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ABSTRACT

A project developed a program for improving writing readiness skills. The targeted population consisted of 37 kindergarten students in an upper middle class southwest Chicago (Illinois) suburb. The need for writing readiness skills was documented through writing observation checklists, anecdotal records, writing portfolios, and diagnostic tests. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that the subjects' prior experiences in writing overemphasized isolated skills, resulting in apprehension towards taking risks in the writing process, and concern over the effectiveness of invented spelling impacted the kindergarten writing process. Reviews of curricular content and instructional strategies revealed less curricular emphasis on writing skills at the kindergarten level. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three major categories of intervention: (1) a journal writing program; (2) a home writing and parent education program; and (3) the implementation of independent literacy activities promoting free exploration. Results from post-intervention data indicated an increase in subjects' writing readiness abilities, an improvement in the level of interest and a decrease in apprehension towards taking risks during the writing process. Findings suggested more parental involvement and understanding of writing readiness skills at the kindergarten level and an increase in subjects' independent writing activities during play. (Various forms, including a teacher survey of writing abilities, a story rubric, and a writing rubric, etc., as well as a grant application sample are appended; contains 51 references.) (Author/CR)

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IMPROVING STUDENT WRITING READINESS SKILLS IN THE KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM

by

***Suzanne Richardson
*Dana Ruane**

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Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight
Field-Based Master's Program

Action Research Project
Site: Tinley Park II
Submitted: April 30, 1996

*Teachers
Palos West Elementary
Palos Park, Illinois

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Abstract

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Site: Tinley Park II

Date: April 30, 1996

Title: Improving Writing Readiness Skills of Kindergarten Students

This report describes a program for improving writing readiness skills. The targeted population consisted of kindergarten students in a growing middle to upper class community, located in a suburb southwest of Chicago. The need for writing readiness skills is documented through writing observation checklists, anecdotal records, writing portfolios and diagnostic tests.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that the kindergarten students' prior experiences in writing overemphasized isolated skills, resulting in apprehension towards taking risks in the writing process. The concern over the effectiveness of Invented Spelling impacted the kindergarten writing process. Reviews of curricular content and instructional strategies revealed less curricular emphasis on writing skills at the kindergarten level.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of three major categories of intervention: a Journal Writing Program, a Home Writing and Parent Education Program and the implementation of independent literacy activities promoting free exploration.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in the targeted students' writing readiness abilities, an improvement in the level of interest and a decrease in the apprehension towards taking risks during the writing process, more parental involvement and understanding of writing readiness skills at the kindergarten level, and an increase in independent writing activities during play.

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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The kindergarten students in the targeted elementary school exhibit a need for improved writing readiness skills as evidenced by classroom teacher observations, anecdotal records, authentic writing portfolios and surveys.

Immediate Problem Context

These kindergarten children in the targeted public school are part of the 2,215 students in the district. Of these students, 95.5 percent are Caucasian, 0.2 percent are African-American, 1.6 percent are Mexican-American, 0.1 percent are Native American and the remaining 2.6 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. The school enrollment figures for the children's base school is 98.3 percent Caucasian, 0.3 percent African-American, 0.6 percent Mexican-American, 0.8 percent Asian/Pacific Islander with no Native-American students. The portion of the school population being male is 47.9 percent, and that portion being female is 52.1 percent (School Report Card, 1994).

According to district records, the faculty and staff members, numbering 109, are Caucasian (School Report Card, 1994). This staff consists of a superintendent, assistant superintendent, business manager and building principals each with an assistant. There are two

psychologists, one English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and one nurse to serve all three buildings. At the base school there are two teachers for the following: physical education, art, speech and learning disabilities. There is also one teacher each for music, band, media center, computers and gifted students. In addition, there are two reading resource teachers, a counselor, itinerant vision teacher, occupational therapist and physical therapist. An inclusion program in conjunction with an area special education cooperative has been in place at the base school for eight years. Currently there are two teachers and five aides working with 15 special needs children. Completing the staff are 30 classroom teachers, kindergarten through grade five. This staff, 23 percent male and 77 percent female, averages 16.1 years of experience with 49.9 percent having a Bachelor's degree and 50.1 percent having a Master's degree or beyond. The average salary for teachers is \$46,038 and \$73,594 for administrators. These salaries include tax-sheltered annuities, retirement benefits and bonus and extra-curricular duty payment. The average years of experience, amount of education and salaries are somewhat higher than the state averages. These state averages being 15.4 years experience, 45.8 percent with Master's degree or beyond and \$39,545 average salary (School Report Card, 1994).

The targeted school, a kindergarten through grade five facility, is a one level brick building located in the suburbs southwest of a large metropolitan area. When the school was built in 1958 for grades one through eight, it was removed from all residential areas situated in the middle of farmers' fields. This is no longer the case. It is now surrounded by numerous housing developments which have necessitated, over the years, two additions to the original building. There is a total of 37

classrooms of varying sizes, a multi-purpose room, gymnasium, media center, computer lab, primary library, main office, administrative offices and health office. The surrounding expansive grounds contain courtyards, playground and blacktop areas and athletic fields.

District records show that the following average class size is representative of the district as a whole: Kindergarten - 20.6; Grade One - 25.2; Grade Three - 21.4. The amount of money spent per pupil is \$5,527 annually. The time devoted per day to teaching of core subjects is exemplified by the following third grade guidelines: Mathematics - 60 minutes; Science - 24 minutes; English/Language Arts - 120 minutes; Social Studies - 24 minutes. Students are provided with music and art 40 minutes per week and with 80 minutes of physical education per week. Several times a week, extra reading help is provided to 3.4 percent of the children with 12.5 percent receiving additional assistance (speech, learning disabilities) as indicated by their Individual Education Program. Gifted or accelerated classes are offered to ten percent of the targeted school's students (School Report Card, 1994).

The reading series used at the targeted school in grades kindergarten through grade five is Harcourt-Brace. It offers a somewhat modified whole language approach to reading. A hands-on approach to science is implemented through the use of pre-packaged science kits from a local science distribution center. Spelling is taught in various ways according to grade level needs. Some teachers use word lists provided by the reading series while others create their own as appropriate to grade level skills. The mathematics series is also Harcourt-Brace and provides much use of math manipulatives.

The successful results of the district's programs are indicated by the Illinois Goal Assessment Program which is administered to Grade Three. The IGAP test results for the 1993-1994 school year are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Illinois Goal Assessment Program for the 1993-1994 School Year

		Score	Band	Percent Tested
Reading:	School	321	301-341	89.6
	District	318	304-332	89.4
	State	255		75.7
Math:	School	377	357-397	88.7
	District	359	345-373	88.6
	State	271		75.8
Writing:	School	22	21.2-22.8	89.6
	District	22.2	21.8-22.6	89.6
	State	18.7		74.8
Science:	School	288	270-306	88
	District	302	290-314	89.7
	State	246		89.1
Social Studies:	School	309	293-325	91.2
	District	319	307-331	91.4
	State	245		89.2

For any school year, if the average score for the state falls outside of the score band for the school, there is a significant difference between the school average and the state average. This, as shown, is the case for the targeted school and the district as a whole. The district scores are significantly higher than state scores (School Report Card, 1994).

The targeted school is constantly striving for success. Each year staff members create a general plan for improvement. The following goals were targeted for the 1994-95 school year:

- *Monitor the achievement of all learners in all curriculum areas
- *Incorporate additional vocabulary strategies
- *Develop alternative means of assessing performance in all content areas

The value of parental involvement in this district cannot be minimized. There is 100 percent contact with parents each year through at least one parent/teacher conference. This compares with the state parental contact average at 93.2 percent (School Report Card, 1994). Parent volunteers, numbering in the hundreds, are also an integral part of the school's programs. Parents are involved with various district committees such as Strategic Planning, School Improvement and those committees involved with hiring administrators. In addition, there is a very strong Parent-Faculty Association. Only one example of its strength and involvement is an average yearly contribution to the school district of \$50,000 (Aggen, personal communication, May 5, 1995).

According to the School Report Card (1994), another contributing factor to the district's success is pupil attendance at 95.9 percent. The targeted school's attendance is 96.5 percent with 2.4 percent mobility and zero percent truancy.

The Surrounding Community

The targeted middle to upper middle class community, incorporated in 1914, is located southwest of a large metropolitan city in an area surrounded by forest preserves. The terrain is hilly, wooded, resplendent with creeks, caves, ravines, deer, birds and a variety of smaller animals.

Current residents take pride in its natural beauty, interesting history of pre-historic Native-Americans, glacial formations, artist colonies and cultural contributions (DeNovo, 1989).

The local government is comprised of a mayor, four commissioners and a village clerk. All are elected officials. The businesses in the area are small with no heavy industry.

The latest census (1990) shows the residents number 4,199. The median age of residents is 39.5 years. The total number of households is 1,389. Of these, 1343 are Caucasian and 41 Asian. 511 households have children. Most houses in this area are one unit detached dwellings with no structures having more than ten units. The average number of rooms per dwelling is 7.5. Prices for dwellings in this area range from \$158,000 in the lower quartile, \$206,400 in the middle quartile to \$290,000 in the upper quartile. An acre of residential land sells for approximately \$80,000. Income ranges show the per capita income to be \$31,202 with average family income at \$75,044 while household incomes average \$68,005. Incidence of low income students in the school district is two percent and 1.4 percent at the targeted school.

The school district is a mid-sized elementary district with two buildings (kindergarten through grade five), a middle school (grades six through eight) plus administrative and transportation buildings. Schools in this district can trace their beginnings to an 1838 lean-to erected next to an early settlers' cabin. This served as the area's first school house (DeNovo, 1989).

The district has a fine reputation. Realtors report that people move to their community in large part so that their children can attend its schools. In fact, realtors use the schools as a principal part of their sales strategies

(Rosensteil, personal communication, May 27, 1995). As reported by the district, teacher applicants number into the hundreds for each available position and come from all across the country (Ulbricht, personal communication, May 24, 1995).

The district is governed by an elected school board currently made up of three men and four women. Their terms are four years in length. With the exception of two, all members of the board are new to the job as of the last election. The board meetings are held twice a month and are often well attended by community and staff.

After many years of only gradual change, the school board, school district and community are currently dealing with several new issues. Because of the state's 5+5 retirement plan, the district has lost numerous administrators and teachers in the last two years. Of the new teachers hired, most are first year teachers. Because of their high numbers, their effect on the dynamics of the district is evident. In addition, there are now a new superintendent and a new business manager. Two of the three principals are also new as are their assistants. Not only are there many new personalities for the school and community to adjust to, but there are new and different leadership styles resulting in the implementation of many new programs.

Site-based management is one of the recent changes under a new administration. This differs greatly from the previous top down method of decision making and is still evolving. The effect is expected to be of major proportion as this represents complete reconstruction.

In addition, concept-based thematic units are currently in a state of development. The district will implement this approach to learning during the next school year. Each grade level, after having chosen a theme, is

working to define its purpose and philosophy and to segue this theme into an already existing curriculum. Upon completion of this work, the teachers will provide parent with pertinent information so that they can understand the very real changes and how their children will be taught.

Also, with recent tax caps and other legislative changes, the district has found itself with financial difficulties. Although this has been somewhat alleviated through some creative financial rearrangement (putting off the worst case scenario for a few more years), the realization of dwindling monies has served to disturb parents and staff alike. There has been much talk of dropping programs and eliminating teaching positions. Because the community is very diligent in monitoring the district programs, this dire financial forecast has dramatically increased attendance at board meetings with many parents speaking out strongly. The community is very adamant in their desire to take measures that will save programs and jobs. As these financial effects are far reaching with no positive solution in sight, this will continue to be a pressing and disturbing issue to the entire district.

Regional and National Context of Problem

Nationally, the writing process at all grade levels has been at the forefront of curriculum planning and revision. All children regardless of age, sex, and socioeconomic status are expected to improve their writing skills through an integrated, process and product oriented approach to writing. The Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) indicates, in response to children's poor academic performance, that "attention within educational reform has focused on higher order literate thinking skills and reasoning and their relationship to writing and writing instruction" (Hildyard, 1992, p.1528). Results from large-scale assessments of student

achievement (National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP], 1986) indicate that children show success at *basic* written composition. However, little success is evident through tasks that require higher order literate thinking skills (Applebee, Langer & Mullis, 1986). As a result, teachers are required to increase class time spent on writing skills, incorporate higher order literate thinking skills and motivate their students in the writing process. Ultimately, writing instruction, beginning in the very early years of a child's education, has been the focal point and the driving force of today's curriculum.

The "process" approach to writing instruction has strongly influenced curriculum recommendations and guidelines. The concern with a process-oriented curriculum has effected both the California Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program (California State Department of Education, 1982) and the New York State Composition in the English and Language Arts Curriculum (New York State Department of Education, 1986). The K-12 California and New York State writing curriculum encourages that the guidelines build on students' interests but also treat writing as a process which includes prewriting, writing, responding, revising, editing, developing skills with writing conventions, evaluating and postwriting (Jackson, 1992).

In addition, the National Council of Teachers of English, the Modern Language Association and six other organizations concerned with the teaching of English gathered for a three week meeting to discuss and analyze the language needs of students and the new direction of education. The English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language (Lloyd-Jones and Lunsford, 1989) called for a major effort to transform Writing and English education into an interactive experience between teachers and students in a way in which language is used to ponder meaningful topics

and communicate their thought and knowledge (Jackson, 1992). Hildyard best describes writing concerns in that "various pressures -from education, business, government and the public- have refocused attention on the processes involved in learning to write and in achieving the skills necessary to communicate effectively, for whatever purpose, in writing" (1992, p.1529).

The importance of beginning the writing process and fostering the necessary enthusiasm for writing at an early age is evident. Children at the primary level, particularly in kindergarten, should participate in authentic writing activities that stem from familiar experiences. Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (1993) suggest that children at all ages and levels need writing opportunities to fully complete and reflect on communicative tasks since writing is an important and complex academic task. The earlier children are allowed to express their thoughts even through scribbles, drawings and variations of the written language, the more knowledgeable, competent and confident they will become. Avery's philosophy on early writing illustrates the significance of prewriting and writing skills at the kindergarten level when she states "(1) young children can write, (2) young children want to write and (3) young children possess knowledge, interests and experiences to write about" (1993, p.89).

In light of the educational research and concerns of the general public, the teachers in the targeted school district are attempting to revise their writing curriculum to improve their students' writing abilities. In addition, the changes in the kindergarten writing curriculum in the targeted school must also parallel this changing philosophy with the hopes to meet the needs of their students at their developmentally appropriate level.

Chapter 2

PROBLEM DEFINITION

Evidence of Problem

In order to document the writing readiness skills of the targeted Kindergarten students, the researchers used an Observation Checklist of Writing Behaviors (Appendix A), an Oral Language Story Rubric (Appendix B), a Writing Sample Rubric (Appendix C), and a Teacher Survey of Writing Abilities (Appendix D). The results displayed a need to improve the targeted students' writing readiness abilities. The researchers feel that the ability to write well enables any child to function adequately in all areas of the curriculum. In addition, it is the researchers' belief that all Kindergarten children should enter into this process with confidence and enthusiasm. However, based on the documentation, the targeted Kindergarten children do not possess the necessary writing skills.

The targeted population involved in the assessments consisted of 37 Kindergarten students. Kindergarten class 1 (K1) is comprised of 18 students while Kindergarten class 2 (K2) consists of the remaining 19 students. These students attend the targeted school and are all members of the Kindergarten morning sessions.

In order to assess writing abilities, the researchers observed the children's writing in all areas of the curriculum. A summary of the writing behaviors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Observation Checklist of Writing Behaviors
 (Percentages of K1 and K2)

STAGES OF WRITING	No Progress	Emerging	Satisfactory
Pictures	0	3	97
Scribbles	0	49	51
Random Letters	51	19	30
Initial Consonants	68	14	18
Middle Consonants	87	8	5
Final Consonants	79	5	16
Vowels	92	8	0
Labels	65	24	11
Sentence Format	86	11	3
Proper Spacing	92	5	3
Punctuation	94	3	3
SPATIAL AWARENESS			
Left-Right Prog.	NA	NA	NA
Top-Bottom Prog.	NA	NA	NA
Appropriate Size	NA	NA	NA
INTEREST			
High level during Writing Assign.	51	38	11
Ability to take risks	68	19	13
Visits Writing Center Independently	73	24	3
Uses writing during play activities	76	21	3
Displays an awareness of print	3	3	94

The observation checklist of writing behaviors was used for the first three weeks of the 1995-1996 school year. Each child in the targeted kindergarten classes was observed and assessed during numerous independent writing activities. This checklist was used to ascertain baseline information regarding the various stages of writing and the accompanying level of interest for the targeted kindergarten children.

The results show the majority of the children, 97 percent, entering kindergarten in September, 1995 used pictures when asked to write. Of those children also using scribbles, 49 percent were found at an emergent level while 51 percent were using them satisfactorily. Although 19 percent showed emerging letter usage and 30 percent satisfactory use, it is of significance that 51 percent of the children's writing displayed no letter usage at all. Due to the fact that over half of the targeted kindergartners are not progressing with the writing of letters, it is not startling that, at a satisfactory level, only 18 percent of the children used initial consonants, five percent used middle consonants, 16 percent used final consonants, and none of the children exhibit the use of vowels. In addition, the use of sentence format, proper spacing and punctuation is only considered satisfactory in three percent of all writings.

Although almost all of the children displayed an awareness of print, over half of the students did not demonstrate high levels of interest during writing assignments nor did they display a willingness to take risks in their writing. Furthermore, three quarters of all the students did not visit the Writing Center independently nor did they use writing during their play activities. This suggests to the researchers that while aware of print, the

targeted children have had little opportunity to write. This is evidenced by their lack of interest and hesitancy.

The researchers deemed the analysis of spatial awareness inappropriate at this initial juncture. This is indicated on Table 2 as not applicable (NA). This will be included in subsequent assessments.

To further the researchers' data collection, one writing sample was obtained from each student as an initial artifact. This will be placed in the students' writing portfolios and compared to future writing samples. A compilation of collected data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Writing Sample Rubric
(Percentages)

	Kind of Writing	K1	K2
Level 1	Scribble text with or without illustration	61	95
Level 2	Writing which the child can read	39	0
Level 3	Simple texts which can be read by others	0	5
Level 4	Fairly accurate and fluent texts	0	0

The Writing Sample Rubric was administered during the second week of the 1995-1996 school year. It more specifically assessed the children's writing by focusing on an initial writing sample from each student. The researchers feel that the sample substantiates the observations of Table 2 (Observation Checklist of Writing Behaviors). The rubric shows the majority of the children (61 percent from K1 and 95 percent from K2) using scribble-text accompanied or not by pictures. 39 percent of the children from K1 and none of the children from K2 write that which they can

read and only one child produced text that can be read by others. No child in the targeted classes wrote with any degree of accuracy or fluency.

As a means to assess verbal abilities, the students dictated their own creative story to the researchers. The following analysis in Table 4 describes the targeted students' oral language capabilities.

Table 4
Oral Language Story Rubric
(Percentages)

		1*	2	3	4	5**
Fluency of Story	K1	11	6	50	22	11
	K2	0	11	37	21	16
Use of English Language	K1	0	17	56	22	6
	K2	5	0	42	26	5
Creativity	K1	6	22	28	28	17
	K2	11	21	26	21	5
Positive Attitude	K1	6	0	17	22	56
	K2	0	5	42	16	21

* Least amount of evidence

** Most amount of evidence

The children dictated stories to the teachers during the second week of the 1995-1996 school year. The Oral Language Story Rubric was used for assessment of these stories. The evidence provided by this rubric suggests that the majority of the targeted Kindergarten students (50 percent from K1 and 37 percent from K2) were fluent when dictating stories. 56 percent from K1 and 42 percent from K2 displayed an average use of language. This was coupled with quite a bit of creativity with a combined average of 63 percent ranging from three to five on the rubric. The number of children displaying a positive attitude toward this type of writing activity was considerable. The researchers believe that the

assessment of this dictation makes a statement about the children's ability to write. Although Table 2 indicates the children, when doing their own writing, did not display a high level of interest nor a willingness to take risks, this dictation exercise displays quite the opposite. The researchers suspect that while these children are not yet taking risks with their own writing and appear to have no interest doing so, they do have quite a bit to say, can express it well, and are interested in seeing their words in written form.

In addition to assessing their fluency, use of language, creativity, and enthusiasm, the researchers found the number of words that the children used, as illustrated in Table 5, appropriately parallels the previous data (Table 4).

Table 5
Oral Language Story Rubric
(Number of Words)
(Percentages)

	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81-90	91-100	101 +
K1	0	0	6	17	17	11	6	6	17	17	17
K2	0	26	11	26	0	5	0	11	0	0	0

This section of the Oral Language Story Rubric concerns the number of words used by the children in their dictated stories. Although 26 percent of the children from K2 dictated as few as 11-20 words and 17 percent of the children from K1 dictated more than 100, 75 percent of all the children ranged from 21-100 words. This is considered adequate by the researchers especially in view of the results from Table 4. The previous

rubric suggests, as indicated, good fluency and use of language plus creativity and positive attitude.

Finally, a survey to assess teachers' attitudes towards writing instruction was administered to all primary teachers in the targeted school. A summary of teacher attitudes is presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Teacher Survey of Writing Abilities
(Percentage of Responses)

Importance of Students' Writing	Not	Somewhat	Very	Critically
	0	23	38.5	38.5
Evaluation of Students' Writing	Never	Sometimes	Frequent	Always
	0	8	69	23
Minutes per Week Devoted to	0-1 hours	1-2 hours	2-4 hours	4 or more
	30	38	16	16
Curriculum Overload	Lacking content	Acceptable	Moderate	Extreme
	0	0	46	54
View of Own Writing Skills	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
	0	23	54	23
Teacher Attendance at a Writing Seminar/Class	Never	5-10 years	1-5 years	0-1 years
	0	46	46	8
Attitude of Students toward Writing	Very negative	Negative	Positive	Enthusiastic
	0	0	69	31
Writing Skills of Students	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
	31	31	38	0
Use of Invented Spelling	Not allowed	Not comfortable	Somewhat	Very Comf.
	8	8	38	46

In order to collect data from the primary teachers at the targeted school, an informal survey was administered and a brief interview session conducted during the first week of the 1995-1996 school year. The thirteen teachers participating represented all of the teachers at the Kindergarten, First and Second grade levels.

How much importance do you place on your students' writing? Of those teachers surveyed, 77 percent felt children's writing to be very or critically important while 23 percent stated writing was somewhat important. It is significant to the researchers that not one teacher stated writing was of no importance.

How often do you evaluate your students' writing? 92 percent of the teachers stated writing should be done frequently or always. The remaining 8 percent felt evaluation should be done sometimes. The fact that no teacher has responded that evaluation of writing was unimportant is a salient detail.

How many minutes per week do you devote to writing instruction? In view of the importance of writing and evaluation expressed by these teachers, it is interesting to note the amount of time devoted to writing each week. Of the teachers surveyed, 30 percent devoted no more than one hour per week to writing, 38 percent devoted less than two hours per week, 16 percent devoted 2-4 hours and only 16 percent devoted four hours or more. As was shown, 77 percent of the teachers felt writing to be very or critically important, but only 16 percent devoted four hours per week, an average of 45 minutes per day, to writing instruction. This was of significance to the researchers. It suggests while teachers are aware of the importance of writing, they are not aware that it needs to be taught often. It also may suggest that the teachers do not have the time to address writing adequately.

To what degree do you think the curriculum is overloaded? As is shown, 100 percent of the teachers believe the curriculum to be moderately or extremely overloaded. Although 46 percent of the teachers felt the curriculum was only moderately overloaded, when interviewed, they

expressed considerably more frustration with the time constraints of an overloaded curriculum. Researchers noted that many teachers hesitated to give what might be considered negative answers about this situation. Some were so uncomfortable that they wanted to know how other teachers had answered. The fact does remain that 100 percent of the teachers felt that the curriculum was overloaded to some degree, and the researchers felt this could certainly have an adverse effect on the amount of time devoted to writing. It is felt there is a correlation between the overloaded curriculum and the small amount of time devoted to writing by 68 percent of the teachers.

How do you view your own writing skills? The importance of writing is again reiterated by the teachers' views of their own writing skills. While 23 percent rated their skills as fair, 77 percent thought their skills to be good to excellent. The researchers believe that, knowing the importance of good writing, the teachers wanted to convey that they were good or proficient writers.

How long has it been since you have attended a writing seminar/class? The following percentages, concerning attendance of writing seminars or classes, give another indication of the teachers' abilities to write and to teach writing. Only 8 percent have had writing instruction in the last year, 46 percent have had instruction in the last 1-5 years and nearly half, 46 percent, have had no instruction in 5 years or more. In addition, several teachers during the interview mentioned the lack of education and guidance provided by the targeted district. The researchers felt there is a correlation between these figures and the 68 percent of teachers who spend less than two hours per week on writing. It is thought that these teachers are not aware of the masses of research stating the

importance of frequent and constant writing experiences. In addition, the researchers believe that this lack of schooling suggests the teachers are not familiar with the various writing strategies.

Overall, how would you describe the writing skills and attitudes of your students toward writing? While 100 percent of the teachers indicated that their students were positive or enthusiastic about writing, only 38 percent indicated that their students' writing abilities were good. None indicated these skills were excellent. 62 percent of the teachers rated their students' writing skills as fair or poor. The researchers believe while there is a high level of enthusiasm, as previously mentioned, the low level of aptitude may be due to the lack of actual experience and instruction time .

In addition, the low level of assessment could be attributed to the very high expectations voiced by the teachers when interviewed. For example, First grade teachers indicated the following expectations for those children entering their classrooms: correct spacing, use of capital letters and punctuation marks, ability to form a sentence, expression of complete thoughts creatively, use of invented spelling complete with initial and final consonants or near correct spelling. Not only did the Second grade teachers indicate that their students should be weaned away from invented spelling well before the end of that grade, they also appeared uncomfortable with its use at any time.

How comfortable are you in allowing your students to use invented spelling? The last consideration was the use of invented spelling and the accompanying comfort level. 84 percent of the teachers indicated that they were somewhat to very comfortable with the use of invented spelling while 8 percent were not comfortable with the practice, but did allow its use. 8 percent did not allow any use of invented spelling. The researchers felt

that the high levels of comfort were somewhat deceiving. During the interviews, teachers invariably qualified their answers, indicating less comfort than percentages show. Consequently, researchers question the high percentage indicating use of invented spelling. The kindergarten teachers stated that other grade level teachers often made disparaging remarks about their children's attempts at writing. These writings clearly contain invented spelling. It was their supposition that invented spelling was not understood or valued by other grade level teachers. The researchers accept this as a possibility.

In reviewing all the information, from Tables 2 - 6, from the earliest point in a child's education, the researchers suggest that educators would be advised to include writing readiness as an integral and major aspect of any Kindergarten curriculum.

Probable Causes

Although a significant portion of research supporting writing in young children was done the 1970's and early 1980's as evidenced by the large amount of work by Graves and Chomsky, among others, the latest revision of the Kindergarten curriculum, done in 1987 in the targeted school district, does not reflect this. There is no writing component (Kindergarten Curriculum, 1987). Later research, such as that done by Schickendanz (1992) , indicates writing can and should be done by young children. In spite of this, the school district has not focused on this in any organized fashion.

The fact that writing has not been addressed is apparent in several ways. First, although there have been some curricular additions or changes incorporated since 1987, none have been done by way of a formal

revision and none have been in the area of writing. Changes or additions in reading, handwriting and science have been the result of district committee work with accompanying in-service opportunities. However, writing has not been addressed.

There is no structure or plan for the teaching of writing in the targeted Kindergarten. The teachers are not presented with philosophy, guidelines or expectations for the teaching of writing. They have been offered neither training nor materials. After discussion with and observation of the teachers, it is evident that there is no coordinated approach to writing in the targeted district's Kindergarten program. Due to a lack of guidance, understanding, awareness and education, every Kindergarten classroom in this district approaches the teaching of writing differently and to varying degrees. At one end of the spectrum is the teacher who allows almost no freedom and little possibility for early creative expression. Here, the early stages of writing are not only misunderstood, but not encouraged at all. The children are not allowed to write anything but that which is considered to be perfect spelling and construction. Falling at various places along the continuum, the other teachers try, to differing degrees, to approach writing as research indicates -begun early, done often, and with all stages encouraged and accepted.

The literature suggests yet some other reasons why a lack of writing readiness skills exist. As mentioned previously, some teachers are ill-prepared for the teaching of the writing process or have an overload in the curriculum which results in little time devoted to writing. "Just as children are at different stages in their development, so too we as teachers are at different levels of growth" (Hillerich, 1985, p. 31). The writing process has taken different forms in many classrooms and this can be attributed to each

teacher's individual knowledge and beliefs as to how writing should be taught. Educators are now being asked to use writing across the curriculum rather than teach it as a single discipline which was the common practice in the past. According to Silberman (1989), the fact is that most teachers are inept to teach writing simply because most colleges and universities did not properly train them in writing development. As is the case with most elementary curriculums, universities emphasize the students' progress in reading and math more often than any other subject. Ultimately, teachers pursue course work on their own or use alternate resources to increase their knowledge of the writing process.

Most teachers are trying not to squelch the enthusiasm that is necessary for writing. Even in the early years of a child's education, the teachers' intention is to get students off to a "good start". However well-meaning, teachers are often making the mistake of over-emphasizing basic skills rather than encouraging the writing ideas that these five and six year old children may already possess (Silberman, 1989). This may be caused, in part, by the educator's lack of knowledge concerning writing or an over-emphasis of basic skills and standardized test scores. According to Atwell, the rationale for encouraging student writing and teacher awareness is that:

We know that every child can write - given enough time and appropriate tools, given a teacher who has learned how to observe kids and how to help, given demonstrations of what writers do and encouragement to break ground, given opportunities to learn from successes and from failures, too (Jensen, 1993, p. 291).

Just as the children are encouraged to learn from successes and failures, teachers, too, should have the opportunity, plus the desire, to develop their knowledge of the way children engage in this writing process.

In addition to the discussed probable causes, a lack of space and time in the Kindergarten curriculum may have a negative impact on the writing curriculum. According to Piaget (1969), children acquire knowledge by interacting with the world or an environment that is conducive to learning and literacy development (Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Kindergarten students who are situated in a large, open and inviting atmosphere are likely to experience more success than students who work in a small classroom. Ideally, the children should experience charts, lists, labels and bulletin boards all around their room. Being engrossed in a print-rich environment, the children will have the opportunity to display their written work daily and will benefit far more in their literacy development. The Kindergarten students in the targeted school are taught in a small classroom setting. Therefore, the opportunities to display their writing samples, work in an open area, or engage in centers are not afforded them. This may inhibit their literacy growth. Although teachers with limited space are usually creative in their classroom arrangement, kindergarten classrooms need to have areas large enough for the children to grow intellectually, physically, socially, creatively, emotionally and linguistically (Spodek, Saracho & Davis, 1987).

As previously mentioned, a lack of time or an "overload" in the curriculum can adversely affect the writing abilities of students. According to the results of our teacher survey of the primary grades, 100 percent of the teachers believe that the curriculum is overwhelming. "Teachers often face having so much to do with little time to do it. Because of this time crunch, we often set priorities in our classroom activities and assignments" (Teachers of the Monroe County Community School Cooperation, in press, p.46). At the kindergarten level, the children are at school for only two and

a half hours a day. Within this time frame, the children are expected to learn math, science, social studies, reading, writing, music, art and physical education. In addition, daily recess, snack and social skills activities are incorporated into their day. As a result, daily work on writing readiness skills, on a daily basis as recommended by many researchers, becomes a real challenge.

Graves (1983) tells us that children can write at a very early age. While their efforts take various forms such as pictures, scribbles and random letters, all are valid (Manning, Manning & Hughes, 1987). We are also told by Richgels (1987) that these efforts should be encouraged in order to build a foundation for later writing. This can begin in the pre-schools because, as we know, children are aware of print and its purpose as early as two years of age (Schickendanz, 1992). In fact, Beemer and Grippando (1992) tell us children need to "begin writing as early and as much as possible" (p. 36).

The children entering the targeted Kindergarten program appear not to have had all the various types of opportunities for writing that research encourages. Upon observation by the classroom teacher, it appears that they are reluctant to write and fearful that their efforts will not be accepted. This would suggest that they have not had many opportunities to write freely at their appropriate level with the assurance of acceptance. Graue (1992) tells us that it takes as little time as a semester to turn hesitation into enthusiasm. The observed reluctance clearly illustrates that the children have not spent much time involved in spontaneous writing prior to entrance into Kindergarten.

This supposition is supported when reviewing the curriculum of those local pre-schools most attended by targeted students. Although many

other readiness areas such as reading, math, science and even Spanish were mentioned in these curriculums, writing readiness was rarely, if ever, mentioned. In those few pre-schools that did address writing, it was a very small portion of a very full curriculum. In studying the curriculum and interviewing the pre-school teachers, it became clear that most writing efforts were centered around correct copying of words and sentences or worksheets. There appeared to be little opportunity for children to take those ever important risks needed to independently develop their own writing (Danielson, 1992; Graue, 1992). Also, most of the pre-school curriculums centered on teaching sounds and letters, but without any accompanying writing component. Richgels (1987) tells us that this combination, sounds, letters, and writing, is one of real importance and, therefore, the lack of same is significant.

The result of experiencing these various pre-school curriculums would be kindergarten children who have done little spontaneous writing and have not experienced writing in its natural developmental stages. These kindergarten children, as those in the targeted district appear to be, would be reluctant and fearful writers.

A final challenge for improving writing readiness skills centers around the controversy as to how children write. It has been noted through observation by the kindergarten teachers in the targeted school district that their own peers, other teachers, do not understand the writings of the kindergarten student. There is a tendency on their part to look askance at this work, seeing little or no validity to any writing that does not display perfect spelling, that is, any writing using invented spelling. If educators do not see the value, is it any wonder that parents also do not understand and are concerned about invented spelling, hesitating to accept it as legitimate

writing? In fact, these concerns have been voiced by parents at the targeted school through interviews and conferences.

As Richgels (1987) tells us, invented spelling is the "beginning writer's ability to write words by attending to their sound units and associating letters with them in a systematic, though unconventional, way" (p. 523). He also tells us that teachers do not understand or respect it and do not consider it part of traditional learning. At best, they only tolerate it for a brief period of time before discarding it for what they consider to be the valid way to teach. He states, however, that the child's early attempts at invented spelling are desirable and should be accepted. Tice (1992) tells us that through their own inventions children create systems "amazingly close...to standard English" (p. 49). It is not the case, as teachers fear, that children will never drop the invented spellings and never learn to spell correctly (Atkins, 1995). Teachers are very hesitant for their students to use invented spelling, fearing the reactions of parents (Atkins, 1995). This is a valid concern because, as Mulhall (1992) tells us, parents join educators and, in fact, the general public in believing kindergarten children cannot write.

Tice (1992) tells us there is "new emphasis on children's ability to invent spelling systems of their own" (p. 49). While Jensen (1992) also shares the thoughts that there have been real changes in how writing is perceived by teachers and parents, there are still articles that suggest otherwise and cloud the issue in the minds of many. The Chicago Sun Times, widely circulated in the area of the targeted school, published the following as its lead article on the front page of the June 5, 1995 issue: New Teaching Method Spells Controversy. The author, Maribeth Vander Weele, states that invented spelling is a source of "great controversy

nationwide" (p. 1). Dee Corr, American editor of The Phonics Handbook, is quoted as saying that by using invented spelling "you're doing a disservice to the children" (p. 1).

Although both schools of thought on this issue were presented in this article, there seemed to be a slant against invented spelling as this following unsupported quote points out: "But even supporters of Invented Spelling admit they can't point to research that shows it works" (p. 10).

At the very least, this article points out there is controversy and misunderstanding among all concerning invented spelling. This article brought it to the foreground, particularly by its front page placement, to once again alarm educators and parents alike. It is these same parents, it must be pointed out, that react to any invented spelling done in the targeted kindergarten classes.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

It is common knowledge that children learn to walk by walking and talk by talking and listening to the language that surrounds them. Writing, too, can be learned from writing and from observing everyday print. The process of writing plays an important role in a child's education, even at the kindergarten level. According to Newman, "Young children learn very early that print in their environment has meaning" (1984, p. 5). Incorporating writing into a kindergarten curriculum that facilitates this meaning has been a concern for educators today. What we already know about a young child's writing readiness skills is that it takes many forms. Writing at this age level *is* drawing symbols, scribbling, creating random strokes or combining letters (Baghban, 1989; Newman, 1984). Through encouragement, acceptance and praise by their peers and adults, a child's writing readiness and confidence are enhanced. Improving children's writing readiness skills at the kindergarten level can be accomplished through fostering journal writing, promoting literacy during play and encouraging a home-school connection.

Journal Writing. For many years, writing readiness was not a primary area of the Kindergarten curriculum. In many cases it was not even a consideration. Parents and educators alike did not accept that

kindergarten children could write (Mulhall, 1992). This attitude had a harmful effect, however unintentional, on any effort the child might make in that direction (Silberman, 1989). It is only recently that writing has come to the forefront in the school's quest for literacy (Tice, 1992).

Although Maria Montessori wrote early in this century about the writings of four and five years olds, as Graves (1983) points out, the widely held thought has been that the ability to write must follow the acquisition of reading skills (Jensen, 1993). We now know writing needs to be taught not only in conjunction with reading but also prior to reading. In fact, writing needs to be taught as early as possible (Beemer & Grippando, 1992; Martinez & Teale, 1987; Toch, 1992). It is presently recognized that at very early levels children can write, want to write and should be encouraged to write. In fact, most children believe they are writers. Studies show 90 percent of children believe they are writers in comparison to the 15 percent of children who believe they are readers (Silberman, 1989). With many children attempting to write before reading and with Chomsky suggesting "Write first, read later", educators must address this issue (Richgels, 1987, p. 523).

According to Schickendanz (1992), the awareness of written language is evident in the child by about age 2, and this stage of emerging literacy lasts to age 6 or 7. Writing, in fact, is related to our basic intelligence. Simply, all children know something, have something to say about what they know, and can represent what they are saying on paper in some manner (Graves, 1983; Silberman, 1989).

"Writing stems from our basic human drive to express ourselves. People have a primal need to speak, to comment upon their experiences both for others and for themselves. Children want to write because writing

is an outlet for this drive for self expression" (Temple, Nathan & Burris, 1982, p. 190). Because of this natural urge, children will write with confidence given the opportunity, conducive setting and proper tools. In a study at the University of Illinois, Durkin found that preschoolers were very interested in writing and writing materials. So high was their level of interest that the descriptive term "paper and pencil kids" was applied (Schickendanz, 1992).

The strategies these same children used in their writings were found to gradually change and evolve through working with adults. The adult, most often the teacher, sets the tone for writing by what they do, not by what is said. Therefore, by creating a print rich environment with appropriate writing tools, modeling journal writing and providing a regular time each day for this activity, a teacher will set the physical stage for writing in the classroom. The intellectual atmosphere, also created by the teacher, needs to be free of stress with children's work accepted for its best parts. Journal writing provides the opportunity for this development (Graves, 1983; Temple, Nathan & Burris, 1982).

According to Martinez & Teale (1987), if writing is introduced at the very outset of the school year, the child accepts writing as a normal part of the daily activities, and any initial reluctance related to writing can be avoided. In fact, writing can ease the transition to school. Writing, like no other area of curriculum, forms a connection between the children's home life and their life in school (Cooper, 1993). Kindergarten, being the initial point of this transition, should certainly have writing as a part of its curriculum.

As Danielson (1992) suggests, "Children learn to write by writing", and journals afford this opportunity (p. 274). Although these journaling efforts will take various forms, writing should not be delayed (Graves, 1983).

While some children will simply draw pictures, others may scribble or write random letters. Still other children may add labels to their pictures or make lists. Those children further along in their development may actually write simple phrases or sentences (Manning, Manning & Hughes, 1987; Richgels, 1987). All attempts should be respected. In fact, in 1986, the Early Childhood and Literacy Development Committee of the International Reading Association advised encouragement of "children's first attempts at writing without concern for the proper formation of letters or correct conventional spellings...and the acceptance of errors as part of children's natural patterns of growth and development" (Heller, 1991, p. 33).

Regardless of form, this journal writing has much meaning, relevance and purpose for the children and should be accepted in accordance with that. This is the children's own communication. They have put their own original thoughts on paper. This is not copied from or dictated by some other person. Importantly, children own their own work (Danielson, 1992). They need to have the control that journaling can provide. When using journals, teachers can offer help without taking away this control.

Journal writing is a very positive experience for children. It is one that gives children a chance to experiment, expand their imagination and share their voice and thoughts with others. There is a real feeling of pride and ownership when children are allowed to select their own topics. This freedom should extend not only to what they choose to write but to when they choose to do this and what portion of their writing they choose to share with others. It is this situation, created by the classroom teacher, that enables children to begin to journal (Freeman, 1989; Graves, 1983; Heller, 1989).

If these journal entries are dated, the teacher has an opportunity to assess the child's writing development over time, because, with the journal, nothing is discarded. Teachers are able to readily see what skills have been internalized. However, spelling, grammar and penmanship should not be a concern as children will learn from these writings. They will be continually reworking their written language. Repetitive entries should also be of no concern. As children write repetitively they gain confidence and eventually begin to vary their writings (Fallon & Allen, 1994; Graves, 1983; Kintisch, 1986). As every journal endeavor is to be accepted, the teacher should not grade these but can, and should, write a response for each entry. This response provides an opportunity to convey the importance of writing and the importance of print (Mulhall, 1992). Teachers should focus on the children's many positive strides and the possibilities evident in these early writings while dwelling on the best in each (Graves, 1983). Martinez and Teale (1987) also report that in addition to providing opportunities for independent writing, the resulting type of social interaction between teachers and students is of real significance for early development of literacy.

Through the use of journals children learn to write by writing under the optimum setting, becoming readers of their own work. In addition, teachers can monitor and revel in the children's development (Fallon & Allen, 1994). This positive feeling will transfer to the student as tremendous reinforcement. This will spur the children to further heights with the continuing effect on later writing experiences being quite evident (Danielson, 1992; Tice, 1992).

Literacy During Play. Another component of the kindergarten curriculum deals with literacy during a child's play. Although some

individuals may question the value of play and its role in a child's education, research and observations show that a child grows physically, emotionally, cognitively, socially and linguistically during dramatic play. According to McKimmey (1993), "Play is serious business: it is the child's work" (p.15). Facilitating literacy during play involves the following four subheadings: setting the stage of the physical environment, understanding the importance of literacy during play in the kindergarten curriculum and encouraging peer interactions as well as adult interactions in this process.

Setting the Stage of the Physical Environment: According to Gregory (1990), "Kindergarten children need a writing-conducive environment" (p. 43). This environment must be logically arranged and must appeal and make sense to the children. Prior to the children's arrival, setting up the classroom environment to promote literacy skills holds equal value to that of teaching literacy skills. Recent studies document that the enrichment of the kindergarten environment with carefully selected literacy materials results in a significant increase in the engaged literacy activities of the children during play (Vukelich, 1993). Interestingly, some teachers have traditionally excluded many literacy materials from the environment that is created for young children (Schickedanz, 1986). When observing a child playing with dolls, dishes or blocks, the child's social skill abilities do become an important part of assessment. However, by including literacy materials such as labels, lists and charts as an integral part of their learning, a teacher will evaluate the literacy skills during dramatic play in addition to the social skills. Appropriate physical environments, according to Morrow and Weinstein, are necessary in supporting and influencing the amount and types of literacy behaviors in young children (Morrow, 1990). Careful planning of the physical arrangement and language materials

benefit children's writing readiness abilities in addition to increasing their confidence in the writing process. Although time and financial constraints are apparent in most classrooms, studies have found that children who exhibit an increase in creativity and productivity, along with greater use of language-related activities, are situated in a logically planned classroom environment versus a randomly arranged room (Morrow, 1990). Setting the stage for emergent literacy through planning and materials plays an important role in the writing curriculum at any age level.

The Importance of Literacy During Play. Understanding the importance of literacy during play is a crucial component of devising and implementing the curriculum. Having exposure to a print-rich environment on a daily basis will improve children's vocabulary and letter-sound relationships along with ultimately improving their writing abilities and confidence. The research of Roskos, Schrader & Vukelich shows how dramatic play allows young children to display their increasing knowledge of the everyday functional uses of print (Vukelich, 1992). As children's exposure to various forms of literacy increase, they begin to internalize their new knowledge and create connections to their already existing knowledge. These connections result in a writing environment that has purpose and makes sense to the children.

Peer Interactions. Encouraging the children to relate their knowledge with their peers is another valuable form of education. According to Rowe, "self-selected literacy activities are rich contexts for literacy learning, and that social interactions...[with peers] influence the kinds of literacy strategies children internalize and use independently" (Vukelich, 1992). Rosegrant also claims that peer education especially at the kindergarten level, increases the children's vocabulary from 2,000 to 6,000 new words a

year (Cushman, 1995). Creating a print-rich environment that encourages children's interactions in a purposeful context will greatly improve writing readiness skills.

Adult Interactions: In addition to peer interaction during dramatic play, an adult's influence or encouragement is also a crucial factor in promoting literacy. According to Vygotsky, "the adult provides a social context for the child's learning that enables the child to perform at a higher level than is possible on the child's own" (Morrow, 1990). The amount and type of interaction depends on the teacher's knowledge of the children's abilities. Acting as an observer or participating in the dramatic play is an educational decision made by the teacher according to each individual child. According to Vukelich (1992), Cook-Gumperz describes this interaction by the following:

Learning is not just a matter of cognitive processing in which individuals receive, store and use certain kinds of instructional messages...Learning takes place in a social environment through interactional exchanges in which what is to be learnt is...a joint construction of the teacher and the [learner]. (p. 386).

The construction of literacy is a complex issue. However, the writing readiness skills of students at the kindergarten level can improve with the support of their peers and the adults who are involved in educating our young children.

Home-School Connections. While there is a direct correlation between high parental involvement and a child's academic achievement, and, in addition, teachers are actually closer to parents on an individual basis than 30-40 years ago, the lack of parent involvement in today's school is so alarming that this is being addressed at the highest levels

(Clark, 1995). In discussing this chasm between home and school, Richard Riley (1994), U.S Secretary of Education, feels there is a "moral urgency to our coming together, a need to act, to reconnect" (p. 68). Consequently, the U.S. Department of Education has launched, as a segment of GOALS 2000, a campaign that will encourage all adults to become partners in their child's education. The department is joined in this effort by, among others, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and other community leaders, teacher's unions, entrepreneurial organizations such as Appleseed Project, the AARP and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (Clark, 1995).

Although according to one government survey, only 46 percent of schools rated actual parent involvement as high, many parents care deeply and want to be involved and need to be guided toward this end (Rich, 1994; Riley, 1994). While teachers value what parents have to offer (often more than they value smaller class size and more teacher control), teachers feel parents are not doing their part, particularly in relation to their children's writing (Clark, 1995). 78 percent of the teachers in a survey sponsored by the American Federation of Teachers and Chrysler Corporation in October 1994 wanted more help from parents in relation to writing (Riley, 1994). To this end and to expand on that old adage "Parents are their children's first teachers", educators must make parents aware that "educational responsibilities continue well past the time the child goes off to school. Families must continue to provide reinforcement and to work with children to provide reinforcement and to work with children to provide the help it takes to do well in school. No matter how good the school is, it cannot do the job alone" (Rich, 1994, p. 35).

Defining this role on a very local level, parents can play a very positive role as a teaching partner in the classroom, as a resource person and as

an at-home teacher (Flood, Lapp & Nagel, 1995). This connection will not only benefit children, but the parent will begin to relate to their child in terms of their identity as a student. In fact, if teachers will share their children's writing projects with parents and educate them as to the importance of early writing, they will begin to view their child as a writer (Graue, 1992). Involving parents with the publishing of children's work would be one good way to acquaint them with the entire writing process (Graves, 1983). This knowledge can transfer into support for the emerging writer. Social interaction with any adult is of the utmost importance for early writing development, and who better to join the teacher in this effort than the parent (Martinez & Teale, 1987).

Parents are, however, somewhat hesitant to offer their services or to get involved in any way, thinking they have neither adequate skills nor any ability to teach. Parents feel they would be of little use in the classroom. It is incumbent upon educators to change this perspective. Presenting parents with several ideas for helping in the classroom, and allowing them to choose one they are most comfortable with will serve to raise their comfort level. Giving parents their own work space and selecting activities that capitalize on any particular area of their own expertise could also serve to increase their involvement, (Flood, Lapp & Nagel, 1995).

Graves (1983) tells us that involving parents with writing programs specifically is one of the best ways for parents to help their children. This very relationship with parents will enhance the child's writing experience. Farr (1988) states that "the people in a child's life and not merely the print is the child's chief resource in learning the early lesson of writing. People---provide the child with reasons to write, technical and emotional support (or challenge) during the process and responses once the writing is done"

(p. 53). Kindergarten is the optimum time to take advantage of this not only because writing is at its very beginning levels but also, according to a National Household's Education Survey in 1993, because the possibility for parent involvement is at its highest level and we need to tap into this (Clark, 1995).

As Clark (1995) quotes in his writing, the "most important aspect of parent involvement is --communication, communication, communication" and teachers must do just that - communicate by providing parents with ideas to support our writing program at home (p. 64). Teachers can design homework that will involve parents in the process. Family journals, shared mail and family memory albums are but a few ways to do this. Parents can also model writing, reinforce through praise and discuss environmental print. This is said to be a real bridge between school and home (Danielson, 1992; Heller, 1991).

The following from Carroll (1993) speaks most vividly about the connection between home, school, children and their writing:

I vividly remember my first day in school. We were given paper and invited to write. I made lines: straight lines, long and short lines, even an occasional crooked line all over my paper. When there was no more room, I waved my paper at the teacher. She walked over, looked intently at my work, smiled, and said, "Joyce, what a wonderful page of ones!" Then she pasted a gold star at the top. I ran all the way home with that paper. Breathlessly, I entered the kitchen, shaking my paper at my mom. She looked at it, then said, "A gold star - I'm proud of you." I wanted to explain my breathlessness, my excitement, but, I couldn't. I didn't know the word *metagognition*, but I did know what I knew. The gold star didn't

cause the excitement, the breathlessness - the writing did. I knew in that natural moment that I could write, and someone could read what I had written. I knew in that natural moment the connection between making symbols and knowing symbols (p. 114).

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

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

As a result of an increased curricular emphasis on writing, during the period of September 1995 to February 1996, the kindergarten students from the targeted class will increase their writing readiness skills, as measured by teacher observations, writing portfolios and observation checklists.

In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. A journal writing process will be designed and implemented.
2. A classroom environment that addresses literacy during play will be constructed.
3. Writing activities that provide a home and school connection will be developed.

Action Plan for the Intervention

I. Journal Writing

A. Topic Journals - Through the process of metacognition, the children will convey, in writing, the knowledge obtained from specific areas of study in the kindergarten curriculum.

1. The children will create topic journals at appropriate intervals during the school year based on particular units of study with a minimum of one journal completed per month.
2. This journal will consist of an appropriate number of bound pages depending on individual abilities and time of year.

B. Cross-Grade Level Activities - The use of students in older grades will facilitate our kindergarten students' writing abilities. In addition, they will provide good models with which our students can identify.

1. Beginning in October and continuing throughout the year, the older students will work with the kindergarten students in pairs once every two weeks for 30 minutes.
2. The activities will include dialogue journaling (a continuous correspondence between individual students at the two grade levels), co-authoring of books and the sharing of their own written work.

C. Class Made Big Books/Individual Books - Having children create versions of familiar stories or original stories in Big Book or individual form will give the children an opportunity to write for an audience and see their work in published form.

1. Beginning in September and continuing every month thereafter, the children will write one book individually and contribute to a Big Book written collectively by the class.
2. These books will consist of an appropriate number of bound pages depending on children's' abilities and time of year.

II. Literacy During Play

A. Writing Center - The writing center will allow the children to express themselves as writers in a risk-free context.

1. The children will have the opportunity to visit the writing center daily during Free Time which lasts approximately 20 minutes.
2. The writing center will contain a variety of writing materials such as various types of paper, crayons, markers, typewriter, computer, tape recorder, magazines, etc.

B. Housekeeping/Restaurant - Incorporating writing into the children's dramatic play will provide a context in which the children can display or improve their knowledge of the use of everyday print.

1. The children will have the opportunity to visit the Housekeeping area daily during Free Time which lasts approximately 20 minutes.
2. The Housekeeping/Restaurant area will contain paper, pencils, menus from local restaurants, receipts, cash register, etc.

C. Message Line/Post Office - Having the opportunity to write to another individual will improve a child's writing skills plus provide an audience and model.

1. The children may visit the message line or Post Office during the daily 20 minute Free Time. The message line will be used during September and October while the Post Office will evolve thereafter. The children will be encouraged to write messages to their classmates.
2. The message line/Post Office will contain a multitude of materials with which to write letters.

III. Home-School Connection

A. Letter Writing - Writing letters to someone outside the school setting will give the children an opportunity to vary their writing style, learn another purpose for writing and write for a different audience.

1. The children will write friendly letters to various family, friends or community members. Beginning the fourth week of September, this activity will continue once a month for the remainder of the year.
2. Although the children will have freedom of choice as to the recipient of the letter and topics discussed at times, the teacher will assign some at least 50 percent of the time. These assignments will be based on specific units of study, time of year, etc.

B. Show and Tell - Completed at home, this writing activity will bring about parental involvement. Parents can motivate, encourage and

serve as the child's editor. The parents will be able to see the Kindergarten writing process in action.

1. The children will choose an item to share with the class and write a minimum of one sentence, at home, about it. Bringing this to school on the assigned day, the children will read the sentence(s) to the class as a portion of their show and tell presentation. The students will complete this once a month beginning in September and will continue for the remainder of the school year. Initially the sentence can be dictated and written down by parents if this is more comfortable for the child. By the third show and tell, the children will write their own sentence.

2. The students will have the opportunity to choose the item and what is written. However, 50 percent of the time, the teacher will suggest possible topics to present based on current units of study, approaching holiday, etc.

C. Character for a Day - This activity will encourage family involvement. Parents will be part of motivational activities centered around storybook characters and can serve as the child's editor in the process.

1. In September, each child will take home a storybook character for one overnight visit. The child will write a minimum of one sentence about the character's experience in the home and will bring their adventure and the character back to school the following day. The child will share the experiences and read the sentence(s) to their classmates.

2. The children have the choice to write about any aspect of the experience.

D. Writing Suitcases - By taking the writing activity into the home, parents can become involved in the Kindergarten writing process as editor, motivator and as a source of reinforcement.

1. The students will take home a backpack containing all materials necessary to write a book at home (paper, pencils, stapler, etc.) along with another storybook character. Upon their return to school, the children will share the book with the class and it will then be part of the classroom library. This activity will begin in October with each child having the backpack one weekend of the school year until all of the children have had their chance. The activity will be repeated as often as the rotation allows throughout the rest of the year. It would be best to obtain four to six backpacks so that the children may have multiple writing opportunities. These backpacks plus supplies might be obtained through minigrants, local businesses or parents.

2. The children will be free to write a book of their choice 50 percent of the time. The teacher will offer suggestions for all other books written based on current units of study, etc.

E. Newsletters - Communication between school/home will not only inform parents about our writing program and activities but also enlighten them as to the process.

1. The teacher will send home monthly newsletters informing parents of classroom writing activities. Through class discussion, the children will provide the input for the letter.

2. Each newsletter will contain current writing samples from eight students. Each newsletter, different students' writing will be highlighted. This will begin in September and will continue throughout the year. Computers and Xerox machines will be available to facilitate this task.

F. Professional Articles - If appropriate professional articles are shared with parents, they will not only more easily understand the process and philosophy, but will also feel as if they are an important part of their child's education.

1. Professional articles will be sent home at a rate of one per month for the duration of the school year, beginning in September.
2. The teacher will convey to parents a willingness to discuss any article and its relation to our impact on the Kindergarten Curriculum.

Methods of Assessment

The primary method of assessment in this study focuses on the writing portfolio. This portfolio will portray each child's writing abilities throughout the school year. The children along with their teacher will choose samples of their writing which will be placed in their portfolio for the purpose of evaluating growth and progress. In addition to the writing portfolio, the children will engage in a pre and post writing activity in which they will be instructed to draw a picture and write about their illustration. As does the writing portfolio, the pre and post writing prompt will trace the children's writing development over time and will be assessed using a writing rubric (Appendix C). In using these forms of authentic assessment,

the researchers will evaluate writing progress by utilizing anecdotal records and observation checklists on each child (Appendix A). Data will be collected at the onset and culmination of the observation period.

Another form of assessment entails evaluating a child's vocabulary growth. The children will dictate an original story which will be written by an adult. These stories will be dictated at the onset and end of the study. The components that will be observed and documented are fluency of the story, use of the English language, number of words, creativity and enthusiasm/positive attitude (Appendix B). The final form of assessment that will be used is the Individual Reading Inventory (IRI) (Appendix E). The IRI will determine the children's knowledge of the letter and sound relationships and will be administered at the end of the research. Through a balance of authentic and formal assessments, the researchers have the opportunity to reflect upon the progress of the targeted students over the course of the intervention.

Chapter 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase writing readiness skills in the targeted Kindergarten students during the period of September, 1995 to February, 1996. The implementation of journal writing, the creation of a classroom environment addressing literacy during play and the development of writing activities providing a home-school connection were selected to effect the desired change.

Opportunities to write were offered to all Kindergarten children as early as the first week of school. Through increased daily opportunities, these efforts evolved into the prescribed journal writing. Individual topic journals using knowledge gleaned from particular units of study were written at appropriate intervals during the course of this intervention. The children wrote and illustrated no less than one journal each month. While teachers encouraged, motivated and offered thought provoking comments, they, in no way, limited the natural flow of the children's writing. As time went on and the children's individual writing abilities developed, these journals became longer in length, more intricate in design and increasingly sophisticated in substance. These journals were shared with the teacher and peers and accorded universal acceptance and respect.

Journaling was further implemented through cross-grade activities. Twice a month, older students worked in pairs with Kindergarten students for a period not exceeding 30 minutes. By co-authoring books, sharing their own written work with the Kindergarten student and acknowledging the younger student's work, these older students provided incentive, good modeling and positive reinforcement. The original intent was to have the paired students do dialog journals, but the researchers reconsidered this aspect. It was felt that true dialog would be hampered by the disparate writing and reading levels of the students involved, with neither child having the ability to adapt or compensate. The researchers felt that dialog journaling could be replaced by good verbal communication.

The class made Big Books and those individually written gave children yet another opportunity to write for an audience and to see their work in published form. Each month during this study, the students contributed to a book written collectively by the class. Working cooperatively under the teacher's guidance, the children contributed illustrated pages, ideas for story line and actual text. Taking various forms, these books were modeled after some of the children's favorite published works or were completely original. With the growth of the children's writing skills, these books varied as to creativity, quality of illustration and text. Upon completion, these books were bound and placed in the class library.

The opportunity to write individual books further motivated the students. The procedure for this activity was similar to that of the class book, however, the children were responsible for all aspects of their own creative work. Various motivating activities and ideas were presented to the students, coupled with ample opportunities for whole class or small group discussions. Time was provided for individual conferences with the teacher

or significant peer. The children then formulated their ideas, wrote their text, illustrated the story and titled it appropriately. The resulting book was bound, shared with the class and placed in a special Young Author's library. This library, while housed in the classroom, was infinitely more special than the regular classroom library, providing recognition and acceptance at yet another level. The resulting books varied from those with only simple pictures to those with complex text. The children's books evolved, becoming more complex as their writing skills increased.

To create the opportunity for development of literacy during play, writing centers were a focal point of the classroom. These centers provided the opportunity for children to express themselves as writers in their own arena, under their own constraints, and with self constructed parameters.

These centers consisted of a variety of writing materials such as numerous writing implements and types of paper, typewriter, computer, tape recorder, magazines and necessary supplies for binding. They were located in a strategic, yet private, area of the classroom. The children could visit this center daily during a 20 minute Free Time or at any other opportune time. This writing was of their own choice, style, length and form. The writing was completed in one sitting or placed in an author's portfolio for future use. At the discretion of the students, the finished product was shared with the teacher or peers, taken home or placed in the Young Author's library. This situation was not only risk free but one in which the student had complete freedom and control.

To improve and display the children's knowledge of every day print and its purpose, writing was incorporated into the children's dramatic play. The housekeeping/restaurant areas provided the perfect vehicle for this.

Utilized from the year's beginning, this center contained not only the obvious components of a miniaturized kitchen and living area, but paper, pencils, menus, receipts, cash register, order forms, check registers and stamps and pads. This area was available during the daily 20 minute Free Time. Here too, the children, either individually or with peers, established the structure and parameters with complete or shared freedom of choice. With writing being the common component, the children would become the server, clerk or customer. By using writing in context, making sense of it, and relating to peers, the students internalized its purpose.

An important activity during the first two months of school was a simple message line which soon evolved into a sophisticated Post Office. This center was supplied with various writing materials, envelopes and stamps. During, but not limited to the daily Free Time, the children wrote messages to classmates, dispersing them through the Post Office. The shared writing provided the opportunity to improve writing skills with freedom, choice and an audience. As the children were also the recipient of messages, the opportunity for modeling was a component of this activity.

In order to strengthen the home school connection, so important at any level and so easily tapped in Kindergarten, and to vary writing style, audience, and purpose, the children wrote letters to people outside the school setting. While closely related to the above activity, the scope was certainly broadened.

This simple letter writing began the fourth week of September and evolved over the course of time with the children writing one letter per month. Although the teacher assigned recipients and topics for 50 per cent of all letters, the children had freedom of choice for the remainder of the letters. These letters were actually sent, and an unexpected highlight was

the many responses received. These responses expanded the activity in a way not previously considered.

As a way of assuring home-school involvement, this next activity was completed at home. Through this, parents not only saw the writing process in action but were a part of it. Expanding on the traditional Show and Tell (Appendix F), the children dictated a minimum of one sentence at home about the item they intended to bring to school. This was then read to the class on the scheduled Show and Tell day. Although students had freedom of choice concerning the shared item and the sentence written, 50 per cent of the time the teacher suggested possible topics pertaining to units of study or approaching holidays. This activity, begun in September, continued once a month. By the third month, the children were required to write their own sentence rather than dictate it to a parent.

An activity that particularly involved all family members was Character for a Day. Beginning in September, each child had the opportunity to bring home a storybook character, Brown Bear, for an overnight visit. The bear traveled in a cloth bag with accompanying sentence strips and markers. By its very nature, this activity involved parents and other family members in all aspects of the visit and the writing experience. By extending the pattern in the much loved book, Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?, the children wrote a minimum of one sentence telling about the character's experience in their home, telling what he did, in fact, see. The children could either write the sentence or dictate it to a parent. The children had complete freedom of choice as to what was written. Upon returning the character to school, the children shared the experiences and read the sentence to classmates. These sentences were then displayed on a bulletin board for all to read.

Similar to, and building upon the Character for a Day, Writing Suitcases (Appendix G) also brought writing into the home and involved all family members. The parents served as motivators and editors, giving much reinforcement. The children had an opportunity to take home a suitcase containing a storybook character and all materials necessary to write a book. The process was much the same as with the Character for a Day except that a titled and illustrated book was the end product. More time was allowed for the process, and parent involvement increased. Upon completion of the book, the suitcase was returned to school and immediately sent home with another student. (There were two suitcases per class.) Having had free choice as to book contents, title and illustrations, the children read their story to the class. The book was then placed in the Young Author's library.

Through the use of their school district's mini-grant program (Appendix H), the researchers were able to obtain money for purchase of all needed supplies. Because of the inclusion of storybook characters, the researchers decided they would not dictate topics for these books but continue the adventure idea initiated in Character for a Day. In addition, it was originally proposed that each child would take a backpack for a weekend. However, when the researchers received considerable grant money, it was decided they would purchase more substantial briefcases. These would wear better and hold an increased amount of supplies in a much more organized manner. This decision meant, rather than several backpacks, two suitcases could be purchased per class.

It is universally accepted that communication between school and home is vital if we as educators are to succeed in our job. We need parents' help, and they need to feel they are a part of the process. It therefore

follows that the success of our action research would depend, in part, on this same need for communication. In addition, because the home/school connection was a component in our research, this communication was not only desirable but mandatory. It was imperative that the parents be informed as well as understand the writing process involved. To this end, the researchers sent home newsletters that reflected student input and contained samples of student writing. Beginning in September, and each month thereafter, the work of eight different students was highlighted. The use of computers, fax machines and Xerox machines greatly facilitated this process.

To further this understanding and to share not only the process but the philosophy, appropriate professional articles were sent to parents once a month. The researchers conveyed a willingness to discuss any article and also held a parent meeting once the program was underway. This meeting was well attended and well received. Although it had not been included in the initial plan, the researchers felt that this was a very beneficial component.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

At the beginning of this analysis, the researchers would like to point out that the targeted Kindergarten classes have had a change in population. Due to student mobility, Kindergarten class two (K2) decreased from 19 students to 17 students while Kindergarten class one (K1) remained at 18 students. The total number of Kindergarten students participating in this action research project changed from 37 students to 35 students.

An observation checklist was used by the researchers to assess the children's writing abilities in all areas of the curriculum. A summary of the

writing behavior is presented in Table 7. In order to measure any changes in these abilities, the children were initially observed and assessed while engaged in many writing activities during September, 1995 for baseline information (Table 2). This same process was then repeated in February, 1996.

Table 7
Observation Checklist of Writing Behaviors
 (Percentages of K1 and K2)

STAGES OF WRITING	No Progress	Emerging	Satisfactory
Pictures	0	0	100
Scribbles	0	0	100
Random Letters	0	3	97
Initial Consonants	0	14	86
Middle Consonants	17	37	46
Final Consonants	8	29	63
Vowels	29	31	40
Labels	3	17	80
Sentence Format	0	29	71
Proper Spacing	14	34	52
Punctuation	0	17	83
SPATIAL AWARENESS			
Left-Right Prog.	0	14	86
Top-Bottom Prog.	0	0	100
Appropriate Size	0	6	94
INTEREST			
High level during Writing Assign.	0	37	63
Ability to take risks	3	23	74
Visits Writing Center Independently	3	43	54
Uses writing during play activities	3	14	83
Displays an awareness of print	0	6	94

In September, almost all children, 97 per cent, used pictures when asked to write. This figure has increased by the remaining three per cent to a total of 100 per cent of the children. The number of children now using scribbles has also increased to 100 per cent. It should be noted that this is an increase of 49 per cent. Although initially 30 per cent of the children were using random letters satisfactorily, it was significant that 51 per cent were not and that only 19 per cent of the children displayed the emergence of this skill. Therefore the changes, with 97 per cent of children now using random letters and the remaining three per cent emerging, are noteworthy. In September, 68 per cent of the children used no initial consonants, 87 per cent no middle consonants, 79 per cent no final consonants and no children displayed satisfactory use of vowels. Current findings show that 86 per cent of the children satisfactorily incorporate initial consonants into their writing with 46 per cent using consonants in middle position, 63 per cent showing final consonant usage and a notable 40 per cent using vowels. These numbers represent significant change. At this point, use of sentence format, proper spacing and punctuation is considered satisfactory in 71 per cent, 52 per cent and 83 per cent respectively. Previous results showed only three per cent satisfactory for these areas. The growth is obvious.

Assessment of spatial awareness was not deemed appropriate initially. However, when assessed at the completion of the study, the results were very positive with 86 per cent of the children displaying left to right progression, 100 per cent working top to bottom and size of writing being appropriate in 94 per cent of the children.

Interest in writing was initially low with just over half of the children displaying no interest and only 11 per cent displaying satisfactory interest.

Now all children display some interest with 63 per cent considered satisfactory and 37 per cent displaying emerging interest. Only 13 per cent of the children were willing to take risks at the beginning of this study. It is significant that now only three per cent will not take a risk, with 74 per cent quite willing and this willingness emerging in 23 per cent of the children. Although there was a high awareness of print initially, almost three quarters of the children did not visit the writing center or use writing during play. These numbers have changed tremendously with only three per cent of the children showing no use of writing in centers or at play. Over half of the children consistently visit the writing center and 83 per cent incorporate writing into their play.

Not only do these numbers show an increase in awareness, interest and skill, they substantiate the daily growth informally observed by the researchers. What these numbers do not show was the speed at which this seemed to happen. Once the children were exposed to all aspects of the aforementioned action plan, growth began and never faltered.

The Writing Rubric, administered during the second week of the 1995-1996 school year (Table 3), was again used at the completion of this study in February, 1996 in order to assess a final writing sample from each of the targeted Kindergarten students. While its focus is more specific, the researchers feel the results substantiate those of Table 7 (Observation Checklist of Writing Behaviors).

Table 8
Writing Sample Rubric
(Percentages)

	Kind of Writing	K1	K2
Level 1	Scribble text with or without illustration	0	0
Level 2	Writing which the child can read	33.33	41
Level 3	Simple texts which can be read by others	33.33	47
Level 4	Fairly accurate and fluent texts	33.33	12

The rubric indicates that, although initially the majority of the Kindergarten children (61 per cent from K1 and 95 per cent from K2) were using scribble text, all the Kindergarten children have now advanced beyond this level. In September, 39 per cent of K1 children wrote that which they could read. This figure, however, is lower, now at 33 1/3 per cent, as the children show progress in areas not previously attained as 33 1/3 per cent write simple text with the remaining third writing fairly accurate and fluent text. K2 children also show progress as 41 per cent of them can, for the first time, write that which can be read. Although previously 5 per cent of K2 could write simple text, that percentage has greatly increased to 47 percent while 12 per cent can now write with a degree of accuracy or fluency.

As a means to assess verbal abilities, the students dictated their own creative stories both at the onset and at the conclusion of the study. As Tables 4 and 9 demonstrate, the researchers observed fluency of story, use of English language, creativity and positive attitude/enthusiasm.

Table 9
Oral Language Story Rubric
(Percentages)

		1*	2	3	4	5**
Fluency of Story	K1	0	0	22	50	28
	K2	0	0	18	24	58
Use of English Language	K1	0	0	11	39	50
	K2	0	0	58	29	13
Creativity	K1	0	0	6	44	50
	K2	0	11	65	6	18
Positive Attitude	K1	0	0	6	78	16
	K2	0	0	6	29	65

* Least amount of evidence

** Most amount of evidence

The Oral Language Story Rubric suggests that the majority of the children from both classes scored in the average range when dictating stories in September. However, this average increased by the end of the study with over three quarters of the children from both K1 and K2 being very fluent when dictating stories. As to use of English language, about half of the children from K1 and K2 displayed an average use of this ability in September. At the conclusion of the study, half of the K1 children progressed to the highest level on the rubric and 71 per cent of the children from K2 scored between three and four. While a combined average of 63 per cent (ranging from three to five on the rubric) portrays K1 and K2 children with a high level of creativity in September, this average has increased to an impressive 95 per cent. This growth is significant. Finally, the number of children displaying a positive attitude toward this activity has been considerable throughout the study. The researchers believe that this enthusiasm can be attributed to the high amount of exposure to books and storytelling both at home and at school prior to and during this study.

In addition to assessing fluency, use of language, creativity, and positive attitude, the researchers examined the number of words used by the children in their dictated stories. The results from the end of the study can be found in Table 10.

Table 10
Oral Language Story Rubric
(Number of Words)
(Percentages)

	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81-90	91-100	101 +
K1	0	0	6	11	16	11	11	6	11	0	28
K2	0	0	35	18	12	12	18	5	0	0	0

In comparison to the September results (Table 5), the number of words has remained consistent with some minor changes for both classes. The researchers consider this fact interesting as the children improved their abilities in all other areas as stated in Table 9. An analysis of this information would suggest that the number of words in the dictated stories demonstrates no correlation to the level of fluency, use of language, creativity and positive attitude.

The final assessment administered by the researchers was the Individual Reading Inventory (IRI). This evaluative tool determines upper and lowercase letter identification, letter-sound relationships and kindergarten sight word recognition. The combined class results can be observed in Table 11.

Table 11
Individual Reading Inventory
 (Percentages of K1 and K2)

	Recognition of Uppercase Letters	Recognition of Lowercase Letters	Letter/Sound Relationships	Sight Word Identification
0-25%	0	0	0	6
26-50%	0	0	6	22
51-75%	3	3	8	26
76-100%	97	97	86	46

As Table 11 suggests, the majority of the kindergarten children identified between 76 and 100 per cent of both upper and lowercase letters. Over four-fifths of the children deciphered between 76 and 100 per cent of letter sounds. In addition, the children who attend this school district are encouraged to recognize 41 basic sight words prior to first grade. Of the 41 sight words tested at the conclusion of the study, about one-half of the children identified between 76 and 100 per cent and about one-fourth of all children recognized between 51 and 75 per cent with another one-fourth between 26 and 50 per cent. The researchers believe that an increase in writing abilities may be attributed to the level of success in letter, sound and sight word recognition. An analysis of the results may signify that the students' confidence and ability to take risks in writing parallel the skills tested in the IRI.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The researchers believe the intervention had a positive effect on the targeted kindergarten students' writing abilities. Daily observations and

student work confirmed increased abilities and positive attitudes toward the writing process. By implementing a journal writing program, incorporating a home-school writing connection and promoting literacy during play, the researchers concluded that these increased writing opportunities led to a successful and meaningful writing connection for the students. A continuation of this program would produce high student achievement and an increased interest in the writing process.

In order to elicit an increased kindergarten writing program, the following recommendations are made by the researchers. Due to the dictated time line of the Action Research Project, writing was begun earlier than in any previous year. Because this was easily implemented with immediate positive results, the researchers will continue this practice.

The topic journals proved worthwhile. The goal of one journal per child per month was easily managed. The journals afforded repeated opportunities for one on one mini-lessons, peer conferencing and editing, and promoted positive social growth. Researchers will continue to incorporate this activity into their curriculum.

While cross-grade activities were beneficial in their contribution to writing, the social growth and effect on self esteem was, as observed by the researchers, of more importance to all students involved. Because the activities began in October, the Kindergarten children's horizons were broadened very early. The association with and acceptance by older students had a very positive effect on the self esteem of the targeted students. Therefore, this activity will be continued to foster self-esteem.

The class Big Book, a good prelude to individual writings, provided an opportunity for cooperation and for modeling lessons. Because these

objectives were accomplished with ease, the researchers believe this activity should remain a part of the Kindergarten program.

When writing their own individual books there was much opportunity for one on one contact between student and teacher or student and peer. This process increased proficiency, interest, confidence and social interaction, convincing the researchers that this activity should continue. It should be noted, however, that time is a factor in this complex activity. Consequently, organization and pertinence of subject matter should correlate with the curriculum.

The establishment of a Young Author's library served not only to motivate but also to increase self esteem. This library can easily continue as a focal point of the classroom as the only requirement is space.

The researchers were astounded by the extensive use of the writing center. Due to high interest and the motivational value, variations of it were added during the course of the study and the researchers certainly recommend continued use. An unexpected positive was the opportunity for social growth. These centers clearly became the social hub of the classroom.

The inclusion of a restaurant, travel agency and post office can easily continue as important aspects of the play area. These afforded writing opportunities and fostered social growth yet required very little planning.

An outgrowth of the post office was the letter writing activity. The researchers felt, in order to effectively use time, the children could write informational letters to parents. Self esteem was surprisingly increased through this activity as many recipients of these letters chose to respond. The researchers will certainly expand upon this unexpected component in the future.

Because Show and Tell, while positively expanded by adding writing as a component, was still very time consuming, the researchers are concerned about the amount of time involved versus the value of the activity. This is, perhaps, an activity to be dropped.

Two valuable activities using little class time were Character for a Day and Writing Suitcases. Involvement of the home and increased self esteem are the major reasons for continuation. While it appeared that parents were doing a bit more of the work than researchers felt necessary, these activities created great excitement. Although initially supplies were paid for by a mini-grant, researchers are concerned about replacement cost of the consumables. One thought is to approach local businesses for donations.

Because of the success of the parent informational meeting, it will be continued. Researchers are considering the addition of a three way conference with student, teacher and parent at some point. This would further facilitate writing efforts and increase communication and understanding. Necessary time and availability of parents are factors to be considered.

Although the faxing of their writing was an interesting experience for the children and brought in a technological component, only those children whose parents had a fax number were involved. While parents initially displayed interest, there were no faxed responses nor any reaction, even though they were given the school's fax number. In addition, the fax machine was not handy to the classroom so the logistical aspect hampered this process. Consequently, this activity may have had too little meaning to the children to be of major benefit. The researchers would, however, like to

try this activity again. In theory, the use of the fax machine could be motivating. If not successful a second time, the idea will be eliminated.

The researchers felt one very positive aspect to this study was their heightened awareness of opportunities for writing. They "thought writing" at all times, seeing possibilities everywhere. Despite the teachers' eagerness to implement the new ideas, the constraints of time and personnel complicated this process. That thread seemed to run through the whole course of the action plan. Rather than eliminate worthwhile activities, the researchers felt that more classroom volunteers would somewhat alleviate this problem. Fortunately, due to parents' high level of interest and involvement historically, this was easily accomplished.

The researchers encourage educators working with kindergarten children to provide opportunities for improving writing readiness skills through journal writing, literacy during play and a home-school connection. By doing so, students and educators alike will be challenged to move toward new and exciting levels of accomplishment.

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Appendices

Appendix A

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Name:

STAGES OF WRITING	No Progress	Emerging	Satisfactory
Pictures			
Scribbles			
Random Letters			
Initial Consonants			
Middle Consonants			
Final Consonants			
Vowels			
Labels			
Sentence Format			
Proper Spacing			
Punctuation			
SPATIAL AWARENESS			
Left-Right Prog.			
Top-Bottom Prog.			
Appropriate Size			
INTEREST			
High level during			
Writing Assign.			
Ability to take risks			
Visits Writing Center			
Independently			
Uses writing during			
play activities			
Displays an aware-			
ness of print			

Appendix B

Story Rubric

Name _____

Number of words _____

	Least Amount of Evidence				Most Amount of Evidence
Fluency of Story	1	2	3	4	5
Use of English Language	1	2	3	4	5
Creativity	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiasm/ Positive Attitude	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C

WRITING RUBRIC

Name: _____

	Kind of Writing	Composition	Performance
Level 1	*Scribble text - with or without illustration	Concepts of: 1. Written Word	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To distinguish writing from drawing. 2. To control a writing implement. 3. Left - Right with spaces. 4. Top - Bottom progression. 5. To make true letters as well as letter-like shapes. 6. To recognize some words. (own name) 7. To distinguish some initial sounds.
Level 2	*Writing which the child can read and which includes some conventional letters.	Concepts of: 1. Letter 2. Word Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To form and orientate letters. 2. To control letter size. 3. To use letters to make words. 4. To leave spaces between words. 5. To identify phonic units in some words. 6. To monitor own performance.
Level 3	*Simple texts which can be read, at least, in part, by others.	Concepts of: 1. Sentence 2. Total text 3. Spelling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To write in sentence. 2. To write legibly, with some distinction between capital and small letters. 3. To attempt to spell some words by sound. 4. To spell familiar words correctly.
Level 4	*Fairly accurate and fluent texts in which ideas are set down without much difficulty.	Concepts of: 1. Story structure. 2. Sequential reporting of experience. 3. Overall planning. 4. The rule-governed basis of spelling.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To use some new linking words. 2. To use punctuation correctly. 3. To spell more conventionally. 4. To monitor the text for meaning.

Appendix D

Teacher Survey of Writing Abilities

Please circle or check the most appropriate response.

1. How much importance do you place on your students' writing?

not somewhat very critically
important important important important

2. How often do you evaluate your students' writing?

never sometimes frequent always

3. How many minutes per week do you devote to writing instruction?

- ___ 0-1 hours
- ___ 1-2 hours
- ___ 2-4 hours
- ___ 4 or more hours

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

lacking acceptable moderately extremely
content overloaded overloaded

5. How do you view your own writing skills?

poor fair good excellent

6. How long has it been since you have attended a writing seminar/class?

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

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

very negative negative positive enthusiastic

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

poor fair good excellent

9. How comfortable are you in allowing your students' to use invented spelling?

do not allow not comfortable
(yet still allow) somewhat comfortable very comfortable

10. Please identify your grade level.

___ K
___ 1
___ 2

Please feel free to make any additional comments.

Appendix E

LETTER IDENTIFICATION SCORE SHEET

Date: _____

Name: _____

Age: _____

TEST SCORE:

Recorder: _____

Date of Birth: _____

STANINE GROUP:

Confusions:

Letters Unknown:

Comment:

Recording:

- A Alphabet response:
tick (check)
- S Letter sound response:
tick (check)
- Word Record the word the
child gives
- IR Incorrect response:
Record what the child
says

	A	S	Word	LR.		A	S	Word	LR.
A					a				
F					f				
K					k				
P					p				
W					w				
Z					z				
B					b				
H					h				
O					o				
J					j				
U					u				
					a				
C					c				
Y					y				
L					l				
O					o				
M					m				
D					d				
N					n				
S					s				
X					x				
I					i				
E					e				
G					g				
R					r				
V					v				
T					t				
					g				

KINDERGARTEN
WORD LIST
4/95

	can	two
red	is	three
blue	see	find
yellow	A	not
green	my	you.
it	at	ten
boy	look	has
no	and	come
yes	make	will
girl	have	did
we	to	run
a	go	what
I	like.	do
the	one	in

ABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABC
123123123123123123123123123123

My Show-and-Tell

Name: _____

ABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABC
123123123123123123123123123123

ABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABC
123123123123123123123123123123

ABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABCABC
123123123123123123123123123123

Dear Parents,

Welcome to "The World of Writing Suitcases!" According to Susan J. Rich, young children become interested in reading and writing as they see adults using these skills. When children have ready access to books, paper, markers, and similar materials and are encouraged to use them, their literacy development blossoms. A Writing Suitcase is a great way for parents and teachers to build children's interest in reading and writing (Young Children - July 1995, p. 42).

This writing suitcase is yours to enjoy for the next _____ days. You and your child can use these materials to write a book about the enclosed animal's adventures while visiting your house.

The book should consist of your child's own thoughts. He should write his own sentences (doing his own spelling), draw his own illustrations and decide on the book's title. You can help him by motivating and encouraging but the work should be his. However, upon completion, you can serve as your child's editor, checking for page numbers, neat work, punctuation marks, nice coloring and proper spacing. Be sure to have your child read their book back to you.

Also, your child will design a picture for the cover and write the chosen title. You, the parent, can print the title if you wish. In addition, you will need to print "Written by" and "Illustrated by" on the cover and your child will sign his name under each. (Sample cover page is included.)

The children have an important responsibility as to care for the suitcase. These are to be used only as described. In order to keep the suitcases and supplies in good repair, therefore extending the life of this program, they should not be used for play or by other children in the family. Your diligence in this area is appreciated.

Please be sure to return the finished book and suitcase/supplies to the kindergarten classroom by the required day as many other children are looking forward to the opportunity to take it home.

We hope you enjoy this wonderful opportunity!

The Kindergarten Teachers

Inventory List

The following items are enclosed in the Writing Suitcase. Please include the completed inventory list when your child returns to school.

Please place a check mark next to each returned and undamaged item. If any items are damaged or lost, please replace them before returning to school.

- _____ Storybook character
- _____ completed book
- _____ assorted colored construction paper
- _____ white writing paper
- _____ 1 ruler
- _____ 1 pair of scissors
- _____ pencils
- _____ colored pencils
- _____ 1 box of 24 crayons
- _____ 1 bag of markers
- _____ 1 stapler and stapler remover
- _____ 1 bag of staples and brads
- _____ 1 roll of tape

Thank you for taking the time to complete this form. This process will ensure that the next child will enjoy all of the materials! Your help is truly appreciated! We hope you enjoyed your adventures!

The Kindergarten Teachers

Child's Name: _____

Parent's Signature: _____

Comments:



·ASSOCIATION·

School District

accepted

MINI-GRANT APPLICATION FORM

September 1995
DATE: _____

\$1,314 (\$132 per class)
TOTAL BUDGET REQUEST: _____

Dana Ruane, Suzanne Richardson, Jackie Durkin, Karen Pernai, Kathy Fontaine

Applicant's Name(s)

Kindergarten (Morning and Afternoon)

Position(s)/Grade Level

School

Writing Suitcases

Project Title



I. Brief Summary Description: (Include purpose, procedures & activities)

All of the kindergarten students from the ten classes in District will have the opportunity to improve their writing skills through Writing Suitcases. Two children from each class will take home a briefcase/suitcase containing all necessary materials to write a book at home for a weekend. They will share their weekend with a storybook character such as Curious George. Upon their return to school, the children will share their book about their adventures with the storybook character with the class which will then be placed in the classroom library. The children will be encouraged to express creativity as they become authors and illustrators of their first books as students. The overall purpose of this activity is to have the children see themselves as authors while improving their skills, confidence and enthusiasm as writers.

II. List grant objective(s).

- To improve the students' self-esteem and increase their confidence about the writing process.
- To improve the students' writing abilities (letter/sound relationships, sentence structure, left to right progression).
- To foster a home-school connection by involving parents as editors, motivators and as a source of reinforcement.
- To develop a sense of responsibility and ownership over the briefcase and materials.

III. Project timelines for implementation: MUST BE COMPLETED BY THE END OF SCHOOL, JUNE, 1996.

The project will be implemented from October, 1995 to May 1996.



IV. Describe student population involved in project (Include grade(s) ages and quantity).

The student population involved in the project consists of all kindergarten students from

V. Describe how you will evaluate the impact of the project.

In addition to observing the increased enthusiasm from the students, the project can be evaluated through the quality of the books that are created and in the improvement of writing abilities such as letter/sound relationships, left to right progression and sentence structure.

VI. We want to be able to share as much information with others who could benefit from your experience as possible. Will you be willing to:

a) *Make a presentation to others in the district who might learn from your project?*

Yes X No

b) *Write a report at the conclusion of the project?*

Yes X No

VII. Detail your Budget Request. Include specific information such as kinds of materials and supplies needed, sources of supply and costs. Categories to be used should be items such as: materials, supplies, transportation, speaker costs, food, substitute teacher costs, etc. (Hardware/equipment excluded). Complete mini-grant expense form attached.

Dore Quare
Suzanne Richardson
Jackie Durkin
Karen Bernai

Applicant's Signature

Kathy Jordane

Signature of Building Principal



ASSOCIATION

School District

MINI-GRANT EXPENSE FORM

PROJECT TITLE Writing Suitcases GRANT AMOUNT \$1,314-(\$132 per class)

EXPENSE ITEM (Describe briefly)	AMOUNT
<u>Suitcases</u> (To carry supplies and storybook character) 20 at \$25 each	500.00
<u>Storybook Characters</u> - (Stuffed Animals such as Curious George) 20 at \$15 each	300.00
<u>Writing/ Book Supplies</u> -	
Colored Pencils (20 sets)	46.00
Markers (40 sets)	120.00
Crayons (48 sets)	48.00
Assorted Construction Paper (40)	40.00
Yarn (10 sets)	23.00
Scissors (20)	32.00
Tape (20 sets)	15.00
Pencils (4 doz.)	12.00
Staplers (20)	100.00
Brass Paper Fasteners (20)	28.00
11" Wide Picture-Story Newsprint Paper (10 reams)	40.00
Staples (10 boxes)	10.00



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