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ABSTRACT

A program was developed and implemented to improve and motivate students' writing in the elementary grades. Research data suggests probable causes for lack of student motivation and progress in writing. These causes include: overloaded and product driven curriculum, lack of appropriate teacher training, time-consuming and subjective grading processes, student frustration, and lack of modeled writing by adults. Subjects were 46 K-3 students in a Chicago suburb, chosen at random. A written language inventory was used to assess pretest (given the second week of September) and posttest (given the second week of January) performance and formally assess written work in student portfolios. Results indicated that the use of writing workshops, a print-rich environment, writing centers, a home writing program, an author's corner, and skill development were effective in increasing student motivation and improving writing skills. Findings suggest that the program implemented was successful due to the manageable design of the plan, ability of the flexible and experienced researchers to make appropriate curriculum decisions and adjustments to daily schedules, and the eagerness of students to explore the world of writing. Even though the targeted population widely ranged in age and ability levels, positive and significant change in all classrooms involved was observed; the combination of strategies used can be highly successful at virtually all grade levels K-3 and special education. (Includes 10 tables of data and 26 references; sample forms and hand-outs are appended.) (Author/CR)

Improving and Motivating Children's Writing

by

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This project is dedicated to all the students who trusted the researchers and took the risks that allowed all of us to learn and grow.

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CHAPTER 1

Problem Statement

Students of the targeted K-3 and Communication Development 3-5 classes exhibit a need for improved writing skills as evidenced by classroom teacher observation, anecdotal records, Writing Workshops, authentic portfolios, and teacher, parent, and student surveys.

"Children need time for messing around with words" (Holt, 1995, p. 49). The writing skills of students have always been a big concern to teachers and parents. Introducing writing strategies to young students and giving them time to play with words will improve not only their writing but also increase their self-confidence and motivate them to write effectively. "Messing around with words" can include dictating stories, being read to, listening to books on tape, reciting poems, writing in journals, and practicing handwriting. Both phonics and literature-based instruction give primary age children the important tools they need to become effective readers and writers.

Children's ability to learn language is unique. This ability progresses in specific stages along a developmental continuum. Writing should not be delayed while reading and spelling skills are being developed. Experimenting with words is one of the best ways to advance reading and writing achievement. Increasing knowledge of children's language development directly affects the observations, evaluations, and strategies implemented in the classroom.

Community Setting

George Washington School District is located in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. This suburb was incorporated as a village in 1892. Consisting of 13.8 square miles, this suburb has a population of 40,000. As of 1992, the average household income was $56,719. More than 95% of the population were Caucasian. The median age was 33. Approximately 32.7% of the

Abstract

This research program was developed to improve and motivate students' writing in the elementary grades.

Data found in research suggests probable causes for the lack of student motivation and progress in writing include: overloaded and product driven curriculum, lack of appropriate teacher training, time-consuming and subjective grading processes, student frustration, and lack of modeled writing by adults.

Students, teachers, and parents will be interviewed to determine attitudes on the writing process. Students will also complete a pretest and post-test assessing writing skill development and self-assessments on written work, all noting an increase in skills, self-confidence, and enthusiasm.

Activities to be implemented in the classroom to achieve the desired results include: Writing Workshop, a home writing project, and the creation of an extensive print rich environment. Skill development strategies will include teacher modeling, use of graphic organizers, mini-lessons, Daily Oral Language activities, and cooperative learning activities.

population are high school graduates, 24.6% have some college credit, 7.1% have an associate degree, 14.5% have a bachelor degree, and 6.4% have a graduate degree. Part of the labor force consists of 9.9% having some high school credit and 4.8% having only elementary school experience (City Census, 1993).

Local Setting

George Washington School is one of five elementary and two middle schools in George Washington School District. George Washington School houses grades K-5, two Early Childhood classrooms, one Hearing Impaired classroom, and one Communication Development classroom. Enrollment, as of September 30, 1994, was reported at 584. Racial and ethnic backgrounds were 94.7% Caucasian, 0.3% African-American, 2.7% Hispanic, 2.2% Asian-Pacific Islander, and 0.0% Native American. Based on 1993-1994 school year figures, the average class size for each grade level was as follows: five special education rooms at 9 per class, kindergarten 22.8, first grade 20, second grade 28.3, third grade 28.8, fourth grade 27.6, and fifth grade 29.8. George Washington School houses the following classrooms: four kindergarten, four first, four second, three third, three fourth, three fifth, and one fourth-fifth split classroom. Families receiving public aid constitutes 2.6% of the attendance population, with the mobility rate standing at 18.2%. Chronic truancy is at 0.0% with an attendance rate of 95.9%. George Washington School faculty consists of 36 people, 35 females and one male. There are sixteen teachers with a master's degree. The average number years of teaching experience is 11.8.

Thomas Jefferson School is another one of the five elementary and two middle schools in George Washington School District. Thomas Jefferson School houses grades K-5. Enrollment, as of September 30, 1994, was reported at 895. Racial and ethnic backgrounds were 93.7%

Caucasian, 0.2% African-American, 1.8% Hispanic, 3.9% Asian, and 0.3% Native American. Based on 1993-1994 school year figures, the average class size for each grade level was as follows: kindergarten 24, first grade 27.4, second grade 27.6, third grade 29.4, fourth grade 30, and fifth grade 29.4. Thomas Jefferson School houses the following classrooms: five kindergarten, five first, six second, five third, five fourth, and five fifth. There are no special education classes in the building. There are 0.1% low income students, and 0.8% of the students are limited English proficient. Chronic truancy is at 0.0% with an attendance rate of 96.2%. The school has a 3.1% mobility rate. The Thomas Jefferson School faculty consists of 36 female teachers. One third of these teachers have a master's degree. The average number years of teaching experience is 11.3 years.

George Washington School District students are heterogeneously assigned to a classroom. The core subject areas and time devoted to them in grades K-5 are as follows: Reading and Language Arts, 900 minutes; Mathematics, 250 minutes; Science, 100 minutes; and Social Studies, 100 minutes. In addition to core subjects, students in grades 1-5 receive six 30-minute periods of Physical Education, Music, and Art. Third through fifth grade also receive computer instruction for 30 minutes per week. First through fifth grade participate in Learning Center activities for 30 minutes per week.

The district adopted the Reading and Language series published by Silver Burdett for grades one and two, and by Harcourt Brace for grades three, four, and five. Many teachers in the district also incorporate the whole language approach in their curriculum. Lee Pensinger's Power Writing is used in most classrooms throughout the district as a specific writing strategy. The Accelerated Reader, a computer reading program, is used as an extra reading incentive for students in grades three through five. Mathematics in Action, by MacMillan/McGraw Hill, is used to teach Math in most classrooms. Many teachers in grades one and two also incorporate

Math Their Way as a hands-on approach to teaching Math. MacMillan/McGraw Hill also publishes the Social Studies series, The World Around Us, which is used in grades one through five. Science Horizons, by Silver Burdett and Ginn, and the program, Developmental Approaches in Science and Health (DASH), are programs used to teach Science throughout the district.

The kindergarten program is 2½ hours per day. The Heath Literacy program, which incorporates all areas of the curriculum, is being used. Math Their Way and DASH, which are hands-on approaches to learning, are also being used. The kindergarten classes receive one 30-minute gym period a week.

Assessment takes many forms in the district. Kindergarten students are screened in early September. Students in third and fourth grades are assessed by the state of Illinois through the Illinois Goal Assessment Program. Grade three is assessed in Reading, Writing, and Math. Grade four is assessed in Science and Social Studies. The Iowa Test of Basic Skills is used to assess grades two and five. Second graders are also given the Test of Cognitive Skills. Quarterly report cards are issued throughout the district. Grades kindergarten through second use the following grading scale: E (excellent), S (satisfactory), N (needs improvement), U (unsatisfactory). Grades three through five use the following grading scale: A (92-100), B (85-91), C (72-84), D (65-71), F (0-64).

In addition to the previously mentioned special education classes, George Washington School District has a Learning Disabilities Resource program that services all identified learning disabled students in the building. Other support services include speech/language, social work, Title One, occupational therapy, physical therapy, Reading Enrichment and Language Arts Mastery (REALM), and psychology. This district supports the practice of inclusion when appropriate.

National Context

The lack of people with effective writing skills has far reaching effects. If 5% of 51.1 million students are retained, the taxpayers' annual expense reaches 1.7 billion dollars (Satz, 1977). This literacy problem not only causes academic problems but social and economic problems as well. These difficulties all prove the necessity for educational improvements in teaching literacy skills during the elementary years (Adams, 1978, p. X).

Professor Chall of Harvard University revealed in the Boston Globe that due to a lack in literacy skills, over half of the adults in the United States are not qualified for today's technical jobs. The Bureau of Census stated that by the 1990s, the United States would experience labor shortages, and the availability of workers between the ages of 18 and 24 years old would be reduced from 30 million in 1980 to 24 million in 1995. Therefore, employers are now facing critical shortages of literacy competent employees (Linden, Whimbey, 1990, p. 1).

Responding to the concern over students' literacy skills, the English Language Arts Standards Project took more than three years to develop twelve standards to assure that students become competent, informed, and productive members of society. These twelve interrelated standards are student-centered, while encouraging the development of curriculum and instruction that builds on the emerging literacy that children bring to school. Included in the twelve standards released this past March were six standards encouraging the progression of the students' writing skills:

1. Students will adjust use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively.
2. Students will use a wide range of strategies to communicate with a variety of audiences and for a variety of purposes.

3. Students apply knowledge of language structure to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print text.
4. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to communicate ideas.
5. Students can participate as knowledgeable, reflective, and creative members of a variety of literacy communities.
6. Students are able to gather information, evaluate, and synthesize information from a variety of sources.

CHAPTER 2

Evidence of Problem

The following methods were used to document the writing abilities of the targeted elementary students in the kindergarten through third grade and the Communication Development classrooms. The targeted population, consisting of 46 students, was chosen at random. This random sample group was accomplished through Systematic Sampling where student names were scrambled, listed, and then chosen based upon a predetermined numerical order. There were 10 students from each grade level K-3 and 6 students from the Communication Development classroom. The researchers used a variety of instruments to collect data including: observational checklists of writing ability, surveys, pretests, and post-tests.

A Written Language Inventory was used to assess pretest and post-test performance and formally assess written work in student portfolios. Two separate checklists were developed to accommodate the differences in writing skills and ages of students (Appendices A and B).

The pretest was given the second week of September. The prompt for the pretest was, "What I Did on My Summer Vacation." All targeted K-3 and special education students were given a pretest to assess entry level writing skills. The Written Language Inventory was used to assess 29 different writing skills, ranging from using pictures to write, to using complete thoughts and compound sentences. The following table presents the results in percentages. The skill levels are indicated as: No Attempt, Emerging, or Mastered. In the pretest, the majority of assessed skills fell in a range between No Attempt and Emerging, while the percentage of Mastered skills were significantly lower. The post-test was given the second week of January. Post-test results will be discussed later.

Table 1

Written Language Inventory

Pretest

Grade Levels - K,1,2,3 & Special Education

Writing Skills	Code	No attempt	Emerging	Mastered
1. Uses pictures to write	1	0%	22%	78%
2. Uses scribbles or symbols	2	15%	7%	78%
3. Random use of letters, symbols	3	15%	4%	81%
4. Left/Right directional movement	4	0%	22%	77%
5. Understands that writing is talk	5	17%	10%	73%
6. Chooses own topic	6	24%	60%	16%
7. Reads writing of others	7	33%	43%	24%
8. Takes risks in writing	8	46%	39%	15%
9. Personal voice heard in writing	9	43%	20%	37%
10. Innovates on language patterns	10	59%	30%	11%
11. Simple beginning, middle, and end	11	59%	41%	0%
12. Writes in different modes	12	65%	35%	0%
13. Uses beginning editing skills	13	80%	20%	0%
14. Uses period	14	50%	43%	7%
15. Is aware of punctuation (? ! , " ")	15	74%	26%	0%
16. Uses a capital letter to begin a sentence	16	46%	46%	8%
17. Uses a capital letter for proper noun	17	52%	46%	2%
18. Uses initial consonants	18	22%	7%	71%
19. Spaces between words	19	22%	20%	58%
20. Takes a risk in spelling	20	33%	33%	34%
21. Uses final consonants	21	26%	15%	59%
22. Conventional spelling of some words	22	52%	43%	5%
23. Uses incorrect vowels, in correct place	23	26%	48%	26%
24. Correct spelling of word endings	24	41%	35%	24%
25. Vowel approximation accurate	25	33%	46%	21%
26. Recognizes misspellings	26	52%	48%	0%
27. Uses classroom resources	27	70%	30%	0%
28. Uses complete thought	28	43%	39%	18%
29. Uses compound sentences linked by "and"	29	84%	12%	4%

A chart was developed to aid teachers in recognizing the appropriate developmental stages in Writing and Spelling. The teachers found the following two charts helpful in understanding the developmental stages of Writing and Spelling.

Chart 1

Developmental Writing Stages	Type of writing Produced	Composition Development	Performance Development	Skill Development	Effective Teaching Strategies
Emergent Writer	Imitates Writing	May scribble draw a picture write a few letters self-selects topic	Left/right directionality spaces between "words"	May write name can "reread" own writing "reads" picture books by memory uses some sound-symbol relationship may use beg., mid., end consonants	Daily opportunities to write and share writing with others Teacher models writing Teacher uses language experience charts
Early Writer	Understands that speech can be written down simple text is written	Stories have beg., mid., and end uses inventive spelling chooses own title begins using dialogue	Letter formation improves organizes words into sentences	May use capital letters and periods correctly spells many high frequency words some vowels correctly placed begins editing skills	Student self-selects topics student uses writing process daily w/ rewrites and publishing student conferences w/ teachers, peers
Fluent Writer	Understands and writes for many purposes writing is refined and quality of work is important	Develops theme in detail shows knowledge of subject	Papers appear neater, more organized, and easier to read	Reads for information to include in writing uses words endings correctly verb tenses agree writes in para. edits own/others work	Teacher continues to model effective writing strategies student encouraged to use entire writing process including revisions, rewriting, and publishing

Chart 2

Developmental Stages of Spelling	Composition Development	Performance Development	Corresponding Developmental Writing Stage
Precommunicative Stage	Communicates w/pictures, symbols, numbers, and shapes	Scribbles May or may not be left/right progression Symbols may be placed randomly on paper	Beginning /Emergent Writer
Semiphonetic Stage	First attempts at sound/symbol relationships May put letters together to form name	Letter formation and spacing between words improves	Emergent Writer
Phonetic Stage	Initial and final consonants Vowels are gradually added Spells many high frequency words correctly	Left to right progression and spacing between words clearly evident	Early Writer
Traditional Stage	Vowels are more accurately spelled Word endings are spelled correctly	All letters of word may be present but not in the correct order	End of Early Writer/ Beginning of Fluent Writer
Correct Spelling Stage	Spelling system is firmly in place Can correct misspelled words Uses a dictionary to check spelling	Written language is very legible	Fluent Writer

The student survey was given during the second week in September to determine student attitudes toward writing (Appendix C). The survey was administered again in the second week of January to determine if student interest and motivation had changed as a result of interventions.

Table 2

Student Survey Results - September

1. Do you consider yourself an author? Why? Why not?	Yes No Don't know 67 68 2 Why? My mom and dad are good writers. I like to write. Why not? I don't like to write.
2. Why do you think people write?	They like to learn. To make money, to earn a living. To communicate.
3. Do you think most people like to write?	Yes No Don't know 111 21 5
4. Who is your favorite author?	R.L. Stine Marc Brown Dr. Seuss Eric Carle
5. Are there any books by a particular author that have changed the way you write? Who ?	Yes No Don't Know 44 75 18 R.L. Stine Marc Brown Dr. Seuss Eric Carle
6. How do you decide what you are going to write about?	Brainstorm Use their imaginations Books
7. What are your favorite topics to write about?	Animals , Family and Friends, and Sports.
8. When and where do you like to write?	At home/bedroom. On Vacation. At School. On a computer. When it is quiet.
9. What helps you to write?	My brain. Materials (pen, pencils, paper) Teacher/Family

* *Includes all students in targeted K-3 and spec. ed. classroom*

The student survey was given to all students in the K-3 and Communication Development classrooms. The purpose of the survey was to elicit responses that determine student attitudes toward writing. The student responses to the survey given in September were as follows:

Do you consider yourself an author? Of the 137 surveyed, 49% consider themselves to be authors, 50% do not consider themselves to be authors, and 1% are unsure. The students who consider themselves authors stated they like to write and their parents are good writers. The students who do not consider themselves as authors stated they simply did not like to write.

Why do you think people write? Various responses were indicated by the students. The most frequent responses were that they like to learn, it helps them communicate, and it enables them to earn a living.

Do you think most people like to write? An overwhelming majority of the students, 81%, thought most people like to write. Only 15% felt that most people do not like to write. A small minority, 4% are unsure.

Who is your favorite author? Many well-known authors were listed on the surveys. Four of the most common authors mentioned were R.L. Stine, Marc Brown, Dr. Seuss, and Eric Carle.

Are there any books by a particular author that have changed the way you write? Of the students surveyed, 32% indicated that a particular author had changed the way they wrote. Some of the influencing authors mentioned were R.L. Stine, Marc Brown, Dr. Seuss, and Eric Carle. Even more students, 55%, claimed there was not a particular author who changed the way they wrote. Thirteen percent of the students were unsure whether a particular author had changed the way they wrote.

How do you decide what you are going to write about? The most popular responses to how students decide what to write about were brainstorming, using their imaginations, and reading books.

What are your favorite topics to write about? Several responses were given for favorite topics. The most popular responses were animals, family, friends, and sports.

When and where do you like to write? The students surveyed revealed they enjoy writing at home, in their bedroom, at school, on vacation, on the computer, and in a quiet atmosphere. Many times and places were listed. However, the above stated were the most popular.

What helps you to write? Once again, many responses were indicated. The responses varied, ranging from literal to higher level thinking. The literal responses included pen, paper, pencils, and even the brain. The students who were thinking on a higher level indicated that resources such as teachers and family help them write.

In addition, a parent questionnaire was sent home the second week of September to determine the effects of the home literacy environment on student writing and attitude (Appendix D). The survey was sent to 147 parents. Of those parents, 76% responded. The parent written responses were generally positive.

Table 3

Parent Writing Interest Survey

	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost never
1. Does your child use writing material appropriately	73	38	1
2. Does you child write at home?	50	56	6
3. Do you encourage your child to write at home?	66	43	2
4. Does your child enjoy writing letters, stories, poems, etc.?	34	48	30
5. Do you talk about your child's writing with him/her?	57	50	3
6. Do you write at home?	47	57	7
7. Does your child see you writing at home?	48	57	7
8. Do you provide writing materials for your child?	100	12	1
9. Are you available to assist your child with re-writing if necessary?	92	18	2
10.Are you able to help edit in the classroom?	22	55	33

** Included all the parents in grades K-3 and Communication Development classroom*

The survey showed that most students, 99%, use writing materials appropriately. Children's writing occurs in 95% of the homes. Writing is encouraged in 98% of the homes. When asked if their children enjoyed writing letters, stories, or poems, 73% of the parents answered positively. On the other hand, 37% stated that their children did not enjoy the different types of writing. Most of the parents, 97%, have talked about their child's writing with him/her. The majority of the parents stated they wrote at home, provided writing materials for their child, and they would be available to assist their child with rewriting. Some parents verbally indicated a lack of interest and a concern that this project may involve more time and effort than they were able to devote.

A teacher survey was given to kindergarten through third grade and special education teachers to determine motivation and ability to effectively teach children to write (Appendix E).

Table 4

Teacher Writing Survey

1. How important is writing in the classroom?	Very important 29	Somewhat 1	Not important 0
2. How often do you include writing activities in your lesson plans?	Daily 19	2-3 times per week 6	Once a week 5
3. Do you use writing across the curriculum?	Yes 27	No 0	
4. Is there enough time in your day to include writing activities regularly?	Yes 13	No 16	
5. Do you feel you are trained to effectively teach writing?	Yes 22	No 8	
6. How would you describe the attitudes of your students toward writing?	Enthusiastic 8	Positive 18	Negative 4
7. Generally how would you describe the writing abilities of your students?	Excellent 4	Fair 21	Poor 5
8. Do you feel comfortable with letting your students use inventive spelling?	Yes 14	Somewhat 12	No 3
9. Do you feel that your students need more motivation to write?	Yes 13	Somewhat 15	No 2
10. Have you had a class or workshop in writing?	Yes 27	No 3	
Grade level teachers are currently teaching	K 4	1 8	2 9	3 5	special education 4

*Includes all students in targeted K-3 and special education classroom

An overwhelming majority of teachers felt that writing in the classroom is very important, and they used writing across the curriculum. However, only 19 out of 30 teachers responded that they included written language activities in their lesson plans on a daily basis. According to 13 of the 29 responses, there was not enough time in the school day to do writing activities on a daily basis. The majority of teachers from grades K-3 and special education felt that students' writing skills were fair and that student motivation was positive (as opposed to enthusiastic or negative). It appears that kindergarten and special education children may lack motivation due

to lack of experience. The teachers concluded that students need more motivation in their written expression. The majority of K-3 and special education teachers are either totally or somewhat comfortable in allowing students to use inventive spelling. Only three teachers were not comfortable at all in accepting at least some inventive spelling from students. The survey also stated that 27 of 30 teachers have had at least one class or workshop in teaching written language. Several teachers responded that they were "self-taught" in the area of teaching writing to children.

Probable Causes

Many probable causes of poor writing ability in elementary age children were determined by the researchers. These causes are evident in all targeted classrooms. Some students lack the skills needed to be effective writers. This was found evident through the assessment checklists (see Tables 1 and 2).

The Writing Report Card (from the National Assessment of Educational Progress) reported that only 12% of eleventh graders wrote well enough to earn an adequate rating for the type of writing needed for educational advancement or employment in many business and technical areas (Linden, Whimbey, 1990, p. 2).

Due to lack of skill development, students become easily frustrated with their written work. Surveys and teacher observation reflect the students' frustration with written communication. These students have a low self-esteem and often refuse to take risks in the written expression mode. These feelings were expressed through the student surveys (see Table 3).

The teachers' surveys revealed that the lack of administrative support leaves teachers feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. "Teachers are constantly kicking their way through a minefield of school-based pressures ... administrative and/or parental expectations ('back to basics'), and emphasis on surface features of product 'accountability' (school-wide marking

publishing routines)." The teacher surveys show that priorities and limitations need to be articulated more clearly to administrators (Nichols, 1989). "The frenetic, harried, and product-driven nature of school environments and the delicate introspective and time-consuming nature of the writing process make it difficult for teachers to stitch the two together" (Parsons, 1991, p. 50).

Some surveyed teachers feel they lack the appropriate training to effectively teach writing skills. Graves' survey of 50 major teacher-preparing institutions in 1994 revealed 24 of our states did not offer a course of writing for teachers in-training (Graves, 1994).

Administrators continually mandate the writing process approach without recognizing the need for appropriate training. One inservice workshop does not adequately prepare teachers.

The targeted district lacks a mandated kindergarten writing program, leaving teachers without training, materials, philosophy, guidelines, or expectations at this level. Graves states that the traditional methods of teaching writing ignore the child's urge to demonstrate what he knows. Teachers often underestimate the child's desires due to a lack of understanding of the child's writing process and what children do to control their own creativity (Graves, 1983, p. 3).

While often overlooked as an effective tool to help students take pride, ownership, and responsibility in written work, self-assessment can be used to learn what students understand about the subject and what they understand about themselves. Watts states that giving students the opportunity to assess their own progress allows them to begin taking responsibility for their own learning. "To be consulted about one's own learning is empowering -not to be consulted is disempowering. Kids without power over their own learning take power in other ways, and some are subverting or resisting what we want to teach them" (Watts, 1996).

There is a need to develop reporting strategies that are more specific, individualized, and encompassing. While educators have continued to rely on grades and standardized testing as the only two measures of a student's progress, it is time to develop more individual systems of

assessment. These systems will require extensive public education to create an appreciation of assessment tools such as conferencing, checklists, rubrics, and portfolios (Watts, 1996).

Recognizing the necessity of these assessment reforms, Watts also notes the difficulty finding the time and the money to develop new assessment and reporting tools. Watts also states that asking overburdened teachers and schools to create these tools without releasing them from other time consuming tasks just continues the present cycle of "adding new expectations for curricula and instructional changes, without ever taking anything away...". This creates such an overload on the classroom teacher that "heroic efforts are needed to do anything adequately" (Watts, 1996). Grading written work tends to be very time consuming and subjective to assess. "Evaluation takes time and we all know that a teacher's time is in short supply" (Graves, 1994, p. 148). Grading and reporting student progress will always involve some degree of subjectivity. "Regardless of the method used, assigning grades or reporting on student learning is inherently subjective" (Guskey, 1996). However, Guskey states that subjectivity is not always a negative part of the grading process. Since teachers know their students, understand the dimensions of students' work, and have a clear idea of progress made, a subjective perception may yield very accurate descriptions of what has been accomplished (Guskey, 1996).

Environmental influences may impact negatively on the students' abilities and attitudes toward written language. Children with various backgrounds all bring different cultural and language patterns to school. An effective writing teacher needs to first listen and recognize these various language abilities of her students. The teacher needs to teach to the strengths and respect the students' unique language styles and customs (Zemelman, Daniels, Hyde, 1993, p. 49).

CHAPTER 3

Review of Literature

"Young children can write, young children want to write, and young children possess knowledge, interests, and the experiences to write about" (Avery, 1984, p. 89). The researchers' experiences with young writers validates these beliefs. Young writers may not use standardized spelling or follow many of the other conventions of written language, but they do understand that created symbols communicate meaning, and they are capable of communication by placing marks on paper. All children have experiences to write about. As readers of children's writing, teachers need an open mind, free of preconceived notions of what children should or should not do as writers. Such expectations handicap the students' efficient, natural learning styles. The role of the writing teacher is to encourage and cheer students on. Writing should extend throughout the curriculum. Students value writing and use it more when it becomes a part of many other learning activities. Writing is, in fact, one of the best tools for learning any material, because the writing process activates thinking.

The following intervening strategies were used to enhance the development of the writing process: Writing Workshop, provision of a print-rich environment, writing centers, home writing program, Author's Corner, and skill development.

Writing Workshop. The workshop model is simple and powerful. Writing Workshop promotes student ownership and active learning. Writing Workshop puts more emphasis on higher-order thinking and less emphasis on teacher-directed instruction. Writing Workshop is an excellent tool to integrate all areas of the curriculum. Introducing strategies to young writers will expand natural abilities. The term workshop creates an image of an environment that facilitates production of written expression. Learning progresses as teachers coach young writing apprentices. According to Calkins, teacher dominated writing instruction suppresses

children's writing. Calkins (1986) states, "The bitter irony is that we, in schools, set up road blocks to stifle the natural and enduring reasons for writing, and then we complain that our students don't want to write. The cycle continues. After detouring around authentic, human reasons for writing, we bury the students' urge to write all the more with boxes, kits, and manuals full of synthetic writing stimulants (p. 4)."

Print-rich Environment. Children who are authors need a print-rich environment because the need for information and sources has been raised significantly. Students need to be surrounded with poetry, factual books, and imaginative stories. Children need to hear, speak, and read literature (Graves, 1983, p. 67). Literature provides drama, precise language, and problem solving skills. As researchers and practitioners, the belief is held that students' writing should be displayed throughout the room to provide opportunity for pupils to view and appreciate the work of others.

Writing Centers. "Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens, or pencils ... anything that makes a mark. The child's marks say, 'I am.' 'No, you aren't,' say most school approaches to the teaching of writing" (Graves, 1978, p. 3).

Including writing centers in the classroom environment is an excellent tool for providing opportunities for students to freely and safely explore the creative writing process. Graves states that freedom of choice provides the element of self-motivation that encourages children to produce more complex text (Graves, 1978).

Home Writing Program. "The most important aspect of parental involvement is communication, communication, communication" (Clark, 1995). Teachers and parents need to work together to promote and encourage literacy in children. Parents are the children's first

teachers, so who better to join the classroom teacher in the effort to encourage and support the young authors.

Author's Corner. The Author's Corner, which will be a literacy circle, will provide children with an opportunity to share their product with their peers. "All children benefit from a responsive audience and a classroom of shared learning" (Zemelman et al., 1993, p. 53). According to Waring-Chaffee, the social environment in which the students are a part legitimizes and encourages exploration by sharing and celebrating growth as readers and writers (1994). Goldberg feels that active listening is learned and practiced. "Students should learn how to respond to their own and other people's writing" (Goldberg, 1983, p. 111).

Skill Development. Modeling written language for young children is crucial. "The importance of modeling cannot be overestimated. Teachers need to be exemplars of what the class is asked to do" (Goldberg, 1983, p. 111). One of the teacher's most important roles is to model both composition and performance aspects of written language. Written language skills are acquired most effectively through direct instruction and modeling by the teacher, followed by practice with feedback and guidance. Through the use of mini-lessons, the following strategies will be employed for skill development: graphic organizers, Daily Oral Language, cooperative grouping, and inventive spelling.

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

After the investigation into the probable causes, as well as the review of the literature, the following project objective is proposed: As a result of implementing a process writing intervention plan during the period of September 1996 to January 1997, the targeted kindergarten through third grade classrooms, including a special education classroom containing grades three through five, will increase motivation and develop necessary skills to

write effectively, as measured by teacher observations, student writing inventory checklist, pretest and post-test results, writing portfolios, and writing surveys that are given before and after the study. In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following strategies are necessary:

1. Writing Workshop will be designed and implemented.
2. A print-rich environment will be maintained in each classroom.
3. Writing centers will be established in the classrooms.
4. A home writing program will be developed.
5. An Author's Corner will be established in each classroom.
6. Skills will be authentically assessed through the use of designed rubrics and writing checklists to reduce subjectivity in grading (Appendix F).

Action Plan

This action plan was developed by the researchers to aid in the implementation of the six major solution components: Writing Workshop, provision of a print-rich environment, development of writing centers, development of a home writing program, providing an Author's Corner in each classroom, and provision for skill development.

I. Writing Workshop

A. Structure - Setting aside predictable time everyday for writing is important for many reasons. This time will allow children to take control of writing, develop writing strategies, and plan to use time effectively. Each daily workshop will have a consistent structure with simple and clear expectations, allowing students to anticipate the daily routine. A smooth transition between mini-lessons and Writing Workshop time will be implemented.

B. Journals- Journal writing will provide the time for students to self-select topics and write without time constraints or teacher evaluation. Journals will be used daily or several times weekly. "...You know how your mother can tell you to go to bed... Nobody can tell you how to write your piece. You're the mother of your story" (Calkins, 1986, p. 6).

C. Topics- Occasionally, specific topics, story starters, and Power Writing prompts may be used, determined by need and related units of study.

D. Finished Products- Individual and cooperative groups will produce mini-books, big books, class books, and Power Writing paragraphs and essays at least one to two times per month.

E. Publishing-

> "Publication of student writing is vital: making bound books, cataloging student works in the school library, setting up displays in classrooms, in school hallways, at the local library, in neighborhood stores, or even placing class anthologies in local doctors' and dentists' waiting rooms. The old idea that the teacher is the only legitimate audience robs students of the rich and diverse response from audiences that is needed to nurture a writers' skills and motivation" (Zemelman, et.al.).

One a month, students will self-select and publish a finished product from the Writing Workshop portfolio. Finished products will be placed in a classroom library. A parent program may be planned to showcase published work. These programs may be video-taped to allow students the opportunity to view and share the tape at home.

II. Print-Rich Environment

A. Displays - Students' work will be displayed throughout the classroom and halls to promote pride, ownership, and an audience.

B. Labels - Familiar objects will be labeled in the classroom when appropriate. A variety of reading, language, and writing activities can incorporate the use of charts, lists, and labels.

C. Visual Displays - Stories, poems, charts, and graphic organizers will be displayed when related to specific areas of the curriculum. These displays will be changed periodically to maintain a high interest level. Vowel pattern displays, spelling visuals, word usage charts, and Power Writing posters will also be displayed to provide students with reference materials, thus giving them the opportunity to self-correct.

D. Reading Materials - A genre of reading materials to expose children to various styles of reading and writing will be readily available throughout the classroom. Materials will include a wide assortment of books, magazines, newspapers, and student published work. Dictionaries and Franklin Spellers will also be provided to allow students access to resource materials and give them an opportunity to self-correct spelling.

III. Writing Centers

A. Set-up - A writing center will be located in a specific area of the classroom. The center will be designed for free-exploration of students' written expression. Students can visit the writing center during available free time. A computer will be available for student use, along with a variety of software that relates to written expression. Writing Workshop portfolios will

be kept in the writing center. A variety of writing activities will be made available for the students to select, such as big book story starters and bear story starters that use manipulatives. Students searching for topics will find high interest motivators to choose from in the writing center. A tape recorder will also be included in the center for students who want to tape record thoughts or listen to tape recordings of published work by other students in the classroom. All materials should encourage free exploration.

B. Supplies - A wide variety of art supplies such as paper, construction paper, crayons, markers, glue, scissors, glitter, pipe cleaners, paper plates, brown bags, craft sticks, and magazines will also be available so that the students can create pictures, puppets, collages, or other projects to go with their writing.

IV. Home Writing Program

A. Communication - Every month, the parents of students in the targeted classrooms will receive hand-outs providing specific ideas to encourage and improve writing skills at home and school and to aid parents in understanding the developmental stages children go through on their journey to improved and engaging writing.

B. Writing Bags - Each student will have the opportunity to bring home an author's backpack to share with family members. The backpack will contain some type of character or stuffed animal, such as Curious George or Mickey Mouse, that relates to a book that is also in the backpack. Each child will have an opportunity to take the backpack home for a weekend. The storybook character will share the weekend with the student. Blank books will be

provided in the pack and used to write about weekend adventures, which will then be shared with classmates at the Author's Corner.

V. Author's Corner

A. Author's Corner - At least once a week, a student will be chosen to select something from the Writing Workshop portfolio to share with peers. This will not only be a time for self-evaluation, but also for constructive peer comments and suggestions for improvement if necessary.

VI. Skill Development

A. Modeling - Teachers will model various writing techniques as related to curriculum areas and needs of the classroom. This could take the form of letter writing, list making, note taking, or writing lesson plans, as long as the class sees the teacher writing!

B. Graphic Organizers - Graphic organizers will be used, either individually or in cooperative groups, to help students organize thoughts to become more effective writers. A web, story map, or Venn diagram often work well in accomplishing this goal.

C. Mini Lessons - Targeted teachers will teach short, 5-10 minute mini-lessons to provide direct instruction to students. These lessons will include the development of skills such as capitalization, punctuation, and grammar, as they pertain to each grade level.

D. Daily Oral Language - Each morning, a sentence or paragraph can be either written on the chalkboard or printed on paper. These sentences contain grammar, spelling,

capitalization, or punctuation mistakes that students must find and correct. The Daily Oral Language should correlate with the mini-lessons to provide review and application of the written language skills previously taught.

E. Cooperative Groups - Cooperative grouping is a very effective way for students to not only improve writing, but also to review basic skills and improve self-confidence in writing. Besides creating and publishing together, the students can do peer editing and tutoring. Often, students will listen and relate better to a peer than to a teacher or parent.

F. Inventive Spelling - The researchers feel that inventive or developmental spelling is an important part of acquiring skills. Although some direct instruction is needed through mini-lessons, many spelling and phonics skills are acquired in developmental stages. Young children need to be encouraged to be creative and write, without worrying about how to spell every word. A beginning writer might spell using only beginning and ending consonant letters. As the student becomes more advanced, vowels may be added either correctly or incorrectly. At early stages, the focus is on ideas and the presentation of those ideas, not the spelling.

> ... by the time many unskilled writers have written three words, they already believe they have made an error. They continually interrupt themselves to worry about spelling, to reread, and to fret. This "stuttering in writing" leads to tangled syntax and destroys fluency and creativity (Adams, 1978, p. 3).

G. Power Writing - Power Writing is a strategy that can be taught to help students organize and present ideas in an effective way. This program involves different strategies from

picture drawing to writing more complex essays. Power Writing is very structured and visual, utilizing mapping to organize main ideas, supporting details, and conclusions.

H. The Writing Process - "Many children, having never been skillful writers at work, are unaware that writing is a staged, craft-like process which competent authors typically break up into manageable steps" (Zemelman, et.al.). The stages detailed in Best Practices include selection of topic, prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. The researchers will "promote real authorship and good decision making" through modeling, conferencing, using small group collaborative work, and peer evaluation (Zemelman, et.al.).

Method of Assessment

Several types of authentic assessment will be utilized on the targeted population during the course of this study. The primary focus of assessment will be on the progressive work in the students' Writing Workshop portfolios. These portfolios will document the stages each child has gone through in the individual's writing process. In addition to the Writing Workshop portfolio, a pretest and post-test will be given to evaluate growth and progress over the course of the intervention. A Written Language Inventory, checklist, and rubric (Appendices F, G, H) will be used to score writing samples. Teacher observation and documentation through anecdotal records will be crucial to the evaluation process. Teacher and peer conferencing will provide an informal means of assessment for each child. Metacognition and self-evaluation will be encouraged and used on a regular basis.

CHAPTER 4

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase students' motivation to write and encourage the progression of writing skills in the targeted grades K-3 and special education grades 3-5 classrooms. The implementation of Writing Workshop, a print-rich environment, writing centers, home writing program, Author's Corner, and skill development were the six major components used to enhance the development of the writing process.

A structured Writing Workshop program was developed for use in each classroom. Students were given regular opportunities to create, edit, revise, publish, and share finished products. Conferencing proved to be a valuable tool to monitor student progress and further develop skills. Student published books were available in classroom libraries for students to view and enjoy. Writing Workshop proved to be a motivational tool to create a positive writing environment. Students looked forward to this opportunity, often requesting additional workshop time. Pride in ownership was enthusiastically exhibited throughout the targeted classrooms. Quite often, the relaxed workshop atmosphere provided an opportunity for student authors to express their emotions, dreams, fears, and reflections of their personal lives through journals and published works. A variety of published work surfaced, demonstrating student desire and ability to write creatively using different modes. Finished products included fiction, non-fiction, poetry, biographies, and personal narratives.

This published work was an important facet in the creation of a print-rich environment. Other important components included student writing displays, word banks, graphic organizers, labels, charts, and posters. A variety of reading materials were readily available. These materials included magazines, books, newspapers, and student published work.

The physical environment was designed to promote free exploration of written expression. Writing centers, set up in each classroom, provided a safe and comfortable environment to enhance and motivate student interest. Included in the centers were: computers, typewriters, tape recorders, and a wide variety of art supplies. Students regularly chose to spend time in this area.

The home writing program also became a positive tool for motivating students and encouraging parental involvement. Informational articles were provided regularly to inform parents about children's developmental writing stages and to encourage the children's writing at home and in school. Additionally, authors' backpacks were created and sent home with a different student each week. Students enjoyed spending time writing about and illustrating the adventures the storybook characters experienced in their homes.

Just as the writing center provided a special area to create written work, the Author's Corner provided a special area to present this work to an interested audience. Author's Corner was a highly successful experience that increased self-confidence in writing and presenting finished products to the class.

Student skill development was an important aspect in the writing process. Along with modeling various writing techniques, mini-lessons and graphic organizers were presented. The use of Daily Oral Language and Power Writing were other effective ways to improve skill development. Inventive spelling eliminated the fear of error, allowing students the freedom to write worry-free. Cooperative grouping encouraged students at all levels to participate and progress at their own skill level. Students enjoyed working cooperatively, and they were able to assist each other in the acquisition of new skills.

A pretest and post-test were administered to measure student skill level before and after the intervention. Students' attitudes about writing were also surveyed before and after the

intervention. Portfolios were kept, providing a record of skill progression while students participated in various writing activities throughout the study.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

A writing post-test was administered during the second week of January to assess the same skills as the pretest administered in September. The prompt used was "What I did on Winter Break." The post-test was scored using the Written Language Inventory. Table 5 on the following page presents post-test data. Student growth, as shown on this table, progresses from left to right.

Bar graphs (Tables 6, 7, & 8 on the following pages) were developed by the researchers to visually compare pretest and post-test data. These graphs illustrate dramatic growth in all skills assessed. There was a significant shift in skill development. The No Attempt skill level showed a decrease in all areas, except two that remained at zero percent. These two skills, left to right progression and uses pictures to write, remained the same because all students were already emerging on these skills at the onset of the project. In the No Attempt level, the goal was to decrease the number of students who did not attempt a specific skill. This positive decrease ranges from zero to 75%.

The Emerging level did not show as significant a change from pretest to post-test, due to the fact that there was such a wide range in difficulty of assessed skills. Skills that were not attempted in the pretest were now emerging or mastered in the post-test. There were fourteen skill areas that showed movement from No Attempt to Emerging or Mastered on higher level writing skills. Some of these skills included understanding writing is talk, uses beginning editing skills, and uses classroom resources. The range of the increase was two percent to 40%. There were fifteen areas that decreased in the Emerging level as students moved to the

Mastery level. Some of these skills included chooses own topic, begins sentences with a capital letter, and uses periods at the end of sentences. Positive decreases range from zero percent to 47%.

Table 5

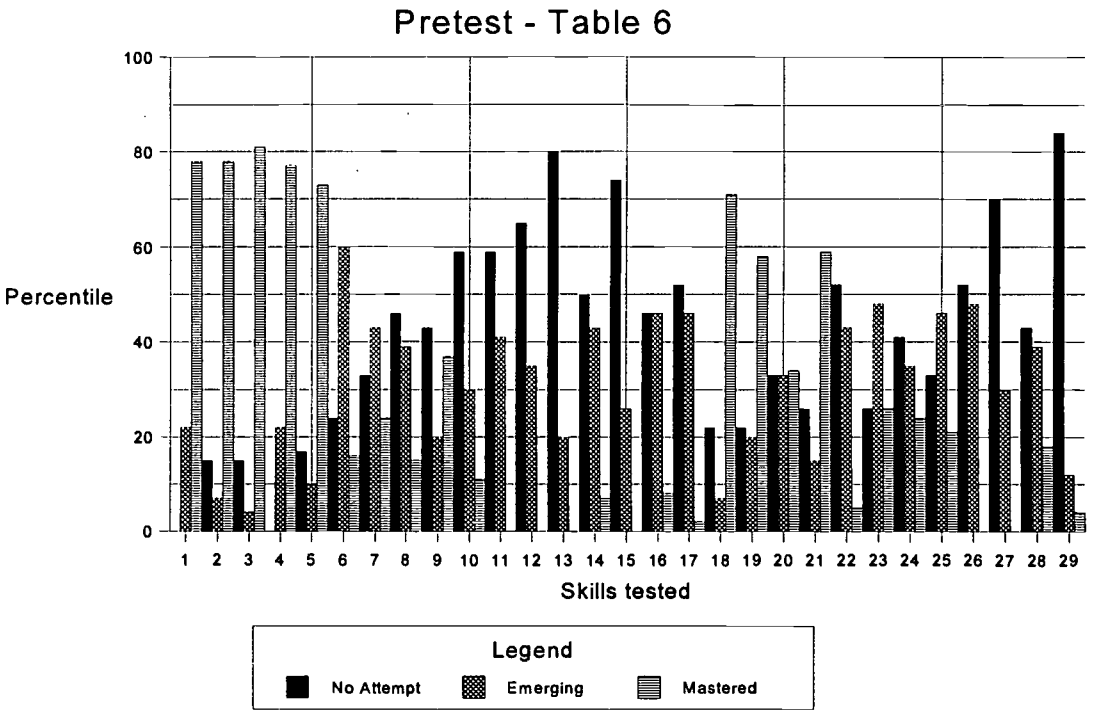
Writing Language Inventory

Grade Levels - K, 1,2,3 & Special Education

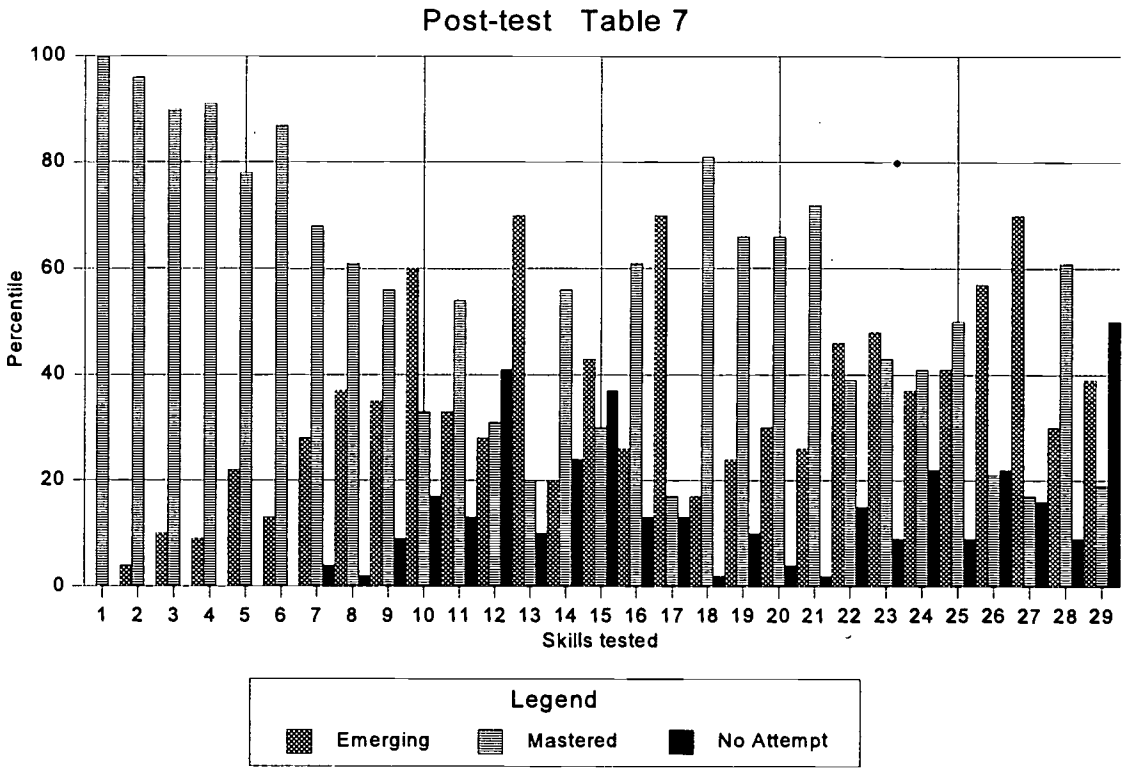
Post-test

Writing Skills	Code	No attempt	Emerging	Mastered
1. Uses pictures to write	1	0%	0%	100%
2. Uses scribbles or symbols	2	0%	4%	96%
3. Random use of letters, symbols	3	0%	10%	90%
4. Left/Right directional movement	4	0%	9%	91%
5. Understands that writing is talk	5	0%	22%	78%
6. Chooses own topic	6	0%	13%	87%
7. Reads writing of others	7	4%	28%	68%
8. Takes risks in writing	8	2%	37%	61%
9. Personal voice heard in writing	9	9%	35%	56%
10. Innovates on language patterns	10	17%	60%	33%
11. Simple beginning, middle, and end	11	13%	33%	54%
12. Writes in different modes	12	41%	28%	31%
13. Uses beginning editing skills	13	10%	70%	20%
14. Uses period	14	24%	20%	56%
15. Is aware of punctuation (? ! , " ")	15	37%	43%	30%
16. Uses a capital letter to begin a sentence	16	13%	26%	61%
17. Uses a capital letter for proper noun	17	13%	70%	17%
18. Uses initial consonants	18	2%	17%	81%
19. Spaces between words	19	10%	24%	66%
20. Takes a risk in spelling	20	4%	30%	66%
21. Uses final consonants	21	2%	26%	72%
22. Conventional spelling of some words	22	15%	46%	39%
23. Uses incorrect vowels, in correct place	23	9%	48%	43%
24. Correct spelling of word endings	24	22%	37%	41%
25. Vowel approximation accurate	25	9%	41%	50%
26. Recognizes misspellings	26	22%	57%	21%
27. Uses classroom resources	27	13%	70%	17%
28. Uses complete thought	28	9%	30%	61%
29. Uses compound sentences linked by "and"	29	50%	39%	19%

Written Pretest Inventory



Written Post-test Inventory



Percentage of change

from Pretest to Post-test -Table 8

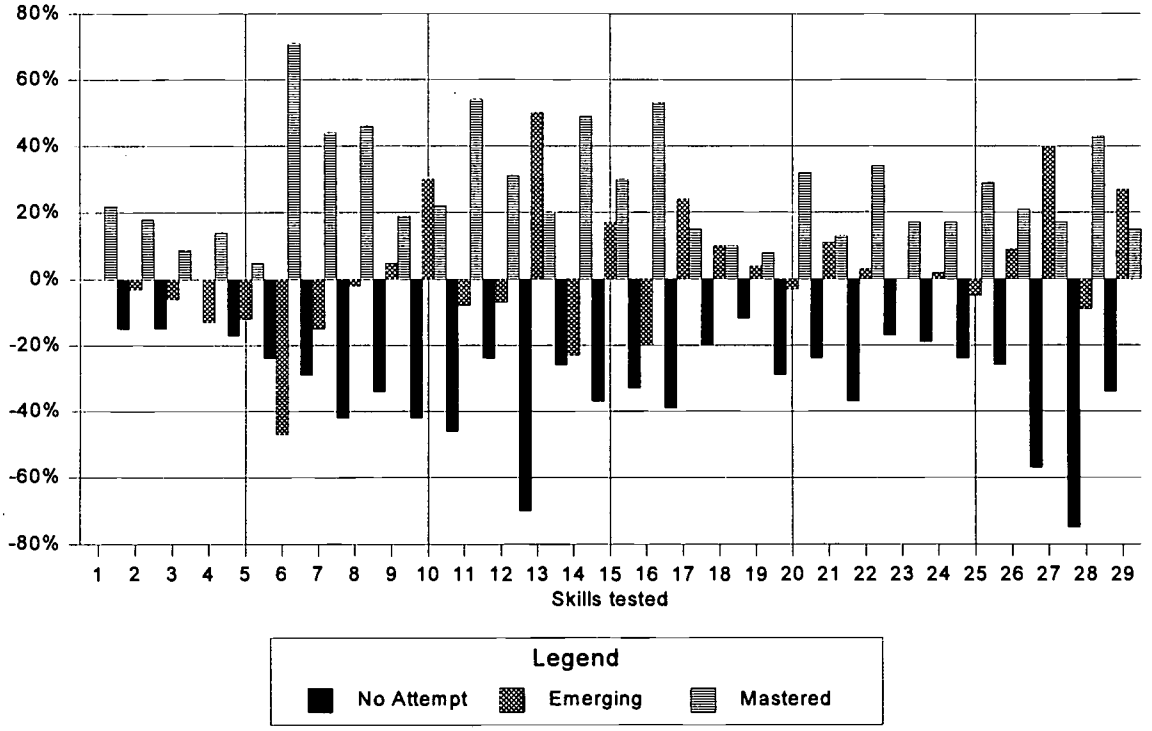


Table 9

Written Language Inventory

Grade Levels - K,1,2,3 & Special Education

% Results

Pre/Post Test

Writing Skills	Code	No Attempt	Emerging	Mastered
1. Uses pictures to write	1	0%	0%	22%
2. Uses scribbles or symbols	2	-15%	-3%	18%
3. Random use of letters, symbols	3	-15%	-6%	9%
4. Left/Right directional movement	4	0%	-13%	14%
5. Understands that writing is talk	5	-17%	-12%	5%
6. Chooses own topic	6	-24%	-47%	71%
7. Reads writing of others	7	-29%	-15%	44%
8. Takes risks in writing	8	-42%	-2%	46%
9. Personal voice heard in writing	9	-34%	5%	19%
10. Innovates on language patterns	10	-42%	30%	22%
11. Simple beginning, middle, and end	11	-46%	-8%	54%
12. Writes in different modes	12	-24%	-7%	31%
13. Uses beginning editing skills	13	-70%	50%	20%
14. Uses period	14	-26%	-23%	49%
15. Is aware of punctuation (? ! , " ")	15	-37%	17%	30%
16. Uses a capital letter to begin a sentence	16	-33%	-20%	53%
17. Uses a capital letter for proper noun	17	-39%	24%	15%
18. Uses initial consonants	18	-20%	10%	10%
19. Spaces between words	19	-12%	4%	8%
20. Takes a risk in spelling	20	-29%	-3%	32%
21. Uses final consonants	21	-24%	11%	13%
22. Conventional spelling of some words	22	-37%	3%	34%
23. Uses incorrect vowels, in correct place	23	-17%	0%	17%
24. Correct spelling of word endings	24	-19%	2%	17%
25. Vowel approximation accurate	25	-24%	-5%	29%
26. Recognizes misspellings	26	-26%	9%	21%
27. Uses classroom resources	27	-57%	40%	17%
28. Uses complete thought	28	-75%	-9%	43%
29. Uses compound sentences linked by "and"	29	-34%	27%	15%

All skill areas showed an increase on the post-test at the Mastered level. This range was from five percent to 71%, depending on the level of skill difficulty. An important factor to be considered is the wide range of age and ability levels of the targeted population. Mastery of higher skill levels was unrealistic for the younger portion of the targeted population. However, it was a realistic goal for the older students.

According to developmental writing and spelling stages, the researchers found students progressing from emergent writers to early or fluent writers and spellers. An increase in performance and skill development was noted throughout the targeted population.

The student writing survey, administered in September, was administered again in January. A significant change of attitude was noted in three areas on the January survey when compared with results from the survey administered in September. In September, only 47% of the students thought of themselves as authors. However, in January, 80% felt that they were authors, as indicated in question one of the survey. These students reported that it was fun to write and that they were good at it! In addition, question nine of the survey reflected an even higher level of thinking than in the previously administered survey. For example, students recognized the need for prewriting strategies, such as mapping and brainstorming. In question eight, students also responded favorably to Writing Workshop, an intervention introduced by the researchers to increase motivation and allow more time to practice skills.

Table 10

Student Survey Results

January

1. Do you consider yourself an author? Why? Why not?	Yes No Don't know 90 45 2 Why? It's fun! To communicate. I'm good at it. Why not? I don't like to.
2. Why do you think people write?	To make people smile. To share stories with others. To tell how you feel. To make children go to bed. To help children read.
3. Do you think most people like to write?	Yes No Don't know 112 20 5
4. Who is your favorite author?	R. L. Stine Dr. Seuss Marc Brown Eric Carle
5. Are there any books by a particular author that have changed the way you write? Who ?	Yes No Didn't Know 32 51 54 R.L. Stine Dr. Seuss Marc Brown Eric Carle
6. How do you decide what you are going to write about?	I Draw first then write. I think about it and then write about it. I read books.
7. What are your favorite topics to write about?	Beanie Babies Animals Make-believe Personal experience
8. When and where do you like to write?	At home. During Writer's Workshop. Anywhere I go.
9.What helps you to write?	Mapping. My imagination. Good light.

** Includes all students in targeted K-3 and spec. ed. classroom*

Recommendations and Conclusions

The researchers conclude there were many positive effects and outcomes resulting from the intervention plan. The use of Writing Workshop, a print-rich environment, writing centers, home writing program, Author's Corner, and skill development were effective in increasing student motivation and improving writing skills in young children. The above interventions

together provided a wonderful opportunity for success in the budding young authors. The researchers strongly feel the continuation of the carefully planned and carried out intervention plan would prove to be a beneficial program for all students throughout the duration of the school year. In September, students were immediately immersed in writing as the researchers provided an abundance of writing opportunities carefully planned to promote motivation and writing skill progression.

One intervention that proved to be successful in motivating students to write and increase skill development was Writing Workshop. This seemingly unstructured free writing time provided the students with opportunities to self-select, collaborate, create, self-evaluate, peer evaluate, and publish finished products. These published works became part of the classroom library where students were able to enjoy the work of fellow student authors. Growth and enthusiasm was noted within each of the targeted classrooms. Students took pride in their published works and in the growth of the classroom collection. Many requests were made for additional workshop time and publishing opportunities. Students appreciated working in cooperative groups or pairs to create, edit, illustrate, and publish collaborative work. Also, the students began to anticipate writing about personal experiences encountered at home or school. Some young authors also began to show an interest in non-fiction topics, such as animals, the human body, geography, and sports. This non-fiction writing provided an expanded opportunity for students to learn more about the world around them. The increased awareness and use of reference material was observed in the targeted classrooms.

Conferencing was used to assess student progress and further skill development. Students were able to share products with teachers and critique their unfinished work as part of the writing process. If Writing Workshop is to be successful, the researchers feel conferencing is an important component that should be included.

Students in the targeted classrooms responded well to specific story starters, topics, or Power Writing prompts when used in the classroom. These topics were usually highly motivational selections corresponding with units of study used to encourage skill development.

In addition, journal writing provided another opportunity for self-expression. Students eagerly anticipated journal time, beginning with short entries in September, growing to full page entries by January.

Based on these observations, the researchers encourage any educator to implement Writing Workshop as a regular component of their curriculum. This proved to be a highly successful, motivational intervention.

Another intervention that promoted motivation was the creation of a print-rich environment. The classroom environment included lists, charts, graphic organizers, poems, and stories displayed throughout the classroom. Familiar objects in the room were labeled and student work was exhibited in the classroom and halls. An extensive variety of reading materials were readily available for the students to explore. The students were proud to display their work for others to enjoy. The researchers found a print-rich environment to be an integral and necessary part of a motivational classroom. This intervention will be continued throughout the school year and is recommended for all educators who desire an interesting atmosphere full of child-centered printed material.

In addition, writing centers were set up to provide a special area for young authors to create freely without interruptions. Writing portfolios were kept in the writing center to house student writing. The center also included necessary materials, such as art supplies, a computer, paper, and a tape recorder, for free exploration of written expression. The targeted students regularly visited this area, adding to their collection of written material. The writing center proved to be a main attraction in the involved classrooms. The researchers conclude that this would enhance

any writing program and is highly recommended. This intervention will also be continued in the researchers' classrooms.

Equally important to promoting writing in young children, was the home writing program. The program consisted of two components. First, communication with parents in the form of informational articles on children's writing was beneficial in promoting home involvement and providing an opportunity for parents to learn more about the developmental stages of the writing process. The second component of this program consisted of the utilization of an author's backpack. Students were allowed to enjoy a writing experience based upon a storybook character that travels to their homes and shares a weekend adventure. The backpack was full of writing materials that would enable the child to create a written account of these weekend experiences. This was a wonderful opportunity to make an important connection between home and school, allowing students to showcase their writing ability with family and peers. Each student anxiously anticipated their turn in spending time with the storybook characters. Parents also commented that their children enjoyed this time, indicating that this was a very worthwhile experience which enabled the child and parent to share in the writing process. This program was definitely one of the more time consuming and costly to put together and would benefit from teacher, parent and district support, as it was extremely motivational and enthusiastically received by parents and students. The researchers highly recommend putting the time and effort into developing this program.

As the students returned from their weekend adventure with the storybook character, a special time and place was designed for the sharing of the home program writing project. Author's Corner provided an opportunity for students to share published work. While the Author's Corner was used to share published work from Writing Workshop and other writing projects, students were enthusiastic upon their return to school with the home writing project,

eager to relate their weekend experiences through written and artistic expression at the Author's Corner. This technique proved to be very beneficial in strengthening self-evaluation and peer evaluation skills. It is recommended that students be consistently allowed to publicly present their finished work, draw conclusions, and make revisions as determined by the author and peers. This program is recommended highly for consistent use in the classroom throughout the school year.

The final recommendation of the researchers falls in the area of skill development. Several strategies were used to enhance the development of necessary writing skills. The first of these strategies was regular modeling of writing techniques by teachers. Modeling helped establish the print-rich environment, necessary in all classrooms where writing skills are emphasized. Another skill modeled and encouraged in the classroom was the use of graphic organizers. Using this skill proved to be extremely helpful in organizing thoughts and ideas across the curriculum. These graphic organizers were an integral part of the district-adopted Power Writing program, where students learn to organize thoughts and ideas as a prewriting strategy. Power Writing is a powerful tool used in preparation for the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) testing which took place in the targeted third grade classroom. Also very powerful were the mini-lessons and Daily Oral Language programs used to further skill development in each targeted classroom. The mini-lessons and Daily Oral Language activities were short, planned, instructional opportunities designed to give students direct instruction, guided practice, and immediate feedback on performance. While correct spelling skills were emphasized during these lessons, inventive spelling was also encouraged during the writing process. However, published work was edited and revised to correct basic spelling errors. Often, this editing and revising would take place in cooperative group settings, allowing, once again, an opportunity for peer interaction and evaluation. All of these skill development strategies were used as part of

the writing process instruction that took place in each targeted classroom. The researchers feel young authors need to recognize writing as a process involving specific steps that follow a natural progression, ultimately leading to a well developed, refined, and appealing finished product. These strategies, designed to improve skill development, proved to be an important intervention in motivating students and teaching them the writing process. Combined, these strategies provided a solid, basic foundation for skill development. The researchers feel all components contributed to the significant advancement of writing skills in each targeted classroom. Highly recommended by the researchers, all strategies should be used consistently throughout the school year, leading students to naturally incorporate developed skills in daily writing opportunities.

Through the use of Writing Workshop, a print-rich environment, writing centers, home writing program, Author's Corner, and skill development techniques, the researchers were able to achieve a significantly higher level of success in promoting authorship. This fact, increasingly more evident to the researchers, also became clearer in the eyes of the young authors as the student survey given in January demonstrated. The number of students considering themselves authors grew from 47% in September to 80% in January. This, to the researchers, was one of the most significant and exciting changes that took place as a result of the intervention plan. Children need to view themselves as capable, proficient, engaging authors, able to command an audience. The researchers felt that this important goal was achieved and, in fact, the students' writing abilities continued to flourish even beyond the intervention period.

As researched evidence has established, educators in many districts regularly run into obstacles when implementing new programs. Overloaded curriculum, lack of administrative support, lack of appropriate training, new inclusion policies placing additional demands, and the

basic day to day operational tasks could combine to make implementation of successful, beneficial programs difficult at best. Based on these factors, the researchers feel limiting district-directed initiatives would ease the overburdened curriculum, as recognized by the researchers and displayed in the review of literature. The researchers feel programs would be more successful if the need to limit new initiatives and demands upon teachers were acknowledged.

In spite of these obstacles, the researchers feel the Action Plan implemented was successful due to the manageable design of the plan, ability of the flexible and experienced researchers to make appropriate curriculum decisions and adjustments to daily schedules, and the eagerness of the students to explore the world of writing.

Even though the targeted population widely ranged in age and ability levels, the researchers observed positive and significant change in all classrooms involved. Based on the action research that took place, the researchers are confident that the combination of strategies used to enhance the writing program can be highly successful at virtually all grade levels K-3 and special education.

The targeted population was allowed time for "messing around with words," but the result certainly did not resemble a mess. The result was a population of more confident, skillful young authors!

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Appendix A
Written Language Inventory

GRADE LEVEL: _____

NAME: _____

Punctuation/Capitalization	Grade / Date				Anecdotal Notes
Uses periods					
is aware of (? ! , " ")					
Uses capitals at the beginning of sentences					
Uses capitals for proper nouns					
Spelling					
Random use of symbols, scribbles, letters					
Uses initial consonants					
L to R progression in words					
Spaces between words					
Takes risks in spelling					
Uses initial, final consonants					
Conventional spelling of words					
Uses incorrect vowel, right place					
Correct spelling of word endings					
Vowel approximation accurate					
Recognizes misspellings					
Uses classroom resources					

KEY: N = No Attempt , E = Emerging , M = Mastered

Appendix A
WRITTEN LANGUAGE INVENTORY

GRADE LEVEL: _____

NAME: _____ DATE OF BIRTH: _____

THE WRITING PROCESS	GRADE / DATE				Anecdotal Notes
Uses a picture to write					
Uses scribbles or symbols					
Random use of letters, symbols					
L or R directional movement					
Understands that writing is talk					
Chooses own topic					
Reads writing to others					
Takes risks in writing					
Personal voice heard in writing					
Innovates on language patterns					
Simple beginning ,middle, end					
Writes in different modes					
Uses beginning editing skills					

KEY: N = No Attempt, E = Emerging, M = Mastered

Appendix A
WRITTEN LANGUAGE INVENTORY

GRADE LEVEL: _____

NAME: _____

Punctuation/Capitalization	Grade / Date				Anecdotal Notes
Grammar					
Uses complete sentences					
Uses compound sentences linked by "and"					

KEY: N = No Attempt , **E** = Emerging , **M** = Mastered

Appendix B
WRITTEN LANGUAGE INVENTORY

GRADE LEVEL: _____

NAME: _____ DATE OF BIRTH: _____

THE WRITING PROCESS	Grade / Date				Anecdotal Notes
Self-selects topics					
Developed beginning,middle,end					
Reads for information to write					
Develops topic with details					
Summarizes information on own					
Writes within all domains: narrative/descriptive informative/expository					
Understands own writing process					
Writing is meaningful an enjoyed					
Prewriting					
Takes notes, makes lists Collaborates, talks Uses clustering,mapping Uses outlines					

KEY: N = No Attempt, E = Emerging, M = Mastered

Appendix B
WRITTEN LANGUAGE INVENTORY

GRADE LEVEL: _____

NAME: _____ DATE OF BIRTH: _____

THE WRITING PROCESS	Grade / Date				Anecdotal Notes
Rough draft					
Writes for a purpose &audience Willing to take risks Uses a word processor					
Revising					
Initiates revision Willingly shares writing Gives and receives advice					
Editing					
Self-initiates editing Uses editing conventions					
Publishing					
Sees self as an author Shares finished piece					

KEY: N = No Attempt . E = Emerging . M = Mastered

Appendix C
Student Writing Survey

Name _____ Date: _____

1. Do you consider yourself an author? Why? Why not?

2. Why do you think people write?

3. Do you think most people like to write?

4. Who is your favorite author?

5. Are there any books by a particular author that have changed the way you write?

6. How do you decide what you are going to write about?

7. What are your favorite topics to write about?

8. When and where do you like to write?

9. What helps you write?

Appendix D

Parent's name_____
Student's name_____
Date_____

Parent Writing Interest Survey

For each item circle your response:	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never
1. Does your child use writing material appropriately?	3	2	1
2. Does your child write at home?	3	2	1
3. Do you encourage your child to write at home?	3	2	1
4. Does your child enjoy writing letters, stories, poems,etc.?	3	2	1
5. Do you talk about your child's writing with him/ her?	3	2	1
6. Do you write at home?	3	2	1
7. Does your child see you writing at home?	3	2	1
8. Do you provide writing materials for your child?	3	2	1
9. Are you available to assist your child with re-writing if necessary?	3	2	1
10. Are you able to help edit in the classroom?	3	2	1

Appendix E

Teacher Writing Survey

1. How important is writing in your classroom?

   Very important Somewhat important Not important

2. How often do you include writing activities in your lesson plans?

   Daily 2-3 times per week Once a week

3. Do you use writing across the curriculum?

   Yes No

4. Is there enough time in your day to include writing activities regularly?

   Yes No

5. Do you feel that you are trained to effectively teach writing?

   Yes No

6. How would you describe the attitudes of your students toward writing?

   Enthusiastic Positive Negative

7. Generally how would you describe the writing abilities of your students?

   Excellent Fair Poor

8. Do you feel comfortable with letting your students use inventive spelling?

   Yes Somewhat No

9. Do you feel that your students need more motivation to write?

   Yes Somewhat No

10. Have you had a class or workshop in writing?

    Yes No

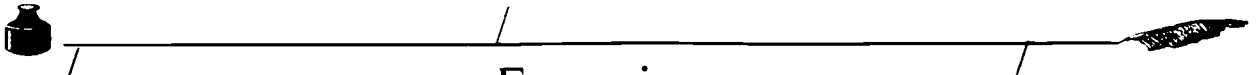
Please circle the grade level you are currently teaching. K 1 2 3 Special Education

Appendix F

Emergent Writer Rubric

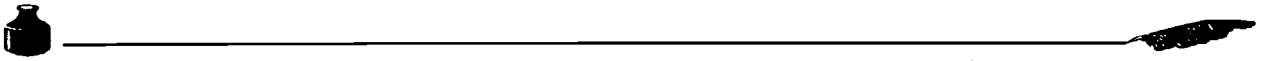
(level k, 1, special ed.)

1. Scribbles, draws a picture, writes a few letters.



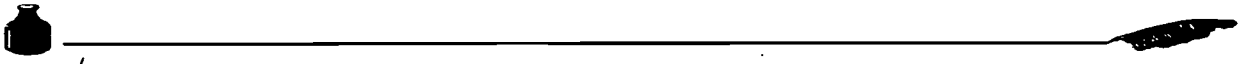
No attempt — Emerging — Mastered

2. Left/right directionality,spaces words.



No attempt — Emerging — Mastered

3. Writes name, uses some sound/symbol relationships.



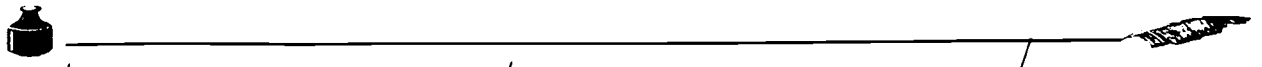
No attempt — Emerging — Mastered

Appendix G

Early Writer Rubric

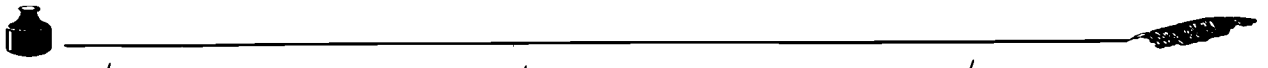
(levels- K,1,2, special ed.)

1. Stories have a beginning, middle, and end.



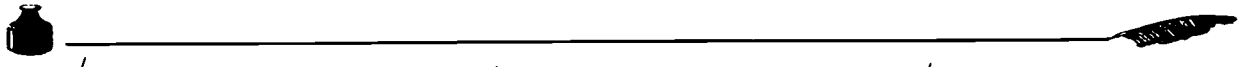
No attempt Emerging Mastered

2. Uses inventive spelling w/some correc'ly placed vowels.



No attempt Emerging Mastered

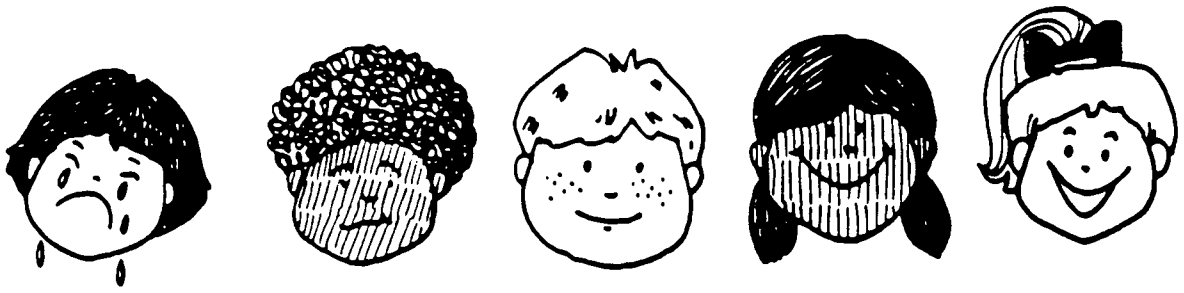
3. Letter formation improves, organizes words into sentences w/ correct spacing.



No attempt Emerging Mastered

Self-Evaluation

My Writing was . . .



AWFUL SO-SO OK FINE SUPER!

Three things I remembered to use in my writing today.

1.
2.
3.

Name_____

Proofreading Checklist

Have a partner check your work.

Writer's Name _____

Proofreader's Name _____

Title of Work _____

	yes	no
Does each sentence begin with a capital letter?		
Does each sentence end with correct punctuation?		
Are words capitalized when needed?		
Is each word spelled correctly?		
Is each sentence a complete thought?		
Is the handwriting neat?		

Do you have any suggestions? _____

_____

_____

_____

Teacher: Students can use this form during the proofreading stage of the writing process. Have them answer each question by coloring appropriate face.

September 1996

Dear Parents,

Five Kirby School District #140 teachers are currently participating in Saint Xavier University Field-Based Master's Degree Program in Teaching and Leadership.

As part of the program, the teachers are completing a research project on effective strategies to improve and motivate writing in the elementary grades. Writing in the elementary exciting topic with many great ideas to implement in the classroom. This project hopes to increase parent involvement not only by sending home informational articles on the improvement of writing skills, but also sending home some "fun" parent-child writing projects. A plan is also in place to have a program to showcase students' writing projects.

In order for your child to be actively involved in this project, a signed permission form is necessary. If your child does participate in the project which extends from September to January, a pretest and post-test writing sample will taken. There will be both student and parent surveys completed to evaluate attitudes toward written language. Students will also participate in a wide variety of writing activities. Each child will keep a Writer's Workshop Portfolio to keep all writing products, and help document progress. Pictures and videotapes may be displayed along with selected student writing products. However, specific names will not be used in reporting survey and test data results.

This project promises to provide students with an exciting opportunity that hopefully all students will participate in, and benefit from.

Please feel free to contact your child's teacher with any questions or concerns relating to this writing project. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
Carol Large
Wendy Maholovich
Laura Menig-Hopkins
Dee Rhein
Lorie Zwolinski

_____I give permission for my child, _____, to participate in the project.

_____I do not give my permission. Date:_____

Dear Parents,

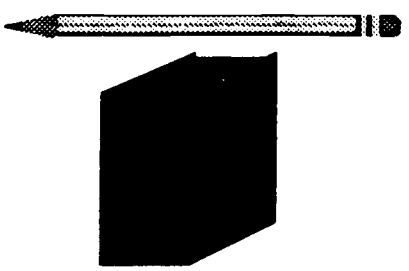
"Young children can write, young children want to write, and young children possess knowledge, interests, and the experiences to write about" (Avery, 1989. p. 84). Teachers and parents need to work together to promote and encourage literacy in children. You, as a parent, are your child's first teacher, so who better to join me in the effort to encourage and support our young authors.

The Home Writing Program is a wonderful experience for you and your child to share together. You may keep the backpack for _____ days. Read the story with your child. Then use the materials in the backpack to write a story about the character's visit in your home.

Begin by having your child write their thoughts down on paper. He/she should put their thoughts into sentences (inventive spelling is fine). You can help by encouraging and editing your child's work. Then have your child write the edited sentences into the book. Each page should be numbered and given an illustration. Don't forget a title for the book! "Written and Illustrated by" should also appear on the cover of the book.

Supplies are included in the backpack. These should be used for this activity only. Encourage your child to be creative!

The backpack, along with it's original contents, and the finished product should be returned on the designated day. The rest of the class is eagerly anticipating their turn to take the backpack home. Thank you for your cooperation.



Have Fun!

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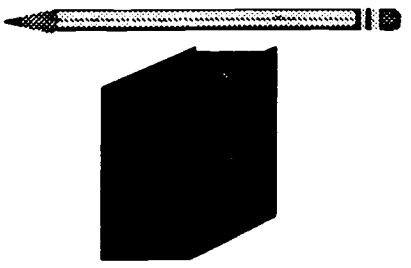

Have Fun!

Backpack Materials

This list is to help ensure all supplies are returned to school. Please check off supplies upon completion of this special activity. If any items are damaged or lost, please replace them before returning the backpack to school.

_____Storybook Character
_____ Character Book
_____Storybook tape
_____ box thick crayola markers
_____ box thin crayola markers
_____ pencils
_____ box crayola colored pencils
_____ box crayons 8 count
_____ scissors
_____ glue stick
_____ assorted construction paper
_____ blank writing book

Thank you again for your cooperation!

Child's name:_____

Parent's Signature:_____

writing is words, sentences, and ideas. Perfection in mechanics develops slowly. Be patient.

4. Find out if children are given writing instruction and practice in writing on a regular basis. Daily writing is the ideal; once a week is not often enough. If classes are too large in your school, understand that it may not be possible for teachers to ask as much writing practice as they or you would like. Insist on smaller classes- no more than 25 in elementary schools and no more than four classes of 25 for secondary school English teachers.

5. Ask if *every* teacher is involved in helping youngsters write better. Worksheets, blank-filling exercises, multiple choice tests, and similar materials are sometimes used to *avoid* having children write. If children and youth are not being asked to write sentences and paragraphs about science, history, geography, and the other school subjects, they are not being helped to become better writers. *All* teachers have responsibility to help children improve their writing skills.

6. See if youngsters are being asked to write in a variety of forms (letters, essays, stories, etc.) for a variety of purposes (to inform, persuade, describe, etc.), and for a variety of audiences (other students, teachers, friends, strangers, relatives, business firms). Each form, purpose, and audience demands differences of style, tone, approach, and choice of words. A wide variety of writing experiences is critical to developing effective writing.

7. Check to see if there is continuing contact with the imaginative writing of skilled authors. While it's true we learn to write by writing, we also learn to write by reading. The works of talented authors should be studied not only for ideas but also for the writing skills involved. Good literature is an essential part of any effective writing program.

8. Watch out for "the grammar trap." Some people may try to persuade you that a full understanding of English grammar is needed before students can express themselves well. Some knowledge of grammar *is* useful, but too much time spent on study of grammar steals time from the study of writing. Time is much better spent in writing and conferring with the teacher or other students about each attempt to communicate in writing.

9. Encourage administrators to see that teachers of writing have plenty of supplies—writing paper, teaching materials, duplicating and copying machines, dictionaries, books about writing, and classroom libraries of good books.

10. Work through your PTA and your school board to make writing a high priority. Learn about writing and the ways youngsters learn to write. Encourage publication of good student writing in school newspapers, literary journals, local newspapers and magazines. See that the high school's best writers are entered into the NCTE Achievement Awards in Writing Program or the Scholastic Writing Awards or other writing contests. Let everyone know that writing matters to you.

By becoming an active participant in your child's education as a writer, you will serve not only your child but other children and youth as well. You have an important role to play, and we encourage your involvement.

For additional copies of this brochure, send requests prepaid to the NCTE Order Department, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. $4.50 per hundred. Parents and teachers are encouraged to make copies for use with local groups.

NCTE National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 618

How to Help Your Child Become a Better Writer

Suggestions for Parents from the National Council of Teachers of English

Dear Parent:

We're pleased you want to know how to help the NCTE effort to improve the writing of young people. Parents and teachers working together are the best means for assuring that children and youth will become skillful writers.

Because the situation in every home is different, we can't say when the best time is to pursue each of the following suggestions. In any case, please be aware that writing skill develops slowly. For some, it comes early; for others it comes late. Occasionally a child's skill may even seem to go backwards. Nonetheless, with your help and encouragement, the child will certainly progress.

The members of the National Council of Teachers of English welcome your involvement in your child's education in writing. We hope you will enjoy following these suggestions for helping your child become a better writer, both at home and at school.

Things to Do at Home

1. Build a climate of words at home. Go places and see things with your child, then talk about what has been seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched. The basis of good writing is good talk, and younger children especially grow into stronger control of language when loving adults—particularly parents—share experiences and rich talk about those experiences.

2. Let children see you write often. You're both a model and a teacher. If children never see adults write, they gain an impression that writing occurs only at school. What you *do* is as important as what you say. Have children see you writing notes to friends, letters to business firms, perhaps stories to share with the children. From time to time, read aloud what you have written and ask the children their opinion of what you've said. If it's not perfect, so much the better. Making changes in what you write confirms for the child that revision is a natural part of writing, which it is.

3. Be as helpful as you can in helping children write. Talk through their ideas with them; help them discover what they want to say. When they ask for help with spelling, punctuation, and usage, supply that help. Your most effective role is not as a critic but as a helper. Rejoice in effort, delight in ideas, and resist the temptation to be critical.

4. Provide a suitable place for children to write. A quiet corner is best, the child's own place, if possible. If not, any flat surface with elbow room, a comfortable chair, and a good light will do.

5. Give, and encourage others to give the child gifts associated with writing.
—pens of several kinds
—pencils of appropriate size and hardness
—a desk lamp
—pads of paper, stationery and envelopes—even stamps
—a booklet for a diary or daily journal (Make sure that the booklet is the child's priv[illegible] property; when children want to sha[illegible] they will.)
—a dictionary appropriate to the child's age and needs. Most dictionary use is for checking spelling, but a good dictionary contains fascinating information on word origins, [illegible] forth. [illegible] battered portable [illegible] newspaper [illegible] liquid for correcting errors that the child wants to repair without rewriting.

6. Encourage (but do not demand) frequent writing. Be patient with reluctance to write. "I have nothing to say" is a perfect excuse. Recognize that the desire to write is a sometime thing. There will be times when a child "burns" to write, others when the need is cool. But frequency of writing is important to develop the habit of writing.

7. Praise the child's efforts at writing. Forget what happened to you in school, and resist the tendency to focus on errors of spelling, punctuation, and other mechanical parts of writing. Emphasize the child's successes. For every error the child makes, there are dozens of things he or she has done well.

8. Share letters from friends and relatives. Treat such letters as special events. Urge relatives and friends to write notes and letters to the child, no matter how brief. Writing is especially rewarding when the child gets a response. When thank you notes are in order, after a holiday especially, sit with the child and write your own notes at the same time. Writing ten letters (for ten gifts) is a heavy burden for the child; space the work and be supportive.

9. Encourage the child to write away for information, free samples, travel brochures. For a[illegible] many suggestions about where to w[illegible] and how to write, purchase a copy of the helpful U.S. Postal Service booklet, *All About Letters* (available from NCTE @ $1.50 per copy).

10. Be alert to occasions when the child can be involved in writing. For example, helping with grocery lists; adding notes at the end of parents' letters; sending holiday and birthday cards; taking down telephone messages; writing notes to friends; helping plan trips by writing for information; drafting notes to school for parental signature; writing notes to letter carriers and other service people; preparing invitations to family get-togethers.

Writing for real purposes is rewarding, and the daily activities of families present many opportunities for purposeful writing. Involving your child may take some coaxing, but it will be worth your patient effort.

Things to Do for School Writing Programs

1. Ask to see the child's writing, either the writing brought home or the writing kept in folders at school. Encourage the use of writing folders, both at home and at school. Most writing should be kept, not thrown away. Folders are important means for helping both teachers and children see progress in writing skill.

2. Be affirmative about the child's efforts in school writing. Recognize that for every error a child makes, he or she will get many things right. Applaud the good things you see. The willingness to write is fragile. Your optimistic attitude toward the child's efforts is vital to strengthening the writing habit.

3. Be primarily interested in the content, not the mechanics of expression. It's easy for many adults to spot misspellings, faulty word usage, and shaky punctuation. Perfection in these escapes most adults, so don't demand it of children. Sometimes teachers—for these same reasons—will mark only a few mechanical errors, leaving others

Vol. 2, No. 4, January–February 1988

Extensions

NEWSLETTER OF THE HIGH/SCOPE CURRICULUM

READING AND WRITING: Getting Children Ready

When young children come to school they have already taken major steps toward the mastery of spoken language--without formal instruction. Children's ability to speak fluently emerges gradually as they unconsciously construct their own language rules, test them out, and refine them. The ability to speak correctly grows as children observe and listen. Eventually, in this natural way, children learn to talk--without pronunciation drills or vocabulary quizzes.

Current research indicates that most young children can acquire fluency in writing and reading through a process similar to that of acquiring speech. Given opportunities to observe and experience the written language in their environment, they invent their own strategies, rules, and systems for decoding written language and producing their own writing. The role of classroom adults should be to support this natural process.

Children normally begin reading and writing sometime between the ages of three and seven. Because this age range is so wide, the preschool or kindergarten environment should provide opportunities for experiences with written language suitable for children with widely varying interests, abilities, and learning styles.

In creating such an environment, remember that the desire to read and write should come before learning to read and write. Premature attempts to teach writing and reading skills often can result in frustration, lack of confidence, and a reluctance to read and write that continues into adulthood.

In this issue of Extensions, High/Scope Senior Consultants Marilyn Adams and Betsye McDonald describe how to support the beginnings of reading and writing skills in preschool and kindergarten children, including teaching strategies and guidelines for [illegible] "print-rich" classroom environment. They also offer a training activity that conveys the problems young children [illegible] in decoding written language, and they describe a successful pre-reading and pre-writing program in a [illegible]

Inside

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[illegible] parents about the dangers of pushing reading and writing skills too early, and share with them the following handout. It conveys realistic expectations for various age groups and suggests the variety of activities that create readiness for reading and writing.

Special Handout

READING AND WRITING: What to Expect For Ages 1–6

One-year-old

- Listens when "read to" by adult. (Adult "talks through" book—labels pictures, does not read word for word.)

Two-year-old

- Chooses books he/she is interested in for adult to read.
- Talks about pictures in books (using mostly single words or short phrases and sentences).

Three-year-old

- Asks adult to read to him/her (books, signs, labels).
- Pretends to write (uses squiggles to imitate adult's writing).

Four-year-old

- Identifies own name in print.
- Pretends to read ("talks through" familiar books).
- Asks adult to write down what he/she says (captions for drawings, letters to significant people, nonsense stories).
- Watches when adult writes.
- Makes up rhymes and plays with words spontaneously.
- Draws pictures that are at least partly recognizable to others.

Five-year-old

- Matches letters that are the same.
- Attempts to "read" transcript of own dictation and familiar books (mostly reciting from memory with help from contextual clues).
- Identifies some words besides own name, typically by recognizing the context of the word (package, bottle, or sign) and the shape of the word rather than its letters (Coca Cola, Toys 'R Us).
- Writes own name.
- Traces and copies words and letters.

Six-year-old

- Identifies all letters of the alphabet (upper and lower case).
- Matches words that are the same.
- Can match words that rhyme and can continue the rhyme series.
- Knows sounds of some letters; sounds out initial consonants.
- Reads some words by noting the letter combinations rather than just the shape of the word; still guesses a lot.
- Becomes aware of short words inside other words (today).
- Writes words other than own name, often inventing own spelling system ("frnd" for friend and "jaz" for jaws).

stories about field trips and other special events; make group murals with dictated captions; dictate or write thank you notes, get well cards, or invitations; dictate stories and then act them out.

By encouraging children to be aware of, use, and enjoy written language throughout the day, you help them learn the value of reading and writing. When children begin to say things like "What does this say?", "Look what I wrote" (squiggles mixed with letters and words), or "Write 'I love you, Grandma' for me," then you know they have reached an important milestone: they have made the connection between spoken and written language and have the desire to learn more.

Once young children have the desire to read and write, it is neither necessary, nor desirable, to present handwriting exercises, phonics lessons, or language worksheets. Such artificial exercises can actually prevent children from developing their own ideas.

Most children will learn to read some favorite words before learning the phonological values of letters. Children usually develop an extensive sight vocabulary of words that are meaningful to them, including, for example, the names of important people in their lives, the names of favorite fast food chains, words on signs, the names of several different dinosaurs. You can encourage children to retain and build their sight vocabulary by writing their favorite words down on cards for them and providing "word b :es" in which each child can store the words he or she knows.

Children will need help with word recognition and phonics skills, of course, but this can be done within the context of the language experiences described above. For example, when looking at a transcript of her dictation, a child may show interest in the shapes of the words and try to "read" the dictation back to the adult. This would be an appropriate time to help the child notice similarities in some of the words (for example, identical words or words starting with the same letter) or perhaps to point out the sound value of some initial consonants.

Similarly, the mechanics of writing should be introduced within the context of other activities, if children show an interest in them. Children often indicate an interest in writing by asking to write, by tracing over the teacher's writing, or by making their own scribbles. Teachers can respond by making an outline of the child's name or a favorite word for the child to trace or copy as a label on an art project. Later, the teacher can make planning sheets with fill-in-the-blank sentences, for example: "I plan to work with _____" or "I am going to the _____area." Children can complete the sentence by copying or tracing over the adult's writing or outlining. Eventually the child will be able to fill in the blanks independently. As children move beyond these basic sentences, they can use the labels in the classroom as models for their writing. Children can store words they have written in their word boxes.

Introduced in these natural ways, writing and reading skills are learned simultaneously. Children see these skills as useful vehicles for accomplishing self-chosen goals. ■

HOW TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S INVENTED SPELLING

Observe and reinforce.

Watch and listen to children when they read and write. Do they know the names of many letters of the alphabet? Do they comment about and ask about sounds in words that they see in books and elsewhere? If so, they may be ready for your reinforcing comments. For example, point out the first letter in the title of Make Way for Ducklings. Say, "That's an M. Make begins with M, 'mmmm', doesn't it?"

Treat early writers as you treat early speakers.

You would not criticize and correct a beginning talker who has invented a two-year-old's system for making sentences ("All gone dog" or "Daddy shoes"). Do not criticize and correct a beginning writer who has invented a spelling system different from yours.

Encourage children to try their own spellings.

If you know children know the names of most of the letters of the alphabet and you have heard them talk about sounds in words, then occasionally refuse to tell them how to spell a word. Say, "I think you can spell that word yourself. Pay attention to the sounds in mosquito and think about the letters you could use." Carrie spelled mosquito bites in the example on the first page after first asking how to spell it and then being encouraged in this way to spell it herself.

Write with children.

Be a good example. When you are writing, children want to join in. Then you have opportunities to do the observing and give the support described here. Carrie did the drawing and writing on the first page while her father was writing a letter to a friend. She asked if she could write a letter too and he said, "Sure."

Choose your words carefully.

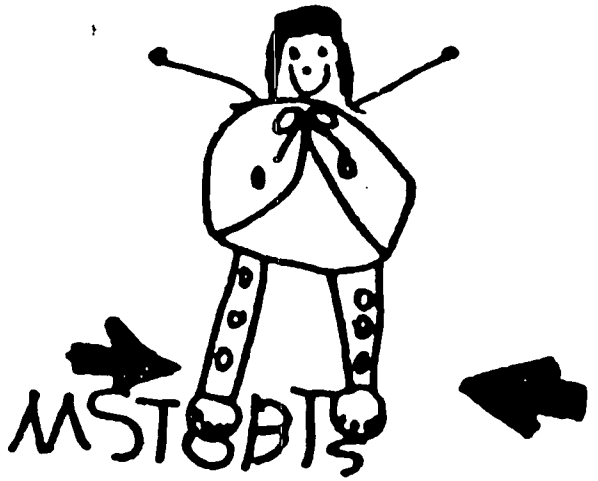
Use "I" language rather than "right-and-wrong" language. When a child writes SRE for sorry, say, "That's good spelling—I can read that!" rather than "That's good, but it is not right. It should be S-O-R-R-Y." Point out that you are aware of what the child's spelling shows about his or her stage of development. Say, "Good for you—I can see that you have figured out what letter goes with 'ssss' in sorry."

This pull-out pamphlet is a special feature of the *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1. It is easy to reproduce and may be done so for noncommercial educational purposes. As long as the pamphlet is reproduced in its entirety, no special acknowledgement is needed.

Wagner

Understanding and Supporting Children's Invented Spelling

Donald J. Richgels
Northern Illinois University



When you encourage children to write at an early age, their first spellings are very unlike your spellings. They may write only one letter for a whole word, usually a letter that stands for the first sound in a word (for example, N for rose). Later, they may write one letter for each sound in a word (for example, KR for cry and BRD for bird). Still later, they may use patterns that they have noticed in other people's spellings, but put them in unexpected places (for example, THAY for they and ALLSO for also). The term invented spelling describes these early stages of spelling development. In all of this, children are moving toward spelling like you and I do. The final stage in this development is correct spelling or conventional spelling.

Appendix O

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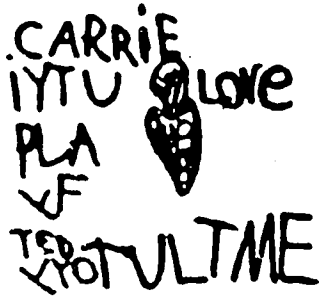
WHAT INVENTED SPELLING IS

Invented spelling is writing.

When children use invented spelling, they are using writing to communicate. They have many of the same purposes for writing that adults have. In the example below, 5-year-old Carrie used invented spelling to write a very important, personal message to her brother (I want to play with you, Ted. Why won't you let me? Love, Carrie).



Invented spelling is spelling!

Inventive spellers have discovered a system that is based on the same principles as conventional spelling (letters stand for sounds). What they do not yet know are the fine points of how their spelling system differs from the conventional spelling system that you and I use. Eventually, they will learn the conventional system, but they have already learned the most important thing—what spelling is all about.

Invented spelling is phonics in use.

Inventive spellers discover phonics on their own. They learn the names of the letters of the alphabet; they begin to pay attention to sounds in words and to sounds in the names of letters; and they put those two discoveries together (if "mmmm" is in the word milk and in the name of the letter M, then maybe the letter M can be used to write the world milk).

Invented spelling is a companion of early reading.

Children who write by paying attention to letters and sounds in their writing, also begin to pay attention to letters and sounds in other people's writing. For example, in the same week that Carrie wrote the message on this page, she was looking at Life magazine. She asked what L-I-F-E spelled. When a grown-up told her, she said, "I thought so, but why does it have an E at the end?" This shows that she had been applying her idea of phonics (that letters are in words because they stand for sounds in words) to her reading.

WHAT INVENTED SPELLING ISN'T

Invented spelling is not the first writing most children do.

Although invented spelling appears before conventional spelling, there are many steps in writing development that occur before invented spelling. Earlier, for example, children may write with scribbles, with mock letters, and with real letters that they do not combine into words or do not associate with sounds in any systematic way. (Inventive spellers may also use these earlier strategies for some writing tasks, especially if the task is very demanding.) All of these writing strategies deserve our understanding and support.

Invented spelling is not laziness.

Inventive spellers work diligently at their writing. They carefully analyze the words they want to write. They listen for individual sounds in words, usually in the correct sequence; they review the letters they know, looking for one that can represent the sound they have isolated; and then they write the letter. They then repeat these steps, moving on to other sounds in a word and to other words in their message.

Invented spelling is not habit forming.

Inventive spellers are not learning bad habits. They do not memorize their invented spellings. They do the diligent sound-by-sound analysis described above each time they write a word. Later, when they come to the point of using memories for how words look, they have plenty of conventional spelling models in books and in the other print all around them (in signs and on T-shirts and on TV screens, etc.).

Invented spelling is not every child's preferred way of writing.

Some children do not go through all the stages of invented spelling before becoming conventional spellers. Inventive spellers use what they hear in words and what they know about letter sounds. Some children are inclined right from the beginning to depend instead on how words look. Other children are perfectionists. They compare their first spellings to a conventional standard and refuse to spell differently. They want to be right. They may frequently ask for help with spelling. Sometimes these children can be encouraged to make invented spelling discoveries, to risk being unconventional. If they can learn to use sound and letter knowledge and to depend on themselves at least some of the time, then the risk taking will have been worthwhile.

Spelling as a Part of Writing

In *Spel . . . Is A Four Letter Word*, author Richard Gentry shares the current research on spelling development. This research indicates there is no relationship between I.Q. and spelling ability, and that spelling is a complex cognitive process rather than a simple memorization task. Visual memory, crucial to spelling, is not an acquired skill but one you are born with. **Most importantly, research shows that spelling is best learned when taught within the context of writing.**

Spelling is a complex cognitive process rather than a simple memorization task.

Instruction, assessment and evaluation of spelling should take place within the meaningful context of writing.

Gentry, as well as other experts, has identified broad developmental stages in learning to spell. Children begin with gross approximations of correct spelling, and work towards self-correction. Children develop through their own self-regulation and motivation. Teachers give input and model how to spell words. Instruction should match the developmental level of the child.

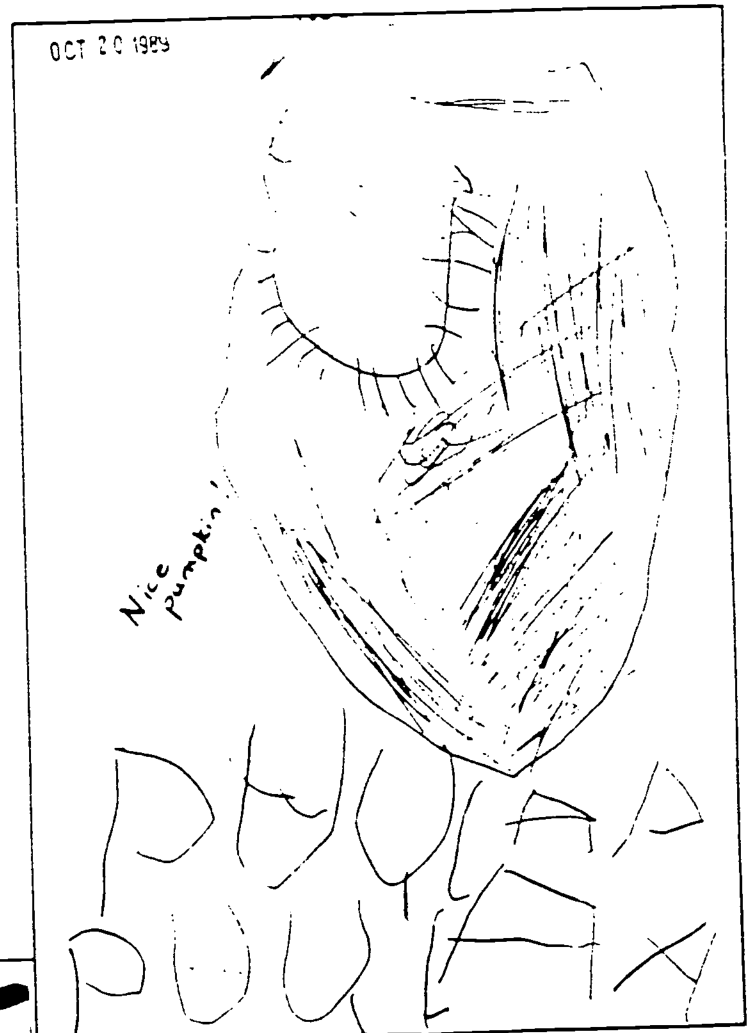
The following pages describe the stages of spelling development and how a child moves toward conventional spelling along a developmental continuum.

Kind of writing produced	A child is learning: 'composing aspect'	A child is learning: 'performing aspect'
Level 1 Orientation towards writing	Symbolic texts with or without illustration	How writing differs from drawing (ii) Concept of word	(i) To pay attention to print (ii) To control a writing implement (iii) To write across the page from left to right (iv) To produce some letter-like shapes
Level 2 Early text-making	Writing which the child can read and which includes some conventional letters	(i) To choose which words to make a written message (ii) Concepts of 'letter' and word structure'	(i) To form and orient letters (ii) To control letter size (iii) To use letters to make words (iv) To leave spaces between words
Level 3 Intra-independent writing	Simple texts which can be read at least in part by others	How to produce messages that others can read (ii) Concepts of sentence and of a text	(i) To organize words into sentences (ii) To distinguish between upper- and lower-case letters (iii) How to spell some familiar words (iv) To spell the words by ear
Level 4 Associative writing	Fairly accurate and fluent texts in which ideas are set down without much difficulty	How to write extended coherent and fairly accurate texts (ii) Concepts of 'story', 'report' and 'spelling rules'	(i) To link sentences (ii) To use some punctuation (iii) To use conventional spelling patterns (iv) To monitor and alter text
Beyond level 4	Texts using different genre schemes, e.g. persona, narratives, reports, explanations, etc.	(i) How to plan a text in terms of the reader's needs and the writer's intentions (ii) Concepts of audience and [illegible]	(i) To control tense sequence (ii) To produce complex sentences (iii) To maintain cohesion both within and between sentences (iv) To revise text

Stages of Spelling Development

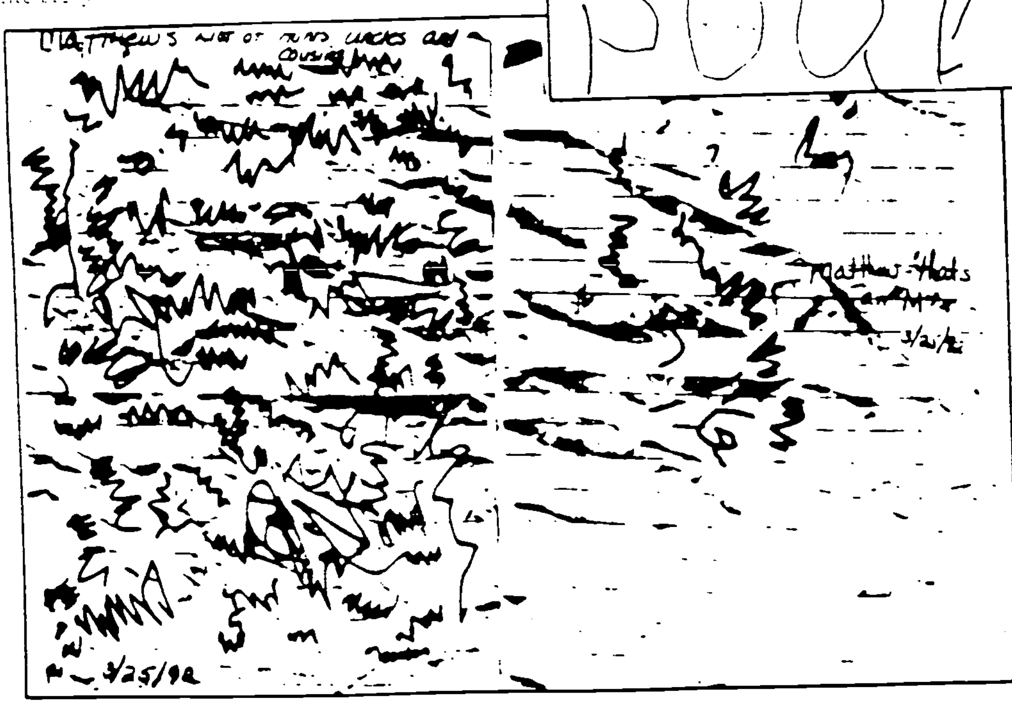
1. *Precommunicative Stage*

At this stage the child scribbles or uses symbols, such as numbers and shapes, in order to write. Drawings almost always accompany writing. There is often no left to right progression, just random placement of the symbols, shapes and scribbles.



Paul strings together the letters of his name. He is not yet aware of sound-symbol relationships. He writes using left-to-right progression.

Matthew says this is a list of his aunts, uncles and cousins. His scribbles tell the story.



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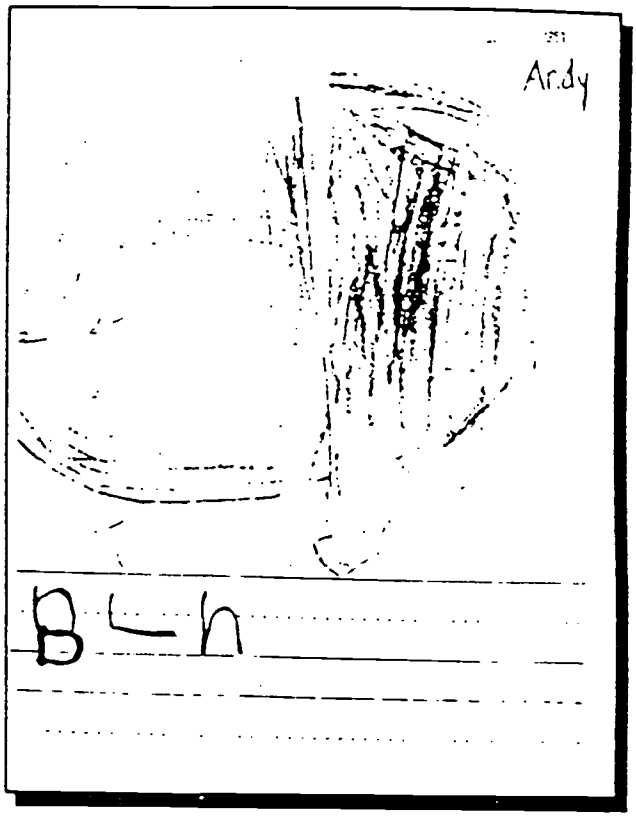
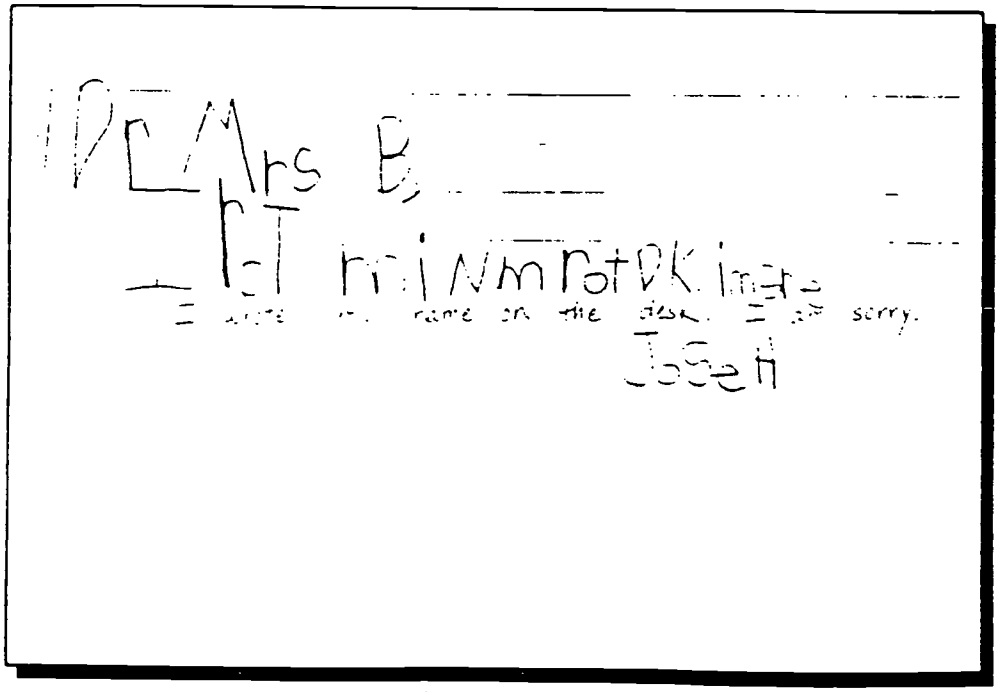
2. Semiphonetic Stage

At this stage the child begins her first attempts at sound-symbol correspondence. For example, she writes *I L P* for "I like pizza." She may also string together letters of her name in order to write a message. There may be some spaces between words.



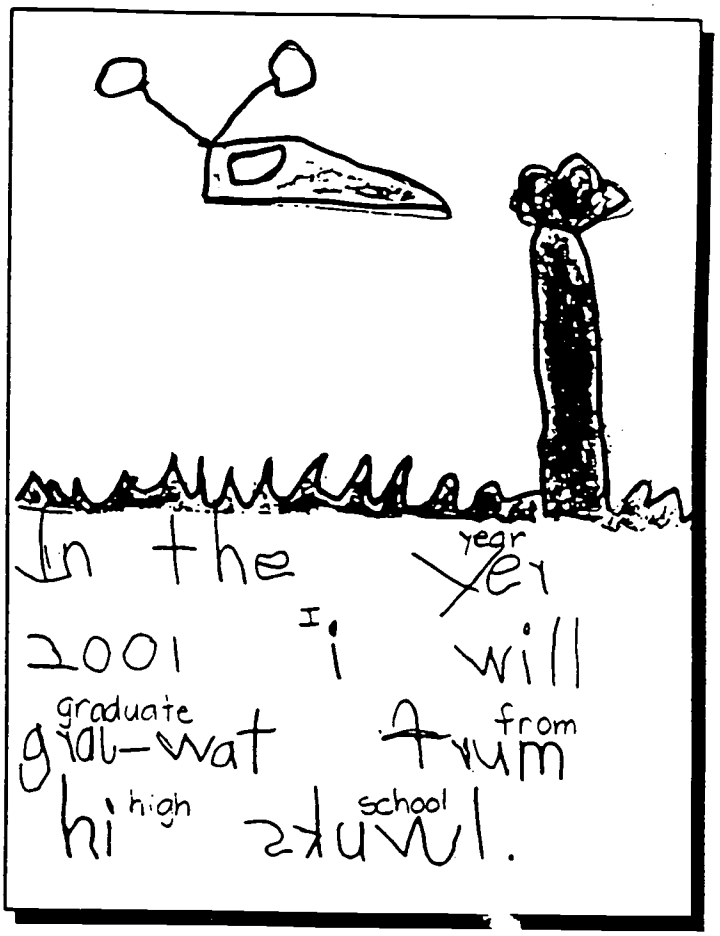
Andy understands the sound-symbol relationship as he writes BLN for "balloon." He will probably soon be adding vowels to his words.



Jose has a good grasp of initial consonants. He knows there are medial and final consonants. He is transitioning to the phonetic stage.

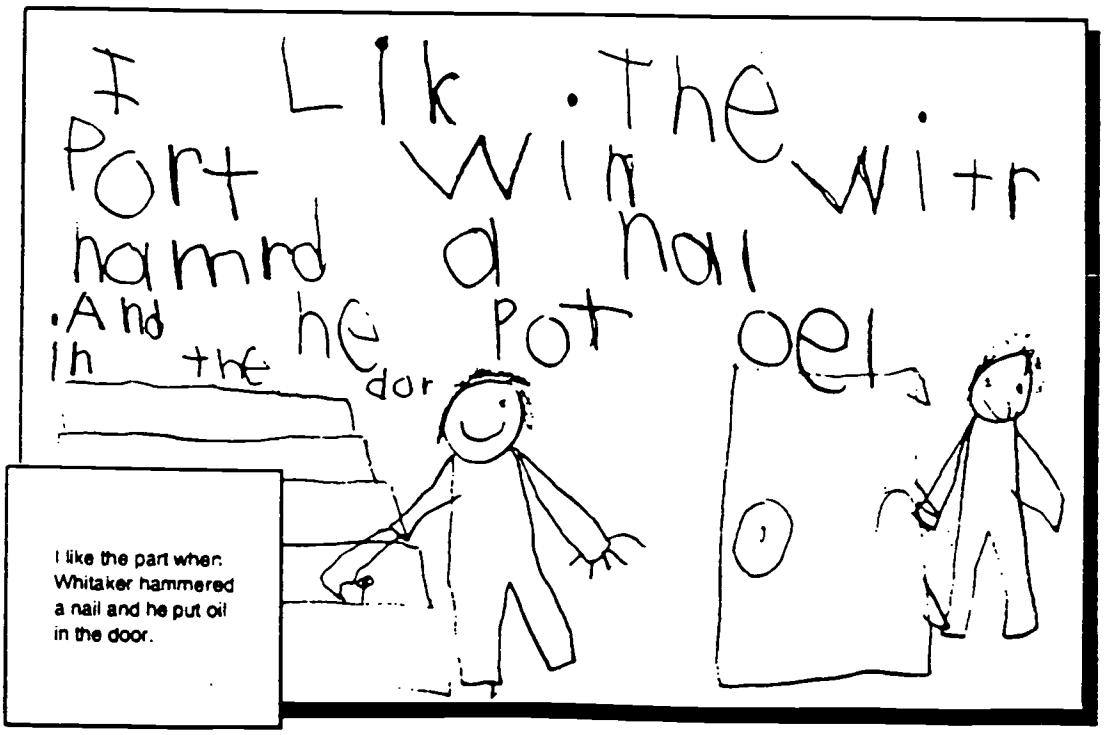
3. Phonetic Stage

Spelling is not conventional at this stage, but it is more easily understood. Initial and final consonants are in place. The child gradually adds interior consonants and vowels. Often the vowels are not correct, but are placed correctly in the word. Left to right progression and word spacing are clearly evident.



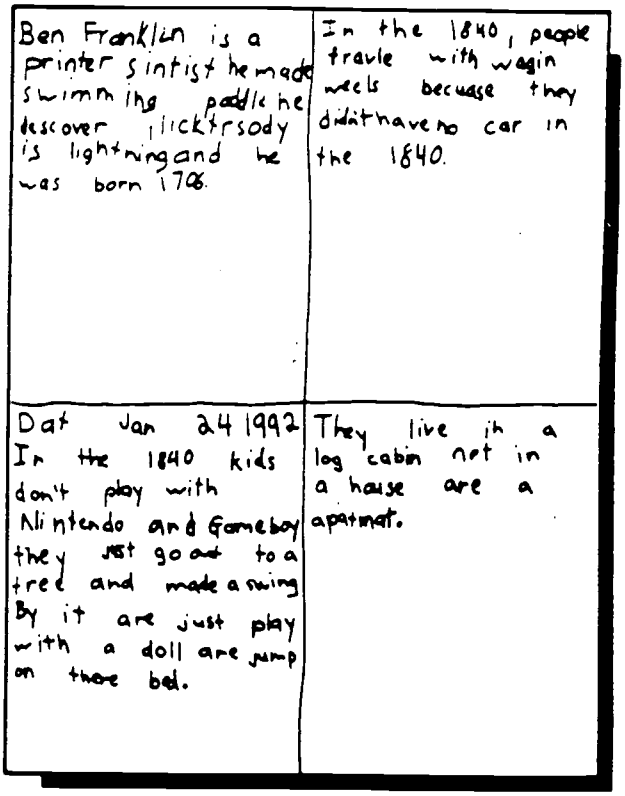
Pamela correctly writes most consonants (beginning, medial, final). Her vowels are in the correct place, but she doesn't always use the correct vowel. Pamela spells phonetically, using the sounds of the letters.

Adam's vowel approximations are appropriate. He is moving towards the transitional stage.



4. Transitional Stage

At this stage the child's writing has more correctly spelled words. Vowel letter approximations are more accurate and word endings are spelled conventionally. Often all the letters necessary to spell the word are there but they may be in the wrong order. For example, *becuase* for "because."



Ben Franklin is a printer sintist he made swimming paddle he descover licktersody is lightning and he was born 1706.

In the 1840, people travle with wagin weels becuase they didithaveno car in the 1840.

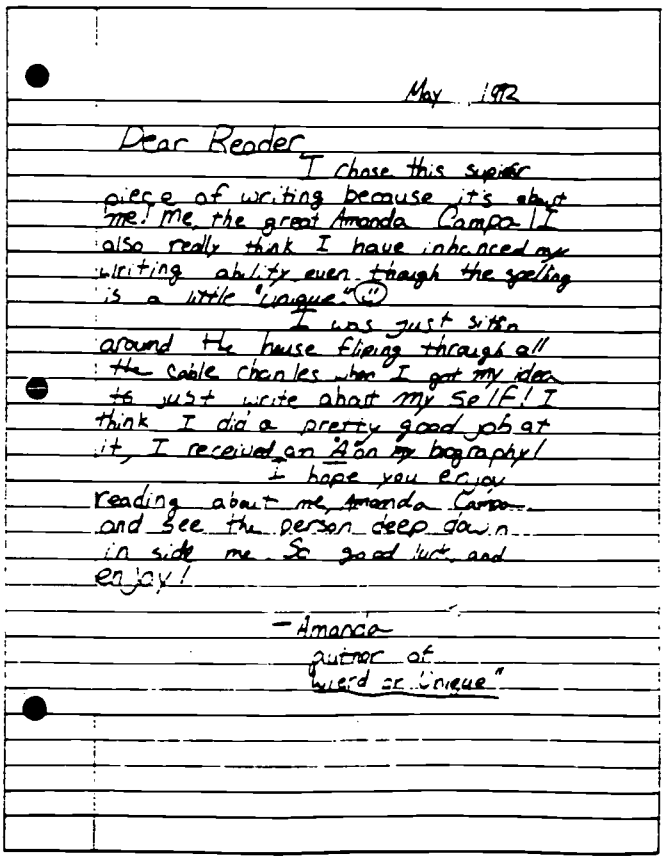
Dat Jan 24 1992 In the 1840 kids don't play with Nintendo and Gameboy they just go out to a tree and made a swing By it are just play with a doll are jump on there bed.

They live in a log cabin not in a hause are a apatmet.

Dat uses English as a second language, so he writes like he speaks. He spells most words correctly and approximates some vowels. He does not allow his spelling to hinder communication—he writes what he wants to say.

5. Correct Spelling

Knowledge of the spelling system is firmly established at this stage. The child recognizes when the word doesn't look right and experiments with alternatives. A large number of words are spelled automatically. When unsure of a word, the child uses dictionaries and other resources to correct the spelling.



May 1992

Dear Reader,

I chose this super piece of writing because it's about me! Me, the great Amanda Campa! I also really think I have inhanced my writing ability even though the speling is a little "unique." (:)

I was just sitten around the house fliping through all the cable chanles when I got my idea to just write about my SELF! I think I did a pretty good job at it, I received an A on my biography!

I hope you enjoy reading about me, Amanda Campa, and see the person deep down inside me. So good luck and enjoy!

-Amanda
author of
"word or Unique"

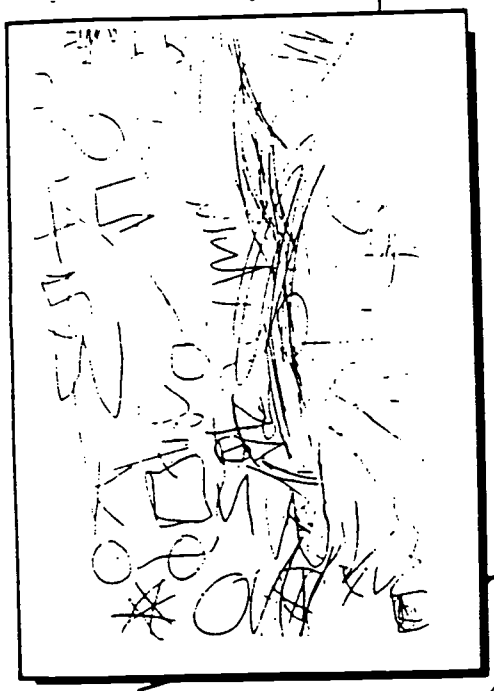
Amanda has a solid understanding of spelling. She tells the reader that she spells "uniquely" at times, so we realize she knows her words don't always look right.

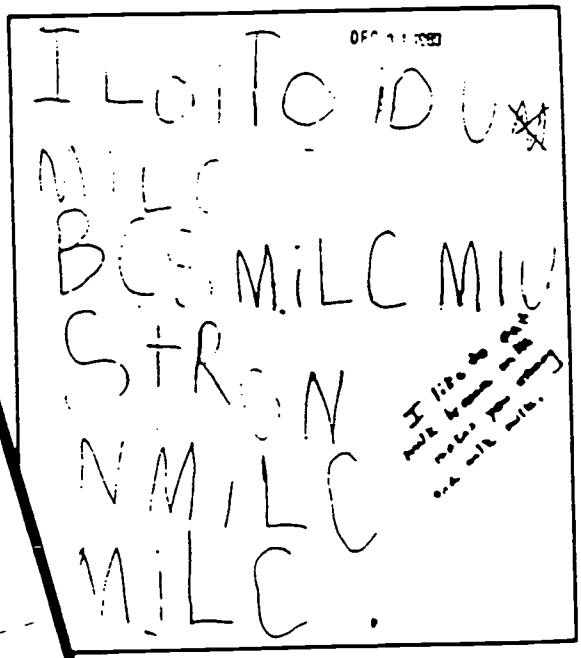
The Three Stages of Writing Development

1. The Emergent Writer

An emergent writer is one who is imitating writing. This writer is often a child who has been read to and has had opportunities to interact with books. He has seen people read and write and has experimented with paper and writing tools. He is beginning to notice print in his environment, such as the McDonald's or Burger King signs, and the print on cereal boxes. The emergent writer may scribble, draw a picture, write his own name or write a few letters in his name. He can reread his own writing or read picture books by memory.

This writer uses letters, numbers, symbols and scribbles to write a story. The writer has established left-to-right directional movement but no sound symbol relationship.





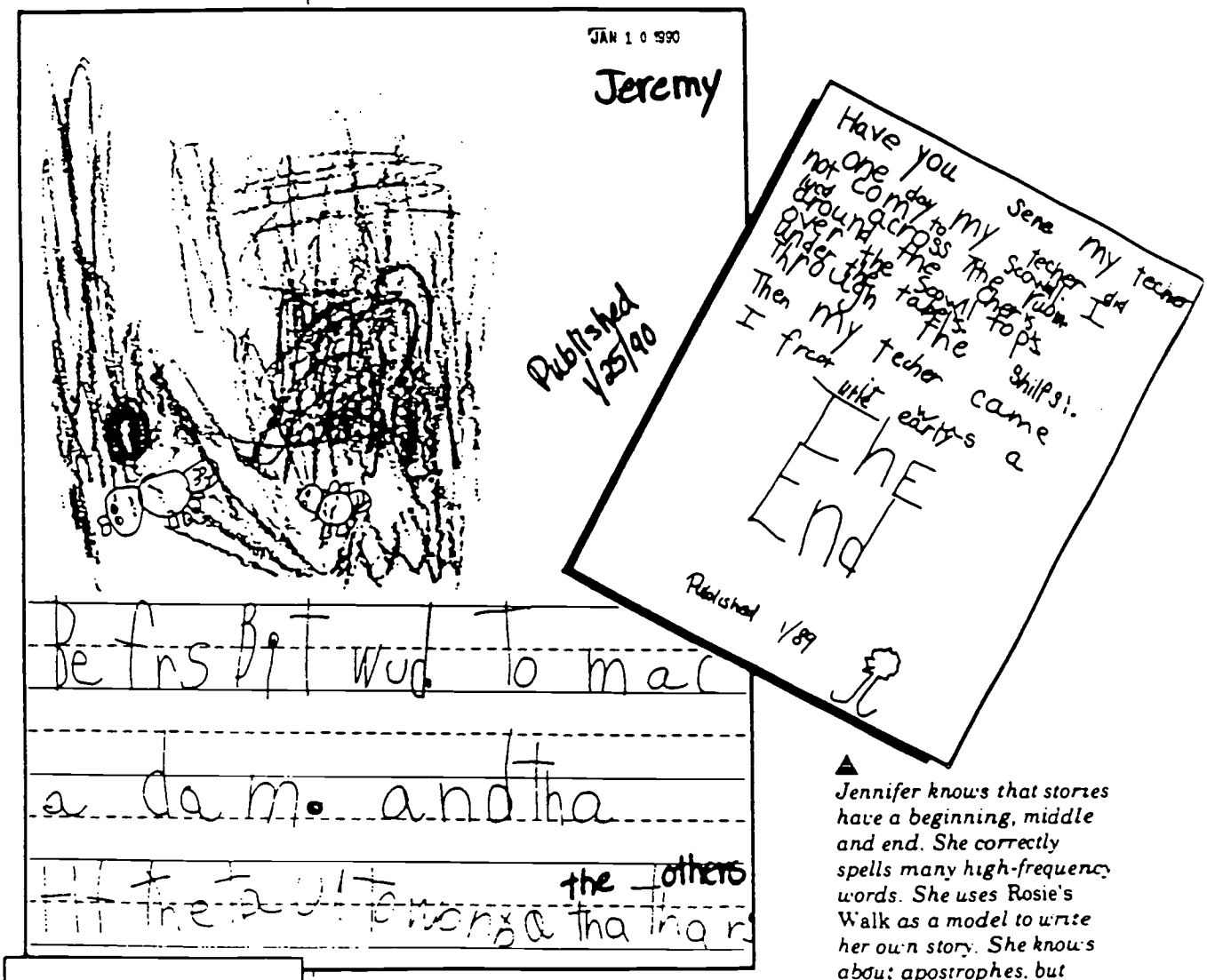
The child has established left-to-right direction, and uses sound symbol relationships. There are spaces between the words. This writer is transitioning into the early writer stage.

Andy uses beginning, medial and final consonants but is not writing sentences yet. Andy should be encouraged to take risks in his writing.

The Emergent Writer	*Classroom Experiences to Emphasize*
◆ Draws a picture to write a story	✓ Teacher reads aloud from all genres for writing models
◆ Engages in scribble writing or symbol writing	✓ Student self-selects topics
◆ Understands that writing is talk written down	✓ Student has opportunities to write and share writing daily
◆ Uses left-to-right directional movement	✓ Teacher models writing
◆ Tells a story or reads "writing" to others	✓ Teacher uses language experience to write down a child's talk
◆ Uses approximations writing	
◆ Uses initial consonants	
◆ Uses spaces between words	
◆ Takes risks in writing	
◆ Uses frames for writing	
◆ Self-selects writing topics	

2. *The Early Writer*

An early writer understands that speech can be written down. This writer is beginning to realize that conventions control writing and that writing can be reread. The child does quite a bit of erasing as she struggles with conventions, letter formation and spelling. She rereads to regain understanding lost during these spelling and handwriting struggles.



Beavers bite wood to make a dam and they hit their tail to warn all the others

Jeremy uses correct initial and final consonants. He uses capital letters and "approximates" periods. Jeremy is writing nonfiction text in first grade!

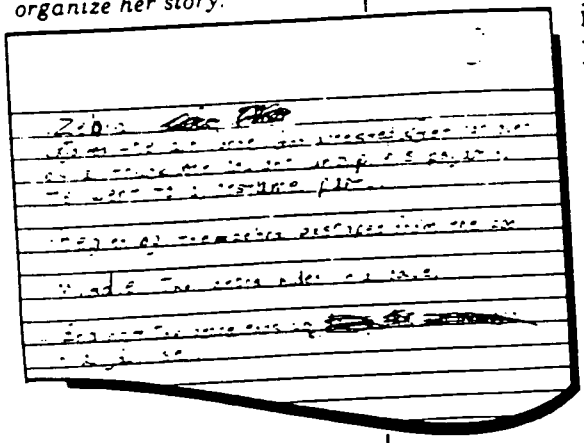
▲ *Jennifer knows that stories have a beginning, middle and end. She correctly spells many high-frequency words. She uses* Rosie's Walk *as a model to write her own story. She knows about apostrophes, but hasn't yet mastered the concept.*

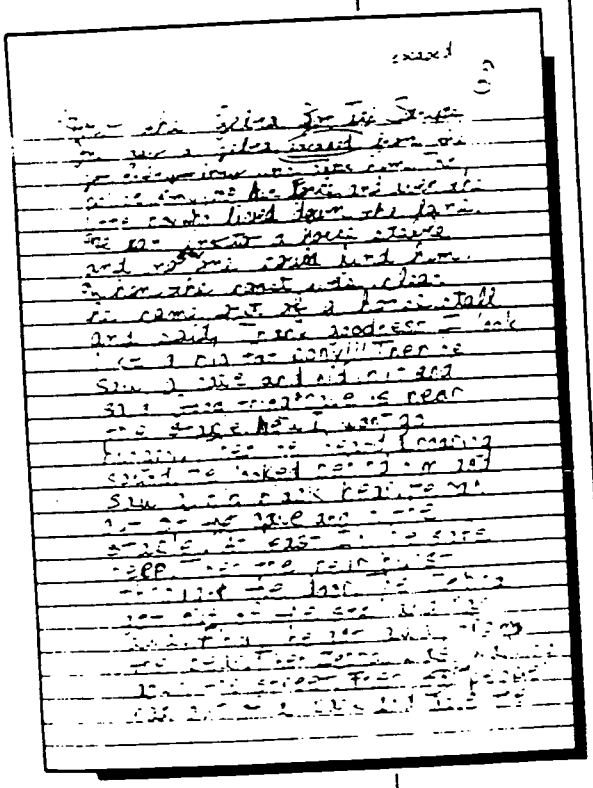
The Early Writer	*Classroom Experiences to Emphasize*
◆ Uses approximate spelling but is moving toward correct spelling	✓ Teacher reads aloud from all genres for writing models
◆ Uses initial and final consonant sounds correctly	✓ Student self-selects topics
◆ Places vowels correctly within a word, but not necessarily the *correct* vowel	✓ Student uses the writing process daily—primarily prewriting and rough drafts. The teacher assists with rewriting and the child illustrates for publication
◆ Spells many high-frequency words	✓ Student has opportunities to share writing
◆ Uses book models and patterns to help with writing	✓ Teacher models writing
◆ Chooses own title for a story	✓ Student conferences with teacher and peers
◆ Includes a simple beginning, middle, and end in a story	✓ Student needs many models and demonstrations of how print works—shared reading, guided reading and writing
◆ Begins using dialogue	✓ Teacher gives positive responses to the student's approximations
◆ Uses editing skills—capitals and periods, circles misspelled words	
◆ Begins to consult classroom resources in order to correct approximations	
◆ Establishes a personal style	

3. The Fluent Writer

The fluent writer has gradually gained control over writing conventions and letter formations and is therefore writing with ease. He realizes the many purposes for writing. He refines his writing to say what he means and cares about quality. The fluent writer initiates rewriting and revision. He takes more time to complete his text and is conscious of how he "goes about writing." He talks about his and others' writing. He sees that writing involves more than conventions and recognizes the need for developing a theme with detail.

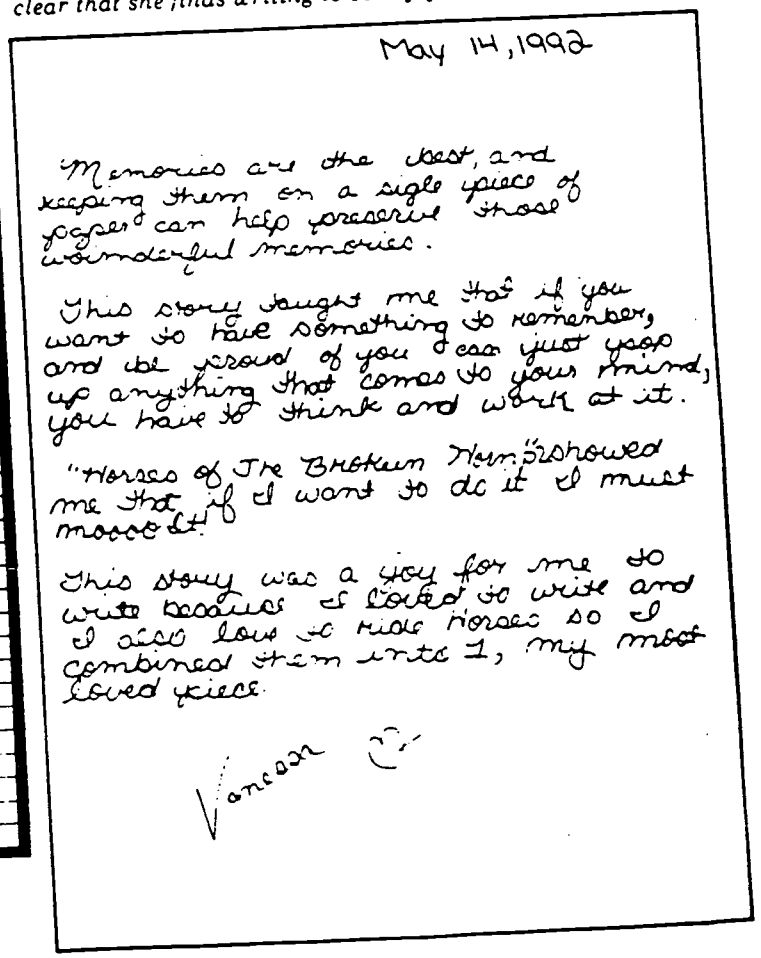
This is Diana's own pre-writing style. She is a fluent writer who knows how to choose a topic and organize her story.





Here is Diana's beginning rough draft. She correctly uses punctuation and other grammar conventions. She needs help in forming paragraphs.

Vanessa finds it easy to tell about a story she wrote. It is clear that she finds writing to be a "joy."



May 14, 1992

Memories are the best, and keeping them on a sigle piece of paper can help preserve those wonderful memories.

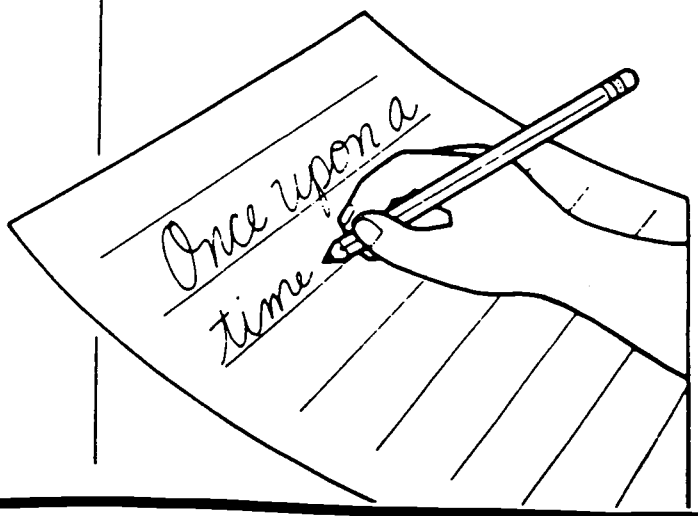
This story taught me that if you want to have something to remember, and be proud of you can just coop up anything that comes to your mind, you have to think and work at it.

"Horses of The Broken Horn" showed me that if I want to do it I must make it!

This story was a joy for me to write because I loked to write and I also love to make horses so I combined them into 1, my most loved piece.

Vanessa

The Fluent Writer	*Classroom Experiences to Emphasize*
◆ Develops a beginning, middle, and end to a story	✓ Teacher reads aloud from all genres for writing models—topic development, story structure, language usage
◆ Reads for more information to include in writing	✓ Student self-selects topics
◆ Demonstrates knowledge about the subject	✓ Student uses the writing process daily—the entire writing process: revisions, rewriting, and publishing by the student
◆ Develops a theme or topic with details	✓ Teacher models writing—how to revise and work on a text in order to fulfill the writer's intentions and meet the readers' needs
◆ Writes in a variety of genres	✓ Student has opportunities to share writing
◆ Uses word endings correctly	✓ Student conferences with peers
◆ Makes verb tenses agree throughout writing	✓ Student conferences with teacher—conversations, strategies, final editing
◆ Writes in paragraphs	
◆ Uses correct punctuation—exclamation point, question mark, comma, quotation marks	
◆ Self-initiates editing	
◆ Self-initiates revision	
◆ Shows concern for quality	



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