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NARRATIVES IN A DRUG COURT SETTING

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Interdisciplinary Studies:  
Integrative Studies

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by  
Anna Catherina Maria Keller  
December 2006

NARRATIVES IN A DRUG COURT SETTING

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino


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by  
Anna Catherina Maria Keller  
December 2006

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Date

  
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Dr. Sam Crowell, Language, Literacy and  
Culture

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to obtain a better understanding of working on narratives with adult learners in a drug court setting. The project allowed a more thorough look at the narrative concept and how it could be used constructively in a program focused on rehabilitating people with drug addictions.

The project gave the students an opportunity to do reflective writing and start the process of refocusing their lives. The unit used writing prompts to teach the students to become problem solvers by rewriting their past events with a possible present day solution.

The project consisted of the development of a draft of the unit based on the review of the literature and my past experiences in this field. The draft was reviewed by others in the professional field, one professor, two teachers and a principal of adult jail programs who provided feedback and offered ideas for revision for improving the unit. With this information and by evaluating the effectiveness of a sample unit with my students, I revised the unit to be appropriate for interested teachers in the same type of setting.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the three professors who were involved in the development of my thesis into the Masters project that evolved. I want to thank Dr. Sam Crowell for his inspirational teaching. His spirit lives in this project. I would like to thank Dr. Randall Wright, the professor who motivated me with the subject of narratives. His concern in regard to the area of Correctional Education stimulated the focus for this project. Last of all, I want to thank Dr. Bob London for his time, direction and encouragement. Without his help, I would not have finished. For seeing me through until the end, I will be forever grateful.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND

#### Introduction to the Project

I work as a teacher in a drug court program, a rehabilitative program that works with people who have committed a felony. The students are drug addicts who have been convicted of a drug related felony and are placed in the program in lieu of going to prison. I have been the teacher on site for many years and though the faces change, the story does not change. Many of the students have gone through some type of trauma in their life causing them to have a lower self-image than most addicts. In the time I have been with this program, I have been a listener to many of their past and present problems. I believe that each person has the answer within them to solve their problems and that educators' can help a person find that answer within themselves to help see the problem more clearly.

The students in this program are basically good people who have made bad choices in their lives. In many situations, what most of us think is natural reasoning is not in their realm of thinking. They were raised in different environments, ones where there was abuse,



neglect and many situations that were tragic. They do not deserve to go to prison. They need to learn some of the fundamentals that most of us learn while growing up. It has been stated that our program is not a place of rehabilitation but a habilitation site. The students learn life -developing strategies for the first time in their lives.

Our program uses many different techniques to help the students see themselves through different perspectives. They receive group therapy, lectures and education. As a teacher in the academic component in the drug court program for over seven years, I have always wanted to use the educational process as a way to influence their processing skills. I wanted to help them develop their strengths in making wiser choices for the future.

While attending a class about the history of correctional education, I learned about Jerome Bruner, a noted psychologist, who developed theories of learning that relate to one's development of a narrative. A narrative is the story we tell ourselves based on the interpretations of our past and present experiences. I sought after research in this area and investigated how I could implement this theory with the students in my class.

In my investigations, I found that narrative therapy had been effectively used in settings similar to mine to aid a person with an addiction problem in separating the problem from their self-evaluation. Winslade and Smith in Monk et al., 1997 dedicated an entire chapter titled "Countering Alcoholic Narratives" towards changing alcoholics' perspectives of themselves by using narrative therapy. Towards the end of this chapter, they are quoted as saying that, "We would prefer not to participate in the ongoing repetition of internalizing language that continues to convince many people affected by alcohol that they are sick or weak" (Monk et al., 1997, p. 191). They continue by stating, "Rather we are eager to promote the narrative metaphor as a potentially powerful tool in the elaboration of alternative stories in the combat against alcohol trouble" (Monk et al., 1997, p. 191).

These studies suggested to me that I could adapt a form of narrative therapy using writing prompts to effectively help my students. Instead of believing that they were incapable of making proper choices, the writing assignments could aid them in developing skills towards building their strength in the decision making process. People with an addiction problem tend to have a lower level of self worth because of all the wrong choices made

in the past. The process of rewriting past events could give them a better perspective of alternatives in particular situations where they could have made other choices.

Writing is therapeutic and I sought to draft a unit to help the students become better problem solvers by developing different endings to past situations. I wanted to create a way to help improve on the narratives the students were developing about themselves.

#### Purpose of the Project

The primary purpose of this project was to develop and evaluate a unit that could be beneficial for students in my correctional education setting by using writing prompts as a therapeutic tool to improve the students' coping skills. Secondly, it is hoped that the unit would also develop the students' writing skills.

#### Description of the Project

Based on a review of the relevant literature and my experiences, I developed a draft of a unit. The unit consisted of writing prompts that are divided into three different phases of learning; paragraph writing, essay writing and rewriting past events. I developed a methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of the unit that

began with submitting the draft of the unit for feedback to four professionals who are in the educational field. I included a series of questions and asked them to critique the unit. Each of the four professionals reviewed the unit by answering the guiding questions that were submitted with the unit.

This unit was implemented in class with my students. At the end of the series of writing prompts, the students were given a written survey, based on a five point Likert scale. The students were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the written assignments. They were given a series of questions giving them choices on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree on the usefulness of the written assignments. Finally, I interviewed four students randomly selected (with written permission) from the students in the class who participated. With the input from all of these sources, I developed a workable unit that will hopefully meet the needs of students in my professional context, as well as other similar contexts in the correctional field.

#### Significance of the Project

The significance of this project is that it gives the students an opportunity to do reflective writing and start

the process of refocusing their lives. The unit uses writing prompts to teach the students to become problem solvers by rewriting their past events with a possible present day solution. Changing the ending of a past event may give the students a chance to view past events with a different perspective.

The correctional field has many types of students with backgrounds that are similar to the students in my program. The students are in middle school community schools, high school community schools, juvenile hall, adolescent residential facilities to adults in treatment centers and jail settings. This unit could be beneficial to most of these students by helping them develop their ability to become problem solvers.

#### Limitations of the Project

This project is developed for one type of correctional education setting and field tested by one person. The problem with the unit is that it may not work properly with the different types of students that are in the correctional field. I tested the unit on students in my setting and then I asked four educational professionals to critique it by answering questions about the format. The input received from all these sources was used to

develop a more constructive unit hopefully adaptable to more areas in correctional education.

The unit was designed to fit my educational setting and philosophy, so it may need to be adapted to fit the needs of other settings and teaching philosophies. Also, my students are very eager to please me and they may have answered the questions from a favorable perspective.

#### Project Outline

I will briefly describe the content of the remaining chapters. In Chapter two, the review of the literature, there are five areas of research that are a vital part of my project and that are discussed in depth. (1) A review of the roots of narrative therapy begins with the history of the narrative text that has developed over the years into an explanation of a person's story and how a person can derive meaning from their experiences. (2) Review of the literature concerning narrative therapy and how narrative text is being used by professionals to identify problems a person is having in their life through their life stories. (3) A section on adults as learners, reviewing research identifying the differences in learning, as a child and as an adult. This section describes how adults need to find meaning before they

begin their learning quest. (4) The section on addiction and narratives describes how a person with an addiction problem is usually a person that has created a dysfunctional narrative. (5) The last section, reframing, reauthoring and retelling looks at the research that indicates a person with an addiction problem can also become more aware of their life through the process of writing and education, including research that indicates writing about past occurrences can bring a different outlook to the person with an addiction problem.

In Chapter three I give some basic information concerning my professional setting and the students I work with and briefly describe the nature of the unit. In the rest of the chapter, I summarize the methodology that I use to develop and evaluate the unit. In implementing the methodology I took the following steps: Submitted the unit draft with guiding questions to four professionals in the educational field and revised the unit based on their feedback. In addition, I also collected data from my students, which included writing prompts given in class to the students, writing surveys filled out by the students after completing the project and interviews with a few of the students upon their completion of the sample unit.

In Chapter four I outline the results from the implementation of the methodology and the input that I received from my students and the educational professionals.

In Chapter five I summarize the project and give my recommendations for future exploration.



## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Review of the Literature

The purpose of this review of literature is to obtain a better understanding of working with narrative essays with adult learners in a drug court setting. This review allows for a more thorough look at the narrative concept and how it can be used constructively in a program focused on rehabilitating people with drug addictions.

To review the use of narratives, five topics will be discussed. First, the evolution of the narrative text, which involves an individual's interpretation of the events that have happened in his/her life, will be discussed. Second, a new psychological field that has taken the narrative text and developed it into a therapeutic tool for people with certain life problems will be introduced. The third area of discussion explains how the motivation to learn as an adult changes from the learning style they adapted in their formative years. The fourth topic concerns addiction and narratives, and will give a better understanding of the life problems that people with an addiction have and the resulting narratives that they have developed over the years. The final topic

is about reframing, reauthoring and retelling. The references discuss methods students can apply to rewrite past events. The writer can reframe the ending to a past occurrence and identify different outcomes.

### Narrative Text

Jerome Bruner, a noted psychologist, developed theories of learning that relate to one's development of the narrative. A narrative is the story we tell ourselves and the stories that others tell about us. He believed in three stages of cognitive growth, "children move from an enactive stage to an iconic stage and finally to a symbolic stage" (Woolfolk, 2001, p. 287). Bruner also believed that students must play an active part in their learning by identifying key principles in their own language. The student must be able to take what the teacher presents and work with that until a relationship is discovered. Their own language is what develops their story and is very relevant to their interpretation. The outcome of Bruner's educational theory is a social production of meaning; that is, the establishment of meaning comes from the combination of the self and society by way of the narrative text (written, spoken, sung, painted or drawn on various mediums). He claimed that humans are storytellers beginning from a very young age.

The stories begin with the oral tradition and Camozzi (1994) believes that it is reinforced in the course of abstract learning, such as written text, discussions or lecture.

Cultural psychology borrows from other disciplines—history, literature, anthropology, law, philosophy, and linguistics—to reveal the human entry into meaning through stories. For Bruner, the touchstone for a human self and identity is culture; stories embody our culture and human community. Levine (1984) defined culture as “a shared organization of ideas that includes the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic standards prevalent in a community and the meanings of communicative actions” (p. 67). Culture is a community of people who see their world in a certain manner that brings about meaning to their own experiences. Culture is understood to be a group of individuals who share meaning in a collective sense. “The self is constituted by myths, traditions, beliefs, assumptions, and values of one’s particular culture, all developed within discourse” (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 44-45). The stories that are translated from one generation to the next are the dominant stories with distinct meaning. “The young learn to tell the dominant stories of their culture group---be those stories

scientific, civic, moral, mathematical, religious, historical, racial, or political in nature" (Howard, 1991, p. 192). This is the determining factor of what our culture suggests are fundamental principles to live by.

"Stories are habitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart" (Mair, 1988, p. 127). People are the stories that they create. Their narratives are determined by their own interpretations of their every day events. Individuals live in the great stories of their culture. They live through their own stories. They become the stories of their race and place. "We are, each of us, locations where the stories of our place and time become partially tellable" (Mair, 1988, p. 127). It is this pervasive function of stories that is especially important to sense more fully.

Every person creates their own narrative, one that they live by. They internalize every aspect of their life and create their own story. It could be a story of resiliency or it could be one of victimization. The stories become real. Their stories usually include an ethical perspective. "The ethical level provides the narrative with a deeper resonance, as the narrative is not

only a story about the fortunes and misfortunes of the protagonist, but an articulation of good and bad, worthy and unworthy, right and wrong in human life" (Hanninen & Koski-Jannes, 1999, p. 1839). People see the good and bad in themselves. A value is placed on each of their actions and memories.

To better understand an individual, their story should be heard without trying to change it. "Narratives are the basic material of the life assessment, with Early Recollections enjoying a privileged reputation as useful vehicles for encouraging therapeutic insight and change" (Maniacci et al., 1998, p. 451).

### Narrative Therapy

Narrative therapy evolved from the use of narrative text in a therapeutic manner. Psychologists and counselors began using narrative therapy with people who had had bad experiences in the past that changed their view of themselves. Narratives have been used by several professionals who believe that it works well with people who are identified with certain life problems. "Narrative (or storytelling) approaches to understanding human action have recently become more popular in several areas of psychology" (Howard, 1991, p. 187). This is now referred to as using narrative therapy.

Narrative therapy began in family therapy in the late 1980's in Australia and New Zealand. Since then it has expanded to other counseling settings and a growing amount of literature has come from it. It is situated in the social constructionist, postmodern, postconstructuralist themes that dispute and oblige a re-evaluation of humanism and traditional psychological and counseling discourses. "Its pioneering authors, White and Epston, state clearly that, amongst others, they have been influenced by the work of the French theorist Michael Foucault to not only question the dominant assumptions underlying humanism and psychology, but also to address issues of meaning, subjectivity, power and ethics" (Besley, 2002, p. 125).

A person may believe that because of the negative events that have happened to them in their life, their experiences tend to follow in a negative pattern. "The basic premise of narrative therapy is that as people go through life, they tend to internalize certain beliefs about themselves that blind them to many vital experiences in their lives" (White, 1995, p. 21). These personal stories can be influenced by many types of relationships; these stories could be individuals, family or societal messages. If people internalize the problem, then they believe that the problem is inside of them. One of the

goals of narrative therapy is to enable people to "separate their lives and relationships from knowledges/stories that are impoverishing" (Carlson, 1997, p. 272). If the problem is separated from the person, then the person can look at the problem objectively, not subjectively. "A major goal of narrative therapy is to help people externalize the problem--to help them to see that they are not the problem but rather that 'the problem is the problem'" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 39).

The use of narratives aids the person in seeing things in a clearer perspective, especially if they are rewriting the narrative with a different ending. Winslade and Monk (1999) believe that narrative therapy uses the notion of rewriting to help people see a dominant story and an alternative story, helping them to 're-author' their stories and to see the different choices they have and may wish to make. Generally, in narrative therapy, when a person tells a story about a past event, the therapist does not change the story but offers another scenario or asks the person to think of another situation where they are able to retell the story with a different result.

"Although person-centered to the extent that the person is the focus, paradoxically, narrative therapy is directive and influential in its use of questioning, but empowers

people to find their own voice" (Winslade & Monk, 1999, p. 21).

Narrative therapy is not just a new set of skills or techniques. The rehabilitation involves the different theories of nature, ethics and skills because it is "partly a consistent ethical stance, which in turn embodies a philosophical framework" (Winslade & Monk, 1999, p. 21). The experience is not just therapeutic but it is also a lifestyle and a political project that involves speaking and listening.

Narratives are the stories that each person builds upon their experiences in life. Narratives can show if a person sees themselves in either a positive or a negative image. Howard (1991) argues that "several theorists see the development of identity as an issue of life-story construction; psychopathology as instances of life stories gone awry; and psychotherapy as exercises in story repair" (p. 187).

One implication of this theory for the classroom teacher is to think of each student as an individual who through the years has developed his/her own story. The stories we create affect our world. For example, the stories might determine how resilient we are in the face of adversity. "Stories are habitations. We live in and



through our stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as our story world. Stories inform life. They hold us together and keep us apart" (George, 1991, p. 195). The stories are told from our own perspective.

The use of language is important. Language can distort our experience as we relate our story. We use our interpretation of the language in conditioning how we think, act and feel. This interpretation could be used as a therapeutic tool for people to understand themselves better and towards enhancing their self esteem. "Logic or rationality represents a type of story (or a kind of analysis) that one might choose to apply to a particular problem (or situation) in order to understand the issues at stake and discover plans of action that one might entertain" (Howard, 1991, p. 191). With this type of an approach, education and real life experiences might help us to find solutions to problems in a rational manner.

We are in the process of creating value in our lives—of finding the meaning of our lives. A life becomes meaningful when one sees himself or herself as an actor within the context of a story—be it a cultural tale, a religious narrative, a family saga, the march of science, a political movement, and so forth. Early

in life we are free to choose what life story we will inhabit—and later we find we are lived by that story. The eternal conflict of freedom versus destiny is revealed in the old Spanish proverb: Habits at first are silken threads—then they become cables. The same could be said of stories. Thus, a paraphrase of one of Shakespeare's more dire warnings becomes appropriate, Beware of the stories you tell yourself—for you will surely be lived by them. (Howard, 1991, p. 197)

This author suggests that a person can create a self fulfilling prophecy, that is, he/she becomes what they tell themselves that they are.

#### Adults as Learners

Generally, adults learn in a different way than when they were children. When they were younger, education was deemed as a necessity in the passage of childhood. The process and the meaning of education changes as people grow older.

Learning is a lifelong process. Adults can be involved in this progression because of the changes that occur in their lives.

The adult learning force can be pictured as a pyramid of learners. Its broad base consists of self-directed

learners, a category that includes just about everyone. A smaller group, estimated at one third or more of the population, participate in some form of organized instruction each year, and the tip of the pyramid consists of that very small proportion of adult learners who pursue college credit in a wide variety of traditional and nontraditional programs.

(Cross, 1981, p. 79)

Adults can continue to be learners, but the learning needs to be meaningful to the one involved in the educational process. As an adult, learning can transform many of one's former beliefs about themselves and others. For example, "Mezirow's concept of perspective transformation—a term he uses to suggest that, at some point, new learning is not just additive to what we already know but, rather, transforms existing knowledge to bring about a new perspective" (Cross, 1981, p. 231).

In a school setting, the main focus is on the story that each student brings with him/her into the class. "A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally *narrative* character" (Freire, 1970, p. 71). The students' understanding comes from their own point of view. Many political and educational plans have failed

because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, not taking into account the people to whom their program was supposedly directed.

It is only when we discuss our different outlooks that we can come to a better understanding of the other person. "It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours" (Freire, 1970, p. 96). There is a power within political and educational establishments to either empower the individual before them or to oppress them. Freire (1970) has noted that self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. They often hear that "they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything-that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive-that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness" (p. 63). The individual internalizes the statements and this can become part of their own narrative.

Adult learners need to try to see another person's point of view.

Connected knowers develop procedures for gaining access to other people's knowledge. At the heart of

these procedures is the capacity for empathy. Since knowledge comes from experience, the only way they can hope to understand another person's ideas is to try to share the experience that has led the person to form the idea. (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 113)

In order for the adult learning process to have an effect on their personal narrative, there needs to be an open line of communication. If reflection is "to occur, the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen or read and write-sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other's experiences" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 26).

Through the process of speaking and writing, a person's story begins to develop. The learning process is very dependent on this process to hear the student's voice. There is no wrong or right perspective, because the core of the truth in the subjectivist view is, "that each of us has a unique perspective that is in some sense irrefutably 'right' by virtue of its existence" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 222).

#### Addiction and Narratives

A person with an addiction is usually a person who has created a dysfunctional narrative. There are various methods to help fix their narratives.

An addict is defined by Webster's dictionary as one who has a confirmed habit, as the overuse of drugs (Webster, 1995, p. 19). Kooyman (1993) characterized addicted persons as having failure identities, negative self-concepts, inability to maintain stable interpersonal relationships and fear of intimacy. Because of a lack of bonding and emotional and physical closeness, their childhood experience has produced a negative self image. They do not feel deserving of a loving relationship and avoid intimacy and closeness to prevent them from experiencing the pain of rejection. The addicted person generally has the capacity to portray either the role of a victim or the role of a resilient adult. The narrative within their mind makes the difference in how they see themselves fitting into society's role. The narratives are their own interpretation of life's experiences that have occurred to them.

Addiction can be identified in many areas, but the focus of this project is on the addiction to drugs and alcohol. The purpose of using narratives in both these forms of addiction is used as a method in the student's road to recovery. "Rather, we are eager to promote the narrative metaphor as a potentially powerful tool in the elaboration of alternative stories in the combat against

alcohol trouble" (Monk et al., 1997, p. 191). There are newer beliefs about the use of narratives with people with addictions and "we are interested in the postmodern emphasis on the discourse about alcohol—that is, the set of ideas that circulate in social and professional contexts and that define the limits of thinking about and relating to alcohol. These cultural scripts determine how people develop their relationships with alcohol" (Monk et al., 1997, p. 163). A person does not accidentally begin to abuse drugs and alcohol. The abuse begins when the person is still in the developmental stages and a particular story becomes their own. They have the ability to render experience in a narrative form that "seems to be a universal human capability which manifests itself early in childhood" (Collins, 1985, p. 57). The narrative that evolves is either one of addiction or recovery. "Every story type articulated one central value, in the light of which the former life as an addict was seen as problematic and the new life as valuable" (Hanninen & Koski-Jannes, 1999, p. 1847).

There are many types of narratives used in a recovery type setting. One type is the writing of an autobiography. The students write their best memories down and the counselor tries to see the connection between the events

in their lives and the connection to their drug use. "To illustrate the process of a self-narrative, one may think of the writing of an autobiography which follows certain literal 'rules' (i.e. chronological and causal progression of events, plot, outcome), but which is also constantly unfolding" (Androutsopoulou, 2001, p. 282). The writing of the autobiography is not only one step that is built on to see the past more clearly, but also an ability to learn something from the past to change the future.

Another method of writing in a recovery setting is the use of a daily journal, where the person in recovery writes their daily thoughts and feelings.

A major effect of the narrative turn has been that family therapists have started to pay more attention to the stories clients tell them, treating these stories as whole narratives instead of stripping them to catch a glimpse of what may lie at the core of these stories (i.e. mental constructs, repressed events and so on). In that light, any text written by clients-be it in the form of journals, letters, poems or short stories-is considered precious, for it is seen as one expression of the 'self' (or 'selves'). (Androutsopoulou, 2001, p. 279)



The counselors read the client's daily journals and see if there are any patterns in feelings. They also use the journals to ask questions to clarify the consistency of the person's whole story. Letters, poems and short stories can also be used as an expression of how the student is feeling about whatever is relevant to them for that day.

Another form of writing in this type of setting is the use of a twelve step program, in which the person is required to answer questions in each one of the steps to form a better understanding of who they are their actions in the past and their responsibilities for the future. "When making meaning is located inside the individual, the need for change and adjustment is seen as being the individual's responsibility. This leads to the notion that individuals are required to own their own actions and that the choice is theirs and theirs alone" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 44). Reflective writing gives a great insight to the events of the past. The writing also serves to help the client to consider present day actions and how to handle the problems that evolve each day. "But dealing with problems that have been defeating people requires a process through which they can build a sense of competence to overcome the problem" (Monk et al., 1997, p. 183). The troubles that a person with an addiction is experiencing

cause them to feel defeated and can distort their thinking. "Logic or rationality represents a type of story that one might choose to apply to a particular problem (or situation) in order to understand the issues at stake and discover plans of action that one might entertain. So, through education and practical experience, we might learn to solve problems logically and rationally" (Howard, 1991, p. 189). It is only through experience that the person with an addiction becomes a better problem solver. This experience can come in the form of a counselor who redirects their thinking and their writing. "It is therefore more helpful for a mediator to validate explicitly the stories through which people experience the conflict and then to seek out the points where the story might incorporate some different perspectives" (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 3).

#### Reframing, Reauthoring and Retelling

The person with the addiction can also become more aware of their life through the process of writing and education. Writing about past occurrences can bring a different outlook to the person with an addiction problem. They can try to reframe the incidents in their lives. Wilhite (1979) focused on mining the cognitive material of the early memories through the use of the technique of

reframing. Reframing is a procedure in which the client is asked to recreate the Early Recollection toward their self ideal. There are five steps to the Wilhite technique:

Step One: Collect the client's early recollections

Step Two: For each early recollection, have the person rework each recollection to an ideal form. This method constructs what Wilhite calls the 'Self Ideal'. The person needs to be able to identify the affective component of each sentence in the original statements and the ideal statements. If they cannot identify a feeling for the statement, then they need to identify a fact. This is used to bring about a realization of a memory that has been discounted or repressed.

Step Three: The person is asked to "list the emotional sequence". Wilhite believes that the perception of life they have is an emotional set-up for a self-fulfilling prophecy that confirms their expectations about life.

Step Four: The person presents a problem with which they are currently having difficulty. The person is asked to imagine how this problem will unfold. This method is working on their rationality.

Step Five: The person should apply their 'Self Ideal' to this problem. The key to behavior change is identifying the emotions involved. "It is this identification of feelings permitting the shift to new behaviors which is the strength of the Wilhite method" (Maniacci et al., 1998, p. 459-460).

The person is asked to think things through logically and to be able to identify the feelings that are connected to these early recollections. "Well-formed (intelligible) self-narratives are crucial in our sense of well-being" (Androutsopoulou, 2001, p. 283). It is how each person develops their stories that constitute their way of action. If there is something that goes wrong, then he/she reconstructs their story to show an imbalance. "Thus emotional difficulties are reflected in our self-narratives, both in their content and form, making these narratives less than 'well-formed' stories" (Androutsopoulou, 2001, p. 283). There is a constant interaction between our thoughts and our actions that determines how we will internalize these thoughts regarding our "story". "In terms of linguistic features, when individuals face emotional difficulties, their self-narratives tend to be more difficult to follow, incomplete, unconnected, full of exaggerations,

contradictions and unnecessary repetitions of words, sentences or ideas" (Androutsopoulou, 2001, p. 283-284). That is why it is important to be able to look at one's narrative and try to reconstruct it to find that balance in life. The self-narrative structures the conceptions of the past by focusing on the events considered to be essential in shaping the life course. It also provides future orientations. "The formation of a self narrative is particularly important in times of life change, when it is essential to maintain the sense of continuity and to create new visions for the future" (Hanninen & Koski-Jannes, 1999, p. 1838).

Reconstructing a story is not easy for someone who has many problems occurring in their life. "But dealing with problems that have been defeating people requires a process through which they can build a sense of competence to overcome the problem" (Monk et al., 1997, p. 183). A person with an addiction has to have a "bag of tools" that they are able to utilize in reconstructing their stories to a more logical solution. From a narrative perspective, the strongest objection to the worth of identifying problems would be its underlying assumption that the self is more or less stable.

From the social constructionism and narrative viewpoints, the 'self' equates to a continuous construction of a self-narrative, aiming to secure a sense of historical continuity, directionality and coherence among what often appear to be loosely connected 'selves' that may seem to act differently depending on the circumstances. The process of constructing a self-narrative and forming an identity is seen as a lifelong struggle. (Androutsopoulou, 2001, p. 282)

Stories are developed through a building process. Each experience is a story which is interpreted by past experiences. Narratives become the building blocks of our identity. In the rewriting of our stories, we become more assured of who we are. "Literacy is a passage to the self and through the self, to the world" (Wright, 2001, p. 87). This literacy can be in the form of an essay, where the student can reflect on what he has written and possibly rewrite it in the form of a different ending. Clyde Winters (2000) believes essay writing helps in the process of education with inmates because it: 1) helps to transfer experiences; 2) helps in gaining a disciplinary outlook; 3) increases the speaking and thinking processes of the writers; and 4) it encourages students to take a second

look at their own words. When the writer takes the time to write an essay, it can be a transforming experience because the writer must think critically about the topic given. "This critical thinking should cause him to put himself in the place of others or bring about self-disclosure and a full examination of inappropriate values" (Winters, 2000, p. 313).

The education component of the drug court system is a valuable aid to the students in recovery. "Education is like the mythical bird, the Phoenix, from out of the ashes and fire comes a fresh new beginning. Education gives us hope—hope for a better future for our children, grandchildren, and our civilization as a whole" (Wright, 2001, p. 88). Knauer (2002) believes the sense of hope is so important in working toward recovery that it is probably one of the most difficult points for the survivor to grasp. How is it possible for someone who has been constantly disappointed and hurt by life to obtain the necessary courage to hope one more time? Using education as a tool with narrative therapy as an aid, students in a drug court setting may be able to help as Winslade and Monk (1999) believe, to see a dominant story and an alternative story, to help them 're-author' their stories and to clarify what choices they may have and wish to

make. This is a potential new method of retrieving past memories and learning from them in a positive manner.

There are many forms of writing within a recovery type setting that can give the person a better understanding of themselves. "It seems true that narrative remains a privileged form in which we render experience meaningful and with which we gain or express an understanding of our complex worlds" (Collins, 1985, p. 58).

In conclusion, educators need to remember that we should always be aware of one's personal narrative because, "Humans are complex, and so is the world they are both thrown into and find themselves co-creating" (Maniacci et al., 1998, p. 478).



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this project is to develop a unit using writing prompts that will benefit adolescents and adults in a correctional education setting. The focus of the unit is for students to learn to develop the ability to become problem solvers. The unit is consistent with the belief that, "Literacy is a passage to the self and through the self, to the world" (Wright, 2001, p. 87). The students will also have an opportunity to improve in their writing skills.

In this chapter I will first give some basic information concerning my professional setting and the students I am working with and briefly describe the nature of the unit. In the rest of the chapter, I will outline the methodology that I used to develop and evaluate the unit.

#### Professional Setting and Students

The setting is a rehabilitative center that is initiated through the court system. In lieu of the person going to prison, they are placed in a drug court program. The drug court program is a collaborative of three county

departments, Mental Health, Probation and Education. The Mental Health Substance Abuse Department consists of one Supervisor, one Drug Court Consultant, three Behavior Specialists, two interns and one secretary. The Probation Department has on their staff one Probation Officer, one Probation Assistant and one secretary. The educational component of this program is one teacher on site and a Principal who is off site. There are about forty to fifty students and approximately two-thirds of the population is male.

The students are adults who are placed through the court system into a year long drug court program. They plead guilty to a drug related felony and are released on their own recognizance to our day treatment program. They attend the program from eight o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon, Monday to Friday. The typical day consists of group time and lectures conducted in the morning by the Behavior Specialists. Class time is the first hour of the day and two hours in the afternoon. As their teacher in the academic component of the program, I work on their basic skills predominantly in the areas of Math and English. The students' reading skill levels vary, ranging from illiterate to highly literate. As part of their work in writing, the students are presented with a

writing prompt in the morning that is to be completed before the end of the day. The writing exercises vary in three different formats, the first phase works strictly on the formation of a paragraph. A sample prompt for this phase is, "What was the nicest thing your parents ever did for you?" The second series focuses on students working on essays. An example of a prompt from this section would be, "What was the scariest thing that ever happened to you?" The last section of the unit works on rewriting the ending of a past event. An example of a prompt from this section would be, "Recall a time when you did or said something you wished you could erase and do over. Explain what you did or said, and write in the concluding paragraph what you would have done or said differently." The exercises used for the unit for this project were optional and they did require a consent form. In completing the exercises, the students learn the process of rewriting their essays, which gives them a different perspective concerning past situations. The writing prompts and skills are an important component of education in the correctional field. Many of the students come from troubled backgrounds and they need to learn how to express themselves. In addition, the assignments give them an opportunity to

revisit past experiences and see them with a different perspective.

### Methodology

The major goal of this project is to develop a unit for correctional students that will create better writers with an ability to use problem solving skills. Hopefully, they will be able to reflect on past life events and use them in preparation towards future choices and decisions.

The methodology for this project consists of the development of a draft of the unit based on the review of the literature and my past experiences in this field. The draft was reviewed by others in the professional field, one professor, two teachers and a principal of adult jail programs who provided feedback and offered possible ideas for revision for improving the unit. With this information and by evaluating the effectiveness of a sample unit with my students, I revised the unit to be appropriate for interested teachers in the same type of setting. In the rest of the chapter, I will clarify each of the steps of the methodology

### Review of the Literature

In the review of literature, I discuss the following topics:

Narrative Text-In this section, I explain how narrative text has developed over the years into an explanation of a person's story and how the person can derive meaning from writing about their experiences. The stories that the students write are their personal narratives that typically have meaning for them.

Narrative Therapy-This section explains how narrative text is being used by professionals to identify problems a person is having in their life through their life stories. The research suggests rewriting endings to a problematic situation as a therapeutic technique. The data shows that writing can aid the student through a reflective process to identify possible solutions to past and present occurrences.

Adults as Learners-For this topic, the differences in learning, as a child and as an adult, are identified. This section describes how adults need to find meaning before they begin their learning quest.

Addiction and Narratives-A person with an addiction problem is usually a person that has created a dysfunctional narrative. This section of the review outlines some methods to help the addict refine their narrative.

Reframing, reauthoring and retelling-This section looks at the research that indicates that a person with an addiction problem can also become more aware of their life through the process of writing and education, including research that indicates writing about past occurrences can result in a different outlook to the person with an addiction problem.

#### Draft of the Unit

Based on the review of literature and my experience, I developed a draft of a unit that attempts to:

(1) improve the students' problem solving abilities, especially in the area of rewriting past events, (2) give the student a better perspective on their strengths in making wiser choices for the future as a life skill, and (3) increase the students' writing capabilities.

The unit consists of writing prompts that are divided into three different phases of learning; paragraph writing, essay writing and rewriting past events. I drafted this unit to help the students become better problem solvers by developing different endings to past situations. I tried to create a way to improve on the narratives the students had developed about themselves. I believe that writing is therapeutic and that this unit would benefit the students in their ability to solve

problems and also facilitate improvement in their writing skills.

### Professional Feedback

I requested feedback on the unit from four people, Dr. Robert London, Christiane Deaton, Tom Arthur and John Pierce. Dr. Robert London is a professor at the California State University of San Bernardino. Christiane Deaton and John Pierce are teachers in a correctional education setting. Christiane is a teacher of teenage boys at the Twin Pines facility and John is an educator for adults at the Banning Correctional Institution. Tom Arthur, a principal of adult correctional education, checked the rough draft of the unit and gave me his recommendations for possible revisions. Tom is the principal of the drug court program in which I work. Each of the four professionals reviewed the unit by answering the following guiding questions that were submitted with the unit:

1. Do you see any revisions within the unit that will make it more consistent with my stated purposes?
2. Are there any writing prompts that you might suggest?

Or are there any writing prompts that should be rewritten or deleted?

3. Am I allowing enough time for the assignments?
4. Is the grading scale fair? Do I need to explain the objective further in each area?
5. Is there any subject matter that you would include or exclude from the unit?
6. Should I include the computer assignment or is it a distraction from the unit's true purpose?
7. Is there anything else that you would include in this unit, any other type of instructions?

#### Student Participation and Feedback

In addition, I evaluated the effectiveness of the sample curriculum by collecting three types of data from the students with whom I work:

I collected writing samples from the students, who participated in the project, in response to writing prompts from the three components of the unit. The first series in the unit instructs the students on how to develop a paragraph. A sample prompt for this phase is, "What was the nicest thing your parents ever did for you?" The second series has the students working on essays. An example of a prompt from this section would be, "What was the scariest thing that ever happened to you?" The last section of the unit works on rewriting the ending of a past event. An example of a prompt from this section would



be, "Recall a time when you did or said something you wished you could erase and do over. Explain what you did or said and write in the concluding paragraph what you would have done or said differently." Since I work with adults who have an addiction problem, the subject of each paper will be related to something in their past. There are many occurrences in their lives that had negative ramifications. Winters (2000) states that, "Ideally, the essay topic should encourage the inmate to explore his own feelings or identify with the feeling of others" (p. 313). I intended to use the essays in a potentially therapeutic manner to help the students in my program see the past with a more positive outlook.

At the end of the series of writing prompts, the students were given a written survey, based on a five point Likert scale. The students were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the written assignments. They were given a series of questions giving them choices on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree on the usefulness of the written assignments. I tried to avoid double barreled questions and kept the questions close to the subject of the value of the essays. The questionnaire was followed by a few semi-structured questions such as: Did the prompt help you to look at this event in your life in

a different perspective? Did anything positive come from the writing assignments? Did they help you? They were asked to explain their answers. I have attached the survey in Appendix B.

Finally, I interviewed four students randomly selected (with written permission) from the students in the class who participated. The questions I asked were selected from the following: Do you like having school time in a recovery program? Did you ever have classes in any other place of drug rehabilitation? How well did you do in school when you were younger? How do you find being in school today different from the past? Do you enjoy the writing assignments? Do you like to write? Do you enjoy the writing exercises that we do every morning in class? Is it hard for you to write about what you are thinking? Do you have problems writing about the past? Does writing have an effect on you? Is it hard for you to reflect about some of your past events? Does writing about the past help you to see the past through different eyes? Do you believe that you can learn from your mistakes? Are you able to reflect through the writing assignments about your past mistakes and think of how it could have worked out differently? If you rewrite an event from the past, without telling me what the incident was about, do you

think that this could help you? If the answer is yes, then how do you feel it helps you? If the answer is no, then tell me why you feel it wouldn't help.

#### Unit Revision

I reviewed the data from both the experts and the students. I looked for patterns and central themes in all the data. Based on the reviewed data, I revised the unit in a form that should be effective for other educators to use in a similar context with their students.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this project was to develop a unit using writing prompts that would benefit adolescents and adults in a correctional education setting. Students would learn to develop the ability to become problem solvers. In this chapter I will discuss the results of implementing the following steps of the methodology: (1) the review of the literature had the information necessary for the development of the draft of the unit, (2) the formation of the draft of the unit, (3) the submission of the draft of the unit to four professionals in the educational field and their feedback, (4) the submission of the unit to the students, their feedback and interviews, and (5) the revision of the unit.

#### Review of the Literature

To begin with, I reviewed the literature in five relevant areas and found information to aid in the drafting of the unit. The first topic was narrative text. This section describes the history of the narrative text and how it has developed over the years. From this literature I extracted the information that each person

develops their own narrative based on their life's experiences. I developed the prompts with the thought that each writing assignment should have a personal and reflective aspect to it.

The next topic was narrative therapy. This concept has evolved from the narrative text. The basic idea of narrative therapy is to enable people to separate the problem from their perception of who they are. I wanted to use the writing prompts in such a way that the student could look at the past in an objective manner rather than subjectively.

This section also explains how narrative text is being used by professionals to identify problems a person is having in their life through their life stories. The research suggests rewriting endings to a problematic situation. The data shows that writing can aid the student in a reflective manner to identify possible solutions to past and present occurrences. The students enjoy doing the writing assignments and they believe that it is good to reflect on past events to obtain a better perspective on the problems that they have today.

The next topic was adults as learners. In this section the differences in learning, as a child and as an adult, are identified. I wanted information on this topic

because the students in the program are adults and I wanted to have a clearer understanding of their learning styles. I found out that adults need learning to be meaningful before they begin their learning quest. Then their learning at some point could become transformative. I kept this in mind as I developed the writing prompts.

The next topic was about addiction and narratives. A person with an addiction is usually a person who has created a dysfunctional narrative. This section of the review outlines some methods to help the addict refine their narrative. I wanted to incorporate a learning tool with the writing exercises that could be conducive to the students' road to recovery.

The last topic covered in the review of literature concerned reframing, reauthoring and retelling. This section looked at the research that indicates that a person with an addiction problem can also become more aware of their life through the process of writing and education, including research that indicates writing about past occurrences can bring a different outlook to the person with an addiction problem. The section discusses methods students can apply to rewrite past events. The writer can reframe the ending to a past occurrence and

identify different outcomes. I applied this method to the last section of writing assignments in the unit.

In summary, the following concepts and guidelines found in the review of the literature were most relevant to the writing of the draft of the unit. I developed the writing prompts to be helpful in the area of past experiences. The writing exercises had to be meaningful to the students. Some of the writing prompts needed to have a reflective element. The writing prompts had to communicate a certain degree of sensitivity to my students by keeping comments concerning their writing on a positive level. The rewriting of the ending was a very important factor in this unit.

#### Draft of the Unit

The draft of the unit was developed based on the principles extracted from the review of the literature and my past experiences in this field. The unit is divided into three different sections; the first part consisted of two weeks worth of writing prompts. Examples of writing prompts from this section are:

- (1) Write about your name. Why is it special? How did you get it?

- (2) Think of a childhood memory that you recall clearly. Write about what happened.

These writing prompts were to be used as a form of reflective writing. The student writes about memories from their past. Later there will also be a few exercises in which the student rewrites the ending on an occurrence from the past. These rewrites will be given to the student in the last section of the writing schedule when they are better prepared to think of an alternate solution for a past event.

The students will also be learning the formation of paragraphs and developing computer skills. The second segment introduces the structure of an essay while using the writing prompts. Examples of writing prompts used in this section are: (1) Think of something you have done that brought you satisfaction, pleasure, or a sense of accomplishment. Write about that activity or event and tell why it sticks in your mind. (2) What experience have you had that has taught you something important?

The final section of the unit is the rewriting of past events. The stories that the student will be asked to rewrite will have three parts.

- Beginning: names the characters, the setting and the problem.



- Middle: this part contains the events in order leading up to the climax or high point of action in the story.
- Ending: this delivers a satisfying or meaningful conclusion to the problem. It shows how the character resolves the problem and what lessons may be learned from the story.

An example of a writing prompt used here is: Recall a time when you did or said something you wished you could erase and do over. Explain what you did, and write what you would do differently. The unit finishes up with a few reflective discussions and a drawing exercise.

One purpose of the unit is to help the student in a correctional or court related class to advance in learning the correct methods of developing a paragraph, an essay and rewriting the ending. By using writing formats that begin with a thought or a writing directive, the student writes on a series of prompts that help the student in identifying the stories of their lives. They learn to be the author of their own story. The student begins to focus on beliefs and expectations that they have based on memories from the past and their own outlook about their future.

The original unit draft and writing prompts are located in Appendix A.

#### Feedback from the Experts

I submitted the unit draft with guiding questions to four professionals in the educational field. The four from the teaching field were Christiane Deaton, Tom Arthur, Bob London and John Pierce. Three from the group were involved in correctional education and one of those three is an English teacher and one a principal. The fourth expert was a University professor. Each person answered the following questions:

1. Do you see any revisions within the unit that will make it more consistent with my stated purposes?
2. Are there any writing prompts that you might suggest? Or are there any writing prompts that should be rewritten or deleted?
3. Am I allowing enough time for the assignments?
4. Is the grading scale fair? Do I need to explain the objective further in each area?
5. Is there any subject matter that you would include or exclude from the unit?

6. Should I include the computer assignment or is it a distraction from the unit's true purpose?
7. Is there anything else that you would include in this unit, any other type of instructions?

I received some excellent advice on revising the unit. I will summarize some of the details that I received from each person that I found most helpful.

The first professional to return the unit was Christiane Deaton, a teacher for Twin Pines, a correctional facility in Idyllwild. She suggested showing examples of a good paragraph and a bad paragraph, so the students would have a better idea of what is expected of them. She also stated that there needed to be more emphasis on future experiences, possibly implementing a project with future goals. She gave me a sample writing rubric that had more details on the level of expectations for each score of one through four. She suggested calling phase three rewriting the ending instead of just having it titled rewriting. She also suggested a section with graphic organizers to use in class as handouts, posters and reinforcement during the teaching of the unit. She gave me several handouts to consider using in the unit.

In looking at this feedback, I used the examples of a good and bad paragraph, so the students will have a visual

to guide them. She also gave me the idea to revise the writing rubric to be more detailed on the expectations from the writing assignments. I liked the renaming of the phase three section to rewriting the ending and the graphic organizers could be useful.

The professional who returned the unit draft next was Tom Arthur, principal of the adult jail programs for the Riverside Office of Education. He stated that possibly I was allowing too much time for the assignments and that he believed that the grading scale was a typical scoring scale and that it did not need any changes unless I wanted improvements in certain areas of writing. He believed that the computer use should remain because it is a vital learning tool. For rewriting the ending section, he asked the question, "to what degree is this self reflecting and to what degree is it a writing skill based assignment?" When he gave this feedback he implied that I had to be definite in what goal I wanted to achieve with this unit. Did I want the emphasis to be on the writing skills or did I want the student to be more reflective with their writing prompts?

The time element was an important factor. I will revise the unit along a different timeline. The grading scale will be revised to define more specific

expectations. The computer work will remain in the unit because he defined it as a vital learning tool. He also gave me feedback on what goal I was trying to achieve with this unit and that brought me back to emphasizing my true purpose for this assignment, which is to aid the students in their recovery process.

Bob London, a professor of education, works at the California State University of San Bernardino. He was the next professional to submit his advice on the unit draft. For question number one, he made eighteen specific suggestions throughout the unit for the redrafting of the unit. The second question he answered stated that there was an excellent selection of writing prompts available but offered a suggestion that I should offer the students at least two prompts for each lesson, in case one is not appropriate for some of the writers. In addressing the fourth question he stated that in general there was enough time for the assignments but to allow an amount of flexibility to address different levels of need of the students. He believed that the grading system seems fair but that I could be clearer in my explanation of how to implement the system. He believes that the computer assignment should be included because it is a great skill to include for life preparation, but again suggests

flexibility in case it does deter from the main purpose of the unit. Overall he stated that it looks like an excellent unit.

His answers for the first question led to eighteen specific changes within the unit. Some of those changes included using different wording, days intended for the writing assignments, more complete instructions, revising my wording of instruction, having an assessment tool for the assignments, having overheads that have more information concerning directions for the writing prompts, examples of positive comments and guidelines concerning length and time for each assignment. I gave each of these suggestions serious consideration in the revision of the unit.

Bob also suggested that I offer at least two writing prompts for the student to choose from, in case the student was uncomfortable with one of the topics in the writing prompt. This is a suggestion that will definitely be implemented in the revision of the unit.

The time element is already being revised, but it will be with a certain degree of flexibility for the students with different levels of need. The grading system is also being revised to incorporate more clear

expectations. This will include more explanation of implementing the system.

The last professional to critique the unit and answer the questions was John Pierce, an English teacher at the Banning Smith Correctional Facility. He gave me a one page commentary as well as answering the guiding questions in great detail. He addressed the concern that the writing prompts were delving into areas that could present possible problems. He also acknowledged that the rubric is adequate but needed more detail if this unit was to be used in a high school setting. He explained that expanding the unit with a more interdisciplinary approach would be beneficial and made several excellent suggestions on how to do this.

Question one he answered by saying that personal experiences are a good source of information to develop writing skills. He added that our typical students need more communication skills for writing on the job. The second question he answered by showing in the list of writing prompts which ones he thought should be revised or eliminated. For the third question, he gave the suggestion of creating a writers' workshop for which the emphasis is less on the teacher and more on the student. He offered several excellent suggestions for the development of a

writers' workshop. The next question was about the rubric and he stated that I needed to develop one that relates to the identifiable writing skills that I want to see demonstrated. Question five he answered by stating that he stays away from childhood issues because it could be a minefield with our type of population. He affirmed, in question six, that computer skills should be a core component of the unit. If the true purpose of the unit is to teach editing skills, then the computer is a wonderful tool. He stated that if one of the unit's goals is to engage in transformative education, then the unit should also help the students to identify the oppressive conditions in their environments and to help them to create change through political activism.

He made the comment that the writing prompts were delving into areas that could present problems. I think that by offering at least two writing prompts to the students that it will eliminate some of this concern. The rubric will include more detail and I will give consideration to either include or set up a different rubric for high school students.

John's suggestion of creating a writers' workshop was an excellent idea. This idea would also be very helpful to allow an amount of flexibility to address different levels



of need for the students. He recommended using a more interdisciplinary approach within the unit. I will submit his suggestions within the unit if any teacher would like to implement these ideas.

He believed that the computer is an essential tool especially for teaching editing skills. He also stated that to make the unit transformative I should help the students identify oppressive conditions in their environments and to encourage change through political activism. These were great ideas, but my goal is to begin with personal transformation, seeing increased political activism as a step beyond the scope of this project.

#### Student Feedback

I submitted the draft of the unit to the students who gave their permission to participate in this writing project. I began the unit with fifteen students, who gave their permission to be subjects in this project. Since they had permission to drop out at any time without any retribution, I had ten drop out during the time allowed for the unit. Five students completed the entire project. I used the writing survey with these students and the results were mostly favorable. One of the students, Charles, answered mostly in fives which meant strongly

agreed with all of the comments (Sample of writing survey is in Appendix C). He commented that he is happy to learn better writing skills while writing about his life. The only woman to complete the whole project, Kay, had a range of answers. She had great difficulty recalling her childhood memories. The next student, Kevin, answered with only fours and fives. He would like to write more about recovery in the future and he wrote that the writing assignments helped him put the past experiences into perspective and he even found humor in some of them. James also answered with a five on eight of the ten questions. He wrote a thank you for allowing him to be a part of this project. William scored seven out of the ten questions with a five. He wrote that the writing assignments helped him to understand himself better. He also went through several feelings during the writing assignments.

The ten students who started this unit and dropped out had many different reasons. Since the unit was optional and they had the option to back out without any consequences, the students who felt overwhelmed with their other obligations to the program, such as working on their step work, going to meetings and the rest of their class assignments, opted to back out of the writing assignments. Several dropped out when we started the essays. There were

some students who had a fear of beginning something more complicated. They also knew that there were no repercussions for withdrawing from the project and it made it easier for some to stop. There were also a couple of students who ended up going back into custody because of a violation of their probation.

### Student Interviews

I interviewed four of the five students who completed the unit. The fifth student had moved up into the next phase of our program. The second phase has little or no class time while at the program. The interview questions are included in Appendix B.

Question one concerning whether they enjoyed having a teacher in their drug treatment program was answered as a yes by all four. Only one person had a teacher in a previous drug program called NARCANON, which is a Scientology program. The teaching experience was described as being very intense.

When I asked the students how being in school was different today then it was in the past, I received four positive answers. William told me that he has more desire today because he values it more. Kay said that she pays better attention now and she wants to learn. James commented that he wants to learn now as opposed to when he

was younger. Kevin believes that he can focus better; that he is not as afraid to apply himself; and that he finds that he just does it.

Question four related to what I could do to improve the unit for possible revisions. Two of the students had suggestions on how to improve the unit. James suggested that I use more topics and that I give the students a choice of two prompts about which they would write. Kevin gave a very useful insight; he suggested that I delay the essay writing to a final topic. He believed that the essay assignment was the reason that we lost so many of our volunteers for the project. I believe that this could have been one of the reasons some of the ten students did not complete the project. Writing in an essay format is more frightening to some of the students who are not as proficient in writing as other students in the class.

#### Patterns in the Data

In reviewing all the collected data, I identified the following suggestions that guided the rewriting of the unit.

(1) The guidelines and principles I received from the four professional experts are as follows: Showing examples of a good paragraph and a bad paragraph, so the students

would have a better idea of what is expected of them. Place more emphasis on future experiences, by possibly implementing a project with future goals. Calling phase three rewriting the ending instead of just having it titled rewriting. The computer use should remain because it is a vital learning tool. A suggestion that I should offer the students at least two prompts for each lesson, in case one is not appropriate for some of the writers. I should allow an amount of flexibility to address different levels of need. The grading system seemed fair but I could be clearer in my explanation of how to implement the system. Expanding the unit with a more interdisciplinary approach would be beneficial to the students. A suggestion was offered about creating a writers' workshop where the emphasis is less on the teacher and more on each other. The one suggestion that I will not follow is to stay away from childhood issues because it could be a minefield with our type of population. I believe that allowing two prompts to pick from and alerting the teacher to be sensitive to this issue are adequate to address this concern.

Based on the feedback from the students I drew the following conclusions that guided my rewriting of the unit:

(1) Students that completed the unit found it to be generally effective. (2) Many students need a better transition to essay writing. (3) I should use more topics and that I give the students two prompts and let them choose which one they would write about. (4) One important suggestion was that I delay the essay writing to the final topic.

#### Revised Final Unit

Based on the review of the literature, the methodology used and the critiques from the professionals in education and the input from my students, I revised the draft of the unit. The major changes in the revised unit included:

1. Provide more instruction on the writing exercises.
2. Create a better rubric, one that will define more of the expectations on each section of the writing exercises.
3. Give more examples, such as a good and a bad paragraph, on an overhead detailing what is expected in their writing assignments.
4. Give out more than one choice of a writing prompt for each lesson.

5. Create a Writers Workshop; a writing workshop is made of students who share and critique each others' writing. "Critique" doesn't mean "I'm going to tell you everything that's wrong with your writing." Instead, a critique shows the strengths and weaknesses of something. You might hear it called "constructive criticism" because it helps build, not tear down.
6. Keep the computer assignments.
7. Revise the timeline to allow for more flexibility.
8. Include more options for an interdisciplinary approach, by integrating literature, film and popular cultural referents.
9. Revise the wording of some of the writing prompts. See Appendix C for the complete revised unit.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this project was to develop a unit using writing prompts that would benefit adolescents and adults in a correctional education setting. Students would learn to develop the ability to become problem solvers. They were able to reflect on past life events and to use them in preparation for future choices and decisions.

The results of the project were aligned with the categories in the review of the literature. There were five areas of research that were vital to this project and were addressed in the review of the literature. First, I reviewed the literature concerning narrative text. Narrative text has developed over the years into an explanation of a person's story and how a person can derive meaning from their experiences. The student's own language develops that story and their interpretation is very relevant. Second, I researched narrative therapy. Narrative therapy explains how narrative text is used by professionals to identify problems a person is having in their life through their life stories. The third area, adults as learners, has research identifying the



differences in learning, as a child and as an adult. This section describes how adults need to find meaning before they begin their learning quest. Addiction and narratives is the fourth section and it describes how a person with an addiction problem is usually a person that has created a dysfunctional narrative. Finally, the last section, reframing, reauthoring and retelling looks at the research that indicates a person with an addiction problem can also become more aware of their life through the process of writing and education, including research that indicates writing about past occurrences can bring a different outlook to the person with an addiction problem.

These studies suggested to me that I could adapt a form of narrative therapy using writing prompts to effectively help the students in my class. With this in mind, I drafted a unit to adapt to the students in the correctional field.

The draft of the unit was evaluated by four educational professionals and by five students in my class who completed the entire unit. The critiques and input I received aided me in restructuring the unit to make it more effective for other educators to use in a similar milieu.

## Conclusion

The writing prompts were beneficial for the students because they had a dual purpose. The students' writing skills progressed and they were able to reflect on past events in a positive way.

The students in correctional settings are basically good people who have made bad choices in their lives. In many situations, what most of us think is natural reasoning is not in their realm of thinking. They were raised in different environments, ones where there was abuse, neglect and many situations that were tragic. They need to learn some of the fundamentals that most of us learn while growing up. The students learn life developing strategies perhaps for the first time in their lives by reflecting and rewriting endings to past events. Instead of believing that they are incapable of making proper choices, the writing assignments aided them by developing skills towards building their strength in the decision making process for future choices.

A major limitation of the project was that it was developed for one type of correctional education setting and field tested by one person. It would need to be adapted to fit the needs of other settings and teaching philosophies. Since I incorporated the input from the

professionals and from my students, I believe the revised unit is more likely to be appropriate for other correctional education settings. A recommendation for future research in this area is to continually develop more use of writing exercises towards more therapeutic outcomes.

I encourage the educators who incorporate this unit into their curriculum to stay open minded and positive with their comments on the writing assignments.

APPENDIX A

UNIT DRAFT: INCLUDES WRITING PROMPTS

## Philosophy of the Unit

The reason this unit was developed is twofold. The primary purpose of the unit is to develop personal growth by having the student write relevant biographical information that is encouraged with different writing prompts. This unit is intended for the students who have problems dealing with life because of incidents that have occurred in their past. Each one of us is the story we create. The personal stories, the family stories, the moments of triumphs and disasters that we recall help us to identify who we are.

A secondary reason is to help the student in a correctional or court related class to advance in learning the correct methods of developing a paragraph, an essay and rewriting the ending. By using writing formats that begin with a thought or a writing directive, the student writes on a series of prompts that help the student in identifying the stories of their lives. They learn to be the author of their own story. The student begins to focus on beliefs and expectations that they have based on memories from the past and their own outlook about their future.

These writing prompts are to be used as a form of reflective writing. The student writes about memories from

their past. Later there will also be a few exercises where the student will rewrite the ending on an occurrence from the past. These rewrites will be given to the student in the later section of the writing schedule when they are better prepared to think of an alternate solution for a past event.

The pupil will discover the person they are and the type of character they have developed in their text. The student will determine the importance of the experiences in their life and also how they relate to the other characters in their writings.

The stories that the student will be asked to rewrite will have three parts.

- Beginning: names the characters, the setting and the problem.
- Middle: this part contains the events in order leading up to the climax or high point of action in the story.
- Ending: this delivers a satisfying or meaningful conclusion to the problem. It shows how the character resolves the problem and what lessons may be learned from the story.

By using this method, the writer can identify alternatives to the problem that they might not have thought of before the incident.

To address the second purpose of the unit, the student will go into three different phases of writing prompts that will go along with the three formats of writing that the student will be practicing. The first phase will be learning to write paragraphs, the second phase will be in developing an essay and the last phase will cover the process of rewriting.

The site where I work is an adult program. The students have been placed in the program through the court system. I believe that writing is an important element of their education. I have used the writing prompts for many years and I have found that they do help the student to reflect on the past and support the formation of a different perspective. Their outlook is affected by rewriting some of their past events into alternative methods that they could have used. They begin with simple writing and then it develops into rewriting past memories with solutions that they would have preferred.

The grading scale that is used is not critical of their personal writing. It only looks at the structure of the paragraphs and the essays. The only comments sent back

to the students are positive statements about their past reflections. These comments are helpful in giving the students thoughts about how to look at their past in a different manner. The ones who receive a 2 or a 1 on their structure and need to rewrite a portion or all of their paragraph or essay will be assisted by the teacher.

Writing can be restorative and this unit gives the student a chance to learn the proper order of writing a paragraph, an essay, in addition to learning to rewrite past events. The goal of this unit is to create better writers with problem solving skills in past life events to prepare them for future endeavors.



Title of the unit: Creating Your Future by Rewriting Your Past

Subjects covered: English and Computer Skills

Grade Level: Secondary and Adults in a Correctional Setting

Goal: This unit is important in establishing skills in developing paragraphs and essay writing. It gives the student an opportunity to develop their higher order thinking skills and analytical skills in real life situations. The rewriting in the end of the unit helps the students with non linear problem solving.

Objectives: By the end of this unit the students will be able to:

1. Compose a paragraph.
2. Compose an organized essay about important experiences in their life.
3. Illustrate the importance of this event with descriptive image based words and phrases.
4. Recognize the importance of clear writing and organization throughout their essays.
5. Understand the technique of rewriting.
6. Come to an understanding of how to problem solve real life situations
7. Develop computer skills while creating their paragraphs and essays in the form of a book/folder.

Materials:

- Overhead Projector and chalkboard for class discussions on paragraph format, image based words, essay format and the rewriting format.
- Computers and a Word Program for developing the autobiographical book.
- Thesaurus and Dictionary
- Paper and pens/pencils
- A Floppy Disk for each student
- A folder to hold all of their typed assignments.

### Time Frame:

- This unit is designed for a period of two months
- Allow one hour every day for the assignments given out.

### Teacher Preparation:

- Set aside a particular time every day to allow for a writing session
- Be available to the students in helping research new image words.
- Set aside a time for each student to have access to a computer to develop their books.
- As the assignments are turned in, make sure that they are assessed not only on the format but also on their content. Since the content will be about their past memories, comment only in a positive manner as you read in their paragraphs. This will assist the student when it comes time to do a rewrite.

### Beginning the Unit:

- Hand out the first assignment. The students draw a self portrait and write a description of who they are.
- This assignment is to be turned in when completed. Save these to compare with the last assignment.

### Procedure Day 1:

- Introduction to the unit. Outline the objectives of this unit.
- Show the overhead with the basic instructions on the details of a paragraph. (Topic sentence, supporting details and a concluding sentence)
- Allow time for a discussion on these instructions

### Procedure Day 2:

- Show overhead again about the basic instructions on the details of a paragraph.
- An additional comment from the teacher about what the criteria is for developing a good paragraph and how it will be assessed. (Show the overhead with the prewriting, writing and editing instructions)
- Hand out the first writing prompt, which will ask a reflective question about a person, place or incident from the past.
- This assignment is to be turned in when completed.

### Procedure Day 3-4:

- Each day give the students a writing prompt that they will use to write a paragraph.

### Procedure Day 5:

- Show instructions on an overhead about how to use the Word program and how to save their work on a floppy disk.
- Allow the students time today to begin typing their paragraphs and saving them on their floppy disk
- This time can also be used to redo the paragraphs that the teacher has sent back with a note to revise their work.

*End of Week 1:* Student should have the basic knowledge of creating a paragraph.

### Procedure-Day 6 9:

- Introduce a new writing prompt each day to be completed.
- Continue working with the students on their paragraphs and also on helping the students to create lists of words that could describe their experiences.

Procedure Day 10:

- Allow the students time today to type their paragraphs and save them on their floppy disk
- This time can also be used to redo the paragraphs that the teacher has sent back with a note to revise their work.

*End of Week 2:* Student should have a working knowledge of creating a paragraph.

Procedure Day 11:

- Show an overhead that shows steps on developing an essay.
- Discussion on the formatting of an essay and answer any questions the students might have.
- Provide the students a writing prompt that they will answer in an essay format.
- The assignment needs to be turned in the next day.

Procedure Day 13, 15, 17, 19:

- Hand out new writing prompts every other day, to allow extra time to complete a full essay on each prompt.
- Essays will be turned in on Day 12, 14, 16, and 20.

Procedure Day 20:

- Allow the students time today to type their essays and save them on their floppy disk
- This time can also be used to redo the essays that the teacher has sent back with a note to revise their work.

*End of Week 3:* Student should have a basic knowledge of creating an essay.

Procedure Day 21, 23, 25, 27:

- The students continue every other day writing an essay that responds to writing prompts that are to be turned in on Day 22, 24, 26, and 28.

Procedure Day 29:

- The students will be formed into cooperative groups and given a non linear problem to solve. This will prepare the students for the future rewriting project.

Procedure Day 30:

- Allow the students time today to type their essays and save them on their floppy disk
- This time can also be used to redo the essays that the teacher has sent back with a note to revise their work.

*End of Week4:* Student should have a working knowledge of creating an essay.

Procedure Day 31:

- Show the overhead that instructs the students on the rewriting format for the concluding paragraph and explain the steps.
- Answer any questions that the students may have.
- Hand out the writing prompt, remind the students of the essay instructions and also the rewriting steps.

Procedure Day 33, 35, 37, 39:

- The students continue every other day creating essays that respond to writing prompts with a rewriting of the concluding paragraph that are to be turned in on Day 32, 34, 36, 38 and 40.

### Procedure Day 40:

- Hand out the last assignment. The students draw a self portrait and write a description of who they are. Compare these to the first assignment and see if there is a difference in the two descriptions.
- The students will spend the final day typing their assignments and placing them in their folders. (Allow an extra day if not finished in time).
- The teacher will finish this unit by having a discussion with the class about the value of the rewrites and what they learned from the exercise. This can be valuable in the reflection of the unit for future use.

### Assessment:

- The grading scale for evaluating the format of the writing paragraphs and essays will be a score of 1 to 4. The score will be dispersed in the following manner:
  - 4 = Excellent/no additional work necessary
  - 3 = Great/no additional work necessary
  - 2 = Needs Work/some rewriting is necessary
  - 1 = Unsatisfactory (needs to be rewritten)
- The personal writings will not be graded. Only positive notes should be sent back on the paragraphs and the essays.

### Standards:

#### Ninth and Tenth

##### *Evaluation and Revision*

- 1.9 Revise writing to improve the logic and coherence of the organization and controlling perspective, the precision of word choice, and the tone by taking into consideration the audience, purpose, and formality of the context.

##### *Writing Applications*

- 2.1 Write biographical or autobiographical narratives

## Eleventh and Twelfth

### *Writing Applications*

2.1 Write fictional, autobiographical, or biographical narratives

2.2 Write reflective compositions

### *Written and Oral English Language Conventions*

1.3 Reflect appropriate manuscript requirements in writing

## Writing Prompts

Here are suggestions for each phase of the writing prompts.

### Phase 1-Paragraphs

- Draw an outline of your earliest home and fill in as much detail as you can
- List three people who made a difference in your life. Write a paragraph about each person.
- What is the best day you have ever spent with your family? Include at least three reasons that explain what made it the best day.
- What is your earliest memory? Why has it stayed with you?
- Write about a past memorable Christmas experience. Explain who you were with, where you were, what happened and what made it memorable.
- Write about the members of your family. Describe each person and what they mean to you.
- List four of your best qualities. Pick one that you think helps you succeed in life. Write about how this quality helps you overcome day-to-day obstacles.
- Families are important because...
- Think about a place that is so special to you that you just love thinking about it. It might be as big as a city, or as small as one corner of a room. Describe this place so clearly that your reader will know just what it was like to be there.
- Write about your name. Why is it special? How did you get it?

- Write about the nicest thing your parents ever did for you.
- Think about the first gift you remember receiving. Describe it. Who gave it to you? How did it make you feel?
- Write about a time in your life when you were happy. Why did you feel this way? What was going on to make you feel this way? Write the events that were occurring during this time.
- Think of a childhood memory that you recall clearly. Write about what happened.

### Phase 2: Essays

- Think about a place where you like to go to be alone. Write about this place and tell why you like to go there to be alone.
- Think about a time a person did something that made a difference in your life. Write about that time.
- Think of the most valuable thing you own that was not bought in a store. Explain why it is important to you.
- Write about the most irritating, bothersome things in your life.
- If you had a day all for yourself and could do whatever you wanted to, what would you do? Start with waking up and describe the entire day. Include things like what you would eat, who you would see, where you would go, and what you would do.
- Take a few minutes and think about this question. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? Describe this. What steps do you need to take to be there? How about 10 years from now? Describe this. What will bring you to this place?
- What is the scariest thing that ever happened to you? Describe this event and write about why it scared you.
- If you could have three wishes, what would they be and why would you choose these three?
- What is the most exciting thing that ever happened to you?



- What would you most like to change about yourself? Why?
- Think of something you have done that brought you satisfaction, pleasure, or a sense of accomplishment. Write about that activity or event and tell why it sticks in your mind.
- Pretend you are a palm reader. Look at your own hands. What are they telling you? What does your future hold?
- What experience have you had that has taught you something important?
- Describe your best day. Then switch gears and describe your worst day.
- Think back to your childhood. Can you remember a specific time when you told a lie? Write about the childhood incident. If you got caught, what did you learn? If you did not get caught, did you learn anything?
- If you had to name the one time in your life when you were the angriest, when was it and what happened?

### Phase 3-Rewriting

- Think about a major decision you made in your life. What would have happened if you had chosen a different path?
- Write about an incident in your past that you would like a chance to relive and do differently.
- You have been given the opportunity to go back in time to change one thing. What would it be and why?
- Think about an event in your life that seemed bad but turned out to be good.
- Think back to your past. Think of a mistake that you might have made that was very serious. You were told today that you could go back and change this mistake and make it right. Write what the mistake was and how you would change it today.
- Recall a time when you did or said something you wished you could erase and do over. Explain what

you did, and write what you would do differently.

- Think about a crisis that has occurred in your life. Did you respond, as you wanted to? What would you have done differently? Write out the story as you wished it had happened, or as it actually happened.
- Write about a huge mistake you made. Why do you regret it?

APPENDIX B  
WRITING SURVEY AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Writing Survey

*Circle the one closest to your answer.*

1. I like the writing exercises.

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5

2. The writing exercises help me to reflect meaningfully on past experiences.

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5

3. The writing exercises make the differences between how I perceive the past and the present clearer.

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5

4. I would rather write about my past experiences than talk about them.

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5

5. I feel better about myself after a reflective writing exercise.

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5

6. The writing exercises will help me to make better choices for my future.

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5

7. When I write about past experiences, I understand the memories in a different way.

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5

8. The writing questions make me think about your life.

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5

9. Writing is therapeutic (Good for you).

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5

10. I believe that I can learn from past mistakes.

(Strongly disagree)

(Undecided)

(Strongly agree)

1

2

3

4

5



## Interview Questions

### **1. Do you like having school time in a recovery program?**

#### **Alternate Questions:**

- Did you ever have classes in any other institution or place of rehabilitation?
- How well did you do in school when you were younger?
- How do you find being in school today different from the past?

### **2. Do you enjoy the writing assignments?**

#### **Alternate Questions:**

- Do you like to write?
- Do you enjoy the writing exercises that we do every morning in class?
- Is it hard for you to write about what you are thinking?
- Do you have problems writing about the past?

### **3. Does writing have an effect on you?**

#### **Alternate Questions:**

- Is it hard for you to reflect about some of your past events?
- Does writing about the past help you to see the past through different eyes?
- Do you believe that you can learn from your mistakes?
- Are you able to reflect through the writing assignments about your past mistakes and think of how it could have worked out differently?
- If you rewrite an event from the past, without telling me what the incident was about, do you think that this could help you?
- If the answer is yes, then how do you feel it helps you?
- If the answer is no, then tell me why you feel it wouldn't help.

APPENDIX C  
REVISED UNIT DRAFT AND WRITING PROMPTS

**Creating Your Future by Rewriting Your Past**

**A unit on developing essays based  
On writing personal narratives**

**Revised draft and writing prompts**



Title of the unit: Creating Your Future by Rewriting Your Past

Subjects covered: English and Computer Skills

Grade Level: Secondary and Adults in a Correctional Setting

Goal: This unit is important in establishing skills in developing paragraphs and essay writing. It gives the student an opportunity to develop their higher order thinking skills and analytical skills in real life situations. The rewriting in the end of the unit helps students with problem solving.

Objectives: By the end of this unit the students will be able to:

1. Compose a paragraph.
2. Compose an organized essay about important experiences in their life.
3. Illustrate the importance of an event with descriptive image based words and phrases.
4. Recognize the importance of clear writing and organization throughout their essays.
5. Understand the technique of rewriting.
6. Understand how to problem solve real life situations. (Coping skills)
7. Develop the ability to work in a group setting.
8. Develop computer skills while creating their paragraphs and essays in the form of a book/folder.

Materials:

- Overhead Projector and chalkboard for class discussions on paragraph format, image based words, essay format and the rewriting format.
- Computers and a Word Program for developing the autobiographical book.
- Thesaurus and Dictionary
- Paper and pens/pencils
- A Floppy Disk for each student
- A folder to hold all of their typed assignments.

- Handouts, posters on the wall for reinforcement of the instructions.
- Using other formats, such as videos, readings, etc. Ones that will aid the student in expanding their views.

Time Frame:

- This unit is designed for a period of one to three months; it can be extended if the three major areas are not covered completely. Or if the time is too long, then shorten the time period.
- Allow at least one hour every day for the assignment given.

Teacher Preparation:

- Set aside a particular time every day to allow for a writing session
- Instruct the students on the formation of groups for a writers' workshop and peer critiquing.
- Be available to the students in helping research new image words.
- Set aside a time for each student to have access to a computer to develop their books.
- As the assignments are turned in, make sure that they are assessed not only on the format but also on their content. Since the content will be about their past memories, comment only in a positive manner as you read in their paragraphs. This will assist the student when it comes time to do a rewrite.

Beginning the Unit: (Allow a two week progression)

- Give basic instruction on the purpose and direction of this unit. (Possible first day plan).
- (Possible day 2) Hand out the first assignment. The students draw a self portrait and write a description of who they are.

- This assignment is to be turned in when completed. Save these to compare with the last assignment.
- Introduction to the unit. Outline the objectives of this unit.
- Show the overhead with the basic instructions on the details of a paragraph. (Topic sentence, supporting details and a concluding sentence) (Show examples of a good and bad paragraph)
- Allow time for a discussion on these instructions
- Show overhead again about the basic instructions on the details of a paragraph.
- An additional comment from the teacher about what the criterion is for developing a good paragraph and how it will be assessed. (Show the overhead with the prewriting, writing and editing instructions) (Show examples on the overhead of a good and a poorly constructed paragraph).
- Hand out at least two choices of writing prompts, which will ask a reflective question about a person, place or incident from the past. This assignment is to be turned in when completed.
- Each day give the students a couple of writing prompts to choose from that they will use to write a paragraph.
- Show instructions on an overhead about how to use the Word program and how to save their work on a floppy disk.
- Allow the students time to begin typing their paragraphs and saving them on their floppy disk
- Time can also be used to redo the paragraphs that the teacher has sent back with a note to revise their work.
- Continue working with the students on their ability to construct paragraphs and also on helping the students to create lists of words that could describe their experiences.

End of Week 2: Students should have the basic working knowledge of creating a paragraph.

Assignments for a period of a month:

- Time can be used to redo the paragraphs that the teacher has sent back with a note to revise their work.
- Show an overhead that shows steps on developing an essay.
- Discussion on the formatting of an essay and answer any questions the students might have.
- Provide the students writing prompts to choose the one they want to use that they will answer in an essay format. Form the groups and give instructions on peer critiquing. Try to place stronger learners with ones who have a different level of need.
- The assignments need to be turned in as soon as completed.
- Hand out new writing prompts every one or two days, to allow time to complete a full essay on each prompt that has been chosen.
- Allow the students time to type their essays and save them on their floppy disk
- This time can also be used to redo the essays that the teacher has sent back with a note to revise their work.
- The students continue every other day or two writing an essay that responds to writing prompts that are to be turned in.
- Allow the students time to type their essays and save them on their floppy disk
- This time can also be used to redo the essays that the teacher has sent back with a note to revise their work.

End of the month: Student should have a working knowledge of creating an essay with feedback from their peers and teacher.

### Assignments for two weeks:

- Show the overhead that instructs the students on the rewriting format for the concluding paragraph and explain the steps.
- Answer any questions that the students may have.
- Hand out the writing prompt, remind the students of the essay instructions and also the rewriting steps.
- The students continue creating essays that respond to their choice of writing prompts with a rewriting of the concluding paragraph that are to be turned in.
- The students will spend the final days typing their assignments and placing them in their folders.
- Hand out the last assignment. The students draw a self portrait and write a description of who they are. Compare these to the first assignment and see if there is a difference in the two descriptions.
- The teacher will finish this unit by having a discussion with the class about the value of the rewrites, writers' workshop and what they learned from the exercises. This can be valuable in the reflection of the unit for future use.

### Assessment:

- The grading scale for evaluating the format of the writing paragraphs and essays will be a score of 1 to 4. The score will be dispersed in the following manner:
  - 4 = Main idea (thesis) very clearly stated and topic is effectively limited. Organization and structure is very evident: major points divided into paragraphs and signaled by use of transitions. Each paragraph has a topic sentence; sentences within each paragraph relate to each other and are subordinate to the topic. Introduction and conclusion are effectively related to the whole. Full variety of

sentence structures used correctly. Word choice interesting, accurate and contributes to the writer's ability to communicate the purpose.

3 = Response to assignment generally adequate and thorough. Organization and structure clear. Most major points are separated into paragraphs and signaled by transitions. Paragraphs are built on related sentences that logically develop the main points. No major digressions. Introduction and conclusion are effectively related to the whole. Variety of sentence structures used correctly despite an occasional flaw. Accurate and descriptive image based word choice.

2 = Minimum response to the assignment. Organization and structure mostly clear. Many major points are separated into paragraphs and signaled by transitions. Most points are logically developed. There may be a few minor digressions but no major ones. Introduction and conclusion are somewhat effective. Sentences & word choices are predictable. Occasional errors in sentence structure, usage & mechanics do not interfere with writer's ability to communicate the purpose.

1 = Does not respond well to assignment. The organization and structure must be inferred by the reader. Only some major points are set off by paragraphs and are signaled by transitions. There are some logically connected points. There may be some major digressions. Introduction and conclusion may be lacking or ineffective. Little sentence structure variety; wording predictable; few synonym alternatives used. Errors in sentence structure, usage and mechanics sometimes interfere with the writer's ability to communicate the purpose.

- The personal writings will not be graded. Only positive notes should be sent back on the paragraphs and the essays. (Notes should only be added on how to improve on the skill of writing)

Standards:

Ninth and Tenth

*Evaluation and Revision*

- 1.10 Revise writing to improve the logic and coherence of the organization and controlling perspective, the precision of word choice, and the tone by taking into consideration the audience, purpose, and formality of the context.

*Writing Applications*

- 2.2 Write biographical or autobiographical narratives

Eleventh and Twelfth

*Writing Applications*

- 2.3 Write fictional, autobiographical, or biographical narratives
- 2.4 Write reflective compositions

*Written and Oral English Language Conventions*

- 1.3 Reflect appropriate manuscript requirements in writing

Writing Prompts

Here are suggestions for each phase of the writing prompts.

Phase 1-Paragraphs

- Draw an outline of your earliest home and fill in as much detail as you can
- List three people who made a difference in your life. Write a paragraph about each person.
- What is the best day you have ever spent with your family? Include at least three reasons that explain what made it the best day.
- What is your earliest memory? Why has it stayed with you?

- Write about a past memorable holiday experience. Explain who you were with, where you were, what happened and what made it memorable.
- Write about the members of your family. Describe each person and what they mean to you.
- List four of your best qualities. Pick one that you think helps you succeed in life. Write about how this quality helps you overcome day-to-day obstacles.
- Families are important because..
- Think about a place that is so special to you that you just love thinking about it. It might be as big as a city, or as small as one corner of a room. Describe this place so clearly that your reader will know just what it is like to be there.
- Write about your name. Why is it special? How did you get it?
- Write about the nicest thing that someone ever did for you.
- Think about the first gift you remember receiving. Describe it. Who gave it to you? How did it make you feel?
- Write about a time in your life when you were happy. Why did you feel that way? What was going on to make you feel that way? Write the events that were occurring during this time.

## Phase 2: Essays

- Think about a place where you like to go to be alone. Write about this place and tell why you like to go there to be alone.
- Think about a time a person did something that made a difference in your life. Write about that time.
- Think of the most valuable thing you own that was not bought in a store. Explain why it is important to you.
- Write about the most irritating, bothersome things in your life.
- If you had a day all for yourself and could do whatever you wanted to, what would you do? Start



with waking up and describe the entire day. Include things like what you would eat, who you would see, where you would go, and what you would do.

- Take a few minutes and think about this question. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? Describe this. What steps do you need to take to be there? How about 10 years from now? Describe this. What will bring you to this place?
- What is the scariest thing that ever happened to you? Describe this event and write about why it scared you.
- If you could have three wishes, what would they be and why would you choose these three?
- What is the most exciting thing that ever happened to you?
- What would you most like to change about yourself? Why?
- Think of something you have done that brought you satisfaction, pleasure, or a sense of accomplishment. Write about that activity or event and tell why it sticks in your mind.
- Pretend you are a palm reader. Look at your own hands. What are they telling you? What does your future hold?
- What experience have you had that has taught you something important?
- Describe your best day. Then switch gears and describe your worst day

### Phase 3-Rewriting the ending

- Think about a major decision you made in your life. What would have happened if you had chosen a different path?
- Write about an incident in your past that you would like a chance to relive and do differently.
- You have been given the opportunity to go back in time to change one thing. What would it be and what would you change?
- Think about an event in your life that seemed bad but could have turned out to be good.

- Think back to your past. Think of a mistake that you might have made that was very serious. You were told today that you could go back and change this mistake and make it right. Write what the mistake was and how you would change it today.
- Recall a time when you did or said something you wished you could erase and do over. Explain what you did, and write what you would do differently.
- Write about a huge mistake you made. Do you regret it? How could it have been changed?

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