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ABSTRACT
                This paper describes a program implemented to improve
student writing skills. Research data included teachers' observations and
evaluations, student surveys, and student writing samples. Subjects were
students in grades 1, 3, and 4 in 5 Illinois schools showing a need for
writing improvement. Objectives were to increase writing abilities with these
procedures: (1) daily oral language; (2) directed writing prompts; (3)
creative writing implementation; and (4) writing workshop implementation,
with self-evaluation by students in the latter two (rubrics were developed
according to developmental abilities at the targeted grade levels). Results
indicated that, overall, all children increased their writing abilities
between September and January. Increases include an average of 15.6% for
first graders and 23.8% for third and fourth graders. Findings suggest that
first graders made a 15-20% increase due to chronological age, developmental
ability, and prior knowledge and experience with the written language. Third
and fourth graders made a greater increase in their writing abilities. It is
recommended that teachers make students aware of good writing through focused
questions and actual daily practice of editing skills, with both unstructured
free writing and formalized structured writing used consistently throughout
the year. Rewarding students through publishing or displaying work is also
recommended, as well as the use of rubrics and one-to-one student and teacher
conferences. (Contains 5 tables of data and 18 references; sample assessment
forms.) (CR)

Improving Writing Skills Through Student Self-Assessment

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Elaine Hartmann
Lisa Herbert
Trisha Walsh

An Action research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

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

Saint Xavier University

Field-Based Masters Program

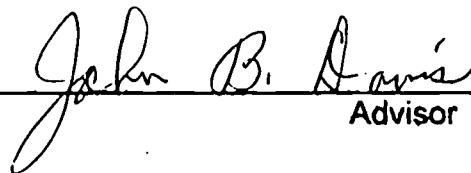Chicago, Illinois

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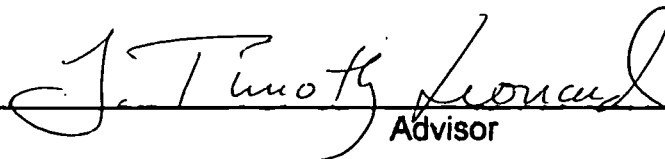
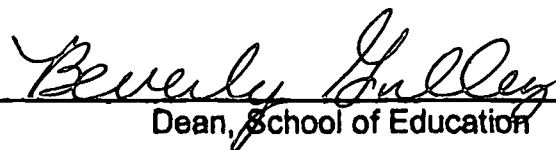BEST COPY AVAILABLE

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This project was approved by

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ABSTRACT

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted group show a need for writing improvement. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes teacher observation and evaluation, student surveys, and student writing samples. The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of student evaluation on improving writing skills.

Statement of Probable Causes

Based on the researchers' prior childhood experiences with writing and a review of relevant literature, writing instruction has emphasized product rather than a process. The focus was on grammar, sentence structure, and language mechanics. Therefore, the researchers of this project understand the following to be on site causes for the problem: limited time devoted to writing experiences, poor student attitude toward writing, lack of consistent direct writing instruction in kindergarten through grade five, lack of knowledge about the developmental writing process, lack of professional teacher training, and limited teacher modeling of writing.

Many researchers believe that the ideal finished product has little to do with the skills to produce those products. (Calkins, 1986) A review of the literature suggested that the instructional emphasis on completed writing products is beginning to take a backseat to the processes that produce them. Process writing is "teaching and learning which focuses interactively on the processes available to a writer when developing a text which articulates the thoughts of the writer and communicates them to a reader." (Cordeiro, 1992) In the past learners have been left out of the process of record keeping and evaluation. Because of this, many students are simply unaware that they are learning anything. Just as we found it essential as teachers to keep asking ourselves, 'what are we learning?' it is essential for our students to continually be challenged to think about and express what they are learning. This helps them to build internal standards for judging what constitutes good work, (Harp, 1991) Evaluation should help learners develop realistic intrinsic self-

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evaluation strategies. Hollow praise offered in the name of "positive reinforcement" does not promote self-evaluation. When students are actively involved in planning, executing, and evaluating their own learning, they have the opportunity to become self-directed, independent learners. (Goodman, Goodman, and Hood, 1989)

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

After clearly stating the problem, considering its causes, and researching its solutions, we propose the following objectives:

As a result of student self-assessment of their writing during the period of September 1996 to January 1997, the targeted first, third, and fourth grade students will increase their writing abilities as measured by pre and post intervention writing samples.

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

1. Daily Oral Language
2. Directed writing prompts will be developed.
3. Creative writing will be implemented.
4. Writers Workshop will be implemented.

Self-evaluation by the students will occur with creative writing and Writers Workshop. Rubrics were developed according to developmental abilities at the targeted grade levels. (Appendices H and I)

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of Problem

The students of the targeted group show a need for writing improvement. Evidence for the existence of the problem includes teacher observation and writing samples of students. The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of student evaluation on improving writing skills.

Immediate Problem - School A

Christa McAuliffe School, one of five elementary and two middle schools in Kirby School District 140, has 878 students in grades kindergarten through fifth. Based on the 1996 School Report Card, the average class size for each grade level is as follows: Kindergarten - 25.6, first grade - 28.6, second grade - 25.0, third grade - 28.6, fourth grade - 27.0, fifth grade - 29.8. There are five kindergarten classes, five first grade classes, six second grade classes, five third grade classes, six fourth grade classes, and five fifth grade classes. The building is ten years old, air conditioned, has an open "commons" area, and a media center with a loft. There are no special education classes in the building.

The racial-ethnic background is 95.2 percent White, 0.2 percent Black, 1.9 percent Hispanic, 2.5 percent Asian, and 0.1 percent Native American. There are 0.2 percent low income students and 0.9 percent of the students are limited English proficient. There is a 96.1 percent attendance rate with 0.0 percent truancy. The school has an 8.0 percent mobility rate. (Kirby School District 140 Report Card, 1996)

The staff at Christa McAuliffe is comprised of 37 female teachers. Of these teachers, 37 percent have their Master's Degree. The average teaching experience is 12.3 years.

The students are heterogeneously assigned to classrooms. The core subject areas and time devoted to them are as follows: mathematics - 60 minutes, sciences - 30 minutes,

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language arts - 150 minutes, social studies - 30 minutes. In addition to core subjects, students also receive three 30 minute periods of physical education, two 30 minute periods of music, and one 35 minute period of art each week.

Students in fifth grade are assessed in all subject areas using the California Test of Basic Skills, "CTBS" and local assessment for math and language. These students are also given the Test of Cognitive skills, "TCS". Fourth grade is assessed by the state using the Illinois Goal Assessment Program, "IGAP" in science and social studies. Third grade students are also assessed by the state using IGAP in reading, writing, and math. Local assessment is also done in science, social studies, and the fine arts. Second grade students are assessed using the CTBS and the TCS in reading, language, and math. First grade students are assessed locally in the area of drama. All students receive a quarterly report card. Students in grades three through five receive letter grades consisting of A (92-100), B (85-91), C (72-84), D (65-71), and F (0-64). Students in grades one and two receive letter grades consisting of E (excellent), S (satisfactory), N (needs improvement), U (unsatisfactory or failing).

The teachers in grade three at McAuliffe School use a diversity of teaching strategies which range from a traditional style to a literature based or thematic unit approach to a holistic child-centered approach. The district has adopted Harcourt, Brace for reading/language, Houghton Mifflin for spelling and MacMillan McGraw Hill for handwriting. Teachers also incorporate "Daily Oral Language", "Power Writing", novels, trade books, and creative writing into the language arts curriculum. The teachers also have access to "whole language" units that were developed in response to the whole language movement.

The mathematics series is MacMillan McGraw-Hill with Math : A Way of Thinking as a supplement in grade three. Students in grade three are grouped by ability for math instruction. The science curriculum utilizes Developmental Approach to Science and Health (DASH) and the Silver Burdett series. The social studies series is MacMillan McGraw-Hill with grade one using only the activities program.

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Computer education consists of a curriculum developed by media center personnel. Each classroom has one computer which is a Macintosh CD-Rom with printer. Grades three and four students receive direct computer instruction for one 30 minute period per week throughout the entire school year.

The gifted program, Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) provides opportunities for students in grades three and four who have been recommended by the homeroom teacher and have scored in the 95th percentile or above in all areas of the CTBS that was administered in grade two. Gifted students in grades three and four are clustered in designated classrooms. The students meet with the gifted coordinator for one hour period per week. Classroom teachers are responsible for meeting the needs of any gifted students in grades one and two.

The gifted coordinator is available as a resource person for grade one and two teachers. A learning disability resource program is available to students who have been identified through a district referral process. Students with English as a second language are offered services through Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI). Regular education students who are identified by the classroom teacher as having difficulties within the grade level language arts curriculum are referred to a district program titled Reading Education and Language Mastery (REALM). If these students qualified, they receive reinforcement and guidance from a reading aide who works directly with the classroom teacher.

McAuliffe has a very active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). They give funds to the classroom teacher and the school. Parent volunteers help with fund raisers, hot lunch programs, and social events such as roller skating parties and school activity day. The PTO is always willing to help the students, teachers, and community.

Immediate Problem - School B

John A. Bannes School, one of five elementary and two middle schools in Kirby School District 140, has 481 students in grades kindergarten through fifth. Based on the 1996 School Report Card, the average class size for each grade level is as follows:

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Kindergarten - 22.0, first grade - 29.0, second grade - 28.3, third grade - 26.7, fourth grade - 26.0, fifth grade - 22.5. There are three classes each of Kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grade. In addition, there are two Cross - Categorical classes in the building. The building is twenty - five years old with a seven year old addition which is air conditioned.

The racial-ethnic background is 94.8 percent White, 0.6 percent Black, 2.9 percent Hispanic, 1.7 percent Asian, and 0.0 percent Native American. There are 0.1 percent low income students and 1.5 percent limited English proficient. There is a 96.7 percent attendance rate with 0.0 percent truancy. The school has a 2.5 percent mobility rate. (Kirby School District 140 Report Card, 1996)

The staff at John A. Bannes is comprised of 24 female and 2 male teachers. Of these teachers, 72.3 percent have their Master's Degree. The average teaching experience is 13.1 years.

The students are heterogeneously assigned to classrooms. The core subject areas and time devoted to them are as follows: mathematics - 60 minutes, sciences - 30 minutes, language arts - 150 minutes, social studies - 30 minutes. In addition to core subjects, students also receive three 30 minute periods of physical education, two 30 minute periods of music, and one 35 minute period of art each week.

Students in fifth grade are assessed in all subject areas using the California Test of Basic Skills, "CTBS" and local assessment for math and language. These students are also given the Test of Cognitive skills, "TCS". Fourth grade is assessed by the state using the Illinois Goal Assessment Program, "IGAP" in science and social studies. Third grade students are also assessed by the state using IGAP in reading, writing, and math. Local assessment is also done in science, social studies, and the fine arts. Second grade students are assessed using the CTBS and the TCS in reading, language, and math. First grade students are assessed locally in the area of drama. All students receive a quarterly report card. Students in grades three through five receive letter grades consisting of A (92-100), B (85-91), C (72-84), D (65-71), and F (0-64). Students in grades one and two receive letter grades consisting of E (excellent), S (satisfactory), N (needs improvement), U (unsatisfactory or failing).

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The teachers in grade one at Bannes School use a diversity of teaching strategies which range from a traditional style to a literature based or thematic unit approach to a holistic child-centered approach. The district has adopted Harcourt, Brace for reading/language, Houghton Mifflin for spelling and MacMillan McGraw Hill for handwriting. Some teachers also incorporate "Daily Oral Language", "Power Writing", novels, trade books, and creative writing into the language arts curriculum. The teachers also have access to "whole language" units that were developed in response to the whole language movement.

The mathematics series is MacMillan McGraw-Hill with Math Their Way as a supplement in grade one. The science curriculum utilizes Developmental Approach Science and Health (DASH) and the Silver Burdett series. The social studies series is MacMillan McGraw-Hill with grade one using only the activities program.

Computer education consists of a curriculum developed by media center personnel. Each classroom has one computer which is a Macintosh CD-Rom with printer. Grades three and four students receive direct computer instruction for one 30 minute period per week throughout the entire school year.

The gifted program, Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) provides opportunities for students in grades three and four who have been recommended by the homeroom teacher and have scored in the 95th percentile or above in all areas of the CTBS that was administered in grade two. Gifted students in grades three and four are clustered in designated classrooms. The students meet with the gifted coordinator for one hour period per week. Classroom teachers are responsible for meeting the needs of any gifted students in grades one and two. The gifted coordinator is available as a resource person for grade one and two teachers.

A learning disability resource program is available to students who have been identified through a district referral process. Students with English as a second language are offered services through Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI). Regular education students who are identified by the classroom teacher as having difficulties within the grade level language arts curriculum are referred to a district program titled Reading Education

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and Language Mastery (REALM). If these students qualified, they receive reinforcement and guidance from a reading aide who works directly with the classroom teacher.

Bannes has a very active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). They give funds to the classroom teacher and the school. Parent volunteers help with fund raisers, hot lunch programs, and social events such as roller skating parties and school activity day. The PTO is always willing to help the students, teachers, and community.

Immediate Problem - School C

Fernway Park School, one of five elementary and two middle schools in Kirby School District 140, has 577 students in grades kindergarten through fifth. Based on the 1996 School Report Card, the average class size for each grade level is as follows: Kindergarten - 27.3. first grade - 25.8, second grade - 26.8, third grade - 27.3, fourth grade - 27.8, fifth grade - 29.5. There are three kindergarten classes, three first grade classes, three and one-half second grade classes, three and one-half third grade classes, four fourth grade classes and three fifth grade classes. In addition, there are two Early Childhood, one Cross Categorical, and one Multiple Disorders class in the building. The building is thirty-four years old with a four year old addition that is air conditioned.

The racial-ethnic background is 95.3 percent White, 0.2 percent Black, 2.4 percent Hispanic, 1.7 percent Asian, and 0.3 percent Native American. There are 2.3 percent low income students and 2.4 percent limited English proficient. There is a 95.1 percent attendance rate with 0.0 percent truancy. The school has a 7.6 percent mobility rate. (Kirby School District 140 Report Card, 1996)

The staff at Fernway is comprised of 25 female and two male teachers. Of these teachers, 33.3 percent have their Master's Degree. The average teaching experience is 11.3 years.

The students are heterogeneously assigned to classrooms. The core subject areas and time devoted to them are as follows: mathematics - 60 minutes, sciences - 30 minutes, language arts - 150 minutes, social studies - 30 minutes. In addition to core subjects,

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students also receive three 30 minute periods of physical education, two 30 minute periods of music, and one 35 minute period of art each week.

Students in fifth grade are assessed in all subject areas using the California Test of Basic Skills, "CTBS" and local assessment for math and language. These students are also given the Test of Cognitive skills, "TCS". Fourth grade is assessed by the state using the Illinois Goal Assessment Program, "IGAP" in science and social studies. Third grade students are also assessed by the state using IGAP in reading, writing, and math. Local assessment is also done in science, social studies, and the fine arts. Second grade students are assessed using the CTBS and the TCS in reading, language, and math. First grade students are assessed locally in the area of drama. All students receive a quarterly report card. Students in grades three through five receive letter grades consisting of A (92-100), B (85-91), C (72-84), D (65-71), and F (0-64). Students in grades one and two receive letter grades consisting of E (excellent), S (satisfactory), N (needs improvement), U (unsatisfactory or failing).

The teachers in grade four at Fernway School use a diversity of teaching strategies which range from a traditional style to a literature based or thematic unit approach to a holistic child-centered approach. The district has adopted Harcourt, Brace for reading/language, Houghton Mifflin for spelling and MacMillan McGraw Hill for handwriting. Many teachers also incorporate "Daily Oral Language", "Power Writing", novels, trade books, and creative writing into the language arts curriculum. The teachers also have access to "whole language" units that were developed in response to the whole language movement.

The mathematics series is MacMillan McGraw-Hill. Students in grade three are grouped by ability for math instruction. The science curriculum utilizes Developmental Approach to Science and Health (DASH) and the Silver Burdett series. The social studies series is MacMillan McGraw-Hill with grade one using only the activities program.

Computer education consists of a curriculum developed by media center personnel. Each classroom has one computer which is a Macintosh CD-Rom with printer. Grades three and four students receive direct computer instruction for one 30 minute period per week throughout the entire school year.

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The gifted program, Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) provides opportunities for students in grades three and four who have been recommended by the homeroom teacher and have scored in the 95th percentile or above in all areas of the CTBS that was administered in grade two. Gifted students in grades three and four are clustered in designated classrooms. The students meet with the gifted coordinator for one hour period per week. Classroom teachers are responsible for meeting the needs of any gifted students in grades one and two. The gifted coordinator is available as a resource person for grade one and two teachers.

A learning disability resource program is available to students who have been identified through a district referral process. Students with English as a second language are offered services through Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI). Regular education students who are identified by the classroom teacher as having difficulties within the grade level language arts curriculum are referred to a district program titled Reading Education and Language Mastery (REALM). If these students qualified, they receive reinforcement and guidance from a reading aide who works directly with the classroom teacher.

Fernway has a very active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). They give funds to the classroom teacher and the school. Parent volunteers help with fund raisers, hot lunch programs, and social events such as roller skating parties and school activity day. The PTO is always willing to help the students, teachers, and community.

Immediate Problem - School D

W.A. Johnson School, one of four elementary and one middle school in Bensenville School District 2, has 385 students in grades kindergarten through sixth. Based on the 1996 School Report Card, the average class size for each grade level is as follows: Kindergarten - 23.0. first grade - 24.0, second grade - 23.1, third grade - 23.0, fourth grade - 23.4, fifth grade - 25.0, and sixth grade - 26.0. There are two half day kindergarten classes, two first grade classes, three second grade classes, three third grade classes, two fourth grade classes and three fifth grade classes, and two sixth grade classes. In addition, there are is one Behavior Disordered class in the building consisting of twelve students. The building is thirty-nine years old with a two year old addition.

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The entire building has been air conditioned and sound-proofed due to the proximity to O'Hare International Airport.

The racial-ethnic background is 77.4 percent White, 3.4 percent Black, 14.3 percent Hispanic, 4.4 percent Asian, and 0.5 percent Native American. There are 3.9 percent low income students and 9.1 percent limited English proficient. There is a 95.1 percent attendance rate with 0.0 percent truancy. The school has a 36.1 percent mobility rate. (Bensenville School District 2 Report Card, 1996)

The staff at Johnson is comprised of 18 female and two part-time male teachers. Of these teachers, 27.7 percent have their Master's Degree. The average teaching experience is 15.0 years.

The students are heterogeneously assigned to classrooms. The core subject areas and time devoted to them are as follows: mathematics - 60 minutes, sciences - 30 minutes, language arts - 150 minutes, social studies - 30 minutes. In addition to core subjects, students also receive two 30 minute periods of physical education, two 45 minute periods of Spanish, and one 30 minute period of learning center each week.

Students in third grade and sixth grade are assessed by the state using IGAP in reading, writing, and math. Fourth grade is assessed by the state using the Illinois Goal Assessment Program, "IGAP" in science and social studies. Local assessment is also used in math, reading, and writing for first grade, second grade, and fifth grade. All students receive a quarterly report card. Students in grades one through six receive letter grades consisting of A, B, C, D, and F.

The teachers in grade three at Johnson School use a diversity of teaching strategies which range from a traditional style to a literature based or thematic unit approach to a holistic child-centered approach. The district has adopted novel units by purchasing multiple copies of novels and developing a district scope and sequence to follow for each novel unit. Many teachers also incorporate "Daily Oral Language", graphic organizers, trade books, and creative writing into the language arts curriculum.

The primary staff has a choice of Scott Foresman, MacMillan McGraw-Hill, and Mimosa, a hands-on approach, for math instruction. Grades four through six use the MacMillan McGraw-Hill series.

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Computer education consists of a curriculum developed by media center personnel. Each classroom has one computer which is a Macintosh CD-Rom with printer. Grades three and four students receive direct computer instruction for one 30 minute period per week throughout the entire school year.

A learning disability resource program is available to students who have been identified through a district referral process. Students with English as a second language are offered services at a separate location which incorporates a bilingual school curriculum and philosophy.

Johnson has a very active Parent Teacher Association (PTA). They give funds to the classroom teacher and the school. Parent volunteers help with fund raisers, hot lunch programs, technology support for each classroom as well as the building, and social events such as student dances and roller skating parties and school activity day. The PTO is always willing to help the students, teachers, and the community.

Immediate Problem - School E

Southwest School, one of four elementary and one junior high school in Evergreen Park School District 124, has 340 students in grades kindergarten through sixth. Based on the 1996 School Report Card, the average class size for each grade level is as follows: Kindergarten - 18.7, first grade - 19.5, second grade - 26.8, third grade - 23.5, fourth grade - 27.8, fifth grade - 29.5, sixth grade - 23.5. There are three kindergarten classes and two classes each of first grade through sixth grade. The building is over forty years old and has been completely renovated in the past three years.

The racial-ethnic background is 95.0 percent White, 0.3 percent Black, 2.6 percent Hispanic, 2.1 percent Asian, and 0.0 percent Native American. There are 6.5 percent low income students and 1.5 percent limited English proficient. There is a 95.9 percent attendance rate with 0.0 percent truancy. The school has a 4.7 percent mobility rate. (Evergreen Park School District 124 Report Card, 1996)

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The staff at Southwest is comprised of 18 female teachers and 1 male teacher. Of these teachers, 63.2 percent have their Master's Degree. The average teaching experience is 11.1 years.

The students are heterogeneously assigned to classrooms. The core subject areas and time devoted to them are as follows: mathematics - 60 minutes, sciences - 30 minutes, language arts - 150 minutes, social studies - 30 minutes. In addition to core subjects, students also receive two 40 minute periods of physical education, two 40 minute periods of music, two 40 minute period of art each week, and one 40 minute period of computers each week.

Students in second and fifth grade are assessed in all subject areas using the California Achievement Test, "CAT". Fourth grade is assessed by the state using the Illinois Goal Assessment Program, "IGAP" in science and social studies. Third and sixth grade students are also assessed by the state using IGAP in reading, writing, and math. Second grade students are assessed using the CAT in reading, language, and math. All students receive a quarterly report card. Students in grades three through six receive letter grades consisting of A , B , C, D, and F. Students in grades one and two receive letter grades consisting of E (exceeds expectations), M (meets expectations), and I (improvement needed).

The teachers in grade three at Southwest School use a diversity of teaching strategies which range from a traditional style to a literature based or thematic unit approach to a holistic child-centered approach. The district has adopted Harcourt, Brace for reading/language, spelling, and handwriting. Many teachers also incorporate "Daily Oral Language", "Power Writing", novels, trade books, and creative writing into the language arts curriculum. Teachers in grade one have established a peer-reading program once a week with fifth grade students. During this 25-30 minute period one first grade and one fifth grade student read books together on a casual/informal basis.

The mathematics series is Silver Burdett - Ginn with Math Their Way as a supplement in kindergarten and first grade. The science curriculum utilizes the Silver Burdett series. The district is currently in the process of evaluating and adopting a new

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series. The social studies series is MacMillan McGraw-Hill with grade one only using the coordinating activities program.

Computer education consists of a curriculum developed by the District Technology Committee with assistance from the Technology Coordinator. Southwest School has one computer lab consisting of 14 IBM computers. Teachers in all grades are responsible for computer activities taking place during a 40 minute assigned instructional period. The district has also purchased the software program "Writing to Write" for all students in second through sixth grade.

The gifted program, Project TREE (Together Reaching Educational Excellence) provides opportunities for students in all grades who have been recommended by the homeroom teacher and have scored above average in all areas of the CAT that was administered in grade two. Gifted students are clustered in designated classrooms. Classroom teachers are responsible for meeting the needs of any gifted students in their classrooms. There is a core curriculum for all students which is differentiated for gifted and talented learners through modification of content, process, product, and/or the learning environment. Modified thematic curriculum units, based on higher level thinking skills, are also employed as a teaching tool to accommodate the needs of the gifted learner.

A learning disability resource program is available to students who have been identified through a district referral process. Students with English as a second language are offered services through English as a Second Language. Regular education students who are identified by the classroom teacher as having difficulties within the grade level are referred to a district program titled Positive Aspects of Learning (PALS). If these students qualified, they receive reinforcement and guidance from a certified teacher who uses an extended day and/or summer school format for direct instruction in reading.

Southwest has a very active Parent Teacher Association (PTA). They provide funds for the classroom teacher and the school. Parent volunteers help with fund raisers, monthly Market Day fund raiser and service, and social events such as Meet the Author Day, awards ceremonies, and school activity days. The PTA is always willing to help the students, teachers, and community.

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Description of Surrounding Community - Schools A and B

Christa McAuliffe and John A. Bannes Schools are located in the village of Tinley Park, Illinois. In this district 94.6 percent of the population is White, 0.4 percent of the population is Black, 2.3 percent is Hispanic, and 2.6 percent is Asian Pacific Islander. Of the 4,573 students enrolled, 1.0 percent are form lower income families and 1.4 percent are limited English proficient. One hundred percent of the teachers are White. Male teachers comprise 11.0 percent and females account for 89.0 percent of the teaching staff. The average years of teaching experience in the district is 11.8 with an average salary of $34,044. The pupil-teacher ratio is 22.0:1. Teachers with a master's degree and beyond comprise 47.7 percent of the total of 236 teachers. The administrators have an average salary of $64,840. and the pupil-administrator ratio is 285.8:1 (McAuliffe/Bannes School Report Cards, 1996).

Both schools are located in the community of Tinley Park, incorporated as a village in 1892. Tinley Park is a southwestern suburb of Chicago, Illinois. It is adjacent to Orland Park. Tinley Park consists of 13.8 square miles with a population of 40,000. As of 1992, the average home value in Tinley Park was $139,611. The average household income was $56,719. More than 95 percent of the population was White.
The median age was 33.

Of the population of Tinley Park, 32.7 percent are high school graduates. 24.6 percent have some college credit, 7.1 percent have an associate degree, 14.5 percent have a bachelor degree, and 6.4 percent have graduate degrees. Part of the labor force consists of 9.9 percent having some high school credit and 4.8 percent having only elementary school experience (Tinley Park Census, 1993).

Description of Surrounding Community - School C

Fernway Park School is located in the village of Orland Park, Illinois. In this district 94.6 percent of the population is White, 0.4 percent of the population is Black, 2.3 percent is Hispanic, and 2.6 percent is Asian Pacific Islander. Of the 4,573 students enrolled, 1.0 percent are form lower income families and 1.4 percent are limited English

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proficient. One hundred percent of the teachers are White. Male teachers comprise 11.0 percent and females account for 89.0 percent of the teaching staff. The average years of teaching experience in the district is 11.8 with an average salary of $34,044. The pupil-teacher ratio is 22.0:1. Teachers with a master's degree and beyond comprise 47.7 percent of the total of 236 teachers. The administrators have an average salary of $64,840. and the pupil-administrator ratio is 285.8:1 (Fernway Park School Report Card, 1996).

Fernway Park School is located in the eastern part of Orland Park and is the only school in Kirby School District 140 that is not located in Tinley Park. The majority of its students come from Orland Hills- only a small percentage come from Orland Park. Orland Hills is a southwestern suburb of Chicago Illinois. It is sandwiched between Tinley park and Orland Park. Orland Hills consists of only two square miles with a population of about 6,000. Orland Hills is a residential community. Affordable housing ranges from $80,000 to $150,000.

The mean income in Orland Hills is $44,015. This is based on the 1990 census. The percentage of people living below the poverty level is 3.6 percent. Residents pursue a wide variety of occupations ranging from white collar professionals and managers to salesmen, laborers, and construction contractors.

The largest part of the population is 92.1 percent white. The African American population is 3.9 percent, and there is a mixture of the other races making the remaining .4 percent. (US Department of Commerce, 1990)

Description of Surrounding Community - School D

W.A. Johnson School is located in the city of Bensenville, Illinois. In this district 51.6 percent of the population is White, 2.4 percent of the population is Black, 36.8 percent is Hispanic, 8.5 percent is Asian Pacific Islander and 0.6 percent is Native American. Of the 2,017 students enrolled, 10.3 percent are form lower income families and 19.8 percent are limited English proficient. The racial/ethnic background for the teachers in this district is 95.9 percent White, 0,0 percent Black, 4.1 percent Hispanic, 0.0

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percent Asian Pacific Islander, and 0.0 Native American. Male teachers comprise 16.9 percent and females account for 83.1 percent of the teaching staff. The average years of teaching experience in the district is 12.9 with an average salary of $40,085. The pupil-teacher ratio is 22.4:1. Teachers with a master's degree and beyond comprise 47.7 percent of the total of 100 teachers. The administrators have an average salary of $74,462. and the pupil-administrator ratio is 231.8:1 (W.A. Johnson School Report Card, 1996).

The community of Bensenville was incorporated as a village in 1884. Bensenville is a northwestern suburb of Chicago, Illinois. It is adjacent to Elmhurst and Wood Dale. Bensenville consists of five square miles with a population of 17,767. As of 1996, the average home value in Bensenville was $143,729. The average household income was $51,309. More than 85 percent of the population was White. The median age was 34.

Of the population of Bensenville, 21.9 percent are high school graduates. 12.8 percent have some college credit, 3.2 percent have an associate degree, 8.1 percent have a bachelor degree, and 3.0 percent have graduate degrees. Part of the labor force consists of 9.6 percent having some high school credit and 7.8 percent having only elementary school experience (Bensenville Census, 1990).

Description of Surrounding Community - School E

Southwest Elementary School is located in the southwest quadrant of the village of Evergreen Park, Illinois. In this district 93.0 percent of the population is White, 1.5 percent of the population is Black, 3.4 percent is Hispanic, 1.9 percent is Asian Pacific Islander and 2.0 percent is Native American. Of the 1,821 students enrolled, 9.4 percent are from lower income families and 1.9 percent are limited English proficient. The racial/ethnic background for the teachers in this district is 100 percent White. Male teachers comprise 11.6 percent and females account for 88.4 percent of the teaching staff. The average years of teaching experience in the district is 11.1 with an average salary of $36,403. The pupil-teacher ratio is 20.3:1. Teachers with a master's degree and beyond comprise 67.4 percent of the total of 103 teachers.

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The administrators have an average salary of $67,111. and the pupil-administrator ratio is 202.3:1 (Southwest School Report Card, 1996).

Southwest School is located in the community of Evergreen Park, incorporated as a village in 1893. Evergreen Park is a suburban residential community located 17 miles south of downtown Chicago. It is bordered by Chicago itself and Oak Lawn to the west. Evergreen Park consists of four square miles with a population of 22,400. The average household income was $36,869.

Approximately thirty-four percent of the residents are white collar professionals, 61 percent are blue collar workers, and 5 percent are unemployed. Recent estimates indicate that more than 83 percent of the housing is owner-occupied. Single family dwellings constitute a large majority of the housing in the village with apartments and townhouses comprising the remaining housing opportunities. (Evergreen Park Census, 1993)

Regional and National Context of Problem

Students' self assessment of writing is becoming an influential factor for improving writing skills. This area of concern has sparked interest at the state and national levels. Researchers believe that students who consistently self - correct and self - monitor their writing are writing for meaning (Transitions, 1988).

At the state level, teachers are working with students to create an awareness of the characteristics of effective writing. Students themselves were asked to come up with the criteria for the assessment rubric. One teacher found that the writing criteria his students came up with thoroughly infused their work and their thinking (Instructor, 1995).

Nationally, teachers are creating rubrics to evaluate students work. Teachers explain the rubric for the writing assignments to the students before they begin to write. This aids students with better performance in writing (Instructor, 1995).

According to Graves (1994) students own records of their writing help them to stay in touch with their progress and help you as the teacher to be time efficient in sensing

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overall classroom needs. The basic philosophy behind teaching students self assessment record keeping is that students need to be aware of their increasing improvements.

Moskal states, as assessment in literacy changes, teachers are discovering the value of student self-assessment where the students provide perceptions of their growth and development along with the teacher's (Moskal, 1995).

Most recently, the IRA/NCTE standards for Language Arts were released stating that students should participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

CHAPTER TWO

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

There was evidence that students' writing needed improvement. The existence of this problem is shown through the data collected from standardized test scores, students' writing experiences and samples, teacher anecdotal records and evaluations, and student surveys. The data is presented in tables to show the need for writing improvement.

In order to document the level of the need, the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) scores from the state, district, and school levels were used. At the third grade level, using the three districts involved in this research project, 958 students were evaluated using the IGAP document. The average percentage of students who did not meet the state goals, who met the state goals, and who exceeded the state goals is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

IGAP State Performance Standards for Writing (Grade 3 - 1995)

Level	%Do not meet goals	%Meet goals	%Exceed goals
Districts	10.3	60.7	29
State	19	59	22

Of the 958 students tested from the three districts, 84 students did not meet the goals as stated in the IGAP Standards. Those meeting the goals accounted for 591 students and 283 students exceeded the goals. Although test scores do not show a need for

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improvement, the other criteria exhibited do show the need for improving the writing skills.

Classroom writing experiences are another tool used in evaluating the scope of the problem. Students were given time to practice through journals, weekly story prompts, and Daily Oral Language (DOL) activities. To determine whether the students were applying the editing, revising, and rewriting skills, assessment was done weekly. Using the students' own writings, the teacher used the Teacher Rubric for Story Writing Assessment. A graphic organizer was used to show this progress in self-assessment through the Teacher Rubric (Appendices J and K). The observational and performance checklists were used to determine the application of writing skills. Students at each grade level used a writing performance checklist (Appendices A and B) and Student Rubric for Writing (Appendices H and I) to evaluate their proficiency in story writing.

The last criterion to be used in documenting the problem was a set of surveys regarding students' attitudes toward writing and students' attitudes toward self-assessment vs. teacher assessment. (Appendices E, F, and G) The results assisted in determining the probable causes for writing improvement.

Probable Causes From the Site

Based on the researchers' prior childhood experiences with writing and a review of relevant literature, writing was seen as a product rather than a process. The focus was on grammar, sentence structure, and language mechanics. Therefore, the researchers propose the following as the on site causes for the problem: limited time devoted to writing experiences, poor student attitude toward writing, lack of consistent direct writing instruction in kindergarten through grade three, lack of knowledge about the developmental writing process, lack of professional teacher training, and limited teacher modeling of writing.

Probable Causes From the Literature

A review of the literature suggested that the instructional emphasis on final products is beginning to take a backseat to the processes that produce them. Many researchers believe that the ideal finished product has little to do with the skills to produce those products. (Calkins, 1986) Process writing is "teaching and learning which focuses interactively on the processes available to a writer when developing a text which articulates the thoughts of the writer and communicates them to a reader." (Cordeiro, 1992) In the past learners have been left out of the process of record keeping and evaluation. Because of this many students are simply unaware that they are learning anything. Just as we found it essential as teachers to keep asking ourselves, 'what are we learning?' it is also essential for our students to continually be challenged to think about and express what they are learning. This helps them to build internal standards for judging what constitutes good work. (Harp, 1991)

Evaluation should help learners develop realistic intrinsic self-evaluation strategies. Hollow praise offered in the name of "positive reinforcement" does not promote self-evaluation. When students are actively involved in planning, executing, and evaluating their own learning, they have the opportunity to become self-directed, independent learners. (Goodman, Goodman, and Hood, 1989)

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CHAPTER THREE

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Improving writing skills for all students is a major concern for everyone in education. Research shows students need to feel a sense of ownership in their learning and understand the purpose and process of their writing. As assessment in literacy changes, teachers are becoming aware of the value of student self-assessment.

The professional literature on methods used for evaluation from 1900 through 1979 is very trend-related. One method was never used exclusively, but there have been times when one approach has been more dominant. The term 'holistic evaluation' emerged in the 1970s. It generally involved a quick, general impression type of reading. Shirley M. Haley-James pointed out that Richard Lloyd-Jones described holistic evaluation as "generally more valid, more informative, and more expensive than means evaluation" (1981, p. 15). Teacher and peer conferencing with student writers became predominant in the mid 1970s. In this situation, the writer and the teacher sit down while the teacher responds to and comments on the writer's paper (1981).

Research has also shown that traditional grading methods do not seem to reflect the kinds of learning that are taking place in the classroom today (Bunce-Crim, 1992). The traditional assessment of writing has focused on mechanics such as spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and neatness (Peltz & Finn, 1981). Thus, classroom instruction focused heavily on these specifics rather than allowing children to practice using these mechanics in a relevant writing situation. The time in the classroom that is focused on test content narrows the overall curriculum covered by overemphasizing basic skills and neglecting high-order thinking skills (Herman & Golan, 1991).

Perhaps the largest weakness of all was that teachers do not have a balanced approach to evaluation with an emphasis on observation (Cutting, 1991). Testing had assumed a prominent role in recent efforts to improve a quality of education. Recent

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studies raise questions about whether standardized test score improvements truly signal an improvement in learning (Herman, 1990). Other critics are concerned with the narrowness of content on standardized tests, their match to curriculum and instruction, their neglect of higher order thinking skills, and their relevant and meaningfulness to the real world. Time spent on direct test preparation also concerns Herman. "Twenty-eight percent of the teachers in Smith et al.'s study (1987) started two or more months before the test and an additional twenty-two percent started the week before" (1990, p. 5). Depending on your viewpoint, standardized testing coupled with increasing pressures has prompted an interest as well as a concern about test content and the curriculum.

Bobbi Fisher explained that children must have daily opportunities to write about their own topics before they are able self-assess. There has to be consistency, trust, and commitment on the part of the students as well as the teacher (1995). Graves emphatically states that "children don't suddenly make good judgments about what strikes them in a piece of writing. The quality of what they observe is the result of sound mini-lessons" (1994, p. 139). A mini-lesson is a forum for making a suggestion, modeling a technique, or reinforcing a strategy. Sometimes these lessons are very intense and content oriented. Other times these lessons are designed to create a feeling or start a discussion. In any case, mini-lessons help children understand the functions and the power of print. They support the less able student while celebrating and raising the level of what the more capable students are doing.

Lucy Calkins went on to explain that the purpose of the mini-lesson is to suggest options and to give the children a bank of strategies from which they can draw (1996). As stated in an article by Nancy DeLisle-Walker (1996), Calkins observed that if you don't write with students, it's like you're standing before them with your clothes on while they're naked. When teachers are ready to begin mini lessons, they need to consider the developing abilities of the students so they can pinpoint the specific skills writers need in order to write. Mini lessons can cover a variety of writing concepts such as conventions, spelling, character development, author's point of view, cause and effect relationships, and author's style and genre. Mini lessons are also very helpful when teaching students how to evaluate themselves.

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Teachers do play an important role in evaluation but it is a role of helping students become long-term thinkers, writers, and evaluators. Teachers can show students how to do all the steps of the writing process by modeling and reflecting on their own writing. When teachers write, evaluate, revise, rewrite, and re-evaluate with the students, it shows them what real writing is truly all about. If students are expected to think like an author, the student has to learn to relate his or her life experiences to the craft of writing. The student needs this experience in the classroom as well as the assistance of an adult coach. Guidance and help are both essential to the students success. When assignments are designed by the teacher and there is no student input, there is also no ownership or investment in the process on the student's part (DeLisle-Walker, 1996). The relinquishing of some of the teacher's own control and the allowance of the student to increase his or her responsibility is easier if the child's progress can be properly documented.

"Assessment and instruction work together; self-evaluation, reflection, and goal setting are integral to daily instruction and practice" (Routman, 1996, p. 48). In order for children to learn how to evaluate, they need to internalize the criteria and practice self-assessment on a daily basis before improvements are seen in their own writing. This criterion should be created together between the teacher and the student and applied in their daily writing. Marna Bunce-Crim explains that "conferencing is one of the most effective ways of evaluating student writing on a regular basis, but it is also essential for helping children develop the pieces they are currently working on" (1992, p. 26). The teacher can use open-ended questions to interview the student and determine his/her level of understanding. And, as the control of learning shifts, students learn to critically question what criteria adds to quality writing.

The process of achieving quality writing for children is ongoing. Students move towards quality writing through repetitive practice, mini-lessons, and evaluation. Talking about the differences between skilled and unskilled writers, researcher Linda Flower (1980) claims that the skilled writers approach writing by planning not only what they will say, but also what they will do. Children need guidance, repetition, and direction to be able to plan their writing effectively. These plans allow a writer to set priorities and to organize ways of solving a problem (Calkins, 1986). According to Valencia (1990),

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when students are able to evaluate their own work, it helps them reflect on and understand their own strengths and needs, and encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning. Students already know a great deal about how they learn. Students can be their own evaluators for their writing, however, students may need individual guidance to feel comfortable about self-assessing their writing. Feedback lets students know what is working for them.

Effective teachers involve students in constructive and meaningful evaluation by providing them with effective feedback. This involvement includes self-goal setting and self-evaluation, particularly through conferencing with the teacher and reflecting on what has been learned and what improvements might come next (Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde, 1993). When students are given the opportunities to self-assess, they take an active role in the entire writing process - writing, evaluating, revising, rewriting, and evaluating. As a result of this total involvement, students who self-asses have a strong sense of ownership in their learning, are able to put their thoughts and ideas into written form, and ultimately able to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Finally, self-assessment enables students to internalize the hows and whys of writing.

Brian Cutting (1991) felt that a balanced approach to evaluation is needed. The emphasis for evaluation should be on observation and, more importantly, on the students' own evaluation of their learning. The role of the teacher in this situation is more as a coach and facilitator than as a primary evaluator. The teacher is present to help the children ask the right questions of themselves, and also to help the children decide what to do next. This way the students are able to visualize their own success and profit from it as a personal, on-going, self-evaluation tool.

Haley-James makes the following observations about writing instruction:
> *Children learn to write by writing.
>
> *Even very young school age children whose knowledge
>   of letter formations and spelling patterns is limited can
>   and should write.
>
> *Writing frequently on self-selected topics is important
>   to developing skill in writing.

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*When children feel the need or a desire to write for some
purpose or audience, they write more effectively.

*Writing purpose and a developing concept of audience
lead children to a logical need for revising selected
pieces of their writing.

*Teacher and peer conferences with the writer are
appropriate means of helping children process their writing
orally and progress from first drafts, in which the primary
concern is with getting meaning out on paper, to improved
drafts (1981, p.17).

Cutting keeps reiterating that a personal, on-going, self-evaluation system is the only way for students to visualize their own success. Basically, personal self-evaluation is the foundation of successful writing growth. Teachers and students can recognize and physically visualize when students are doing their best work. There is proof in their own pieces of writing. They can also use that information to create learning experiences to help students (1991).

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

After clearly stating the problem, considering its causes, and researching its solutions, we proposed the following objective:

* As a result of student self-assessment of their writing during the period of
September 1996 to February 1997, the targeted first, third, and fourth
grade students will increase their writing abilities as measured by
pre and post intervention writing samples, anecdotal records, writing
rubrics, and student attitude surveys.

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In order to accomplish the above terminal objective, the following procedures were enacted:

1. Daily Oral Language
2. Directed writing prompts
3. Creative writing
4. Writers Workshop

Self-evaluation by the students occurred with creative writing and Writers Workshop. Rubrics were developed according to developmental abilities at the targeted grade levels. (Appendices H and I)

Action Plan for the Intervention

    I. Daily Oral Language

    Purpose: To introduce and teach grade level writing mechanics (syntax and grammar

    A. Daily presentation of a writing sample containing mechanical errors displayed on the chalkboard.

    B. Individual students offer needed corrections.

        1. First Grade - Create a color coding system to help visually recall punctuation marks:

            * First letter of every sentence is green because "green means go"

            * The ending mark of every sentence is red because "red means stop"

            * Commas are yellow because it means to "slow down but keep going"

            * Proper nouns are purple capitals because "purple is important"

            * Quotation marks are blue because "they are up in the sky"

            * Improper language is always highlighted in orange

        After sentence is corrected and color coded, students individually write corrected sentences. To check for understanding, students individually read the corrected sentence to the teacher.

        In testing the skill, students are tested each Friday, by individually correcting and color coding a sentence.

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2. Third Grade - Students are taught editing marks. (=, ^, o, ~, /). Corrections are made individually by the students. There is whole group discussion on the necessary changes. To assess the skills, students are tested each Friday by individually correcting the sentences.

3. Fourth Grade - Students are taught editing marks. (=, /, ^, o,) Corrections are made individually by the students. There is whole group discussion on the necessary changes. To assess the skills, students are tested each Friday by individually correcting the sentences.

II. Directed Writing Prompts

Purpose: To learn how to write, at length, to a specific topic.

A. Students completed a monthly story prompt which is content oriented.

B. Students self-assessed this writing using a student created rubric.

C. Students rewrote to make improvements based on the rubric used.

D. There was a conference with the teacher; one - on - one, small group, or whole group to note improvement as a result of self-assessment.

III. Creative Writing

Purpose: To gain experience in writing for enjoyment. It means giving students choices, responsibilities and the opportunity to interact while they write. It also means guiding students toward independence.

A. Journal Writing

1. Fifteen minutes of daily non structured journal writing time were allocated.

2. The length of structured writing time was determined by the needs of the teacher and students.

3. Students had the option to share their writing with the teachers and/or peers.

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4. The teacher reviewed journals once a month to check for application and improvement of writing mechanics.

B. Writer's Workshop

1. Teachers rearranged their daily schedules to include one hour of Writer's Workshop one to three days a week.

2. Students kept a writing folder which will contain their writing samples.

3. Through mini lessons, the teacher modeled a whole group lesson on a skill or some aspect of the writing process. Mini lessons can include:

   * using traditional literature to identify and compare/contrast story parts

   * the steps needed to "publish a book" i.e. choose topic, characters, setting, problem, solution, ending, title; write a rough draft and checklist; meet with a peer editor; meet with an adult editor; rewriting the final copy; typist; illustration; title page, dedication page, listener page, author's page; share with a friend.

4. Students worked at their own pace to continuously "publish" writing.

5. During the writing time the teacher held a conference with students and assist as needed.

IV. Self-Evaluation

Purpose: To create and decide criteria which was used by students to self-assess their writing.

A. The teacher modeled creating a rubric using age appropriate writing samples.

B. At the beginning of the school year, the teacher and students brainstormed answers to the following "questions of the week" during language time.

Week 1: Why do people write?

Week 2: Who are you writing for?

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Week 3: Does your writing make sense?

Week 4: What questions do you have for the author?

Week 5: What is good writing? How do you make it better?

C. Following completion of the above brainstorming, students used the collected information to create a whole class rubric to be used in self evaluation of their writing.

Methods of Assessment

In this study the effects of the intervention were assessed using pre and post intervention writing performance rubrics (Appendices J and K), pre- and post- intervention student attitude surveys (Appendices E, F, and G), teacher anecdotal records, teacher performance checklists (Appendices C and D), and students' writing performance checklists (Appendices A and B).

Data was collected monthly using either teacher or students writing performance checklists and rubrics. Teachers periodically recorded anecdotal changes in student writing performance (Appendix L). In addition, pre- and post- intervention prompt and rubrics were used to measure writing growth over the course of the study. The stories that students wrote in October were returned in January for revisions to determine whether self-assessment was successful.

The researchers anticipated the following outcomes to occur after the intervention of student self-assessment. The researchers projected that fifteen to twenty percent of the students would have a more positive attitude toward the writing process. As far as writing performance, the researchers foresaw that fifteen to twenty percent of the first grade students would exhibit an increase in their writing performance. The researchers also anticipate that ten to fifteen percent of third and fourth grade students would show an increase. It is important to note that the researchers anticipated a greater increase to occur in first grade due to chronological age, developmental ability, and prior knowledge and experience with written language.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

Our objective was to improve students' writing skills and attitudes about writing through a variety of writing experiences and self-evaluation. During the period, September 1996 through February 1997, self-evaluation strategies and techniques were implemented to increase the students' writing skills and overall attitudes towards writing and self assessment.

In order to inform the parents that we would be implementing strategies designed to improve writing skills through student self-evaluation, a parental consent letter was sent home with each student. (See Appendix L) Of the consent letters issued, 99.1 percent were signed and returned. The one parent who did not agree to grant permission did not give an explanation other than concern over the publication of information regarding her child's academic performance, regardless of anonymity.

A student writing attitude survey was given to each student the first week of school. The purpose of this survey was to identify the personal feelings of each student towards writing, the writing process, and their opinions about their own abilities. An attitude survey on self assessment versus teacher assessment was also given to each student. The purpose of this survey was to identify the students' preferences towards evaluation.

During the month of September the students were asked to respond to the following four questions:

1. Why do people write?
2. Who are you writing for?
3. Does your writing make sense? How? Why?
4. What questions do you have for the author?

The students' responses were recorded for future reference because the responses aided in the development of future rubrics and writing guidelines.

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In order to introduce and teach grade level writing mechanics in syntax and grammar, the students were given mini-lessons. There were daily presentations of writing samples containing mechanical or grammatical errors. In first grade, a color-coding system was introduced to assist in visually recalling punctuation errors in sentences. In third and fourth grade editing marks were introduced and used to recall errors in writing.

Students were given opportunities in both formalized-structured writing experiences as well as unstructured free writing experiences. The formalized-structured experiences included thematically based writing projects and developmentally appropriate frameworks. For example, in first grade students wrote within a framework or take-off the the story <u>Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?</u> The first grade student supplied the ideas and words to complete the thought or sentence. In third and fourth grade, the students wrote short stories related to the topic being studied. They also wrote essays in paragraph form relating to the unit or topic.

The unstructured free writing experiences included frequent journal writing and story prompts to foster effective writing ideas for students. For example, the first grade students were expected to write at least one sentence independently. No restrictions were made on subject, length, or spelling abilities. In third and fourth grade, students responded to reading by independently rewriting stories. At the end of the month a formalized lesson on editing was used to exemplify proper ways to edit a story. Three different versions of Goldilocks and the Three Bears were read, revised, and edited by the students. Then discussion and further revisions were made by the whole group.

During the month of October students were asked to respond to the following questions: "What is good writing?" and "How do you make it better?" Students were able to use their prior experiences with writing to answer these questions appropriately. Author studies assisted in answering the aforementioned questions by providing specific examples of good writing. Mini-lessons revolved around the actual literature written by the featured authors. These stories were used to discuss story lines such as beginning, middle, and end. Expansion of what is included in the beginning, middle, and end were introduced as "story components". These story components discussed were: Story Starter, Setting, Character, Problem, Solution, and Ending. Literature written by the

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Character, Problem, Solution, and Ending. Literature written by the featured authors were analyzed according to the story components. Students were also given opportunities to apply these story components to their own writing through unstructured writing times. Daily Oral Language, structured writing experiences and unstructured journal writing continued on a regular basis.

At the end of the month, students were given an experience in evaluating their own writing. In first grade the students were asked to choose a sample of their best writing from their daily journals. Students then gave reasons for why they chose a specific writing piece. Discussions regarding "good writing" preceded the actual selection. Third and fourth grade students used a structured writing prompt, then were asked to develop criteria for evaluating their writing sample. This criterion was then used to develop an authentic rubric for evaluation. Teacher-made rubrics were also introduced for the thematically based structured writing assignments.

In November, the students collectively created their own writing rubric for structured writing examples. Teachers also assessed student writing samples with a teacher-made rubric (Appendices J and K). Conferencing was used to individually discuss similarities and discrepancies in student and teacher evaluations. In order to further promote self-evaluation in the classroom, students in first grade were introduced to a Writer's Workshop philosophy including a multi-step process to becoming a "published" author. These steps included:

1. Topic and story components
2. Sloppy copy
3. Peer Editor or Student Editor
4. Adult Editor
5. Revision and rewrite (Final Copy)
6. Typist
7. Illustrations
8. Title page, dedication page, authors page, etc
9. Publisher (to bind book)
10. Celebrate! Author sharing

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Daily Oral Language, structured writing experiences, and unstructured journal writing continued through this month also. Students were also given opportunities to apply these story components to their own writing through unstructured writing times. At the end of the month students were given another experience in evaluating their own writing and chose a sample of their best writing from their daily journals. Students then gave reasons why they chose a specific writing piece. Third and fourth grade students used a structured writing prompt again this month, and then were asked to develop criteria for evaluating their writing sample. Teacher-made rubrics were used for the thematically based structured writing assignments (Appendices J and K).

In the month of December the students in first grade were given more specific opportunities to apply the story components to their own writing through structured frameworks. Mini-lessons were also used to assist the children in expanding their story lines. For example, students elaborated on simple sentences by adding descriptive language, character development, and plot development. They also spent one half hour each day developing their written ideas through publishing their revised and rewritten work. Daily Oral Language, structured writing experiences, and unstructured journal writing continued through this month for all grades.

At the end of the month students were given another experience in evaluating their own writing and chose a sample of their best writing from their daily journals. Students then gave reasons why they chose a specific writing piece. Third and fourth grade students used a structured writing prompt again this month, and then were asked to develop criteria for evaluating their writing sample. Teacher-made rubrics were used for the thematically based structured writing assignments.

In the month of January, more time each day was devoted to enhancing the editing, revising, and evaluating of the writing process. In first grade students reexamined a previously evaluated writing sample from their journal. They were asked, "How can you make this example better?" Students re-evaluated, revised and rewrote the sample explaining why they rewrote to make the piece better.

Conferencing occurred between the students and the teacher to discuss the current changes for improvement and the final evaluation. Students continued to write using the

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story components and the multi-step publishing process. Many students by this time became published authors by completing the multi-step process. In addition to the writer's workshop experiences, students were also writing in the context of thematic units. A student created rubric was developed to evaluate a writing sample from the thematic unit. Teacher made rubrics were also used in the evaluation process.

In third grade the main emphasis was on IGAP writing samples. Students practiced expository writing, narrative writing, and persuasive writing. The previously created student rubrics were used to evaluate these styles of writing. The teacher used the student rubric also to evaluate the students' writing samples. For example, when evaluating a writing sample, the student would circle the rubric score for each criteria, and then the teacher would use a highlighter (on the same evaluation rubric) to evaluate the student's work. Conferencing completed this evaluation process.

In fourth grade, students continued creative writing, journal writing, and thematic based writing. Rubrics helped the students in all writing areas by aiding in the self-evaluation process. Writing rubrics were not always used for all writing experiences all of the time, but rather for specific writing samples some of the time. The teacher was responsible for choosing a variety a writing experiences.

Daily Oral Language, structured writing experiences, and unstructured journal writing continued through this month in all grades. All grades continued using student made rubrics for student self-evaluation. Teacher made rubrics were used for formal evaluation and for conferencing to make the student more efficient and effective in self-assessing. In conclusion, students were more aware of what is involved in the daily writing process. Their self-evaluation of their writing, using the student rubric, became more real and more meaningful.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In analyzing the data we observed more positive attitudes in several areas. The number of children who felt that they were poor writers decreased by the end of this study. More students liked to write at the end of the study as opposed to the beginning of this

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study. Results from the Writing Attitude Survey showed that the students felt more pride in their own writing abilities.(Table 2A - 2J) A majority of the students considered themselves great, good, or average writers.(Table 3) We attribute all of these positive attitudes to the process used by the researchers in this study.

The writing and assessment process enabled the students to become self-motivated because their finished products were displayed or published. This independence was shown through the fact that the majority of students like setting their own personal writing goals. (Table 4E) More students liked finding, correcting, and revising their writing errors. It provided a "second chance" for the young writers to succeed. (Table 4C) The atmosphere in the classroom allowed the opportunity for students to successfully work on their own, and the students were able to take ownership in the evaluation of their work. This is why there was a decrease in the number of students who preferred the teacher to find and correct their writing errors. (Table 4A)

One area that showed an increase for first grade and a decrease for third and fourth grade was those who liked to rewrite their work.(Table 4D) The researchers felt this might be due to the fact of IGAP centered writing and the length of the writings in the upper grades. Also, in first grade, their writing always ended in a published piece. In thrid and fourth grade, the students were writing lengthy essays which required more intense revising, editing,a nd re-writing techniques.

On the average, the children's attitudes toward writing showed a decline in how they would rate themselves as writers. (Table 3) Through Daily Oral Language, the students acquired an increased awareness of what good writing looks like. The researchers believe that students now feel that they are not the quality writer they initially believed themselves to be, because their abilities to appropriately evaluate themeselves are now more accurate.

Overall, the researchers were pleased with the writings by their students throughout this study. In many children, it raised their self-confidence in knowing that they can write. The rubrics made them aware of what is needed to complete a written piece. Writing is such an integral part of life that we hope the skills taught and learned in this study will continue to produce average, good, and GREAT writers.

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Table 2A

<u>Writing Attitude Survey Results</u>   <u>September 1996 and January 1997</u>

<u>Question #1- I like to write.</u>

I like to write.

- ▤ %Always/Sept
- ▥ %Always/Jan
- ▨ %Most of Time/Sept
- ▤ %Most of Time/Jan
- ▥ %Hardly Ever/Sept
- ▨ %Hardly Ever/Jan
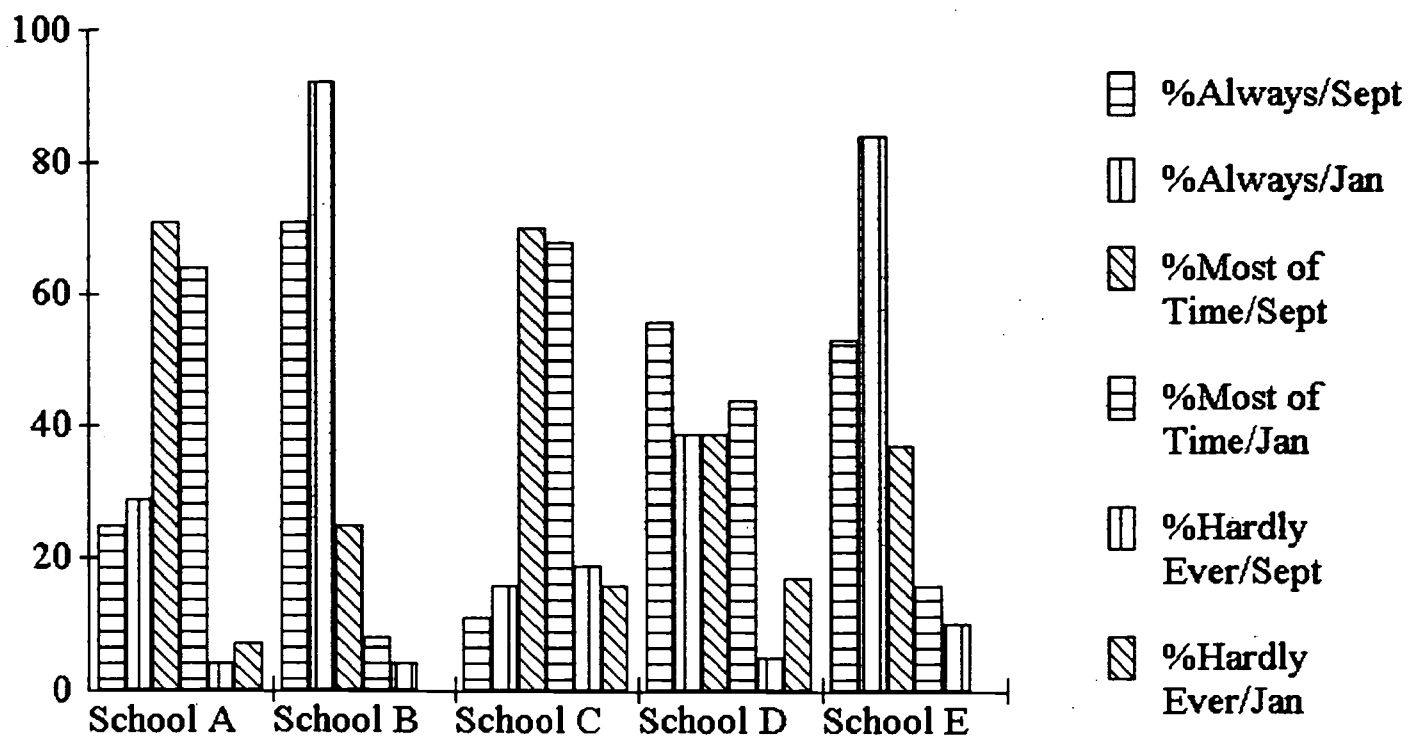
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	25	71	11	56	53
%Always/Jan	29	92	16	39	84
%Most of Time/Sept	71	25	70	39	37
%Most of Time/Jan	64	8	68	44	16
%Hardly Ever/Sept	4	4	19	5	10
%Hardly Ever/Jan	7	0	16	17	0

42

Writing Attitude Survey Results   September 1996 and January 1997

Question #2- I find it easy to write.

I find it easy to write.
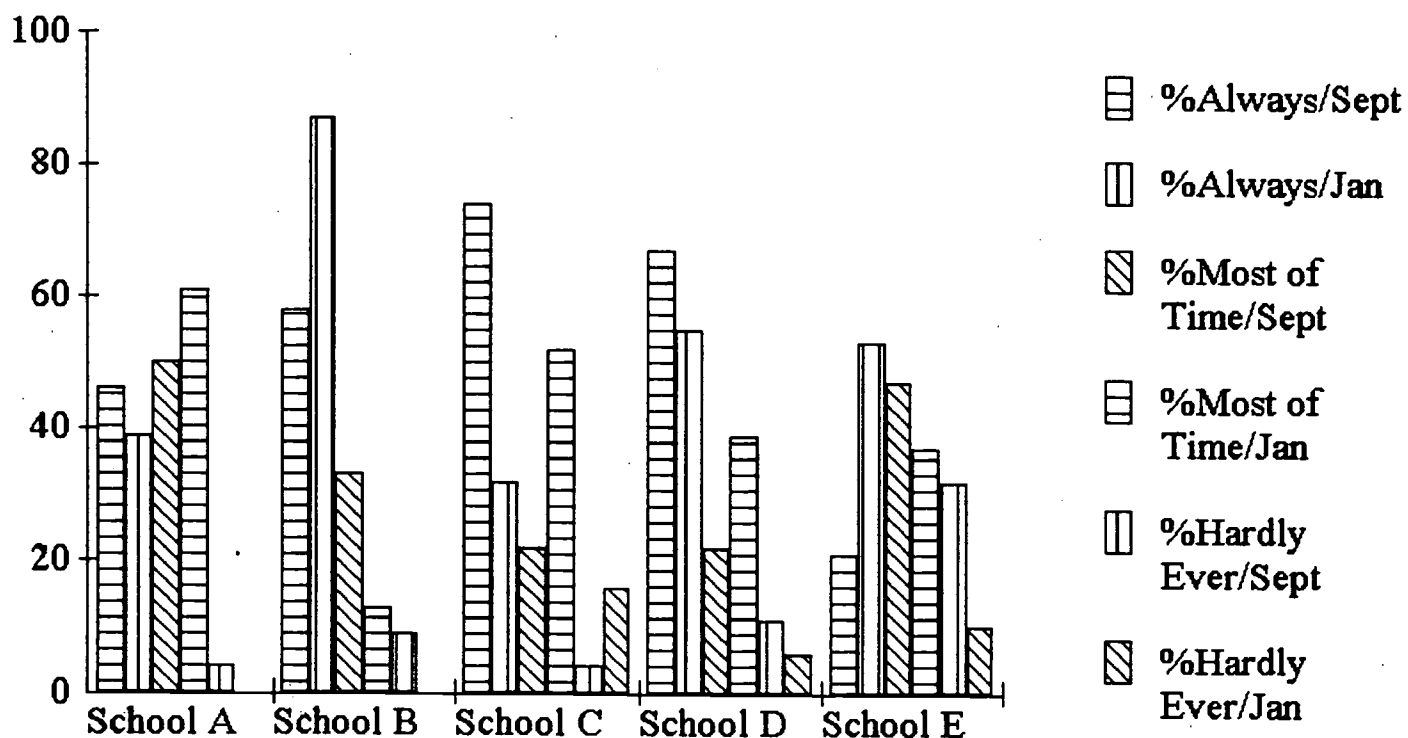
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	46	58	74	67	21
%Always/Jan	39	87	32	55	53
%Most of Time/Sept	50	33	22	22	47
%Most of Time/Jan	61	13	52	39	37
%Hardly Ever/Sept	4	9	4	11	32
%Hardly Ever/Jan	0	0	16	6	10

37

Writing Attitude Survey Results   September 1996 and January 1997

Question #3- I think writing is important.

I think writing is important.
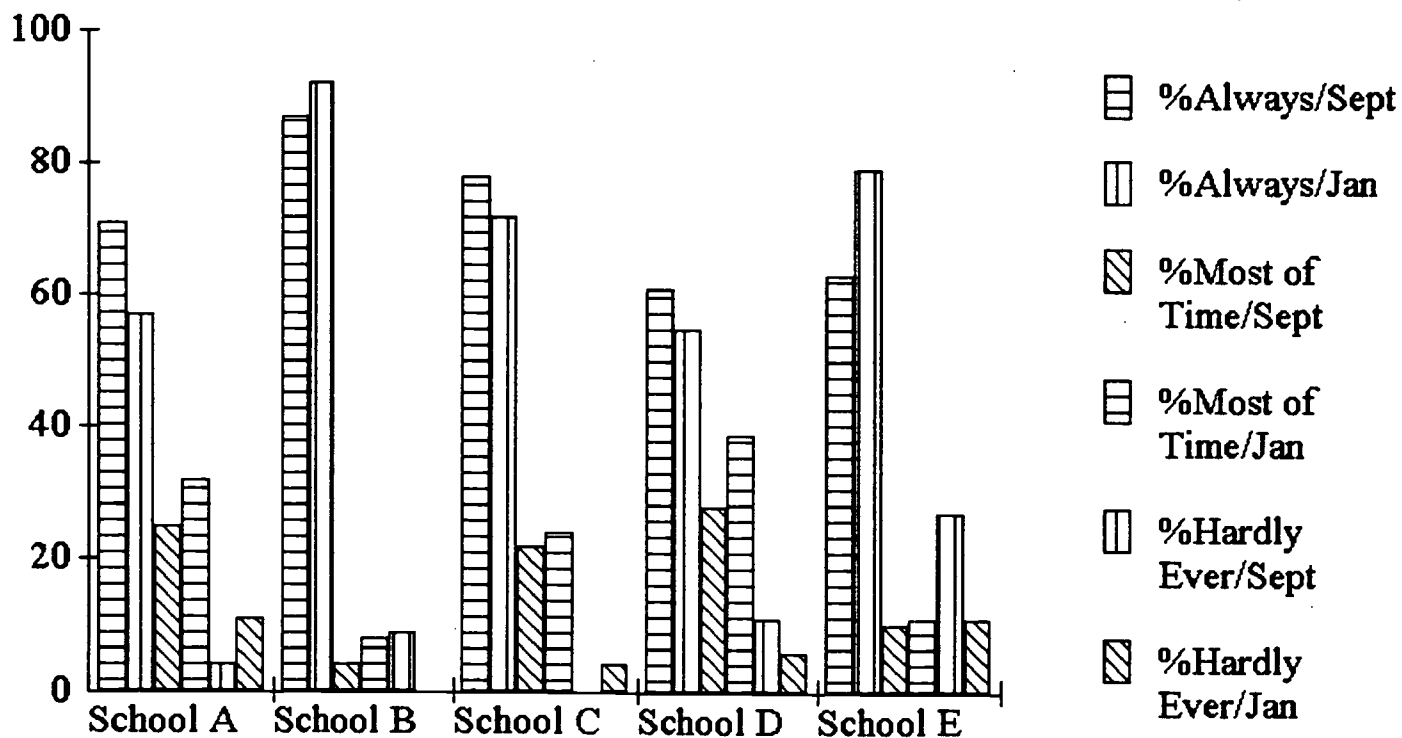
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	71	87	78	61	63
%Always/Jan	57	92	72	55	79
%Most of Time/Sept	25	4	22	28	10
%Most of Time/Jan	32	8	24	39	11
%Hardly Ever/Sept	4	9	0	11	27
%Hardly Ever/Jan	11	0	4	6	11

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Writing Attitude Survey Results   September 1996 and January 1997

Question #4- I like to write at school.

I like to write at school.

- ⊟ %Always/Sept
- ⊞ %Always/Jan
- ▨ %Most of Time/Sept
- ⊟ %Most of Time/Jan
- ⊞ %Hardly Ever/Sept
- ▨ %Hardly Ever/Jan

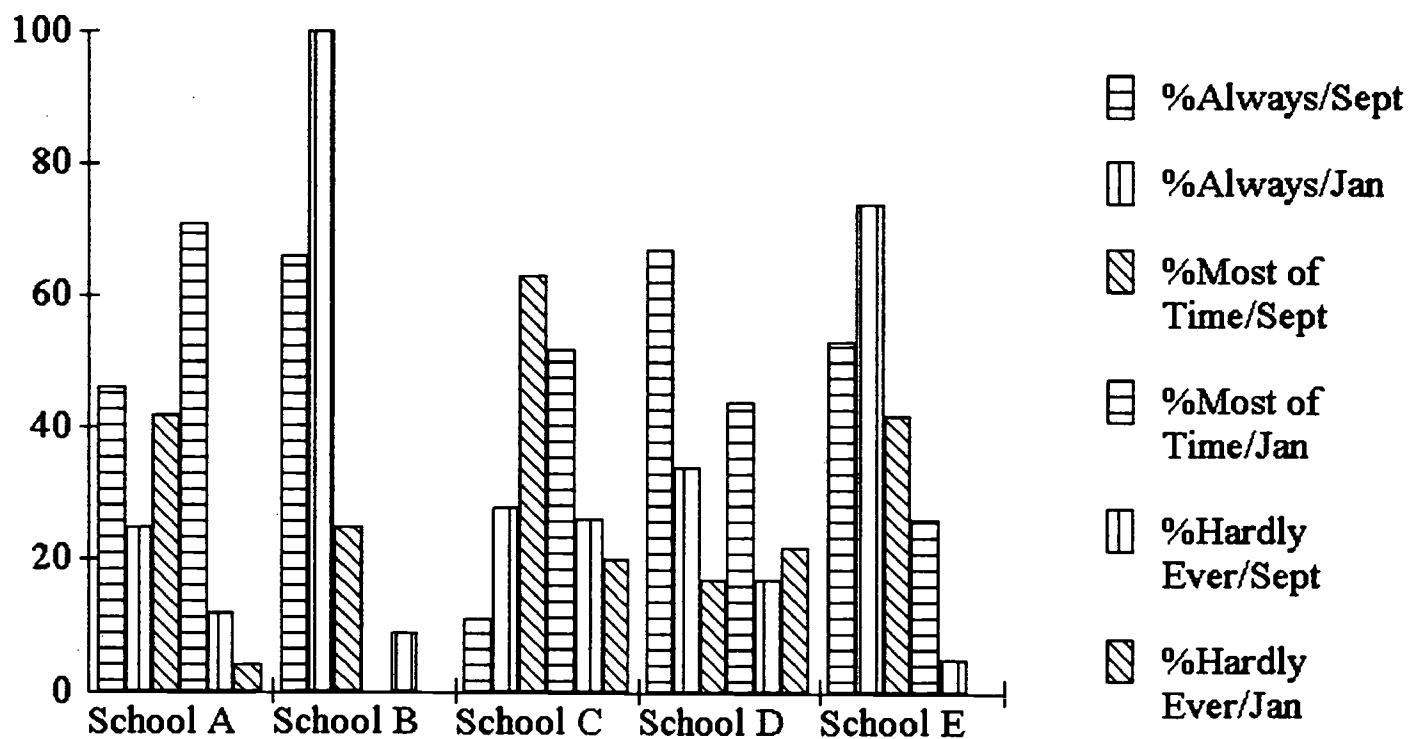|	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	46	66	11	67	53
%Always/Jan	25	100	28	34	74
%Most of Time/Sept	42	25	63	17	42
%Most of Time/Jan	71	0	52	44	26
%Hardly Ever/Sept	12	9	26	17	5
%Hardly Ever/Jan	4	0	20	22	0

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Table 2E

Writing Attitude Survey Results   September 1996 and January 1997

Question #5- I like to write at home.

I like to write at home.
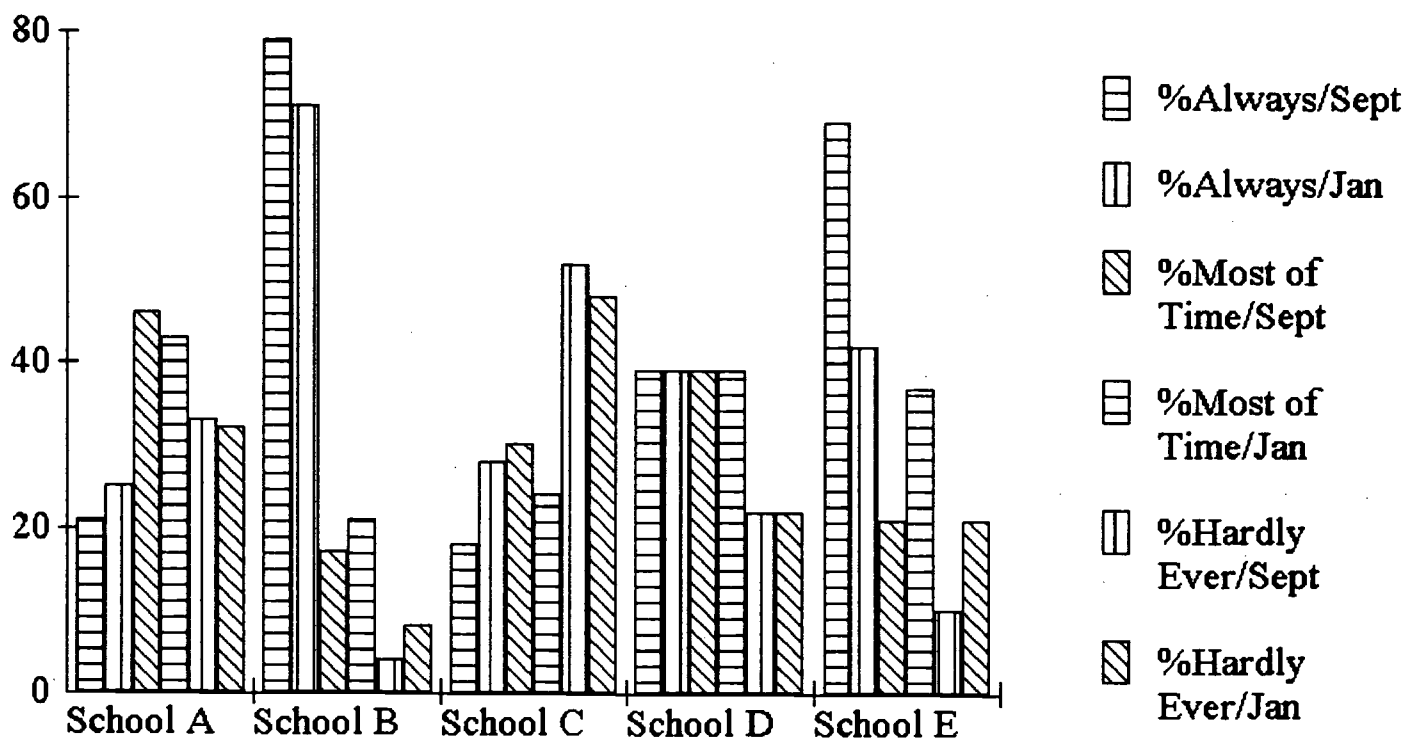
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	21	79	18	39	69
%Always/Jan	25	71	28	39	42
%Most of Time/Sept	46	17	30	39	21
%Most of Time/Jan	43	21	24	39	37
%Hardly Ever/Sept	33	4	52	22	10
%Hardly Ever/Jan	32	8	48	22	21

40

Writing Attitude Survey Results   September 1996 and January 1997

Question #6- I am proud of what I write.

I am proud of what I write.
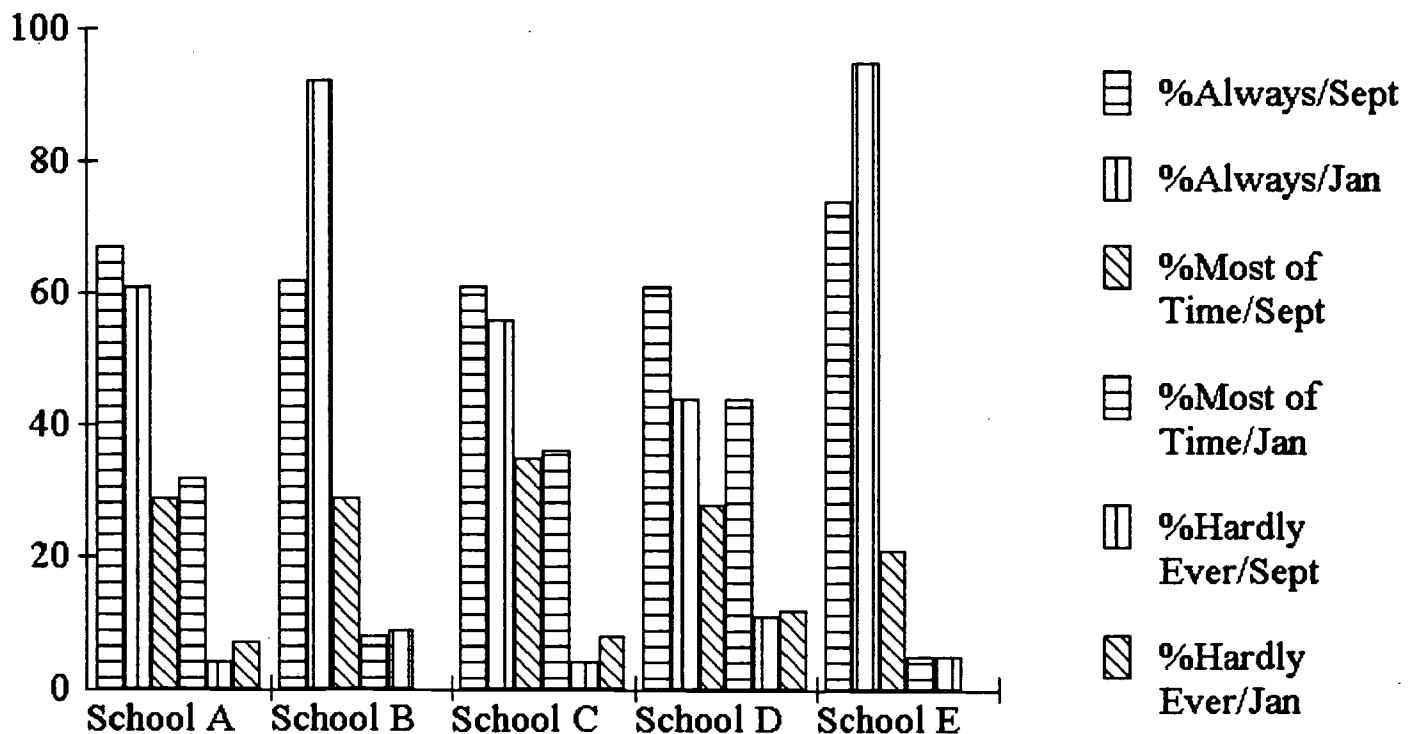
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	67	62	61	61	74
%Always/Jan	61	92	56	44	95
%Most of Time/Sept	29	29	35	28	21
%Most of Time/Jan	32	8	36	44	5
%Hardly Ever/Sept	4	9	4	11	5
%Hardly Ever/Jan	7	0	8	12	0

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I am good at putting ideas on paper.
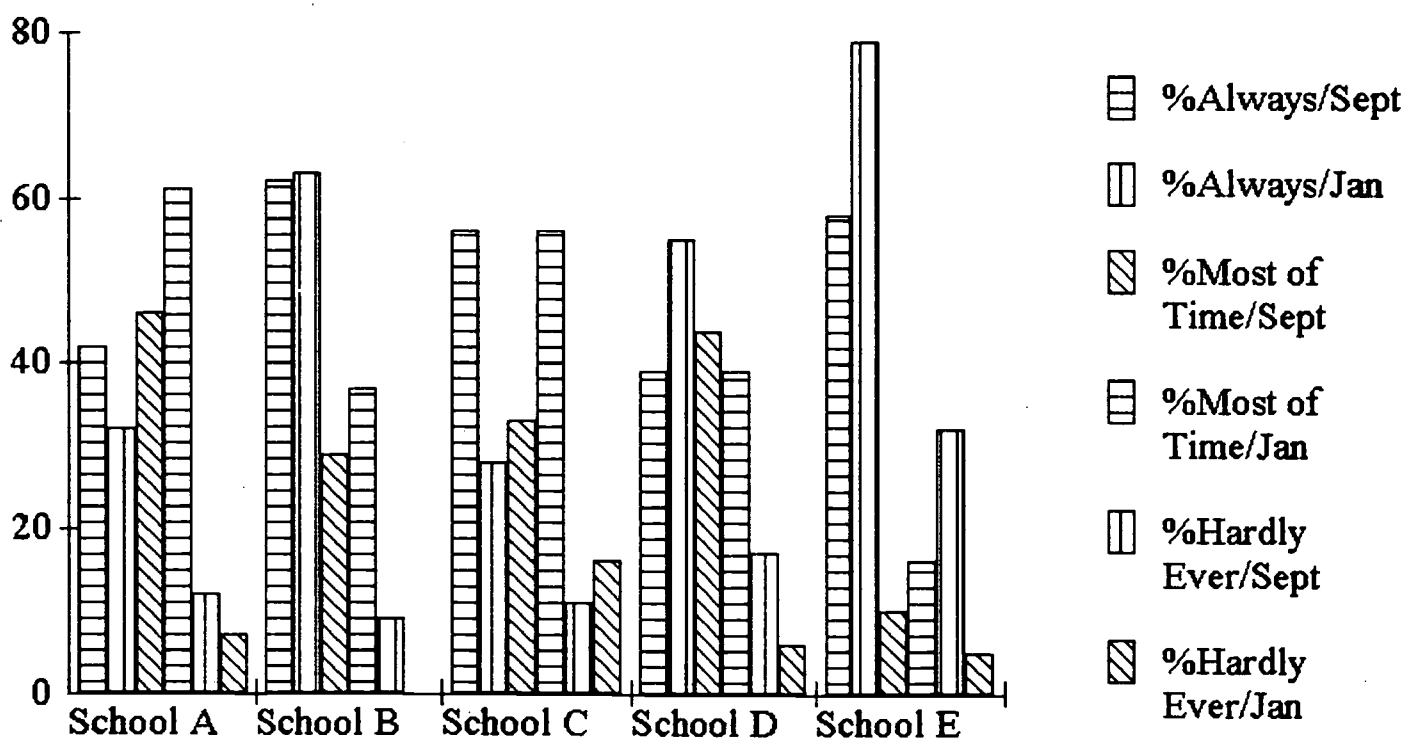
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	42	62	56	39	58
%Always/Jan	32	63	28	55	79
%Most of Time/Sept	46	29	33	44	10
%Most of Time/Jan	61	37	56	39	16
%Hardly Ever/Sept	12	9	11	17	32
%Hardly Ever/Jan	7	0	16	6	5

42

Writing helps me tell what I have learned.
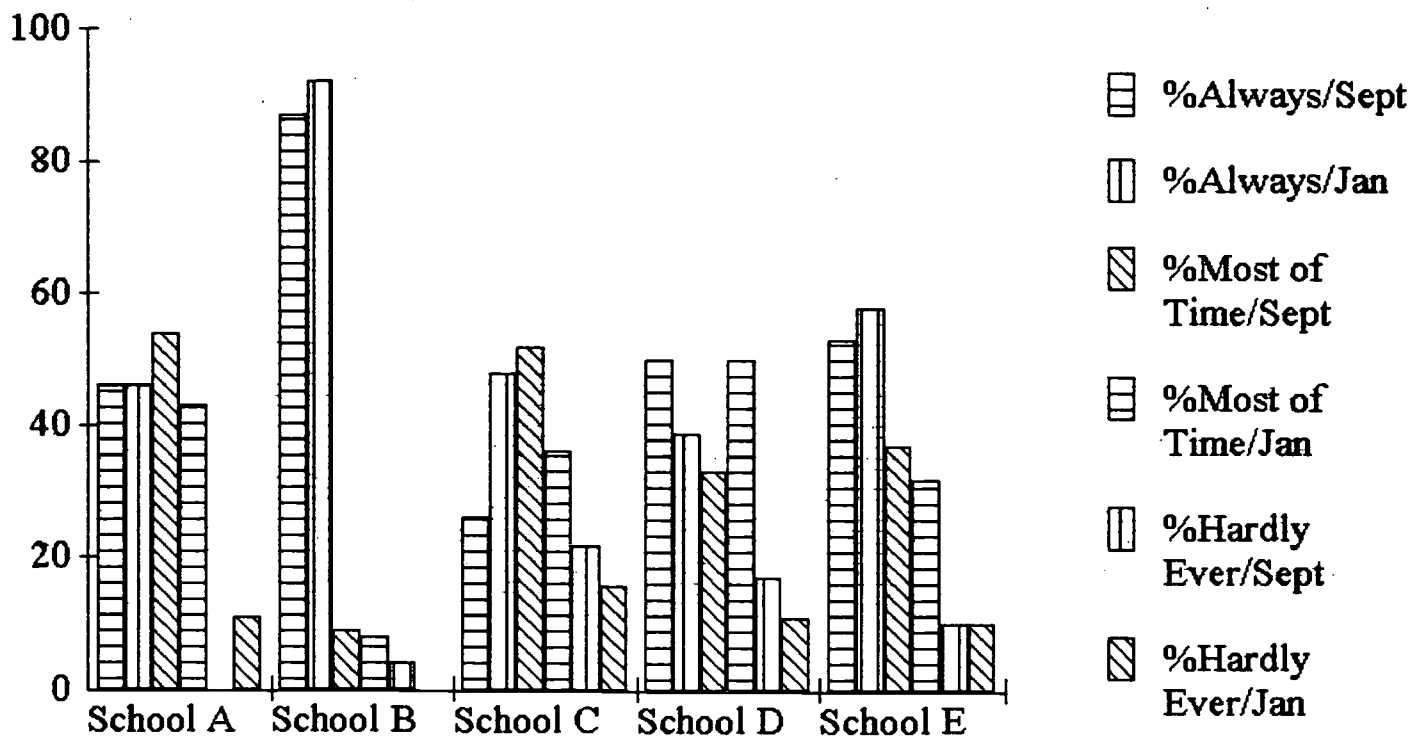
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	46	87	26	50	53
%Always/Jan	46	92	48	39	58
%Most of Time/Sept	54	9	52	33	37
%Most of Time/Jan	43	8	36	50	32
%Hardly Ever/Sept	0	4	22	17	10
%Hardly Ever/Jan	11	0	16	11	10

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Writing Attitude Survey Results   September 1996 and January 1997

Question #9- I am able to revise my writing.

I am able to revise my writing.
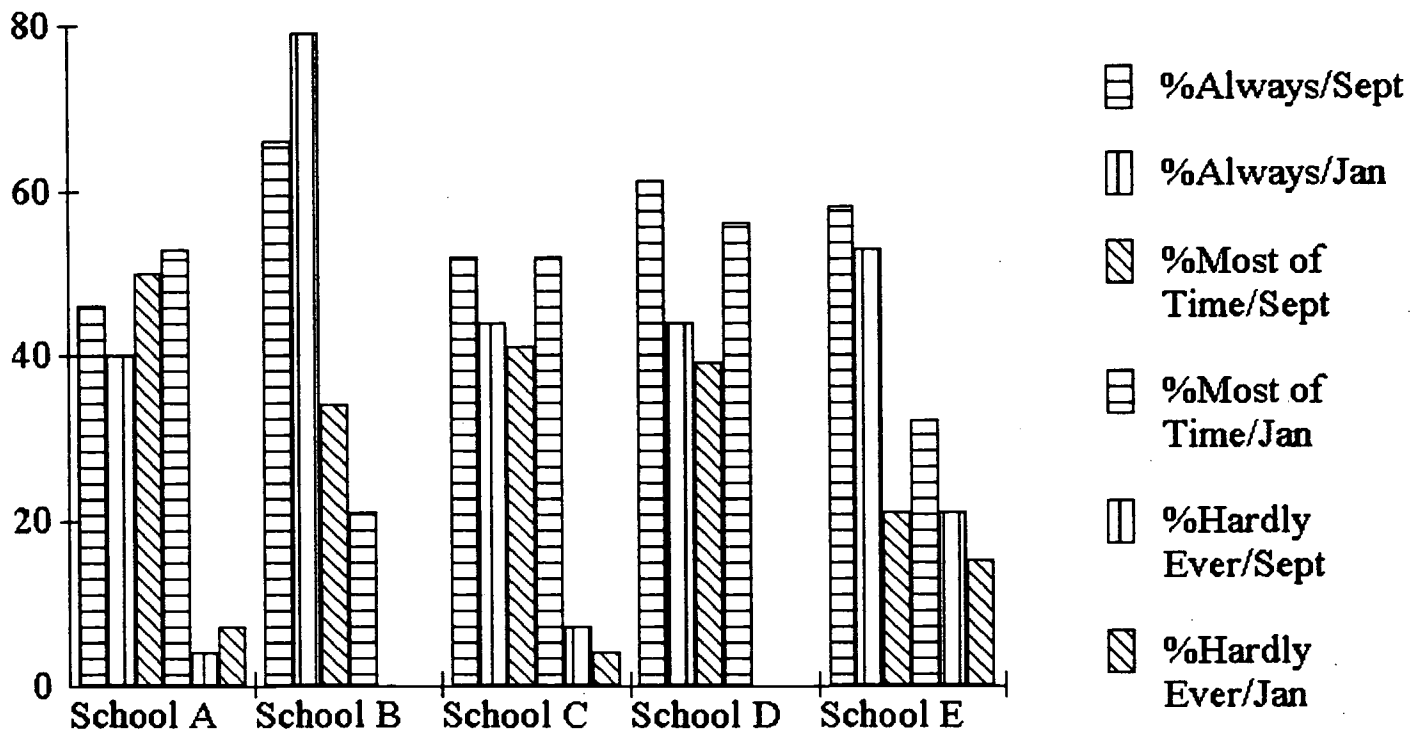
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	46	66	52	61	58
%Always/Jan	40	79	44	44	53
%Most of Time/Sept	50	34	41	39	21
%Most of Time/Jan	53	21	52	56	32
%Hardly Ever/Sept	4	0	7	0	21
%Hardly Ever/Jan	7	0	4	0	15

44

Writing Attitude Survey Results   September 1996 and January 1997

Question #10- I write different types of stories.

I write different types of stories.
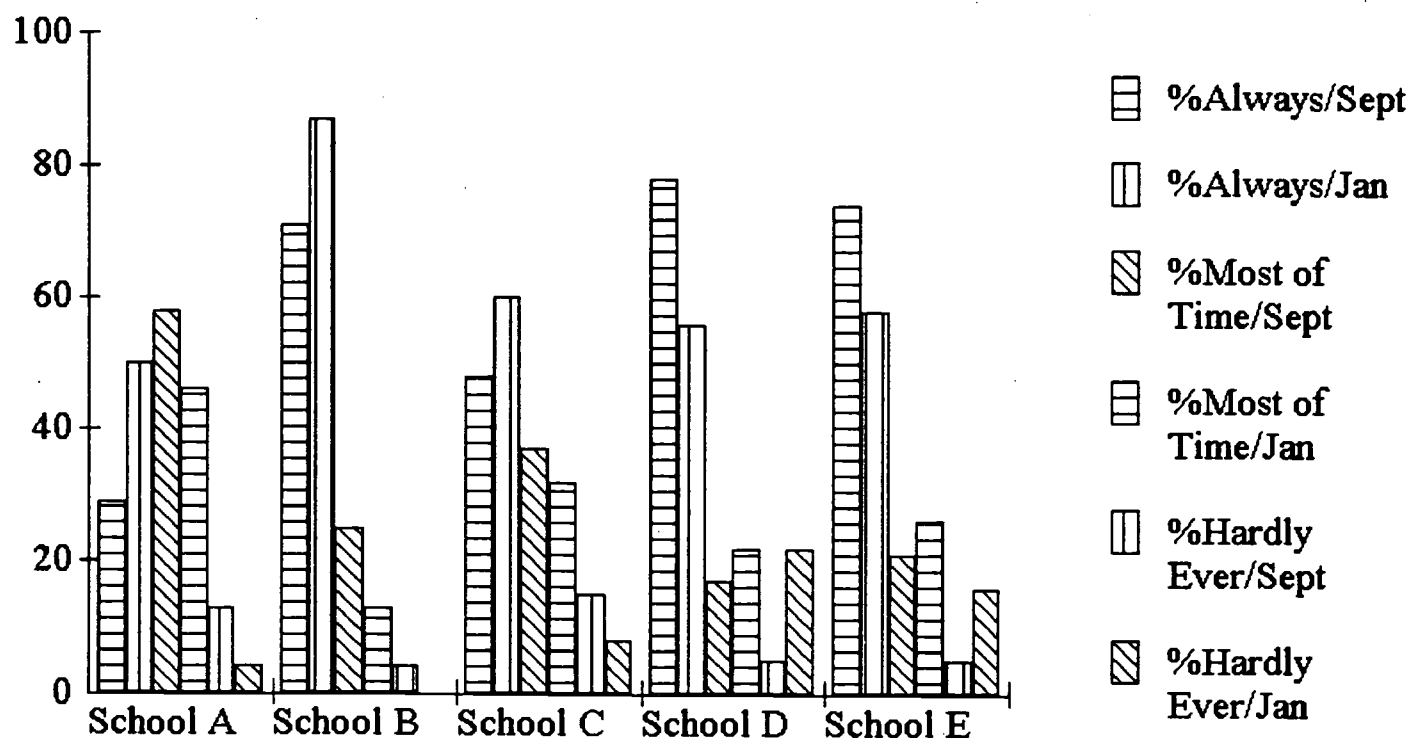
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Alway/Sept	29	71	48	78	74
%Always/Jan	50	87	60	56	58
%Most of Time/Sept	58	25	37	17	21
%Most of Time/Jan	46	13	32	22	26
%Hardly Ever/Sept	13	4	15	5	5
%Hardly Ever/Jan	4	0	8	22	16

45

Table 3

Survey Results:

What kind of a writer do you think you are?

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
Great/Sept	32	62	15	44	47
Great/Jan	11	54	26	28	53
Good/Sept	46	25	66	28	37
Good/Jan	78	17	56	44	26
Average/Sept	22	9	15	17	11
Average/Jan	11	29	18	22	21
Poor/Sept	0	4	4	11	5
Poor/Jan	0	0	0	6	0

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Table 4A

Attitude Towards Self Assessment vs. Teacher Assessment Results

1. **I like when the teacher points out my errors and <u>she</u> corrects them.**
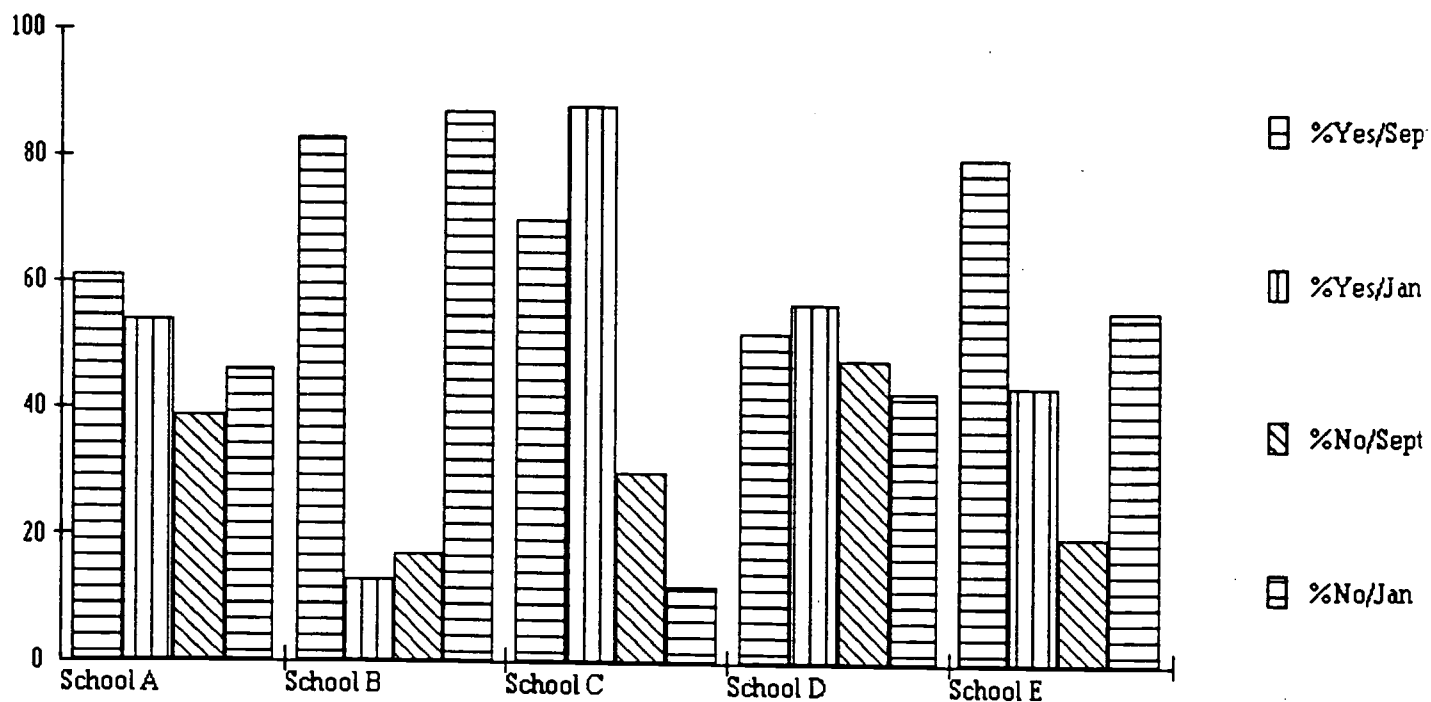
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Yes/Sept	61	83	70	52	80
%Yes/Jan	54	13	88	57	44
%No/Sept	39	17	30	48	20
%No/Jan	46	87	12	43	56

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Table 4B

Attitude Towards Self Assessment vs. Teacher Assessment Results

3. I like when I find my own errors and I correct them.
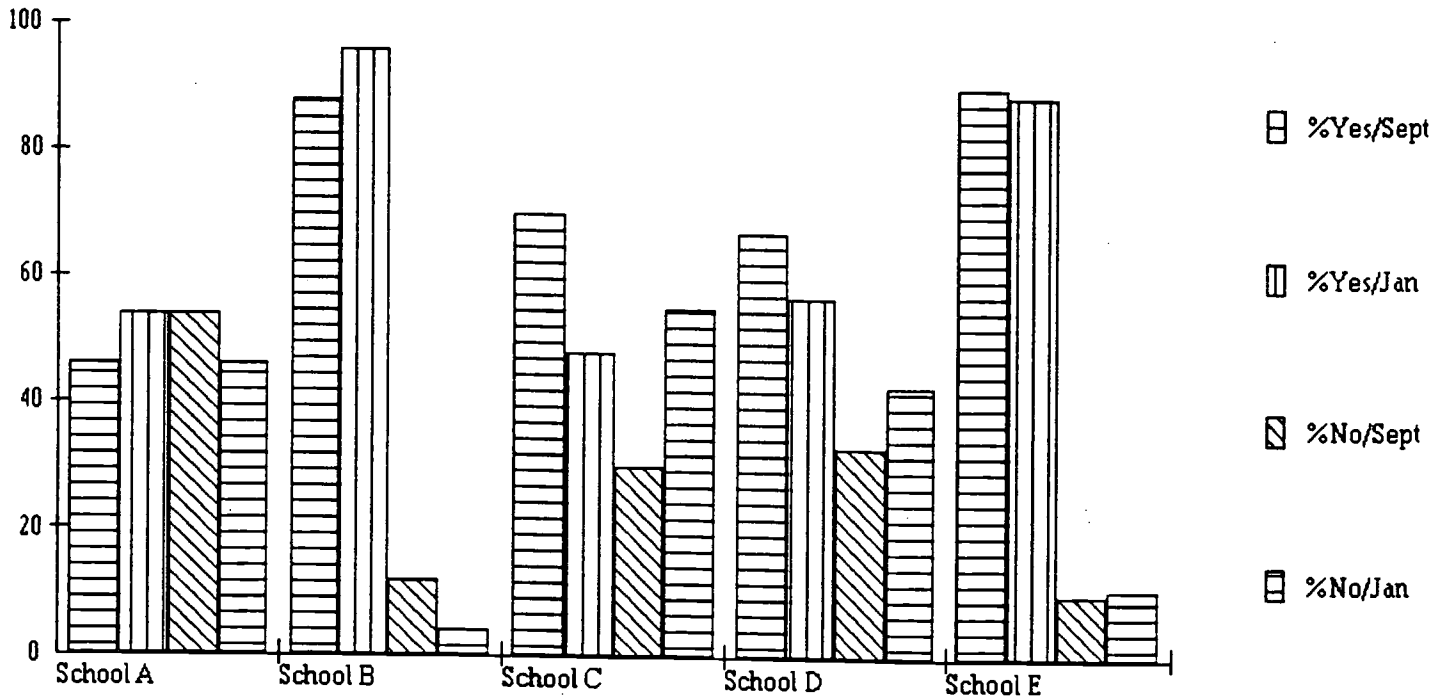
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Yes/Sept	46	88	70	67	90
%Yes/Jan	54	96	48	57	89
%No/Sept	54	12	30	33	10
%No/Jan	46	4	55	43	11

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Attitude Towards Self Assessment vs. Teacher Assessment Results

9.   I like to revise my work.
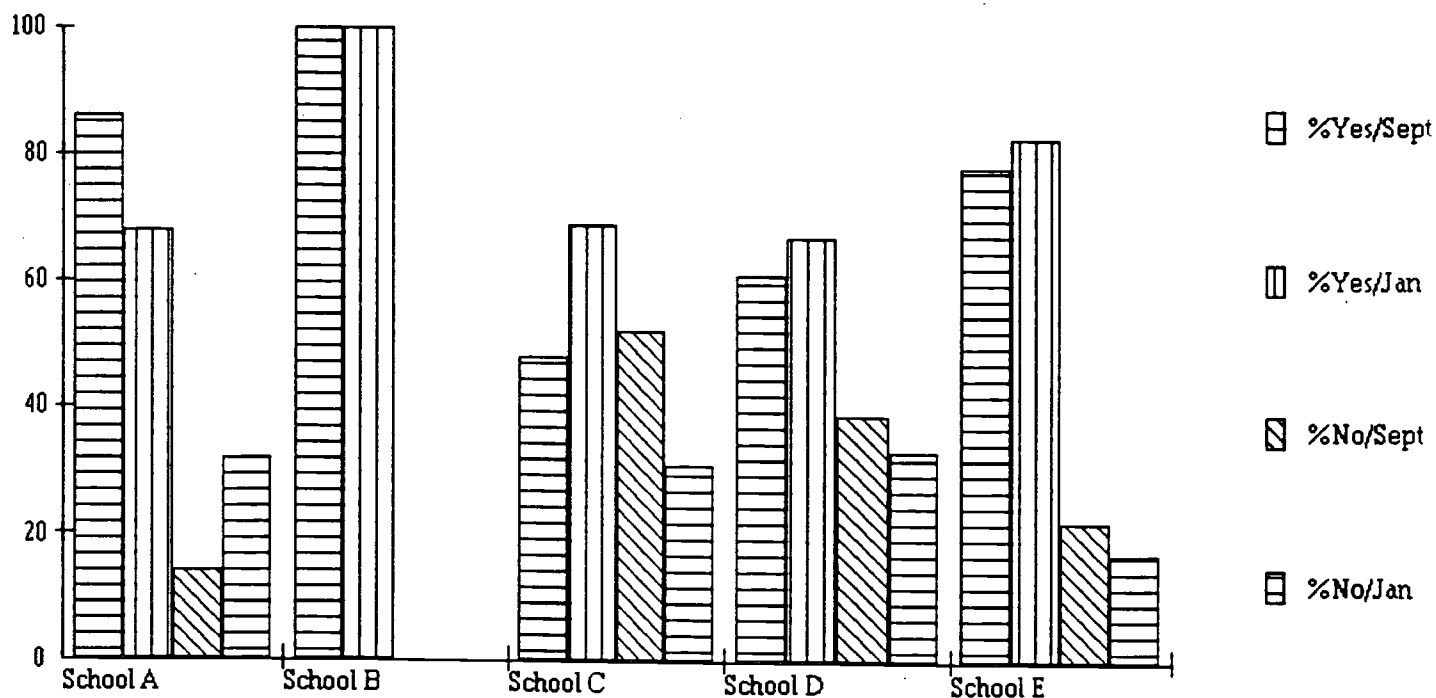
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Yes/Sept	86	100	48	61	78
%Yes/Jan	68	100	69	67	83
%No/Sept	14	0	52	39	22
%No/Jan	32	0	31	33	17

49

Table 4D

Attitude Towards Self Assessment vs. Teacher Assessment Results

10.   I like to rewrite my work.
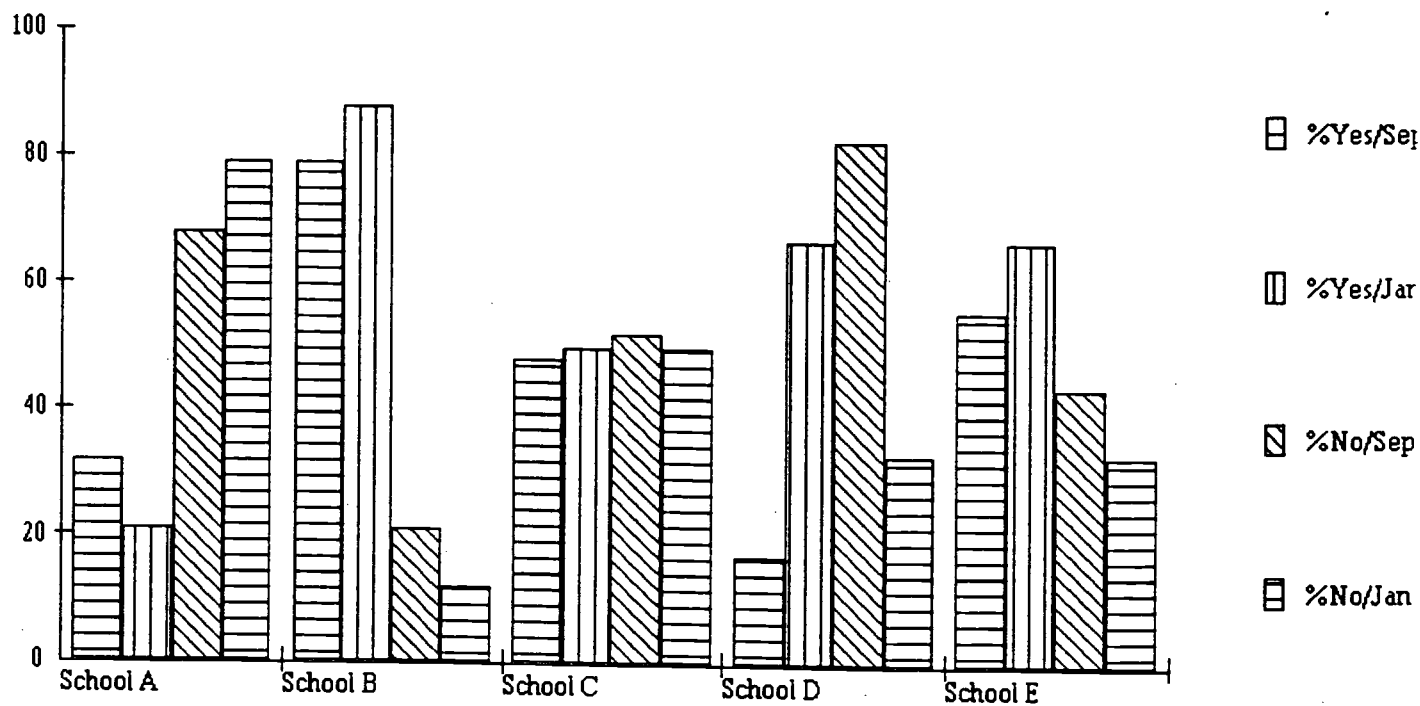
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Yes/Sept	32	79	48	17	56
%Yes/Jan	21	88	50	67	67
%No/Sept	68	21	52	83	44
%No/Jan	79	12	50	33	33

50

Attitude Towards Self Assessment vs. Teacher Assessment Results

15.   I like when I set my own writing goals.
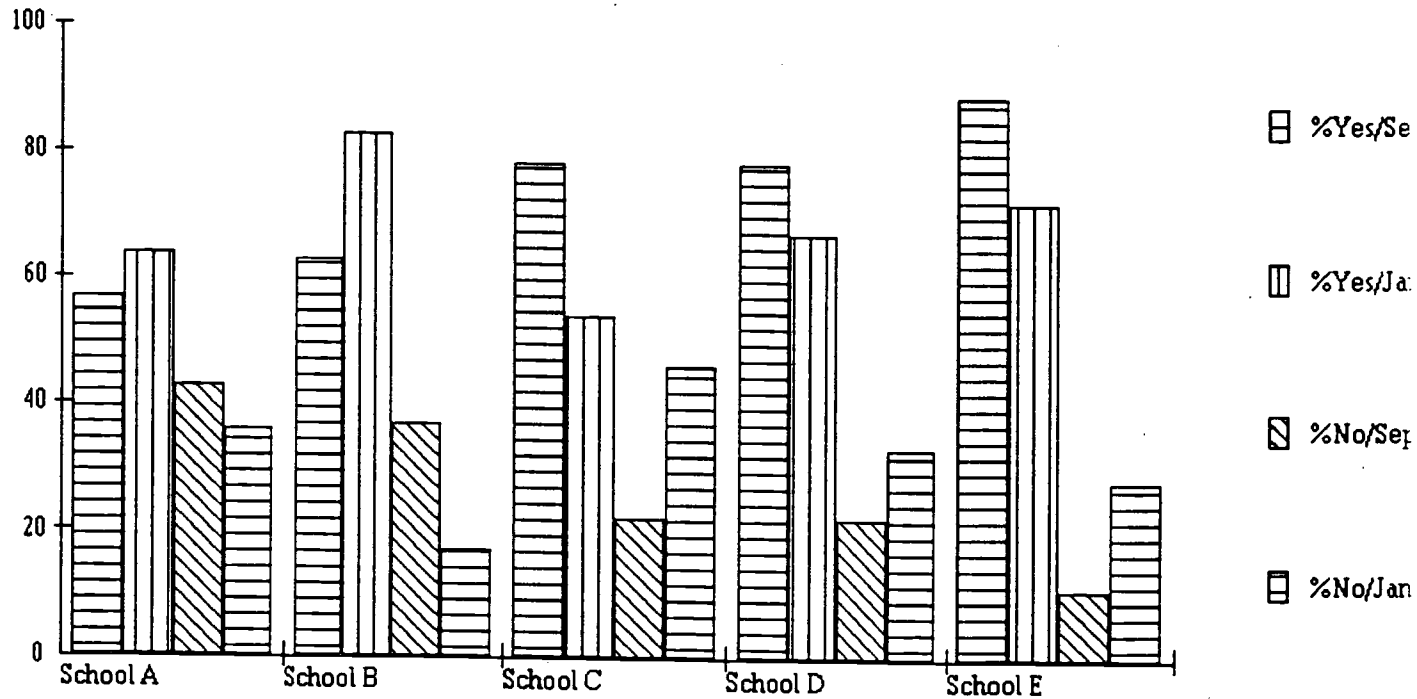
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
%Yes/Sept	57	63	78	78	89
%Yes/Jan	64	83	54	67	72
%No/Sept	43	37	22	22	11
%No/Jan	36	17	46	33	28

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Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers involved in this action research project feel it is a worth while approach to writing instruction, which can be used at all grade levels. The researchers recommend the use of a writing attitude survey at the beginning and the end of the school year to show the direct result of the students' attitude toward taking ownership of their writing.

Overall, the researchers found that all children increased their writing abilities between September and January. First grade students increased their writing skills by an average of 15.6 percent while third and fourth graders increased by an average of 23.8 percent. (Table 5) First graders did make a 15-20 percent increase due to chronological age, developmental ability, and prior knowledge and experience with the written language, although these factors did not explain greater increases over the third and fourth grade students. Third and fourth grade students made a greater increase in their writing abilities. The researchers now attribute this success to a greater understanding of writing skills, and an increase in the application of writing mechanics.

It is important to make the students aware of good writing through focused questions and actual daily practice of editing skills. Both unstructured free writing and formalized structured writing should be used consistently throughout the year. The researchers also feel that it is important to reward the students through publishing or displaying work. Students benefited from the use of student-made rubrics after each writing activity. Rubrics provided a structured guideline or checklist for the students to self-correct their work, as well as to evaluate their work. The use of rubrics also made the authentic grading process of written work more manageable for the researchers of this study.

An essential component of the evaluation process is one-to-one student and teacher conferencing on the students' self-evaluation of their writing. The researchers highly recommend sending this final product with both rubrics home for parents to review and discuss with their child. Overall, the researchers recommend this meaningful approach to writing, revising, and self-assessment to be used in all classrooms.

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Table 5

September/January Assessment Results
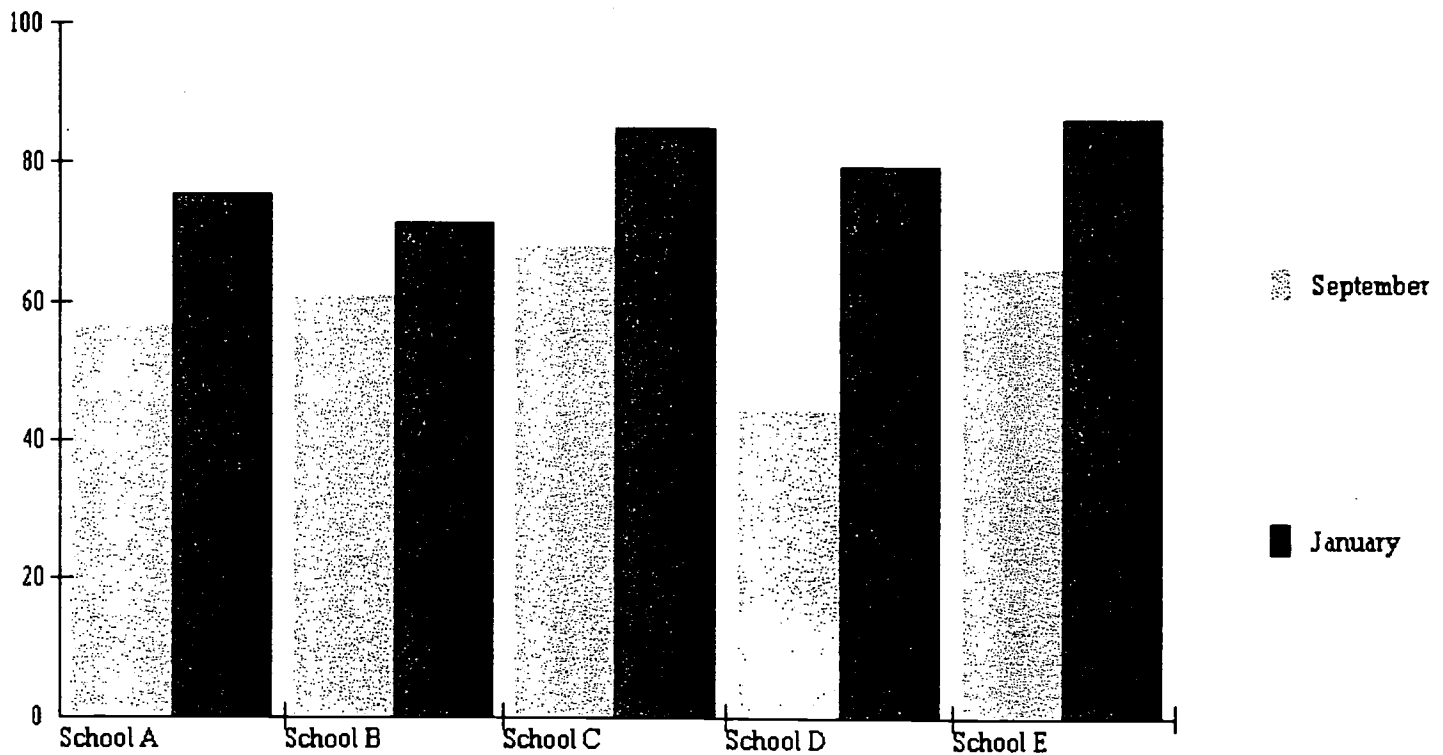
	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
September	56.5	60.8	67.9	44.2	64.8
January	75.6	71.3	84.9	79.6	86.5

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Appendix A

First Grade Writing Performance Checklist

Name_____   Date_____

1. My story makes sense.		yes	no
2. I wrote for a reason.		yes	no
3. I used capitals.		yes	no
periods.		yes	no
question marks		yes	no
excitement marks		yes	no
4. I used my best spelling		yes	no
a. tried myself		yes	no
b. checked with a friend		yes	no
c. checked in a dictionary or other book		yes	no
5. My story has a title and an author.		yes	no

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Appendix B

Third and Fourth Grade Writing Performance Checklist

Name_____   Date _____

	Always	Most of the time	Hardly ever
1. I used capital letters appropriately.	1	2	3
2. I used various punctuation appropriately.	1	2	3
3. I used grammar correctly.	1	2	3
4. I demonstrated use of spelling rules.	1	2	3
5. My writing topic is clearly stated.	1	2	3
6. My writing makes sense.	1	2	3

Appendix C

First Grade Writing Performance Checklist (Teacher)

Name_____ Date_____

Teacher_____

1. The story makes sense.   yes   no

2. The story was written for a reason.   yes   no

3. Correct punctuation was used.   yes   no

4. Appropriate spelling strategies were used.   yes   no

5. The story has a title and an author.   yes   no

Appendix D

Third and Fourth Grade Writing Performance Checklist (Teacher)

Name_____ Date_____

Teacher_____

	Always	Most of the time	Hardly ever
1. Used capital letters appropriately	1	2	3
2. Used various punctuation appropriately	1	2	3
3. Used grammar correctly	1	2	3
4. Demonstrated use of spelling rules	1	2	3
5. The writing topic is clearly stated.	1	2	3
6. The writing makes sense.	1	2	3

First Grade Writing Attitude Survey

1. I like to write.

2. I find it easy to write.

3. I think writing is important.

4. I like to write at school.

5. I like to write at home.

6. I am proud of what I write.

7. I am good at putting my ideas on paper.

8. Writing helps me tell what I have learned.

9. I am able to revise my writing.

10. I write different types of stories.

11. What kind of writer do you think you are?

    a. A great writer

    b. A good writer

    c. An average writer

    d. A poor writer

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Appendix F

Third and Fourth Grade Writing Attitude Survey

	Always	Most of the time	Hardly ever
1. I like to write.	1	2	3
2. I find it easy to write.	1	2	3
3. I think writing is important.	1	2	3
4. I like to write at school.	1	2	3
5. I like to write at home.	1	2	3
6. I am proud of what I write.	1	2	3
7. I am good at putting ideas on paper.	1	2	3
8. Writing helps me tell what I've learned.	1	2	3
9. I am able to revise my writing.	1	2	3
10. I write different types of stories.	1	2	3

11. What kind of writer do you think you are?

    A. A great writer

    B. A good writer

    C. An average writer

    D. A poor writer

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Appendix G

Attitude Toward Self-Assessment vs. Teacher Assessment of Writing

1. I like when the teacher points out my errors and she corrects them.	Y	N
2. I like when the teacher points out my errors and I correct them.	Y	N
3. I like when I find my own errors and I correct them.	Y	N
4. I like when a peer helps me find and correct my errors.	Y	N
5. I like when the teacher assigns a writing topic.	Y	N
6. I like when I choose the writing topic.	Y	N
7. I like when my teacher gives my writing a letter grade.	Y	N
8. I like when my teacher writes comments on my writing.	Y	N
9. I like to revise my work.	Y	N
10. I like to rewrite my work.	Y	N
11. I like to have my work published.	Y	N
12. I like learning about other published authors' writing styles.	Y	N
13. I like using different writing styles in my written work.	Y	N
14. I like when the teacher sets my writing goals.	Y	N
15. I like when I set my writing goals.	Y	N

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First Grade Students Rubric for Writing

1. **My writing makes sense.**

    3   2   1

2. **I used capitals and ending marks in my sentences.**

    3   2   1

3. **My pictures match my words.**

    3   2   1

4. **My printing is neat.**

    3   2   1

5. **I used describing words.**

    3   2   1

3 = Excellent!
2 = You're on the right track!
1 = See the teacher or a friend.

<u>Scale</u>
12 - 15 = Experienced
12 - 8 = Developing
5 - 7= Emerging

Third and Fourth Grade Student Rubric for Writing

1. I have a complete topic sentence.

   5   4   3   2   1

2. My supporting sentences go along with my topic sentence.

   5   4   3   2   1

3. I added extra support sentences to give more detail.

   5   4   3   2   1

4. All of my sentences have the proper punctuation, beginning and ending.

   5   4   3   2   1

5. I have corrected all of my spelling mistakes.

   5   4   3   2   1

6. My paragraph makes sense and sticks to one topic.

   5   4   3   2   1

7. My paragraph was checked by_____

5 = Excellent effort! This is super writing.

4 = Nice job, one element is missing.

3 = OK but are you sure you checked carefully?

2 = You should check carefully with a buddy again.

1 = you need to review your pre-writing ideas with the teacher.

<u>Scale</u>

28 - 30 = A

26 - 27 = B

22 - 25 = C

20 - 21 = D

0 - 19 = F

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Appendix J

First Grade **Teacher** Rubric for Writing **Assessment**

1. Student's writing makes sense.

      3   2   1

2. Student used correct punctuation.

      3   2   1

3. Student's illustrations correspond with their print.

      3   2   1

4. Student used appropriate printing strategies.

      3   2   1

5. Student used descriptive writing.

      3   2   1

6. Student used compound sentence structures (vs. simple sentences)

      3   2   1

7. Student used appropriate spelling strategies.

      3   2   1

8. Student listened and followed directions correctly.

      3   2   1

3 = Excellent

2 = You're on the right track!

1 = See the teacher or a friend

Scale

24 - 21 = Experienced

20 - 12 = Developing

11 - 8 = Emerging

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Third and Fourth Grade **Teacher** Rubric for Writing **Assessment**

1. Student has a complete topic sentence.

    5   4   3   2   1

2. Student's supporting sentences go along with my topic sentence.

    5   4   3   2   1

3. Student added extra support sentences to give more detail.

    5   4   3   2   1

4. All of student's sentences have the proper punctuation, beginning and ending.

    5   4   3   2   1

5.   Student uses various punctuation.

    5   4   3   2   1

6. Student has corrected all spelling mistakes.

    5   4   3   2   1

7. Student's paragraph makes sense and sticks to one topic.

    5   4   3   2   1

8.   Student uses appropriate grammar.

    5   4   3   2   1

7. Student's paragraph was checked by_____

5 = Excellent effort! This is super writing.

4 = Nice job, one element is missing.

3 = OK but are you sure you checked carefully?

2 = You should check carefully with a buddy again.

1 = You need to review your pre-writing ideas with the teacher.

Scale

28 - 30 = A   22 - 25 = C

26 - 27 = B   20 - 21 = D   0 - 19 = F

Appendix L

Dear Parent,

Your child could be involved in an exciting adventure this year. He/she could be a participant in the action research project I am doing as a requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership from St. Xavier University. As an active participant, your child will learn how to self-assess his/her own writing so that he/she can become a more independent and capable writer. All information I would gather will be kept in strict confidence, no use of names would be used.

Please indicate on the form below that you are aware and approve of your child's participation in this project. Please return this form to school on _____.
Thanks for your support .

My child, _____, has my permission to be a part of the action research project on "students self-assessing their own writing so they can improve their writing skills and abilities."

_____   _____

Parent Signature   Date

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