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ABSTRACT
        A study investigated the effectiveness of a program
to improve writing performance across the curriculum. The targeted
population consisted of students (n=73) from the elementary sector of
a middle-class community in a south suburb of Chicago, Illinois. The
problem of deficiencies in student writing throughout content areas
was documented through teacher observations and writing samples.
These data revealed a need for implementation of writing
interventions. Analysis of the probable cause data revealed that
faculty observed student underachievement in writing due to
overloaded curriculum, lack of a need to write, and attitudes.
Reviews of curricular content and instructional strategies revealed a
need to emphasize the teaching of writing in all content areas. The
professional literature suggested that students were poor writers
because of a deficiency in the writing curriculum, and attitudes from
previous writing experiences. Solution strategies suggested by
knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem
setting, resulted in the selection of two major categories of
intervention: implementation of a comprehensive writing program for
targeted students; and the establishment of a cooperative learning
program to increase social and interpersonal relationships within the
same population. Post-intervention data indicated a positive attitude
towards the writing process, improved clarity in student writings,
and increased confidence in the editing and revising of student work.
(Contains 31 references and 14 tables of data. Appendixes present a
63-item bibliography and numerous survey instruments.) (Author/RS)

IMPROVING WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

by

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*Mary Beth Lumpkins
*Judith Sewell
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master's of Arts

in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight

Field-Based Master's Program

Action Research Project   *Teachers
Site: Orland Park, IL   *Marya Yates School
Submitted: May 1, 1995   **Sieden Prairie School
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This research project is dedicated to our
families for the encouragement and love they
provided and to the students who were our
inspiration.

Pat Vagena
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Abstract

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DATE: May 1, 1995

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Post intervention data revealed a positive attitude towards
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increased confidence in the editing and revising of student
work.

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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The students in the targeted elementary schools exhibit a
need for improved writing skills as evidenced by baseline data
gathered through classroom teacher observation of the writing
process and evaluations of writing samples.

Description of Immediate Problem Setting (School A)

Elementary School A is a 13 year old facility located in
far south suburban Cook County. It is one of four
kindergarten through eighth grade schools in Elementary School
District 159 and is comprised of 405 students, 54 percent of
whom are male and 46 percent of whom are female. As recently
as 1985, the population of school A was approximately 48
percent black, 48 percent white, and 4 percent other.
Currently, the racial makeup of the school is 85 percent
black, 10 percent white, and 5 percent other.

The school was originally constructed and opened because
of a housing growth which took place during the 1980's. The

demographics of the school have changed dramatically in the past nine years. The district has noted an increase of families moving to the area from the city of Chicago. The main reason given by parents is that they are seeking stronger education and a safer environment for their children.

The socioeconomic status of School A's students reflects the working middle class population. The mobility rate of 16.3 percent, has a tendency to follow the fluctuation of an improved economy. School A's boundary is currently experiencing an increase in new housing. It is projected that once again the mobility rate will increase. The academic backgrounds of many of the new students are below grade level. However, research compiled by the school district indicates that students who reside in the district two years or more show an increase in academic levels. The study also showed most of the new students attended numerous previous schools, possibly negatively impacting the students' academic achievement. Seven percent of the students have an individualized educational plan (I.E.P.) and receive special educational services. There is also a program for gifted education, known as Program Challenge. Eleven percent of the school's population is involved in the gifted program (Marya Yates School State Report Card, 1993).

The School A staff consists of specialty teachers for music, art, and physical education. The principal, assistant principal, 20 classroom teachers, a part-time nurse and other office personnel round out the staff. Attached to this building is the district office that includes the superintendent, assistant superintendent, business manager, grounds and maintenance supervisor and other support staff.

An inclusion program is presently being implemented in the district and is still in the developmental stages. The district works with the Southwest Cooperative Association for Special Education (SWCASE) to help service the students in the inclusion program.

Description of Immediate Problem Setting (School B)

Elementary School B is one of four kindergarten through eighth grade elementary schools found in Elementary School District 159. Constructed in 1963, School B is the oldest structure in the district currently being used as an educational facility.

The 31 year old structure houses an administrative office, which includes private offices of the principal, assistant principal and school nurse. Also included in the school are: 18 regular education classrooms, a learning resource center, an art room, a music room, a full-sized

gymnasium with locker rooms, a computer lab, an office for
school counseling personnel, and a center for food service
personnel. A special services complex is also found within
the school. This complex includes: a learning disabilities
resource center, speech and language resource center, remedial
reading room and an office for Program Challenge.

Surrounding the school are athletic fields and
playgrounds with age appropriate playground equipment
maintained by the school district. Adjacent to the school is
a park maintained by the Matteson Park District. The park
includes athletic fields, tennis courts, a play area for young
children and a walking path. This park is used throughout the
year by the School B faculty and students.

The 323 students enrolled at School B are being serviced
by 47 faculty and staff personnel. Faculty and staff include
all personnel ranging from the principal to the custodial
staff members. Included on the personnel roster are three
staff members employed by SWCASE. These staff members teach
in Elementary School District 159 under an agreement the
district holds with SWCASE to provide special education
services to the students at School B. Children with mild to
moderate, high incidence disabilities are included in the
regular classroom setting. These students receive resource
help from special education personnel in the classroom.

Enrollment reports for School B as of September 30, 1992, show that the 323 students are from the following racial/ethnic background: 73 percent white, 24 percent black, and 3 percent other. Of these students 13 percent are classified as low-income students. Low-income students are pupils aged three through seventeen, from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. In contrast to the 14.8 percent student mobility rate currently found in the district, School B shows a student mobility rate of 6.7 percent.

Scores for Elementary School District 159 are above the State of Illinois scores at all levels and in every subject area. Certain subjects, at certain grade levels, do need improvement. The target areas of improvement include: curricular revamping of the mathematics program at all levels, technology upgrades in the school library, introduction of calculators into the curriculum to more closely align students' capabilities to the state's methods of assessment and no-nonsense discipline policies aimed at improving the learning environment for all (Sieden Prairie School State Report Card).

Description of Surrounding Community

Elementary School District 159 is located in Rich Township, approximately 32 miles southwest of the Chicago "Loop" and 11 miles west of the Indiana state line. Founded in 1869, the district encompasses an estimated 17.5 square mile area, ranking it as the third largest elementary school district in Cook County.

The district operates four facilities, meeting the educational needs of 1,546 students in grades kindergarten through eighth. The four facilities are Sieden Prairie School, constructed in 1963; Neil A. Armstrong School, constructed in 1973; Woodgate School, constructed in 1976; and the Marya Yates School which also includes Elementary School District 159 offices, constructed in 1981. A seven member Board of Education is the governing body of the district. Day-to-day operations are administered by the superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of business, four principals, two assistant principals and a staff of 129 certified and 38 non-certified employees.

The district is a feeder district to Rich Township High School District 227. Prairie State Community College and Governors State University are located within 15 minutes of the district.

Villages served by the district are Matteson, Richton Park and a portion of Tinley Park. The Sieden Prairie, Woodgate, and Marya Yates Schools are all located in the Matteson and Tinley Park section of Elementary School District 159. The Neil A. Armstrong School is located in the Richton Park section of the district. Matteson's population, according to the 1990 census, numbered 11,378. Matteson residents are 52 percent white, 44 percent black, and 4 percent other. The median age listed was 32. The median household income was $51,233 (GAMS, 1992). Single family homes range in price from $65,000 to over $250,000.

The tax base of the district is comprised primarily of residential and commercial properties. Since 1987, the district's assessed valuation has increased approximately 55 percent. Much of this increase is due to the growth in commercial development (Matteson Community Relations, 1993).

The school enrollment in 1988-89 was 1,728 students. For the 1992-93 school year the district reported a declined enrollment of 1,546. Elementary School District 159 State School Report Card issued to parents throughout the district in October of 1993, listed a mobility rate of 14.8 percent (Sieden Prairie School State Report Card).

Regional and National Context of Problem

The movement to develop national standards and assessments for the education of children is well past the initial stages of discussion. "In a few short years, the idea that the United States ought to have national standards for what students learn has emerged as one of the most widely discussed options for improving the United States education system" (O'Neill, 1993, p. 4). Educators have been working to improve all areas of the curriculum, and it has proven to be a long and difficult process.

It was during the 1960's that the American public was first shocked by the news that students could not read. In addition, it was noted that students' reading ability was continuing to deteriorate. Swift action was taken in the form of conferences and seminars to enlighten educators on how to best teach reading to children. Reading became a top priority for professionals at all levels within the educational system. With so much emphasis, time and money supporting the teaching of reading, students' reading scores began to improve (Hicks, 1993).

It was not until the 1970's that educators began to realize that if students' reading skills were poor, their writing skills were even worse. Even with this realization, it was not until the 1980's that students' poor writing skills

were fully addressed. Just as the poor reading skills of the
60's had been the subject of great attention, the poor writing
skills of the 70's and 80's were now in the forefront of
national debate. Unfortunately, the outcome of improvement
efforts have been less than anticipated. "Studies have
indicated - and continue to indicate, little or no improvement
in most cases" (Hicks, 1993, p. ix).

Over the past 15 to 20 years an unprecedented amount of
research has been conducted on the acquisition and use of oral
and written language. In addition, major studies have been
conducted on how children develop as writers (Calkins, 1986;
Jaggar, Smith-Burke, 1985). These studies become increasingly
important to educators as school districts, parents and the
business community demand increased writing abilities from the
students of the 90's (Fiske, 1992).

According to Fiske (1992), the United States is entering
a new era. No longer will a country prosper or fail on the
basis of geographical location or wealth of natural resources.
A country's ability to prosper and grow will be based on the
ability of their citizens to think. In conjunction with the
ability to think, citizens will need to acquire a greater
ability to communicate effectively.

In 1979, the International Year of the Child, a joint
committee was formed which included educational professionals

for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA). The members of the committee entertained diverse points of view and represented several different regions of the globe. Their mission was to address the dramatic changes in child language research. Originally their concentration centered on the technical aspects of writing and language development but soon changed to the processes and functions of children learning the oral and written language skills. Their approach also changed from one of controlled experiments to one of naturalistic research (Jaggar & Smith-Burke, 1985).

There is much information regarding oral and written language that is yet to be uncovered. According to Hicks (1993), researchers and educators must make a commitment to improving children's writing. An important new trend is surfacing which integrates reading and writing. Integration of instruction has yet to gain a foothold in most schools (Noyce & Christie, 1989). Integration may become the tool of the 1990's, enabling educators to more effectively teach oral and written language skills. "Educators want a curriculum with strong content-but they know it cannot be achieved except through processes powerful enough to ensure meaningful learning" (Brandt, 1988).

Chapter 2

PROBLEM DEFINITION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the level of student writing abilities, anecdotal records consisting of teachers' observations of the students' writing process, student and teacher surveys of interests and attitudes toward writing and current student performance levels were noted. Within the targeted school district, writing across the curriculum is becoming increasingly important. Initial writing observations are made by the classroom teacher. If low writing abilities are detected, students are referred for further testing by resource staff members. The results of these tests are shared with the classroom teacher and the parents and/or guardians.

The targeted population involved in the data collection process consisted of 73 students. Of the 73 students, 40 attend school A at the third and fourth grade levels. Thirty-three attend school B at the kindergarten and third grade

levels. An anecdotal record for journal writing (Appendix A) was developed by the researchers to aid in the recording process. A summary of initial observed writing behaviors is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS DURING JOURNAL WRITING

A=Always S=Sometimes N=Never

*Denotes not relative to this level.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS	KDG			3A AND 3B			4A		
	A	S	N	A	S	N	A	S	N
Writes Continuously	5	13	1	18	13	3	13	7	0
Writes with Purpose	3	12	4	11	18	5	6	12	2
Enhancement with Illustrations	7	11	1	1	17	16	3	10	7
Enhancement with Written Characters	7	11	1	*	*	*	*	*	*
Focused While Writing	3	13	3	8	20	6	6	12	2
Show Interest in Sharing Work	8	8	3	12	15	7	10	8	2

The checklist was used to enable the teacher to observe the students during journal writing. Of the 73 responses reported by the researchers, the highest percentages are found

in the sometimes column for all grades. The students' ability to improve writing in the areas of purpose and focus will be addressed through future interventions by the researchers. In contrast, the lowest percentages are found in the never response column. The 19 kindergarten students are the only children observed for question four of the behavioral chart. The developmental stage of these students is centered around the use of illustrations for words rather than the written word itself.

Secondly, two surveys were administered to all targeted students. The first survey (Appendix B) was given to gather general statements about the students' interests in academic and personal areas. This survey will help the researchers to further assess the needs in the content areas, and plan for future interventions. A compilation of collected data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

INTEREST SURVEY

WRITING INTERESTS	MATH	LANGUAGE ARTS	PHYSICAL EDUCATION	OTHER
FAVORITE SUBJECT	43	16	18	23
LEAST FAVORITE SUBJECT	16	27	10	47
FREE TIME ACTIVITY	0	14	60	26
WHAT I DO WELL?	9	18	32	41
WHAT I WANT TO LEARN?	37	15	1	47

The writing interest survey was given to the 73 targeted students of schools A and B. Questions six and seven are not included in the table. The researchers did not find the results of these questions to be notable. Math is identified as the favorite subject by 43 percent of the targeted students. Thirty-seven percent of the targeted students indicate a desire to learn more about math. Language arts reflect English, reading, spelling, phonics and writing. While the column "others" include the content areas of social studies, science and health. The research reveals a low level of student interest in writing. Among the 73 targeted students only three percent cite writing as their favorite subject. This could be the result of a lack of emphasis on

the writing process and a focus on math in the current school curriculum. Of the targeted students, 44 chose physical education as their favorite free time activity.

The second set of surveys (Appendix C, Appendix D) were used to gather baseline data to record students' attitudes about writing. Appendix C was used for the targeted students in grades three and four. Appendix D was used for the targeted students in kindergarten. A compilation of collected data are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3

WRITING ATTITUDE SURVEY

Questions one, two and three.

QUESTIONS ABOUT WRITING	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	UNSURE
How do you feel about writing?	62	6	5
Is it important to be a good writer?	66	5	2
Are you a good writer?	44	7	3

Of the 73 students surveyed in the targeted schools, 8ɔ percent report a positive attitude toward writing; 90 percent

cite the importance of being a good writer; whereas 10 percent report that writing is not an important academic skill.

Of the 54 third and fourth grade students who were surveyed for question three, 81 percent report that they are good writers; 19 percent cite a need to improve their writing skills. The 19 students in kindergarten from school B, are not included in the responses for question three.

The researchers suggest that the results from this table indicate a high percentage of third and fourth grade students from the targeted schools show a positive attitude toward writing. This may be attributed to an encouraging and motivating writing environment in the primary grades, and also previous positive school experiences. Although the findings of the writing interest survey and the writing attitude survey appear to be in contrast, the researchers believe the difference occurred due to the fact that the two surveys were given to gather divergent information. Overall the students still exhibit a positive attitude toward the academic curriculum.

Regarding question four, of the 73 students surveyed in the targeted schools, results indicate 47 percent of the kindergarten students, 56 percent of the third grade students, and 50 percent of the fourth grade students cite thinking,

imagining, and brainstorming as the favored selection process
for writing topics. Students' reflection of favorite books or
special events is the second most popular process used in the
selection of writing topics.

Table 4

WRITING ATTITUDE SURVEY

Question four: How do you decide what to write about?

WRITING DECISIONS	KDG.	3A	3B	4A
Brainstorming	9	8	11	10
Teacher assigned	1	0	0	1
Favorite things	9	5	3	4
Unsure	0	1	2	2
Same topics	0	0	4	3

The results of this table indicate that the students in
kindergarten through fourth grade at the targeted schools
write about personal experiences, and familiar topics more
often than choosing teacher assigned topics. Researchers
suggest this may be because young children are more

comfortable with writing about topics they can identify with, or have personally experienced.

In response to question six, of the 54 third and fourth grade students surveyed, 36 percent of the third grade students from school B, 10 percent of the third grade students from school A, and five percent of the fourth grade students from school A, cite spelling errors as the main area of difficulty in producing quality writing. The researchers did not include the 19 kindergarten students from school B for the responses from question six.

Table 5

WRITING ATTITUDE SURVEY

Question six: What frustrates you about writing?

WRITING FRUSTRATIONS	3A	3B	4A
Time and effort	2	4	3
Topic awareness	1	1	4
Neatness	2	2	2
Spelling	5	2	1
Nothing	0	6	2
Other reasons indicated	4	5	8

Of the seven questions included in this survey, two are not noted in the final analysis. The researchers combined questions five and six, and also questions four and seven. The information resulting from the two remaining questions cite similar data and do not add any new results to the survey.

Thirdly, a survey (Appendix E) regarding teacher attitudes toward writing instruction and personal writing abilities was administered to all regular and special education teachers in school A and school B. A summary of teacher attitudes is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Percentage of Teacher Responses

	lacking content	acceptable	moderately overloaded	extremely overloaded	no response
1. Curriculum Overload	2	34	46	16	2

	not important	somewhat important	very important	critically important	no response
2. Importance of Writing Across the Curriculum	2	18	57	23	0

	never	sometimes	frequent	always	no response
3. Evaluation of Student Writings	9	36	41	12	2

	0-1	1-2	3-5	5+	no response
4. Minutes per Week Devoted To	32	30	27	5	6

	never	sometimes	frequent	always	no response
5. Peer-Conferencing	21	45	27	7	0

	poor	fair	good	excellent	no response
6. Teaching Writing Skills	2	14	59	20	5

	never	5-10 yrs.	1-5 yrs.	0-1 yrs.	no response
7. Teacher Attendance at a Writing Seminar	20	7	55	18	0

	very negative	negative	positive	enthusiastic	no response
8. Attitude of Previous Students to Writing	2	25	52	12	9

	poor	fair	good	excellent	no response
9. Writing Skills of Previous Students	9	30	45	14	2

In order to collect data from the researchers'
colleagues, an informal survey was administered to 44 teachers
at schools A and B during the first week of the 1994-95 school
year. Of the 44 teachers surveyed, most found the curriculum
to be within the acceptable to moderately overloaded range.
The researchers believe the results of this question to be
misleading. The researchers suspect the respondents reported
the expected response rather than the answer that truly
reflects the current curriculum.

It is interesting to note that 80 percent of the
respondents found writing across the curriculum to be very or
critically important, while only 32 percent of the respondents
devote three or more hours per week to the writing process.
In addition, 66 percent of the respondents never or sometimes
encourage peer conferencing in their classrooms. In addition,
45 percent never to sometimes evaluate students' writing. The
researchers suggest this may be due to the fact that only 18
percent of the respondents have participated in a writing
conference in the past year.

Overall, 79 percent of the teachers rank their writing
skills to be good or excellent. Once again, the researchers
believe the results of this question to be misleading.
Unfortunately, the researchers would suggest that in all

actuality most teachers writing skills fall somewhere between fair and good. In surveying teachers' previous students' writing attitudes, more than 50 percent reported a positive or enthusiastic rating. When surveying the previous students' writing skills, more than 50 percent reported a good to excellent rating. The researchers suggest that once again the respondents have reported the expected answer as opposed to the answer that accurately reflects their previous students' attitudes and skills.

Finally, a variety of writing samples of the targeted students was collected and analyzed. Two checklists (Appendix F, Appendix G) were developed by the researchers to evaluate the targeted students' proficiency in the writing process. Appendix F was used for the targeted students in grades three and four. Appendix G was used for the targeted students in kindergarten. A compilation of writing abilities is presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7

WRITING CHECKLIST: GRADES THREE AND FOUR

September 6, 1994 through October 14, 1994

WRITING CHECKLIST	NO PROGRESS	EMERGING	SATISFACTORY
Uses capital letters	5	29	20
Uses correct punctuation	15	27	12
Writes complete sentences	12	26	16
Uses correct sentence structure	14	29	11
Stories have beg/mid/end	18	32	4
Stories develop sequentially	19	28	7
Uses expanding vocabulary	25	19	10
Demonstrates spelling fluency	20	26	8
Engages promptly in writing task	8	33	13
Sustains attention to writing task	9	35	10
Able to self-evaluate	34	13	7
Makes multiple revisions	34	12	8
Shares and discusses writing	12	33	9
Works effectively with others	10	33	11
Writes 1-5 sentence stories	6	26	22
Writes 6-10 sentence stories	33	13	8
Writes 11-20 sentence stories	47	1	6
Writes for a variety of purposes	37	7	10

Of the 54 targeted students in grades three and four, 54 percent to 91 percent exhibit emerging or satisfactory skills in various mechanical areas of writing. Researchers consider checklist items one through eight to be mechanical skills. Researchers suspect this may be due to constant exposure and emphasis on writing mechanics at previous grade levels. Also noteworthy is the high percentage of students who display emerging or satisfactory levels in the areas of self-motivation (85 percent) and sustained attention given to the task (84 percent).

A noticeable shift from emerging or satisfactory toward no progress or emerging occurs in items nine through eighteen of the writing checklist. Sixty-three percent of the targeted students display no progress in their ability to self-evaluate. In addition, 83 percent of the targeted students demonstrate no progress or emerging skills with regard to sharing and discussing writing. However, eighty percent of the targeted students demonstrate the ability to work effectively with others. It is also worth noting, that during this initial observation 46 percent of students demonstrated no progress in the use of expanded vocabulary. Sixty-three percent of students were also unable to make multiple revisions in written work. In both cases, this may be due in

part to the date of the initial observations. Intensive vocabulary and multiple revision instruction occur at a later period during the school year. Sixty-nine percent of the targeted students demonstrate no progress or emerging skills when writing for a variety of purposes. This dramatic shift in student abilities leads researchers to suspect a need for increased emphasis on the writing process across the curriculum and throughout all grade levels.

The results of the kindergarten checklist are presented in Table 8. Of the 19 targeted students in kindergarten, a high percentage of students exhibit the earliest characteristics of the writing process. Eighty-four percent of the targeted students are able to tell and retell chronologically correct stories with main events. The percentages indicate to the researchers the ability of students to participate in the writing process at a very early age.

Table 8

WRITING CHECKLIST: GRADE KINDERGARTEN

September 6, 1994 through October 14, 1994

WRITING CHECKLIST	NO PROGRESS	EMERGING	SATISFACTORY
Tells story w/main events	3	1	15
Retells story chronologically	3	10	6
Uses expanding vocabulary	3	12	4
Works effectively w/others	4	6	9
Is able to self-evaluate	*	*	*
Uses random letters	7	6	6
Uses invented spelling	*	*	*
High frequency words spelled correctly	*	*	*
Prints letters horizontally	8	7	4
Leaves a space between words	*	*	*
Attempts punctuation usuage	*	*	*
Writes a complete sentence	*	*	*
Stories have beg/mid/end	*	*	*
Writes a 1-5 sentence story	*	*	*
Stories develop in sequence	*	*	*
Engages promptly in writing task	4	12	3
Sustains attention to the writing task	6	7	6
Shares and discusses writing	*	*	*

Conversely, a high percentage of students exhibit no progress and emerging progress with regard to writing mechanics. Sixty-eight and one-half percent of the targeted students exhibit no progress and emerging skills in random letter usage during the writing process. Seventy-nine percent of the targeted students demonstrated no progress and emerging skills when printing letters horizontally on a page. These percentages would indicate that at an early age children exhibit a better understanding of the writing process than of the mechanics involved in writing. As formal schooling is just beginning for five-year-olds, these percentages appear to be reasonable to the researcher. At this point it should be noted that not all skills are appropriate for beginning kindergarten students. Those specific data were not collected by the researcher at this time and carry the asterisk (*) on table eight.

In reviewing all the information from Tables 7 and 8, the researchers suggests from the earliest grades and throughout all grade levels, educators would be advised to integrate a well rounded writing program across the curriculum which allows for growth in both the mechanical and process areas of writing.

Probable Causes

Over the past 20 years an unprecedented amount of
research has been conducted on the acquisition and use of
written language. Although current research findings are
available to educators, the materials and practices currently
being used in many classrooms do not effectively utilize this
important information (Jaggar, & Smith-Burke, 1985).

The literature suggests several reasons why writing
instruction need to be improved across the curriculum. "Just
as children are at different stages in their development, so
too we as teachers are at different levels of growth"
(Hillerich, 1985, p. 31). Traditionally teachers were taught
writing as a singular discipline. Presently, teachers are
being encouraged to introduce writing across the content
areas. Currently, teachers in Illinois are finding the need
to supplement writing skills to meet the demands of the state
based assessments.

Writing has not always been practiced across the
disciplines. Perhaps it is the time constraints teachers
experience when trying to complete a textbook or prepare the
students for standardized and state testing. Often the
classroom teacher is praised for student test scores and not
for his/her true abilities as a classroom instructor. It is

the over-emphasis on test scores that force teachers to teach
to what is tested. These scores are a reflection of only a
few days work. Unfortunately they have become the measure of
a teachers successes and failures in the classroom over the
course of a year. Unfair as it may sound, with so much
emphasis on performances, there is little time to develop new,
more innovative techniques in the classroom. According to
Hillerich (1985):

> A Haley-James investigation reported how 319 fourth-
> grade teachers allocated their non-reading language arts
> time. The greatest portion of each period was devoted to
> grammar, with the next largest amount of time given to
> spelling. 'Written composition' finished as a weak
> third, barely ahead of listening and handwriting. All
> of this suggests that a major reason students do poorly
> in writing is that we just don't teach writing. (p.3)

Many reasons reported by teachers is the uncertainty
concerning the overloaded curriculum; what to teach, how to
evaluate, and ways to motivate. These concerns are very valid
and need to be addressed so that writing can be taught and
evaluated properly within all the disciplines across the
curriculum. Writing cannot be a "one shot activity"
(Hillerich, 1985, p. 3). Teachers find no time to teach the

writing process and include writing across the disciplines.
With a crowded curriculum, time becomes a very serious
concern. "Teachers often face having so much to do with little
time to do it. Because of this time crunch, we often set
priorities in our classroom activities and assignments"
(Teachers of the Monroe County Community School Corporation,
in press, p. 46).

Larson (1975) has found in his research concerning
written composition, that in the history of education,
composition has not been stressed as an important part of the
language curriculum in many elementary school systems. Most
typically, writing to communicate ideas, or to organize facts
and information was taught in the secondary school system.
Larson also mentions however, that if given a preference,
teachers would choose to teach literature or the mechanics of
writing rather than the written composition courses.

Educators agree that these basic skills are necessary and
need to be developed to help writers clearly express their
ideas, and communicate with others in written form.
Unfortunately, however, these skills alone do not allow the
writer to organize thinking, enrich and perfect style, and
learn a process of writing that will help develop written
communication across the content areas (Silberman, 1989).

Donald Graves is among the researchers who have found a lack of composition instruction in the language curriculum. In a 1977, essay entitled "Writing: An Endangered Species", Graves suggested that the instruction of writing was apparently disappearing from the public schools across the country. Several surveys conducted by Graves reported that while 169 reading instruction courses were offered in the teaching colleges, only two writing instruction courses were listed as being offered to prepare teachers for the implementation of this important area of their classroom curriculum (Graves, 1987).

Graves also found a disparity in the amount of research money being spent for reading and writing by the departments of education. For every dollar spent on the study of writing, three thousand dollars were spent on the improvement of reading (Fletcher, 1991).

Until teachers integrate more writing instruction as part of their daily curriculum, the problem of poor writing ability will exist. Writing will improve only if students are exposed to a variety of written composition, and are given the opportunity to write more often.

An unorganized classroom or an uninviting writing center may prove to be deterrents for student writing. According to

Schickedanz (1986), although a teacher may want his/her
students to utilize the classroom writing center, children are
not attracted to areas where materials are not readily
available or in good working order. Children relish the
opportunity to use markers, but dried out markers hold little
appeal. Pinecones, shells and hermit crabs pique the interest
in young curious minds, but a blank piece of paper and a
pencil do little to generate enthusiasm. "The variety of
materials in a reading/writing center is limited only by
imagination and availability" (Teachers of the Monroe County
Community School Corporation, in press, p. 16).

According to Schickedanz (1986), literary materials have
traditionally been excluded from the environment we create for
young children. Dramatic play areas are often filled with
baby dolls, dishes and dress up clothes but we rarely see a
variety of print forms. Telephone books, magazines,
cookbooks, paper, pencils and books to be used in creative
play are frequently missing from the area's inventory.
Teachers stop by play areas to offer encouragement, extend
vocabulary and stimulate student interaction, but it is rare
to hear the same adult ask about a shopping list or a letter
to grandma (Schickedanz, 1986).

Writing centers can be sites for peer interaction or student-teacher interaction. Writing centers can also be very isolated and lonely places. Children may not choose to work in the writing center where teachers and peers do not stop to offer words of encouragement, extend help, demonstrate good writing habits or actually model writing for the child (Schickedanz, 1986).

In addition to giving children teacher support and an appealing environment in which to work, the writing folder becomes an important component of the writing program. Educators who are writing folder proponents are finding it a challenge to convince other educators that a writing folder can be a valid measure of what students know. Writing folders are questionable as an assessment tool, because they do not show statistics that the standardized tests offer. For these reasons, some teachers are unwilling to implement them into the curriculum. This may be due to the teacher being uncomfortable in making evaluations and interpretations of the students performance without specific criteria. When implementing writing folders in the classroom, some teachers feel it overpowers the curriculum and narrows their focus (Belanoff, 1991). Unfortunately, some educators have little training in the use of authentic assessment and knowledge

regarding its value in motivating students to write. If the goal of the writing folder is to reflect students' abilities and growth, and if it is to involve authentic assessment, then student ownership in the folder is critical (Frank, 1994).

In addition to a writing folder assessment, teachers must also learn to properly evaluate and kid watch. "Kid watching or observing means making careful study of what you see, what you hear, and keeping reports of your observation free from assumptions and personal opinions" (Raths, Wassermann, Jonas, & Rothstein, 1986, p. 41). The lack of knowing how and what to look for is one of the major problems confronting observers in today's classroom. This is primarily due to inadequate training of teachers, plus a lack of teacher commitment. During the day teachers are usually involved in several different activities, therefore observation can be difficult and time consuming. Teachers are the only constant observer of students. For this reason they need to be well trained in being objective (Jaggar, 1985).

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Teaching writing has become a primary concern among
educators today. The traditional writing lesson of years ago
looked at sentence structure, proper punctuation and spelling
errors. Writing today needs to be taught as a communication
skill rather than a penmanship lesson.

Journal writing has come to be one approach educators
expect to increase the quality of children's writing.
According to Lucy Calkins (1986), all children seem to have a
need to communicate, both orally and in written form.
Journals allow children to express their inner most thoughts,
feelings and to speak from personal experience. The purpose
behind journal writing is to help students write on a regular
basis and in time improve their fluency as writers. It is
imperative for parents and educators to realize that
children's writings have meaning for them as writers. "Data

have shown that when children enter first grade, 90 percent believe they can write, compared to only 15 percent that believe they can read" (Graves, 1987, p. 18). If the children enter school with this belief, it is the job of educators to encourage them by giving them more opportunities to write.

Children's writing begins at very early stages. They experiment with non-writing materials on undesirable surfaces. As limited as this may seem, it's still the early stages of written expression. This has meaning for the child. It is important that parents encourage this self-expression with the proper tools, pencil and paper, as well as model the proper behavior for them.

Journal writing may begin at very early stages also. The entries may start out as a scribble or some recognizable letters of the alphabet, and end up weeks later as a brief thought. First grade may seem young for journal writing, but it has been very successful.

Mary Ellen Giacobbe, a first grade teacher from Atkinson, New Hampshire, passed out blank page, hardcover books with children's names embossed on the covers the first day of school. She simply said, 'You can write in these books. They all did in their own fashion. They drew pictures, wrote their names, made columns of numbers. Some wrote phrases, made inventive

spellings, and several wrote in sentences. The
important thing is they all believed they could write.
No one said, 'But I don't know how' (Graves, 1987, p.
3).

Often times the teacher will have the student begin by
dating their journal entry. This enables the teacher to see
growth in the length of their writing at just a glance. With
growth in length, there may also be improvement in content and
grammar.

There are two types of journal writing: free response
and literature based. Free response journals have proven to
be a more successful and widely used for; of practicing the
writing process. If the purpose of this genre is for the
student to have self-reflection and outward expression then it
is inevitable that free response would be the wisest choice.

Literature based responses have their successes too.
These responses allow the student to creatively reflect upon a
prior reading and spontaneously express ideas and organize
their thoughts on a particular subject matter, also known as
best topic. This creates a sense of ownership for the writer.

The data show that writers who learn to choose topics
well make the most significant growth in both
information and skills at the point of the best topic.
With best topic the child exercises strongest control,

establishes ownership, and with ownership, pride in the piece (Graves, 1986, p. 21).

Journal writing in any genre is an opportunity to allow students to communicate in a non-threatening manner while gaining confidence in their writing abilities. It also allows the teacher to explore the other disciplines. It should be a non-graded activity, but one in which the teacher may comment on the entry's content. This allows the threat of failure to be erased. Writing cannot become a penmanship, spelling, or grammar lesson, if it is to have true value in its final product. Journal writing can become a way for children to become more creative and expand their imaginations. It can even be a place for them to practice writing fiction. "Nevertheless an overriding belief is the demonstrated fact that individuals also learn to write by writing" (Hillerich, 1985, p. vii). Writing must be used as a tool for learning not just a means by which their knowledge of grammar is displayed and checked.

Observation is one way a teacher can assess his/her students other than through written work. Teacher-researchers constantly probe and question, listen and observe, notice and note. They are in Yetta Goodman's words, 'kid watchers', a term Goodman introduced more than ten years ago to identify teachers who interact with students and who monitor class

activities in order to understand more about teaching and
learning (Fiske, 1992).

Kid watching is a form of observation that is an
important assessment tool. While kid watching, a variety of
student samples can be collected from across the curriculum.
Observations are documented with anecdotal records showing
students in various events, behaviors, and skills. These
records become the data which show student growth and progress
over a period of time.

Teacher observations can be objective and/or
interpretive. An objective observation would be the act of
making notations on observable student behaviors. An
interpretive observation is when the teacher actually
evaluates and writes a brief comment on a narrative form about
the observation. Kid watching starts when the students enter
the classroom and continues throughout the day. During
observation the teacher should be able to identify and
pinpoint the students' strengths and weaknesses. This process
is a critical, integral part of assessing and evaluating
students.

Using writing folders has become a popular and valuable
activity in today's classroom. Teachers are beginning to
utilize these folders as teaching tools, as well as an
evaluative source. The purpose of student writing folders is

to create an informative and accurate picture of the students'
development and academic growth. The chronological order of
the folders' content will show the students' cumulative
successes over a given period of time. While creating these
writing folders, the students begin to see work progress.
These folders become a way to showcase individualism.
According to Keeshaw (1991):

> While teacher goals for the class and for the individual
> writers are important, the linking of teacher and
> individual student goals bring energy and vitality to
> the writer's workshop. Teacher and learner are partners
> in helping the writer grow; and one of the indices of
> that growth is a folder collection of writing that
> becomes increasingly larger and more developed(p. 86).

The format used to organize the writing folders is not
important. The ultimate goal is for students to learn the
self-reflective process and take an active role in selecting
material for the writing folders. Involvement in this
selection process will help students build ownership and self-
esteem. Students need the opportunity to reflect on the
writing content, and review the processes involved. The
students' written reflections about the work are the most
important component in the writing folders.

Students and teachers together, need to have a conference to review the folders periodically. During these conferences, new items may be added or old ones deleted. It is the teachers' role to ask intuitive questions that will help guide the students to reflect on their own learning.

When students shares writings with classmates on a regular basis, it widens the listeners' audience. The students have now gone beyond writing solely for the teacher and included a new audience, the students' peers. In ideal situations, the writing folders move along with the students from grade to grade. This documented evidence shows growth and progress from year to year. The intended outcome is that the students will continue to grow and develop as writers. This would enable teachers to enhance writing programs with new challenges to meet the needs of all students. It must be remembered that the most important message elicited from the folders is that student writing is critical (Simmons, 1990).

In the 1960's, researchers, Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, Slavin and others, began conducting studies and started training teachers in the classroom to implement the cooperative learning style of instruction. The roots of cooperative learning can be traced back to social psychologists, Morton Deutsch and Kurt Lewin. Johnson and

Johnson attribute many of their ideas, and much of their success to the foundations that were set by these two men.

Learning instructions may be structured so that students compete with each other, ignore each other and work independently, or work together cooperatively. The extensive research comparing these student-to-student interaction patterns clearly suggests that cooperation among students produces higher achievement, greater motivation to learn, more positive relationships among students, greater acceptance of differences, higher self-esteem, and a number of other outcomes than do competition or working individualistically (Johnson, Johnson, & Houlubec, 1988, p. iv).

"Paired partners", a phrase used by Fogarty & Bellanca (1991, p. 109), is a good procedure to follow when introducing the cooperative learning style of instruction. It is an appropriate and successful beginning for structuring strategies to use with small cooperative groups for problem solving, questioning and communicating with fellow students to achieve learning goals.

Researchers and educators use a variety of terms when referring to student-to-student meetings. These small group exchanges may be addressed as: paired partners, peer conferences, collaborative conferencing, share meetings,

partner practice and collaborative instruction. Much emphasis
in the paired partner strategy is placed on discussion,
revision and editing in a writing conference.

When students work together in these partner groups, they
read and listen to each other's ideas about their writing
projects. They help each other brainstorm, pre-write, write,
illustrate, edit, and eventually evaluate. They can do this
process in groups of three or more after they have become
comfortable about sharing with one other classmate in the
paired partner setting.

Children enjoy talking, writing, listening, and
exchanging ideas with their partners. They help each other
build confidence and self-esteem through praise,
encouragement, and positive evaluation. Children learning
from children, under the direction of the classroom
instructor, provides a very comfortable atmosphere for these
young authors. "I not only want young writers to write,
share, and rewrite their stories, I also want them to admire
and learn from the work of other authors, to try diverse kinds
of writing, and to use and adapt the techniques they find in
the literature they read" (Calkins, 1986, p. 147).

Peer evaluation and peer revision are two segments of the
writing conference. It is during this portion of the
conference that students, by working together, develop a

stronger awareness of their particular writing skills. As
students evaluate the writing of their peers, they develop a
greater awareness of what makes their own writing understood
and enjoyed by others. Peer evaluation also widens the
audience for these young writers. Students become more
willing to venture into new areas for their ideas and styles
of written work.

Trust and cooperation are two components that determine
how successful peer evaluation will be. Penelope A. Dyer
(1984), believes that students themselves must realize that by
helping others they are also developing responsibility and
growth in their own writing progress.

When these conferences are introduced, they should be
modeled by the instructor and presented as a whole class
activity. They should be carefully planned and short in
length. The first sessions should present and establish
guidelines to ensure constructive, rather than destructive
criticism. Again this procedure needs to be specifically
modeled by the classroom instructor. As the process becomes
more comfortable for the students, the groups can work more
independently and conferences can be longer in length.

As part of the structuring for the writing workshop
sessions, the instructor will want to provide more scheduled
time for peer conferences. Eventually this will allow extra

time for more facilitating and will eliminate the instructor's position as the only evaluator of students' written work. Children are motivated to improve writing skills more for their peers than for simply having their teacher exclusively judge them as authors (Dyer, 1984).

According to Nancie Atwell (1989), teachers are beginning to realize the important role reading plays in learning to write. It is through the use of children's literature that teachers are given a new avenue for exposing their students to enriched vocabulary and a broadened knowledge of the world. The wealth of children's literature available introduces young readers and non-readers to a variety of persons, places and things when thoroughly integrated into the curriculum.

Reading and writing have long histories that researchers are now beginning to realize reach back into infancy. At one time, scribbling and retelling familiar stories were considered merely pretend. Adults recognized real reading and writing to be that which occurred during formalized schooling. It is currently being suggested that reading and writing experiences at school are merely permitting children to draw upon already existing knowledge of oral and written language (Schickedanz, 1986).

It is Schickedanz's (1986) contention that when storybooks are one of the major components in the introduction

of print to young children, the idea that the printed word has meaning is communicated at the outset. In addition, exposing children to the printed word should not stop in the primary grades, but continued exposure should occur through all grade levels and across all disciplines.

Introducing children to the printed word through a print rich environment allows youngsters to be emersed in writing in a very natural way. Writing which is meaningful and functional helps children develop a sense of literacy. The routine nature of a print rich environment also provides constant and predictable encounters with the written word, which is important in helping children learn (Schickedanz, 1986).

According to D'Arcy (1989), a teacher who encourages emergent writing, is likely to encourage emergent reading too. "Like talking and listening, reading and writing are two sides of the same coin" (D'Arcy, 1989, p.25). Researchers should consider that perhaps the reverse is also true. A teacher who encourages emergent reading, is likely to encourage emergent writing as well. Rief (1989) summarized:

Neither can I separate reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They are integrated processes finely woven into a tapestry of literacy. The components of language have to be taught as a whole for learning to be

meaningful. Each aspect of language enriches another (p.15).

Although the traditional writing lessons have not been discarded they have taken on a new form. The solutions offered in this text have been selected from the many new techniques available to today's educator. These solutions have been implemented with the hope of improving writing across the curriculum in the targeted schools.

Prototype for Action Research Project

AUTHORS: Mary Kay Gibisch   Site: Orland Park
           Mary Beth Lumpkins
           Judith Sewell
           Patricia Vagena

Project Outcomes and Solution Components:

After the investigation into the probable causes, as well as the review of the literature on this subject, the following project objective is proposed:

As a result of peer-conferencing and cooperative learning, during the period September, 1994 to February, 1995, students from the targeted classes will increase their editing and revising skills through self and peer review of their writing samples.

In order to accomplish the above terminal objective, the following strategic procedures are proposed:

1.   Students in a cooperative setting will exchange writing compositions in order to revise and edit.

2.   With the use of a teacher made editing tool, students will enhance their revision and editing skills.

3.   While in cooperative groups, the children will share their writing orally.

4.   Selected compositions will be shared with a larger audience.

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Project Outcomes and Solution Components:

After the investigation into the probable causes, as well as the review of the literature on this subject, the following project objective is proposed:

As a result of increased writing opportunities across the curriculum, during the period September, 1994 to February, 1995, students from the targeted classes will improve their writing skills, and attitudes toward writing as measured by teacher observation, writing folders, and surveys.

In order to accomplish the above terminal objective, the following strategic procedures are proposed:

1. Writing techniques will be modeled by the teacher.

2. Journal writing will be used on a daily basis.

3. Thirty minutes of writing per day for a minimum of three days per week will be incorporated into the curriculum across all disciplines.

4. The children will experience literature presented orally at the rate of 50 minutes per week.

5. A variety of literature will be used as the springboard for numerous creative writing experiences.

Prototype for Action Research Project

AUTHORS: Mary Kay Gibisch   Site: Orland Park
           Mary Beth Lumpkins
           Judith Sewell
           Patricia Vagena

Project Outcomes and Solution Components:

After the investigation into the probable causes, as well as the review of the literature on this subject, the following project objective is proposed:

> As a result of increased authentic evaluation and teacher observation of student writing performance, during the period September, 1994 to February, 1995, the students and teachers in the targeted classes will be better able to assess student writing performance, as measured by teacher records and writing folders.

In order to accomplish the above terminal objective, the following strategic procedures are proposed:

1. Researchers will utilize a writing skills checklist.

2. A narrative card will be used by the researcher for recording observations.

3. The researchers will incorporate the use of writing folders to collect writing samples.

4. A self-evaluation survey will be used to monitor student confidence in writing.

Action Plan

During the first week, researchers conducted a writing attitude survey and an interest survey (see Appendices B, C, and D) in the targeted schools. The writing survey (Appendix B) was administered to all targeted children in grades three and four at schools A and B. A similar, age appropriate survey (Appendix C) was administered to all targeted children in kindergarten at school B. The interest survey (Appendix D) was administered to all targeted students at all grade levels. The writing attitude survey will be administered one additional time at the end of the program to re-evaluate student attitudes with regard to writing.

In addition a teacher survey was administered to select faculty members at schools A and B, (see Appendix E). Administrators, clerical staff, and school nurses were not surveyed, as they are not directly involved in a daily instructional program.

During the second week of school, children were responsible for decorating their writing folders. The purpose of the self-decorated writing folder is to designate a special place for the child to showcase his/her writing samples. Within the writing folder a content analysis sheet will be used to document the writing strengths and needs of each student. This sheet will be completed once each month by the

researcher. Specific writing skills will be charted by the researcher on a checklist, (see Appendices F and G). This process will occur at the culmination of each formal writing assignment. The first writing sample to be completed for the writing folder will be the mirror activity, (see Appendix H). The mirror activity will provide a written and/or visual self-portrait of the child. As an evaluative measure, this activity will be repeated at the conclusion of this study. As an additional activity, the fourth grade students in school A, created a classroom album to include a family photo and narrative about that photo.

Anecdotal cards will be used for the collection of data pertaining to the study. Each child will be randomly assigned a color coded card which divides the class into four equal groups. One group will be informally assessed each day of the week and interpretive data are recorded by the researcher. This interpretive data will include, but not be limited to; focus on writing, work attitude, continuous writing, and writing for purpose.

On a daily basis the children will be given an opportunity to write. This will be accomplished through the use of daily journals. Journal writing time need not exceed fifteen minutes per day. The writing process will be practiced at a rate of no less than thirty minutes a day, three days a week.

This allotted time will allow writing to be emphasized across all content areas. During this time period, new writing styles will be introduced and developed. The incorporation of oral reading for fifteen minutes each day will expose targeted students to a wide variety of writing forms and vocabulary. The oral reading selections at the kindergarten level will directly reflect the current thematic unit. At the kindergarten level two weekly activities will be implemented. The first activity will be the class book. Each week all students in the targeted kindergarten classroom will be responsible for submitting a preassigned writing page. Writing pages will be collected and made into a class book. Secondly, one student per week will be selected to take home a backpack containing a literary character, three related story books, and a writing journal. The student will be given an opportunity to write about his/her weekend adventures with the literary character. On Monday, the journal entry will be read by the student to the class.

On a monthly basis students in the third and fourth grades of schools A and B, will be exposed to various authors and illustrators for the purpose of enriching their writing through literature. Authors' book jackets and illustrators' artwork will be displayed on a specially selected board.

Another writing experience will be provided for the
students on a more personal level through the use of a
birthday book. The children will be given an opportunity to
practice personal note writing as they produce an illustration
and/or short note in honor of a classmate's birthday. All
illustrations and notes will be compiled in a class booklet.

Methods of Assessment

The main method of assessment in this study is the writing folder. This folder gives a clear and concise picture of the students writing skills and academic development. Included in the writing folder will be the table of contents and a content analysis page. Within this writing folder the researchers will collect data on writing skills by means of a checklist, (see Appendices F and G). A separate interpretive anecdotal card will be kept to document each student's progress. The collected data will be used at the culmination of the observation period to assess writing growth and development. In addition, with increased writing opportunities, students will be improving editing and revising skills through peer and teacher conferencing. With the implementation of anecdotal records and repeated kid-watching, researchers will have a wider selection of data upon which to base authentic assessment of student writing, editing, and revising skills.

There will be two initial data samples: the mirror activity and the writing attitude survey. These two data samples will be repeated at the culmination of the research project. These samples will give the researchers an opportunity to reflect upon the progress of the targeted students over the course of the intervention.

Chapter 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve writing
across the curriculum. The implementation of peer
conferencing, cooperative learning, increased writing
opportunities, authentic evaluations, and teacher
observation were selected to effect the desired changes.

Peer conferencing was used in a cooperative setting
where students exchanged their compositions for the purpose
of editing and revising the assigned writing exercises.
Students were given a teacher made editing tool, a sample of
which can be found in Appendix I. While in cooperative
groups, the children shared their writings orally, gave
constructive criticism, and were encouraged to give positive
feedback. Compositions varied in length and type, and often
were illustrated. Selected compositions were chosen to be
shared with a larger audience.

Over the proposed six months, increased writing opportunities were offered on a daily basis. Journal writing was one avenue used in offering additional writing activities for the children. This daily exercise was provided to all targeted students. Journal entries ranged from illustrations with or without written characters to multiple paragraphs with illustrative enhancement. Children were encouraged by the teacher to write continuously, expand upon their original thought and to stay focused while writing. It was not the teacher's intent to limit the students in any way during this writing exercise. Although original plans called for journal writing to occur on a daily basis, the researchers amended this time line to a minimum of three times per week. Time constraints, unexpected schedule changes and student interest necessitated the change.

At all grade levels, class books were implemented to encourage student writing. The class books took various forms. Kindergarten students contributed individually illustrated pages to form their class books, which were modeled after various published works. For the most part, the class books produced by the third grade students were modeled after selections from their basal readers. At the fourth grade level, a literary selection was chosen by the

teacher, the students then modeled their writing after the original theme and offered their own versions through written and illustrated class books.

In addition to the aforementioned writing opportunities, each grade level participated in a writing activity specifically designed to challenge and enrich the abilities of the targeted students. Each child at the kindergarten level participated in a weekend backpack program. During this program each child was assigned a weekend to take home the backpack containing the class journal, three storybooks and a stuffed animal. The "backpack writer" was responsible for making journal entries over a period of three days. Upon returning to school on Monday, the "backpack writer" gave an oral presentation to the class. Discussions included but were not limited to the contents written in the journal during the three day period.

Third grade students participated in an authors and illustrators program. The purpose of this program was to enrich writing through literature. As a by product, the children became acquainted with authors and illustrators on a personal level. Researchers chose artists whose work appealed specifically to a young audience. Among the professionals chosen were Roald Dahl, Scott O'Dell, Beverly Cleary, and Judy Blume.

Fourth grade participants created a classroom album. Each student provided a photograph and a written portrait of themselves and/or their families. This was a cooperative activity, which allowed the students to become better acquainted with their peers, introduced cooperative learning and set the tone for positive classroom attitudes. All targeted students also participated in a variety of additional activities. Researchers exposed the children to oral reading on a daily basis. Presentations were made using various forms of literature and time allotments were held to no less than fifteen minutes per day.

The birthday book was used to give children an avenue to write for each other on a personal level. On his/her birthday each of the targeted students received a birthday book composed of illustrations or written work completed by their peers. It was not the researchers intent to edit or interfere with the creation of this book.

The mirror activity was used as part of our authentic assessment. A sample of the mirror activity can be found in Appendix H. The project began and ended with this activity. The mirror activity allowed the student to give a written as well as a visual self-portrait. The children found this activity to be quite exciting, as they were able to compare the pre and post portraits.

As a method of authentic evaluation, writing folders were implemented and introduced at all targeted grade levels. Students were responsible for the management of their own writing folders. These writing folders were to include a table of contents, which can be found in Appendix J, and a writing reflection page, which can be found in Appendices K and L. In addition, a content analysis page was included to document the writing strengths and weaknesses of each student. This intervention was completed once a month by the researchers. The content analysis page can be found in Appendix M.

In an effort to improve teacher observation of student's writing performance, a writing skills checklist was utilized. A sample of the checklist can be found in Appendices F and G. This checklist was used to collect and analyze specific writing assignments composed by the targeted students. In addition, teachers used a narrative card to record more detailed observations during the assigned writing activities. These anecdotal cards were instrumental in noting progress and assisting the researchers with recall during the student-teacher conferencing.

At the beginning and at the conclusion of our study, a self-evaluation writing survey was used as a comparative

tool to measure the student's confidence in writing. This survey can be found in Appendices C and D. The objective of the writing survey was to measure the post-intervention writing attitudes of the targeted students.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

At this time the researchers would like to call attention to the fact that the targeted kindergarten class experienced a decrease in the population. Due to student mobility, the number of students participating in the action research project changed from 19 students to 17 students.

Writing journals were utilized to encourage and evaluate writing in the classroom. Students' journals were collected monthly and observation on the written work, as well as student writing behaviors, were noted on the observable data checklist. A sample can be found in Appendix A. Data revealed a more positive response to writing and an increase in student confidence towards the writing process. The collected data are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS DURING JOURNAL WRITING

A=Always   S=Sometimes   N=Never

*Denotes not relative to this level.

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS	KDG			3A AND 3B			4A		
	A	S	N	A	S	N	A	S	N
Writes Continuously	10	7	0	20	13	1	17	3	0
Writes with Purpose	11	6	0	19	12	3	16	4	0
Enhancement with Illustrations	*	*	*	15	17	2	0	8	12
Enhancement with Written Characters	3	14	0	*	*	*	*	*	*
Focused While Writing	12	5	0	19	12	3	15	5	0
Show Interest in Sharing Work	15	2	0	30	4	0	9	10	1

Generally, the targeted students appeared enthusiastic about the undertaking of each individual assignment. Through regular kid watching, teachers kept abreast of observable behaviors which could be recorded and examined. It was during this intervention that teachers noted continuous writing, purposeful writing, enhancement with illustrations and/or written characters, focus while writing, and an interest in sharing work. Overall students

appeared much more focused and confident in their writing and displayed an exceptionally high response to sharing their work. While enhancement with illustrations proved of interest to the older targeted students, enhancement with written characters was exclusively characteristic of targeted students in kindergarten. In conclusion, researchers noted a marked improvement of writing skills in the areas of purpose and focus.

In order to measure the writing attitudes displayed by all targeted students, the writing survey initially administered in September was re-administered in February. Appendices C and D were used to make this measurement. The collected data are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

WRITING ATTITUDE SURVEY

Questions one, two and three.

QUESTIONS ABOUT WRITING	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	UNSURE
How do you feel about writing?	63	4	4
Is it important to be a good writer?	68	3	0
Are you a good writer?	43	10	1

Eighty-five percent of the students continued to
exhibit a positive attitude toward writing. An additional
four percent have developed a positive attitude following
the intervention. Overall, 96 percent of the targeted
students saw real importance in writing. This was an
increase of three percent compared to the pre-intervention
data. Overall, pre and post intervention data revealed
seventy-nine percent of the targeted students saw themselves
as good writers.

Question four refers to writing decisions made by all
targeted students. Journal topic choices varied among
students and grade levels. All targeted students were
surveyed for question four. The collected data are
presented in Table 11.

Table 11

WRITING ATTITUDE SURVEY

Question four: How do you decide what to write about?

WRITING DECISIONS	KDG.	3A	3B	4A
Brainstorming	10	11	12	9
Teacher assigned	2	0	6	1
Favorite things	5	2	2	10
Unsure	0	1	0	0
Same topics	0	0	0	0

Results from Table 11 indicate a growth in decision
making by students at all levels. In nearly every instance
students exhibited confidence in choosing journal topics
independently. Responses given by students on the writing
survey (See Appendices C and D), also showed topics covered
a wide variety of subject areas. Prior to the intervention
researchers noted that nine of the surveyed students
indicated a need for teacher assigned topics to write about.
At the conclusion of the intervention, it was reported that
only two of the 71 targeted students needed teacher
assistance with chosing a topic. These two students
represent only three percent of the targeted population.

After the intervention only one student was unsure in what
to choose to write about, compared to the initial results of
five students. This student represents one percent of the
targeted population. In addition, favorite things cited by
the targeted kindergarten students as the topic of choice
for writing, increased from five to nine students. During
the initial survey kindergarten students chose their topics
from brainstorming sessions. Following the intervention,
kindergarten students displayed increased confidence in
choosing their own topics for writing. Interestingly,
targeted kindergarten students surveyed on this question,
reported that they often just think and write.

Question six refers to writing frustrations for the
targeted students in grades three and four. The targeted
kindergarten students were not polled for this question.
While the responses for the two third grade classes are
separate on the writing survey, totals were combined for the
purpose of this analysis. The collected data are presented
in Table 12.

Table 12

WRITING ATTITUDE SURVEY

Question six: What frustrates you about writing?

WRITING FRUSTRATIONS	3A	3B	4A
Time and effort	0	6	7
Topic	2	3	6
Neatness	2	2	1
Spelling	2	2	3
Nothing	4	4	2
Other reasons indicated	4	3	1

Following the intervention, the targeted students
participating in this survey, reported time and effort,
along with topic awareness, to be the two main sources of
frustration in the writing process. Before the
intervention, nine targeted students' reported time and
effort as a writing frustration. After the intervention
thirteen targeted students reported time and effort as a
writing frustration. The researchers conclude that although
the data have increased, they attribute the increased
writing opportunities and higher level activities to be
responsible for this substantial increase. Spelling as a

writing frustration decreased after the intervention, as students' confidence in this area developed over the school year. Interestingly enough, other reasons indicated decreased from seventeen targeted students initially to eight students at the conclusion of the intervention. Although students reported frustrations in the writing process, the researchers did not conclude that these frustrations in any way inhibited the students' interest and enthusiasm for writing or their writing ability.

Throughout the intervention a variety of writing samples of all targeted students was collected and analyzed. Researchers selected writing assignments that specifically correlated with the targeted students' current curriculum in all subject areas. A writing checklist (see Appendix F) was utilized to record the collected data from grades three and four. A compilation of data are presented in Table 13.

Table 13

WRITING CHECKLIST: GRADES THREE AND FOUR

October 15, 1994 through February 28, 1995

WRITING CHECKLIST	NO PROGRESS	EMERGING	SATISFACTORY
Uses capital letters	4	11	39
Uses correct punctuation	8	13	33
Writes complete sentences	10	13	31
Uses correct sentence structure	10	21	23
Stories have beg/mid/end	8	19	27
Stories develop sequentially	8	21	25
Uses expanding vocabulary	12	33	9
Demonstrates spelling fluency	14	25	15
Engages promptly in writing task	2	31	21
Sustains attention to writing task	5	29	20
Able to self-evaluate	24	17	13
Makes multiple revisions	10	34	10
Shares and discusses writing	3	35	16
Works effectively with others	5	27	22
Writes 1-5 sentence stories	2	12	40
Writes 6-10 sentence stories	13	10	31
Writes 11-20 sentence stories	24	24	6
Writes for a variety of purposes	3	28	23

Across the board the targeted students displayed growth in their ability to participate in the writing process. Initially mechanical writing skills, considered checklist items one through eight, showed a range of 54 to 91 percent emerging or satisfactory levels. Following the intervention, the same mechanical skills showed a range of 74 to 93 percent emerging or satisfactory levels. Also noteworthy is the increase of students who displayed emerging or satisfactory levels in the areas of self-motivation, and sustained attention given to the writing task. Self-motivation showed a nine percent increase from 85 percent to 96 percent. Sustained attention given to the writing task showed a five percent increase from 84 percent to 91 percent.

Prior to the intervention researchers found a low rate of student ability to participate in the writing process as it related to items nine through eighteen on the writing checklist. Where at one time 63 percent of the targeted students displayed no progress in their ability to self-evaluate, following the intervention only 44 percent displayed a lack of ability to self-evaluate. This reflects a 19 percent improvement.

In addition, increases in ability to share and discuss writing were noted. Originally, 22 percent of the targeted

students demonstrated no ability in this area. This

percentage has decreased to five percent following the

intervention. When working effectively with others, 59

percent are displaying skills ranging from no ability to

emerging skills, as opposed to 80 percent working at this

level during the initial survey period. Use of expanded

vocabulary has increased from 54 percent of the targeted

students emerging or satisfactory to 77 percent of the same

population.

The most dramatic changes occurred in the areas of

revision making and writing for a variety of purposes.

Originally 63 percent of targeted students were unable to

make multiple revisions. Following the intervention only 19

percent of the same population remained unable to make

multiple revisions. Likewise, 69 percent of the targeted

students were unable to write for a variety of purposes

prior to the intervention. Only five percent of the

targeted students now demonstrate little or no ability to

write for a variety of purposes. Researchers conclude that

emphasis on the writing process across the curriculum has

impacted positively on the targeted students.

A variety of writing samples was collected and analyzed

from the targeted kindergarten students. Researchers

selected grade appropriate writing assignments that

specifically correlated with the targeted students' current
curriculum in all subject areas.   The results of the
kindergarten checklist are presented in Table 14.

Table 14

WRITING CHECKLIST: GRADE KINDERGARTEN

October 14, 1994 through February 28, 1995

WRITING CHECKLIST	NO PROGRESS	EMERGING	SATISFACTORY
Tells story w/main events	1	2	14
Retells story chronologically	2	2	13
Uses expanding vocabulary	4	2	11
Works effectively w/others	0	4	13
Is able to self-evaluate	4	5	8
Uses random letters	0	3	14
Uses invented spelling	4	2	11
High frequency works spelled correctly	6	2	9
Prints letters horizontally	1	3	13
Leaves a space between words	4	5	8
Attempts punctuation usage	5	3	9
Writes a complete sentence	7	9	1
Stories have a beg/mid/end	4	12	1
Writes a 1-5 sentence story	16	1	0
Stories develop in sequence	4	7	6
Engages promptly in writing task	0	1	16
Sustains attention to the writing task	0	2	15
Shares and discusses writing	0	1	16

During the initial survey process only eight of
eighteen skills on the writing checklist were designated by
the researchers as appropriate for the entry level
kindergarten students. Throughout the course of the year
and the writing interventions, the targeted students have
shown remarkable growth in their writing abilities.
Originally 71 percent of the targeted students exhibited
emerging or satisfactory skills in random letter usage
during the writing process. Following the intervention 100
percent of the targeted students exhibited emerging or
satisfactory skills in random letter usage. The original
survey showed 65 percent of the targeted students
demonstrated emerging or satisfactory skills when printing
letters horizontally on a page. Ninety-four percent
currently demonstrate this skill at emerging or satisfactory
levels. The researchers note that although the mechanics of
the writing process have increased dramatically, the ability
of students to tell and retell chronologically correct
stories with main events has remained at levels found during
the initial survey.

Perhaps the most astounding discovery made by the
researchers relates to the sharing and discussion of written
work by the targeted students. During the initial survey
period the targeted students demonstrated no ability or

understanding of this skill. Originally researchers did not
note this skill as applicable. Following the intervention
94 percent of the targeted students share and discuss their
writing at satisfactory levels. The researchers conclude
that integrating a well-rounded writing program across the
curriculum allows for growth in both the mechanical and
process areas of writing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The intervention had a positive influence on the
targeted students' attitudes and abilities towards the
writing process. This positive attitude was not limited
only to the language arts sector of the day, but encompassed
the way the class worked as a whole. The peer conferencing
helped to promote a cooperative atmosphere and positive
social growth among the targeted students. The researchers
felt confident that a continuation of this program would
produce student proficiency and greater interest in writing
across the curriculum. The researchers concluded that
increased writing opportunities led to increased writing
abilities and confidence among the targeted students.

Not only was there success for the targeted students,
the researchers noted an increase in their own abilities to
direct and integrate writing instruction across the

curriculum. Writing became a natural part of daily lessons.
The researchers as well as the students found this variety
to be very beneficial. For example, an ordinary math
lesson, which previously included strictly numbers was now
enhanced by written words about numbers. Students found
this to be interesting and challenging.

The following recommendations are made by the
researchers in order to illicit a more effective outcome to
future writing programs. Due to the enormity of the writing
curriculum researchers suggest that future researchers
narrow the focus of the project. Due to time constraints
and periodic schedule changes during the school year,
researchers found it difficult to effectively incorporate
all prescribed interventions. With additional time, data
would be more effectively gathered, leading to increased
accuracy of the results. Such activities as the birthday
card would be eliminated as students were more interested in
writing for purpose and importance. The benefits from the
birthday card intervention did not justify the use of class
time.

Time would have been more wisely spent for increased
daily journal writing. In conjunction with additional
journal writing, increased time allotments should be made
for student sharing and discussion of written work.

Students enjoyed the freedom of finding their own "special place" for this task. Overall the journal writing experience had a very calming effect on its subjects. It is important to note at this point, researchers conclude that students at the kindergarten level needed more direct instruction during journal writing. This may be due to lack of previous writing experiences.

Students took great pride in writing, illustrating and assembling their personal writing folders. As an additional intervention parent-student-teacher conferences revolving around the writing folder would be recommended. Researchers received positive responses from students, parents and colleagues regarding the increased emphasis on writing. Although standardized test scores are still considered to be an important part of student records, the researchers found authentic assessments to be more indicative of student abilities.

The researchers encourage other educators to pursue continued development of their current writing program. Implementing writing across the curriculum will offer exciting challenges to both students and educators.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Journal Checklist

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS DURING JOURNAL WRITING

A=Always   S=Sometimes   N=Never

OBSERVABLE BEHAVIORS						
Writes Continuously						
Writes with Purpose						
Enhancement with Illustrations						
Enhancement with Written Characters						
Focused While Writing						
Show Interest in Sharing Work						

Interest Inventory

Student's Name _____ Grade _____

Interviewer _____ Date _____

1. What is your favorite subject in school?

   _____

2. What is your least favorite subject in school?

   _____

3. What do you like to do in your free time?

   _____

4. Who is your best friend?

   _____

5. What is your favorite sport?

   _____

6. What is your favorite animal?

   _____

7. Name something you do very well.

   _____

8. Name something that makes you angry.

   _____

9. What is your favorite T.V. show?

   _____

10. What is your favorite book?

    _____

11. What is your favorite movie?

    _____

12. If you could meet a famous person, who would it be?

    _____

13. Why would you like to meet that person?

    _____

14. What would you like to learn in school this year?

    _____

Writing Survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How do you feel about writing?

   _____

2. Is it important to be a good writer?

   _____

3. Are you a good writer? Why or why not?

   _____

4. How do you decide what to write about?

   _____

5. What do you like about writing?

   _____

6. What frustrates you about writing?

   _____

7. How do you choose the stories you will publish?

   _____

Writing Survey

Name: _____

1. How do you feel about writing? *(Circle one.)*

2. Is it important to be a good writer? *(Circle one.)*

    yes   **not sure**   **no**

3. How do you decide what to write about?

_____

_____

4. What do you like about writing?

_____

_____

Appendix E

Teacher Survey of Writing Proficiencies

Please circle the most appropriate response. When questions refer to your previous students, please consider your 1993-94 school population.

1. To what degree do you think the curriculum is overloaded?

----

lacking   acceptable   moderately   extremely
content   overloaded   overloaded

2. How much importance do you place on writing across the curriculum?

----

not   somewhat   very   critically
important   important   important   important

3. To what extent do you evaluate your student's writing across the curriculum?

----

never   sometimes   frequent   always

4. How many minutes __per week__ do you devote to writing instruction?

___   0 - 1 hours.
___   1 - 2 hours.
___   3 - 5 hours.
___   5 or more hours.

Appendix E

5. How much encouragement do you give to peer-conferencing during the writing process?

```
----------------------------------------------------------
```

never   sometimes   frequent   always

6. How do you view your own writing skills?

```
----------------------------------------------------------
```

poor   fair   good   excellent

7. How long since you have attended a writing seminar?

```
----------------------------------------------------------
```

never   5-10 yrs.   1-5 yrs.   0-1 yrs.

8. Overall, how would you describe the attitude of your previous students toward writing?

```
----------------------------------------------------------
```

very   negative   positive   enthusiastic
negative

9. Overall, how would you describe the writing skills of your previous students?

```
----------------------------------------------------------
```

poor   fair   good   excellent

10. Please identify your grade level.

____ K - 2
____ 3 - 4 - 5
____ 6 - 7 - 8
____ specialty

Please feel free to make any additional comments on back.

Appendix F

Student Writing Checklist

Grades Three and Four

Name:									
USES CAPITAL LETTERS									
USES CORRECT PUNCTUATION									
WRITES COMPLETE SENTENCES									
STORIES HAVE BEG/MID/END									
STORIES DEVELOP SEQUENTIALLY									
USES EXPANDING VOCABULARY									
DEMONSTRATES SPELLING FLUENCY									
ENGAGES PROMPTLY IN WRITING TASK									
SUSTAINS ATTENTION TO WRITING TASK									
ABLE TO SELF-EVALUATE									
MAKES MULTIPLE REVISIONS									
SHARES AND DISCUSSES WRITING									
WORKS EFFECTIVELY WITH OTHERS									
WRITES 1-5 SENT. STORIES									
WRITES 6-10 SENT. STORIES									
WRITES 11-20 SENT. STORIES									
WRITES FOR A VARIETY OF PURPOSES									

Appendix G

Student Writing Checklist

Grade Kindergarten

Name:										
TELLS STORY WITH MAIN EVENTS										
RETELLS STORY CHRONOLOGICALLY										
USES EXPANDING VOCABULARY										
WORKS EFFECTIVELY WITH OTHERS										
IS ABLE TO SELF-EVALUATE										
USES RANDOM LETTERS										
USES INVENTED SPELLING										
HIGH FREQ. WORDS SPELLED CORRECTLY										
PRINTS HORIZONTALLY ON PAGE										
LEAVES SPACE BETWEEN WORDS										
ATTEMPTS PUNCTUATION USAGE										
WRITES A COMPLETE SENTENCE										
STORIES HAVE BEG//MID/END										
WRITES 1-5 SENT. STORY										
STORIES DEVELOP SEQUENTIALLY										
ENGAGES PROMPTLY IN WRITING TASK										
SUSTAINS ATTENTION TO WRITING TASK										
SHARES AND DISCUSSES WRITING										

Appendix H

Mirror Activity Sheet

Questions	YES	NO
1. Did I indent the first word of each paragraph?		
2. Did I begin each sentence with a capital letter?		
3. Did I use the correct mark at the end of each sentence?		
4. Did I spell each word correctly?		
5. Did I use capital letters correctly?		
6. Did I use my best handwriting?		

Mark	Meaning
——	cross out
∧	add
⊘	move
¶	indent
≡	capital letter
/	small letter
◯	check spelling

WRITING FOLDER

Name _____

Date	Topic/Theme	Stages of the Writing Process				Comments
		Prewriting	1st Draft	Revising	Editing	Publishing

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Writing Reflections

Name: _____

1. After reading my story I feel.... *(Circle one.)*

   happy   not sure   sad

2. I have improved in:

   _____ writing complete sentences.

   _____ using capital letters.

   _____ using correct punctuation.

   _____ spelling.

   _____ telling a story.

   _____ handwriting.

3. I am most proud of:

   _____

   _____

4. Next time I write I will try to:

   _____

   _____

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Writing Reflections

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. After reading my story I feel....

_____

_____

2. I have improved in:

        _____ writing complete sentences.

        _____ using capital letters.

        _____ using correct punctuation.

        _____ spelling.

        _____ telling a story.

        _____ using descriptive language.

        _____ handwriting.

3. I am most proud of:

_____

_____

4. Next time I write I will try to:

_____

_____

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Appendix M

WRITING FOLDER
CONTENT ANALYSIS

STUDENT'S NAME_____
DATE _____

WRITING STRENGTHS:

WRITING NEEDS: