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ABSTRACT

This study describes a program designed to improve students' writing skills in order to improve academic achievement. The targeted population consists of third and fifth grade elementary students in two separate communities ranging from low to middle class, located in two midwestern suburbs of a large city. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes writing samples, report card grades, state test scores, and teacher observations. Analysis of probable cause data reveals that students received inconsistent writing instruction between or across grade levels, lacked quality models of writing at school and home, had limited background knowledge, lacked an interest in writing, lacked skills expected for writing assessments, and received inconsistent vocabulary and terminology across and between grade levels. A review of the solution strategies suggested by the professional literature, combined with an analysis of the settings of the problem, resulted in the selection of five major categories of intervention: teacher training on the writing process, parent involvement, implementation of a writing program to teach concepts/skills, use of a variety of writing strategies, and peer editing. Post intervention data indicated an increase in students' writing skills. Students' knowledge of writing elements increased as demonstrated by documented work in the classroom setting. (Contains 28 references and 51 figures of data. Appendixes contain writing prompts; a writing checklist; a writing rubric; student, parent, and teacher surveys; writing goals; and a parent reflection form.) (Author/RS)

IMPROVING STUDENT WRITING SKILLS THROUGH THE MODELING OF THE WRITING PROCESS

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

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Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This study describes a program designed to improve students' writing skills in order to improve academic achievement. The targeted population consists of third and fifth grade elementary students in two separate communities ranging from low to middle class, located in two midwestern suburbs of a large city. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes writing samples, report card grades, state test scores, and teacher observations.

Analysis of probable cause data reveals that students received inconsistent writing instruction between or across grade levels, lacked quality models of writing at school and home, had limited background knowledge, lacked an interest in writing, lacked skills expected for writing assessments, and received inconsistent vocabulary and terminology across and between grade levels.

A review of the solution strategies suggested by the professional literature, combined with an analysis of the settings of the problem, resulted in the selection of five major categories of intervention: teacher training on the writing process, parent involvement, implementation of a writing program to teach concepts/skills, use of a variety of writing strategies, and peer editing.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in students' writing skills. Students' knowledge of writing elements increased as demonstrated by documented work in the classroom setting.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted third grade and fifth classes exhibit weak writing skills which contribute to lower student achievement in the area of writing. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes writing samples, report card grades, teacher observations, student surveys, previous teacher surveys, previous teacher interviews, and parent surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

This project will take place at two different schools. Site A is a medium-sized elementary school housing grades kindergarten through fifth. The school is located in a midwestern suburb of a large city. The total school population is 584 students. The student body consists of 43% White, 3.1% Black, 48.3% Hispanic, 5.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and there was no report indicating Native American or other racial/ethnic origins.

Low-income families comprise 41.3% of the student population at Site A. Low-income students are those from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. The student population consists of 30.8% Limited-English-Proficient students. Limited-English-Proficient students are those who have been found eligible for Transitional Bilingual Education classes.

Site B is a medium-sized, private elementary school housing grades preschool through eighth. The school is located in a midwestern suburb of a large city. The school is made up of 364 families. The families that are enrolled at Site B are obligated to pay a yearly tuition to attend this school. The students are responsible for

their transportation to and from Site B. The total school population is 597 students. The student body consists of 94.6% White, 3.5% Hispanic, 1.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, and there was no report indicating Native American, Black, or other racial/ethnic origins. Low-Income families and limited English-Proficient students comprise zero percent of the student population at Site B.

The school attendance at Site A is 95.1% and Site B is 95.5%. The student mobility is 9.8% at Site A and 2.3% at Site B. The schools do not have a problem with chronic truancy, retention and suspensions.

The staff at Site A includes: one principal, twenty-three staff members that teach kindergarten through fifth grade of which six are bilingual teachers. There are also two special education teachers and one assistant, one library media specialist and an assistant, two part-time instructional technology specialists, one physical education teacher, one art instructor, one music instructor, one speech therapist, and one part-time and one full-time social worker. Auxiliary personnel include: one secretary, one full-time health aide, one part-time nurse and three custodians. There is a part-time psychologist available upon request.

The staff at Site B includes: one principal, twenty-five preschool through eighth grade teachers in addition there are three preschool assistant teachers, three special education teachers, two teachers responsible for the gifted program for children in grades three through eight, one library media specialist, one physical education teacher, one art teacher and one art aide, two music teachers, one of those instrumental music only, one instructional technology specialist, and one technology assistant. Auxiliary personnel include: one secretary, one full-time health aide, one full-time nurse, one part-time office clerk, and three custodians.

The average teaching experience at Site A is 14 years. There are 54.3% that

have a bachelor's degree and 45.7% who have a master's and above. The Pupil-Teacher Ratio is 18.7 to 1 and the Pupil-Administrator Ratio is 222.7 to 1. The average teacher salary is $43,220. The average administrator salary is $77,662.

The average teaching experience at Site B is 8 years. There are 86% that have bachelor's degrees, and 14% that have a master's and above. The Pupil-Teacher Ratio is 22.1 to 1 and the Pupil-Administrator Ratio is 591 to 1. The average teacher's salary is 22,000. The average administrator salary is $40,000.

Site A has: two self-contained classrooms in each of the following grades: kindergarten, second, fourth, and fifth grade. This site also has three first and third grade self-contained classrooms, as well as two fourth/fifth multi-age classrooms. Additionally, the school has bilingual education programs at the following grade levels: first, second, second/third multi-age, fourth, and fifth grade classes. The school also houses the Physically Health Impaired Program for the surrounding area, however, this program is run independently of the district.

Site B has: two half-day kindergartens, one full-day kindergarten, three first, second, third, and fourth grade self-contained classrooms. Grades fifth through eighth are departmentalized by subject area. The school also has a LD/Resource classroom.

At Site A there are twenty-four classrooms, an art room shared with a.m. kindergarten, a gymnasium, a music room, a library media center, and a computer lab. The area around the school consists of two playgrounds, one for primary students and one for intermediate students with a wide array of playground equipment.

At Site B there are 29 classrooms, an art room, music room, gymnasium, library media center, computer lab, teacher work room, and teacher cafeteria. The

area around the school consists of two playgrounds, one for primary students and one for intermediate students with various equipment. The school is currently under renovation. A new gymnasium, science lab, music lab, computer lab, student cafeteria and four additional classrooms will be added. Completion of this renovation is projected for summer of 2001.

The average class size at Site A in kindergarten is 23.8, first grade is 22.8, and third grade is 22.3. The time devoted to teaching in the subject areas is: mathematics 60 minutes per day, science 30 minutes per day, English 160 minutes per day, and social science 18 minutes per day for the third grade (The State School Report Card, 1999). There are several programs offered throughout the school year such as Peer Tutoring, Peer Mentors, Read Aloud, 600 Minute Reading Club, Math-A-Thon, Spanish Club, Science Club, Speech Club, Student Council, Chorus, Intramurals, and Roll into Reading.

The average class size at Site B in kindergarten is 19, first grade is 22.3, third grade is 27 and fifth grade is 25. The time devoted to teaching in the subject areas is: mathematics is 40 minutes per day, science is 40 minutes per day, and English (inclusive of all language arts) is 185 minutes per day, and social studies per 40 minutes per day for the fifth grade. There are several programs offered throughout the school year such as Let Peace Begin With Me Program, All-School Reading Incentive Program, 600 Minute Reading Club, French Club, Childrens' Choir, Instrumental Music, Student Council and Intramurals, and After-School Sports Programs for intermediate and junior high grades.

The Surrounding Community

The school at Site A is located within a large district located approximately 35 miles northwest of a metropolitan area. The district encompasses four suburban

towns which consolidated into one district with nine elementary schools, grades kindergarten through fifth, and two middle schools, grades sixth through eighth. There are 7,432 students enrolled in the district who feed into the high schools.

The school at Site B is a private school located within a medium-sized public school district approximately 25 miles northwest of a metropolitan area. The commuter system links this community to a major urban area. The public school district encompasses a suburban town which feeds into three elementary schools, grades kindergarten through fifth, and two middle schools, grades sixth through eighth. Students enrolled in Site B and within this public school district may feed into one public high school or their choice of private facilities.

The racial/ethnic background for the district at Site A is 65.1% White, 2.9% Black, 25.1% Hispanic, 6.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and there was no report indicating Native American or other racial/ethnic origins. The percentage of students from low-income families in the district is 27.0. Students in the district with Limited-English-Proficiency is 18.6%. The percentage in the district for attendance is 95.7, a mobility rate of 9.1 is reported, and chronic truancy is reported at zero. Average class size for the district in kindergarten is 19.5, first grade is 20.9, and third grade is 21.2.

The teachers in the Site A are 96.4% White, 3% Hispanic, 0.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and there are no reports indicating Black, Native American or other racial/ethnic origins. There are 11.5% teachers that are male and 88.5% are female. The average amount of teaching experience is 13.7 years. There are 46.9% teachers that hold Bachelor's Degrees and 53.1% which hold Master's Degrees and above. Operating expenditure is $7,073 per pupil.

The teachers in Site B are 100% White, there was no report indicating Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, or other racial/ethnic origins. The

percentage of female teachers is 100%.

Site A participates in a state assessment test which assesses students in grades third through eighth in reading, writing, mathematics or science and social studies for a particular grade level. The disciplines tested vary depending on the grade level. The third graders are tested in reading, writing, and math.

All of the schools in the district at Site A participate in a school improvement plan. For the 1999-2000 school year, the district targeted five areas for planned improvement: Decrease the number of students "not meeting" state standards in the areas of reading and writing. Each teacher must be able to deliver instruction in a variety of ways. Instruction must emphasize hands-on and product oriented activities. Subject matter must be integrated and related to the real world. Assessment must be varied and related to the real world.

Site B does not participate in a state assessment test, however, they participate in a commercialized test called the Terra Nova Assessment Test. This test assesses students in grades second, third, fifth and eighth in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies.

All of the schools in the diocese where Site B is located participates in a school improvement plan. For the 1999-2000 school year, the school targeted three goals for planned improvement. Goal One: To instill in our students the fact that Catholicism is a way of life through faith formation liturgical experiences, and role modeling. Goal Two: To increase reading comprehension in all content areas by addressing needs as determined through formal and informal evaluation. Goal Three: To work as a team to complete the process for school evaluation as mandated by the Office of Catholic Education.

The district at Site A uses a literature-based reading program published by

Harcourt Brace (Wings and Diamond Cove, 1999), and the University of Chicago Math Program which is hands-on math. Grade first through fifth receive instruction from the district's Discovery Science Learning Team throughout the year for a total of six 3 1/2 hour sessions. The students also receive quarterly science kits which allow them to do hands-on science in their own classrooms. The spelling program is a teacher-made program provided by the district. The social studies program is based on whole-language materials. Fine arts instruction is provided by teachers specializing in these areas through music education and art education programs. Computer technology is provided by instructional specialists. The district services identified gifted children students through a pull-out program.

The district at Site B uses a literature-based reading program published by Houghton Mifflin (The Literature Experience, 1996). Math, English, and spelling are also taught through the series published by Houghton Mifflin. Social studies is taught through the series published by MacMillan/MCGraw-Hill. Science is taught through the series published by Scott Foresman. Fine arts instruction is provided by teachers specializing in these areas through music education and art education programs. Computer technology is provided by both the classroom teachers and instructional specialists.

The school in Site A is located in a midwestern suburban community covering 8.5 square miles. The total population is 29,911. The population is 90.1% White, 4.6% of the population is Asian or Pacific Islander, 1.8 % of the population is Native American, 1.68% of the population is Black, and 3.4% of the community population is defined in a separate category. Males comprise 48.85% of the population and females comprise 51.15% of the population. The median age is 30.2. The number of households in the community is 12,495. The average home value is $168,611. The

median gross rent is $679. The median household income is $58,800 (1990 Census of Population and Housing).

The school at site B is located in a midwestern suburban community covering 10.2 square miles. The total population is 53,168. Of the population 92.1% are White, 4.9 % Hispanic, 1.2 % Black, and 1.8% of the community population is defined in a separate category. Males comprise 49.5% of the population and females comprise 50.5% of the population. The median age is 34.7. The number of households in the community is 20,948. The average home value is 115,100. The median gross rent is $564. The median household income is $46,508.

National Context of the Problem

There is a wide spread problem with declining writing abilities among students and the results of writing tests have been very disappointing. The majority of the students are scoring well below state goals (Mariconda, 1999, p. 5). Much of the problem is a result of the following factors in school: Each teacher is interpreting "writing as a process" differently and delivering the program in different ways. There is little consistency across or between grade levels in writing instruction. There is little consistency in vocabulary and terminology across and between grade levels, resulting in student and teacher confusion. Most students' writing lacks the following: focus, elaborative detail, voice, and "a clear sense of story" (Mariconda, 1999, p.5). A clear sense of story is when a writer includes the necessary components, a clear beginning, middle, and end in a writing selection, and has a logical sequence to the events. Other factors for the problem involve classroom management, motivation, and English as a second language.

All across America, classroom teachers are facing the prospect of administering more and more tests to students at virtually every grade level. This

trend will surely gain momentum as states continue to place even greater emphasis on test scores to evaluate teachers, promote students, rate districts, and even fund schools. At the same time, many states are also changing the ways tests are administered, the way tests are scored, and the skills students are expected to demonstrate.

About thirty states currently require a student writing assessment, and most of these have a very similar format. While states use different terms for the elements of writing, they are looking for the same criteria. With state testing, most of us are at a disadvantage, as they are unfamiliar with the criteria by which students are scored. Once the teacher understands the "language of the test", they will be better able to help students improve their scores. The language of the test includes all of the elements used for assessing writing. While terms for assessing writing vary, basically each state is looking for the same elements (Rose, 1999, p. 6).

In our schools, students tell us they don't want to write (Calkins, 1986). We know this when we see stories that are barely adequate and from the questions they ask "How long does it have to be?" When students resist writing, teachers resist teaching writing. Children will care about writing when it is personal and interpersonal. When writing becomes a personal project for children, teachers are freed from pushing, pulling, and motivating (Calkins, 1986, p. 4).

Children want to write. For years we have underestimated their urge to make marks on paper. We have underestimated that urge because of a lack of understanding of the writing process (Graves, 1984, p.17). Free-style writing is wonderful-it allows students to be creative and encourages writing as a "fun"' discipline-but it doesn't necessarily focus on the nuts and bolts of writing: creating stories that have a beginning, middle and end and contain sufficient dialog, character

development, and description. We also emphasize creativity at the expense of some crucial elements of good writing, such as organizational skills, focused writing, grammar, and spelling. These elements of good writing do not just naturally occur; they need to be taught. Without clear definitions of what specific skills a good writer possesses, teachers and students cannot be expected to recognize, demonstrate, apply, or assess writing skills in consistent meaningful ways. Also, if they are not stressed early on, many students will continue making the same mistakes over and over, convinced that creative ideas alone make for good writing (Rose, 1999, p.5).

According to state goals, writing that is clear is essential to any person's effective communication. It is also critical to employment and production in today's world. The challenge of helping children write well and live well is bigger than any of us and bigger than any of our theories. It is a challenge that's big enough to live for (Calkins, 1991, p. 8).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEMDOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The students in the targeted third and fifth grade classrooms exhibited underdeveloped writing abilities as shown through writing samples, report card grades, teacher observations, student surveys, previous teacher surveys, previous teacher interviews, and parent surveys.

A prompt to write a narrative writing piece was provided (Appendix A). The students had a forty minute block to plan, organize, and write their papers. This prompt was assessed in two ways, through a writing checklist (Appendix B) and a scoring rubric (Appendix C).

The writing checklist included nine skills grouped into two categories: organization and conventions. Organization assesses how logically and well developed ideas are presented. Conventions assesses the use of standard English. The checklist is not number-based or letter-based because it is being used to assess, not grade, a piece of writing. It aides in identifying where the students are developmentally. Each student is identified as either an emerging writer, a developing writer, or an experienced writer. The emerging writer would receive a minus on the checklist indicating the writer has "not yet" attained the skill. The developing writer would receive a check mark indicating that the student is doing "okay", which means that they are showing evidence of the skill, yet it is not fully understood or correctly applied. The student writer may apply the skill occasionally, but not consistently. The experienced writer would receive a plus which indicating the student is doing "good". This means the student has mastered the skill and it is present throughout the piece. As the observation checklist is applied, the observer

should consider the student-author's abilities and approaches to writing.

The results of the writing checklist showed that the students at Site A as a whole were strongest in the area of conventions. In particular, seven students had mastered capitalization. None of the students performed at a mastery level of writing in all areas.

Specifically at Site A, in the area of organization, none of the students put their papers correctly into paragraphs or showed evidence of the skill. All of the students demonstrated that paragraphing was still not yet attained.

Only one student at Site A indented all of the paragraphs, none of the students showed evidence of the skill, and 19 had not yet attained the skill.

In Figure 1, of the 20 students at Site A, six had an introduction which meant it was 'good', four showed evidence which would equate to okay, and 10 had still 'not yet' attained the skill.

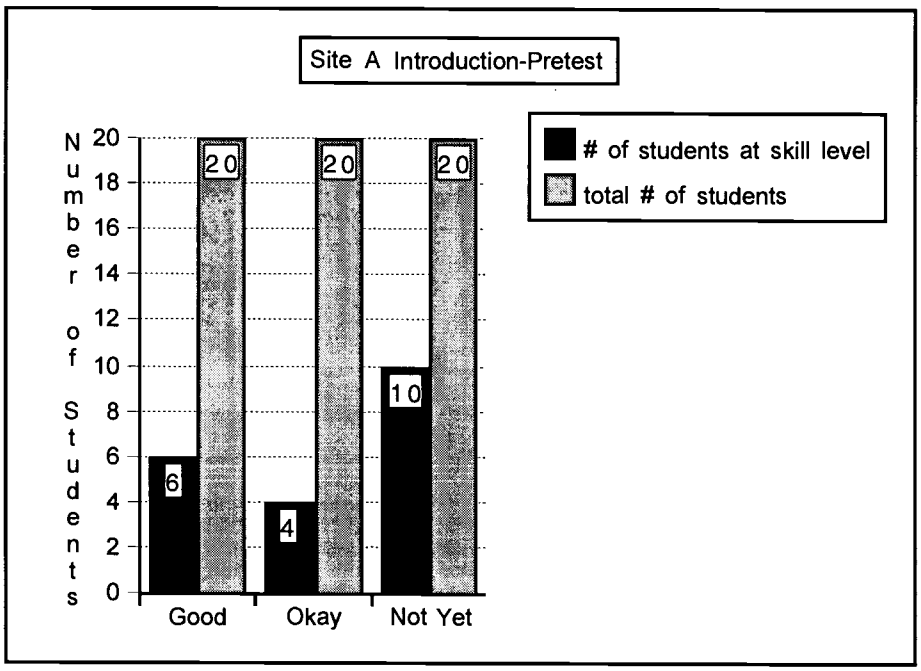

Figure 1. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site A for the introduction.

In Figure 2, there were two students who had a 'good' body, six showed

evidence which would equate to 'okay', and 12 had 'not yet' attained the skill.

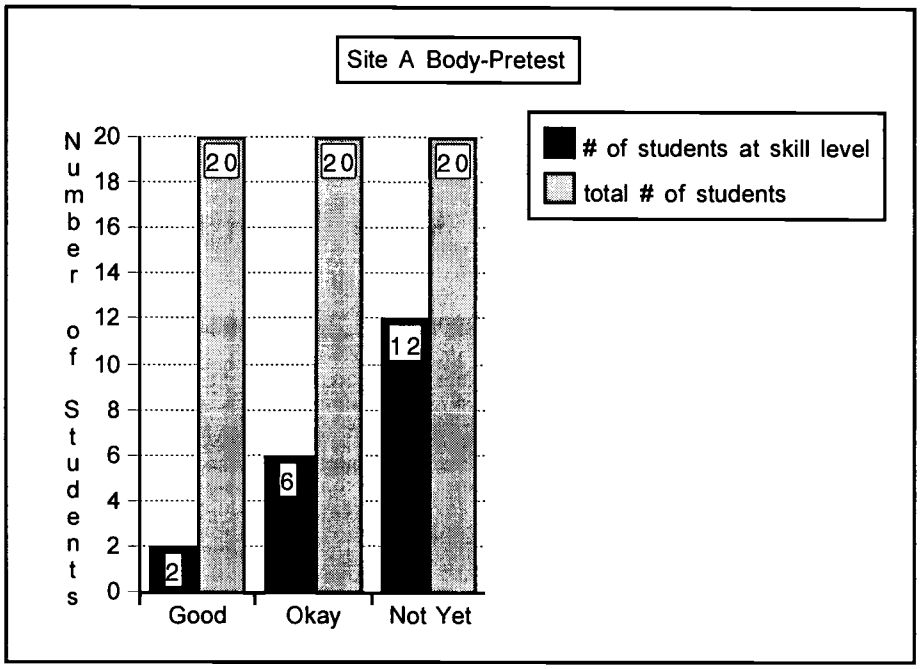

Figure 2. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site A for the body.

Finally, in Figure 3, two of the students at Site A had a 'good' closing, three showed some evidence of an 'okay' closing, and 15 had 'not yet' attained the skill.

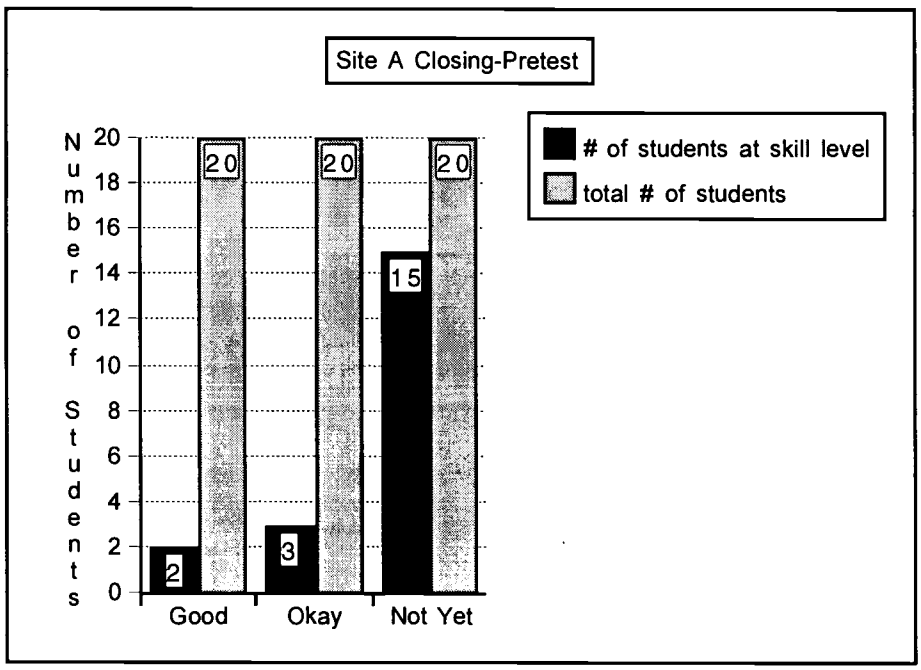

Figure 3. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site A for the closing.

Student performance at Site A in the area of conventions varied from high to low levels when applying the writing principles of punctuation, grammar, spelling, and capitalization. Of the 20 students, none of the students performed at a mastery level of writing in all areas of conventions. Beginning with punctuation, in Figure 4 seven students used 'good' punctuation, five showed evidence of the skill which would equate to'okay', and eight had 'not yet' attained punctuation skills.

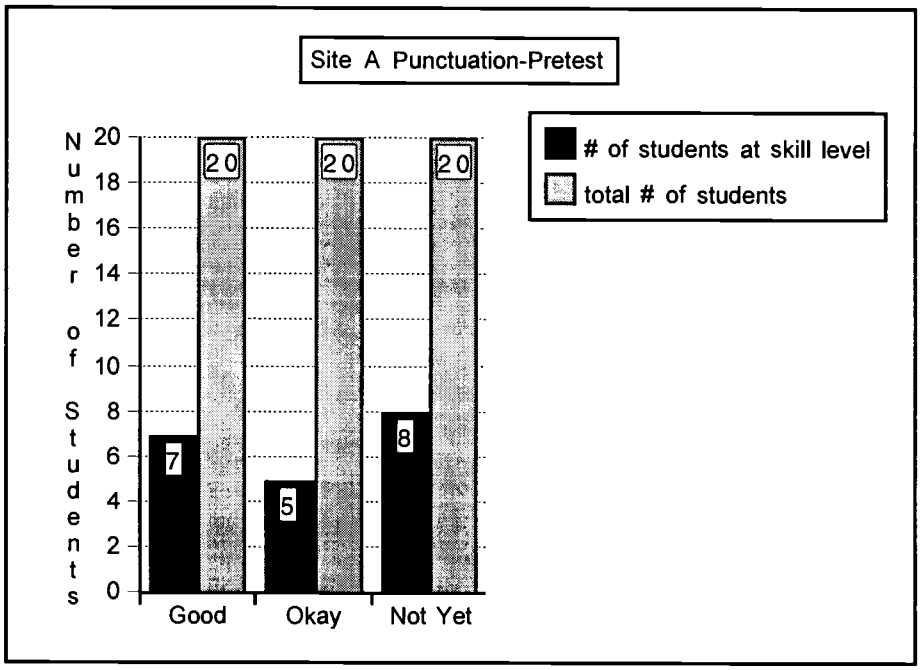

Figure 4. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site A for punctuation.

In Figure 5, none of the students at Site A were at a mastery level in using 'good' grammar, eight showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and 12 had 'not yet' attained good grammar skills.

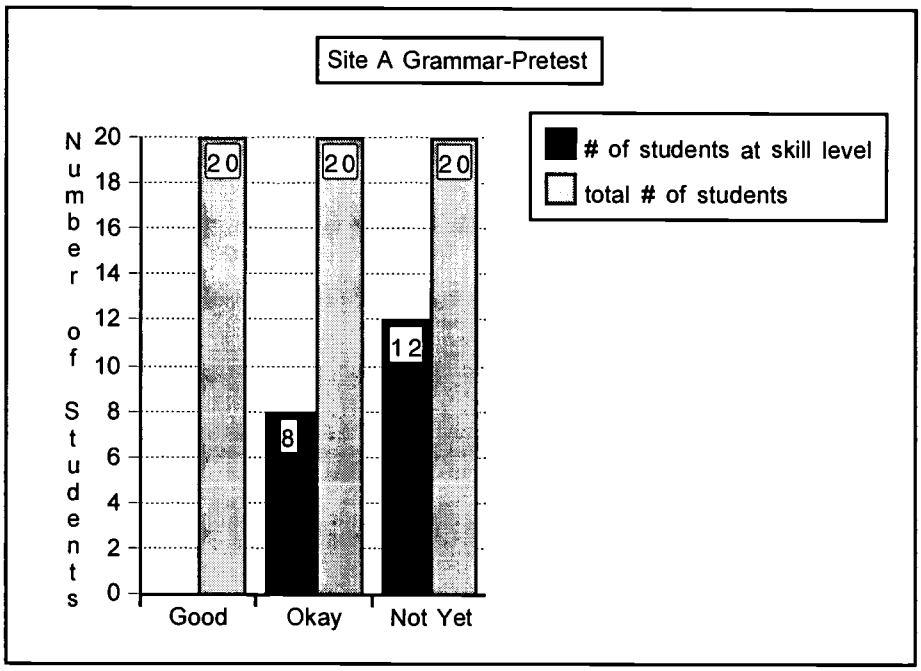

Figure 5. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site A for grammar.

In Figure 6, out of the 20 students, none of the students at Site A had mastered 'good' spelling, eight have showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and 12 had 'not yet' attained spelling skills.

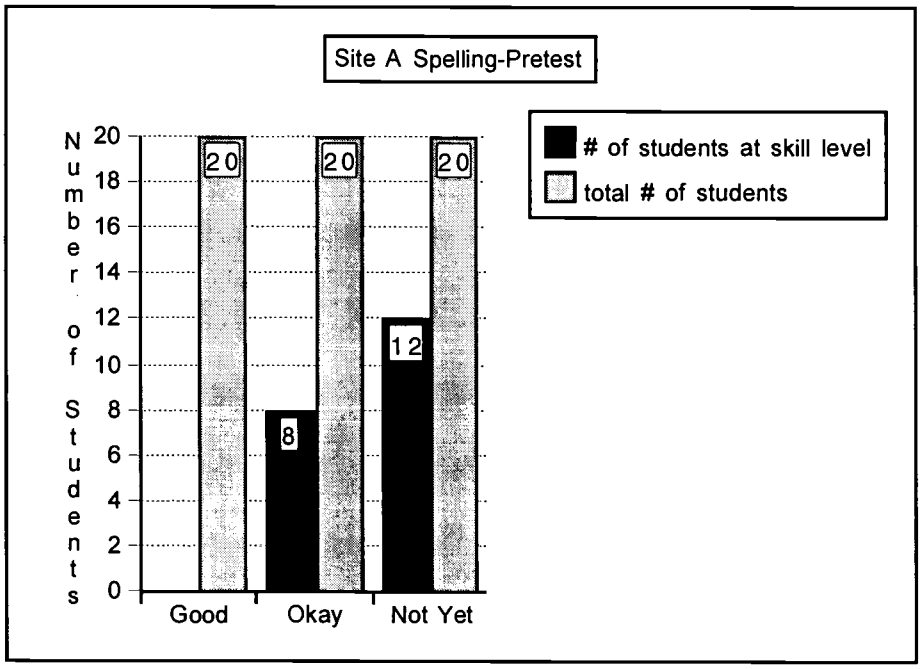

Figure 6. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site A for spelling.

Finally, in Figure 7, there were nine students at Site A who mastered 'good' capitalization, eight students showed evidence of the ability to capitalize correctly which would equate to 'okay', and three had 'not yet' attained the skill of capitalization.

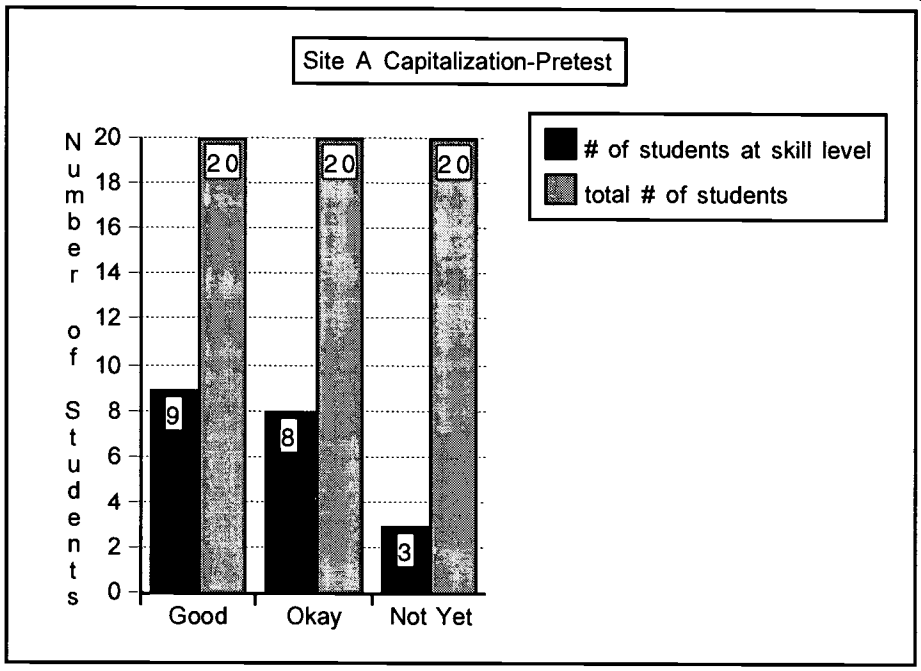

Figure 7. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site A for capitalization.

The results of the writing checklist showed that the students at Site B were also strongest in the area of conventions. In particular, 10 students had mastered capitalization. None of the students performed at a mastery level of writing in all areas.

Specifically at Site B in the area of organization, none of the students put their paper correctly into paragraphs or showed evidence of the skill. All of the students demonstrated that paragraphing was still not yet attained.

In Figure 8, eight students at Site B indented all their paragraphs which meant it was good, five showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and 10 had 'not yet' attained the skill.

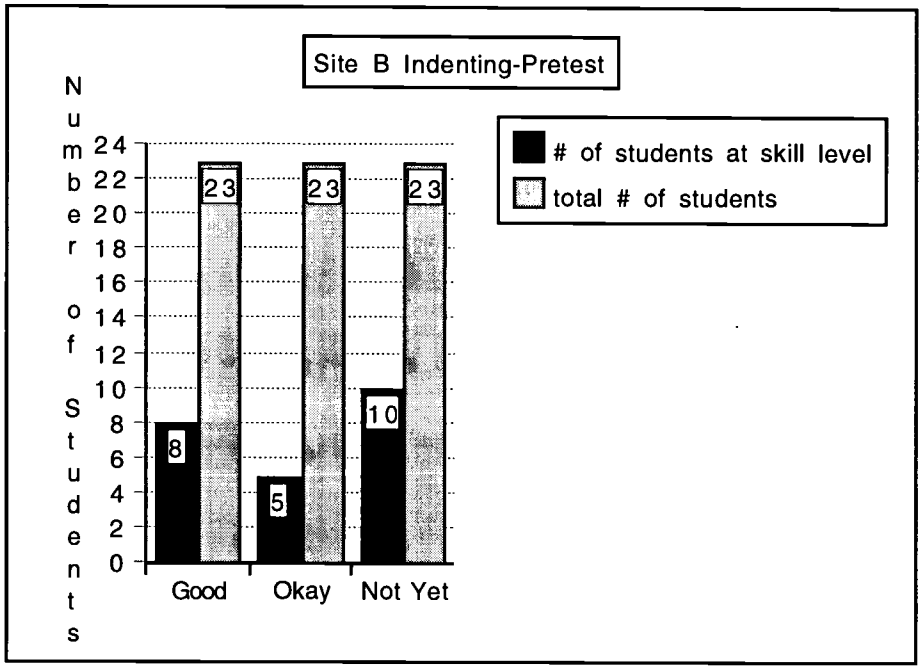

Figure 8. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site B for indenting.

In Figure 9, of the 23 students at Site B, three had a 'good' introduction, 12 showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and eight had still 'not yet' attained the skill.

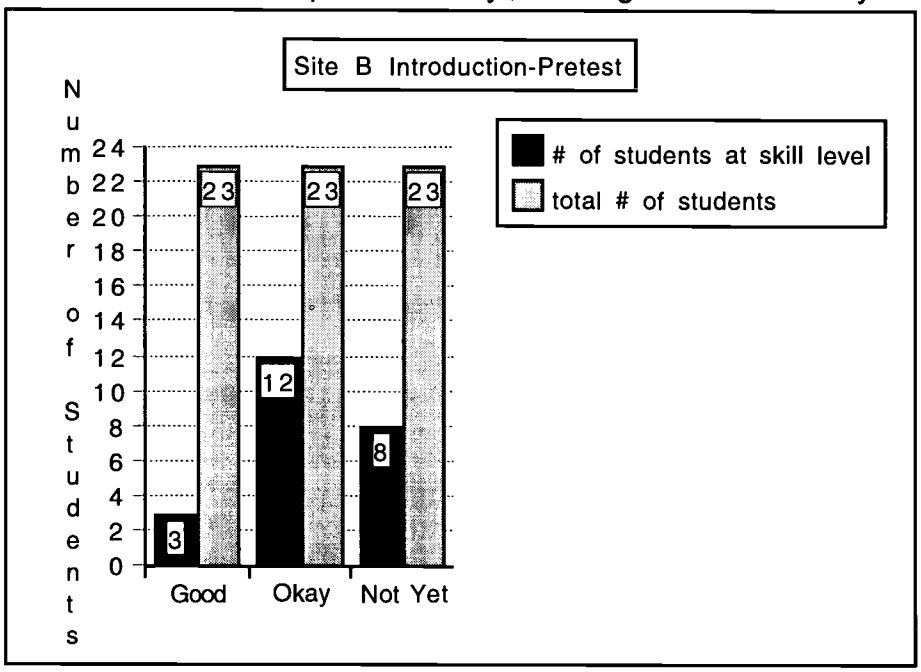

Figure 9. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site B for the introduction.

In Figure 10, none of the students at Site B had a 'good' body, eight showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and 15 had 'not yet' attained that skill.

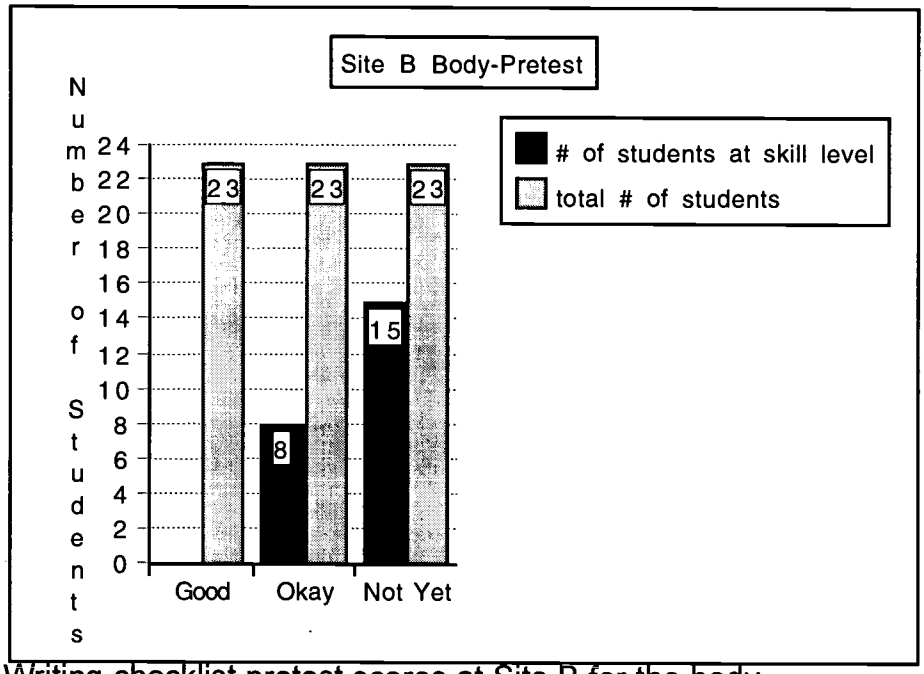

Figure 10. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site B for the body.

Finally, Figure 11, showed that none of the students at Site B had a 'good' closing, nine showed some evidence of an 'okay' closing, and 14 had 'not yet' attained the skill.

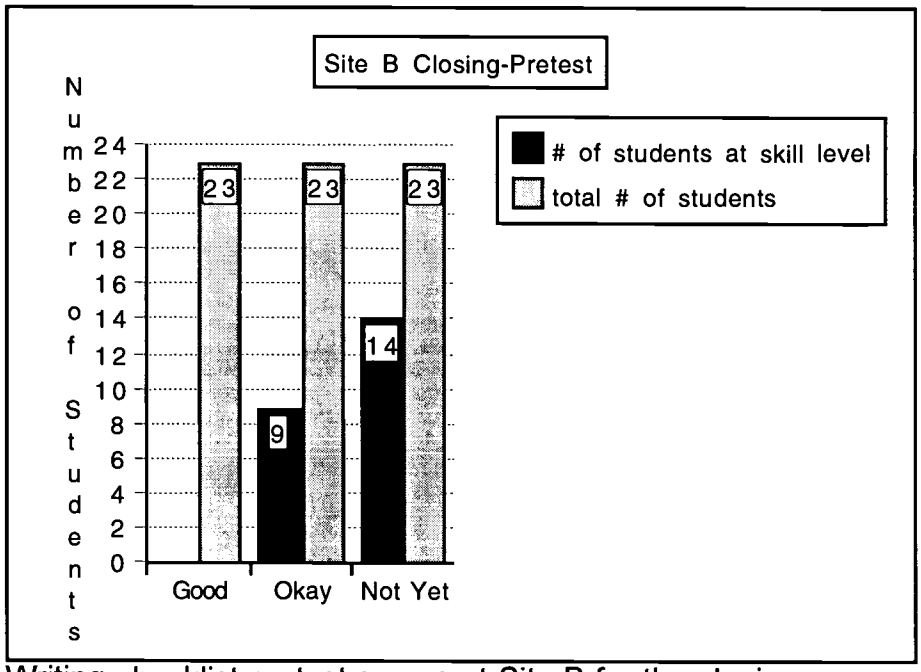

Figure 11. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site B for the closing.

Student performance at Site B in the area of conventions varied from high to low levels when applying the writing principles of punctuation, grammar, spelling, and

capitalization. Of the 23 students, four students performed at a mastery level of writing in all areas of conventions. Beginning with punctuation, Figure 12 showed that five students used 'good' punctuation, 13 showed evidence of the skill which would equate to'okay', five students had 'not yet' attained punctuation skills.

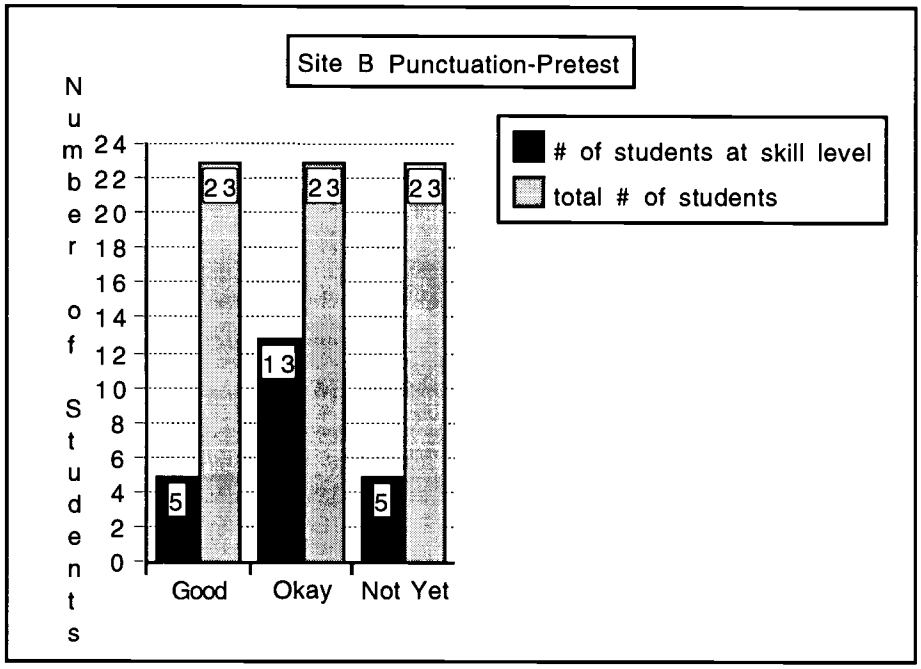

Figure 12. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site B for the punctuation.

In Figure 13, there were five students at Site B who were at a mastery level with 'good' grammar, 11 showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and seven had still 'not yet' attained good grammar skills.

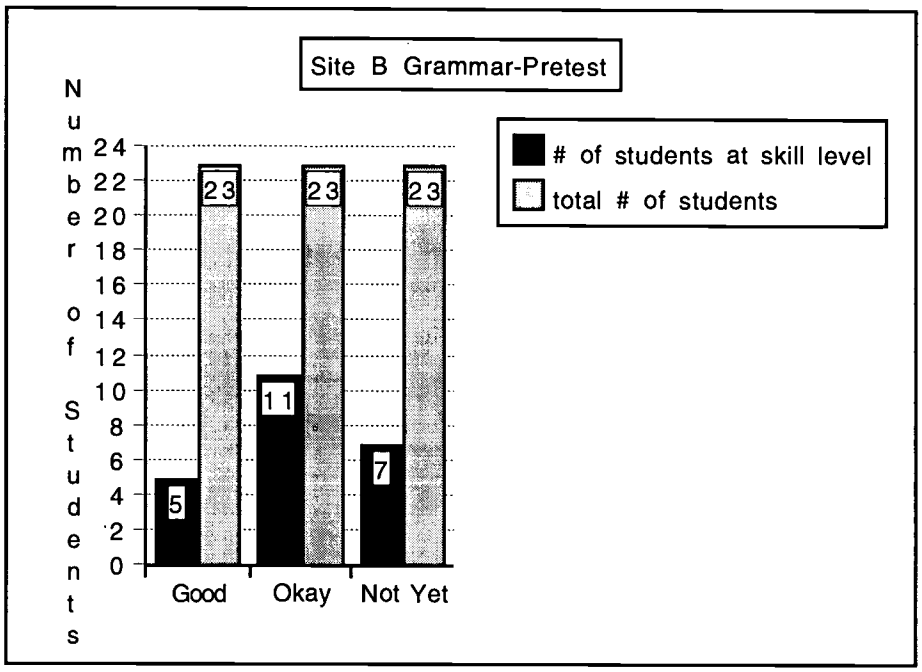

Figure 13. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site B for grammar.

Figure 14 showed that out of the 23 students at Site B, four have mastered 'good' spelling, 14 have showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and five had 'not yet' attained spelling skills.

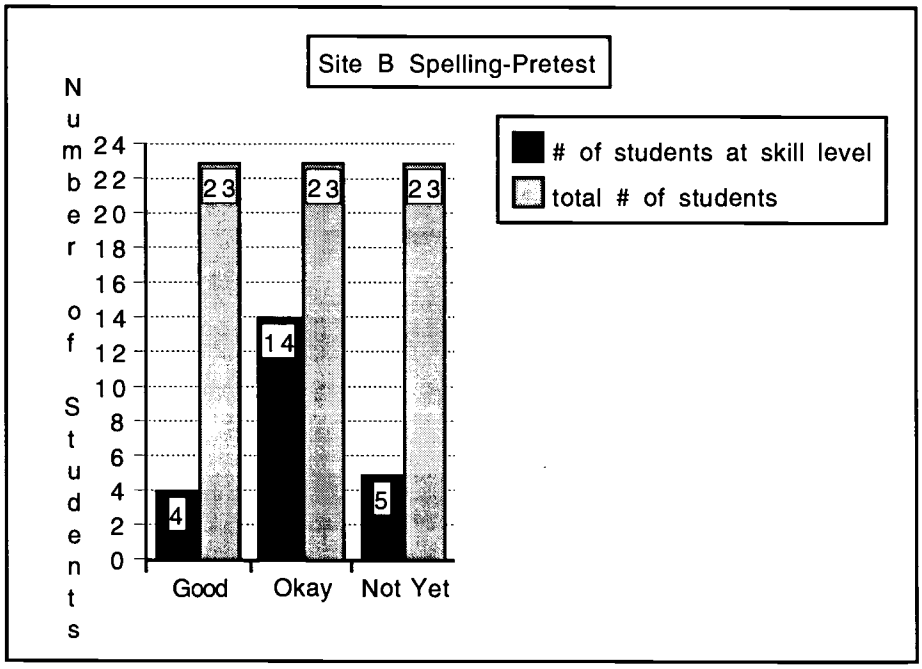

Figure 14. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site B for spelling.

Finally, in Figure 15, there were 10 students at Site B who mastered 'good' capitalization, eight students showed evidence of the ability to capitalize correctly which would equate to 'okay', and five had 'not yet' attained the skill of capitalization.

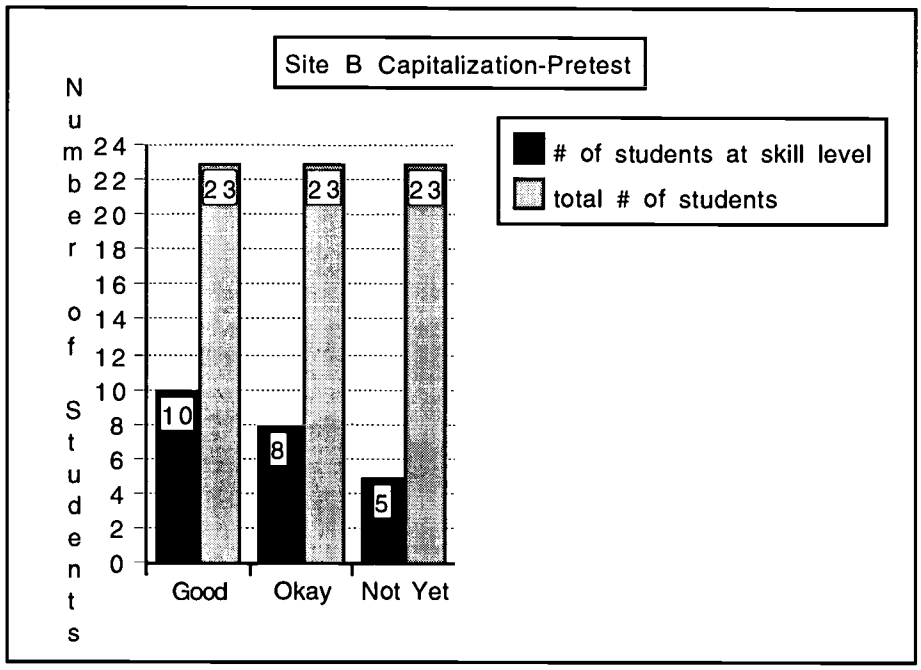

Figure 15. Writing checklist pretest scores at Site B for capitalization.

The writing samples were also scored by a writing rubric as a second mean of determining students' writing ability. This scale was designed to give a descriptive profile of a student's command of fundamental techniques of clear writing. Similar to the writing checklist used, this rating system emphasizes stages of development and considers the performance expectations of the student.

The scoring rubric was developed to summarize the key features of a piece of writing. Students were assessed by four features of writing: focus, elaboration (support), organization, and conventions. Within each feature, specific writing skills are assessed. Focus determines the clarity with which a paper presents and maintains a clear main idea, point of view, theme, or unifying event. Elaboration (support) focuses on the quality of details, reasons, and the explanation of the theme.

The thoroughness of elaboration depends upon balanced descriptions of the key components of the paper. Organization scores the plan of development and whether or not the key components and sentences logically flow together, including transitions. Conventions scores the use of standard written English. This includes: sentence construction, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and paragraph format.

Each feature, except for conventions, was rated on a two point scale. The number indicates the level of development in the piece. A score ranging from a zero to one indicates that the feature was absent or in the developing stages. A score of a "two" signals the feature was basically well developed. Conventions are rated from a "zero" to a two. A zero indicates that a paper has many errors. A "one" indicates that a paper has some errors. A "two" indicates that a paper has few errors. Each feature was rated independently. An overall score was given to each paper. The students' scores were based on a ten-point scale.

The students' writing samples at Site A scored by the writing rubric indicated that none had received all points possible for their paper. The breakdown was as follows: four students received six points, two students received five points, four students received four points, five students received three points, three students received two points, and two students received zero points.

Figure 16 demonstrates the first feature, Focus. This score determined four out of 20 students at Site A had fully developed their focus. It stated that six had a clear and effective beginning/ending. While nine maintained the narrative topic.

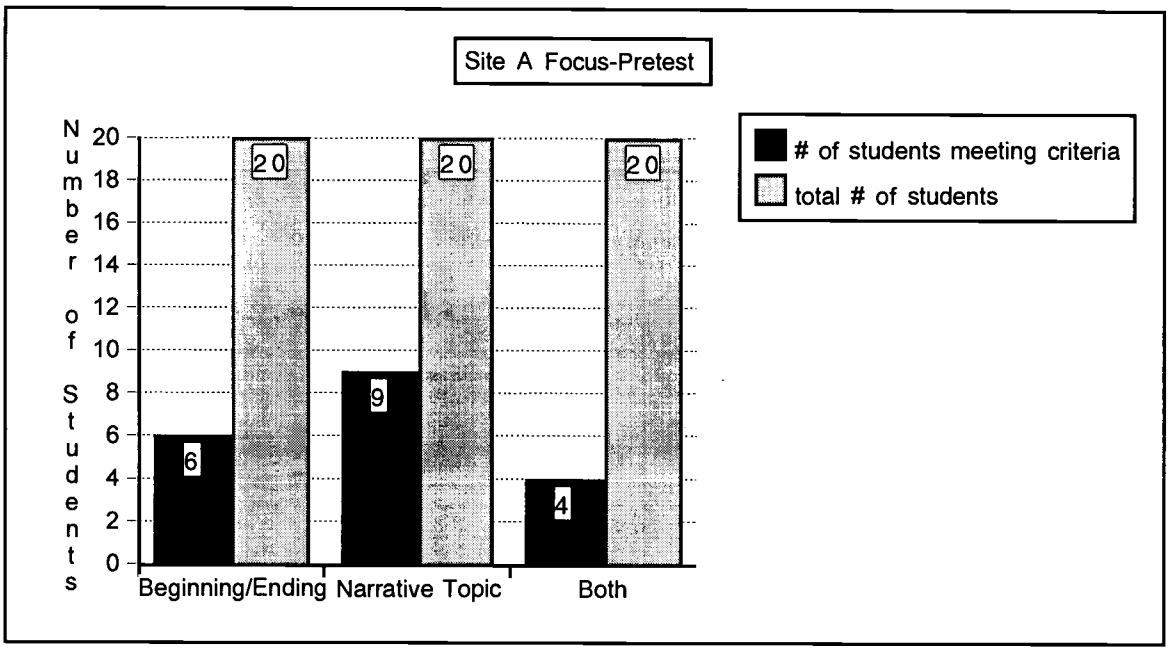

Figure 16. Writing rubric pretest scores at Site A for focus.

Scores for support, Figure 17 showed that five students at Site A had fully developed support. There were eight students who had details and reactions, while six had elaborated in their essay.

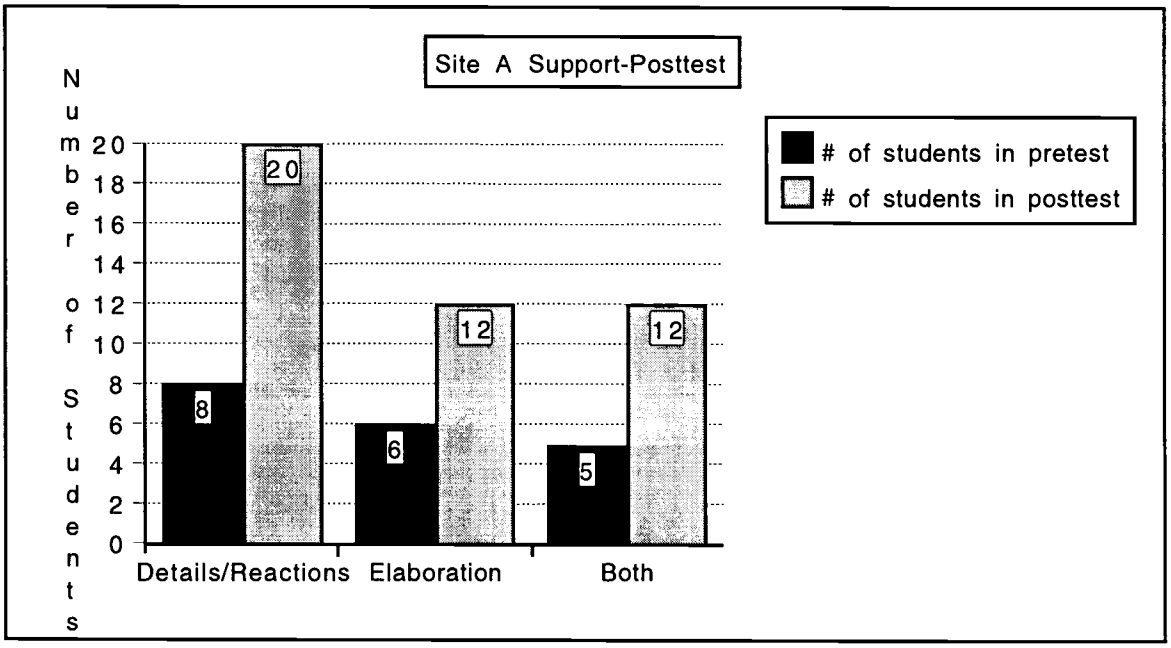

Figure 17. Writing rubric pretest scores at Site A for support.

The results on organization were similar. None of the students fully developed organization. Out of the 20, four had time order transitions. None of the students had appropriate paragraphing.

The collective group of students at Site A were more successful in the area of style. Style evaluates the paper based on good word choice and varied sentence structure. In Figure 18, only three of the students had fully developed style. There were seven of the students who used good word choice. Also, three of the students had varied sentence structure.

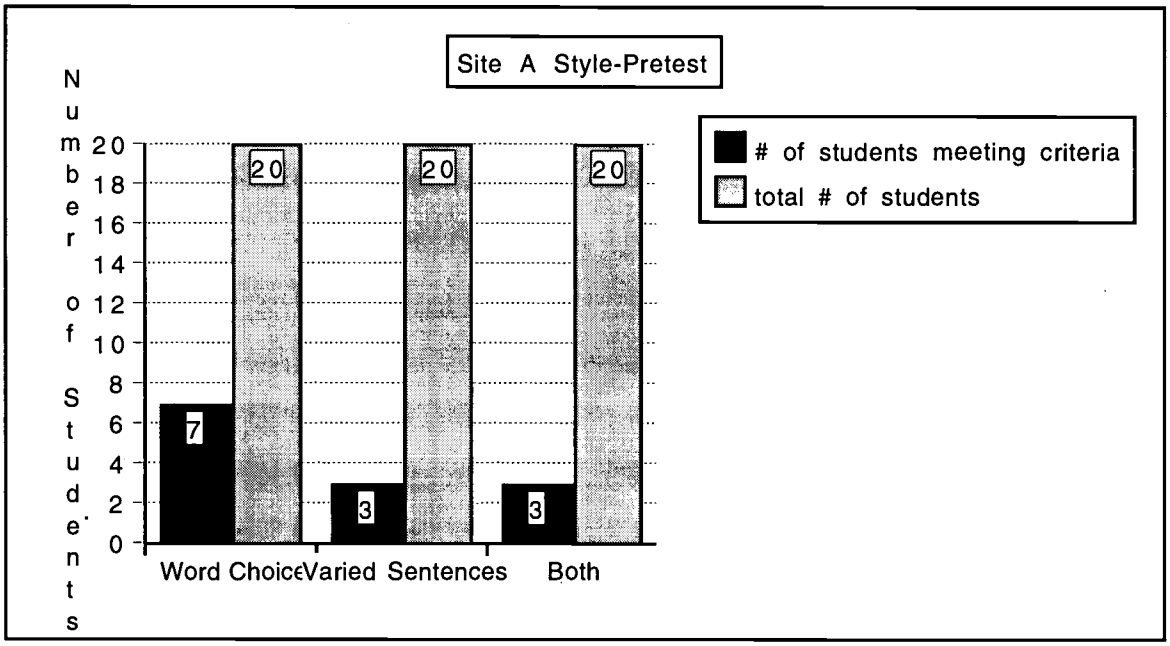

Figure 18. Writing rubric pretest scores at Site A for style.

The final feature assessed at Site A was conventions. A student who received "few errors", a total of three or less, in any of these areas: capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and grammar, received two points. A student who had "some errors", a total of four to seven, in the same areas received one point. A student who had "many errors", a total of seven or more, received zero points. As shown in Figure 19, six of the students received two points for few errors. There were six students who received

one point for some errors. Finally, eight of the students received no points because they had many errors.

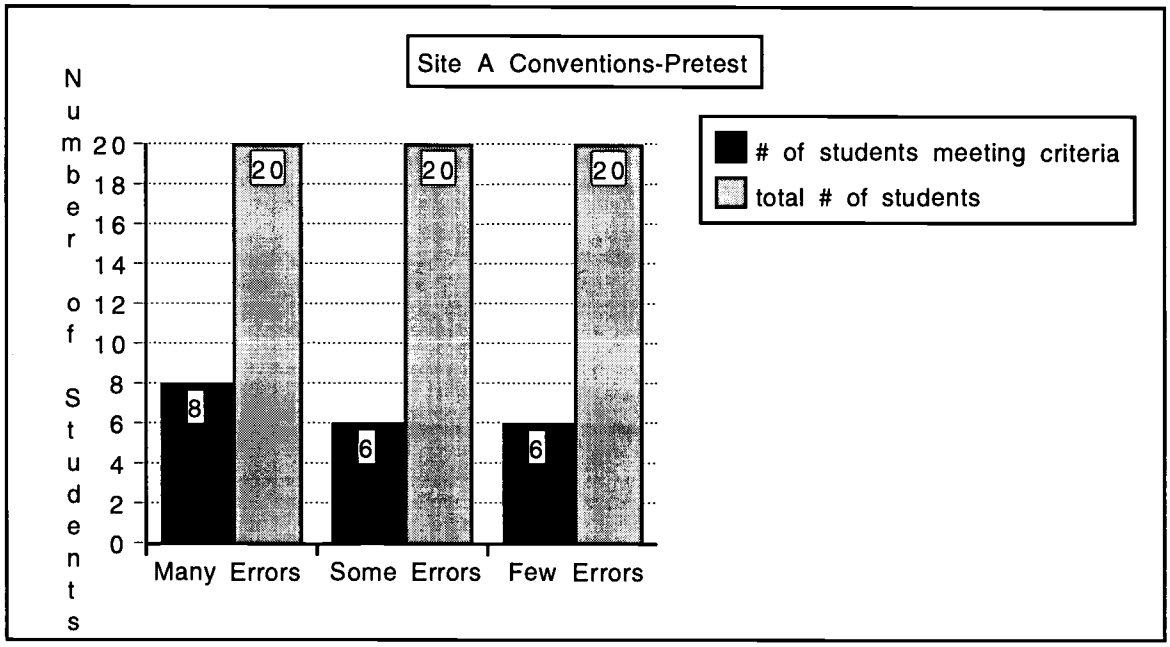

Figure 19. Writing rubric pretest scores at Site A for conventions.

The students' writing samples at Site B scored by the writing rubric indicated that none had received all points possible for their paper. The breakdown is as follows: one student received seven points, two student received six points, five students received five points, six students received four points, one student received three points, two students received two points, four students received one point, and two students received zero points.

Figure 20 demonstrates the first feature, focus, for Site B. This score determined 10 out of 23 students at Site B had fully developed their focus. It stated that 13 had a clear and effective beginning/ending. While 10 maintained the narrative topic.

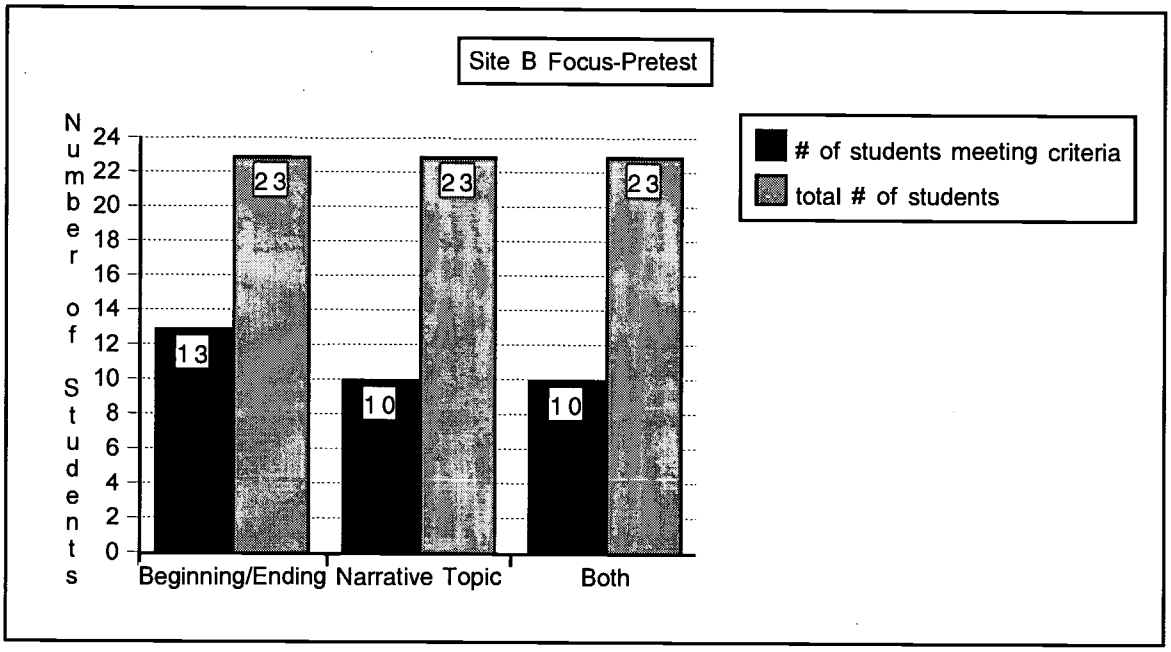

Figure 20. Writing rubric pretest scores at Site B for focus.

Scores for support at Site B, Figure 21 showed that one student at Site B had fully developed support. There were eight students who had details and reactions. While one had elaborated in their essay.

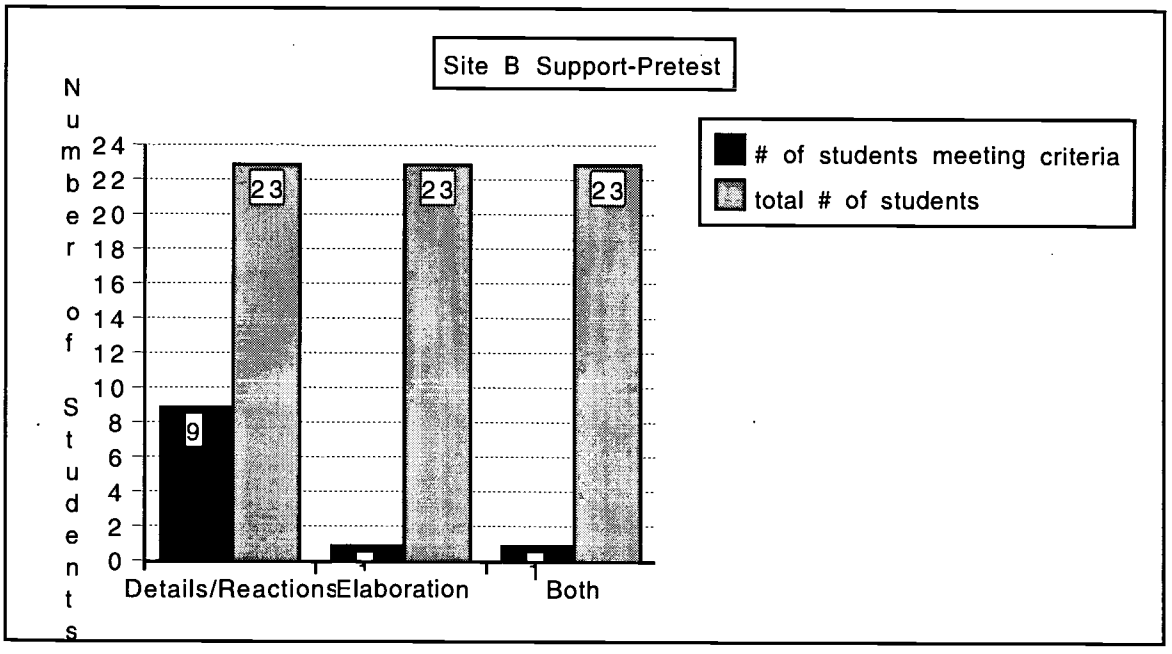

Figure 21. Writing rubric pretest scores at Site B for support.

The results on organization at Site B were also similar. None of the students were fully developed in the area of organization. Out of the 23, one had time order transitions. None of the students had appropriate paragraphing.

The collective group of students at Site B were more successful in the area of style. Style evaluates the paper based on good word choice and varied sentence structure. Figure 22 demonstrated that only one of the students had fully developed style. There were nine students that used good word choice. Also, two of the students had varied sentence structure.

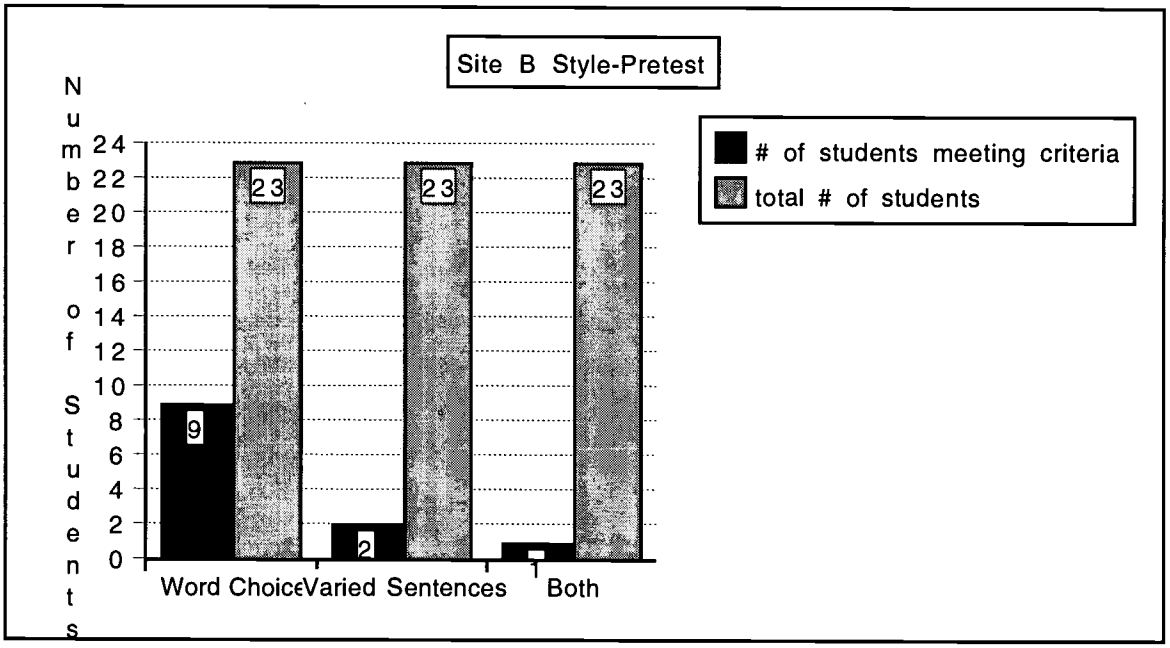

Figure 22. Writing rubric pretest scores at Site B for style.

The final feature assessed at Site B was conventions. As shown in Figure 23, 11 of the students received two points for few errors. There were 10 students who received one point for some errors. The remaining two students received no points because they had many errors.

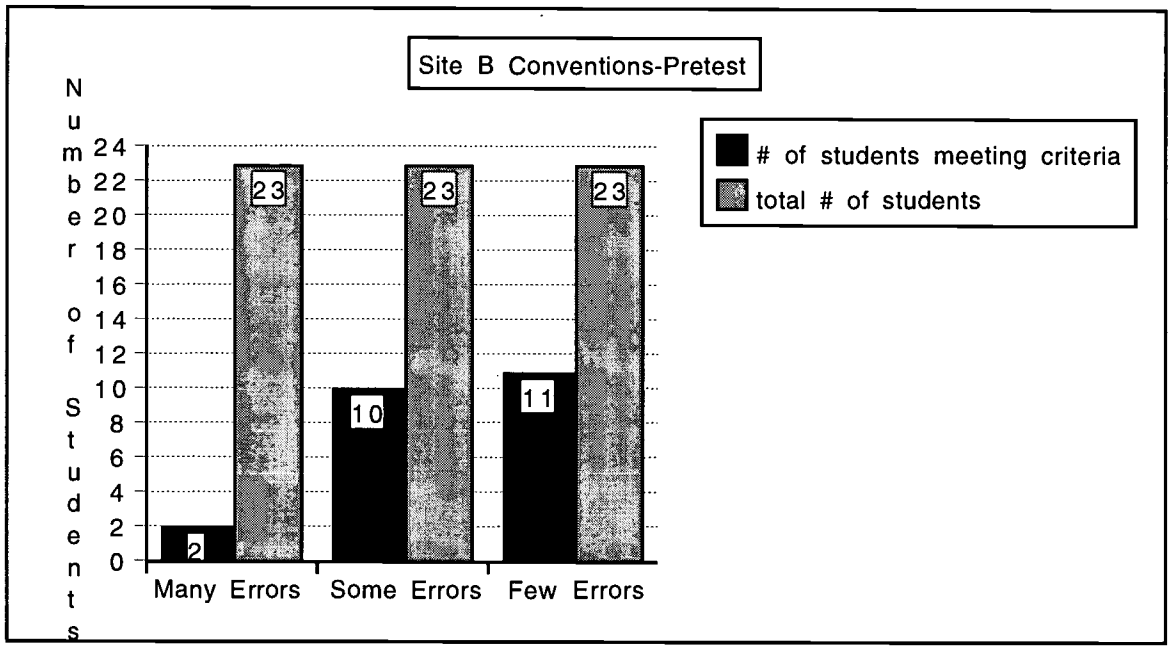

Figure 23. Writing rubric pretest scores at Site B for conventions.

At the beginning of the Action Research Project, the students were asked to complete a writing survey (Appendix D). The purpose of the survey was to find out how the children felt about writing, how they perceived themselves as writers, and if they knew about the writing process. There were six questions to the Student Writing Survey. These were the results from both sites.

- The first question read, "Are you a writer?"

Site A	Site B
18 students answered "yes"	16 students answered "yes"
two answered "no"	seven answered "no"

- The second question read, "Do you write everyday?"

Site A	Site B
10 students answered "yes"	five students answered "yes"
10 answered "no"	18 answered "no"

• The third question read, "Do you write for fun?"

Site A	Site B
six answered "yes"	10 answered "yes"
13 answered "sometimes"	eleven answered "sometimes"
one answered "no"	one answered "no"

• The fourth question read, "Do you like to write?"

Site A	Site B
10 answered "yes"	10 answered "yes"
eight answered "somewhat"	12 answered "somewhat"
two answered "no"	one answered "no"

• The fifth question read, "Do you know and understand the steps of the writing process?"

Site A	Site B
five answered "yes"	16 answered "yes"
eight answered "somewhat"	five answered "somewhat"
seven answered "no"	two answered "no"

• The sixth question read, "Do you think you are a good writer?"

Site A	Site B
11 answered "yes"	13 answered "yes"
six answered "somewhat"	nine answered "somewhat"
three answered "no"	one answered "no"

At the beginning of the Action Research Project, the parents were asked to complete a writing survey (Appendix E). The purpose of this survey was to see how parents perceived their children as a writers, and if they encourage writing. The Parent Writing Survey consisted of eight questions. These were the results of both sites.

- The first question read, "Does your child write at home beyond required homework?"

Site A	Site B
four answered "almost always"	four answered "almost always"
11 answered "sometimes"	14 answered "sometimes"
five answered "never"	five answered "never"

- The second question read, "Do you encourage your child to write at home?"

Site A	Site B
eight answered almost "always"	five answered almost "always"
11 answered "sometimes"	15 answered "sometimes"
one answered "almost never"	three answered "almost never"

- The third question read, "Does your child enjoy writing letters, stories, poems, etc.?"

Site A	Site B
five answered "almost always"	10 answered "almost always"
10 answered "sometimes"	10 answered "sometimes"
five answered "almost never"	three answered "almost never"

- The fourth question read, "Do you talk about your child's writing with him/her?"

Site A	Site B
10 answered "almost always"	10 answered "almost always"
eight answered "sometimes"	10 answered "sometimes"
two answered "almost never"	three answered "almost never"

- The fifth question read, "Do you enjoy writing letters, stories, poems, etc. at home?"

Site A	Site B
three answered "almost always"	eight answered "almost always"
12 answered "sometimes"	nine answered "sometimes"
five answered "almost never"	six answered "almost never"

• The sixth question read "Does your child see you writing at home?"

Site A	Site B
two answered "almost always"	six answered "almost always"
13 answered "sometimes"	12 answered "sometimes"
five answered "almost never"	five answered "almost never"

• The seventh question read, "Do you provide writing materials for your child?"

Site A	Site B
15 answered "almost always"	18 answered "almost always"
five answered "sometimes"	three answered "sometimes"
zero answered "almost never"	two answered "almost never"

• The eighth and final question read, "Are you available to assist your child with rewriting if necessary?"

Site A	Site B
12 answered "almost always"	20 answered "almost always"
eight answered "sometimes"	three answered "sometimes"
zero answered "almost never"	zero answered "almost never"

At the beginning of the Action Research Project, a previous teacher interview and survey was given to the second and fourth grade teachers of the students at Site A and Site B (Appendices F, G, and H). The purpose of the interview and survey was to gain background knowledge of what the students were taught prior to third and fifth grade.

At Site A, there were three teachers interviewed, and at Site B there was one teacher interviewed. The first question read, "How many minutes per week do you spend on writing in your classroom?" At Site A, two teachers taught writing 400 to 600 minutes were week, and one teacher taught writing zero to 200 minutes per week. At

Site B, the teacher taught writing 200 to 400 minutes per week.

The second question read, "In order of importance, which subject do you incorporate writing into daily?" At Site A, the three teachers chose language arts as the most important and social studies as the second most important subject area. Two of the teachers chose math and one teacher chose science as the third most important. Two of the teachers chose science and one teacher chose math as the fourth most important. At Site B, the teacher chose language arts as the most important, social studies as the second, math as the third, and science as the fourth most important.

The third question read, "Do you feel you are trained to teach the three types of writing?" All the teachers at both sites said yes.

The fourth question read, "What types of writing do you teach in your classroom?" At Site A, three of the teachers taught narrative and expository writing and only two taught persuasive. At Site B, the teacher taught narrative and expository writing.

The fifth question read, "What components of the writing process do you focus on most often?" At Site A, two of the teachers said they focused on: brainstorming, prewriting, the first draft, editing/revisions, and publishing. The other teacher focused on brainstorming and the first draft. At Site B, the teacher focused on brainstorming, prewriting, the first draft, editing/revisions, and publishing.

The sixth question read, "What is the overall attitude on writing in your classroom?" At Site A, two of the teachers thought the attitude was neutral and only one thought the attitude was positive. At Site B, the teacher thought the attitude was neutral.

The seventh question read, "Do you feel that your students need more motivation to write?" At Site A, two of the teachers said somewhat, and one teacher said yes. At Site B, the teacher said yes.

The eighth and final question read, "Which of the following writing interventions do you use in your classroom?" At Site A, all of the teachers used teacher conferencing, writing portfolios, graphic organizers, and writing prompts. In addition, one teacher used pen pals and another teacher used peer conferencing/editing. At Site B, the teacher used graphic organizers and teacher conferencing.

Probable Causes

In reviewing the data, it is evident, the targeted 3rd and 5th grade classes are not able to write at grade level. Their skills are not adequately developed. Students may be facing one or more probable causes including: lack of modeling of writing, lack of background knowledge, instruction with one emphasis, lack of motivation, and inconsistencies in instruction.

People learn when taught through demonstration. Learning to write is one such act. Students with fewer exposures to literacy have a more difficult time reading and writing. Children who have seen few demonstrations of writing in their homes have had even fewer conversations about writing. Naturally, children with little history of home or school writing experiences will require the most focused teaching, the opportunities to see writing demonstrated, and to actually experiment with writing themselves (Allington, 1994). Students coming from an environment where literacy is reinforced, have a natural interest in learning to read and write. Modeling at school is equally important. Teachers who model writing often have the most success with teaching writing.

Background knowledge is another important link to success in the area of

writing. The children who have visited museums, traveled, and participated in many events will have a larger base knowledge to draw upon than the child who does not have the background knowledge. It is much easier for the child who has had life experiences, such as the ones mentioned, to draw upon those experiences when writing. Children's first writings, often times, rise from their own experiences.

Instruction with one emphasis is another probable cause to be considered. Writing instruction is commonly taught in isolation of other subjects. It is a separate class where students are taught rules of language, such as: capitalization, punctuation, or paragraphing. This isolated setting does not provide a situation where students can apply writing to "real-world" situations. They do not see the connection between writing and reading processes. Children who are successful at becoming good writers view writing as an authentic activity from which they get information and can communicate with others (Allington, 1994, p.21).

Literature suggests that students' attitude toward writing is another probable cause for their unsatisfactory performance. Some students will say they do not like to write, others show that they do not like to write through the stories they produce. Calkins (1986, p. 4) says, "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." Calkins suggests that students will be motivated to write when they are writing about topics important to them, thereby making writing personal and interpersonal.

It was apparent that there were inconsistencies in instruction with prior teachers. All the previous teachers at both sites had not exposed their students to the various types of writing: narrative, expository, and persuasive writing. Also, the previous teachers did not spend equal amounts of minutes in the area of language

arts.

Probable causes gathered from the literature and from the sites include: lack of modeling writing, lack of background knowledge, instruction with one emphasis, and lack of motivation. All of these factors contribute to the inadequate writing skills and will be taken into account when the action plan is derived and implemented.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

As stated in Chapter 1, interest in students' writing ability is widespread. There has also been a great interest in writing instruction recently that has provided us with many major studies on how children develop as writers (Calkins, 1986). Many states are devising state tests to assess students' writing skills. With this interest in writing there has been a shift in focus from product based instruction in writing to process based instruction.

With many states requiring state-wide testing, most teachers are at a disadvantage, as they are unfamiliar with the criteria by which these tests are scored. Teachers need to better understand the necessary components of a writing test so they can help students improve their scores. Terms for assessing writing vary, but basically each state is looking for the same elements of good writing: focus, elaboration (support), organization, integration (style), and conventions. These terms need to be taught to the students so they understand the meaning and how it will be assessed both in the classroom and on state-wide assessments.

Although free-style writing is wonderful, it does not necessarily focus on the nuts and bolts of writing. Some other crucial elements of good writing are: organizational skills, focused writing, grammar, and spelling. Organizational skills involves paragraphing, indenting, and having a beginning, middle, and end in an essay. Focused writing means maintaining the topic that is being written. Finally, using correct grammar and spelling in a paper are also important. These elements of good writing do not just naturally occur, they need to be taught. If they are not stressed early on, many students will continue making the same mistakes over and

over (Rose, 1999, p. 5).

Teachers need to model good writing. Students need to see teacher-made examples as well as student-made examples. Just as teachers demonstrate themselves as readers, they also want to demonstrate themselves as writers. In kindergarten and early first grade, these demonstrations take place mostly in small-group and whole-class settings, with the teacher writing in front of the children. However, once students can write without teacher intervention, it works well if the teachers write at least several times a week in their own journals at the same time the students are writing. Also, teachers do not mark papers during sustained silent reading. Journal writing is best used only for writing if we want students to understand the message that this kind of writing is a valued activity (Routman, 1991).

Another important key to successful writing is repetition. Gretchen Courtney (Personal Communication, Jan. 10, 2001), a former teacher now speaker on teaching students to succeed in writing, has stated how important it is for students to practice a certain type of writing through mini-lessons. She believes for students to fully understand how to write a specific type of writing, they need to practice it twenty-five times. She also recommends shorter, teacher directed writing lessons because of the fact that students have the tendency to lose interest quickly.

Students' understanding of procedures used to engage in writing can affect the quality of writing they do. Process writing is an approach to teaching writing that allows students to take charge of their own writing and learning. As each of the five steps are introduced to students they must be modeled, guided, and supported by the teacher until the students take charge of their own writing (Cooper, 1993). The five steps of process writing are pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. As students learn the process, they grow into writers and come to think of themselves as

authors.

Frequently, the five step process is organized into a Writer's Workshop in the classroom. The first step of the writing process is pre-writing. The pre-writing step is when a student plans what they are going to write about using a graphic organizer. The second step drafting, is where the student actually writes the paper. The third step is revising. At this step, the student, the teacher, or peer reads the student's paper and recommends ways to improve the wording of the paper. The fourth step, editing, is where the student has a teacher or peer proofread their paper.and the student makes the necessary changes. The fifth step is publishing. The student writes their final copy. The Writer's Workshop approach furthers the students' understanding of the writing process. A student who understands the instruction procedures in the writing process has more potential for taking advantage of the time and support offered (Rhodes, 1993).

Although the five step writing process is the scaffold for writing, research has shown that each individual has a composing process which may slightly deviate from the five steps. Every person has strategies for composing and rhythms of work that are drawn upon whenever one has to write. Therefore, teachers can best assist writers when they observe them writing and discover what works best for that individual writer. The discovery that individuals has a composing process led to the recognition that all writers follow a process of craft when they work, much as researchers follow the scientific method (Calkins, 1986).

When teachers understand the writing process they can help their students understand, invent, and adapt effect writing strategies. It is critical that teachers acknowledge the process. The basic elements of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing should all be a part of writing. However, students may not

always follow them sequentially (Routman, 1991). Students may meander back and forth through the steps allowing the writing or what they think they want to say, lead them. Flexibility in the writing process as well as large blocks of time are important in writing.

The writing process approach requires a radically different pace in classroom structure then teachers are used to in their schools. If students are going to become deeply invested in their writing, and if they are going to draft and revise, sharing their text with each other as they write, they need the luxury of time. If they are going to have the chance to do their best, and then to make their best better, they need long blocks of time (Calkins, 1986).

Taking time for oral sharing promotes language development, inspires confidence, and gives reluctant writers possible topics from which to choose. Oral language is used as a tool for learning and is integral to successful journal writing. While some students are talking about what they might write about, others are developing and practicing good listening skills and getting ideas for their own writing. The oral language time also allows the teacher the opportunity to probe and guide the student to awareness of what he already knows but may not know he knows. Initially, some teachers feel guilty about taking time for oral language, but oral language is critical and gives students a framework for writing (Routman, 1991). Sharing time is important because it validates and gives children an audience. It is the "show-off" stage. Almost all young children enjoy the opportunity to read their journal entries and talk about their illustrations. Sharing seems to work best when it is voluntary (Routman, 1991).

It is often very difficult to get students to revise their writing. Most students are generally pleased with their first draft and do not see the point of working on it further.

This leaves educators, with the question: If teachers want children to own their writing should they insist that the children refine it? (Tully, 1996, p.7) Answering this question is not easy. Teachers respect their students' instincts about their writing and worry that if they intervene in the process, some children will get the message that they writing is not good enough and will stop writing.

On the other hand, some teachers have come to the conclusion that elementary students are just not developmentally ready to revise their work. In her book, Literacy at the Crossroads (Tully, 1996, p. 7), noted educator Regie Routman says,

> There's no incentive for a student to revise unless the writing is for a purpose or the student chooses or values what they wrote. Be realistic about revision. Don't expect kindergarten and first-grade children to do much revision. Children in grades two and above can handle revision if they are taught the skills that enable them to do it and if revision is presented to them as a process of developing - rather than correcting - writing. Kids have to know it is not about correcting errors, but making their meaning clear."

As Donald Murray has said in Shoptalk: Learning to write with writers, "If educators accept a student's first draft as is, the child misses out on the heart of the writing process." He or she misses the opportunity to extend the piece and make it even better, and also misses the chance to grow as a writer and a thinker (Tully, 1996, p. 8).

When students finish their rough draft, they are often ready to write their final copy omitting all the other steps of the writing process. For revision to take place, a teacher-student writing conference is crucial. Many teachers try so hard to be helpful they forget to be real. They forget to listen. When teachers confer with writers they

often worry so much about asking the write questions. That is why they forget to listen. They focus on asking the questions that will draw out more information, not realizing that it is listening that creates a magnetic force between writer and listener. The force of listening will draw words out; writers will find themselves saying things they didn't know they knew. The first job in a conference, then, is to be a person, not just a teacher (Calkins, 1986).

Children learn to read and write by reading and writing. Therefore, reading and writing are the actual modes or forms of instruction for which the skills of reading and writing develop. The students gain the skills through application. Researchers have verified the importance of extended writing as the major way in which students develop their ability to use grammar and learn to spell. Independent writing helps to make literacy and exciting process in multiple ways. It is important because while writing they are thinking, explaining, their knowledge base, and activating prior knowledge. When they are critical readers of their writing they learn to self-edit which leads to improvement of their writing skills (Cooper, 1993).

When students are subject to modeling at home and at school, they get a better sense of the need for writing. As Graves (1994, p. 44), noted revolutionary of the writing process, says,

> We need to show children why writing matters in our lives, and how we draw writing ideas from every day events. I can this "reading the world". I demonstrate how writing is connected to wonder. I show how I chose details. In doing so, I begin to answer that toughest question for the child. "Why should anyone want to write?"

Parents and teachers demonstrate that they are writers themselves and are an extremely powerful means for communicating the importance of writing to children.

Students often write their essays with little forethought about main events or sequence. Students sometimes do not know how their essays will end before they finish writing. Modeling lessons that use graphic organizers help students plan what they want to write from beginning to end.

A major part of helping children become effective writers is keeping them motivated and excited about their learning. Motivation may come from within the students themselves or be fostered by the teacher, other students, or their experiences. Motivation is not created by a single activity that the teacher conducts. Rather it is created and sustained by several factors inherent in a classroom learning environment which produces students who are interested in learning to read and write. Within this environment, students take ownership for their learning and come to feel that they have the right to chose what they learn and to manage their learning in cooperation with the teacher and their peers (Cooper, 1993).

All teachers have had their "bag of tricks" which are meant to motivate writing. teacher-led activities may stimulate writing but they do not help students become personally involved in their writing. Intrinsic motivation would happen when writing is personal and interpersonal. The teacher's job is to acknowledge that each student comes to class with ideas, concerns, memories, and feelings. Students need to have freedom o write about what is important to them Calkins believes that all humans have an urge to write, a teacher needs to be skilled to tap into that urge. That urge can be taped into if teachers help students realize that their lives are worth writing about and if teachers help students choose their topic, their genre, and their audience (Calkins, 1986).

This literature review covered strategies which transform students into writers. When teachers recognize individuals' writing processes, provides skill and strategy

instruction in writing, and arrange regular times for authentic writing, students gain confidence in themselves and their abilities to write.

Project Objectives and Processes

While reviewing the literature it became apparent that the experts in the area of writing agree on several key points in the development of writing skills. Therefore the following action plan will be implemented. As a result of incorporating the writing process during the period of September 5, 2000 through February 5, 2001, the students in the targeted third and fifth grade classes at the elementary schools will improve their writing skills as measured by writing portfolio scored by a writing rubric.

In order for the terminal objective to be accomplished, the following process objectives are necessary:

1. Teach the necessary components of a quality essay.
2. The five step writing process approach will be implemented with an emphasis on editing.
3. Use graphic organizers as a planning tool for writing.
4. Teach how to write a narrative, expository, and persuasive essay.
5. Teach the concepts and skills necessary for assessing writing.

Project Action Plan

While reviewing the literature, it became apparent that teaching how to write a quality essay through the use of the writing process is important to build students' writing skills. Students will learn the necessary components to a quality piece: indentation, punctuation, paragraphing (introduction, body, supporting details, and conclusion). The writing process incorporates many of the critical components of a successful writing program, including the three types of writing: narrative, expository, and persuasive. It allows students to choose a topic, follow a sequential process, and learn to evaluate their writing and that of their peers. Graphic organizers will be used to model quality writing. The outline below lays out the researchers' action plan:

I. September

A. Previous teacher interview and survey

B. Distribute parent survey

C. Administer student survey

D. Complete teacher observation writing checklist

E. Pretest narrative writing prompt will be administered and holistically scored

F. Introduce the necessary components of a quality essay

G. Work on narrative essay by modeling

H. Work on a writing piece with the use of a graphic organizer

I. Begin collecting writing pieces for portfolio

J. Students write goals biweekly in the area of writing

K. Introduce writing program to parents at Open-House

L. Include in newsletters to parents information on writing program

M. Begin teacher/student conferencing

October

A. Introduce proofreading marks

B. Introduce descriptive writing

C. Begin peer-editing process

D. Reinforce writing skills

E. Introduce expository essay writing

F. Introduce more types of graphic organizers

G. Write expository essay about friend

H. Use dialogue and quotation marks in writing

I. Continue teacher/student conferencing

J. Students write goals biweekly in the area of writing

K. Include in newsletters to parents information on writing program

L. Continue collecting writing pieces for portfolio

November

A. Introduce, model, and write a persuasive essay

B. Introduce more types of graphic organizers

C. Parent-teacher conferences

D. Continue teacher/student conferences

E. Continue peer editing process

F. Students write goals biweekly in the area of writing

G. Continue collecting writing pieces for portfolio

H. Include in newsletters to parents information on writing program

December

A. Teach self-editing and self-evaluation

B. Introduce report writing and write a report

C. Continue collecting writing pieces for portfolio

D. Organize portfolio event scheduled for January

E. Students write goals biweekly in the area of writing

F. Continue teacher/student conferences

G. Include in newsletters to parents information on writing program

January

A. Review narrative, expository, persuasive and report writing

B. Review various type of graphic organizers

C. Give post parent and student surveys

D. Review writing skills

E. Review assessment components

F. Post-test writing prompt will be administered and holistically scored

G. Complete teacher observation writing checklist

H. Final reflection of progress based on biweekly goals

I. Include in newsletters to parents information on writing program

J. Hold portfolio event for parents

Methods of Assessment

Writing samples, report card grades, teacher observations, student surveys, previous teacher surveys, and parent surveys will be used to assess the effectiveness of the project. Their writing samples will be evaluated by tools of assessment used in the beginning of the project. Students will be asked to complete the survey the first week of the project implementation and a post test. Answers to the survey will be compared and evaluated for understanding of the writing process as well as students attitudes toward writing.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve writing skills of the targeted third and fifth grade students. This was done through: the implementation of a five-step writing process, the concepts and skills necessary for a quality essay, the use of graphic organizers as a planning tool, and a focus on multiple types writing selected to effect the desired changes. The interventions were implemented September 5, 2000 through February 5, 2001 with few alterations. Each writing lesson at both sites took several days and were taught in 40 minute blocks.

Initially in September, the students at both Sites were taught how to write an expository essay. Originally the researchers were planning to write a narrative essay as the action plan had stated. The researchers began the lesson by showing the students a model essay which they had written. The essay prompt was to write three interesting things about yourself. The researchers brought in their paper bags with three things inside that would tell about themselves along with an essay they had written. The researchers read their essays as they introduced the objects they had brought. Then, the students were able to bring in their own three favorite things to write about. The students were excited about the prompt and eager to share what they had in their paper bags. Each paragraph of the essay was taught by introducing a topic sentence and closing that the students could model. The students also began to learn indenting, paragraphing, punctuation, and capitalization. While the students were writing their essays, the researchers at both sites began implementing teacher/student conferencing. Teacher/student conferencing continued throughout the project.

After they had completed their essays, the students wrote goals for themselves on what they needed to work on with their writing. The students were able to write goals (Appendix I) based on the writing checklist and writing rubric that they would receive during each writing experience. The checklist and writing rubric were explained to the students to inform them of what was expected in their essays. The students continued to write goals throughout the implementation of the project after each essay they had finished instead of writing them biweekly. This seemed to be more effective because the students were able to look at their essays and see what they needed to improve. Although, the students did write a weekly newsletter (Appendix J) to their parents explaining what they had learned recently in all subjects, including writing. Having the students write their own newsletters helped to reinforce writing skills.

The second prompt the students were given introduced narrative writing. The prompt was for the students to write about a time he/she got a haircut. As an opening to the lesson, the students were read a model story and asked to identify elements such as the title, the introduction, and closing. They were also asked to point out describing words, where capital letters were used, and when the author indented. Next, the classes looked at a graphic organizer, used for circle writing, to summarize the story they had read. Circle writing is when the author uses something in the closing paragraph that was mentioned in the introduction. The students wrote a brief description of what each paragraph was about in the graphic organizer. The purpose of making a graphic organizer for a model story was so that the students would be able to see what would be expected of them when making their own graphic organizer. Then to begin teaching the writing process, starting with prewriting, the students wrote their own graphic organizers about a particular haircut they

remembered. The students had also brainstormed a list of hair words that they may use in their essays and were taught paragraph by paragraph how to write their essays starting with the use of onomatopoeia in the introduction. Each body paragraph, including the closing, were written by the students using their graphic organizers. The researchers had suggested to the students that their use alliteration in their essays or titles. Throughout the implementation of the project, the students wrote titles for their essays after finishing each essay. Also, the same type of graphic organizer was used in each lesson.

At the end of September, both sites introduced the writing program at Open-House to the parents. The parents were also given information about what the students would be learning and how they could help proofread their child's papers by using the same proofreading marks that the researchers used in class. The parents were also made aware of the fact that the students would be collecting their writing pieces in a portfolio.

In October, the third piece of writing the students were taught was another narrative. The students' prompt for Site A's essay was to tell about a time he/she had lost a tooth. Site B used the prompt the time he/she was hurt or scared. Again, these were prompts on topics the students could relate to. The students were taught alliteration, used circle writing again, the proofreading process, and how to write a closing. All the students began the lesson by filling out a graphic organizer. Again the students were taken through the process of writing each paragraph step by step. The last thing the students did was to create a title using alliteration.

Next the students at both sites were reintroduced to expository writing. The students' at Site A were given a prompt to tell how to eat an Oreo cookie. This lesson focused on expository writing as a process-writing what must be done first, second,

and third to complete a task. This lesson also involved using onomatopoeia which if used correctly and creatively can help the quality of the piece. The students began the lesson by eating an Oreo cookie. Before they ate the cookie, the students were to brainstorm a list of words to describe what the cookie looked like using their five senses. The researchers wrote these descriptions on chart paper for the students. As the students ate the cookie slowly, they continued to give the researchers their observations. When the students had finished their cookies, the researchers asked the students how the cookies were using descriptive words other than good. This lead into showing the students how to edit by using a delete and carat mark for substituting better descriptive words in their stories. At the end of each essay the students had written, it was recommended by the researchers that they use the carat mark to add five descriptive words to their essays. Finally, the students were shown a model story, wrote their own stories, staring with making a graphic organizer. The students were able to either use the model introduction, change the model introduction, or make up their own. As for the following paragraphs, the students were able to write them by on their own by using their graphic organizers and list of descriptive words.

The students at Site B wrote an expository essay on a holiday and it's traditions. The students were asked to select their favorite holiday and elaborate on three events that occur on that holiday. The students began the lesson by brainstorming about different holidays and their traditions. The students were shown a model essay. They selected their holiday of choice and began with a circle graphic organizer as a pre-writing strategy. They worked through the steps of the writing process and wrote a final expository writing piece. Later they presented their essays in front of their peers as a culminating activity.

At both Site A and Site the researchers facilitated by walking around the room, checking for indenting, paragraphing, and transition words. The students were reminded of circle writing when writing their closings. When the students' finished their essays, they were asked to proofread their own essays and then switch with a partner. Having the students read each other's papers led to teaching the students about peer-editing and the use of proofreading marks.

The next lesson the students were taught was how to elaborate. The students took their first essay, of three interesting things about themselves, and had elaborated more about each thing. The students were shown a model essay with elaborations. Then, the researchers had taught them elaboration starters, transition words used for elaborating. The students took their original expository essays about themselves and had to cut and paste their new elaborations to their introduction and closing. Some other skills that were reinforced with this lesson were indentation, paragraphing, use of carats for insertions, and proofreading.

Another expository piece the students learned how to write was not about themselves, but about their best friend or hero. This lesson continued to reinforce the skills from the previous lessons along with learning how to write an introduction using dialogue and quotation marks. Each lesson, up to this point, had taught additional skills. Each additional lesson was formatted to give the students less assistance leaving the students responsible for implementing the process. The students developed a list of best friend qualities, made a graphic organizer, wrote their essays, revised, and proofread them with a partner.

At the beginning of November, the students were taught how to write a persuasive essay by the researchers. The essay prompt was for the students to decide which was a better pet to have a dog or cat. The students had to try and

convince the reader by listing advantages why one pet was better than the other. Then they were shown a model story, made a graphic organizer, wrote their essays, revised, and proofread them with a partner. To reinforce persuasive writing, the researchers gave the students another persuasive prompt. The students' prompt was to write whether or not students should receive homework on the weekends. The same format was followed as for the previous persuasive essay.

The final lesson taught in December, was to reinforce self-editing and self-evaluation. The students had read an expository essay and indicated on the essay where various elements were located. The students also gave the researchers advice on how the author could improve his essay. Reviewing an essay gave the students concrete examples of when where and how to improve a piece of writing. Then, the students were asked to repeat this activity by editing a piece of their own writing. A chart was provided for the students with tips to use for editing.

In January, the researchers reviewed with their students: the different types of essays, the steps of the writing process, how to make a graphic organizer, the writing skills implemented, and how they will be assessed. The researchers at both sites also had sent home the students portfolios for the parents to review. The researchers realized that the contents of the portfolio would take some time to review. Therefore, it was decided that it was best to send the portfolio home with the child instead of holding a portfolio night as in the action plan. The parents were also given a reflection (Appendix J) to fill out. Many of the parents were impressed with the work the students had done.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Writing samples, report card grades, teacher observations, student surveys, previous teacher surveys, and parent surveys were used to evaluate the effectiveness

of the project.

The students at both sites were given the same writing prompt (Appendix A) they used for the pretest. The students had a 40 minute time block to plan, organize, write, and revise their paper. The prompt was assessed in two ways, by the writing checklist (Appendix B) and a scoring rubric (Appendix C).

As stated in Chapter 2, the writing checklist included nine skills grouped into two categories: organization and conventions. Organization assesses how logically and well developed ideas are presented. Conventions assesses the use of standard English. The checklist is not number-based or letter-based because it is used to assess, not grade, a piece of writing. It aided in identifying where the students were developmentally: an emerging writer, a developing writer, or an experienced writer. The emerging writer would receive a minus on the checklist indicating the writer had "not yet" attained the skill. The developing writer would receive a check mark indicating that the student is doing "okay", which means that they were showing evidence of the skill, yet it is not fully understood or correctly applied. The student writer may apply the skill occasionally but not consistently. The experienced writer received a plus which indicated the student was doing "good". This meant the student had mastered the skill and it is present throughout the piece. As the observation checklist was applied, the observer would consider the student-author's abilities and approaches to writing.

The results of the checklist indicated the students at Site A and Site B showed growth in each of the two categories: organization and conventions. Within each of those areas, there are specific skills defined. The improvement on the specific skills varied.

The posttest checklist showed that at Site A the area of organization was the

strongest area for the group as a whole. Initially, most of the students did not do well and now most are at either a mastery or developing level. Out of the 20 students, 18 are now at a mastery level in indenting compared to only one student at a mastery level on the pretest. Also, there were 14 students who performed at a mastery level in paragraphing, where in the pretest none of the students demonstrated these skills.

Specifically at Site A in the area of organization, Figure 24 showed that 14 of the students put their paper correctly into paragraphs which meant it was 'good', none showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and six of the students demonstrated that paragraphing was still 'not yet' attained. Where in the pretest, all of the students had 'not yet' attained paragraphing skills.

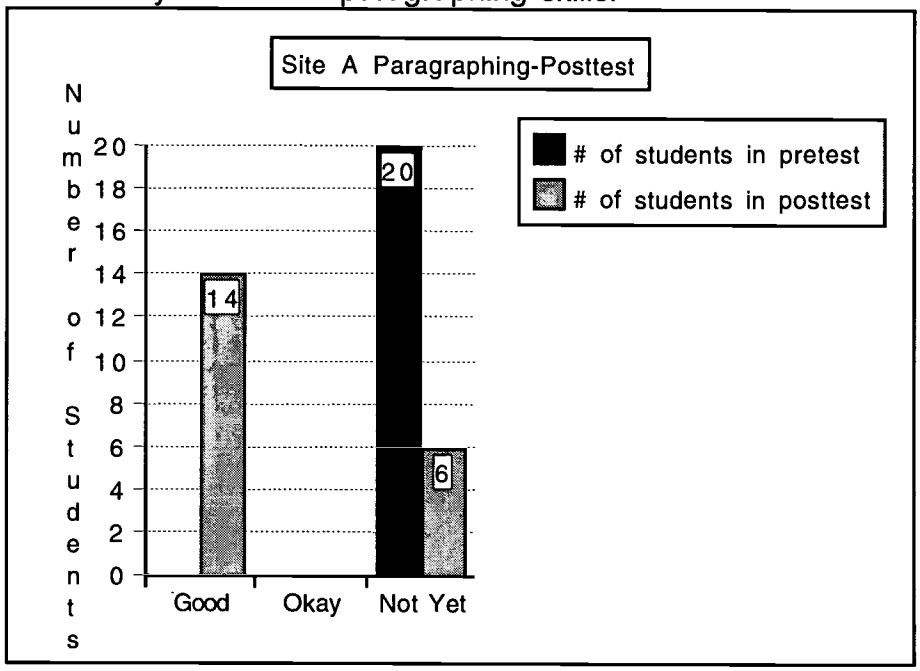

Figure 24. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site A for paragraphing.

In Figure 25 at Site A, showed that only 18 students indented all of the paragraphs which meant it was 'good', one of the students showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and one student had 'not yet' attained the skill. Where in the pretest, only one student indented all of the paragraphs which meant it was 'good' and 19 had 'not yet' attained the skill.

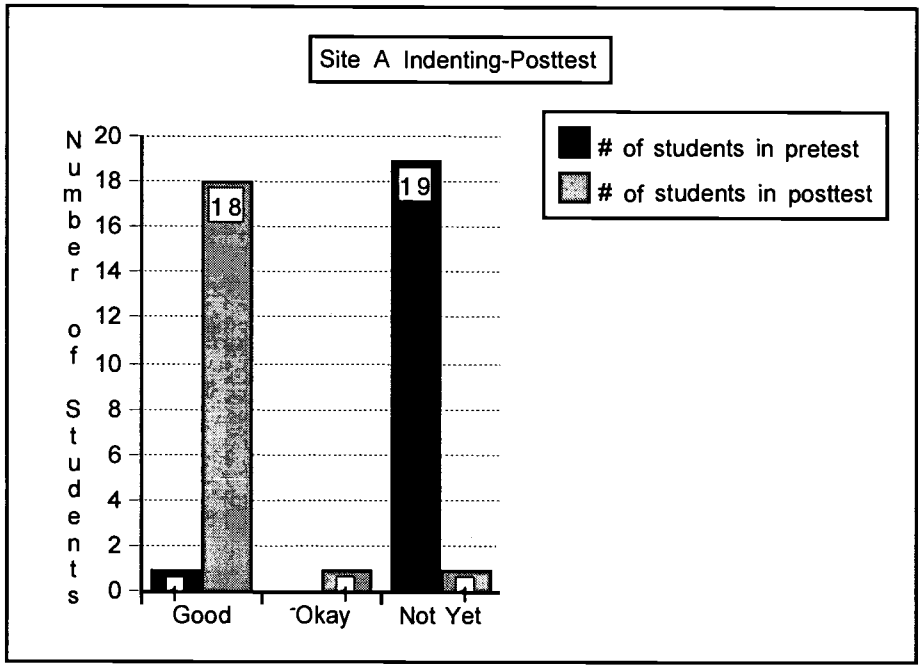

Figure 25. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site A for indenting.

In Figure 26 at Site A, of the 20 students, 10 had a 'good' introduction, five showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and five had still 'not yet' attained the skill. Where in the pretest, six had a 'good' introduction, four showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and 10 had still 'not yet' attained the skill.

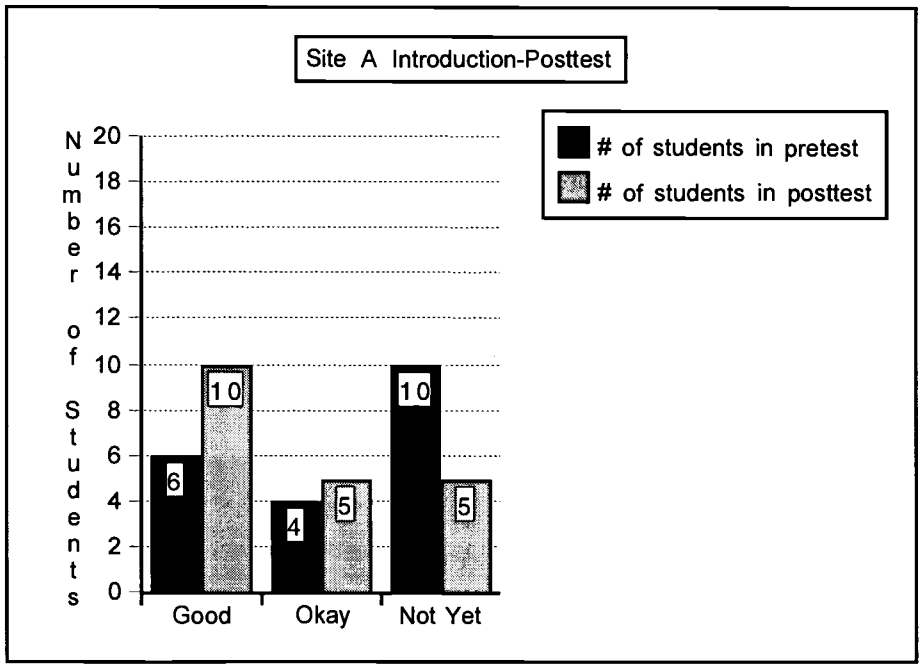

Figure 26. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site A for the introduction.

In Figure 27 at Site A, there were four students who had a 'good' body, eight showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and eight had 'not yet' attained the skill. Where in the pretest, two students had a 'good' body, six showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and 12 had 'not yet' attained the skill.

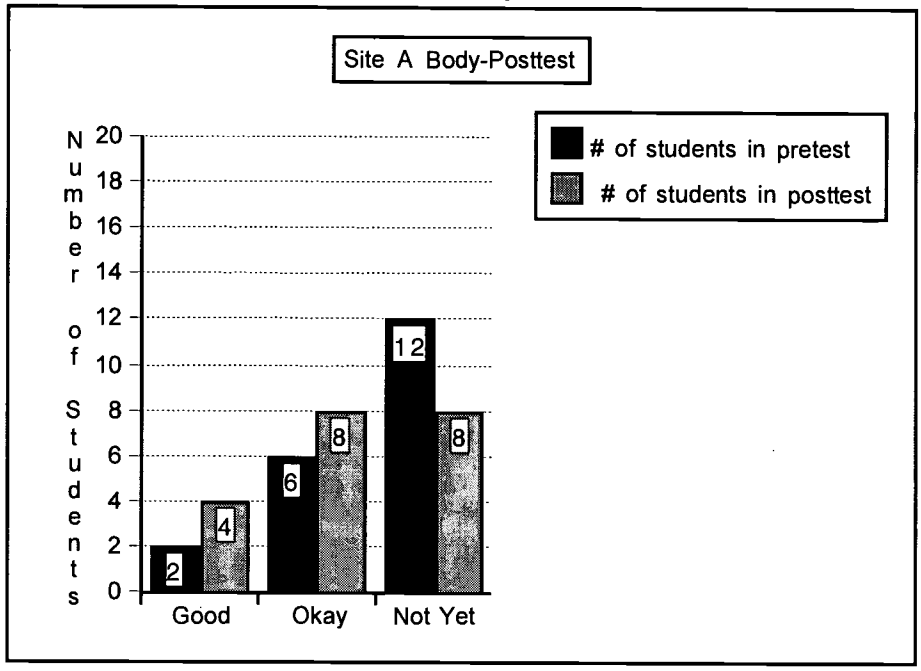

Figure 27. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site A for body.

Finally, in Figure 28 at Site A, three of the students had a 'good' closing, eight showed some evidence of a closing which would equate to 'okay', and nine had 'not yet' attained the skill. Where in the pretest, two of the students had a 'good' closing, three showed some evidence of a closing which would equate to 'okay', and 15 had 'not yet' attained the skill. This seemed to be the most problematic area for students within the area of organization.

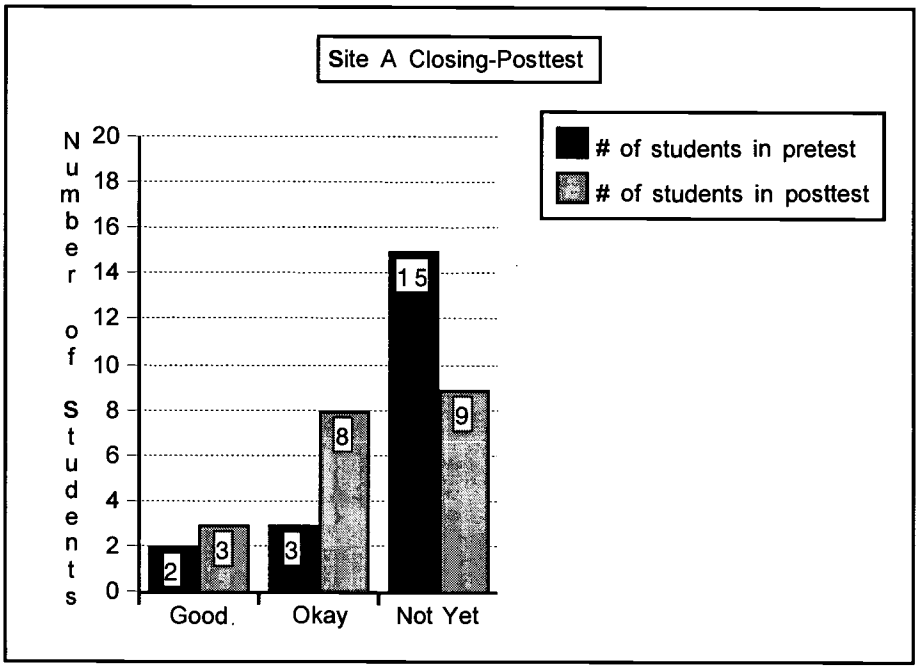

Figure 28. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site A for the closing.

Student performance at Site A in the area of conventions improved slightly when applying the writing principles of punctuation, grammar, spelling, and capitalization. Of the 20 students, 13 students performed at a mastery level of writing in the area of capitalization. This was the overall best improvement in the area of conventions.

Beginning with punctuation, Figure 29 at Site A, seven students 'good' punctuation, 12 showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and one had 'not yet' attained punctuation skills. Compared to the pretest, this showed more students were developing their punctuation skills. In the pretest, seven students 'good' punctuation, five showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and eight had 'not yet' attained punctuation skills.

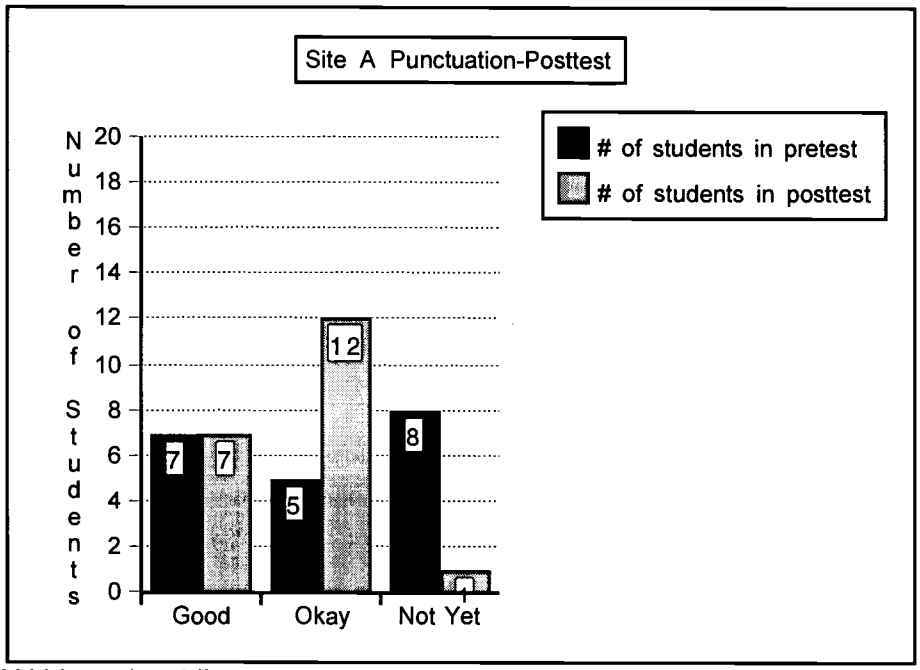

Figure 29. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site A for punctuation.

In Figure 30 at Site A, one of the students were at a mastery level with using 'good' grammar, 15 showed 'okay' evidence of the skill, and 4 had still 'not yet' attained good grammar skills. Here again, while not all the students were at a mastery level in grammar, many were at a developing level. Where in the pretest, none of the students were at a mastery level with using 'good' grammar, eight showed 'okay' evidence of the skill, and 12 had still 'not yet' attained good grammar skills.

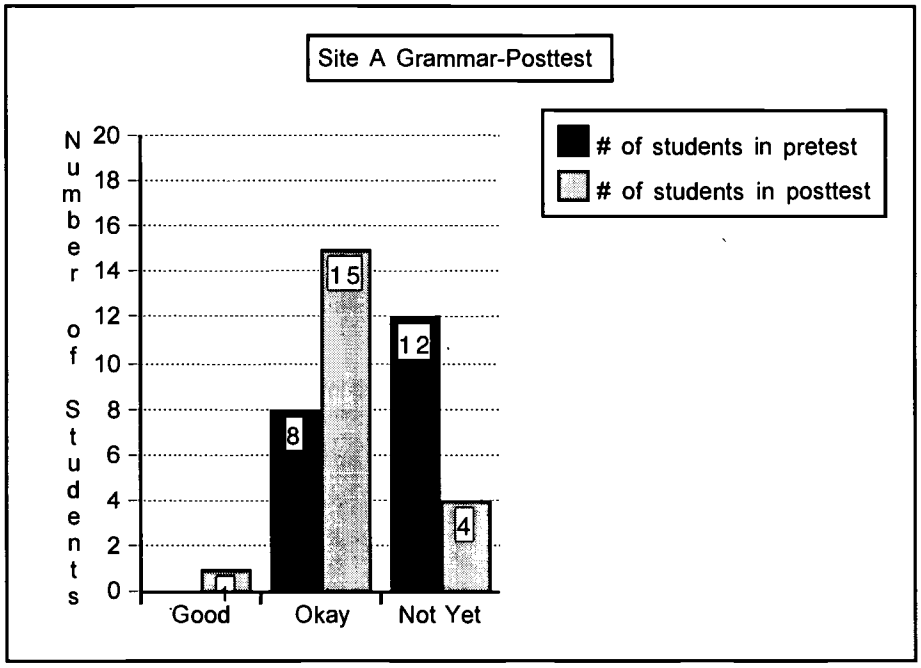

Figure 30. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site A for grammar.

In Figure 31 at Site A, out of the 20 students, four of the students had mastered 'good' spelling, 10 have showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and six had 'not yet' attained spelling skills. Where in the pretest, none of the students had mastered 'good' spelling, eight have showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and 12 had 'not yet' attained spelling skills. This area showed that twice as many students moved from emerging writers to developing and experienced writers.

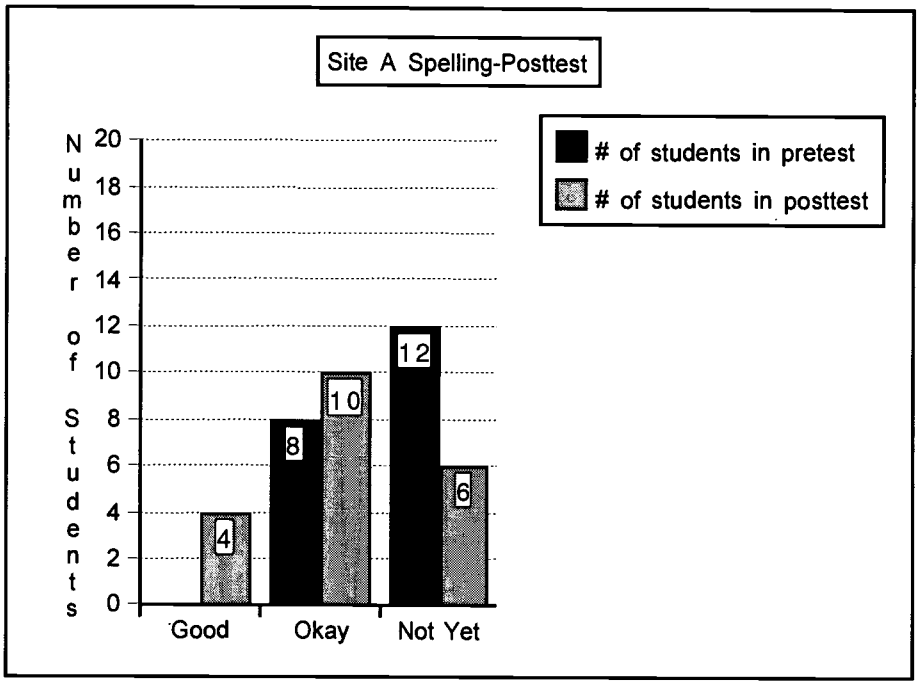

Figure 31. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site A for spelling.

Finally, in Figure 32 at Site A, there were 13 students who mastered 'good' capitalization and seven students showed evidence of the ability to capitalize correctly which would equate to okay. All of the students were now at either a developing or mastery level. Where in the pretest, there were nine students who mastered 'good' capitalization, eight students showed evidence of the ability to capitalize correctly which would equate to 'okay', and three who had 'not yet' attained capitalization skills.

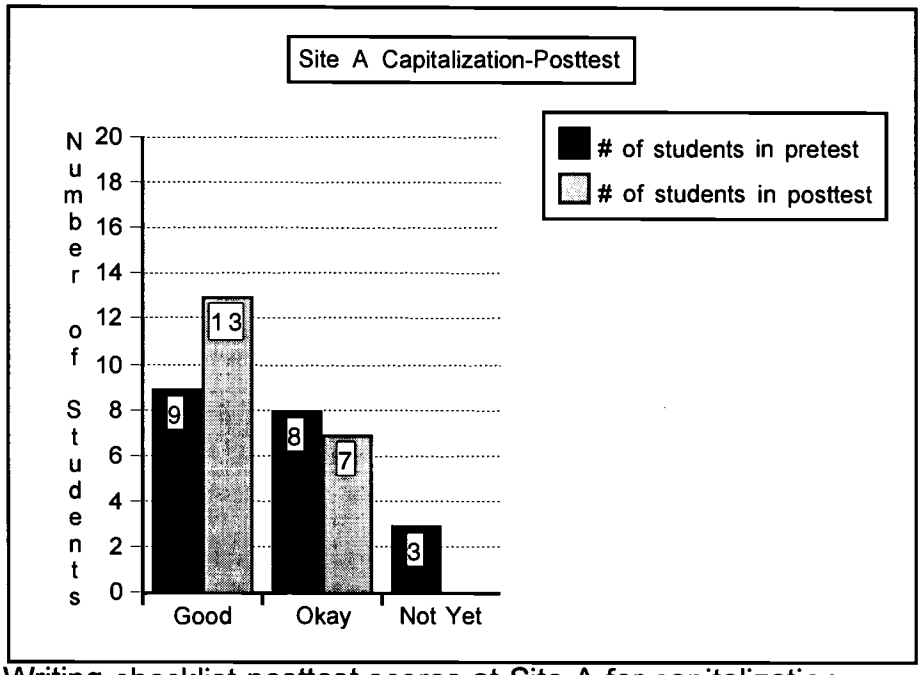

Figure 32. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site A for capitalization.

The results of the writing checklist showed that the students at Site B were also strongest in the area of conventions. In particular, 21 students had mastered capitalization. There were 12 students that performed at a mastery level of writing in all areas.

Specifically at Site B in the area of organization, Figure 33, showed that 21 of the students mastered 'good' paragraphing, and one student showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay'. One of the students demonstrated that paragraphing was still 'not yet' attained. Where in the pretest, none of the students had mastered 'good' paragraphing.

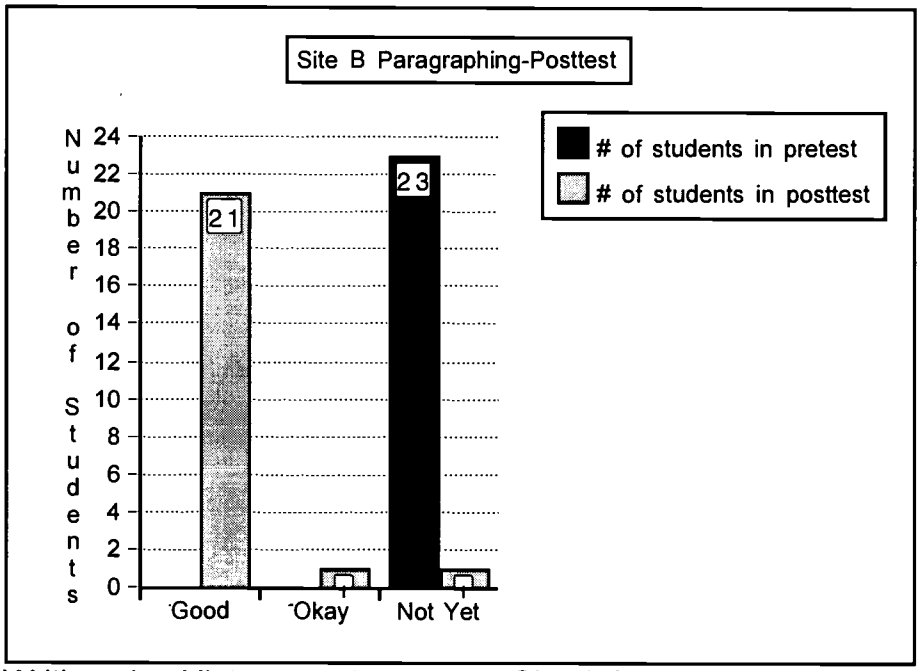

Figure 33. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site B for paragraphing.

In Figure 34, 12 students at Site B indented all their paragraphs which meant it was 'good', four showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and seven had 'not yet' attained the skill. Where in the pretest, eight students indented all their paragraphs which meant it was 'good', five showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and 10 had 'not yet' attained the skill.

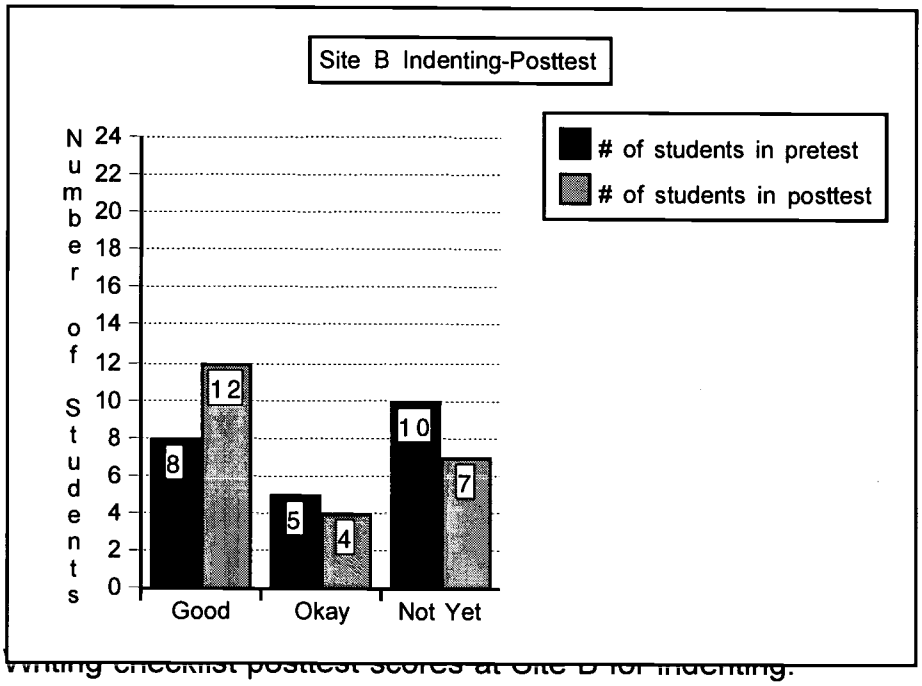

Figure 34. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site B for indenting.

In Figure 35, of the 23 students at Site B, 21 had a 'good' introduction, and two showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay'. Where in the pretest, three had a 'good' introduction, and 12 showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and eight had 'not yet' attained the skill.

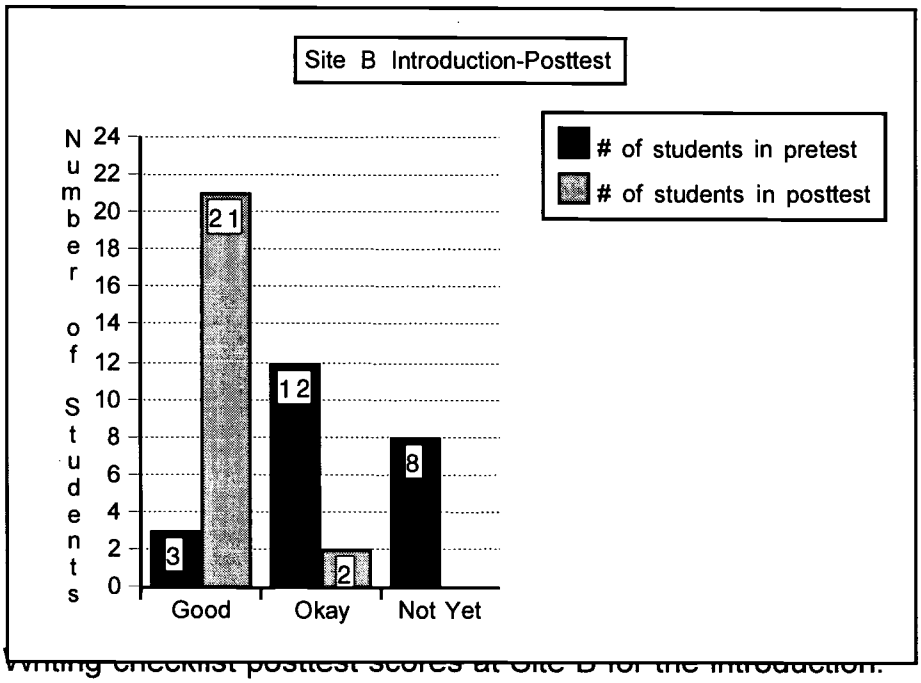

Figure 35. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site B for the introduction.

In Figure 36, 21 of the students at Site B had a 'good' body, and two showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay'. Where in the pretest, eight showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay' and 15 had 'not yet' attained the skill.

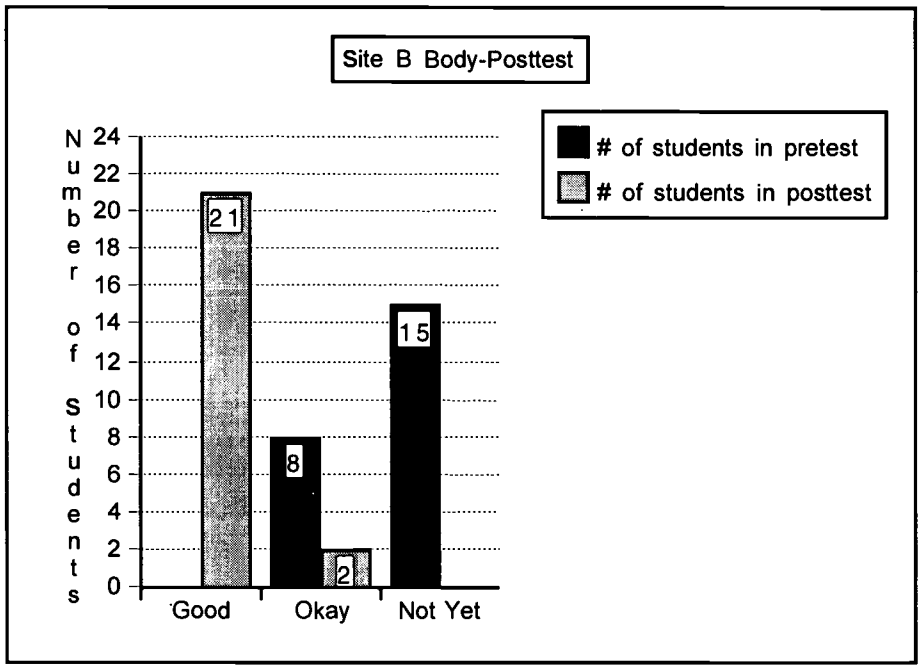

Figure 36. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site B for the body.

Finally, Figure 37, showed that 19 of the students at Site B had a 'good' closing, and four showed some evidence of a closing which would equate to 'okay'. Where in the pretest, nine showed some evidence of a closing which would equate to 'okay' and 14 had 'not yet' attained the skill.

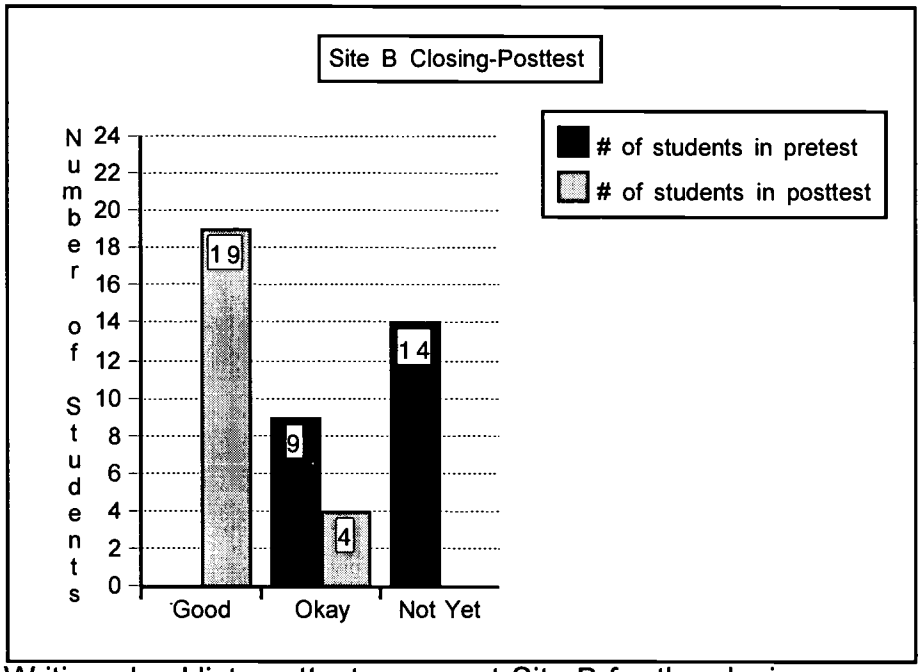

Figure 37. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site B for the closing.

Student performance at Site B in the area of conventions varied from high to low levels when applying the writing principles of punctuation, grammar, spelling, and capitalization. Of the 23 students, 14 students performed at a mastery level of writing in all areas of conventions. Beginning with punctuation, Figure 38, showed that 17 students had 'good' punctuation, and six students showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay'. Where in the pretest, five students had 'good' punctuation, 13 students showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay', and five had 'not yet' attained the skill.

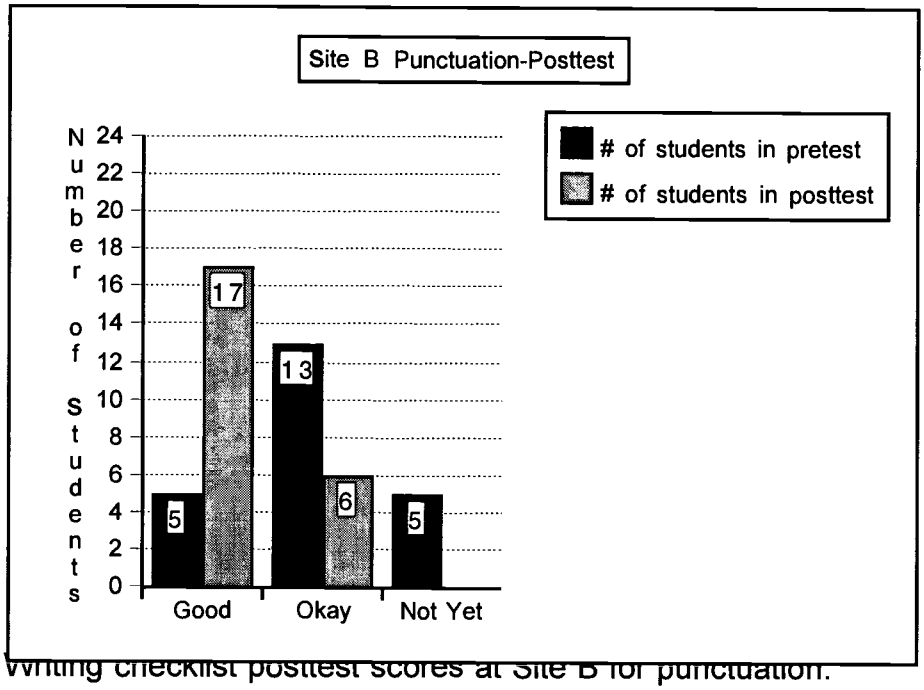

Figure 38. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site B for punctuation.

In Figure 39, there were 17 students at Site B who were at a mastery level with using 'good' grammar, and six showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay'. Where in the pretest, five were at a mastery level with using 'good' grammar, and 11 showed evidence of the skill which would equate to 'okay' and seven had 'not yet' attained the skill..

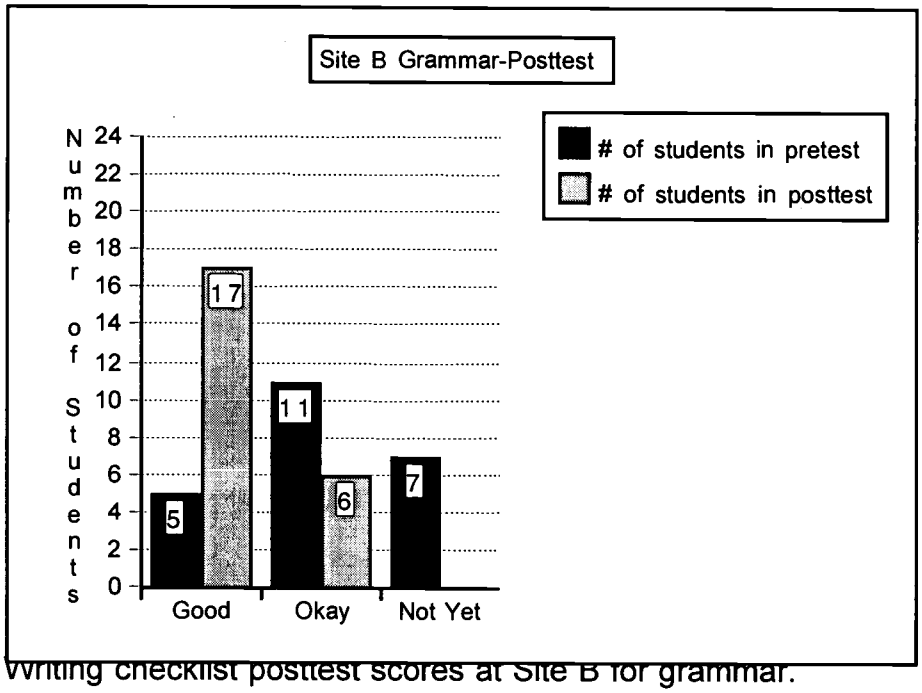

Figure 39. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site B for grammar.

Figure 40 showed that out of the 23 students at Site B, 14 mastered 'good' spelling, seven showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and two had 'not yet' attained spelling skills. Where in the pretest, four mastered 'good' spelling, 14 showed evidence which would equate to 'okay', and five had 'not yet' attained spelling skills.

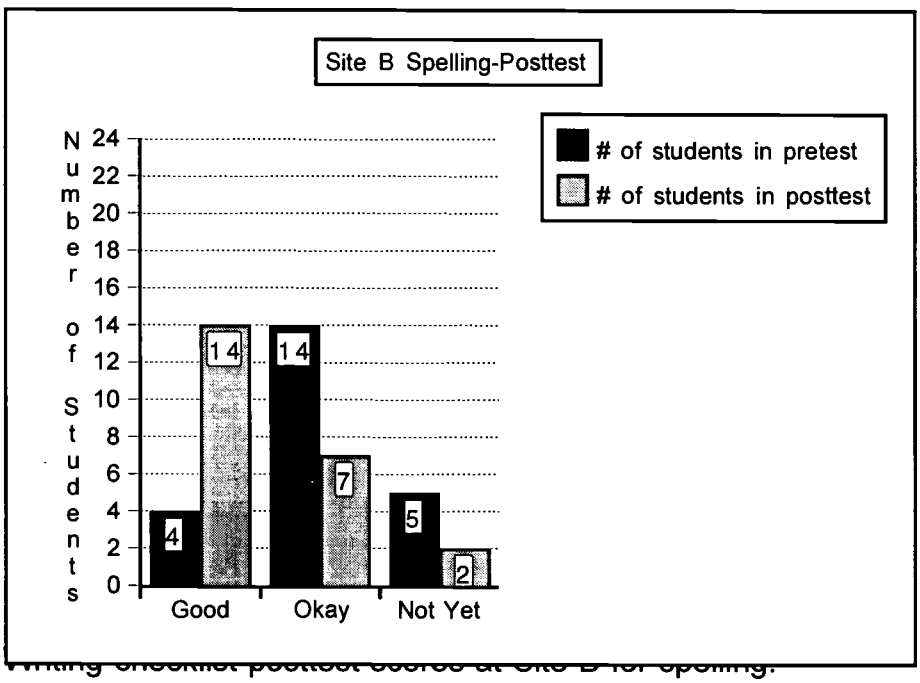

Figure 40. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site B for spelling.

Finally, in Figure 41, there were 21 students at Site B who mastered 'good' capitalization skills, and two students showed evidence of the ability to capitalize correctly which would equate to 'okay'. Where in the pretest, 10 students mastered 'good' capitalization skills, and eight students showed evidence of the ability to capitalize correctly which would equate to 'okay',and five had 'not yet' attained capitalization skills.

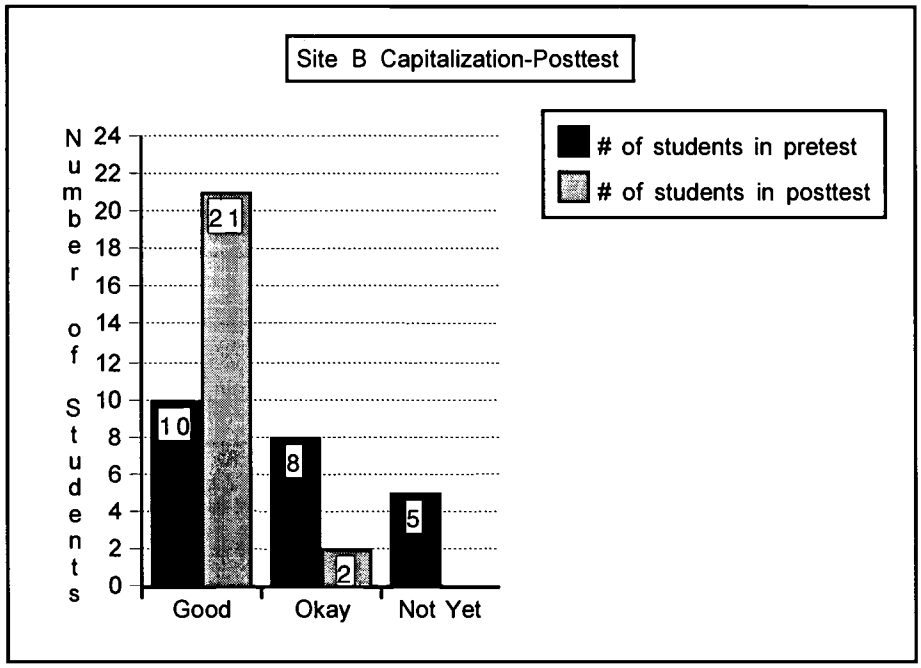

Figure 41. Writing checklist posttest scores at Site B for capitalization.

As stated in Chapter 2, the samples were also scored using the writing rubric. This rubric was designed to give a descriptive profile of the student's command of fundamental techniques of clear writing. The assessment also produces a focused, holistic score of style which reflects how well the composition as a whole accomplished the assignment. Similar to the writing checklist, this rating system considers the performance expectations of the student.

The student writing samples at both sites scored by the writing rubric revealed a significant improvement for the students in each of the five areas scored. The

students' writing samples at Site A scored by the writing rubric indicated that one student had received all points possible for their paper. The breakdown was as follows: one student received 10 points, three students received nine points, two students received eight points, two students received seven points, two students received six points, four students received five points, two students received four points, and four students received three points.

Figure 42, demonstrates the first feature, focus. This score determined eight out of 20 students at Site A had fully developed their focus. It also stated that 10 had a clear and effective beginning/ending. While 12 maintained the narrative topic. Where in the pretest, four students had fully developed their focus, six had a clear and effective beginning/ending, and nine maintained the narrative topic.

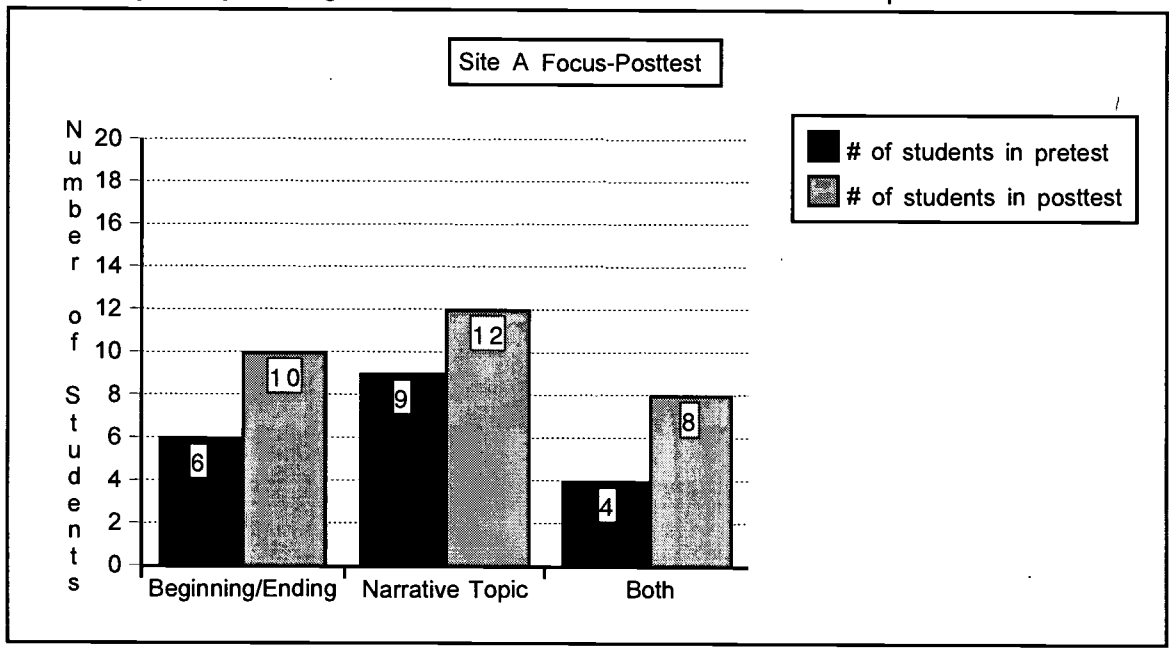

Figure 42. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site A for focus.

Scores for support, Figure 43, showed that 13 students at Site A had fully developed support. There were 20 students who had details and reactions, while 12 had elaborated in their essay. Where in the pretest, five students had fully developed

support, eight students had details and reactions, and six had elaborated in their essay.

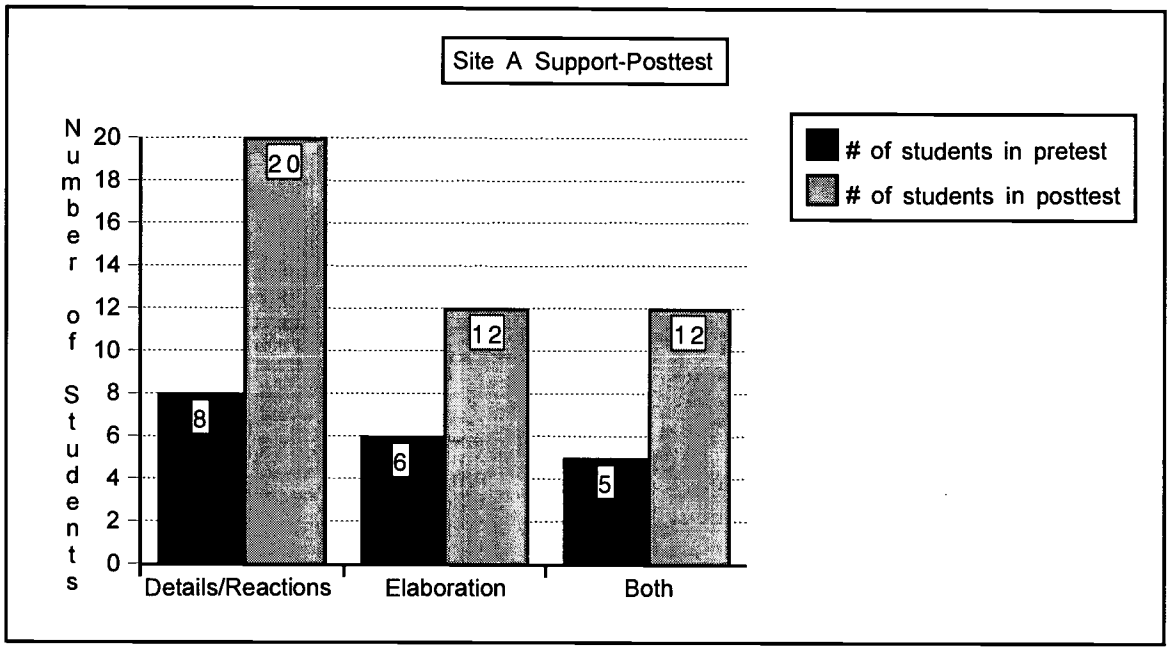

Figure 43. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site A for support.

The results on organization were similar. As Figure 44 demonstrated, eight of the students at Site A had fully developed organization. Of the 20 students, 12 had time order transitions and there were 14 students who had appropriate paragraphing. Where as in the pretest, only four of the students had time order transitions.

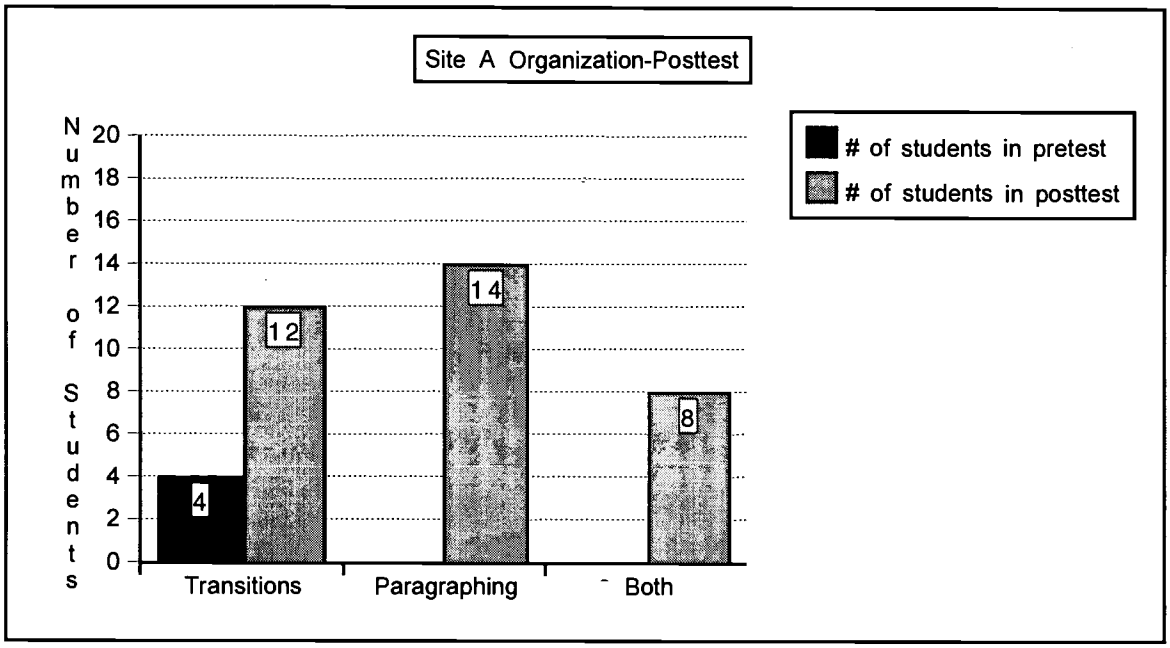

Figure 44. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site A for organization.

The collective group of students at Site A were more successful in the area of style. Style evaluates the paper based on good word choice and varied sentence structure. In Figure 45, six of the students had fully developed style. There were eight of the students who used good word choice. Also, nine of the students had varied sentence structure. Where as in the pretest, three of the students had fully developed style, seven of the students used good word choice, and three of the students had varied sentence structure.

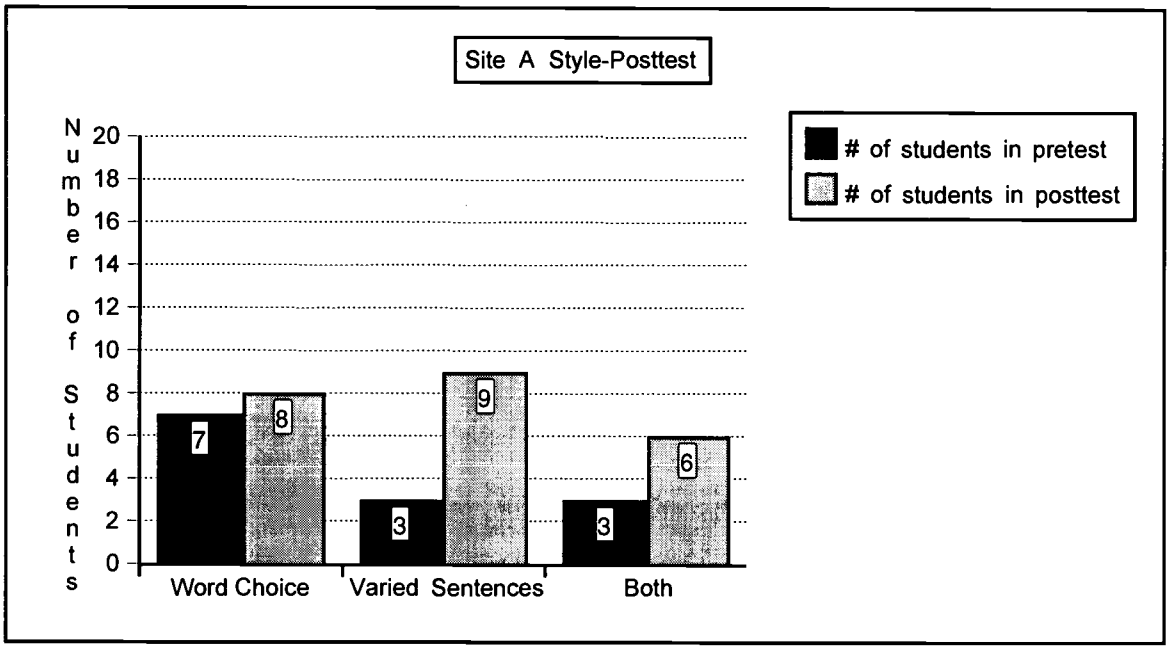

Figure 45. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site A for style.

The final feature assessed at Site A was conventions. A student who received "few errors", a total of three or less, in any of these areas: capitalization, punctuation, spelling and grammar, received two points. A student who had "some errors", a total of four to seven, in the same areas received one point. A student who had "many errors", a total of seven or more, received zero points. As shown in Figure 46, six of the students received two points for few errors. There were 10 students who received one point for some errors. Finally, four of the students received no points because they had many errors. Where as in the pretest, six of the students received two points for few errors, six students received one point for some errors and eight of the students received no points because they had many errors.

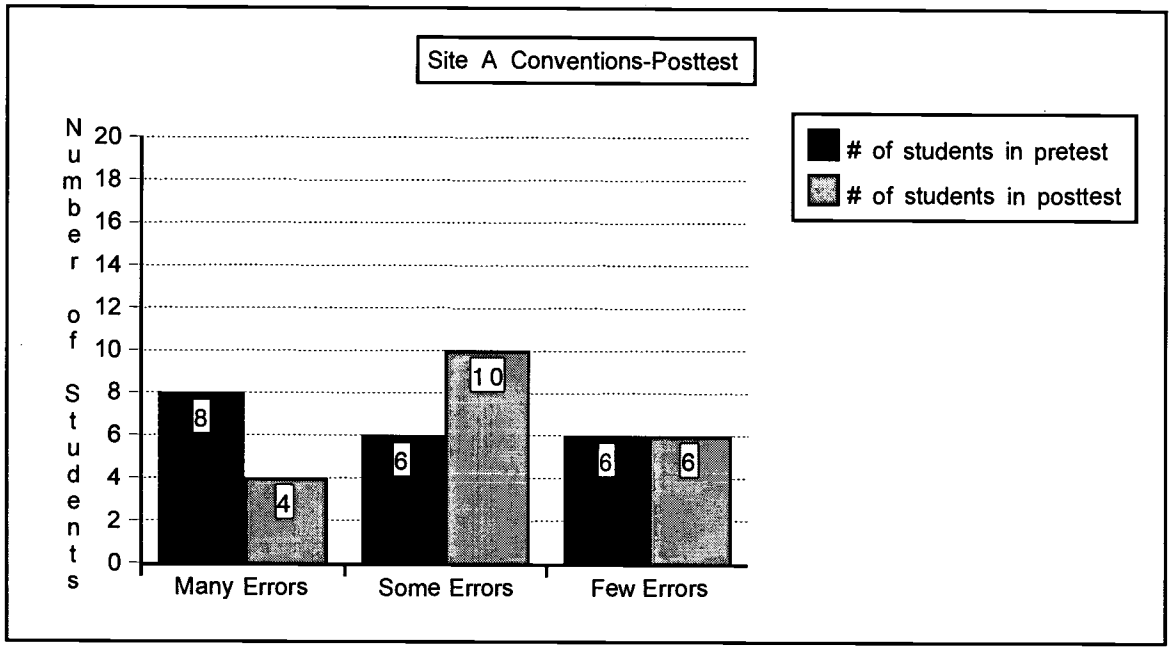

Figure 46. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site A for conventions.

The students' writing samples at Site B scored by the writing rubric indicated that seven students had received all points possible for their paper. The breakdown is as follows: seven students received 10 points, 10 students received nine points, three students received eight points, one student received five points, and two students received four points.

Figure 47, demonstrates the first feature, focus, for Site B. This score determined 21 out of 23 students at Site B had fully developed their focus. It stated that 23 had a clear and effective beginning/ending. While 21 maintained the narrative topic. Where as in the pretest, 10 had fully developed their focus, 13 had a clear and effective beginning/ending, and 10 maintained the narrative topic.

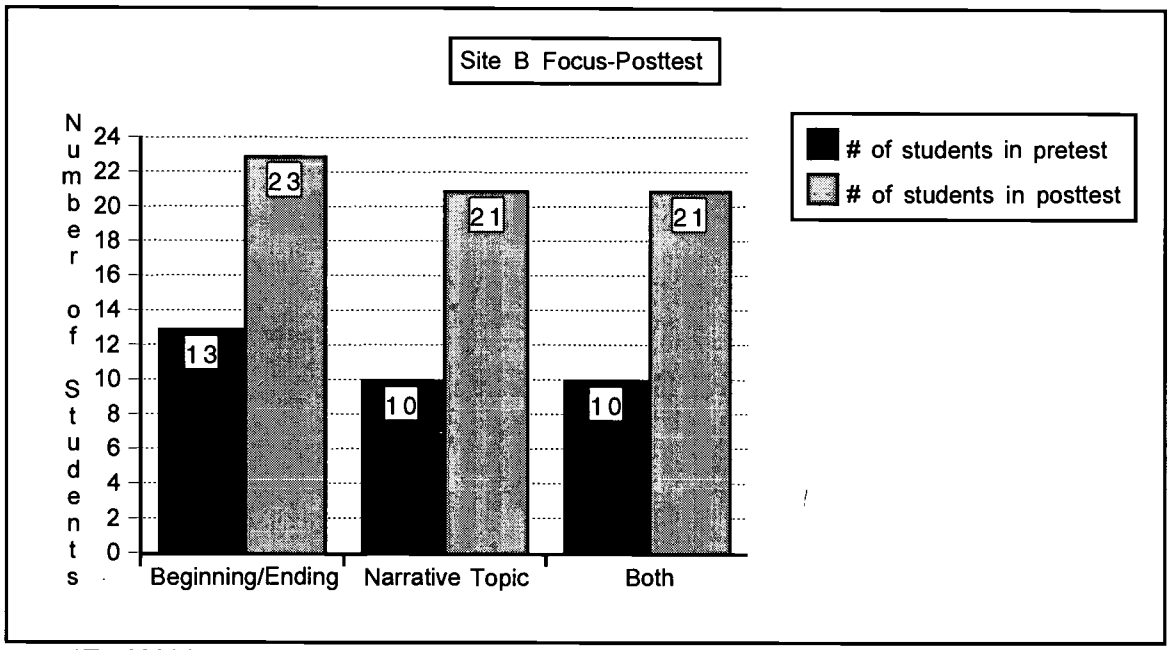

Figure 47. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site B for focus.

Scores for support at Site B, Figure 48, showed that 20 students at Site B had fully developed support. There were 23 students who had details and reactions. While 20 students elaborated in their essay. Where as in the pretest, one student had fully developed support, nine students who had details and reactions,and only one student elaborated in their essay.

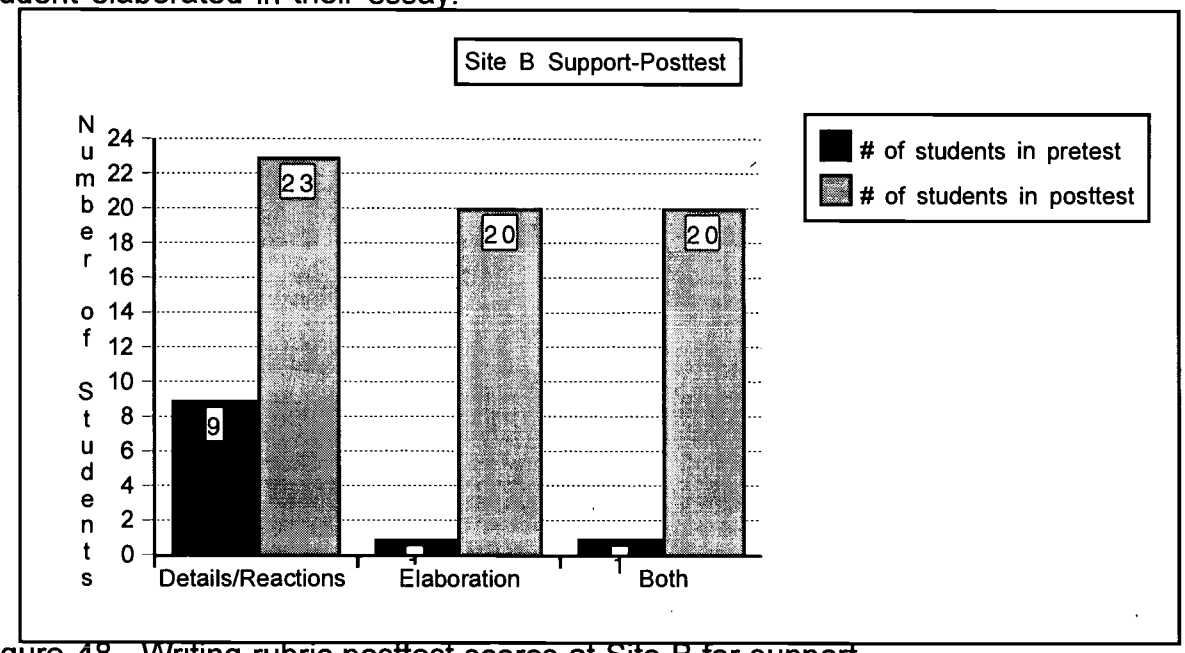

Figure 48. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site B for support.

The results on organization at Site B were also similar. As Figure 49 demonstrated, 16 of the students were fully developed in the area of organization. Out of the 23, 16 had time order transitions, and 21 of the students had appropriate paragraphing. Where as in the pretest, only one student had time order transitions.

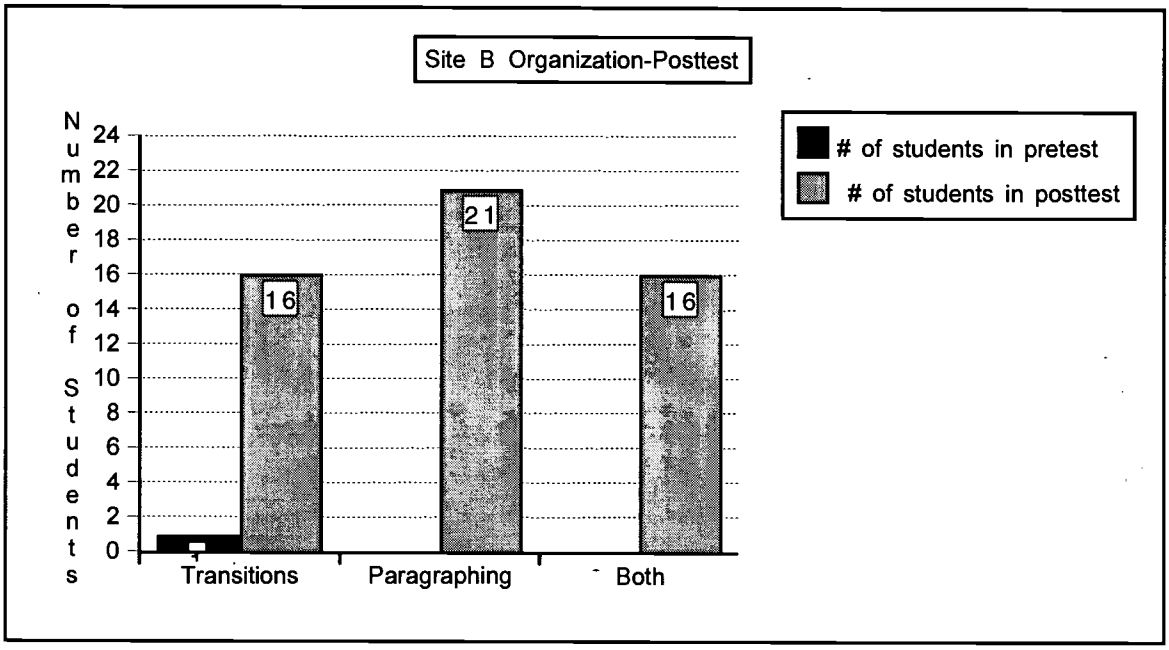

Figure 49. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site B for organization.

The collective group of students at Site B were more successful in the area of style. Style evaluates the paper based on good word choice and varied sentence structure. Figure 50 demonstrated that 15 of the students had fully developed style. There were 16 students that used good word choice. Also, 20 of the students had varied sentence structure. Where as in the pretest, one of the students had fully developed style, nine students used good word choice, and two of the students had varied sentence structure.

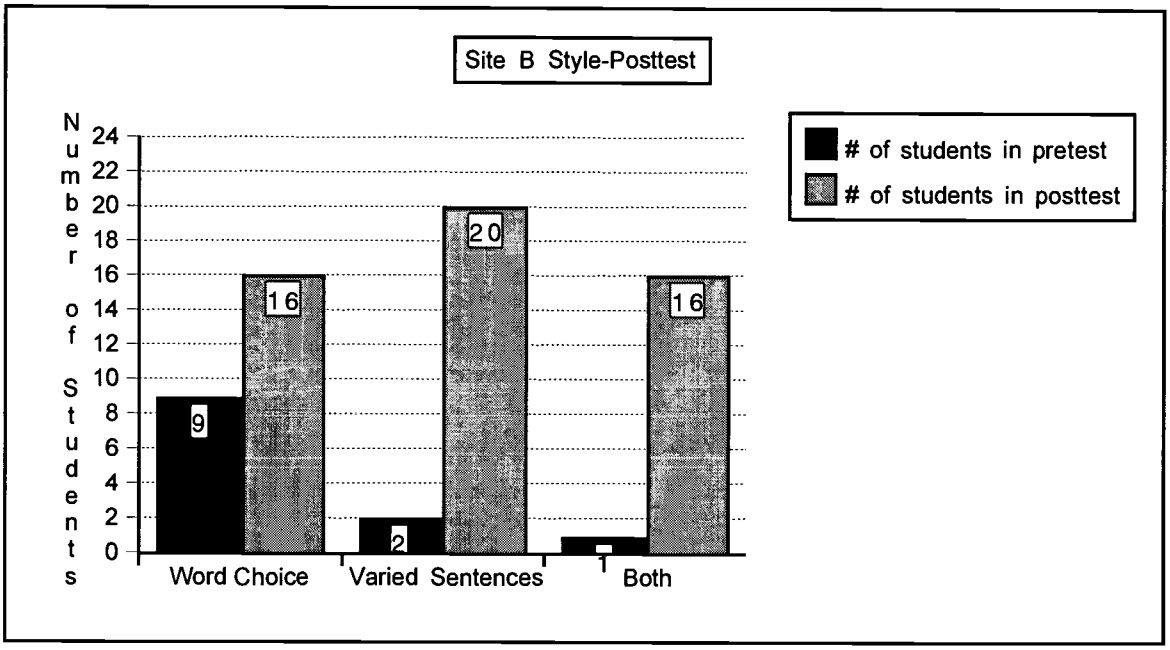

Figure 50. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site B for style.

The final feature assessed at Site B was conventions. As shown in Figure 51, 14 of the students received two points for few errors. There were seven students who received one point for some errors. The remaining two students received no points because they had many errors. Where as in the pretest, 11 of the students received two points for few errors, 10 students received one point for some errors, and two students received no points because they had many errors

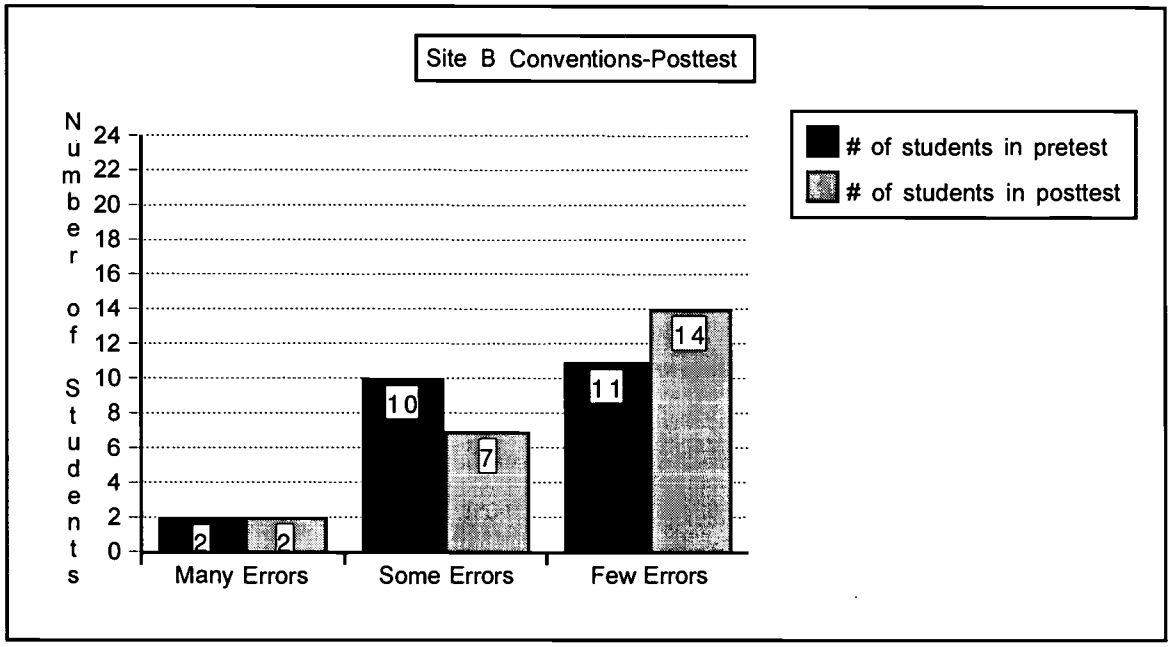

Figure 51. Writing rubric posttest scores at Site B for conventions.

At the end of the Action Research Project, the students were asked to complete the same writing survey they completed at the beginning of the project. The purpose of the survey was to find out how the children felt about writing, how they perceived themselves as writers, and if they knew about the writing process. There were six questions to the Student Writing Survey. These are the results from both sites.

• The first question read, "Are you a writer?"

Site A	Site B
20 students answered "yes"	20 students answered "yes"
zero answered "no"	three answered "no"

• The second question read, "Do you write everyday?"

Site A	Site B
10 students answered "yes"	12 students answered "yes"
10 answered "no"	11 answered "no"

• The third question read, "Do you write for fun?"

Site A	Site B
eight answered "yes"	four answered "yes"
eight answered "sometimes"	19 answered "sometimes"
four answered "no"	zero answered "no"

- The fourth question read, "Do you like to write?"

Site A	Site B
11 answered "yes"	10 answered "yes"
seven answered "somewhat"	11 answered "somewhat"
two answered "no"	two answered "no"

- The fifth question read, "Do you know and understand the steps of the writing process?"

Site A	Site B
12 answered "yes"	20 answered "yes"
five answered "somewhat"	three answered "somewhat"
three answered "no"	zero answered "no"

- The sixth question read, "Do you think you are a good writer?"

Site A	Site B
14 answered "yes"	13 answered "yes"
two answered "somewhat"	10 answered "somewhat"
four answered "no"	one answered "no"

At the end of the Action Research Project, the parents were asked to complete the same writing survey they completed at the beginning of the project. The purpose of this survey was to see how parents perceived their children as a writers, and if they encourage writing. The Parent Writing Survey consisted of eight questions. These were the results of both sites.

- The first question read, "Does your child write at home beyond required homework?"

Site A	Site B
five answered "almost always	seven answered "almost always"
12 answered "sometimes"	13 answered "sometimes"
three answered "never"	three answered "never"

- The second question read, "Do you encourage your child to write at home?"

Site A	Site B
nine answered almost "always"	10 answered almost "always"
11 answered "sometimes"	13 answered "sometimes"
zero answered "almost never"	zero answered "almost never"

- The third question read, "Does your child enjoy writing letters, stories, poems, etc.?"

Site A	Site B
six answered "almost always"	10 answered "almost always"
nine answered "sometimes"	12 answered "sometimes"
five answered "almost never"	one answered "almost never"

- The fourth question read, "Do you talk about your child's writing with him/her?"

Site A	Site B
eight answered "almost always"	12 answered "almost always"
10 answered "sometimes"	11 answered "sometimes"
two answered "almost never"	zero answered "almost never"

- The fifth question read, "Do you enjoy writing letters, stories, poems, etc. at home?"

Site A	Site B
eight answered "almost always"	10 answered "almost always"
seven answered "sometimes"	11 answered "sometimes"
five answered "almost never"	two answered "almost never"

- The sixth questions read "Does your child see you writing at home?"

Site A	Site B
five answered "almost always"	six answered "almost always"
nine answered "sometimes"	15 answered "sometimes"
six answered "almost never"	two answered "almost never"

- The seventh question read, "Do you provide writing materials for your child?"

Site A	Site B
14 answered "almost always"	18 answered "almost always"
six answered "sometimes"	three answered "sometimes"
zero answered "almost never"	zero answered "almost never"

- The eighth and final question read, "Are you available to assist your child with rewriting if necessary?"

Site A	Site B
12 answered "almost always"	20 answered "almost always"
eight answered "sometimes"	three answered "sometimes"
zero answered "almost never"	zero answered "almost never"

Conclusions

Although this has been a time demanding implementation, it has been effective. The students at both sites have a better understanding of writing this year due to the "gradual release" method. The gradual release method is when students begin to write with a high degree of structure and modeling. As the students gradually increase their knowledge and mastery of new skills, they receive less guidance from the teacher. The basic steps were repeated lesson after lesson, each one offering new skills. Each lesson helped the students reach a higher level of skill development. Most teachers and schools that have used this method have

dramatically improved students' scores in writing. This approach has been very successful in even the most "at risk" schools, where many students are functioning far below grade level (Rose,1999). However, raising test scores are just an by-product of great instruction. The students may get higher writing scores, but they have also learned a valuable lifelong skill of being able to organize their thoughts and put them down on paper.

In the writing process, giving the students topics that they could relate to was very important. The students did best and were most interested in writing when the topic was about themselves or about something they had prior experience with. The topics were also related to areas throughout the curriculum that the students were studying. The students were able to write effectively and not say "I don't know what to write about". They were actually motivated.

Portfolios were a third important component. The portfolio was a tangible collection displaying the students' performance and growth in writing. Sharing their portfolios was an exciting event for the students. They exhibited pride in their writing. The students also understood and were using the proofreading marks. Now when the students would see proofreading marks on their paper, made by their teacher, they knew what they meant. The students could also proofread their own and other students papers. By reading and critiquing other students' writing, along with their own, they became more critical readers and writers.

The terminology used throughout the lessons by both researchers was consistent. The students became very familiar with the terms focus, elaboration (support), organization, integration (style), and conventions. These are terms used by the state and therefore very important for the students to understand. It was by these terms that the researchers based their criteria for evaluating the students. The

researchers at both sites had emphasized how important using the same terminology throughout the school and throughout the district is. Both sites are now taking this into consideration and making it a part of their schoolwide plan.

Another key component to the implementation was teaching the students the writing process. Breaking down the allotted time for writing into manageable sections made it easier for the students to concentrate and not be overwhelmed by the whole procedure. Repeating the steps of the writing process for each essay topic became routine and then easy for the students to remember.

The researchers found the implementation to be worth the time and energy it took to institute. When trying to implement the intervention again, several issues would need to be addressed. These issues lie in teacher/student conferencing, at risk students, and time.

Recommendations

First, teacher/student conferencing was a problem. It was very difficult to conference with all students when a question arose or when their writing needed to be checked to see if they were on the right track. The students, because of their various abilities, would finish their writing at different times or need help in different areas. There were so many management issues that needed to be addressed. A better management plan would have to be implemented to be able to meet the needs of all students.

Second, some of the students were at risk students. The students the researchers considered at risk students are students who are second language learners, below grade level, or do not care to write. More instruction is needed for these students. The possibility of having more mini, small group lessons could help these students. These students need more assistance with vocabulary and spelling

which hinder their writing. Some of these students also lack motivation and further strategies may be needed to get them interested in writing.

Third, time was a problem. Writing is a long process. Trying to fit in time for essay writing along with everything else in the curriculum was difficult. Even though the researchers were able to get through most of the action plan there still seemed to be shortness of time. If there were more time, some of the lessons could have been broken down into mini-lessons in areas that the students were having difficulty with. Pacing was also a concern. Some of the children caught on faster and would have been able to move at a faster pace, while others still needed assistance.

Despite the results, this has been an outstanding experience for both the researchers and the students. It was incredible to see most of the students enthusiastic about their writing and publishing quality pieces of work on a consistent basis. They explored more tips that would improve their writing than they would have been introduced to without the implementation. The students began the year as emerging writers and ended the year as young authors.

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AppendixA

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Narrative Prompt

Name _____

Narrative Prompt

There are many things we give people-such as gifts or advice. Sometimes it is a simple gift like a smile. Other times it is something like a present you put in a box and wrap. Think about a time when you gave something to someone.

Write a narrative paper about one time you gave something to someone. Tell what happened and how you felt about it.

Appendix B

Writing Checklist

Writing Checklist

Name_____ Date_____

Essay_____ Type_____

Key:	+ = Good	√ = Okay	- = Not Yet

Skills

Organization **Comments**

1. Paragraphing ☐ _____
2. Indenting ☐ _____
3. Introduction (beginning) ☐ _____
4. Body (middle) ☐ _____
5. Closing (end) ☐ _____

Conventions

1. Punctuation (commas, periods, colons, exclamation marks) ☐ _____
2. Grammar ☐ _____
3. Spelling ☐ _____
4. Capitalization ☐ _____

Narrative Quick Score Rubric

FOCUS	1 Point **Beginning/Ending are clear and effective**	1 Point **Narrative topic is maintained**	
SUPPORT	1 Point **Details/Reactions**	1 Point **Elaboration**	
ORGANIZATION	1 Point **Time order transitions**	1 Point **Appropriate paragraphing**	
STYLE	1 Point **Good word choice**	1 Point **Varied sentence structure**	
CONVENTICNS	0 Points **Many errors**	1 Point **Some errors**	2 Points **Few errors**

Appendix D

Student Survey

Student Writing Survey

Name:

Date:

1. Are you a writer?

   Yes No

2. Do you write everyday?

   Yes No

3. Do you write for fun?

   Yes Sometimes No

4. Do you like to write?

   Yes Somewhat No

5. Do you know and understand the steps of the writing process?

   Yes Somewhat No

6. Do you think you are a good writer?

   Yes Somewhat No

Appendix E

Parent Survey

Parent's Name:_____ Date:_____
Student's Name:_____

Parent Writing Survey

For each item circle your response:

1. Does your child write at home beyond required homework?
   almost always sometimes almost never

2. Do you encourage your child to write at home?
   almost always sometimes almost never

3. Does your child enjoy writing letters, stories, poems, etc.?
   almost always sometimes almost never

4. Do you talk about your child's writing with him/her?
   almost always sometimes almost never

5. Do you enjoy writing letters, stories, poems, etc. at home?
   almost always sometimes almost never

6. Does your child see you writing at home?
   almost always sometimes almost never

7. Do you provide writing materials for your child?
   almost always sometimes almost never

8. Are you available to assist your child with rewriting if necessary?
   almost always sometimes almost never

Appendix F

2nd Grade Teacher Interview

2nd Grade Teacher Writing Survey

Student Name	Strengths	Weaknesses	Comments

Appendix G

4th Grade Teacher Interview

4th Grade Teacher Writing Survey

Student Name	Strengths	Weaknesses	Comments

Appendix H

Teacher Survey

Teacher's Name:_____ Date:_____

Previous Teacher Interview

1. How many minutes per week do you spend on writing in your classroom?
   600-400 minutes 400-200 minutes 200-0 minutes

2. In order of importance, which subjects do you incorporate writing intc daily?
   ___Language Arts ___Social Studies
   ___Math ___Science

3. Do you feel you are trained to teach the three types of writing? (narrative, persuasive, expository)
   yes somewhat no

4. What types of writing do you teach in your classroom?
   narrative persuasive expository

5. What components of the writing process do you focus on most often?
   brainstorming prewriting 1st draft
   editing/revisions publishing

6. What is the overall attitude on writing in your classroom?
   positive neutral negative

7. Do you feel that your students need more motivation to write?
   yes somewhat no

8. Which of the following writing interventions do you use in your classroom?
   pen pals peer conferencing/editing
   teacher conferencing graphic organizers
   writing portfolios writing prompts

Appendix I

Writing Goals

Name_____**Date**_____

My Writing Goals

1. In writing, I am better at_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. I still need to work on_____

_____

_____

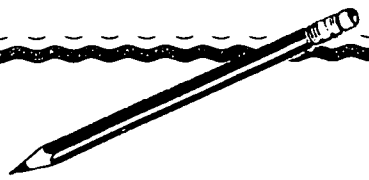
_____

_____

_____

Appendix J

Parent Reflection



Name of Reader: _____

Name of Writer: _____

Class: _____ Date: _____

Reader's Response

Check one box:

- ☐ Response to the following piece of writing
- ☐ Response to the Portfolio

Thank you for sharing your writing with me. Here is my response:

Reactions

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Questions

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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