writers...to appreciate the marvel that children feel at first about converting speech and letters back and forth into each other" (p. 35). Adults must not forget, however, that "for the beginner, literacy is about secrecy and sorcery" and, perhaps, it is the existence of these magical qualities that makes reading and writing appealing to students (Moffett & Wagner, 1993, p. 35). West (1994) ponders this same possibility, suggesting, "perhaps students given long-term opportunities to experience literacy learning as Fun will be the ones

most likely to sustain their own instinctive love of learning" (p. 21). Gee's (2003) work also points to the role of fun in the learning process when he writes, "children must be motivated to engage in a good deal of practice if they are to master what is to be learned. However, if this practice is boring, they will resist it" (p. 68).

So what is the relationship between fun and the development of a love for learning? How can educators find out? One way involves simply asking students. Unfortunately, however, little research exists which has examined children's perspectives related to such issues (West, 1994). Pachtman and Wilson (2006) corroborate, pointing out that the voices most frequently heard in the research literature "are those of teachers, school administrators, or parents as opposed to those of the students" (p. 680). Fairbanks (1992) agrees, maintaining that educators seldom ask for and then actually listen to students' feedback. Yet asking and listening would allow educators to adjust programs to better meet the needs of students (Stewart, Paradis, Ross & Lewis, 1996). Oldfather (1993) and Cole (2002/2003) also underscore the importance of honoring student voices, believing that such honoring can lead to improved teaching and learning.

My research acknowledged the aforementioned void by asking for and then listening to students' opinions regarding reading and writing. To review, I was initially guided by two general research questions. First, how do first graders' beliefs about reading and writing compare with the beliefs of their third and fifth-grade counterparts? Second, what reasons do first, third, and fifth-grade students give for their beliefs? As the research progressed, however, I became interested in the notion that literacy activities could be, in students' opinions, categorized as either "fun" or "boring." This indication sharpened my focus which led to exploring the relationship between these two descriptors and literacy engagement.

Methods

Participants and Setting

This study took place in a small urban district located in the northeastern United States. The district had an enrollment of approximately 1,900 students, kindergarten through twelfth grade with fifty-six percent of the students on free or reduced-cost lunch status. Sixty students attending classes in one elementary building within the district participated in this study. Eighteen students were members of a first-grade classroom, 15 were members of a third-grade classroom, and the remaining 27 students made up a fifth-grade classroom. Of the 60 participants,

52% were male and 48% were female. Fifty-two percent of the students were Black, 46% were White, and 2% were Hispanic.

Procedures and Data Analysis

This research took place in three phases. The first phase involved an in-class administration of a literacy questionnaire at each of the three grade levels. This questionnaire included 12 items, six of which dealt with reading, the other six with writing (see Figure 1). Students were directed to answer "yes" or "no" for each question. All 60 students completed the literacy questionnaire.

1.   Are you a good reader?
2.   Do you like to read?
3.   Do you read at school?
4.   Do you read at home?
5.   Is reading important?
6.   Is reading hard work?
7.   Are you a good writer?
8.   Do you like to write?
9.   Do you write at school?
10.   Do you write at home?
11.   Is writing important?
12.   Is writing hard work?

Figure 1. Literacy questionnaire

The second phase of the project involved individual follow-up interviews with 12 students: four at each of the three grade levels. Half of the 12 (two at each grade level) were chosen because their responses on the literacy questionnaire indicated that their attitudes about reading and writing were generally positive. The other half demonstrated predominantly negative attitudes. During the interviews, these students were asked to explain their answers. For example, if a student answered "yes" when asked "Do you like read?" the student was asked "*Why* do you like to read?" during the follow-up interview which was audiotaped and transcribed. A content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of the interview transcripts was then

conducted. This analysis focused on the reasons students gave for their beliefs about reading and writing. The transcripts of students' interview responses were read and reread, allowing patterns to emerge. Ultimately, two themes stood out, thus forming a framework for coding and a database was organized for all coded responses. The patterns found in the coded responses piqued my curiosity about their continual use of the words *boring* and *fun* which led to more questions, and, consequently, the third phase of the project was conceived.

The third and final phase of the research involved brief individual interviews with all participants at each grade level asking them to provide reasons for answers they had given on the literacy questionnaire. For instance, a student who reported that he did not like to write was asked *why* he did not like to write. The difference during the third phase, however, was a focus on students' spontaneous use of the words fun and boring in their explanations. When students used either of these words they were asked to elaborate. For example, if a student said she did not like to read because it was "boring," she was asked, "*Why* do you think reading is boring?" As with the second phase, interviews were audio taped and transcribed and a content analysis of the transcripts was conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Four of the original 60 participants had moved out of the district, so 56 students took part in this second round of interviews.

After considering the data in its entirety, information gleaned from six of the original 12 literacy-questionnaire items proved most germane in illuminating the relationship between students' perceptions of fun and literacy learning. Consequently, this article focuses on a discussion of these six items.

Results

Phase One: Literacy Questionnaire

Table One summarizes the results of the in-class administration of the literacy questionnaire at the first, third, and fifth-grade levels. Results indicated that positive attitudes towards reading increased from first to third grade, however, these positive attitudes declined from third to fifth grade. For instance, when asked whether or not they liked to read, approximately 69% of the first-grade and 87% of the third grade participants answered "yes," while 63% of the fifth graders answered in the affirmative. Attitudes regarding writing followed the same pattern: an increase in positive attitudes from first to third grade, but a decrease from third grade to fifth. For example, when asked if they thought writing was important, approximately 67%

of the first graders answered "yes," while 100% of the third graders and 85% of the fifth graders responded in the affirmative.

Table 1. Percentage of Affirmative Answers at Each Grade Level (N = 60)

Question	First n = 18	Third n = 15	Fifth n = 27
Reading			
Do you like to read?	68.75%	86.67%	62.96%
Are you a good reader?	62.50%	86.67%	59.26%
Is reading important?	87.50%	100%	81.84%
Writing			
Do you like to write?	94.44%	93.33%	51.85%
Are you a good writer?	83.33%	93.33%	66.67%
Is writing important?	66.67%	100%	85.19%

Phase Two: First Round of Student Interviews

In the second phase of the research, individual follow-up interviews were conducted with four students from each of the three grade levels. During these interviews, students were asked to discuss the answers they had given on the literacy questionnaire. Two themes emerged from the content analysis of the interview transcripts. First, standing in sharp contrast to one another were the ideas that literacy activities were either "boring" or "fun." Students' interview responses were peppered with these two adjectives. For example, when asked whether writing was important, a fifth-grade student responded, "No. It's boring...it takes too much time at school." When asked whether she liked to read, a first grader answered, "No...cause it's boring." When asked if he was a good reader, a third-grade participant responded, "Yes," and went on to say that reading is "fun because you can learn a lot from books." Another third grader explained that she liked to "write stories because it's fun."

The second theme that emerged highlighted the impact the opinions of "influential others" (Mathers, Kushner Benson, & Newton, 2006/2007, p. 294), including teachers, parents and peers, had on participants' ideas about literacy. For example, when asked if he liked to write, a fifth-grader answered, "Yes," explaining that this was due to the fact that "a lot of people say I am creative...teachers, my mom." When asked if she liked to read, another fifth grader responded, "No,"

revealing, "People make fun of me when I read." A third-grade student explained that he liked to write because "whenever I do writing projects and stuff, Mrs. Z. always says that she can hear my writing inside of it." Finally, a fifth grader stated that he thought reading was important, explaining, "Every adult I talked to about this says that over the summer I should read."

The results of this content analysis indicated clearly that influential others do impact students' feelings regarding reading and writing. These findings led to questions regarding whether or not this influence could extend far enough to help convince students that literacy-related activities are not boring, but rather fun. A first step in answering these questions seemed to involve unpacking students' use of these words. For instance, what, exactly, were students trying to say when they called reading boring? Or what did they mean when they said writing was fun? After this first round of interviews, more questions existed than answers, and thus, the need for a second round of interviews became apparent.

Phase Three: Second Round of Student Interviews

In the third and final phase of the research, brief individual interviews were conducted with all participants. As in the second phase, students were asked to provide explanations for the responses they had given on the literacy questionnaire. The difference during this phase, however, was an interest in students' spontaneous use of the words "fun" and "boring" in their explanations. Table 2 outlines the percentage of students who spontaneously used either word as they discussed their opinions about reading and writing.

Table 2. Percentage of Students Who Spontaneously Referenced "Fun" or "Boring" in Phase Three Interview Response (N = 56)

Reference	First n = 18	Third n = 12	Fifth n = 26
Reading			
Reading is "fun"	50.00%	58.33%	15.38%
Reading is "boring"	5.56%	0.00%	3.85%
Writing			
Writing is "fun"	11.11%	33.33%	3.85%
Writing is "boring"	16.67%	0.00%	7.69%

From first grade to third, there was an increase in students' use of the word "fun" and a decrease in their use of the word "boring." Conversely, from third grade to fifth, there was a decrease in the prevalence of the word "fun" and an increase in the prevalence of the word "boring." These percentages paralleled the pattern observed in students' earlier literacy questionnaire responses as there was an increase in positive attitudes from first to third grade, but a decrease in positive attitudes from third grade to fifth.

A content analysis of the interview transcripts shed light on students' perceptions of fun as they relate to reading and writing as three distinct aspects of fun emerged. The following section explains each in detail.

Fun: The entertainment factor. The first aspect highlighted the entertainment value associated with fun. Students were attracted to humor and frequently used the word "funny" to explain why they believed a literacy-related activity was fun. For example, in order to explain why he thought reading was fun, one third grader said, "You get to listen to all the funny things that the characters say." A fifth-grade student also described reading as "fun," and when asked why, answered, "You can kind of place yourself in the main character's situation and sometimes there's really funny parts and stuff like that." A first-grade participant commented, "Sometimes you can read about fun things." When asked to elaborate, she explained, "I read about a cow eating candy." Finally, a third grader said writing was fun, and, when asked what made it so, responded, "Whenever you want to write a story you can make it funny, and whenever you read it you can laugh or keep it for a long time to remember things."

Engaged readers and writers use their skills to satisfy their own purposes and one such purpose includes pleasure (Teale & Gambrell, 2007). The positive feelings student-participants associated with humorous texts motivated them to want to read, thus underscoring the importance of the affective component of literacy engagement (Guthrie, 2004). As a third grader explained, "I write funny stories because it makes me happy."

Fun: The information factor. The second theme that emerged from the content analysis of the interview transcripts involved a connection between fun and reading-to-learn. For example, a third grader commented, "Reading is fun, and it helps me get my education." When asked what she meant when she said reading was fun, a fifth-grade student explained, "It's something you can do at any time and it is good for your brain." Finally, when asked why he liked to read, a first grader replied, "Because it's fun reading. You can learn things if you read."

Students' references to learning in association with fun highlighted yet another goal of the engaged reader, that of satisfying personal curiosity (Teale & Gambrell, 2007). Students classified reading activities as fun when they came away believing they had learned something. For instance, a third-grade student observed, "It's fun to read if you learn." Interestingly, however, while students frequently associated learning and reading, they did not make a connection between learning and writing.

Fun: The choice factor. The third theme that emerged involved the relationship between fun and freedom of choice in writing. For instance, a fifth-grade student explained that writing was fun because "you can write anything you want and make up your own stories." Likewise, a third grader commented, "It's creative and you can make up your own stuff instead of copying off of somebody else." Finally, a fifth grader called writing boring and when asked to elaborate, he replied, "It's the exact opposite of fun...sometimes you have to write stuff from an example...you can't just make stuff up." Later, the same student explained that writing can be fun when "you can add your own experience and everything into it."

Students' responses indicated that they valued the creative nature of writing. These responses echo Moffett and Wagner's (1993) contention that writing is a "play medium" (p. 35). Furthermore, students were attracted to writing activities that gave them freedom of choice not only because the activities were pleasurable, but also because they afforded them the opportunity to satisfy their personal curiosity (Teale & Gambrell, 2007). For example, a third grader explained that writing was fun because when you write it "can be about anything you want or things you like."

Discussion and Implications

Should learning be fun? The answer depends on who you ask. Lewandowski (2005), for instance, writes, "not all learning is fun. Some learning...requires hard work. Competence in reading, writing, and problem-solving builds on the acquired mastery of basics, the fundamentals that can only develop with student effort" (p. 26). The results of this study suggest, however, that fun and hard work do not have to be mutually exclusive; rather, fun may actually encourage higher levels of engagement and effort. Participants associated fun not only with being entertained, but also with gaining information and revealed that both aspects of fun motivated them to want to expend the effort necessary to read and write.

Papert (2002) makes a thought-provoking connection between fun and effort in his article titled, "Hard Fun." In illustrating the concept of hard fun, Papert relays the story of a first-grader who was learning how to program a computer using the language Logo. The student is quoted as saying, "It's fun. It's hard. It's Logo" (¶ 2). Papert contends that, once he became aware of the concept of hard fun, he found it cropping up everywhere. He suggests, the concept of hard fun is "expressed in many different ways, all of which boil down to the conclusion that everyone likes hard challenging things to do" (¶ 3). But, Papert warns, "They have to be the right things matched to the individual and to the culture of the times" (¶ 3).

Papert's (2002) notion of hard fun echoes the views expressed by the students in the current research. Results indicate that, under certain conditions, these students did not regard reading and writing as work to be avoided, but rather, work to be embraced. One of those conditions involves humor. One student explained, "I write funny stories because it makes me happy." Within the classroom, humor, and its motivating qualities, should be taken seriously. This might involve an examination and discussion of different techniques authors employ in creating humorous texts: exaggeration, irony, puns, and odd juxtapositions, to name a few. For instance, after comparing and contrasting Judith Schachner's (2003) *Skippyjon Jones* with Doreen Cronin's (2000) *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*, and Amy Timberlake's (2003) *The Dirty Cowboy*, students could be encouraged to model their own stories after the different authors' styles. When these texts are shared, both teacher and students can enjoy the fact that, as one student pointed out, "Some stories can be really funny and make you laugh." Such a process would require hard work, certainly, but it would also involve Papert's (2002) idea of hard fun.

The second and third conditions that entice students to engage in literacy-related tasks involve learning and choice. Commenting on learning, a student said, "It's fun to read if you learn." Reflecting on the importance of choice, another student explained, "Sometimes you can make up your own things and...they can be about anything you want or things you like." Too often, however, learning is devoid of choice and merely involves answering the questions someone else, such as teachers or textbook and worksheet authors, has asked. Instead, classroom teachers should give students opportunities to choose and answer their own questions. Not only does the formulating of questions involve higher-order thinking processes, but there also exists the added benefit of students' motivation to actually seek out meaningful answers to their own questions. After teachers model what it looks like to ask and answer one's own questions, students could be encouraged to keep an

"I Wonder..." list from which they could later draw inspiration for personal reading and writing projects. Teachers might then provide not only the time necessary for the answering of the questions, but also the resources by providing a wide selection of high-quality expository texts which will lure students into exploring the informational aspects of hard fun.

The results of this study indicate that students' ideas about fun are complex and multi-dimensional. These findings are similar to those reported by West (1994) who explains that, "fun was not simply a label" students "used for playing and goofing off, but an expression of positive feelings about the kinds of learning situations that facilitated their goals" (p. 7). Most classroom learning situations are created for students by teachers, and the instructional decisions involved in creating these experiences can impact children's motivation (Blair, Rupley, & Nichols, 2007; Guthrie, Wigfield, & VonSecker, 2000; Miller & Meece, 1997). Many times these decisions do not include serious consideration of the role fun, particularly hard fun, can play in increasing student engagement. However, the results of this study indicate that literacy activities perceived by students as fun may actually increase their motivation for reading and writing. Consequently, teachers should carefully examine their own beliefs (Squires & Bliss, 2004) regarding the relationship between hard fun (Papert, 2002) and learning. Perhaps educators shy away from serious consideration of fun because the term is typically associated with the kinds of activities found on the playground rather than in the classroom. According to the students involved in this research, however, different definitions of fun can be applied in diverse contexts and these definitions can be broad enough to include parameters specifically related to literacy activities. These parameters incorporate both entertainment value and informational value. Students think reading and writing are fun because, as one third-grade participant said, "You can be entertained and informed."

Moreover, while many studies report a distressing decline, from year to year, in students' attitudes towards reading and writing (Kear, et al., 2000; McKenna, et al., 1995; Wigfield et al., 1997), the results of this study offer a glimmer of hope as although positive attitudes did decline from third to fifth grade, they actually increased from first to third. This pattern indicates that time spent in school does not necessarily lead to a loss of love for reading and writing. This pattern, however, also begs the questions, what is happening in first, second, and third-grade classrooms that leads students to associate reading and writing, more and more, with the word fun? And what is then happening that makes older students, in this case fifth-graders, refer to literacy activities as boring? An effective way for teachers

to find answers to these questions is to ask the students in their own classrooms. Utilizing an interview or questionnaire-format, teachers could invite students to reflect on the following questions:

- Is reading ever fun? If so, when?

- Is reading ever boring? If so, when?

- Is writing ever fun? If so, when?

- Is writing ever boring? If so, when?

An examination of students' responses might help teachers create classroom experiences which take advantage of the motivating power of "hard fun" (Papert, 2002, ¶ 3).

Guthrie (1996) contends that students want to be successful learners, stating, "we know that students bring the desire for involvement curiosity, social interaction, challenge, and enhancement of self-efficacy into school activities" (p. 418). He points out, however, "if the context supports these motivational goals, students become intensively engaged. If the context suppresses them, children become disaffected" (p. 418). It is the responsibility of the responsive teacher (Oldfather, 1993), then, to create contexts which will support, rather than suppress, literacy engagement (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). Asking for and then listening and responding to students' perceptions of fun may be one way to encourage them to embrace the hard fun of literacy learning.

Limitations, Future Research, and Conclusion

The opinions of the first, third, and fifth-graders involved in the current research shed light on the relationship between fun and literacy learning. After considering the responses of all sixty participants, clear themes emerged which demonstrated that these students' definitions of fun were complex and multi-dimensional. Due to the size of the sample, however, interview data was not sorted by grade level, but rather, considered as a whole. Follow-up research could sort responses by grade level in order to examine the subtleties of students' perceptions related to fun at different developmental levels.

The current research also attempted to better understand the relationship between fun and literacy learning through the honoring of student voices. Consequently, it focused solely on the opinions of the student-participants and did not include the voices of the participating classroom teachers. Likewise, the current

study did not include within its scope an examination the participating teachers' classroom practices. Because much research exists which underscores the pivotal role teachers can play in shaping the beliefs of their students (Dreher, 2002/2003; Kern, Andre, Schilke, Barton, & McGuire, 2003; Mathers, et al., 2006/2007), a follow-up to the current project might involve an examination of the relationship between students' perceptions of fun and teachers' instructional choices. Such an examination would shed light on the results of this study which indicate that as students move through first, second, and third grade, they come to associate reading and writing, more and more, with the idea of fun. Such an exploration might also shed light on what happens that makes older students refer to literacy activities as boring. This information might, ultimately, help teachers make better use of the motivating power of "hard fun" in literacy learning.

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