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## ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving student abilities and attitudes toward writing through increased writing time and opportunities. The targeted population consists of second, third, fourth, and fifth grade students at the elementary level in a growing middle class community located in the northwest suburban area of Chicago, Illinois. The lack of interest and ability of students to express themselves through writing will be documented through the use of data collected by surveys and Curriculum Based Measurement. Analysis of probable cause review of literature reveals that students exhibit a reluctance to write due to a lack of teacher training, poor teacher attitude, students' poor writing skills, students' low self-esteem, structure of the school day, gender biases, and students' learning disabilities. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis in the problem setting, resulted in the selection of the following interventions: increasing writing time and journaling throughout the content areas to increase student motivation and writing abilities. Findings suggest that when students are given routine journal writing opportunities, as well as frequent opportunities to write throughout the content areas, their attitudes towards writing will improve and the amount they write will increase. Appendixes contain the student writing survey; curriculum based measurement prompts for each grade level; and consent letters. (Contains 30 references, 3 tables, and 27 figures.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING STUDENT ATTITUDES AND WRITING ABILITIES  
THROUGH INCREASED WRITING TIME AND OPPORTUNITIES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

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Saint Xavier University and IRI/Skylight

Field-Based Masters Program

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## ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving student abilities and attitudes toward writing through increased writing time and opportunities. The targeted population consists of second, third, fourth, and fifth grade students at the elementary level in a growing middle class community located in the northwest suburban area of Chicago, Illinois. The lack of interest and ability of students to express themselves through writing will be documented through the use of data collected by surveys and Curriculum Based Measurement.

Analysis of probable cause review of literature reveals that students exhibit a reluctance to write due to a lack of teacher training, poor teacher attitude, students' poor writing skills, students' low self-esteem, structure of the school day, gender biases, and students' learning disabilities.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis in the problem setting, resulted in the selection of the following interventions: increasing writing time and journaling throughout the content areas to increase student motivation and writing abilities.

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## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

#### General Statement of the Problem

The students in the targeted second, third, fourth, and fifth grade self-contained classrooms exhibited deficiencies in their writing abilities and lacked the motivation to effectively communicate through written expression. The evidence used to identify the problem included student surveys and writing samples. The purpose of this study was to improve students' writing abilities and their attitudes toward writing.

#### Immediate Problem Context

The researchers involved in this project are from the same school. It is important to have an understanding of the school demographics. Table 1 provides detailed information of the school's statistics.



Table 1

Project School Site Demographics

GENERAL INFORMATION	SITE
<u>Students/School</u>	
Location	Northwest Suburban
District Type	Public Large Elementary
Grades Enrolled	K-8
Enrollment	621
Mobility	5.0%
Attendance	93.6%
Low Income	9.5%
Limited-English-Proficient	6.6%
Chronic Truancy	0.5%
<u>Racial-Ethnic Background</u>	
White Non-Mexican American	86.2%
Mexican American	4.8%
African American	1.4%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7.6%
Native American	0.0%
<u>Instructional Setting</u>	
Average Class Size	23.3
<u>Daily Instructional Minutes</u>	
English	960 Per Week
<u>Special Services</u>	
Gifted Program	Yes
Special Education Program	Yes
ESL Program	Yes
<u>Staff/School</u>	
Principal	1
Other Administrators	1
Teachers	42
Speech Pathologist	1
Psychologists	1
Social Workers	1
Nurses	1
Aides	23
Support Staff	2

(Source: School Report Card, 2001).

## Local Context

A total of 621 students are enrolled in this site. Of the 621, 86.2% are White, 1.4% are African American, 4.8% are Hispanic, 7.6% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0% are Native American. Low-income students are 1.1% of the school's population, and 5.5% are limited-English-proficient students. The school has an attendance rate of 95.8%, mobility rate of 4.3%, and there is no chronic truancy (School Report Card, 2001).

The professional staff of this building numbers approximately 48% certified staff. This includes classroom teachers, special personnel, one principal, and an assistant principal. Of that population, 99.1% are White and the remainders are of Asian/Pacific Islander decent. There are 87.5% female staff, and 12.5% male staff (School Report Card, 2001).

This site is located in a northwest suburban area of a large city in the midwestern United States. It is one of two elementary schools in the district and houses identical grades of kindergarten through fifth. The new building, built in 1995, housed four classrooms for each grade level except for kindergarten, in which two rooms were designated. In 2002, this school has five sessions of each grade level, kindergarten through fifth, with two of the fifth grades housed in mobile classrooms outside of the

building. The building also contains four classrooms for resource education and one classroom for gifted education.

The school is equipped with a Macintosh computer lab and each of the 28 classrooms house four student desktop computers, with the exception of 10 classrooms, which have laptops. All classrooms have one teacher computer workstation. The computer lab and all classroom computers have Internet access and are networked with all other buildings in the district. All of the classrooms are wired with an overhead monitor that is connected to the teacher workstation.

The writing curriculum for this site was adopted during the fall of 2001. Currently, grades two through four use Harcourt Brace, 1999. The fifth grade uses Houghton Mifflin, 1999. Both writing programs have a language arts component in conjunction with the reading program. Reading, writing, spelling, and penmanship are taught within the allotted language arts time required by the district. Currently the school does not provide any extracurricular writing programs.

### The Surrounding Community

It is important to have an understanding of the community in which the school is located. Table 2 provides detailed information about the community's demographics.

Table 2

Project Community Demographics

COMMUNITY DATA	SITE
Population	53,211
<u>Racial-Ethnic Background</u>	
White Non-Mexican American	86.3%
African American	0.9%
Mexican American	6.1%
Other	6.7%
<u>Demographics</u>	
Median Family Income	\$88,165
Education-HS or Higher	85.1%
Median Age	39.1
<u>Housing</u>	
Single-Family Units	69.1%
Multi-Family Units	30.9%
Number of Households	20,087

(Source: Chicago Tribune.com, 2001).

## Community Setting

This site is in a suburban community outside of a major midwestern metropolis.

The metropolitan newspaper reports a population of 53,211 people. The community's population is made up of the following ethnic backgrounds: 86.3% White, 0.9% African American, 6.1% Hispanic, and the remaining ethnic backgrounds comprise 6.7% of the population (Chicagotribune.com, 2001).

The average age of a community member is 39.1 years old. The male population is 49.2% and the female population is 50.8%. The average household income is \$88,165.

The recorded number of employed residents is 71.1% and 26.5% are not in the labor force. The unemployed population is 2.4%. The housing is 69.1% single family units and 30.9% multi-family units (Chicagotribune.com, 2001).

The educational attainment of the population consists of 41.7% finishing twelfth grade or less, 27.5% finishing some college or holding an Associate's degree, 22.6% holding Bachelor's degrees, and 8.3% holding graduate degrees (Chicagotribune.com, 2001).

The main issues for the community are the completion of the downtown redevelopment, which affects the generation of more tax dollars, and the financial needs of the public library and the park district.

It is important to understand the district in which the school resides. Table 3 provides a synopsis of the district information.

Table 3

District Data

<u>SCHOOL DISTRICT DATA</u>	<u>SITE</u>
District Type	Large Elementary School
Geographic Region	Northwest Suburban
Enrollment	1,917
Total Number of Teachers	119
<u>Teacher Racial/Ethnic Background</u>	
White	98.3%
African American	0.0%
Mexican American	0.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.7%
Native American	0.0%
<u>Teacher Gender</u>	
Male	11.9%
Female	88.1%
<u>Teacher/Administrator Characteristics</u>	
Average Teaching Experience	13.0
Teachers With Bachelor's Degree	54.7%
Teachers With Master's Degree and Above	45.3%
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	19.5:1
Pupil-Certified Staff Ratio	14.7:1
Pupil-Administrator	239.6:1
Average Teacher Salary	\$48,123
Average Administrator Salary	\$103,268
<u>School District's Finances</u>	
Instructional Expenditure per Pupil	\$3,814
Operating Expenditure per Pupil	\$7,555

(Source: School Report Card, 2001).

The local school district for the community consists of three schools: two elementary buildings and one middle school building. The district spends \$10,760,612 on education and has an instructional expenditure of \$3,814 per pupil. The main issues for the district are the financial constraints due to the state tax cap and increasing student

enrollment, which has caused a need for additional classroom space. In addition, the board of education hired a new superintendent and assistant superintendent for special services (School Report Card, 2001).

### National Context of the Problem

Chomsky, Sealey, Sealey and Millmore's study states that children today may be having a different learning experience when it comes to writing compared to those in the past. While elementary school teachers have always been concerned with children's literacy, in the past most of our efforts were devoted to helping children read rather than to write (as cited by Poindexter and Oliver, 1999). Children have a natural desire to write. Teachers stifle this desire because of a lack of understanding of the writing process and then wonder why the students are not motivated to write (Graves, 1983). Written expression is probably the most challenging to teach because it is the most complex form of expressive language. Writing is necessary throughout our lives, but many learn to detest this form of communication (Marchisan & Alber, 2001). Teachers need to have a wide variety of strategies in order to coordinate modes of instruction to teach students to enjoy the writing process and produce quality pieces of writing (Burns, 1999).

Calkins (1986) stated the following:

We, in schools, set up roadblocks to stifle the natural and enduring reasons for writing, and then we complain that our students don't want to write. After detouring around the authentic, human reasons for writing, we bury the students' urge to write all the more with boxes and kits, and manuals full of synthetic writing-stimulants. At best, they produce artificial and short-lived sputters of enthusiasm for writing, which then fade away, leaving passivity. (p.13)

Writing is important because it comes directly from inside the student, from a union of the mind and soul. It is the most personal thing students are asked to do in school (Calkins, 1986).

“Today, many feel that children need more time to engage in authentic writing experiences and more opportunities to reflect about their writing period. These are thought to be more valuable than learning definitions for parts of speech and diagramming sentences” (Leu & Kinzer, 1995, p.47).



## CHAPTER 2

### PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

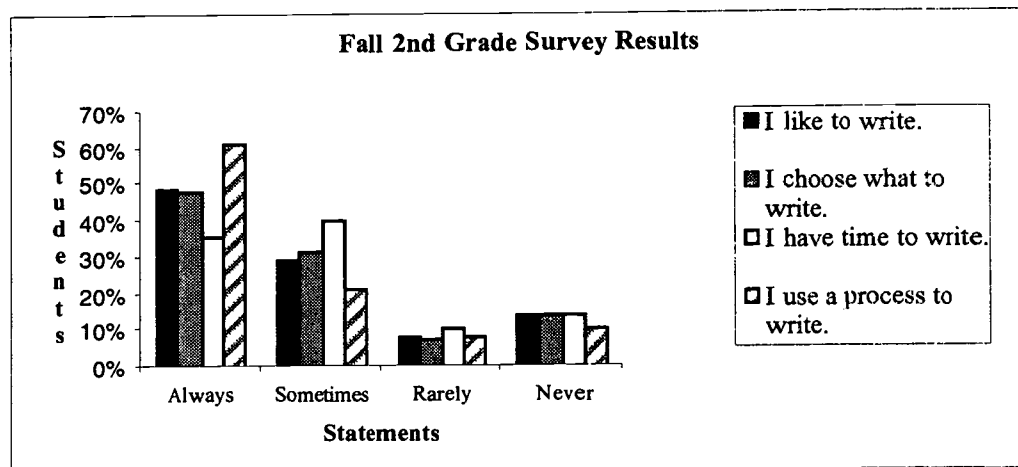
#### Problem Evidence

In order to document the extent of students' lack of writing ability and motivation to effectively participate in writing, student surveys and Curriculum Based Measurement of student writing samples were administered. The Curriculum Based Measurement tool was used as a reliable and valid set of procedures for frequent and repeated measurement of student performance in areas such as writing (Appendices B-D). Student surveys were given to gauge students' interest, motivation, and frequency of writing.

In early September, a survey was administered to the targeted students (Appendix A). The targeted students included 21 second graders, 22 third graders, 23 fourth graders, and 23 fifth graders in self-contained classrooms in the same building. This survey was used to gain information about students' overall feelings about writing. The multiple-choice responses were categorized into four areas of concern, specifically, attitudes, time, choice, and process. In addition to multiple-choice, the survey required written responses from the students. As Figures 1-4 show, a percentage of students within each grade level selected the rarely or never categories on the multiple-choice portion of the survey. The

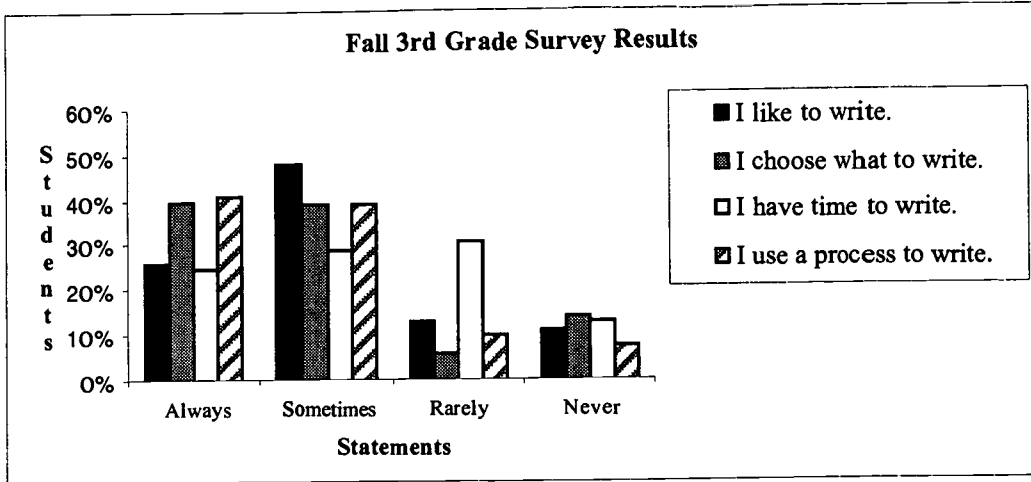
combined percentage of rarely or never responses indicated the existence of negative attitudes toward writing.

A survey was given to second graders to determine their attitude toward writing. The results indicated that 18% of the students rarely or never used a process to write. Additionally, 24% of the students rarely or never had time to write. Figure 1 reports complete results of the data collected.



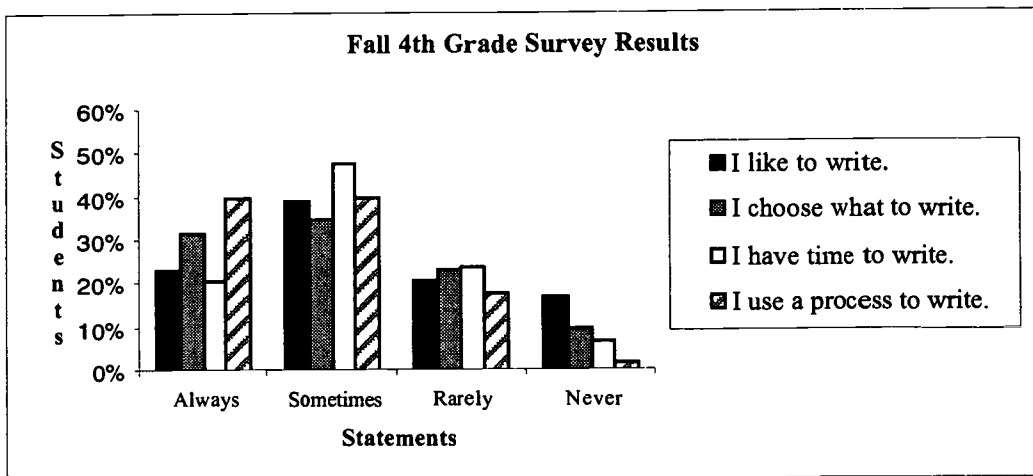
**Figure 1:** Fall second grade survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

In the third grade attitude toward writing survey, the results indicated that 25% of the students rarely or never like to write. Also, 21% of the students chose what they write about. Figure 2 reports complete results of the data collected.



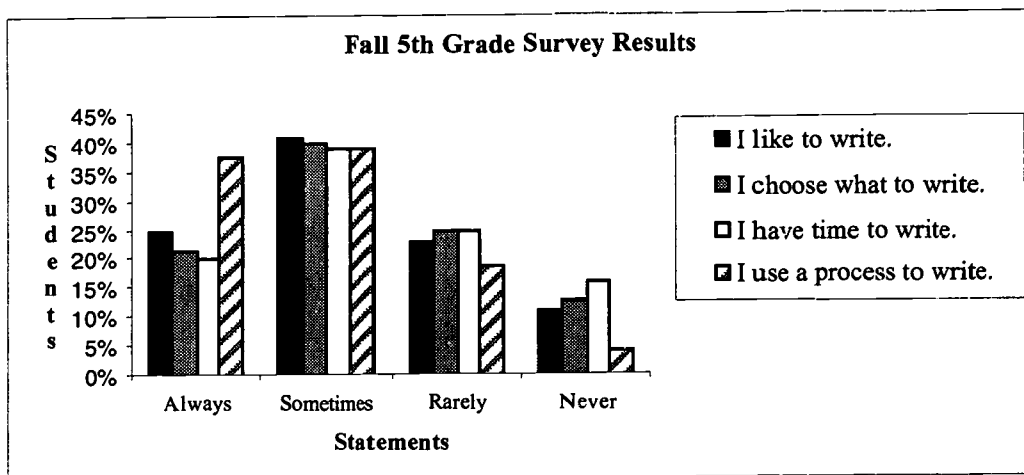
**Figure 2:** Fall third grade survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

The survey given to fourth graders determined their attitude toward writing. The results indicated that 31% of the students rarely or never had time to write. Furthermore, 38% of the students attested that they rarely or never like to write. Figure 3 reports complete results of the data collected.



**Figure 3:** Fall fourth grade survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

Fifth graders were also given a survey to ascertain their attitude towards writing. The results revealed that 41% of the students rarely or never have time to write, and 38.5% of the students rarely or never choose what to write. It seemed, according to the results, that as students get older their attitude toward writing declines. Figure 4 reports complete results of the data collected.

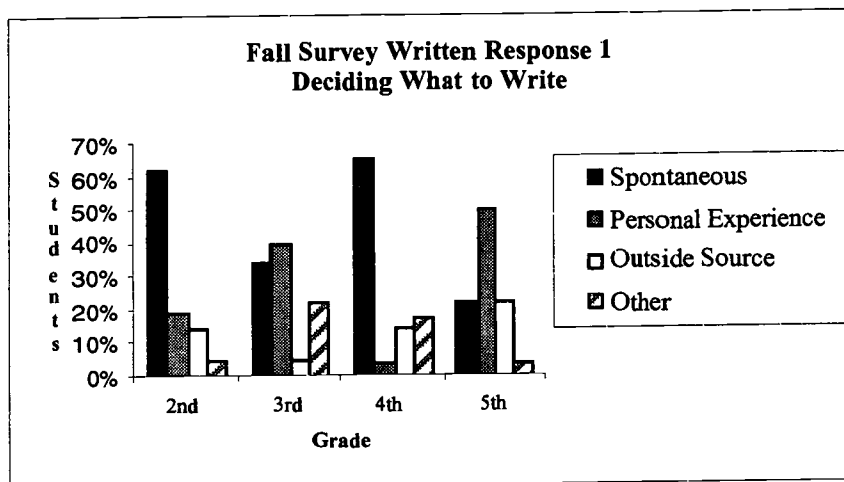


**Figure 4:** Fall fifth grade survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

The students' written responses were categorized according to similar trends found within their answers. Figures 5-9 revealed how students decided what to write, when they wrote in school, why they thought writing is important, and how they felt about themselves as writers. The results from all four grade levels indicated that a percentage of students relied on outside sources or other means to generate writing ideas. This data also showed that a significant amount of students only write when writing is

assigned. The targeted group also responded negatively or had a neutral response to how they viewed themselves as writers.

Figure 5 focuses on how students decide to write. The results indicated that 62% of second graders and 65% of fourth graders wrote spontaneously. Additionally, 39% of third graders and 50% of fifth graders wrote from personal experience. Figure 5 reports complete results of the data collected.

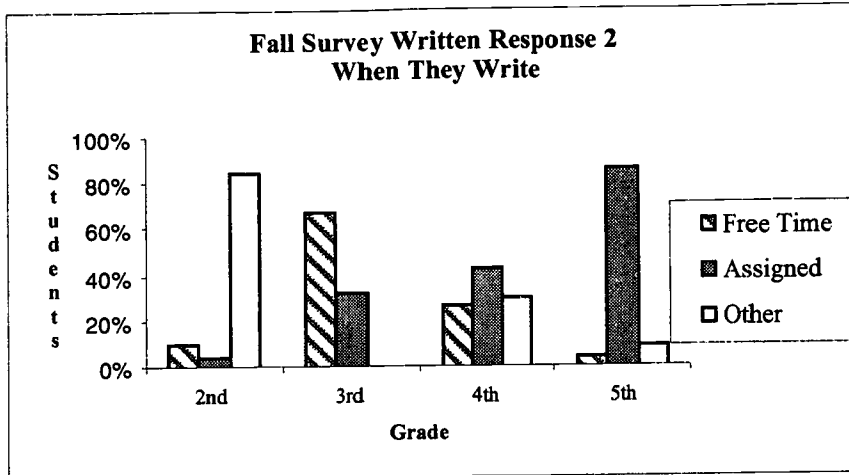


**Figure 5:** Results of written response question 1.

Figure 6 focuses on when students write. The results revealed that by the time students reach the fifth grade, writing occurred more often when it was assigned.

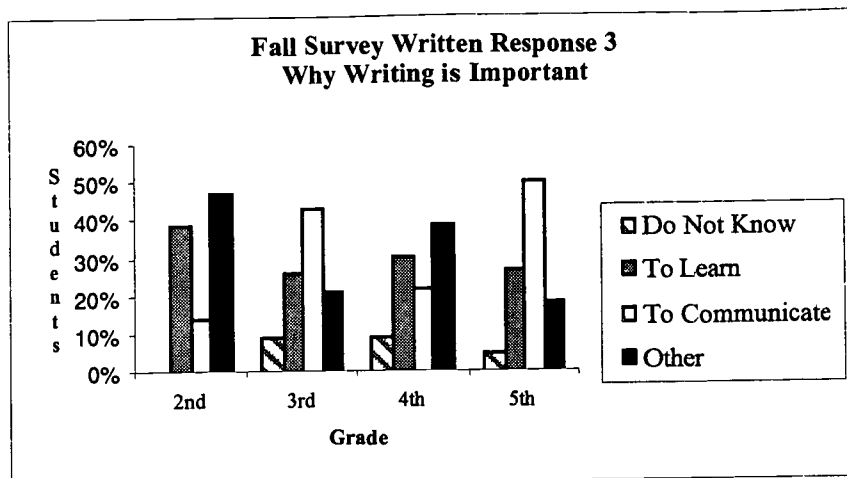
Whereas, only 5% of second graders indicated more writing is done when assigned.

Figure 6 reports complete results of the data collected.



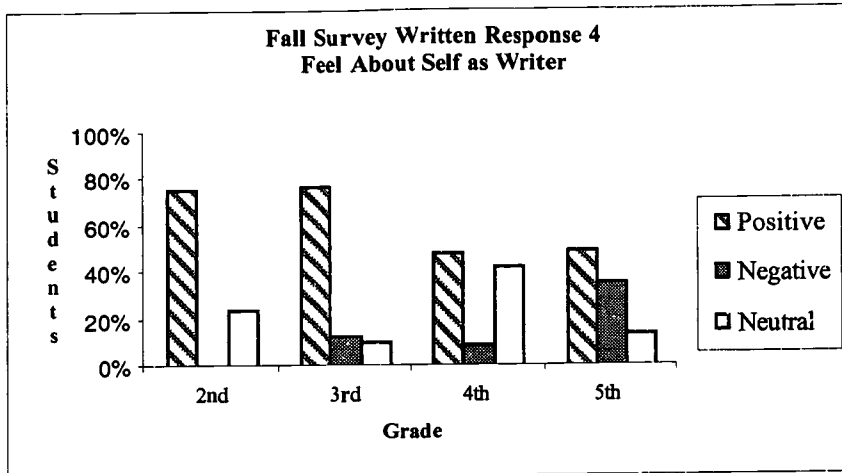
**Figure 6:** Results of written response question 2.

Figure 7 focuses on why writing is important. As the students progress through the grades, the results indicated that writing is important as a form of communication. Fourteen percent of second graders indicated that writing is important as a form of communication, whereas, 43% of third graders responded that communication is a purpose for writing. In fifth grade, the percentage increased to 50%. Figure 7 reports complete results of the data collected.



**Figure 7:** Results of written response question 3.

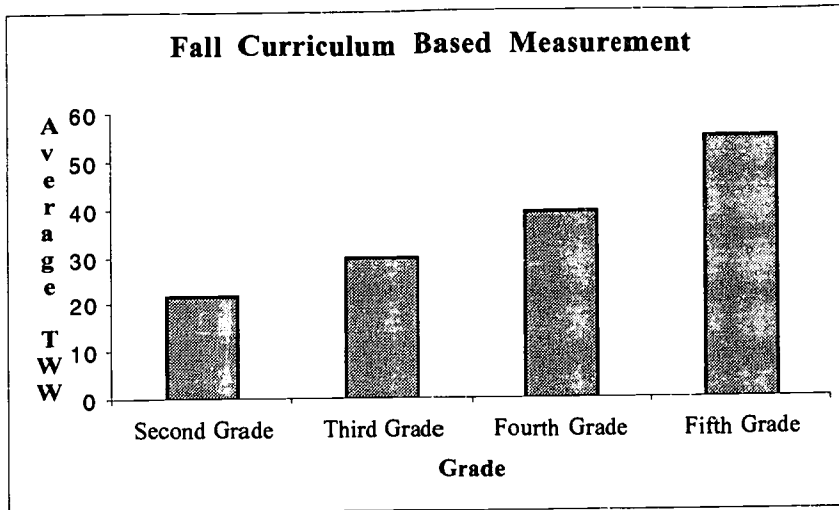
Figure 8 focuses on how students felt about themselves as writers. The results revealed that a positive attitude decreases as the students progress through the grade levels. Specifically, 76% of second grade students and 77% of third grade students indicated a positive attitude toward themselves as writers. However, only 50% of fifth grade students indicated a positive attitude. Figure 8 reports complete results of the data collected.



**Figure 8:** Results of written response question 4.

In addition to the survey, students were given Curriculum Based Measurements (C.B.M) in September to measure the total words written. Each grade level was given a prompt to respond to within a three minute time period (Appendices B-D). The average of total words written was tabulated for each target group, as shown in Figure 9. The average number of words students were able to write in the time period provided a baseline of student writing abilities. Figure 9 reports complete results of the data collected.





**Figure 9:** Results of fall grade level C.B.M.

There was an indication, according to the data collected, that students' attitudes toward writing worsened as they progress through the grade levels as their amount of writing increased. These changes in attitude may be a result of the Illinois Standard Achievement Test, which assesses writing in the third and fifth grades and is a requirement for these students.

#### Probable Causes

The literature suggests several underlying causes for students' lack of writing ability and motivation to participate in writing. Teachers' methods and attitudes, students' self-concepts and abilities, curriculum deficiencies, students' learning disabilities and students' gender all contribute to the inability to communicate thoughts in

written form in the school setting. These factors have created roadblocks for teachers and students.

Teachers have helped to create fears and avoidance of writing in their students by not adequately teaching strategies to help make students' ideas flow on paper (Cimcoz, 1999). "Children who are fed topics, story starters, lead sentences, even opening paragraphs, as a steady diet for three or four years, rightfully panic when topics have to come from them" (Graves, 1983, p.21). According to McBride, traditional methods of teaching using drill and practice have negatively impacted students' desire to write (2000). Teachers tend to focus more on required curriculum rather than providing students' exploration of their own interests (Worthy, 2000). In reference to writing across the curriculum, teachers have limited energy due to schools furnishing little incentive for collaboration, and offering insufficient time, resources, or rewards for doing so (Zimmet, 2000).

Writing is a skill that has not received the attention it deserves in education (Cimcoz, 1999). Unfortunately, the teacher's focus is not on the students' interests or agendas but on the unit of study, the textbook, or the prepackaged curriculum (Calkins, 1986). As Calkins stated, "After detouring around the authentic, human reasons for writing, we bury the student's urge to write all the more with boxes, kits, and manuals full of synthetic writing-stimulants. At best they produce artificial and short-lived sputters of enthusiasm for writing, which then fade away, leaving passivity" (1986, p.4).

The literature has shown that student self-concept and abilities have a direct impact on writing. When children were provided minimal opportunities to write during the school week, their tendency to avoid the task increased (Graves, 1991). This avoidance has led to poor development of writing skills. The lack of writing skills has helped to create barriers for successful writing experiences, such as journaling (Peterson and Jones, 2001). Not only has depletion of skills affected students' desire to write, but also the audience for whom the writing is being prepared is limited. When the teacher is the student's only audience, the writing is poor (Conner, 2000). Due to this limited audience, a writer's self-concept is negatively impacted by past experiences in which the work produced had been criticized and "red-lined" (Graves, 1983).

Not only has attitude impacted writing, students with special needs have an increased challenge to be successful in the area of writing. Teachers have not modified the writing curriculum to accommodate the needs of students with poor handwriting, spelling, and organizational skills (Graham, Harris, and Larsen, 1997). When teachers instruct learning disabled students, their focus is on lower-level writing skills, such as handwriting and spelling, and provide them few opportunities to actually write (Palinscar and Klenk, 1992).

Research has indicated that gender plays a role in student attitude towards writing. Girls are generally more mature in their written responses and are better able to focus and sit for longer periods of time. They enjoy fine motor tasks, as opposed to boys, whose

abilities in this area take longer to develop. Therefore, this impacts their enjoyment of the task (Fraser and Skolnick, 1994).

Therefore, it becomes evident that the following significant causes are reasons for students' lack of desire and abilities to express themselves and communicate through writing:

1. Teacher methods and attitudes affect students' motivation to write.
2. The curriculum does not support the students' urge and abilities to write independently or the teachers' abilities to teach it effectively.
3. A lack of positive writing experiences impacts students' self-worth as a writer and inhibits their ability to express themselves in written form.
4. Students' gender may have an affect on their desire to write.

## Chapter 3

### SOLUTIONS STRATEGIES

#### Review of Literature

The research findings on students' lack of desire and abilities to express themselves and communicate through writing provide more than enough evidence to suggest it is time for schools to successfully address this issue. Teachers have not focused on the underlying causes as to why students are reluctant and uninterested in writing. Instead many teachers focus on "...pushing, luring, encouraging, motivating, stimulating, bribing, requiring..." (Calkins, 1986, p.4). The result is short-lived enthusiasm followed by inevitable passivity which lead to the students' resistance to writing and teachers' resistance to teaching writing (Calkins, 1986).

Research literature substantiates the following solution strategies for improving students' writing abilities and motivation to participate in writing:

1. Journaling/learning logs
2. Writing across the curriculum
3. Student choice and interest in topic
4. Writer's Workshop

## 5. Teacher time management

### Journaling/Learning Logs

Routman wrote that journal writing promotes fluency in reading and writing, gives students opportunities for reflection, offers a safe place to write personal thoughts which encourages risk taking, validates personal experiences and feelings, promotes thinking through written language, and finally provides a tool for written evaluation (1991). As stated by Tichenor and Jewell (1996),

Journal writing provides a valuable learning experience for students and teachers alike. Through journal writing teachers have a window into student interests and needs, and students have an audience and environment for their writing that is nurturing and non-threatening. It is our hope that this framework will be useful as teachers grow in their ability to develop and implement dynamic and effective journal writing programs in schools today. As instructional trends come and go, journal writing can always be a reliable and effective learning experience in the primary grades (p. 84).

Through journaling, students can make connections to literature and deepen comprehension by responding to what they have read (Barlow, 2001). Learning logs, according to Wollman-Bonilla (1991), provide purpose for writing, rather than simply the

teacher's requirements. By having the opportunity to share what is written, students are more likely to integrate and remember information or skills for extended periods of time. Journals give students the opportunity to express their ideas, demonstrate their comprehension, and get questions answered (Wollman-Bonilla, 1991).

### Writing Across the Curriculum

Integrating writing across the curriculum in science, social studies, and math, will provide students with a plethora of ideas from which to draw and offers the teacher the opportunity to teach writing throughout the day in a variety of ways. The wealth of opportunities that are given to the students help develop a growing comfort with writing (Graves, 1983). "We want to immerse children in a multitude of written language experiences, to interact with them so that we can demonstrate how written language works and to provide opportunities so that children can explore writing independently and collaboratively" (Chapman, 1996, p. 337). Thus, writing to learn is a tool that can be used to see how students are relating to, and understanding, what they are doing and learning in the classroom (Mitchell, 1996).

### Student Choice and Interest in Topic

"Writing is meaningful to them (students) when they use it to make sense out of their own experiences and out of issues that really matter to them" (Dossin, 1997). When students are allowed to make choices, it personally encourages them to develop their own interests in literacy (Turner and Paris, 1995). According to Mitchell (1996), writing can

become a successful part of one's class if students are given choices about the form of the writing assignment whenever possible. "The way to encourage children to write is to have them write personal stories that arise from their learning experiences. They need to learn ways to make ideas grow from a background of topics they have been studying" (Maxim, 1998). By allowing the student real choices rather than solely what the teacher wants, students are able to begin composing without reservation and take ownership of the writing process (Harste, Short and Burke, 1988).

### Writing Workshop

"Writing workshop has proven to be a powerful method for the delivery of writing instruction" (McElveen and Dierking, 2000). Teaching becomes deeply personal with writing workshop because teachers and students focus on topics, which matter to children. The teacher's focus is on the child and not on a unit of study, the textbook, or a prepackaged curriculum (Calkins, 1986). Writing workshop allows students to focus on the substance of their ideas rather than the mechanics of writing (Fraser and Skolnick, 1994). Regarding writing workshop, Davis states that a climate of mutual trust and understanding is established where "human beings can come together, no matter what their ages, to share their stories and the writing of their lives within a common community" (1996).



### Teacher Time Management

“Writing taught once or twice a week is just frequently enough to remind children that they can’t write, and teachers that they can’t teach” (Graves, 1983, p.90). Graves continues by saying that teachers find time for writing only when they take it from reading, handwriting, spelling and language, knowing that writing will produce gains in all subject areas (1983). Writing, like exercise, becomes easier and easier when done everyday. Writers get into a rhythm and find a stride (Calkins, 1986).

### Action Plan for Intervention

The action plan is designed to address two major solution components: increased writing time and journaling across the content areas. The following provides an outline of the Intervention.

#### I. Pre-intervention

##### A. Parent Consent Forms (August 26 – August 30, 2002)

1. Permission to participate in research project (Appendix E)
2. Permission for student work to be used as samples (Appendix F)

##### B. Collect Evidence of Problem (September 2-September 6, 2002)

1. Student Surveys
2. Curriculum Based Measurement assessments

##### C. Establish a Writing Schedule

1. Create a block of personal writing time during Language Arts (10 minutes per day)
  2. Create a block of writing share time each day
  3. Formulate a weekly journaling time in other content areas
- II. Intervention (September 16 – December 6, 2002)
- A. Explain writing expectations
1. Organization of writing materials
  2. Identify qualities of a good writer
- B. Create a list of writing topics
1. Model use of graphic organizers
  2. Generate list of topics of interest
- C. Implement journal writing
1. Model journal writing process
  2. Model journaling in content areas
  3. Provide journal writing time (10 minutes each day during Language Arts time)
  4. Provide journal writing in content areas (once a week)
- III. Post-Intervention (December 9-December 20, 2003)
- A. Assessment
1. Student survey

## 2. Curriculum based measurement

### Methods of Assessment

A variety of data collection methods will be used to assess the effects of the intervention. The action plan will be analyzed in January 2003.

The methods of assessment will be authentic in nature. Growth in writing abilities will be measured by use of pre- and post-implementation of Curriculum Based Measurement writing samples. Changes in attitude will be documented by use of pre- and post-implementation of a student writing attitude survey.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT RESULTS

#### Historical Description of the Intervention

The main objective of the intervention addressed the students' deficiencies in their writing abilities and lack of motivation to effectively communicate through written expression. Results from student surveys and Curriculum Based Measurement assessments indicated a need for early intervention in this area. The primary objective of this action research project stated,

As a result of the implementation of increased writing time, during September 2002 to December 2002, the target groups of second, third, fourth, and fifth grade students will increase their writing abilities as measured by a student survey and Curriculum Based Measurement.

In order to accomplish the desired objective, the following strategic procedures were proposed:

1. Survey the students
2. Establish a writing schedule
3. Explain writing expectations
4. Infuse writing into other content areas

As a result of varying types of writing experiences throughout the curriculum during the period of September 2002 to December 2002, students will increase their motivation toward writing, as measured by a student survey and Curriculum Based Measurement.

In order to accomplish the desired objective, the following processes were necessary:

1. Survey the students
2. Create lessons for journal activities
3. Explain response journal expectations

Part of the intervention included initial and final surveys that were developed and given to students to determine their writing abilities and attitudes toward writing. These identical surveys were in a multiple-choice format, and included short written-response questions.

A writing schedule was developed during the summer in order to create a ten-minute block of personal journal writing time during the language arts period. This time was provided to encourage the students to develop their own ideas and to allow them to become more familiar with the writing process. To assist students struggling with the development of writing ideas, a list of interesting topics was generated for each grade level to be used as a resource during journal time. Incorporated in the schedule was a weekly opportunity for the students to share their written work with peers. Additionally, response journaling was implemented in the other content areas on a weekly basis. This gave students the opportunity to reflect on current topics being discussed in class.

Throughout the intervention, the fundamentals of writing were communicated to the students through brainstorming activities, modeling, and the reviewing of writing expectations.

These expectations varied throughout the grade levels and expanded as the intervention period progressed. The expectations for second grade included writing a paragraph with an introductory sentence, three supporting details, and a closing sentence. Third grade required the enhancement of second grade expectations through further expansion of the paragraph. In fourth grade, students were expected to develop multiple paragraphs that

included more complex sentences with the use of transitions. By fifth grade, the students were expected to use style and voice to write a well developed essay.

Also incorporated in the intervention was the use of response journals. By writing in the content areas through response journaling, students were allowed to reflect upon and personalize topics learned in the classroom. This enabled students to transfer content knowledge and make connections to their own experiences. The writing expectations for each grade level were reinforced during this process.

It was fairly simple for the teachers to set up a ten-minute journal writing time during the one-hour blocks of language arts. However, due to time constraints, interruptions, and unexpected changes in schedules, journaling and sharing times were sometimes eliminated or set aside.

The teachers understood that all students were at various developmental levels in the writing process. Therefore, occasional time was spent reviewing grade level writing expectations through whole class and/or small group instruction. This type of activity disrupted the intended writing schedule for a given day.

Setting aside time for writing across the content areas through response journaling proved to be difficult in all grade levels. Other required curricular objectives took precedence over this additional writing experience. Also, at the second and third grade levels, some students were limited by their experiences and vocabulary. Therefore, they were not always able to explain or relate to the concepts through writing. However, in the fourth and fifth grade levels, students were better able to effectively communicate and make connections with curricular concepts and personal experiences.

### Presentation and Analysis of Results

The results of the second, third, fourth, and fifth grade attitudes toward writing survey (Appendix A) and Curriculum Based Measurement (Appendices B, C, & D) administered in week 14 of the intervention showed many areas of improvement when

compared to the data results from week one. All four classrooms involved with the intervention showed similar growth and improvement. Benefits included an improvement in attitudes toward the writing process, an increase in students' perception of themselves as writers, and an increase in the total number of words written within a given amount of time.

When comparing the second grade fall survey results to the winter results, researchers noted a decrease in "never" responses in the areas of attitude toward writing and the writing process. In the fall, 14% of second graders answered that they never like to write, whereas, in the winter, only 11% responded that they never like to write. In response to the questions regarding the writing process, only 3% of the students in the winter survey responded "never" as compared to 10% in the fall. Figures 10 and 11 report complete results of the data collected.

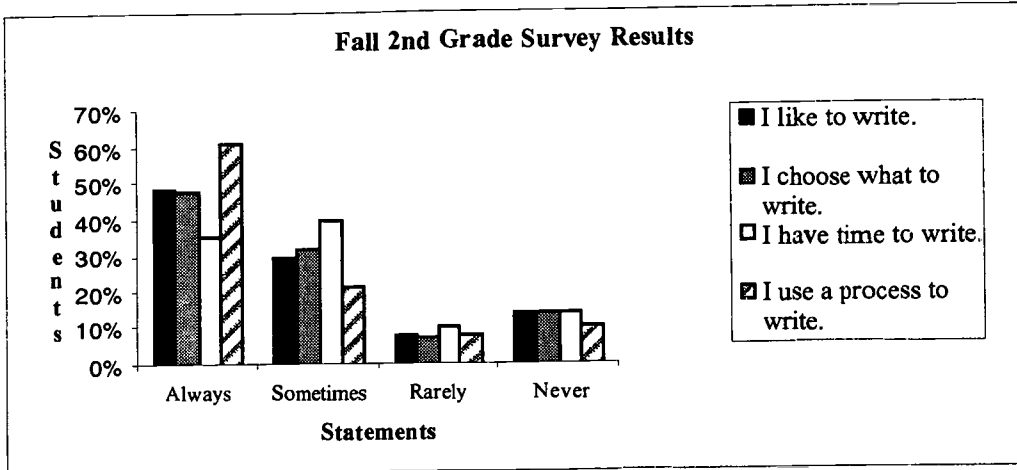


Figure 10: Second grade fall survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

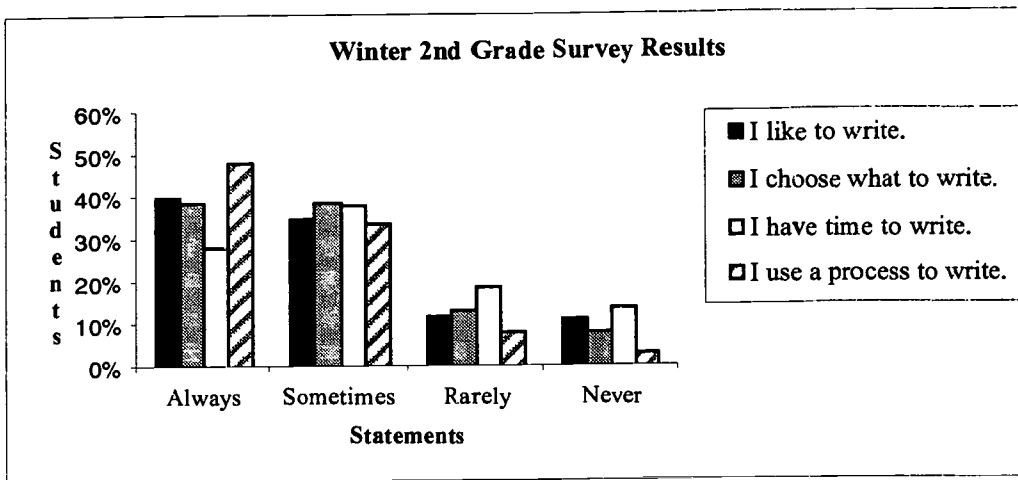
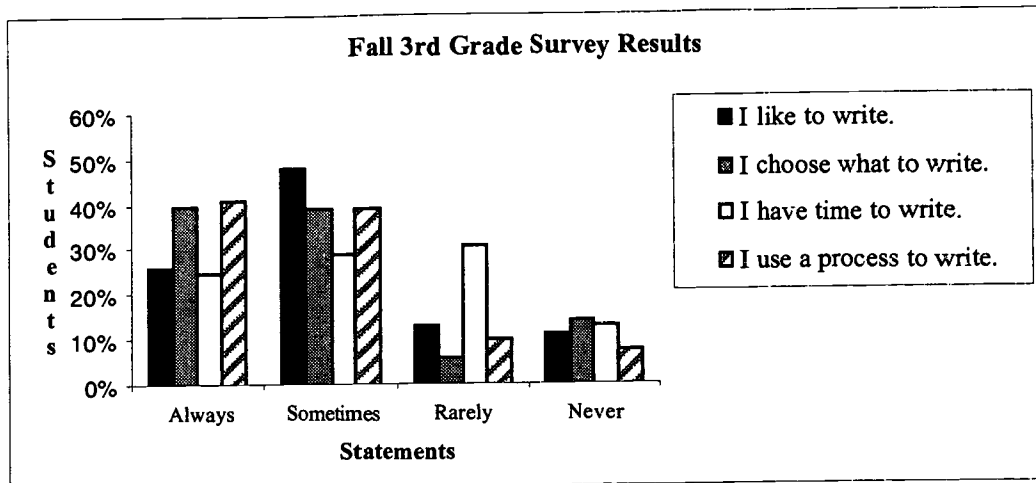


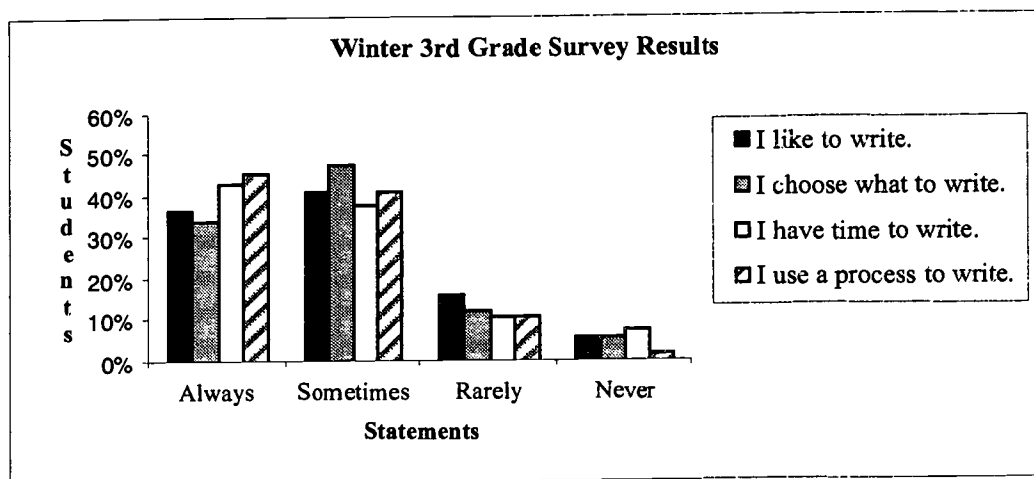
Figure 11: Second grade winter survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

The researchers noted an improved change when comparing the third grade fall survey results to the winter results. A dramatic improvement was evident concerning students' attitudes toward writing. In the fall, 26% of the students responded that they always like to write. In the winter, however, that number increased to 40%. Figures 12 and 13 report complete results of the data collected.



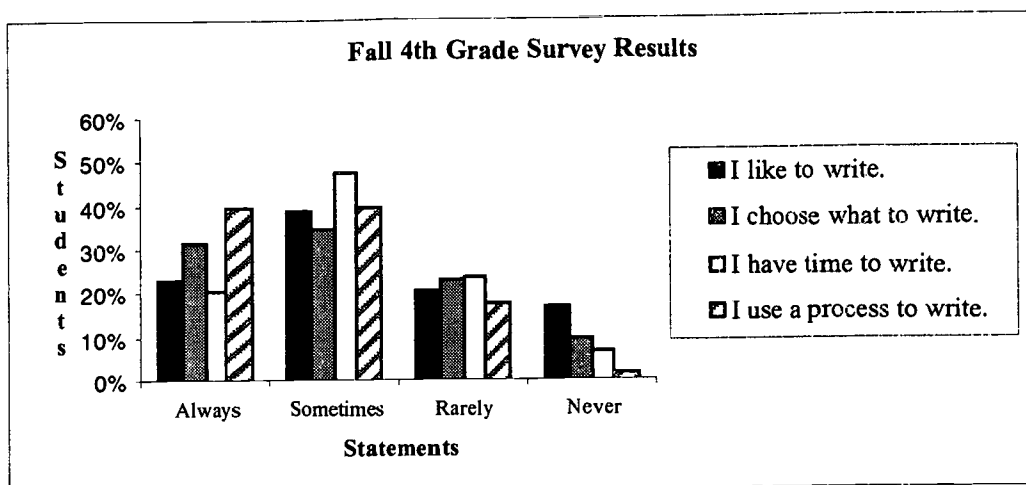


**Figure 12:** Third grade fall survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

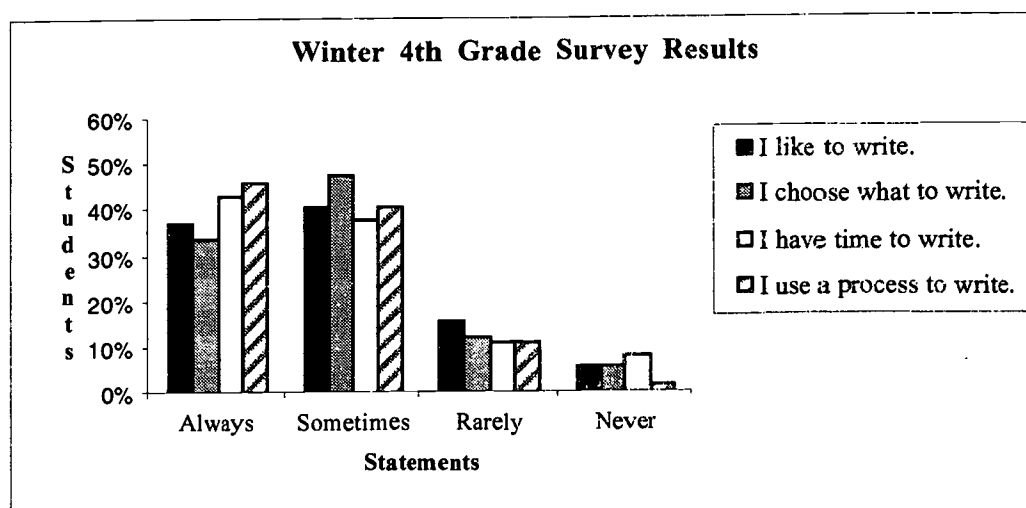


**Figure 13:** Third grade winter survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

The fourth grade survey results revealed improvement in students' attitudes toward writing. Fall survey results revealed 23% of the students always liked to write, while 17% never liked to write. In the winter, the "always" responses increased by 10%, and the "never" responses decreased by 7%. Figures 14 and 15 report complete results of the data collected.



**Figure 14:** Fourth grade fall survey of students' attitudes toward writing.



**Figure 15:** Fourth grade winter survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

The results of the fall fifth grade survey revealed that only 25% of the students always liked to write. By winter, the "always" response increased by 12%. In the fall, 38% of the students stated that they always used a process to write. This number increased to 46% as revealed in the winter survey results. Figures 16 and 17 report complete results of the data collected.

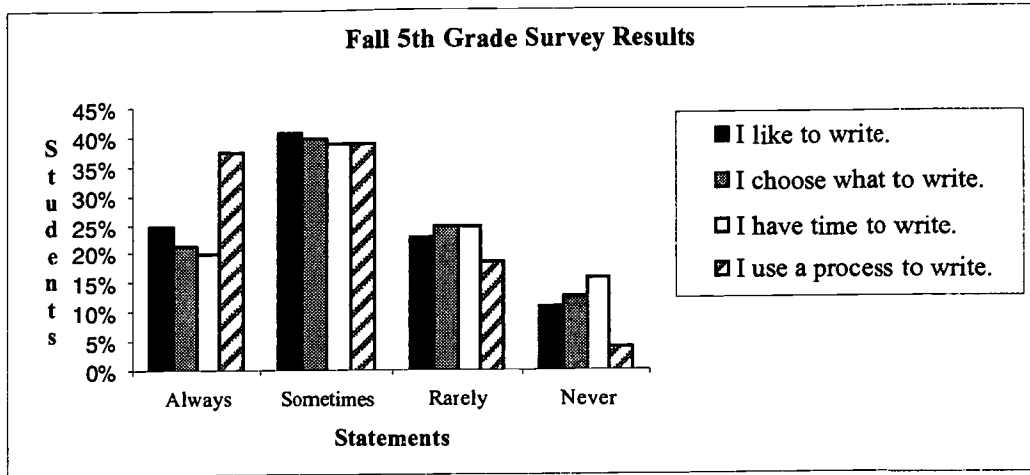


Figure 16: Fifth grade fall survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

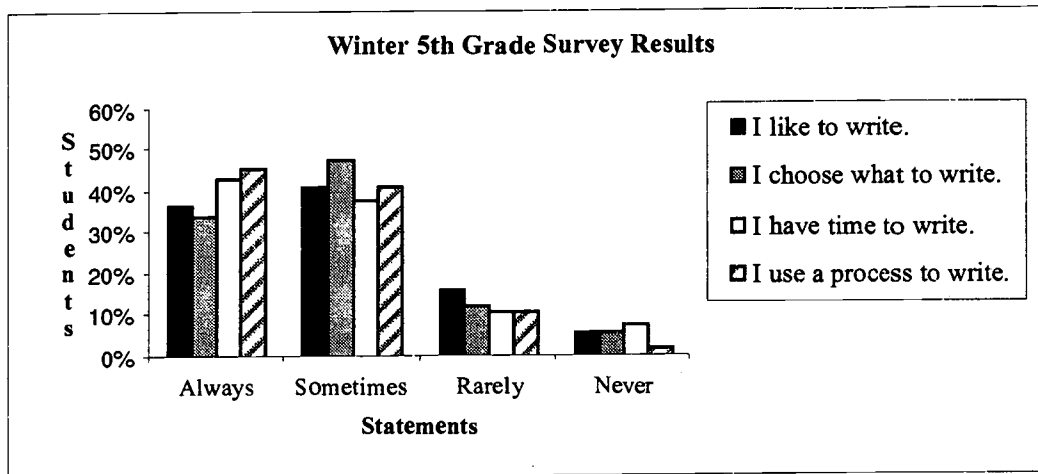


Figure 17: Fifth grade winter survey of students' attitudes toward writing.

During the written portion of the survey, students were asked how they decided what to write about. A majority of the responses from all grade levels were categorized into the areas of spontaneous generation of ideas and ideas from personal experience. Throughout all grade levels, there was an increase in the percentage of students who indicated that they generated ideas from personal experience rather than based on a spontaneous generation of ideas. Specifically, there was a 26% increase in second grade and a 57% increase in fourth grade. Figures 18 and 19 report complete results of data collected.

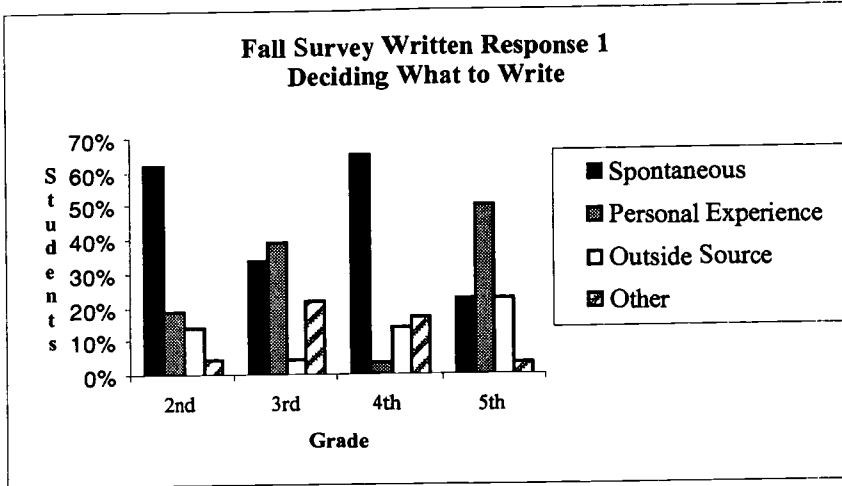


Figure 18: Fall results of written response question 1.

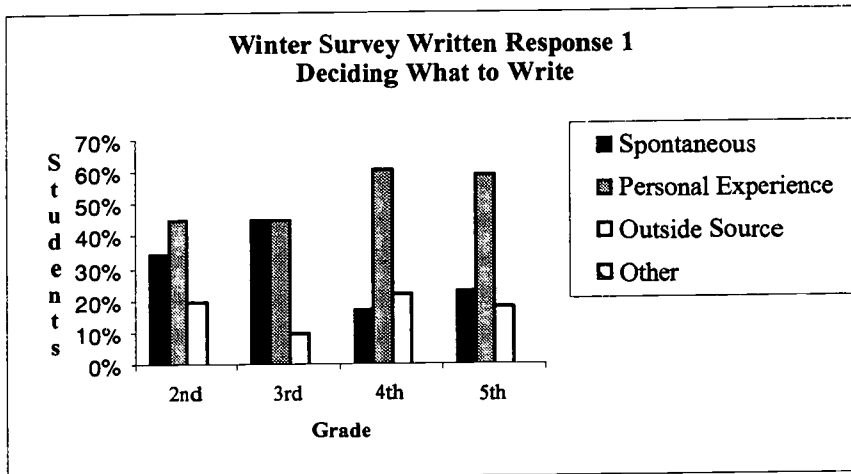
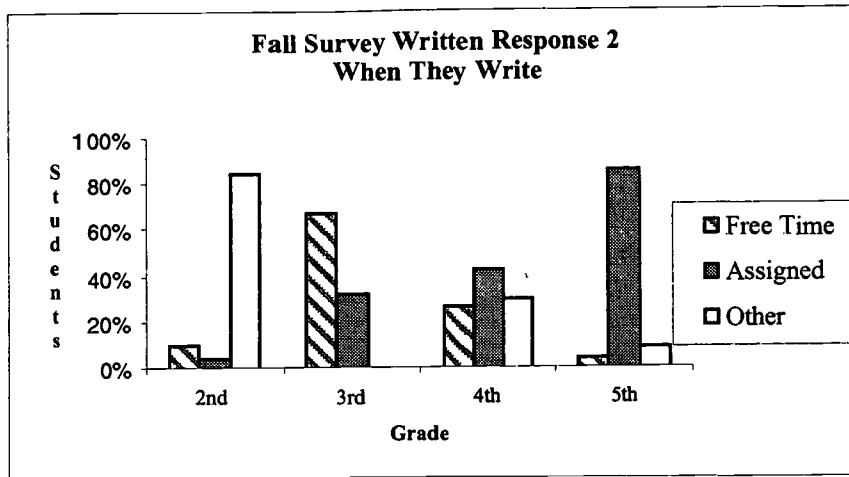
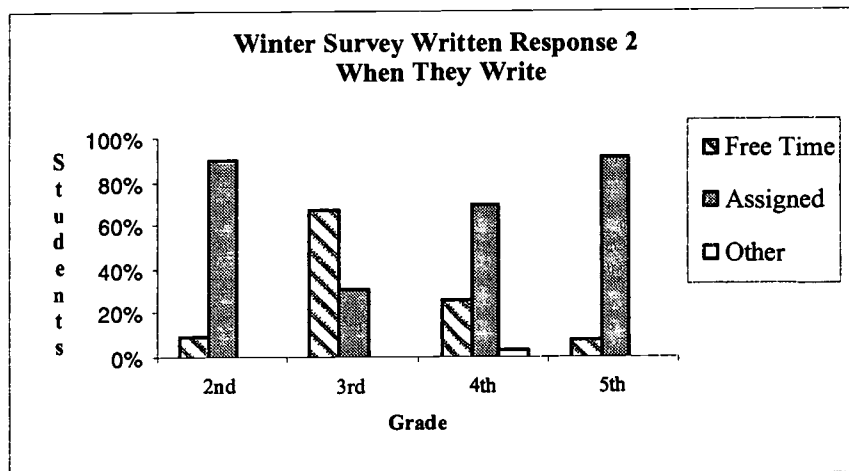


Figure 19: Winter results of written response question 1.

The second question in this portion of the survey asked students when they had the opportunity to write in school. Responses were categorized into writing during free time, writing when it was assigned, and “other”. All grade level responses in the “other” category decreased, while responses in the “assigned” category increased. The largest increase occurred in the second grade where the “assigned” category rose from 5% in the fall to 90% in the winter. Also, second graders had a decrease in the “other” category from 85% in the fall to 0% in the winter. Figures 20 and 21 report complete results of the data collected.

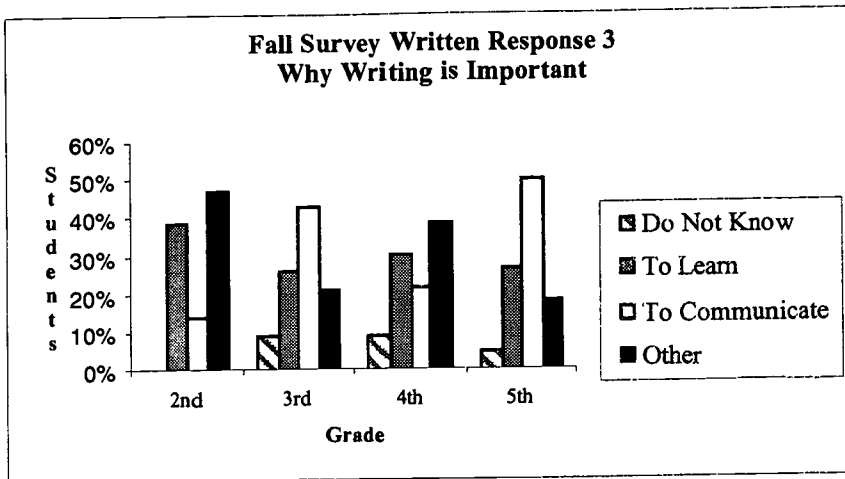


**Figure 20:** Fall results of written response question 2.

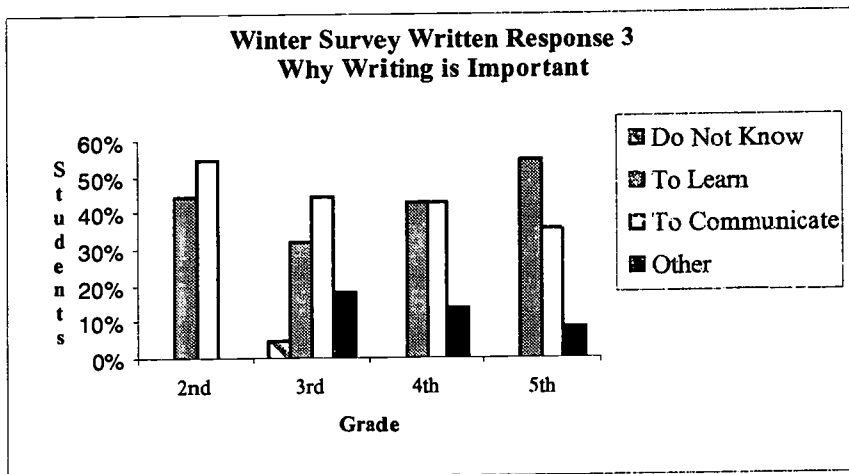


**Figure 21:** Winter results of written response question 2.

Students were also asked to respond to why they thought writing was important. Most responses fell within the writing to learn and writing to communicate categories. A 41% increase was noted for the second grade winter response category of writing to communicate. Additionally, fourth graders had a similar increase in the same category of 21%. Fifth graders had an increase in the writing learn category of 28%. Figures 22 and 23 report complete results of the data collected.

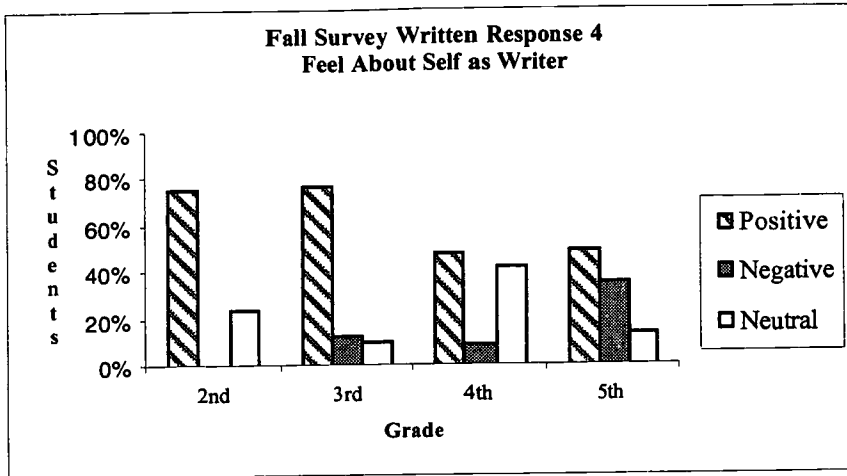


**Figure 22:** Fall results of written response question 3.

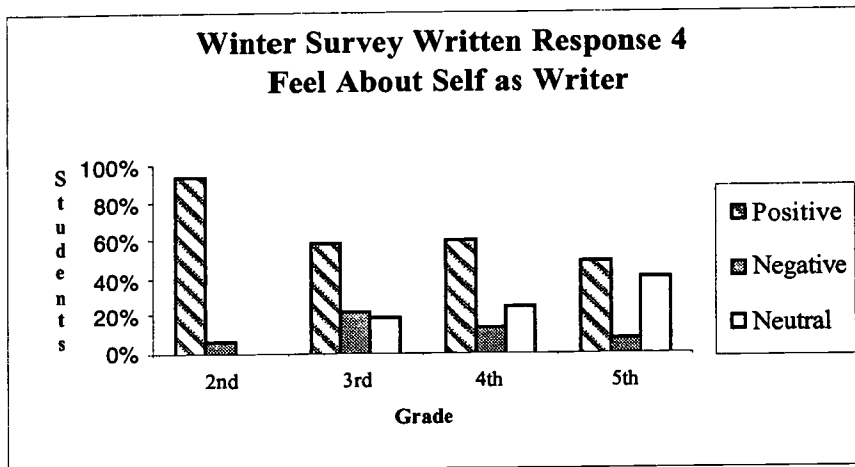


**Figure 23:** Winter results of written response question 3.

Finally, students were asked to explain how they felt about themselves as writers. In the winter survey, more second and fourth graders had positive views of themselves as writers. In the second grade survey, there was an increase from 76% to 95%. Additionally, the fourth graders showed an increase of 13%. There was also a 27% decrease in the number of fifth graders who responded negatively. Figures 24 and 25 report complete results of the data collected.



**Figure 24:** Fall results of written response question 4.



**Figure 25:** Winter results of written response question 4.

The winter results of the Curriculum Based Measurement indicated an increase in the average total words written (TWW) across all grade levels. The largest increase occurred in the third and fifth grades. Third grade had an average increase of 15 words, and fifth grade had an increase of 17 words. The second grade had an average increase of 8 words, while the fourth grade increased by 9 words. Figures 26 and 27 report complete results of the data collected.

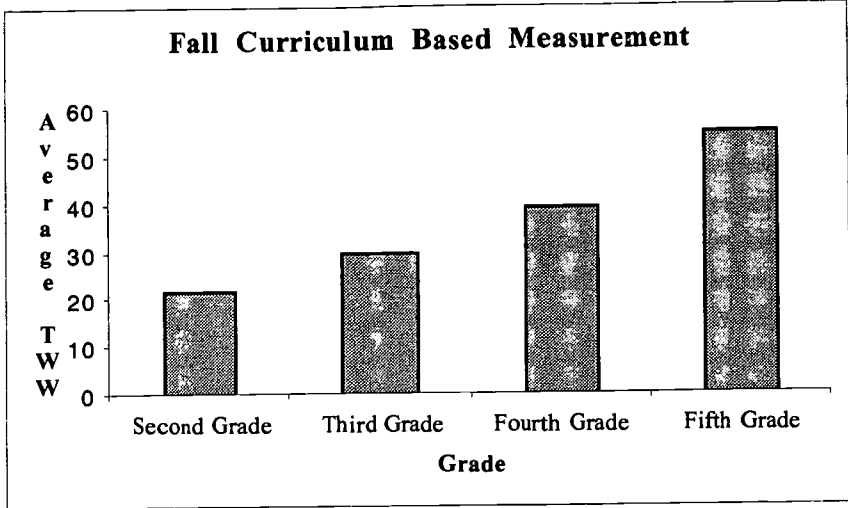


Figure 26: Results of fall grade level C.B.M.

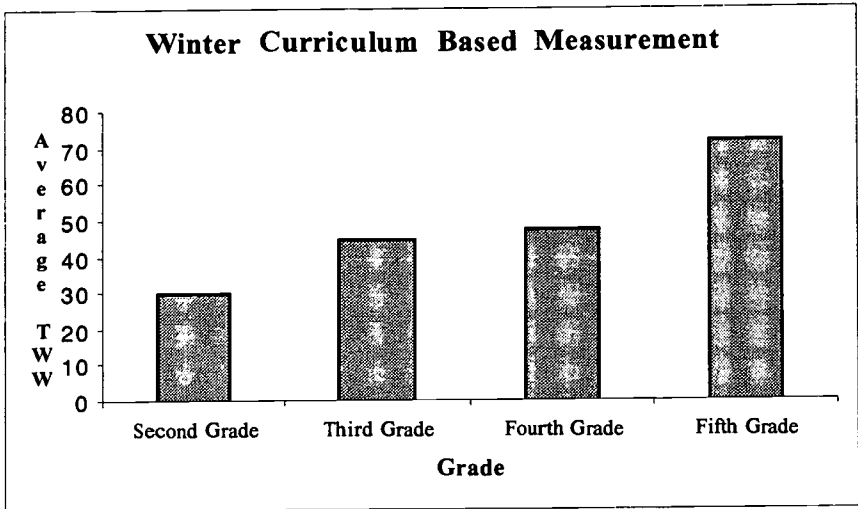


Figure 27: Results of winter grade level C.B.M.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Upon reviewing the data and analyzing the results, the researchers conclude that when students are given routine journal writing opportunities, as well as frequent opportunities to write throughout the content areas, their attitudes toward writing will improve and the amount they write will increase. The researchers believe that giving students a daily 10-minute block of time to write in their personal journals, without



restrictions, helped to improve their attitude toward writing. The students were able to use this time to formulate their own thoughts without relying on the teacher or another outside source to determine the focus of their writing. By scheduling a time each week to share written work, the students became more motivated and confident in their writing abilities. The researchers believe that the sharing opportunity encouraged the students to improve the quality of their writing for themselves and their audience.

The researchers also conclude that using response journals throughout the content areas enabled the students to make possible connections from what they learned in the classroom to their own life experiences. The students became more aware that writing occurred throughout the day in all subject areas and could be used not only as a form of communication, but also as a learning tool. Giving the students more time to write throughout the day improved the average total words written in a given time period. Finally, the Curriculum Based Measurement prompts (Appendices B-D) provided the researchers with a way to assess the students' growth in writing during the course of the intervention.

After reflecting upon this information, the researchers make the following recommendations:

1. Incorporate response journals into the existing curriculum rather than using them as an additional component to the lesson.
2. Provide and maintain a consistent daily time for journaling.
3. Recognize unavoidable changes in the school calendar, such as holidays, special school programs, conferences, state testing, and field trips, which may hinder the implementation process.

There is a consensus among the researchers that this intervention will be used again in their classrooms. The acquired research reveals how important it is that students be given frequent opportunities to write in all areas of the curriculum, as well as

opportunities to make personal connections through written expression. The positive results of this research have led to the conclusion that attitudes and writing abilities can be improved when implementing this intervention. As a result, the researchers will share this action plan with their colleagues

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

Student Writing Survey

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this survey is to obtain your opinion about writing.  
Please circle the word that reflects your opinion to the statement.

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. I like to write.   | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 2. I like to write letters to family and friends.           | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 3. I like to write in a journal/diary at home.              | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 4. I like to write in a journal/diary at school.            | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 5. I like to write on the computer.                         | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 6. I like to write in school.                               | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 7. I have enough time to write in school.                   | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 8. I like when the teacher gives me a topic to write about. | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 9. I like to write stories about myself.                    | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 10. I like to write about something that I have read.       | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 11. I choose to write when I have free time.                | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |
| 12. I can think of ideas of what to write about in school.  | Always Sometimes Rarely Never |

13. I think it is easy to write. Always Sometimes Rarely Never

14. I read what I write. Always Sometimes Rarely Never

15. I check for mistakes after I write. Always Sometimes Rarely Never

16. I like to share my writing with others. Always Sometimes Rarely Never

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

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18. When do you write in school?

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19. Why is writing important?

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---

---

20. Explain how you feel about yourself as a writer?

---

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---









## Appendix E

Saint Xavier University  
Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
IMPROVING STUDENT ATTITUDES AND WRITING ABILITIES THROUGH  
INCREASED WRITING TIME AND OPPORTUNITIES

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are currently enrolled in a master's degree program at Saint Xavier University. This program requires us to design and implement a project on an issue that directly affects our instruction. We have chosen to research improvement of writing abilities and attitudes toward writing by increasing writing time and opportunities.

The purpose of this project is to increase student writing fluency and frequency and help to create a positive attitude toward writing experiences. The students will be provided with many literacy experiences, which will encourage an enjoyment of writing and the ability to communicate ideas and information effectively.

Your permission allows us to include your child in the reporting of information for our project. All information gathered will be kept completely confidential and information included in the project report will be grouped so that no individual can be identified. The report will be used to share what we have learned as a result of this project with other professionals in the field of education.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate, information gathered about your child will not be included in the report.

If you have any questions or would like further information about our project, please contact us through the Fairview School office at 847-394-7320.

If you agree to have your child participate in the project, please sign the attached statement and return it to your child's teacher by Friday, August 30, 2002. We will be happy to provide you with a copy of the statement if you wish.

Sincerely,

## Appendix E Continued

Saint Xavier University

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

IMPROVING STUDENT ATTITUDES AND WRITING ABILITIES  
THROUGH INCREASED WRITING TIMES AND OPPORTUNITIES

I, \_\_\_\_\_, the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, acknowledge that the researcher has explained to me the purpose of this research, identified any risks involved, and offered to answer any questions I may have about the nature of my child's participation. I freely and voluntarily consent to my child's participation in this project. I understand that all information gathered during this project will be completely confidential. I also understand that I may keep a copy of this consent form for my own information.

NAME OF MINOR: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix F

Saint Xavier University  
 Consent to Use Student Work in a Research Study  
 IMPROVING STUDENT ATTITUDES AND WRITING ABILITIES THROUGH  
 INCREASED WRITING TIME AND OPPORTUNITIES

Dear Parent or Guardian,

As part of our research project on improving student attitudes and writing abilities, we may be collecting samples of student work. The purpose of using these writing samples would be to document student growth throughout the course of this research project. To insure confidentiality no names will appear in any part of our project.

Please sign below to indicate if you do or do not give permission for your child's writing samples to be used in our study.

Sincerely,

I, \_\_\_\_\_, the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, **give** permission for the above mentioned researchers to use samples of my child's writing in their research project.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, the parent/legal guardian of the minor named below, **do not give** permission for the above mentioned researchers to use samples of my child's writing in their research project.

NAME OF MINOR: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date



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