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## A Structured Writing Program To Improve Fluency And Attitudes Of Seventh Grade Students In A Basic English Program

Janifer Gorney  
*Nova Southeastern University*

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A STRUCTURED WRITING PROGRAM TO IMPROVE  
FLUENCY AND ATTITUDES OF SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS  
IN A BASIC ENGLISH PROGRAM

by

Janifer Gorney

A Practicum Report

submitted to the

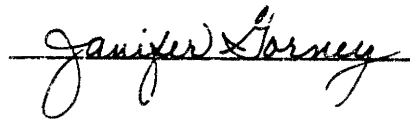
Faculty of the Center for the Advancement of Education  
of Nova University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Science

The abstract of this report may be placed in the  
School Practices Information Files for reference

June, 1987

AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jennifer Torney", is written over a horizontal line.

## ABSTRACT

A Structured Writing Program to Improve Fluency and Attitudes of Seventh Grade Students in a Basic English Program.

Gorney, Janifer, 1987: Practicum Report, Nova University, Center for the Advancement of Education. Descriptions: Middle School/Education/Multi-Cultural Learning Styles/Yaqui/Patterned Writing/Motivation in Writing/Visual Learning/Writing Activities for Reluctant Writers.

The intent of this practicum was to increase writing fluency and improve writing attitudes exhibited by a group of seventh grade students with Yaqui and Hispanic backgrounds. During a period of 16 weeks, a writing unit was implemented consisting of twenty structured activities to guide students in presenting their ideas and to increase their chances for success. As students' fluency increased, the patterns and models given became less structured so that students used more of their own ideas.

Evaluation was conducted through the use of Quality Writing Guidelines as well as student and parent follow-up surveys. Results indicated increased levels of writing fluency, improved capitalization and punctuation, improved sentence structure, and a wider variety of vocabulary. The methodology was found to be extremely effective in improving writing skills of students having difficulty supplement to regular education language arts teachers.

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## Chapter I

### Purpose

#### Background of the Community

The practicum site is a junior high school located in a suburban community with eighteen elementary schools and four junior high schools. This community includes a wide variety of socioeconomic neighborhoods. The immediate area surrounding the practicum site is upper middle income, and many of the heads of these households are professionals. Beyond this area are neighborhoods of middle and lower middle income population. The rest of the school's population is transported from apartments or low income housing developments.

Of the students that were transported, 148 were from a self-contained community of Hispanic and Yaqui Indian population. Many of the homes in this self-contained community are without heating or cooling and have dirt floors. There is a nonacademic environment in most of these homes, in that the children are not generally encouraged to develop their verbal or written communication skills.

#### The School

The practicum site was a junior high school with an enrollment of 725 students. One hundred twenty five of

these students were eligible for the free lunch program, and 23 had reduced price lunches. Of the total school enrollment, 63 students were in special education. Fifteen students participated in the ESL program, which is for students identified as using English as a Second Language.

The class periods at the site were 47 minutes long and the daily schedule included seven periods. Seventh grade students were required to take English, math, literature, science and history, plus two electives.

As an intervention for students with low achievement in communication skills, the school initiated a basic English program. This program was for students who scored below the 40th percentile on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), and who also had below a 'C' average on their previous report cards. There were 52 seventh grade students enrolled in this program and the classes were small, average 12 students per teacher.

#### Target Population

The students enrolled in the seventh grade basic English classes were the recipients of the interventions presented in this practicum. Ninety per cent of these

students were from the Hispanic and Yaqui Indian community. These students had not travelled far from their homes, and their experiences were limited. Students from this self-contained community generally tended to exhibit limited fluency in writing and a negative attitude toward any writing activity or verbal communication. Most did not use writing beyond the school setting.

The home environments of the target population did not appear to exhibit an atmosphere that was conducive to academic pursuits. In general, there was a lack of materials, such as pencils, pens, paper and books. Some research studies have indicated that parents of these students give little or no encouragement to completing school assignments before play. Few households had newspapers or magazines, and books were almost nonexistent. The adult role models rarely were observed completing any kind of writing task.

#### The Staff

The author who developed this intervention program, is a full time classroom teacher with four years experience in teaching language arts. Previously, the author taught second and third grade for ten years, thus accumulating experience across a variety of ability



levels, both heterogeneously and homogeneously grouped. Further, the author has presented several workshops in various school districts on the subject of writing and motivation and has presented twice at the National Conference of Teachers of English regional meeting. A presentation at the International Reading Association is currently scheduled in the near future.

The author of this practicum attended the Greater Phoenix Area Writing Project during the summer of 1983. This was a five-week course that was offered to a select group of teachers who teach English, and have an expertise in the area of writing. Participants were encouraged to teach the same type of class to teachers in their own districts. The writer has co-authored a book on writing activities entitled Creative Quickies Vol. 1 and 2, published by Art's Books, Larkspur, California.

In addition to the author, another staff member at the practicum site helped implement this writing unit. This staff member has been a teacher for two years following employment as a counselor by the Department of Economic Security. In her previous role, this colleague worked with members of the Hispanic and Yaqui community

community to develop programs to improve the community's mental health services.

### The Problem

The practicum site provided a basic academic program for any students who were at risk for failure in reading and communication skills. Many of the students also had a history of poor grades in most subjects. Students who participated in these classes scored below the 40th percentile on the ITBS and carried less than a 'C' average. These students were placed in small classes and given more individualized instruction. Writing assignments completed by seventh grade basic English students were consistently lacking in quantity and quality. Using the Quality Writing Guidelines (see Appendix A:38), it was found that 50% of the samples contained incomplete or run-on sentences, and 90% did not have paragraphs. Limited vocabulary was used, and over 50% of the samples had errors in capitalization and punctuation. Writing samples showed that most of these students experienced great difficulty expressing themselves in writing. Further, when asked to verbalize their thoughts, the students' responses were often minimal. The writing samples completed typically lacked fluency, and the students responded to the writing

activities with great reluctance. An example of one student's writing when asked to describe a family member follows: "my brother Jesse he has blak har and eyes and he is meen to me sumtimes and he is also nise".

Considering the ethnic and low socioeconomic background of these students, it was understandable that many of them seemed to evidence a negative self-image. Several factors, including limited experiences and opportunities, and attending a school where the student may feel inadequate in relation to the peer group, contributed to this poor self-concept. Consequently, many of these students didn't believe that they were capable of effective communication. One of the main objectives of this writing unit was to show them that they can be more fluent in their writing.

One of the problems created when grouping students homogeneously is the lack of role models. Low ability students in basic classes were not exposed to writing by peers who have grade level communication skills. All students need to develop a set of writing skills that can be used for effective communication. As the students in basic classes began to communicate in writing more successfully, it was anticipated that their attitude would improve.

To gather more information directly from the target population, individual surveys were given to explore students' attitudes toward writing and its value to them. While they considered writing to be important, 75% felt they would not use it outside of school. When asked to list titles of writing they had written in the past, most were unable to think of a completed piece of writing that they had done. More than half of the students surveyed said that they had never written anything that they liked. The surveys given to these students indicated that writing was not enjoyable or necessary for them beyond school.

Parent surveys were also conducted in which parents were requested to share their feelings about written communication and observations of their students' attitudes toward writing. Of the 52 questionnaires that were sent home only two were returned. On these, parents indicated that students never wrote at home unless it was a specific school assignment, and that their children had not brought home from school any writing to show them.

#### Outcome Objectives

Over a period of 16 weeks, the author implemented a structured communication unit to increase writing

fluency and improve writing attitude. In the area of increasing fluency, the unit included strategies that used modeling as a primary method of introducing writing assignments. The models of writing came from literature and a variety of printed matter, other seventh grade students, and writing patterns collected or designed by the author. A writing sample was taken at the end of the allotted time span, and it was anticipated that they would show an improvement in the fluency and structure of the writing. One of the components of this unit was to provide opportunities to generate word lists through brainstorming and other group activities. These word lists will then be available for the students to use to enhance their writing, and foster an awareness of vocabulary building.

In the area of improving attitude, the structured activities showed students how their writing can be used to augment their lives beyond school. The patterned writings were related to writing they might do outside of school, such as job applications. In addition, letters were included as a patterned exercise to also reinforce the premise that writing can be a valuable life-long skill. Thus, through these activities, it was anticipated that the students will become more familiar

with successful writing patterns, more appreciative of writing as a functional skill, and more positive toward writing as a way to relate to others.

The following objectives were specific outcome goals for this practicum.

1. Using the Quality Writing Guidelines (Appendix A: 38), the author will evaluate student progress by requiring students to complete another writing sample on the same topic as done previously. It is anticipated that 70% of the students will demonstrate an ability to write in complete sentences, 50% will write in correct paragraphs, and 60% of the students will show improvement in capitalization and punctuation.
2. The author will administer a post survey to the students to record any changes in attitude since the initial survey. It is anticipated that approximately 40% will indicate an improved attitude through reporting an increased frequency of writing outside of class (Appendix E:62, question 2), reporting they like to write (question 4) and recognizing an improvement in their own writing (question 8).

3. A post survey will be sent home to parents to determine whether they have noticed any increases in writing activity exhibited by their children (Appendix F:63, questions 2,4, 5) and whether they have noticed any positive changes in their children's attitudes toward writing (questions 1,2,6).

## Chapter II

### Research and Solution Strategy

#### Learning Styles of the Target Population

In preparing a writing curriculum for students who exhibit limited skills in writing, the author considered cultural studies conducted within the communities of predominantly Hispanic populations, and predominantly Yaqui populations. A 1980 study completed in the community of the target population (Houston, Sbragia, Salazar, Appleton) gave support to the premise that students from that community will usually respond well to visuals and models when learning. The report stated,

Most commonly, Yaqui children are expected to reach these skills of their culture by watching and modeling the desired behavior. Verbal instruction and direction are almost nonexistent. In the community, learning a ceremonial or cultural task (such as making tortillas) is done by watching it being performed. The child who is watching an action...is watching every moment, sound, gesture and prop. This style is begun at a very early age.

The Yaqui students lack many of the experiences linked to the school curriculum, therefore it may be difficult for them to visualize some of the concepts being presented. It is suggested that demonstration, models, and other visual aids will make the subject have more meaning and facilitate learning.



Studies also have found that it is very important to the Yaqui student to complete a task correctly.

According to Houston et al (1980)

To the Yaqui child, it is more than a little confusing to be asked to perform an action or task for which there has not been shown a correct form. These students are not accustomed to that style of learning, nor does it make sense to them.

A review of the literature convinced the author that an approach to teaching these students writing should include models and a format that guarantees success upon completion.

The learning style of the culturally disadvantaged child is complicated by their language development. Because their primary language is generally not English, the only time they are expected to use English is in school. Therefore, their vocabulary frequently is not very developed in either language. In a study by Johnson (1970) it was concluded that, "They (bilingual students) have developed a language that is often adequate in either culture, and substandard in both". There is a connection between a learner's verbal skills and his written performance. Therefore, a strong writing program would recognize the need for including word lists generated partly by the students through brainstorming and then supplemented with a given list.

### Rationale for Using Patterns

The approach for using models for the teaching of writing has a long history in the public schools. According to Myers (1978) this method assumes that a beginning writer can develop skill in writing by imitating successful patterns. Allowing students to use patterning can be an effective way to teach writing. Barth (1969) states, "As the child learns to speak imitatively, so he learns to write imitatively". Cramer and Cramer (1980) also have successfully used a wide variety of patterning activities with students and conclude that students who pattern their writing after excellent models can only benefit. Many stories and poems are constructed with a distinct language pattern. Writing patterned stories, poems, and other types of literature is considered by Cramer and Cramer (1980) to be "...one of the most legitimate and effective ways to become a better writer".

One method of teaching students to use patterned writing involves having the teacher first show students the model to be patterned and reading it together. McCabe (1970) then gives the student a copy of the pattern with certain words left out, leaving the

functional words for developing a thought. For example, a sentence from a paragraph may read:

When driving a car, you should obey the speed limit.

When \_\_\_\_\_ a \_\_\_\_, you should \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_.

Students would then be asked to fill in their own words in the blanks to create their own sentences.

McCabe (1970) believes that this technique works very well with dysfunctional writers. He states that, "...though such an approach seems rigid at first, as students develop proficiency in the use of a model, they tend to depart from a rigid adherence of its lines".

Many teachers use modeling as a major focus in their writing curriculum. For example, Barth (1965) reports that the Northwest Composition Curriculum Center applies this technique at all levels, saying:

Since we feel that students learn to write by imitating those compositions that they have read, we make extensive use of professional models in our lessons, asking students to imitate these models and thereby developing their own repertoire of rhetorical devices. All of our...models...have been carefully selected to embody the principles of composition any particular lesson aims to teach.

The method of using a student's writing as a model has been successfully implemented, also. Students are asked to model their writing after the pattern-oriented

story composed another young writer. As reported by Hillocks, McCabe, and Campbell (1971) students are asked to

...write a description of their own setting (while) referring to the model used in class. The rest of the story is modeled...and at each step the teacher points to the particulars of development in the model. The students are not left to flounder on their own.

Another form of modeling is writing from given information. Giving students practice in conveying information can be of considerable help to them in the future. Students can be given information in the form of charts, diagrams, lists, illustrations, etc., and then asked to explain the information in written form, such as a paragraph sequentially describing how to make tortillas from a diagram. As Gray (1982) concludes in her report,

For students who have had little success with writing or who feel intimidated by the whole process of selecting a topic...a predetermined subject and content can provide a sense of security which leads to greater willingness to write.

#### Learning Attitudes of the Target Population

In preparing a writing curriculum for students who exhibit limited skills in communication, teachers need to consider the origins of learning patterns and

attitudes brought to the classroom. The majority of the students participating in this practicum reside in an Hispanic and Yaqui community and use English as a second language. In motivating bilingual students, Ortiz and Engelbrecht (1986) state that "...an understanding of how children are taught in their homes will help them (teachers) to create meaningful experiences for their students".

It has been noted that students coming from low socioeconomic, ethnic environments typically do not see many examples of good writing. In a study conducted by Birnbaum (1980) it was found that one characteristic of less proficient writers is the lack of role models. Birnbaum found that in one such bilingual community, "Parents said that they had no need to write and instead relied on face-to-face communication or the telephone, just as they tended to rely on the television for news".

When students have difficulty with the writing process, they begin to associate the activity with failure. This can foster a negative attitude towards writing. Research shows that successful writing requires that authors be able to select and organize content that is congruent with an overall plan. A study conducted by Stein (1983) showed that both learning

disabled and culturally different children are susceptible to problems in organizing their thoughts on paper. This lack of organizational skills often frustrates the writer, and these difficulties may be reflected in the negative attitude exhibited when students targeted in the practicum are given a writing assignment.

It is important that teachers are aware of the attitudes and feelings present in students who are having difficulty with writing. Since completing a piece of writing has generally eluded the targeted students, they have come to believe that they are not capable of being good writers. In a recent U.S. Department of Education publication (1986) this attitude is described as follows:

Once students begin believing that they have failed because they lack ability, they tend to lose hope for future success. They develop a pattern of academic hopelessness and stop trying. They see academic obstacles as insurmountable and devote less time to learning.

Teachers need to respond to this attitude by keeping students motivated and by providing them with activities that guarantee success when completed as directed.

#### Solution Strategy

In designing a solution strategy to improve writing fluency and attitudes of low-achieving seventh grade

students predominantly from a culturally different background, the preceding research was considered along with the expertise of the author. The resulting strategy takes into account ethnic implications, past performance, attitudes and interests of the target population. The positive results from the use of patterns when teaching writing was another factor noted in developing the overall plan for this practicum.

The technique for imitating language patterns has many advantages which may strengthen students' writing skills. Because of the Yaqui background, a majority of the target population is accustomed to the technique of acquiring knowledge and skills through watching and modeling the desired behavior from an adult role model. Further, these students are likely to lack many of the experiences currently included in the school curriculum. Therefore, models and other patterned formulas for writing make the skill less threatening and easier to assimilate.

To increase fluency in these students' writings, the patterns and models have a language pattern that is easy to follow. They are a direct way to apply writing principles already introduced without frustrating the inexperienced writer. Also, these patterns motivate

students to continue writing to the end of the pattern. It is often difficult to keep young writers on task to complete a writing assignment. Patterned writing provides a formula for developing a whole idea, thereby providing enough structure to motivate students to complete the activity.



## Chapter III

### Method

Over a period of 16 weeks, 20 structured writing activities were presented to the seventh grade students enrolled in the five basic English classes at the practicum site.

The writing activities were introduced with some type of visual aid to spark an interest, and were based on a pattern or model for good writing. These visual aids were used to increase the chances of drawing the students into the activity, since research on the Hispanic and Yaqui learner has shown that most of these students respond best to visual learning. The lessons were similar in format. First, a topic was introduced with a picture or some other visual. For example, when 'activity 12' was introduced, the author brought in the materials necessary to prepare a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The students were then asked to verbalize directions on how to make a sandwich. Second, the group of students were encouraged to brainstorm words that were related to the topic. Third, they were given a list of words to add to the words generated by the group. The next step was for them to use these ideas to

complete a pattern or model of writing. When they completed their writing, the class went through a process of editing and revising in small groups and with the teacher. The final step was to write the final copies in pen and then file their writings in their folders.

There were different types of modeling or patterning activities. With one type of activity, the students were shown a pattern or model of good writing to read and discuss with the group. They then were given a copy of the pattern with certain words taken out, while still retaining the function words of the pattern. An example of this type of patterning activity, created by Jesse Hise, is the following formula:

I do not understand

Why \_\_\_\_\_

Why \_\_\_\_\_

Why \_\_\_\_\_

But most of all, I do not understand

Why \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

The thing I understand the most

is \_\_\_\_\_

The students wrote the pattern on a piece of paper, filling in the blanks with their own words. They then had a time for editing, and then the poems were recopied.

The topics of the models and patterns were high-interest and varied. The materials used to enhance each activity were readily and inexpensive. Each activity was contained on one page that was xeroxed for easy use.

The writing unit was monitored through each step so adjustments in implementing the activities could be made as needed. Patterns were modified to fit the individual skill levels. Students were encouraged to change the form when necessary to fit what they wanted to say. One example of how a pattern was modified was in the use of 'activity 18'. Students were to follow the pattern and write about their neighborhoods. Some of the students seemed reluctant to write about their home area, so it was suggested that they write about their "dream" neighborhood. This idea was accepted by those students with enthusiasm, and the results were positive. The flexibility allowed students to develop their own ideas beyond the limits of the pattern, and that was one more way to increase the fluency of these students as they

began to explore new ways to express themselves in writing.

Another incentive to motivate these reluctant writers was to provide each of them with an attractively-bound book containing blank pages, in which they could have their writing. In the back they kept the word lists which were developed during the 16-week unit. Since many of these students have owned few books, the idea of having a book that contained their own writing encouraged the students to complete each writing activity. It was also suggested that they add writing completed by other students in the class. A positive feeling of sharing was evident as they collected other students' writings.

The following timeline was used for this practicum.

1. By October 15, the author identified the fluency level and attitudes of these seventh grade students using:
  - 1.1 Writing samples completed in class on a given topic.
  - 1.2 Student surveys administered in class.
  - 1.3 Parent surveys which were sent home for completion.

2. By November 1, the author:
  - 2.1 Prepared 20 structured writing activities which use a pattern or model format that ensures student success when completed.
  - 2.2 Compiled word lists that students used in conjunction with their writing activities.
3. By March 1, the author:
  - 3.1 Implemented the 20 structured writing activities with identified target population.
  - 3.2 Monitored these activities and adjusted the format as needed to meet the interests and ability levels of the students.
4. By March 31, the author:
  - 4.1 Used guidelines (Appendix A:38) to evaluate student progress by requiring students to complete another writing sample using technique taught in practicum.
  - 4.2 Administered a post survey to the students to record any changes in attitude since the initial survey.

4.3 Administered a post survey to parents to determine whether they had noticed any increases in writing activity exhibited by their children.

## Chapter IV

### Results

This practicum was designed to provide a set of alternative methods to improve the writing skills and measureable attitudes of a select group of minority students with limited communication skills. The activities were designed to encourage basic students to feel less negatively about written communication and more competent in their written and speaking ability.

The methods involved the students in a series of patterned writing activities in which topics were related to their own background and experiences. As the intervention progressed, the activities were designed to be less structured, to enable the young authors to be more responsible for the format of their writing. The samples were evaluated in terms of the effectiveness of the intervention, and analyzed in regard to specific outcome objectives stated in the practicum proposal.

#### Outcome Objective 1

Using Quality Writing Guidelines (Appendix A:38) the author will evaluate student progress by requiring students to complete a post-treatment writing sample on the same topic presented previous to intervention. It is anticipated that 70% of the students will demonstrate

an ability to write in complete sentences, 50% will write in correct paragraphs, and 60% will show improvement in capitalization and punctuation. It is also anticipated that their writing will show an increase in fluency in 80% of the papers evaluated when compared to pre-intervention writing samples.

### Results

All measured criteria of the samples were evaluated by use of Quality Writing Guidelines. Of the 49 samples evaluated, 80% were written in complete sentences. Before the intervention, 50% of the students did not write in complete sentences. This result exceeded the outcome objective by 10%. Although two of the samples completed contained run on sentences, the majority of students were able to write with more fluency when given a model from which to start.

In evaluating for correct paragraphs, it was found that 70% of the students were able to successfully write paragraphs on their topics. The paragraphs consisted of three to four sentences that related to the main idea. The outcome objective was that 50% of the students would be able to write in complete paragraphs. This outcome was exceeded by 20%. Students were able to write two



paragraphs correctly, with each paragraph containing three to four sentences.

In regards to capitalization and punctuation, it was found that every sample exceeded some degree of improvement in punctuation. Sentences were ended correctly with periods. The type of writing that was completed did not require the use of question marks or exclamation points. Commas were used appropriately, although infrequently. Most of the sentences were simple in structure, but complete. Students used capital letters at the beginning of their sentences in 80% of the samples taken.

According to the Quality Writing Guidelines, in capitalization and punctuation, the measured results also exceeded the anticipated outcome objective. Students appeared to be modeling their writing from patterns and models presented during the intervention. They also evidenced more appropriate use of punctuation and capitalization. Of the 49 samples evaluated, 40 indicated a marked increase in fluency, when compared to samples taken before the intervention. It was anticipated that 80% of the students would be more fluent in their writing performances, and the results met that expectation. There was evidence that students

wrote more extensively than they had at the beginning of the intervention. For example, one sample from November contained only nine words. The same student wrote a 57-word paragraph on a similar topic when given a few key words to get started. Evaluation of results also indicated a wider range of vocabulary to express ideas.

#### Outcome Objective 2

The author will administer a post survey to the students to record any changes in attitude since the initial survey. It is anticipated that approximately 40% of the students will indicate an improved attitude through reporting an increased frequency in writing (Appendix E:62, question 2), reporting a more favorable view of writing (question 3) and recognizing an improvement in their own writing (question 7).

#### Results

Results of the post survey indicated that students' self confidence with writing had increased. Previous to the intervention, 75% of the students reported that they never wrote outside of school. On the post survey, 55% of the students indicated that they sometimes wrote outside of school and ten of the 45 students marked that

they frequently wrote outside of school. This result exceeded the outcome objective.

In responding to whether or not they liked to write, 78% of students' pre surveys indicated that they did not enjoy writing. On the post survey, only 20% responded that they disliked writing. Fifty five per cent responded that they liked to write sometimes. All but three of the surveyed students indicated through question 7 that the patterned activities had improved their writing skills.

#### Outcome Objective 3

A post survey will be sent home to determine whether parents had noticed any increases in writing activity exhibited by their students (Appendix F:63, questions 3,4,5) and whether they had noticed any positive changes in their children's attitudes towards writing (1,2,6).

#### Results

Prior to the implementation of this intervention, surveys were sent home to parents of the target group. Only two of the 52 surveys sent home were returned. Forty-seven post surveys were sent home, and six of those were returned. It is difficult to formulate conclusions on such a small number of responses, but the

results returned indicated that students were more positive about their writing. Four of the six parents responding marked that they had seen an increased amount of writing from their students. Three of the students had been observed writing letters.

Noting that the home environment of the students is not conducive to academic pursuits, the effect of the intervention on attitudes was not easily measurable beyond the school setting. Although few surveys were returned, those that were indicated that six of the seven parents were able to list an average of one writing activity observed being completed at home (question 1). Three of the six respondents indicated that their students enjoyed writing (question 2). All of the parents indicated that their students had brought home and shared their books of writing.

#### Other Results

As the intervention progressed, it became evident that a certain number of students were seeing their ideas developed into a meaningful and complete pieces of writing for the first time. They expressed more pride in their work and began bringing pens to recopy their writing. This interest was not displayed prior to the intervention. To reinforce this interest, students were

encouraged to submit their work to the school journalism staff for publication in the student literary magazine. Six students' writings were printed in the magazine. In addition, one student's poem was submitted to the district writing contest and subsequently the author received a certificate for participation. This same poem was recited by the principal at the eighth grade graduation exercises.

When implementing these activities, it was noted that students also improved their writing skills by working in editing groups of two or three students. This peer-editing process was closely monitored by the teacher, who was also a resource for spelling and other writing mechanics questions. This opportunity for students to share their work is a way to encourage them to verbalize their thoughts, and to interact with their peers.

## Chapter V

### Recommendations

This practicum provided a set of alternative teaching activities for the purpose of improving the writing skills and attitudes of students who were struggling with the writing process. The results of this practicum indicate that this series of activities is an effective supplement to a writing program. These structured writing activities can be incorporated into the curriculum that is provided for the basic English program.

At the practicum site, these twenty activities are available to teachers assigned to instruct basic classes at the junior high level. Other staff members with various levels of instructional responsibilities can also have ready access to these writing ideas.

This set of writing ideas is particularly useful with students who have difficulty completing a writing assignment. The writing activities are also useful in other English instruction as a supplement to the writing program. Because of the patterning format, students are encouraged to write in a style that has already been proven successful. This type of activity may transfer quality writing techniques to later writing assignments and projects.

This set of innovative, alternative writing activities for basic education students was presented at a recent national conference, and was received with very favorable response. There has been exploration of combining this material with a set of methods designed to encourage middle school students in their motivation to read and in their appreciation of good literature. This combination of motivational activities in reading and written communication is being prepared for publication.

Teachers who use these activities will find them easy to reproduce and implement with their students. Writing programs are successful when the activities are varied, flexible and geared to the interest of the prospective writers. For teachers of writing there is always room in their files for a writing activity that will motivate their young authors to successfully complete a piece of writing and feel good about the result.

Thus, this practicum provides an effective set of alternative methods to increase writing fluency and improve writing attitudes of basic junior high school students.

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## APPENDIX

Appendix A  
Quality Writing Guidelines

-From Building English Skills  
Published by McDougal, Littell

Writer \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation Symbols

- 1 Needs a great deal of work
- 2 Acceptable--could be improved
- 3 Very good, needs no further revision

Content.

1. Interest. Is the writing interesting and understandable? Does it hold the reader's attention?
2. Purpose. Is the purpose of the writing clear? Has the writer accomplished this purpose?
3. Development. Has the topic been developed well? Is there sufficient information?
4. Unity. Are all ideas and details related to the topic? Do they all help to develop the main idea?
5. Continuity. Do ideas flow smoothly? Has the writer avoided any breaks in thought?
6. Organization. Were ideas arranged in logical order? Does this order suit the purpose of the writing?
7. Language. Is the language appropriate to the writing? Are the words interesting and varied?

The Writer's Opinion	The Teacher's Evaluation	Comments
----------------------------	--------------------------------	----------


Fluency. Count the total number of words written. The student wrote \_\_\_ words in \_\_\_ minutes.

Mechanics.

1. Grammar and Usage. Are there any fragments or runons? Is the correct form of every pronoun and verb used? Are adjectives and adverbs used correctly?
2. Capitalization. Are all first words, initials, proper nouns, proper adjectives, and titles capitalized?
3. Punctuation. Does each sentence have the proper punctuation?
4. Are all words spelled correctly? Are plurals and possessive forms spelled correctly?
5. Form. Is the writing legible? Is the heading correct? Are there sufficient margins?


## Appendix B

Initial Student Survey

1. How often do you write outside of school? I write:  
     \_\_\_ frequently \_\_\_ occasionally \_\_\_ seldom \_\_\_ never
2. Write a list of five writing activities you recall doing in the past two years. \_\_\_\_\_  
     \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you like to write? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What did you write in the past two years that you liked best?  
     \_\_\_\_\_
5. What types of writing are done in your home? (other than school work) \_\_\_\_\_  
     \_\_\_\_\_
6. Rank in order of importance the following skills: (rank in order, 1-5)  
     \_\_\_ Knowing the parts of speech  
     \_\_\_ Knowing how to do long division  
     \_\_\_ Knowing how to make a key chain  
     \_\_\_ writing a complete paragraph  
     \_\_\_ Knowing all the presidents
7. When you are out of school, how often do you think you will need to write a complete thought? \_\_\_ once a day \_\_\_ twice a week \_\_\_ once a month \_\_\_ less
8. List five jobs that require writing skills. \_\_\_\_\_  
     \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you see yourself in a job someday that will require writing skills? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

Initial Parent Survey

Please answer the following questions about your child's writing habits.

1. List any types writing you have seen your child do at home.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Does your child seem to enjoy writing of any kind? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many times in the last month has your child brought home writing from school to show you? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Has your child ever kept a diary? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many letters to relatives or friends did your child write in the last month? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Is there a dictionary in your home? \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer the following questions in reference to your own writing attitudes.

7. Check (✓) any of the following types of writing that you have completed in the past month. \_\_\_ letters \_\_\_ lists \_\_\_ poetry \_\_\_ forms \_\_\_ creative stories \_\_\_ journals \_\_\_ other.
8. What types of writing do you were in school? \_\_\_\_\_  
Did you enjoy writing? \_\_\_\_\_
9. The reason you don't write more often is: \_\_\_ I'm too busy \_\_\_ I don't like to \_\_\_ it's too difficult \_\_\_ have no reason to \_\_\_ other

## APPENDIX D

Compilation of InterventionActivities

1. Which Witch?
2. Why Poem
3. "5W" Poem
4. Trunkful of Traits
5. Fold-A-Gift
6. Night Pattern
7. Paragraph Tree
8. Boy Burns Bottom
9. Win or Lose
10. It's not Easy...
11. In a Nutshell
12. Peanut Butter and Jelly
13. Fold-a-Paragraph
14. Ten Good Things
15. I can Dream
16. Letters
17. Emotions
18. Your Neighborhood
19. Linda is My Sister
20. Our House

## APPENDIX D, Activity 1

Which Witch

According to \_\_\_\_\_ writings,



A witch be known by her

\_\_\_\_\_,  
 \_\_\_\_\_,  
 \_\_\_\_\_,  
 \_\_\_\_\_,  
 \_\_\_\_\_,

and the

\_\_\_\_\_ on her \_\_\_\_\_  
 (by)



Witches tend to live in \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

with \_\_\_\_\_



They often have \_\_\_\_\_,

and usually \_\_\_\_\_

by \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D, Activity 2

Wondering Poem

The following formula for patterning a poem was developed by Jesse Hise, a high school English teacher.

Directions: Copy the pattern as written below and then complete the formula with your own ideas.



I do not understand

why\_\_\_\_\_

why\_\_\_\_\_

why\_\_\_\_\_

But most of all, I do not understand

why\_\_\_\_\_

because\_\_\_\_\_

The thing I understand most

is\_\_\_\_\_

because\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The poem can be from many different points of view, including animals'. Try several different viewpoints, possibly including parents, or even a teacher.



## APPENDIX D, Activity 3

"5W" Poem

This poem pattern answers who, what, where, when, and why about a topic. Each line begins with a capital letter, but there usually will be no punctuation at the end since this is a special type of poem. Following are two examples:

The cricket	The hamburger
Chirping loudly	Sizzling away
On the hearth	On the barbecue
All night--	Until it's done
To be heard	For my empty stomach

Directions: Fill in the pattern below with your own ideas. The answers to each "w" word do not have to be in complete sentences, phrases are used.

Who \_\_\_\_\_  
 What \_\_\_\_\_  
 Where \_\_\_\_\_  
 When \_\_\_\_\_  
 Why \_\_\_\_\_

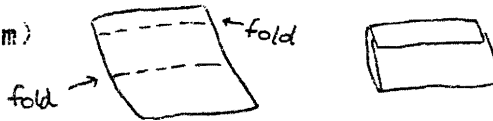
After your poem is proofread, copy it on another sheet of paper. Try two or three poems and then choose the one you like best to illustrate.

## APPENDIX D, Activity 4

Trunkful of Traits

1. Fold a paper in uneven thirds to resemble a trunk.

(see diagram)



2. Draw a lock, slats and other details to make your paper look like a trunk.



3. "Fill!" in your trunk with five traits that you have and think are most important.



4. Write a paragraph that follows the pattern below. Use the same traits that you filled your trunk with, and add describing words as needed.

I think it's great that I am \_\_\_\_\_.

I also am \_\_\_\_\_. I really like the way that \_\_\_\_\_. Sometimes, I think I am too \_\_\_\_\_.

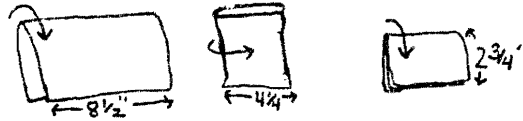
But best of all, I \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, and that makes me \_\_\_\_\_.

*"I think it's great that  
I am a smart  
person..."*

## APPENDIX D, Activity 5

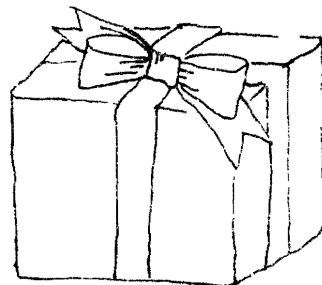
Fold-A-Gift

1. Fold an  $8\frac{1}{2}$ " by 11" plain paper three times as shown in example.



2. On the small portion that is  $2\frac{3}{4}$ " by  $4\frac{1}{4}$ ", draw what you would really like for a gift and label it.
3. Open up one fold and draw a nice gift for your best friend.
4. Open up your paper one more time, and draw and label a wonderful gift for your whole family.
5. Finally, open your paper all the way and draw a wish for a large group of people, like your town, our school, or even the whole world.
6. Fill in the pattern below to describe your gifts

If I could have a gift, it might be a \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_. For my friend I would \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_. My family deserves a \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. Finally, if I  
 could, I would give \_\_\_\_\_.



## APPENDIX D, Activity 6

Patterned Night

The following paragraph was written by Robert Bly. Listen to the complete paragraph as the teacher reads it. Then complete the pattern at the bottom with your own ideas, describing a special night. Cover up the original paragraph before you start writing.

It is a cold and snowy night. The main street is deserted. The only things moving are swirls of snow. As I lift the mailbox door, I feel its cold iron. There is a privacy I love in this snowy night. Driving around, I will waste more time.

It is a \_\_\_\_\_ night. The \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.  
 The only \_\_\_\_\_ are \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. As I \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_, I \_\_\_\_\_. There is a \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_ in this \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ around, I will \_\_\_\_\_ more \_\_\_\_\_.

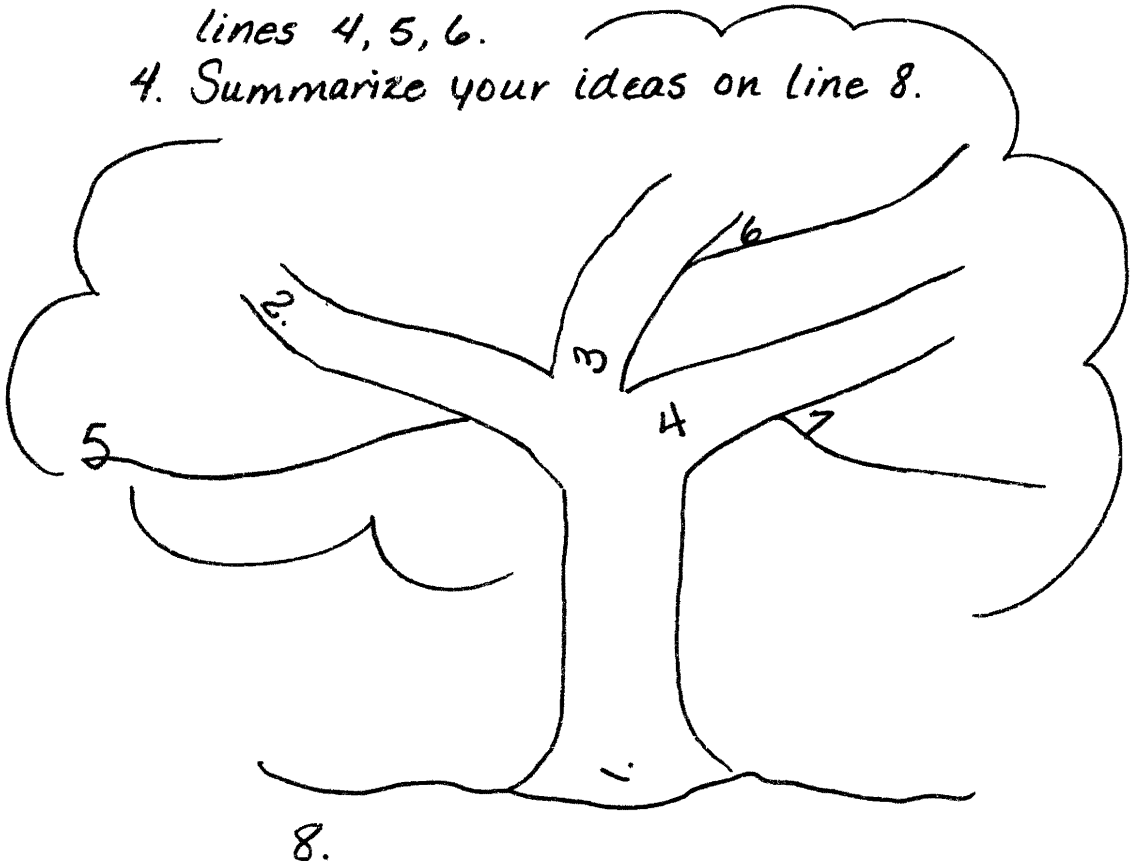
As you are completing the pattern, if some of the words don't fit your idea, it is all right to change the words to fit your thought. Sometimes, it is a good idea to experiment with different words until you find the best ones to express your thoughts. You will need to copy the pattern on another piece of paper.



## APPENDIX D, Activity 7

Paragraph Tree

1. Select an activity (sport, game) and write it in the trunk.
2. Write three general statements on the branches. ( 2, 3, 4)
3. Next, write a detail about each one on lines 4, 5, 6.
4. Summarize your ideas on line 8.



5. Put all the information into five sentences, starting with your topic sentence about #1. Put #2 and #5, #3 and #6, #4 and #7 together in three more sentences. Finish your paragraph with #8.

## APPENDIX D, Activity 8

Boy Burns Bottom

1. Look over several Mother Goose Rhymes and children's stories.
2. Choose one of the nursery rhymes to use as the topic of a newspaper article.
  - A. First, write a headline describing the most important event that happened.
  - B. Next, write sentences that explain the events by answering the 5W's: who, what, when, where and why. Remember to put the most important information first.
  - C. Add any details for interest, then recopy in pen.

Example:

Rhyme: Jack be nimble,  
Jack be quick.  
Jack jumped over  
the candlestick.

**BOY BURNS BOTTOM**

Jack Smith, a boy from Tempe, burned his bottom. It happened last night when he tried to jump over a 10-foot candle. Jack was trying to set a new world record. He is now recovering in the hospital.

## APPENDIX D, Activity 9

Win or Lose

Read and discuss the following poem.

Battle Won is Lost  
                                   by Phil George  
 They said, "You are no longer a lad."  
       I nodded.  
 They said, "Enter the council lodge."  
       I sat.  
 They said, "Our lands are at stake."  
       I scowled.  
 They said, "We are at war."  
       I hated.  
 They said, "Prepare red war symbols."  
       I painted.  
 They said, "Count coups."  
       I scalped.  
 They said, "You'll see friends die."  
       I cringed.  
 They said, "Desperate warriors fight best."  
       I charged.  
 They said, "Some will be wounded."  
       I bled.  
 They said, "To die is glorious."  
       They lied.

Using the same pattern, write an interchange between you and people who are authority figures or who have influence over you. Possible people might be your parents, teachers, a group of peers, or law enforcement officials.

Begin with:

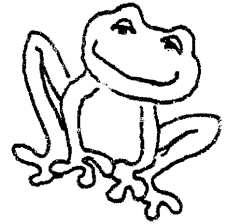
They said, \_\_\_\_\_  
       I \_\_\_\_\_

...and so on....

## APPENDIX D, Activity 10

It's not Easy

♪ It's not easy being green... ♪



It's not easy... being a teenager.  
 ... being a student  
 ... staying calm.  
 ... being a son/daughter.  
 ... being "cool" all the time.

Think about something you are or have done that isn't easy.

Write about it by filling in the pattern.

It's not easy \_\_\_\_\_.

Sometimes, I feel like \_\_\_\_\_.

The hardest part is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I wish that \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_, but I guess \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. Really though, \_\_\_\_\_



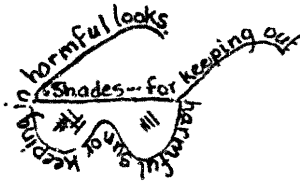
## APPENDIX D, Activity 11

In a Nutshell

Some poetry is very short, but still can be very thoughtful. With the right words, even a one-line message can be beautiful, funny, or sometimes, sad.

Following are several patterns and ideas. Try one of each, or more.

\* Picture poem. Write around a simple shape:



\* If I were \_\_\_\_\_  
I would \_\_\_\_\_  
But I would never \_\_\_\_\_  
If I were a \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\* I used to...  
But now....

example:  
I used to want to  
have a horse of my own,  
But now I would rather  
ride someone else's.

\* write as many as you can.

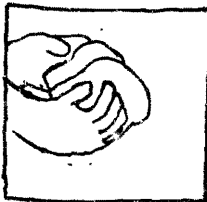
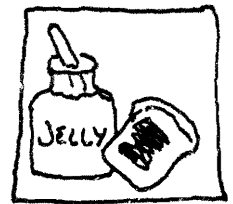
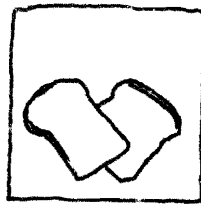
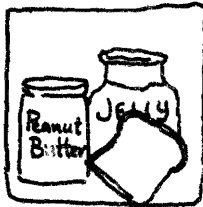
\* Pyramid  
1. First line - a noun  
2. Second - two adjectives  
3. Third - three verb forms  
4. Fourth - short question or statement and question.

example:  
Donuts  
warm, wonderful  
nibbling, eating, devouring  
Self control? What's th-

## APPENDIX D, Activity 12

Peanut Butter & Jelly

1. Study the pictures below that show the steps in making something.



2. On a separate piece of paper, write out in complete sentences what the diagrams are explaining. Remember to title it.

## APPENDIX D, Activity 13

Fold-a-Paragraph

1. Take two sheets of lined paper and fold as shown in diagram.



Staple at the bottom.

2. As shown in example below, write the name of an animal you know details about in the first space.



3. In the second space going back, write a sentence that generally states what the animal looks like.
4. In the third space showing, write a topic sentence on the animal's eating habits.
5. In the fourth space at the top, write a topic sentence that describes the living environment of the animal.
6. On the inside pages, write details about each one of the topic sentences.
7. Rewrite on another piece of paper, keeping your information in three separate paragraphs.





## APPENDIX D, Activity 14

Ten Good Things

After reading The Tenth Good Thing About Barney, by Judith Viorst, use the following pattern from the last page to write a description. Describe the special qualities of a pet, a good friend, or a family member.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ is/ was \_\_\_\_\_

And \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

Also \_\_\_\_\_, and once, he/she \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ a \_\_\_\_\_.

(verb)

It was \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

And sometimes \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is was \_\_\_\_\_ and

he/she helped/is helping me \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

And that's a \_\_\_\_\_ job for a

\_\_\_\_\_.

by \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D, Activity 15

I Can Dream

Write the first sentence of the pattern below on a separate sheet of paper. Then begin each new line with the suggestions listed. Skip a line between each thought.



## Dreams

How great it would be to have the power to make my dreams come true!

I dream about ...

Someday I would like to see...

I wish I could...

I'd like to discover...

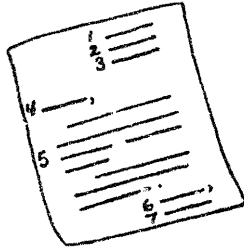
It would be wonderful to give...

Most of all, I would love to...

## APPENDIX D, Activity 16

Letters

Friendly letter :



1. street address
2. city, state, zip
3. date
4. greeting
5. body
6. closing
7. signature

1. Think about your pet, or an animal in a zoo. If that animal could write you a letter, what would be in it?
2. Following the structure above, write a letter to you from that animal.

Letters could also be from :

Characters from Stories

teacher

'Mother Goose' people

someone from Outer Space

trees,

etc.

## APPENDIX D, Activity 17

Emotions

We all feel angry sometimes, or happy or sad. These feelings are emotions, and there are many. Use the senses to describe an emotion. Tell how it tastes, sounds, smells, looks, and its color. Fill in the lines as directed.

\_\_\_\_\_ (emotion)

\_\_\_\_\_ (color)

\_\_\_\_\_ (sounds)

\_\_\_\_\_ (smells)

\_\_\_\_\_ (tastes)

\_\_\_\_\_ (looks like...)

\_\_\_\_\_ (how it makes you feel..)

Recopy in ink, and mount on colored paper.

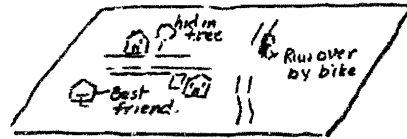
example:

Frustration  
 Frustration is a too-bright  
 orange.  
 It sounds like a noisy  
 classroom.  
 It smells like a stuffy,  
 little-used closet.  
 It tastes like  
 vegetable stew.  
 It looks like total  
 confusion,  
 and it makes me  
 feel desperate.

## APPENDIX D, Activity 18

Your Neighborhood

1. Draw a map of your neighborhood. Label places where things have happened.



2. Fill in the pattern to write about your own neighborhood.

As you walk down the street in my neighborhood you'll see \_\_\_\_\_

You'll see \_\_\_\_\_

You'll hear \_\_\_\_\_

You'll smell \_\_\_\_\_

Some of these sights, sounds and smells may be familiar to you, \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX D, Activity 19

Linda is My Sister

Think of someone special in your life.  
 Fill in the pattern below with some  
 thoughts about that person. Remember  
 a title.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ is my \_\_\_\_\_.

(He/she) is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

and \_\_\_\_\_.

I like the way (he/she)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

We enjoy \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

Sometimes we don't agree.

I remember once, \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

But even so, \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is my \_\_\_\_\_,

And I am \_\_\_\_\_.

## APPENDIX D, Activity 20

Our House

Think about all the things that have happened in your house. Go way back in your memory and try to picture exactly where you were when certain things happened, and what you used to do in certain places. Fill in the pattern with your memories.



This is my house.

It is \_\_\_\_\_.

We \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ here.

This is the \_\_\_\_\_ where \_\_\_\_\_

Here, we used to \_\_\_\_\_

On the \_\_\_\_\_, I would \_\_\_\_\_

This is where \_\_\_\_\_

My \_\_\_\_\_ and I used to \_\_\_\_\_

I loved to \_\_\_\_\_

And this is where \_\_\_\_\_

I loved to \_\_\_\_\_

And you could always \_\_\_\_\_

by \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

Follow-up Student Survey

1. List writing projects you have completed in the past few months: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How often do you write outside of school? I write:  
\_\_\_ frequently \_\_\_ sometimes \_\_\_ seldom \_\_\_ never
3. Mark the response closest to the way you now feel about writing:  
\_\_\_ I like to write sometimes  
\_\_\_ Writing is difficult for me  
\_\_\_ I do not like to write
4. What types of writing are done outside the school setting? \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_
5. Is writing a skill you will use beyond school? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you see yourself in a job someday that may require writing? \_\_\_\_\_
7. You have done many writing assignments using models and patterns. Do you think these activities have helped your writing? \_\_\_\_\_  
In what ways? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F

Follow-up Parent Survey

Please answer the following questions about your child's writing habits.

Consider your child's habits for the past month only.

1. List any types of writing you have seen your child complete at home. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Does your child seem to enjoy writing of any kind? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many times in the last month has your child brought home writing from school to show you?  
\_\_\_\_\_ several times \_\_\_ a few times \_\_\_ once \_\_\_ never
4. How many letters to someone did your child write in the last month? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Has there been any increase in the amount of writing you have seen from your child? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Did your child bring home a book of his/her own writing, and show it to anyone in the family? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you see any improvement in the quality of your child's writing compared to writing done at the beginning of the year? \_\_\_\_\_