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## ABSTRACT

Educators continue to seek ways to foster writing that produces rich language usage by students. Journal writing in the classroom allows students to express ideas in written form. Two types of journal writing often used by educators include topical journal writing and free choice journal writing. The desire to excel in the area of writing prompted a comparison study on the usage of topical journal writing and free choice journal writing. The study involved 6 weeks of writing, 3 weeks spent in free-choice journal writing and three weeks in topical journal writing. The first-grade students were asked to write at least four sentences three times weekly. The researcher collected data by measuring the number of describing words the students used in each entry. A describing word was defined as any word that described a noun. The researcher retained the hypothesis that comparing descriptive word use in first grade students' free-choice journal writing and topical journal writing would not create a significant difference at the 0.05 level of significance. The researcher, however, observed a higher mean of descriptive words used by students in free-choice journal writing as compared to topical journal writing. The researcher concluded that both forms of journal writing are equally effective in the classroom. Appendixes contain the approval letters. (Contains 30 references, 1 table, and 1 figure.) (Author/RS)

ED 471 384

A COMPARISON OF DESCRIPTIVE WRITING OF FIRST GRADERS USING  
FREECHOICE JOURNALING VERSUS TOPICAL JOURNALING

An Action Research Project

Presented to

The Department of Teacher Education

Of Johnson Bible College

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Holistic Education

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By

Vanessa Gayle Myers

July 2002

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## ABSTRACT

Educators continue to seek ways to foster writing that produces rich language usage by students. Journal writing in the classroom allows students to express ideas in written form. Two types of journal writing often used by educators include topical journal writing and free choice journal writing. In topical journal writing, the student is given an assigned writing topic. Free-choice journal writing allows the student freedom in a writing topic. Topical and free-choice journal writing both seek to create effective writing sessions. However, educators seek to use the most effective tools in achieving the optimum level of learning. The desire to excel in the area of writing prompted a comparison study on the usage of topical journal writing and free choice journal writing.

The study involved six weeks of writing, three weeks spent in free-choice journal writing and three weeks in topical journal writing. The students were asked to write at least four sentences three times weekly. The researcher collected data by measuring the number of describing words the students used in each entry. A describing word was defined as any word that described a noun. The researcher retained the hypothesis that comparing descriptive word use in first grade students' free-choice journal writing and topical journal writing would not create a significant difference at the 0.05 level of significance. The researcher, however, observed a higher mean of descriptive words used by students in free-choice journal writing as compared to topical journal writing. The researcher concluded that both forms of journal writing are equally effective in the classroom.

APPROVAL PAGE

This research proposal by Vanessa Myers is accepted in its present form by the Department of Teacher Education at Johnson Bible College in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Holistic Education.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Significance of the Problem:

Writing is a form of communication. Teaching students effective communication and clear expression of ideas provides opportunities for success. The significance of this study was to determine whether full generation of ideas in writing or guided generation of ideas in writing is more beneficial to the emergent writer. This study conducted in a first grade classroom used free-choice journaling versus topical journaling. The researcher sought to find whether more descriptive words are used more frequently in free-choice journaling in comparison with topical journaling.

### Statement of the Problem

In this study, the researcher compared the differences of First Graders' writing using free-choice journal writing and topical journaling. The researcher counted the number of descriptive words used in each journal entry to measure the difference between free-choice and topical journal writing. The use of descriptive words allows for deeper expression and enables the child to see the world in more detail.

### Definition of Terms

Free-Choice Journaling- this form of journal writing allows the learner to choose a writing topic.

Topical Journaling- this form of journal writing involves the teacher giving the learner a writing topic.

Descriptive Words- words that describe a noun.

C.A.R.E.- (Children Achieving Reading Excellence) –A literacy program that emphasizes letter repetition and sounds in learning the alphabet.

### Limitations

Pre-determined placement of students in the classroom serves as a limitation to the study.

The study was limited to only seventeen students as a sample size.

The study does not contain a random sample of students with academic abilities.

### Assumptions

The researcher assumed all students know the letters of the alphabet.

In this study, the researcher assumed students possessed an awareness of correct sentence formation.

### Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in first grade students' descriptive writing using free-choice journal writing versus topical journal writing, at the .05 level of significance.

## CHAPTER 2

### RELATED LITERATURE

#### History

In a replicated study, researchers sought to determine how writing instruction had changed from 1982 to 1995 with implementation of K.E.R.A., the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act. Researchers examined first, second, and fourth grades. Studies found that in 1982 children spent little time generating their own writing ideas and a significant amount of time writing verbatim. In 1995, children spent twice as much time engaged in writing (Bridge et al., 2). The study also found that of all the grades examined, the greatest change occurred at the first grade level. These changes were related to the amount of time and activities engaged by students. Students spent more time generating their own writing ideas, in story form and personal journal entries (Bridge et al., p.6). Overall, teachers spent twice as much time in writing instruction in 1995 as they did in 1982.

A Mississippi study involved improvement in reading scores on achievement tests. In the city of Oxford, Mississippi state legislature established a rating system to measure school districts against one another in 1988. The rating system scores from levels 1 to 5. In 1993, Oxford schools achieved on Level 3, which was considered successful. School Board members and educators, however wanted the school to reach the highest level (Vail, p.2). They ranked lowest on reading. To increase the systems rating, Jordan a mid-level administrator, rallied for a reading improvement called

Reading Recovery. In just a three-year period, Oxford's scores went from Level 3 to Level 5(Vail, p.2). Reading Recovery is a structured program for first grade students involving one-on-one tutoring of low-achieving readers. When students in the Reading Recovery program reach the average reading level of their class, they leave the program (Vail, p. 4). Reading Recovery's role in writing development also brought improvement to students' writing abilities. Teachers emphasize reading and writing together, while using all of the senses to build students' literary abilities and interest. Students, who learn to read and write simultaneously, see the processes as related and not separate. Children experience language through writing about experiences; this connects to reading abilities in that children are able to experience stories that relate to writing experiences.

### Gender

In looking at the writing process, differences in gender are a factor. Girls as a whole tend to develop better writing skills as compared to boys. Research supports that girls, in comparison with boys, develop more legible and fluent handwriting (Graham et. al., p.43). In a study conducted on the development of handwriting speed, researchers included these differences as a factor. The study concluded that girls' handwriting speed increased at every level until grade four. Handwriting speed leveled off between grades four and five, increasing again in grades six and seven. Boys' handwriting speed similarly increased from one grade to the next, until grade four. However, unlike girls' speed, boys' handwriting speed did not significantly increase after fourth grade (Graham & et. al., p. 45). These differences in handwriting speed may account for differences in writing abilities between boys and girls.

## Writing Development

In recent years, programs such as C.A.R.E., Children Achieving Reading Excellence, seek to take children back to the basics of handwriting, and offer teachers more opportunities to allow for the writing process. C.A.R.E. is a program designed to build letter recognition and letter sound skills in students. Each day in the C.A.R.E. program students receive a new letter. The students say the letter, make the letter shape in the air, feel the letter shape on paper, write the letter shape once, and then write it again with visual help. For example, the letter “a”, children would first say, “a apple /ă/.” Next, the student makes the letter in the air and says the phrase for the letter simultaneously. Finally, the student feels the letter written in crayon on paper and writes the letter. The C.A.R.E. program emphasizes repetition of learning letters and sounds. In each letter, the student receives exposure to the letter, its sound, and a picture representation. With a background in this program, students’ ability to write words and sentences emerges at an earlier stage.

The teacher can directly serve as an effective writing model for students. In early grades especially, writing needs demonstration, in small groups or whole-class settings. Once students can write without constant aide from the teacher, it is important for the teacher to continue modeling writing. In one first grade classroom, the teacher Mr. Henry wrote in his journal simultaneously with students. Students’ interest in personal writing and the teacher’s writing grew because of his writing model. On the third grade level, another teacher, Mrs. Horton noticed significant improvement in students’ quality and quantity of writing after teacher demonstration (Routman, p. 211). Before the

demonstration the third grade classroom, students writing consisted mostly of listings, and lacked content. After implementing journal writing and demonstrating writing, the teacher found more content in students' writing and improved confidence levels in writing (Routman, p.213).

### Writing Achievement

Recent research indicates that to create students who write well there is a need for balance in low and high level writing skills (Graham, p. 652). These skills range from letter recognition to language used in sentences (Graham, p. 652). Language, especially the process of writing, is effectively presented as a whole process rather than parts of a whole. Children, who receive language, for example as a whole story, learn to become better writers as well as readers (Yoo, p. 4). The experiences in stories help children to generate ideas of how a story is created, thus triggering ideas to put words into a story form. With such a great emphasis placed upon letter formation rather than textual meaning with younger children, the writing process develops inaccurately.

Presenting the process of writing as bits of information rather than an entirety is detrimental to writing development. Writing is one way the world communicates personally, socially, emotionally, historically, and culturally. Teaching children the importance of writing and effective writing strategies provides opportunities for betterment in communications. As mentioned earlier, in teaching writing the educator often presents writing as a process of “meaning-making” or discovery. Considerations as an educator before teaching writing include, writing to “make” meaning and writing as a process of “discovery” (Hillocks, p.4).

First, writing as a process seeks to “make meaning.” To find meaning in something suggests that it is tangible and real, not interpretation. Meaning is never individual in the writing process; it is dependant upon cultural history. Writing that is non-meaning making involve the writing activities seen in schools today. Book reports, repetitious writing, and verbatim writing or dictation writing are activities that constitute writing that are non-meaning making (Hillocks, p. 8). Writing that involves meaning is writing that speaks of experience and establishes a relationship with the audience. Writing that is meaningful usually conveys an emotional response from the reader as well as the writer (Hillocks, p. 10). In the classroom, writing is more than a symbolic representation of text on paper; it is an experience and an emotion felt by the writer, which is so desperately trying to generate the same response in the reader. Educators need to remember that one consideration in creating effective writers is the importance of “making” meaning in the written text.

Secondly, educators need to consider writing as a process of “discovery” before teaching. The term “discovery” in the realm of writing refers to allowing students to write in order to discover new ideas or relationships. Writing and “writing to discover” are two separate ideas to say the two are one is limited. Writing involves research with all its methodologies, not just production of text. Serious writers spend years, often a lifetime inquiring, formulating ideas and putting those ideas into written text (Hillocks, p.13). Educators need to take children to a higher level of writing as a process. The process involves study, observation, evaluation, and discovering new ideas and relationships as well. Brenda Shapiro quotes, “Research and writing are integrated”(Hillocks, p.13). In



the classroom, allowances for children to explore, observe, and grow give opportunities to make meaning and discovery through writing.

Another aspect of teaching writing involves building upon the prior knowledge of students. Teacher awareness of students' abilities provides opportunities for academic growth. Hillocks refers to a situation of a teacher with an African American student. The teacher asked the student named Lem if he had any knowledge of whether classmate, Susan, rode the school bus. Lem replied, "She ain't ride the bus" the teacher corrected "ain't" with does not. The student interpreted the correction, as Susan never rides the bus. Lem's next response was, "She do ride the bus." The teacher frowned upon Lem's language usage and sought to find answers elsewhere. The conflict here was between the teacher and student's differing definitions of the word "doesn't" (p. 15). Barriers in communication between the student and teacher can often cause the teacher to view the student as low ability and lacking discipline. This miscommunication influences how students develop as writers as well as readers. Writing is a way educators can deal with miscommunications between students.

When a person speaks and writes, in a sense, it defines the person's memories, motives, dreams, and values(Hillocks, p. 22). Effective writing by students demands the teacher to view what students know. The use of what students know by the teacher allows for active learning. Writing predominantly allows the student expression of self, which in turn offers the teacher an opportunity to learn how to best reach the student. School curriculum design is not based upon using prior knowledge as a tool but the continual gaining of new knowledge. Hillocks quotes, "Perhaps writing teachers, more than

teachers of any other subject, have attempted to begin with what students know. Even there, for students working at a deficit, writing in school becomes more and more complex and frustrating, less and less rewarding, and more and more socially stigmatizing”(p. 21).

Research on the effects of utilizing prior knowledge in teaching students allows them to become active learners and planners. Positive findings in research on engagement include the effects of positive reinforcement, participation on various levels, and high expectations result in greater levels of involvement over a period. Hillocks speaks of research conducted by Csikszentmihalyi and Larson in what is called a “flow” experience. For example, when students are engaged in difficult or challenging activities, they may lose track of time. This experience happens according to Csikszentmihalyi “when there are clear goals and when the person receives immediate and unambiguous feedback on the activity”(Hillocks, p. 20). In contrast, students in many classroom never receive clear instruction or purpose to their activities, thus it is difficult for students to rate progress (Hillocks, p. 21). The point of emphasis is that in order for students to learn they must be engaged in an activity. In order for students to develop as writers specifically, they must be actively involved in the writing process, creating, developing, and experiencing writing.

The educator who recognizes the need for the student to experience, learn from prior knowledge, and to actively participate in learning, seeks to foster an effective learning environment. Writing in the specificity of journal writing definitely provides the student with these types of opportunities.

### Philosophy of Journal Writing

In the process of writing, one specific area of concern is journal writing. Emphasis on journal writing is prevalent in most schools today. Research findings indicate that in one kindergarten classroom daily journal writings contributed to the development of opportunities to learn phonics and devices of written language (Feldgus, p. 7). In 1998, the International Reading Association and the Association for the Education of Young Children emphasized the use of invented spelling in emergent literacy as significant in the development of writing abilities (Feldgus, p. 7). Journal writing is a type of writing that allows a writer of any ability to express and create text without extreme emphasis on proper conventions.

Feldgus suggests that to understand the value of journal writing in the classroom, educators must form guidelines or a philosophy (p. 9). Feldgus' philosophy lists seven premises: children learn best gradually, child learn best in risk-free environments that offer challenge, children need choice in writing topics, children need freedom to investigate written language, teachers need to model writing behavior as an important part of the classroom, and teachers need to help children write rather than take dictation from children (p.9). Feldgus' research stems from the learning theories of Vygotsky's proximal development and Bruner's concept of scaffolding (p. 9). The emphasis in journal writing is placed upon the students' choices of topics and writing styles (Feldgus, p. 9).

### Benefits of Journal Writing

As educators progress towards a more holistic approach in education, journal writing easily fits into this progression. Journal writing provides an environment allowing children expression of feelings, happenings, and language through writing (Routman, p. 197). Journal writing provides a connection between the teacher and the personal life of the student. Students share their lives in a sense, writing about daily events which are important. When children have freedom of expression, they have a sense of affirmation and encouragement from the teacher.

Specific benefits of journal writing promote reading fluency, writing fluency, risk taking, reflection, personal experiences, privacy in writing, promotes thinking, reinforces language conventions, and personal evaluation (Routman, p.199-200). Reading fluency is promoted through journal writing, because children read their own writing, in their own language. In most journal writing, students write without concern of correct writing conventions. This freedom allows students to take greater risks without concern of teacher evaluation or approval.

Journal writing allows students to freely express ideas, even when the teacher guides writing through topic assignment. Students learn the value of vividly expressing ideas due to opportunities given in journal writing. Teachers who seek to use a more guided approach in journal writing can suggest possible journal ideas throughout the day. For example, subjects of mealtime discussions, family, friends, hobbies, and pets make for good journal topics (Routman, p. 223). Teachers can also brainstorm writing ideas with a whole-class or individually. Children, who have difficulty in attempting to use

words may want to draw a picture before writing. Other techniques include invented spelling, and putting dash marks in places when students are unsure of the next letter.

### Theories of Writing

The communication that takes place in writing is different from that of verbal communication. For children, written communication may begin with scribbles and abstract drawings. Over time, the scribbles take formation of letters, words, and eventually sentences. This process of learning to communicate through writing is delicate, perhaps vital to the lingual development of a child. Effective writing enriches the child's learning and focuses upon the needs of the child, significant or trivial.

The behaviors of a child are an effort from the child to "make sense of their world." (Bridges, p.82) Children process the world around them, often inventing their own language, interpreting the world through their extraordinary paradigm. Children eventually become students and eventually start to learn the conventions of language as their knowledge of the world and neighbors increases (Bridges, p.82). Since children comprehend the world and its surrounds as a process, they must also learn how to communicate it as a process. Learning is a process; learning a language is a developmental process. An educator in the classroom is to provide meaningful experiences that are developmentally appropriate. As emergent writers, developmentally, children are still involved in the learning the early conventions of writing. These convention include letter formation, word formation, and eventually forming words into sentences and thoughts.

Four developmental phases of spelling include pre-phonetical, phonetic, letter name, and transitional. In pre-phonetical phase, the child is pretend writing; there is no visual awareness of a letter formation or sound-letter correspondence. As the child moves into the phonetic stage, there is sound-letter relation. The relation is demonstrated first usually through consonants only, initial vowels, and eventually long vowel sounds. Children demonstrate awareness of letters in at least three of the sounds they hear in a phrase or word as they move into the letter naming stage. Once the child reaches the transitional phase, they are able to use phonetic strategy and visual memory together to form words. In this phase, children remember observed rules of print, such as vowel patterns (Bridges, p.84-85). Most importantly, Bridges stresses that children need to be involved in their own spelling strategies and self-evaluation (p.86). Children need to discuss the conventions of learning how to spell words and write words in a meaningful way. Discussion of writing, conventions, topics, and illustrations teaches the importance of each in relation to writing (Bridges, p.87).

Writing reflects thought through expression and action. Any action performed is reflective of what is stored in the brain (Smith, p.34). Through writing, a person is able to find out what he or she thinks and knows. The process of writing is effective in this manner because of its permanence and capability of independent examination (Smith, p. 35). Smith quotes writing as “a superb instrument not only for exploring the potential of thought but for developing it as well.”(p.36). When educators teach writing they are accessing the thoughts of students. Writing helps students to discover what they think and to access knowledge.

Teaching children skills needed for writing seems properly dealt within the child's context of writing. The educator responds to the child's task and adds to his or her knowledge level of skills (Bridges, p.88). For example, a first grader writer is aware of capitalization and punctuation rules for the beginning and end of a sentence. The student then begins to write dialogue within his or her story; this is an opportune time to introduce quotation marks and commas (Bridges, p.88). Though writing is a process, it is a process taught as a whole. Classroom infiltrated with literature, language, and vivid storytelling allows children to explore the world of writing and communication. Educators seek to help children make sense of their world by developing communication skills, such as writing.

### Descriptive Language

As writing serves as a means of communication, it suffices to say that effective writing is enriching. In a study conducted with fourth graders, first graders, and special education students', emphasis rested upon how students viewed themselves as writers. The study found that many students did not view themselves as writers; causes included limited vocabulary, overemphasis on mechanics, the complexity of the writing process, and lack of time allotted for writing (Corona, Spangenberg, & Venet, p.29). The study discovered three ways to improve writing: create a language rich environment, provide motivational writing settings, and opportunities for peer collaboration (Corona, Spangenberg, & Venet, p.31).

The study revealed significant results from the first grade students in the areas of motivational writing settings and creating a language rich environment. An increase in

basic vocabulary, the use of nouns and specific verbs was visible as the students wrote a descriptive paragraph. As familiarity with the writing process developed, thus did the use of imaginative language in writing (Corona, Spangenberg, & Venet, p.44). In addition, the change in environment, which allotted more time for writing, revealed that 77 percent of students scored higher as compared to 15 percent before interventions (Corona, Spangenberg, & Venet, p.46).

The study concluded that increased emphasis on writing throughout the week and subject areas contributes to students' self-perception as writers (Corona, Spangenberg, & Venet, p.47). A child best experiences the act of writing when there is purpose or an opportunity to gain personal experience. The student develops rich language through writing experiences that incorporate descriptive language. Rich language modeled through literature, stories, and emphasis on descriptive language used by authors allows students to communicate freely and expressively (Corona, Spangenberg, & Venet, p.29).

### Conclusion

Educators seek to instill in students desire to become achievers and life-long learners. Writing in general, but specifically, journal writing, offers children the freedom to express as well as develop skills for writing. Journal writing offers children exploratory activities into the world of reading and written language. Communication and understanding between the teacher and student is positively effected by journal writing practices in the classroom. Educators who use journal writing, either free-choice journaling or topical journaling, allow the child to grow as an effective writer.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### Selection of Subjects

The subjects in this study were seventeen first grade children between the ages of six and seven. The subjects came from low to middle class socio-economic background. The background of the class included one African American and sixteen Caucasian students from a school in Middle-East Tennessee.

#### Timeline

The research took place during the winter semester for a six-week period. The first three weeks of the study involved subjects' free-choice journal writing, and the second three weeks involved the subjects' journal writing by topic.

#### Tests

The researcher counted and compared the number of descriptive words used in each three-week study. The researcher was not concerned with correct spelling, but with descriptive word use in the subjects writing. The subjects wrote three times weekly, with at least four sentences in each journal entry.

#### Experimental Factor

The experimental factor in this study was the comparison between free-choice journal writing and topical journal writing. The topics given for topical writing included: animals, food, movies, games, family, cookies, pets, summer, and sports. The researcher counted the number of words the student used in each journal entry. The students wrote

three times weekly, totaling nine writing periods for free-choice journaling and topical journaling.

First Three Weeks, Free-Choice Journaling Whole Class	Second Three Weeks, Topical Journaling Whole Class
Test as a whole class	Test as a whole class
Students wrote in journals three times weekly.	Students wrote in journals three times weekly.

FIGURE 1  
DESIGN OF STUDY

The researcher compared the mean scores between the first three weeks and the second three weeks.

#### Statistical Analysis

The researcher used a paired sample t-test to compare the mean number of descriptive words used in the free-choice journaling and the number of descriptive words used in topical journaling.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

A paired sample t-test compared the weeks of topical journal writing to that of free choice journal writing. The results showed no significance, at a 0.05 level of significance. The results of the study indicated some increase in the use of descriptive language using free choice journal writing as opposed to topical journal writing; however, did not meet the 0.05 level of significance. Thus, there is no significant difference in using topical journal writing as compared to free choice journal writing to increase descriptive language use in writing ( See Table 1).

TABLE 1  
COMPARISON OF TOPICAL JOURNAL WRITING  
TO FREE CHOICE JOURNAL WRITING

Groups	N	Mean	Mean Difference	Std. Error Of Means	T ratio	Sig.2-tailed
Topical	17	17.12	-4.71	3.654	-1.288	.216
Free-Choice	17	21.82				

\* Not Significant

The researcher retains the hypothesis that the use of topical journal writing as compared to free-choice journal writing does not increase the usage of descriptive words in student writing, at the 0.05 level of significance.

## Chapter 5

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The design of journal writing in the classroom allows for student expression of originality and creativity through writing. Two types of journal writing commonly incorporated by educators include free-choice journal writing and topical journal writing. In the free-choice journal writing, students write freely about any topic, usually under a time constraint. This type of journal writing allows room for original expression in the form of writing. In topical journal writing, students write based on a topic assigned by the teacher, usually under a time constraint. Topical journal writing focuses more upon student ideas on a particular topic or students expression of a topic. Though usage of both forms of journal writing is beneficial in the classroom, this study investigated which type produced greater descriptive language. The study compared topical journal writing and free-choice journal writing by measuring the number of descriptive words used by students while engaged in both forms of journal writing.

#### Conclusions

Implementation of Journal Writing The implementation of the use of journal writing in the classroom involved a two-day unit on describing words. The students were each given a “spicy word jar.” The use of a descriptive word was labeled a spicy word, because it made the sentence “spicy.” The two-day unit was presented again after the first three weeks of free-choice journal writing as a review to students. A weeklong break in

the study allowed for the review unit and the introduction to topical journal writing. The use of both forms of journal writing did not make a significant difference in the usage of descriptive language by students. The study presented the forms of journal writing as a six-week focus. The students wrote three times weekly for three weeks free choice and three times weekly for three weeks through assigned topic. The time set for journal writing was directly after recess, the last hour of the school day. Students wrote at least four sentences, for thirty minutes, three times weekly.

Possible Reasons for No Significance in the Research The students started the six-week study with free-choice journal writing and ended with topical journal writing. The students showed considerable interest in journal writing during the early part of the study. However, as the study progressed, the students grew weary of writing; they lost interest in writing. The research does not indicate whether students' interest decreased because of the type of journal writing used or whether the usage of journal writing grew wearisome.

During topical journal writing, students were given specific topics such as animals, favorite foods, games, family, etc. The students were given a new topic for every journal entry, thus produced three entries with three different topics weekly. Student interest varied according to topics. For example, students' liked the topic of animals. In looking at entries from the topic of animals, the researcher observed good descriptive word use and overall good sentences. The researcher also observed that some students had difficulty when given a writing topic as opposed to free choice in writing. One student became frustrated at the idea of writing by topic and in comparing scores

from free choice and topical, the students scored significantly higher in free-choice journal writing. Likewise, many students flourished when given a writing topic and became very frustrated with a writing choice.

The six-week period seemed to force large amounts of writing in a short amount of time. As students progressed into the weeks of writing, some journal entries digressed in usage of descriptive language. In a week of journal writing, which included three entries, some students would produce several words in one entry, while in another entry very few words in the same week. In looking at the total number of describing words produced daily, the researcher believes the students as a whole grew tired and disinterested in journal writing as the weeks progressed.

Replicating the Study The results of the study indicated a slight significance in the usage of descriptive words, but not according to the 0.05 level of significance. Possibilities in further research of the study might include interspersing free-choice and topical journal writing. Also, writing less frequently or at different times during the school day may facilitate student interest in the study. In examining the results of the study, the usage of both topical and free-choice journal writing in this classroom is an effective method of language development in writing.

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## APPENDICES

KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS  
ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING .

*Dr. Charles Q. Lindsey, Superintendent*

September 14, 2001

Vanessa Myers  
JBC Box 720  
Knoxville, TN 37998

Dear Ms. Myers:

You are granted permission to contact appropriate building.level administrators concerning the conduct of your proposed research. In the Knox County schools final approval of any research study is contingent upon acceptance by the principal(s) at the site(s) where the J study will be conducted. Include a copy of this permission form when seeking approval horn the principal(s). ~

In all research studies names of individuals, groups, or schools may not appear in the text of the study unless *specific* permission has been granted through this office. The principal researcher is required to furnish this office with one copy of the completed research document.

Good luck with your study. Do not hesitate to contact me if you need further assistance or clarification.

Yours truly,

Mike S. Winstead, Ph.D.  
Coordinator of Research and Evaluation  
Phone: (865) 594-1740  
Fax: (865) 594-1709

Project No. 118

P.O. Box 2188 . 912 South Gay Street. Knoxville, Tennessee 37901-2188 . Telephone (865) 594-1800

Dear Parents,

Hello! As the school year presses onward, I wanted to inform you of the progression of my research. Earlier in the year, I mentioned that I would be conducting research involving your children. This research is a requirement in fulfilling the Master of Arts degree for Holistic Education at Johnson Bible College. During the months of January and February, I plan to conduct the experimental part of my study. The six-week study involves three weeks of journal writing by the students' choice of topic and three weeks of journal writing with topic given by the teacher. This study will not identify any specific child; only group the class as a whole. I am excited about how the school year is going and am enjoying each of your children thoroughly. Please sign and return permission for your child's results to be included in the research study. If you have any questions or concerns please call at (865) 251-7772. Thanks for your cooperation!

Sincerely,

---

Miss Vanessa Myers

---

Mr. Pat Robinette

---

Mrs. Susan McLemore

---

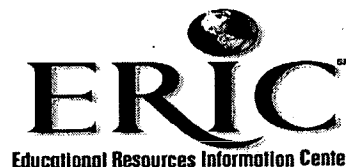
PLEASE FILL OUT AND RETURN

I \_\_\_\_\_ allow my child's data to be included in a research study conducted by Miss Vanessa Myers.

I \_\_\_\_\_ do not allow my child's data to be included in a research study conducted by Miss Vanessa Myers.



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Organization/Address: <i>718 Montgomery Circle Carmi, IL 62821</i>	Telephone: <i>618-382-2807</i>	Fax:
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