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Bonnie J. Simpson

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California State University

San Bernardino

THE WRITTEN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A Project Submitted to

The Faculty of the School of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the

Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Education: Special Education Option

By

Bonnie J. Simpson

San Bernardino, California

1992

APPROVED BY:



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THE WRITTEN LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT  
OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Bonnie Simpson  
California State University, San Bernardino

Abstract

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the writing progress of students with special needs. Students with special needs often dislike writing because of the difficulties they have had with it. Their progress, on the surface, seemed slow and sometimes limited. However, further examination of their writing, using a holistic evaluation system, showed definite progress and an increased understanding of written language. The reluctance of special educators to adopt the changing paradigm of whole language instruction has resulted in the lack of research done on the writing development of students with special needs. The writer felt this was an area that needed further exploration.

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### Procedure

Writing samples were collected from two students with special needs. These samples were collected over a period of two years. The samples were analyzed using the following framework: intention, orchestration, organization, and experimentation (Newman, 1988). Progress was documented and a short summary of each student's progress was written.

### Results

The results of the project indicated that students with special needs do progress through the same stages of writing development as students without special needs. This occurs when they are taught in an atmosphere where writing comes first and skills are taught as they are needed.

### Conclusions and Implications

Students with special needs are entitled to the same instructional methods as normal developing students. They make slow and steady progress when holistic instructional methods are used. Their writing, when evaluated in a holistic manner, shows an increased understanding of written language.

Teachers need to allow students with special needs sufficient time to develop their writing skills. They need to nurture writing skills in a caring, warm atmosphere where students are not afraid to take the "risks" necessary to learn how to write.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank the following people for their help in completing this project.

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## Introduction

### Problem Statement and Research Question

There is an abundance of research on the writing process. This research supports the whole language curriculum found in the classrooms of California schools today. Writing is no longer being taught in isolation but in combination with other subjects. Skills based curriculum is no longer being used in regular education classrooms today. This is not true for the field of special education. Many teachers feel students with special needs should practice skills taught in isolation, they feel the whole language curriculum does not apply to special education.

Special education is slowly moving into the holistic system. The reluctance of special educators to move from skills based curriculum into whole language instruction has resulted in the lack of research done on the writing development of students with special needs. There is an assumption among special educators that these students need skills based instruction. This project will focus on the writing development of students with special needs as analyzed

through journal writing. I have found that these students do go through the stages of writing and usually make slow but steady progress in their writing development.

I collected samples of two student's journal writing over a period of two years. These samples were analyzed using Newman's framework of intention, orchestration, experimentation, and organization (1988). The journal entries were not copied from the board. The students wrote on their own and then I responded to them. I did not give the students the conventional spelling of the words they used. The students were taught the skills they needed when their writing showed they were ready to use the skill, for example, when they started to put periods in their journal entries I showed them the correct place to put the periods and we discussed the concept of a sentence.

The results of this project showed that students with special needs do go through the developmental stages of writing if they are given the opportunity to do so. They do make progress in their writing when they are taught in a whole language environment.

I found these students were not afraid to use their developing writing skills throughout the day. They were willing to take the same risks that all writers take when writing for other people.

### Literature Review

Writing is a developmental process and children produce "written communications before they enter school, but often their written work is not decipherable by adults" (Dobson, 1985, p.30). Language development, reading, and writing are all intertwined. Children learn to speak and listen informally and independently but writing and reading are learned formally in school (Dobson, 1985). Beginning reading is usually the focus of early intervention programs, while early writing programs are usually overlooked. It is important to introduce writing along with reading as part of the "developmental process of language learning" (Dobson, 1985, p. 30).

The following points will be discussed in this review; 1) the relationship between oral and written language, 2) the writing process of normally developing writers, and 3) the writing process for students with

special needs. The last section of the review presents a framework for curriculum organization and design, developed from information gleaned from research and curricular writing.

#### The Relationship between Oral and Written Language

"Learning to write is a language learning activity. It is learned in the same way as learning to read or learning to talk" (Buchanan, D. Cochrane, O. Cochrane, Scalena, 1984, p. 80). Since learning spoken language is an informal process started at birth this process should be carefully examined and its principles applied to written language. There are several factors that influence a child's early language learning that need to be considered for use in the classroom.

First, children are immersed in oral language from birth. The immersion factor can be applied to the classroom by surrounding the student with written language. Students must be completely immersed in oral and written language. They see print in the environment and hear it when stories are read to them. This gives them models for their own writing (Cochrane et al, 1984).



Second, the oral language surrounding children is both meaningful and has a purpose. Children learn that language is both useful and has a purpose when they are surrounded by meaningful and purposeful activities. This factor is applied to written language instruction by involving students in writing activities that serve their present needs. Writing to real people, stories created for real audiences, and school newspapers are some of the ways to accomplish this. Students need real life encounters (Cochrane et al, 1984).

Third, children see important people using oral language every day. Children need to see their teacher using written language at school. Observing the teacher using written language gives the student a model for writing (Cochrane et al, 1984).

Fourth, parents, relatives, and friends give children support as they learn to talk. Almost every attempt made to talk is met with positive feedback. In the classroom every attempt at writing should be met with the same type of feedback. "Time, experience, and practice facilitate better and better writing" (Cochrane et al, 1984).

Fifth, when children learn to talk they spend a great deal of time practicing. They talk constantly to anyone who will listen. This principle must be applied to written language. Writing every day is very important.

The sixth factor is one of choice. Children choose what they practice. Children must be able to practice writing using topics that they are interested in writing about. Teachers need to set up classrooms with an "environment that is conducive to written language learning" (Cochrane et al, 1984, p. 81).

#### The Writing Process of Normally Developing Writers

The process writing classrooms described in Brian Cambourne and Jan Turbill's book Coping with Chaos (1988) are classrooms where seven conditions are present. The conditions include: immersion in written medium, demonstration of how print medium is used, expectations "given off" by teacher to class, taking responsibility for your own learning, approximation of the adult model, practice employing the developing skill, engagement with the demonstrations made available and response--the mutual exchanges between experts and novices. These seven conditions are

important for all students, including the student with special needs. Process oriented classrooms are classrooms where teachers "have confidence in what they are doing and trust that their children are learning" (Cambourne & Turbill, 1988, p. 70). The focus of writing instruction in these classrooms is meaning, writing skills are taught within that context (MacArthur & Schwartz, 1990).

The writing process is very complex. Young children often know a great deal about it. Four concepts outlined in the book The Craft of Children's Writing (Newman, 1984) provide a useful framework when looking at children's writing.

The first concept is intention. Children are aware that print has meaning. Their early attempts at writing have purpose and clearly show their level of understanding. The intent may be hard to recognize but is usually there.

Organization is the second concept. This includes form, punctuation, grammar, writing from left to right, and the format of the writing on the page. The organization of children's writing demonstrates their level of awareness of writing conventions.

Experimentation is one of the most important concepts mentioned. Learning to write is made up of many attempts. Unless children experiment they will not take the risks involved to be a successful writer. The refinement of children's writing is a "consequence of experimentation" (Newman, 1984, p. 31).

The final concept is orchestration. This is the "complex decision-making that must go on in the process of creating any language" (Newman, 1984, p. 32). The child is dealing with all facets of language at once.

The concepts of intention, organization, experimentation, and orchestration occur in concert. Complex transactions take place in the writing process. Children are experienced language users and "know there is too much to orchestrate initially to make correct writing their goal" (Newman, 1984). They are willing to experiment with writing the way that more experienced writers do (Newman, 1984, p. 32). Children become more sophisticated in each of these areas as their writing develops.

Understanding how people learn to read, write, and speak is crucial to teachers of reading and writing. Reading and writing programs that allow students to progress at a natural pace are being developed. Portfolios of work samples are kept to see the progress made by students.

#### The Writing Process for Students with Special Needs

Setting up classrooms that apply these principles is challenging. It is not easy to teach students to be comfortable and at ease with writing. Applying these principles to special education "is a formidable challenge" (Duque's, 1986, p. 214). At the first grade level, teachers often only give average and above-average students the chance to create written work. Children identified as below average are told to copy the teacher's work or dictate to an adult. These children are often placed in classes "where the predominant philosophy maintains that basic skills must be taught" (Nedboy & Rich, 1977, p. 92).

The student with special needs often is not given the chance to go through the developmental stages of writing. The holistic approach predominant in many schools today often applies only to regular or gifted

students. There are still special education teachers who believe that whole language curriculum will not be effective for students with special needs. These educators advocate the use of a skills based curriculum for these students. They are taught skills that they practice. Writing is broken down and learned in parts and then put back together (Dudley-Marling & Rhodes, 1988).

The developmental stages of writing are similar for all children. However, they may differ in how quickly they progress through them. Most children have gone through the scribble stage before they reach first grade. Students with special needs may still be in the scribble stage because they have been taught with a skills based curriculum and have not been given the opportunity to progress through the developmental stages of writing (Dudley-Marling & Rhodes, 1988).

"They need opportunities to use conventions, and at the same time, they require the understanding and patience of informed adults who will allow them to discover the uses of print without having to be overly concerned with forms" (Dudley-Marling & Rhodes, 1988, p. 25).

"Students who have difficulty with writing tasks often feel helpless or blame themselves or their intelligence" (MacArthur & Schwartz, 1990, p. 460). Students with special needs dislike writing and will resist an activity they see as pointless, difficult, which they failed at before. This happens when writing is taught as an exercise in developing skills with no real purpose. When students write for real audiences their attitudes change. They become motivated and excited by writing. The skills they develop are guided by the "need to write so that others will understand" (MacArthur & Schwartz, 1990, p. 460).

Alfreda B. Furnas (1991, p. 3) made a statement about students with special needs and their view of themselves as readers, writers, and learners. She wrote, "Though these children have different problems affecting their learning, they all have one thing in common: fear about themselves as readers, as writers, as learners. I found my greatest challenge in teaching these students was one of the heart, not of the head." Most children "desire to become literate and will accomplish this in spite of vast difficulties and challenges" (Tefft Cousin, 1991, p. 72).

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Observations and results of programs already in place for children identified as below average "lead to a view of early writing as part of the natural process of developmental language learning" (Dobson, 1985, p. 36). Programs that include daily spontaneous writing let children work at their level of understanding. Students view themselves as writers. "At a fundamental level it affects the way in which the teacher conceptualizes children as learners" (Dobson, 1985, p. 36). Looking at learners in this way "should lead to teaching that operates at a level that is meaningful and worthwhile to children" (Dobson, 1985, p. 36).

Writers are people who are in control of what they write. Children whose writing is controlled by a teacher cannot be writers. Children need responsibility for their own writing. Teachers who force their students to copy or insist on taking control of their writing will never know if the students will be able to function as writers (Hall, 1989).

All students with special needs may not become totally proficient writers. They develop skills slowly and may not reach levels exhibited by normally developing learners. Reasonable expectations of some

students may be to develop their written language so it is equal to their oral language. They ought to be able to express themselves in writing as well as they can speak (Duque's, 1986).

Whole language activities that encourage the naturalistic development of writing must be used for all students, not just regular and gifted students. Activities that fragment language, that discourage students from taking chances, and don't permit exchange of ideas, make reading and writing more difficult (Newman, 1984). Environments that encourage children to experiment with written language help them "become comfortable and successful writers" (Newman, 1984, p. 72). What teachers do is crucial to the success of a writing program and the success of the students in it (Teidt, 1989).

#### A Framework for Curriculum Design and Organization

There are four principles of effective writing instruction in Isaacson's article "Teaching Written Expression." They provide a guideline for teaching writing in the classroom.

1. Allow sufficient time for writing instruction and practice.

2. Teach writing as a process.

3. Teach writing through interactive group experiences.

4. Avoid excessive use of corrective feedback.

Newman (1984, p. 72) also includes some guiding principles that are helpful to teachers and parents.

\* We need to place meaning at the forefront of learning about written language.

\* We need to accept the fact that development takes place on many fronts at the same time.

\* We need to understand the importance of experimentation and risk taking in the process of learning to write.

\* We need to support children's experiments, watching for conventions as they creep into their writing.

\* We need to recognize the importance of having audiences respond to the meaning of what children have written.

\* We need to provide demonstrations of what is involved in being a writer.

These principles along with the four given by Isaacson provide guidelines for writing instruction in the classroom. It is important to understand the language process when teaching writing. It should be a natural process that incorporates the development of oral language.

The instruction of writing for students with special needs is not different than the instruction of writing given in regular education. The writing instruction for students with special needs should also follow the guidelines given by Newman and Isaacson. These students should be taught in the same natural, holistic, and supportive manner that is used in regular education.

#### Design and Methodology

The students in this study were students with special needs. They were students enrolled in my self-contained, special education classroom. One student was identified as communicatively handicapped and the other was identified as other health impaired. They were both in my classroom for the full two-year period when writing samples were collected. Journal writings

were collected from October, 1989 to July 1991. Samples were taken from all students enrolled in my class during this period. The writing samples of two students were used in this study. These samples were chosen to represent the student that made the most progress and the student who made the least progress over a period of two years. These students were chosen because they were enrolled in my classroom during the the full duration of the study. This eliminated the effect that two different teachers would have had over their writing during the sampling period. One student represented the population with learning difficulties and the other was representative of the population with more severe involvement, he had physical limitations in addition to his learning problems.

The first student was a female, who was born on March 17, 1981. She had been identified as communicatively handicapped when she was in kindergarten and was placed in a self contained, special education classroom. This student will be referred to as Crystal in this study.

The second student was a male who was born on November 18, 1979. He was identified as a student with other health impairments. This student had physical

limitations as a result of an injury to the head that caused him to have poor physical coordination and poor fine motor skills in addition to his learning handicap. He had been in a self-contained, special education classroom since he started school when he was almost four years old. Writing was a difficult, physical task for him to master. This student will be referred to as Matt in this study.

The samples of writing were analyzed using Newman's framework of intention, orchestration, experimentation, and organization (1988). For this study the following definitions apply: The purpose and understanding behind children's writing was intention. Organization included form, punctuation, grammar, writing from left to right, and the format of the writing on the page. Experimentation was the many attempts children make when learning to write. The complex decision making that went on during the writing process was orchestration.

The samples were examined for the characteristics found in Newman's framework (1988). The characteristics from each sample were placed on a chart (Tables 1 and 2) under the appropriate heading. The

chart entries were summarized for each sample. I examined twelve of Crystal's and twelve of Matt's writing samples, one every two months.

Prior to enrollment in my class, these students had never had the opportunity to write freely without copying someone else's writing. The students came from classrooms where a skills based curriculum was used. They were both comfortable with copying but did not know what to do when asked to write without having something to copy.

I introduced journal writing to the students in my classroom during October, 1989. They each had a book with blank pages in it. Every day they were asked to date the entry and then write about the topic of the day or a topic of their choice. They were encouraged to write on their own without help from the teacher. Spelling and punctuation were not taught formally. When the students completed their writing they read the entry to me and I wrote what they said. When the students started to experiment with punctuation and spelling I showed them how the words were spelled or where the punctuation belonged, after they read their entry to me.

Crystal, October 1989 to July 1991

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Experimentation</u>	<u>Intention</u>	<u>Orchestration</u>
10/89 #1 List of what bears did, Organized it like her day is organized	Put lines on paper, Used print from environment (life)	Used name spelling, Used toto over and over, Used letters she knows	Maintained topic
11/89 #2 Left to right Top to bottom Made up of letters, Spelled & read Dad	Two words spelled right Inventive spelling goog-going me-my	Shown she could write Dad when writing about Dad	Topic maintained, Used words she can spell
1/90 #3 left to right top to bottom Spelled & read: I, my, mom, the	Used different types of lettering, Bubble letters. Four words spelled right	Told what she got for Christmas Made sure someone knew she wasn't wasting bubbles	Maintained topic, Has a message about wasting bubbles
3/90 #4 Wrote on lines	Twelve conventional spelling (catn) for kitten) Relates conver- sation, he said she said	Let people know I'm getting a cat and it's all right with parents	Maintained Topic, Experiment with spelling, flows from beginning to end



Table 1, Continued

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Experimentation</u>	<u>Intention</u>	<u>Orchestration</u>
5/90 #5 Left to right Top to bottom	Experiments with spelling of Gramma and Aunt, Used bare for bear, pu for up	Told what she liked to do	Maintained topic, 7 words spelled right, A complete sentence
7/90 #6 Used sentence Space between words, left to right, top to bottom	Capitals at the beginning of five out of six lines, Seven words spelled right, on most words	Told why they went to beach, for two birthdays	Topic maintained Showed awareness of capitals at beginning of sentences
9/90 #7 Capitals at beginning of lines	Spelled saw--sllle each time she wrote it, Used print in room to spell "green"	List of what she saw on a field trip	Topic maintained List of what she saw connected by "and" & "I"
11/90 #8 Used conversation, Exactly what mom told her, Initial sounds	Writes see you, reads my gramma, Writes "3:" for 3:00. Ten words spelled right, Put capitals at the beginning of second thought	Told what happened & what her mom's instruction to her was	Related what her mom said when she going to Gramma's

Table 1, Continued

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Experimentation</u>	<u>Intention</u>	<u>Orchestration</u>
1/91 #9 Crosses out to because it didn't make sense when she read it back	Seven words spelled right, three complete thoughts connected by "and", Capital at beginning	Wrote about what you do in the snow	Makes a state- ment and has reason to back it up (because)
3/91 #10 Picture to show sleeping man (zzz)	Words came out of a person's mouth in a bubble. ZZZ's to show he's sleeping, eight words spelled right	ZZZ's come out to show how a machine catches robbers when you sleep, Was spelled wis each time	Consistent initial sounds, Cross out a to spell caught (cate)
5/91 #11 Thoughts put together with "and", Left to right, top to bottom	Thirteen words spelled right, Most others just one letter missing or substituted his--hes, white--wite black--block	Described a picture	Wrote name in cursive, Capital at the beginning, Topic maintained
7/91 #12 Thoughts put together with "and"	Beginning to use ending sounds, spelling is becoming conventional	Described what happened to her	Understood conversa- tion, she wrote: "she said" Topic maintained

### Case Study I, Crystal

Writing in journals began in October, 1989.

Crystal was eager to write. It was evident Crystal had some previous writing experience because she knew that letters and words belonged on the pages. She also wrote the entry left to right and top to bottom. It was not long before she was reading her journal entries over and over. She enjoyed reading what she had written.

October, 1989. This entry (Figure 1) was done near the beginning of Crystal's second grade year in school. It showed an existing understanding of written language. It was written left to right and top to bottom on the page. Crystal also drew two lines on the paper to write on. The writing included a spelling using the letters of her name. Her name was one word she could spell and she used it in this entry. She also wrote and read the word the. The use of print from the environment was also shown by the use of the word "life." The word was copied from somewhere in the room. She copied the word but did not read it back

when she read her entry. The same topic was maintained throughout the entry. The entry described what the bears did and was organized in a way that reflected a typical day in her life.

November, 1989. This entry (Figure 2) had two words that used conventional spelling, I and dad. She used inventive spelling when she wrote the word going--goog and my--me. The writing was written left to right but did not go to the right edge of the paper on each line. It was also written top to bottom, but does not use the whole page. In this entry Crystal used words she could spell and read. The entry did not make up a complete thought when read back but, did stay on the topic of her dad.

January, 1990: Crystal wrote and read the words I, my, mom, and the, in this entry (Figure 3). She wrote left to right on the page. The last line was a reply to her mother and was written on a different line. She used different types of printing in this entry. One line was written in block letters. The message she seemed to want to make clear was that she did not waste the bubbles of her new baby doll. She maintained the topic and wrote three sentences, but did not use punctuation.

January 1990 <sup>26</sup>  
I got a new baby bubbles  
my mom said don't waste the  
bubbles.  
I didn't.

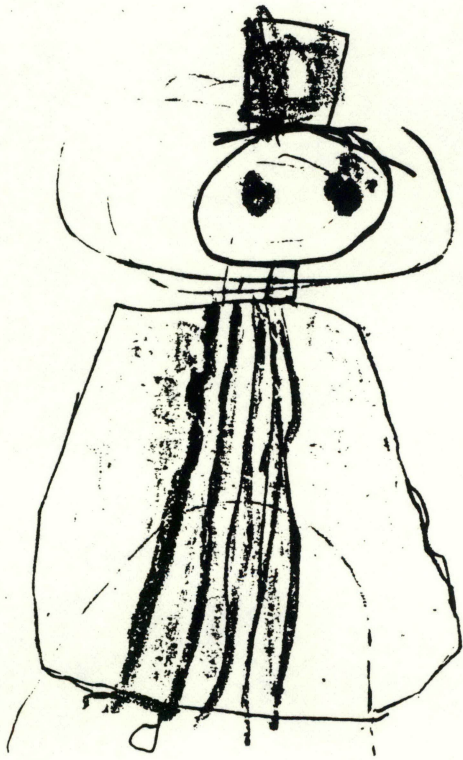


Figure 3: January, 1990

March, 1990. Twelve words were spelled conventionally in this entry (Figure 4). She wrote and read all of them. She wrote about a kitten but spelled it catn. Crystal put lines on the pages and wrote on them. She used one period in this entry. There were two lines in this entry that stated her mom said she could have a kitten. When she read this to me, she wanted me to know it was all right for her to get a kitten. The topic of this entry was maintained almost to the end. She did not stay on topic for the last sentence.

May, 1990. The inventive spelling used in this entry (Figure 5) was very interesting. Crystal used the word bare when she meant to use bear. She spelled up--pu. She experimented with the spelling of Aunt and Gramma and put a capital on each word. The sentence she wrote was a complete sentence with a capital letter at the beginning.

July, 1990. This entry, shown in Figure 6, was the first entry of her third grade year. Crystal put capital letters at the beginning of five of the six lines she wrote. She had the correct initial sound at the beginning of most of the words she used. This entry was organized in sentences. She put space

<sup>March 1990</sup>  
~~I have~~ ~~she~~ ~~a~~ ~~cat~~ ~~to~~ ~~day~~  
<sup>am</sup> <sup>getting</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>little</sup> <sup>kitten</sup> <sup>today.</sup>  
 my mom ~~and~~,  
~~my~~ ~~mom~~ ~~said~~ ~~I~~ ~~could~~ ~~have~~ ~~a~~ ~~kitten~~  
~~she~~ ~~has~~ ~~a~~ ~~cat~~

~~to~~ ~~day~~ ~~I~~ ~~have~~ ~~to~~ ~~work~~ ~~to~~ ~~get~~  
~~my~~ ~~cat~~ ~~to~~ ~~day~~

<sup>little kitten</sup>  
~~my~~ ~~cat~~ ~~to~~ ~~day~~ ~~my~~ ~~mom~~  
<sup>said</sup> <sup>could</sup> <sup>have</sup> <sup>a</sup> <sup>little</sup> <sup>kitten.</sup>  
~~she~~ ~~I~~ ~~could~~ ~~have~~ ~~a~~ ~~little~~ ~~kitten.~~ ~~and~~

~~my~~ ~~DAD~~ ~~when~~ ~~he~~ ~~gets~~ ~~home~~ ~~he~~ ~~will~~  
~~eat~~ ~~tonight.~~ ~~I~~ ~~don't~~  
~~my~~ ~~how~~ ~~BH~~ ~~know~~ ~~DAD~~

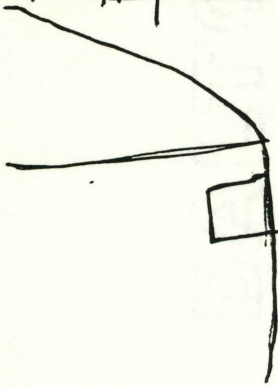


Figure 4: March, 1990

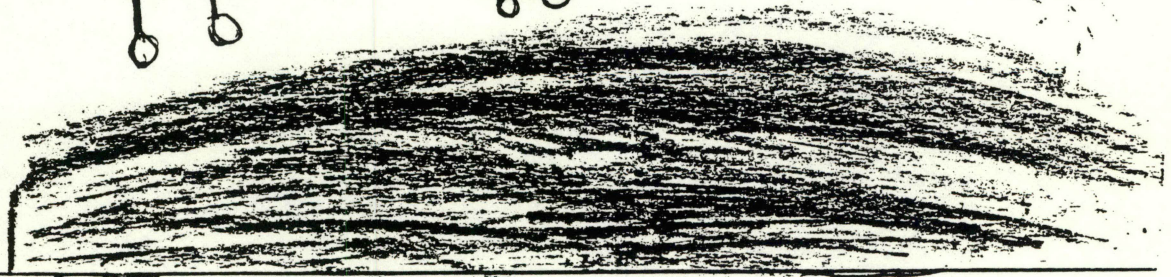
May 1990

~~ink~~ The Bla  $\odot$  out  
 my GAB BLAL Ad by  
 GAB sed # to me  
~~et~~ out to me  
 Berke I sto  
 my Gtat to  
 to Berke et I Wey  
 $\odot$  LA + the

Figure 5: May, 1990



July 1990



I <sup>am</sup> mei <sup>going</sup> go to the  
 beach. <sup>with</sup> Beie Wehie my  
 friends. <sup>It's</sup> Beie is my  
 friends DADs  
 birthday and my friends  
 moms <sup>birthday</sup> BEIE DAX TO HILL

Figure 6: July, 1990

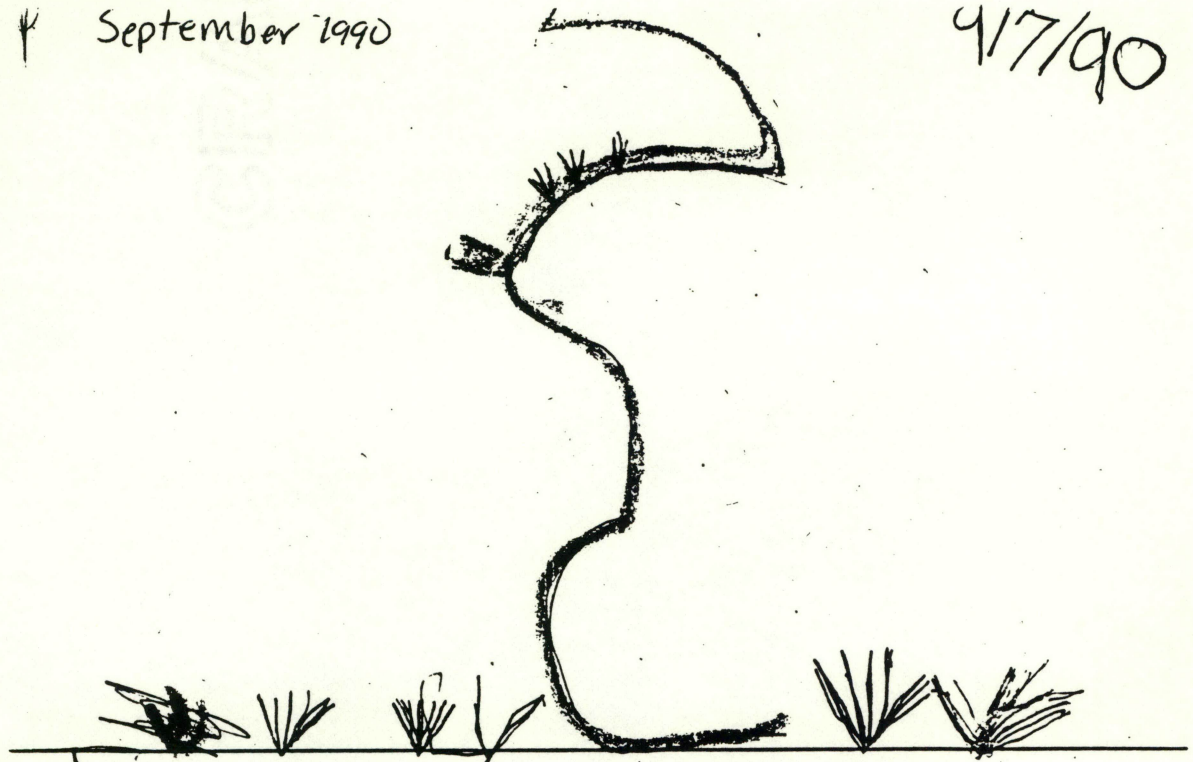
between the words, showing an understanding of words and how they are used on the page. This also indicated an understanding of the concept that words are made up of combinations of letters. The journal entry told the reader they went to the beach and the reason why they went.

September, 1990. Crystal organized her paper into sentences by placing capitals at the beginning of each line. The inventive spelling she used for saw--slle is the same each time she wrote the word. The word green was copied from somewhere in the room. Crystal not only used the correct initial sounds when using inventive spelling but also used correct final consonant sounds. This entry, as shown in Figure 7, was a list of things she saw on a field trip which were connected together by and and I.

November, 1990. Crystal experimented with conversation in this entry, as shown in Figure 8. She wrote the statement: "Be home at 3:00 and eat your supper." This showed her understanding of "written down talk." This statement told the reader exactly

September 1990

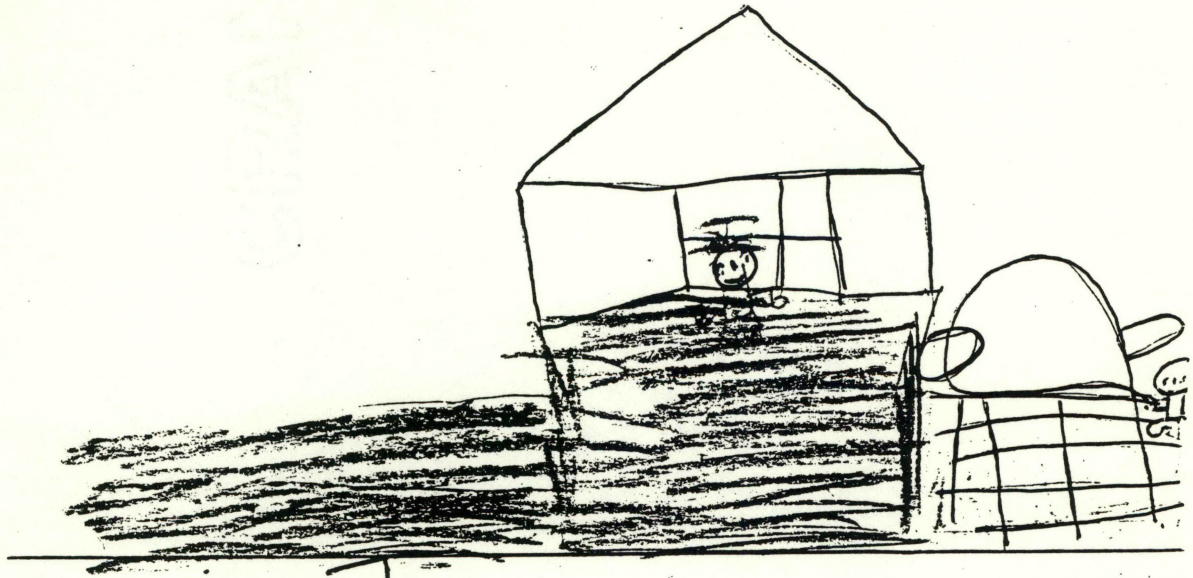
9/17/90



I Site Rocks and  
<sub>Saw</sub> <sub>rocks</sub>  
Bills and a loan  
<sub>Trails</sub> <sub>Train</sub>  
~~loan~~ and a green  
Pie Bills and ~~loan~~  
<sub>prickly plants</sub>  
and Site Some  
<sub>Saw</sub> <sub>Some</sub>  
~~Ducks~~ When we go  
<sub>ducks</sub> <sub>went</sub>  
The we the to the Site  
<sub>to</sub> <sub>the</sub> <sub>trail</sub> <sub>went</sub>

Figure 7: September, 1990

November 1990



I am going to my  
 grammas house to  
 see your  
 and mymar  
 I told me Beme  
 said to me "Be home at 3:00 and  
 eat your supper.  
 At 3: and  
 eat your siel

Figure 8: November, 1990

what her mom said to her. Crystal wrote 3 o'clock as 3:. The letter B, in the word be, was capitalized. This was the beginning of her mother's statement about when to be home. The word be was not the beginning of a line, but the beginning of a new thought.

January, 1991. Crystal wrote three complete sentences in this entry and connected them together with the word and, (Figure 9). She put a capital at the beginning of the long sentence. Most of the inventive spelling was readable in this entry, the spelling was very close to conventional. Crystal read the entry to herself before she shared it with me and crossed out the word to because it did not make sense where she had written it. This entry makes the statement: "I like to play in the snow." After writing this statement, Crystal gave three reasons why she liked to play in the snow. This was an indication of her increasing capability to use more complicated language skills and transfer them to paper through writing.

March, 1991. Crystal wrote about an invention that catches robbers when you sleep. When she drew a picture of the invention she put a sleeping man in the picture. The man had a "word bubble" coming out of his

January 1991

1/8/91



I Lick the Sowe  
like snow

Bcayx We cac Billaa  
because can build

SOWeMah in the Sowe  
snowman snow

and we can Mak sme  
make some

Sowe Bills and taue  
snow balls throw

to at ar fhcs  
at our friends

Figure 9: January, 1991

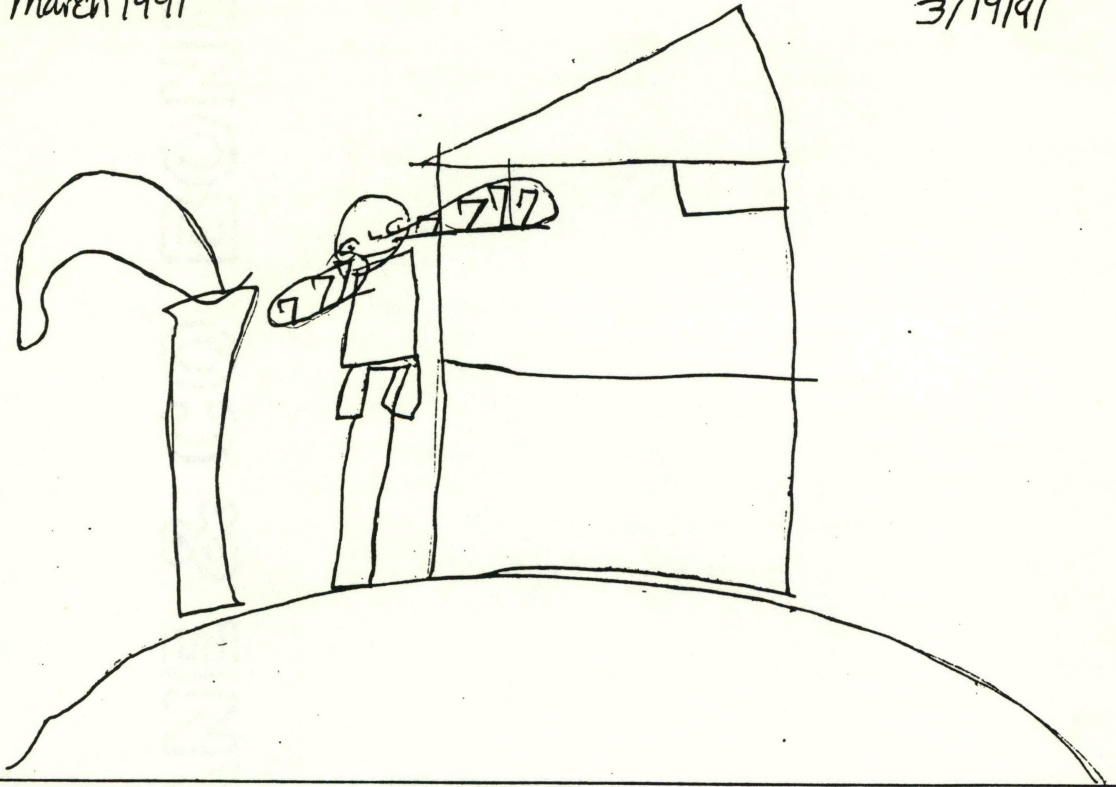
mouth with the letters "ZZZ" in it, as shown in Figure 10. This was another indication of her growing knowledge of written language because she was beginning to use other styles of writing. She was imitating the cartoonist's style of writing in this entry. Crystal also had consistent correct initial sounds in the words she wrote. The mistakes she made were corrected by crossing them out and replacing the mistake with the correct letter. The word used for caught was "cate". Crystal first wrote it aate. The a was crossed out and replaced with a c.

May, 1991. This entry was organized as a series of sentences connected by and, as shown in Figure 11. Thirteen words were spelled correctly. Most of the other words were only missing one letter or had only one wrong letter substituted for the correct letter. For example: hes for his, wite for white, and block for black. Crystal was beginning to use cursive writing when this was written because her name was written in cursive. This entry was a description of a picture she was looking at. The topic of the entry was maintained throughout the whole entry.

July, 1991. This entry, like the May entry, was a series of sentences connected by and. Crystal was

march 1991

3/19/91



His machine was made  
 his Manes wis Myest  
 out of feathers  
 Out of Fuen One Day  
 was  
 he wis out in the  
 shed  
 shelter he wis  
 making a machine  
 Mahn a Mashe he  
 made catcher machine  
 Mahn a crye RR more  
 it caught robbers  
 date Ropres

Figure 10: March, 1991



5/3/91

crystal

May 1991

I went to Gessler Pike and we  
 went to Kessler Park  
 and we had a picnic and we played  
 soccer and we played Hide & Go  
 seek and my Dad and my  
 two sisters went and my grandpa  
 and my grandma went  
 and my mom went  
 and my friend Melissa went with  
 us

Figure 11: May, 1991

beginning to use the correct final consonant sounds each time she wrote a word. Her spelling was becoming more conventional with each journal entry. This entry (Figure 12) was a description of something that happened to her. She used a written conversation style beginning with the words she said. The topic was maintained throughout the entry. This entry was done shortly before Crystal was moved into an intermediate, self-contained, classroom for students with special needs.

The examination of Crystal's journal writing shows a definite progression in written language development. She knew very few words to use in her writing when she first began write. There was no space between the words on the page. Crystal only used one capital letter at the beginning of the entry each time she wrote. She did not use punctuation at all. The topic was maintained throughout most of her entries from the time she began writing.

The evaluation of Crystal's final writing sample showed tremendous growth in the area of written language. Crystal wrote in sentences. She did not punctuate between them, but used and to connect the sentences together. She did not repeat the same

7/5/91

July 1991

CRYSTAL 7, 1991

I went to my grandpa's house  
 to watch the fireworks

light off

on the Fourth of July,

and we had a BBQ and then  
 had BBQ

We had ice cream and my mom

said to me "put your shoes on your  
 feet"

and my sister Kelli and my  
 sister

Sister Kim said to me "come to me  
 sister said 'come to me"

I have to talk to you a minute," she said  
 to me go to MOM AND ask her  
 "Go to mom home  
 I can go home"  
 of can go home"

Figure 12: July, 1991

letters or group of letters over and over in order to fill the page. Her inventive spelling was consistent throughout each entry, using the same spelling for the same word each time she wrote it. She spelled quite a few words conventionally at the end of the sampling period. Her inventive spelling often had only one letter substituted for the correct letter or omitted. She read her entries over to check them before it was read by the teacher. She was not only writing words correctly but reading them as well.

Crystal used every aspect of Newman's framework (1988); intention, organization, experimentation, and orchestration each time she wrote. She was able to use intention, organization, and experimentation together to orchestrate her writing so it made sense to her. Every time she wrote the aspect of orchestration grew. She was able to begin making the complex decisions necessary to the writing process toward the end of the sampling period. Her understanding of written language grew each day she wrote.

Crystal's journal became a book she choose to read for enjoyment and often read it during Sustained Silent Reading time. Writing became purposeful and meaningful to Crystal during the time she was in my class. It became something she enjoyed doing and did it often during her free time at school.

Table 2

Matt, October 1989 to February 1992

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Experimentation</u>	<u>Intention</u>	<u>Orchestration</u>
10/89 #1 Scribbles randomly on page	Used only two words he could spell, first & name	Name was important Large in orange letters, Stands out on page	Writing did not have meaning at this point to him, He did not his scribbles
12/89 #2 Covered page with a scribbles top to bottom Added letters and numbers to it	Used a few letters, Wrote I, is, Used the number six also	Could not read it to teacher	Began to understand writing is made of letters
2/90 #3 Left to right, top to bottom understood writing is letters	Used no known words, combines letters and scribbles, used letters "tt" frequently (they end his name)	Read it to teacher, Did not follow writing when he read	No topic or story line, Low language skills were a problem with student
4/90 #4 Left to right right, Put "words" (letters) in middle of rain	Used "tt" endings, Wrote "TV" but did not read it, Numbers the lines on the side	Writing about rain, put blue rain- drops all over the page	Topic maintained, drawing showed topic

Table 2, Continued

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Experimentation</u>	<u>Intention</u>	<u>Orchestration</u>
6/90 #5 Numbered lines, top to bottom, left to right	Wrote ABCD and used "to" over and over again	Lines filled with "o" and "t", Could not read it to teacher	Writing covered page
9/90 #6 Left to right Top to bottom Letters made up writing	Used more letters, used numbers also, still has scribbling at times	To do what teacher asked him to do	Read back to teacher (not all lines written were read)
11/90 #7 Top to bottom Left to right Punctuation on two lines	Put periods at the end of two lines, Wrote "the" but does not read "the"	Wrote about field trip, drew a picture of a bus	Made up of letters completely, Reading matched picture
1/91 #8 Recognized writing is made up of letters, filled each line, left to right	Name spelling appeared in this sample, read & wrote "I"-capitalized it, Uses all letters no numbers	Picture of dancers They are happy	Story matched Writing & drawing have meaning
3/91 #9 Left to right Top to bottom	Used & read "I" three times, almost spells sick--sisk, Used print from environment	Wrote about home Told why he stayed home, was sick	Picture and topic matched

Table 2, Continued

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Experimentation</u>	<u>Intention</u>	<u>Orchestration</u>
5/91 #10 Left to right on three lines	Almost all words are copied from color word They are not read as color words	He knew there color words but not all words read were colors	Writing is made up of words
6 /91 #11 Fills page with letters and words	Wrote and read "I" and "dog"	Wrote to tell what he was going to do, had a story line	Stayed on topic, Writing was in the lines and has words and letters
2/92 #12 Written with help on spelling, spaces between some words	Format of a paragraph, Punctuation and capitalization were used	He wrote a story and he used the cause and effect reasoning (If this then that)	Follows a story form, Capitals used, period at the end of paragraph



## Case Study II, Matt

Writing in journals began in October, 1989. Matt was a reluctant writer. He did not like to write and often filled pages with scribbling. He had copied things off of the board, but when his first attempt at writing on his own was series of scribbles all over the page I realized he had little previous knowledge of written language. His physical limitations were difficult for him to overcome. His writing was very hard to read and he found writing a frustrating experience.

October, 1989. Matt scribbled all over the page in large circular motions and then wrote his first and last name in large letters on top of the scribbles for his first entry (Figure 13). His name was an important word for him because he wrote it in large letters and went over it in orange crayon. When I asked him to tell me about his entry he was not able to tell me anything about it. At this point written language has very little meaning for Matt.

December, 1989. The entry this month was still scribbled but was written from top to bottom on the page, as shown in Figure 14. There were a few letters

October 1989

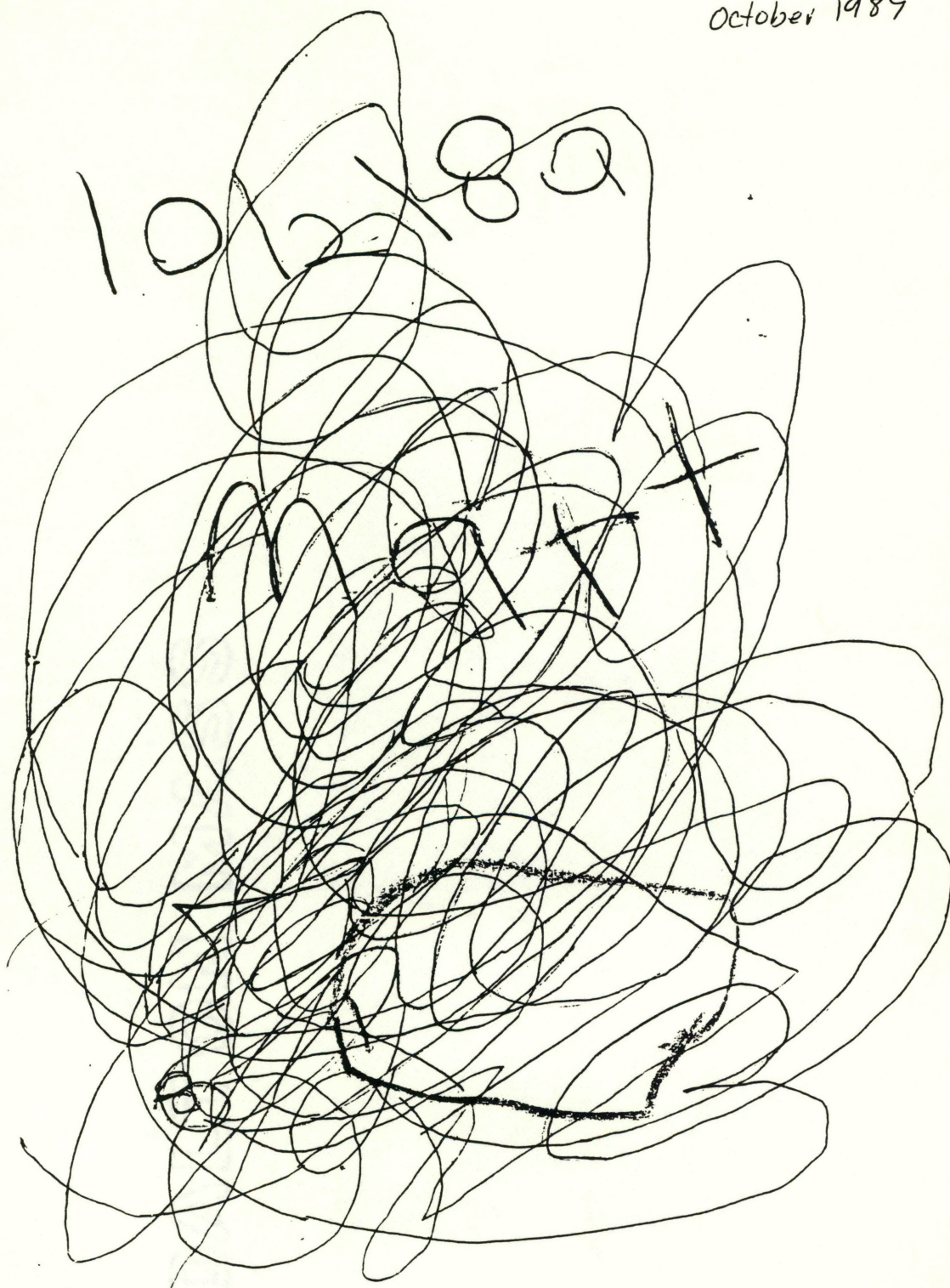


Figure 13: October, 1989



and numbers mixed in with the scribbles. He also used the words I and is. He could not read it back to me when I asked him what it said.

February, 1990. Matt wrote from left to right and top to bottom in this entry (Figure 15). He used tt frequently on the page. These two letters are found at the end of his name. Letters were used instead of scribbles so he was beginning to understand writing is made up of letters. Matt read his writing to me but did not follow it when he read. Most of the time he did not even look at his journal while he was reading it. There was no maintenance of topic in this entry and the sentences are incomplete.

April, 1990. Matt placed his writing in the middle of the page with rain drops falling all around it, as shown in Figure 16. There was a person drawn on the page with the rain. The story was about playing in the rain so he put a person in the rain. He was writing about rain and stayed on the topic of rain when he read it to me. He used tt ending frequently in this entry. The lines of writing were numbered down the left side of the page.

February 1990

C M F h u d c L L i e h  
 stuff inside a wagon  
 W h u + d u e (S h e r)  
 I make a wagon I help

S F W  
 my daddy put the wagon  
 C h h L L e f + s e h e r  
~~together~~  
 Although

Figure 15: February, 1990

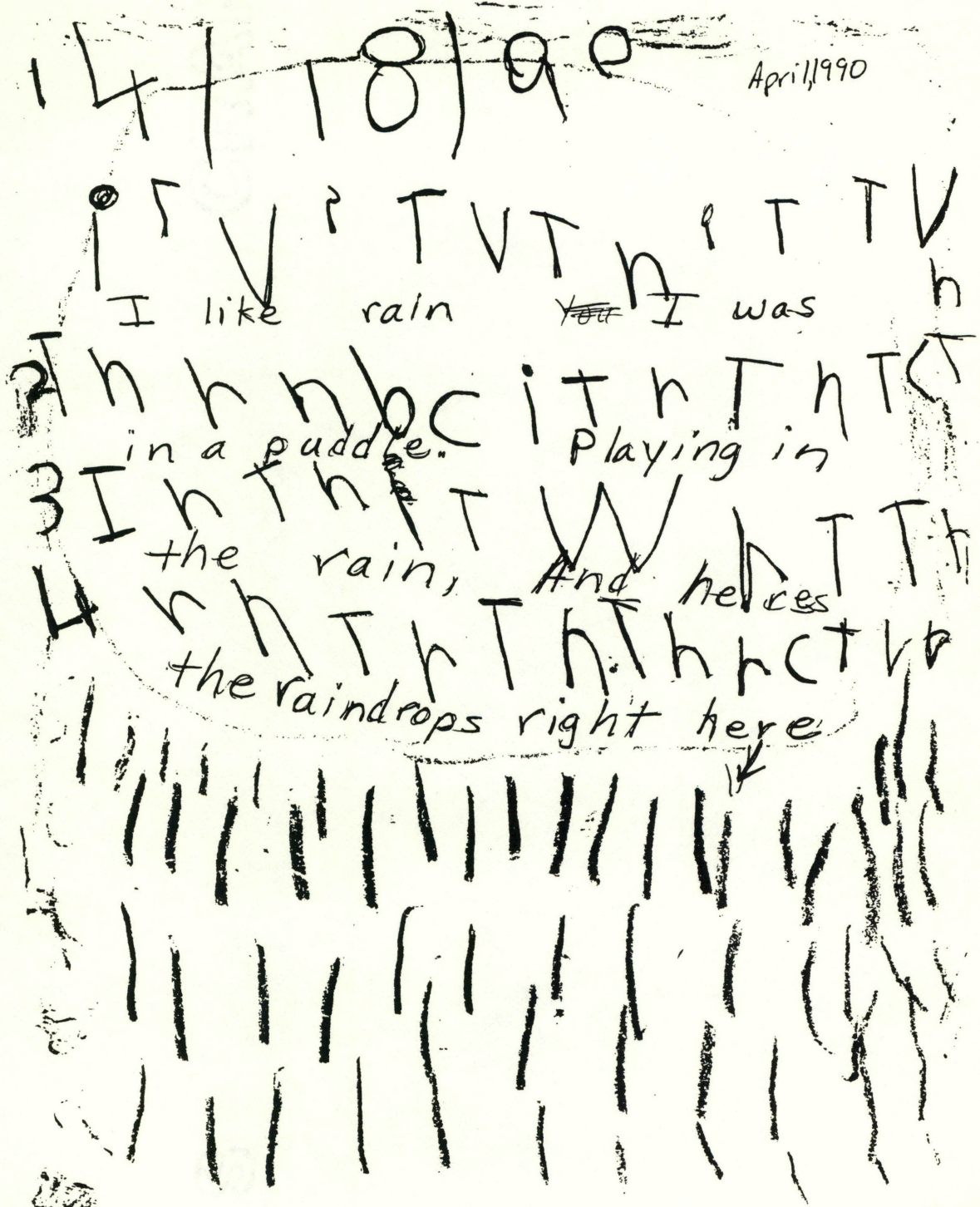


Figure 16: April, 1990

June, 1990. The sequence ABCD was the beginning of this entry (Figure 17) followed by tototo over and over again filling the page. Matt could not tell me what he wrote about and he could not remember what he wrote about. The writing did not have any meaning to Matt as a form of communication.

September, 1990. More letters of the alphabet were used in this entry (Figure 18). He put a few numbers in the entry and did have some scribbling in this entry. He could read it back to the teacher but not all the lines were read. Matt used letters, scribbles, and numbers to fill the page. There appeared to be no real purpose behind his writing in terms of communication with the reader.

November, 1990. The word the was written in this entry (Figure 19). Matt wrote it but did not read it. He put periods at the end of two lines. He began to use more letters in his writing. The picture he drew for this entry matched the reading of the writing. The subject of the entry was a field trip and Matt drew a bus.

January, 1991. Matt wrote each line, filling the line, from left to right, as shown in Figure 20. He used some spelling using the letters of his name. The

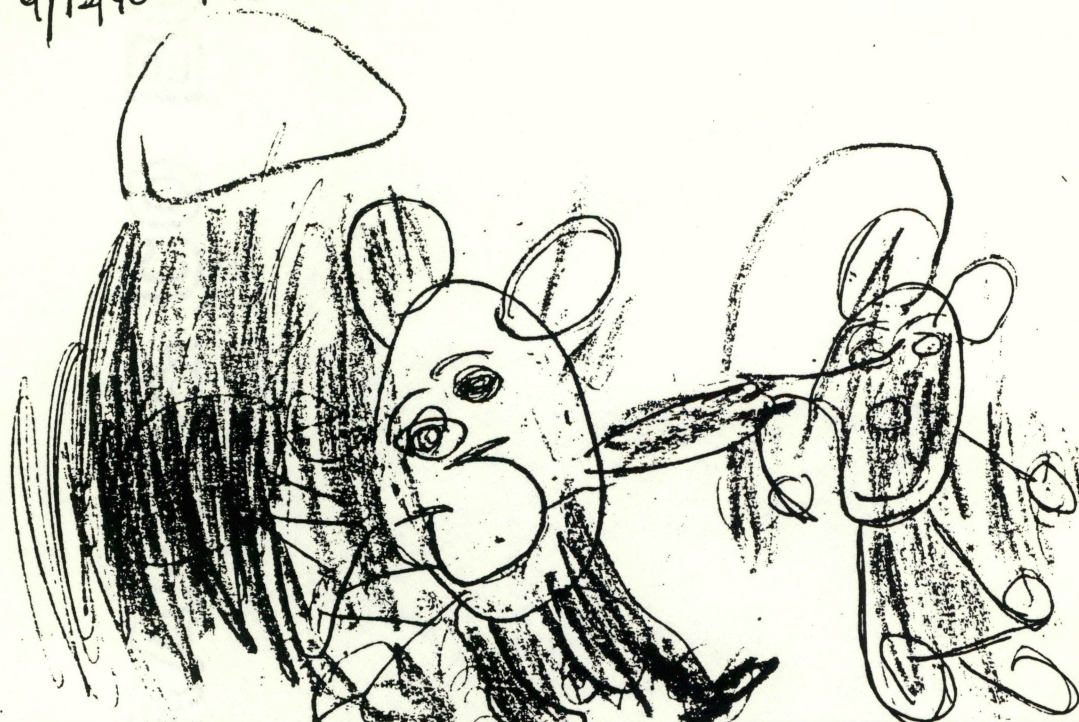
June 1990

1 b o y B D C x s t o t o 27  
2 # o t o t t  
3  
4 o o t o p n x x t o o o  
5 t o t o t o n n ? z o o  
6 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
7 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
8 t o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
9 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
10 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
11 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
12 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
13 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
14 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
15 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
16 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
17 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
18 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
19 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
20 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
21 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
22 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
23 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
24 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
25 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o  
26 o o t o t o t o t o t o t o t o

Figure 17: June, 1990



9/12/90 nice

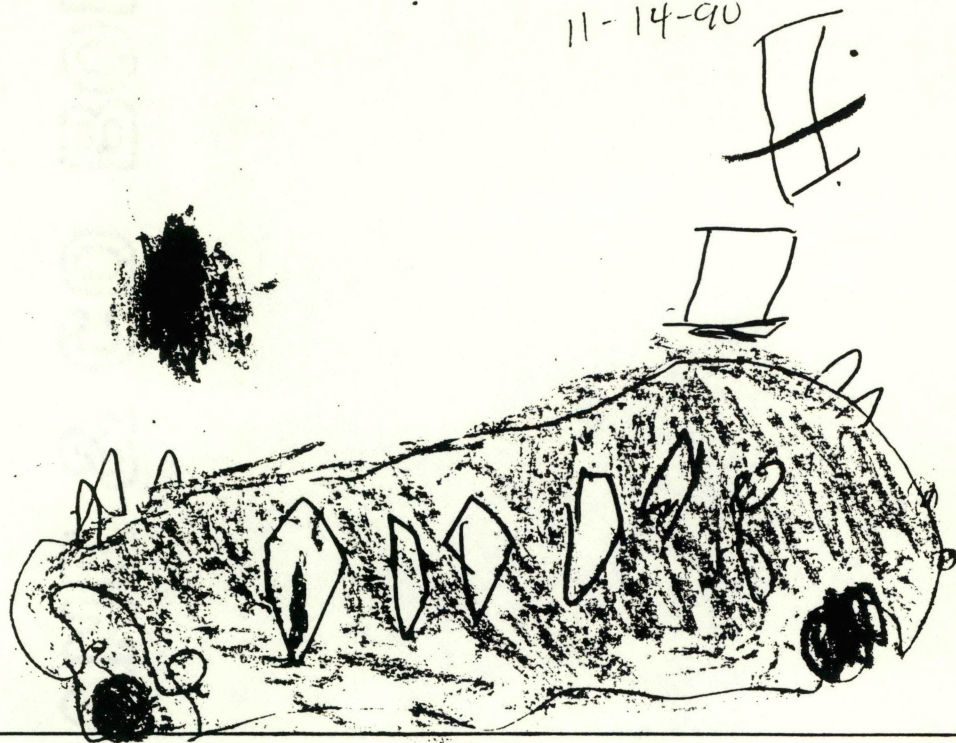


b o b u e k p o s t n e e k e  
 I stay home and  
 o f o t o t o o k p k b k e  
 I get ready for school.  
 b k e v m n e p t k o e x  
 Then I waiting for my bus  
 b o k i b o b t e b o k e  
 outside. The bus bring  
 k e o b b t o o e k o s t s  
 me here to school.  
 b i b k b o e e x t o b

Figure 18: September, 1990

September 1990

11-14-90



F MISS P VS VS P V . K

DB PK IN O P S PK PD P K P.

The BROH FGGS

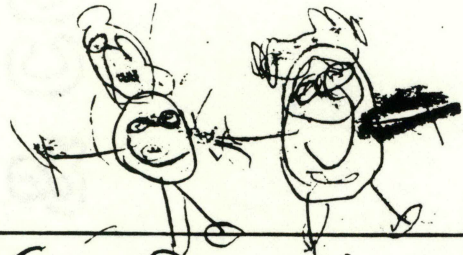
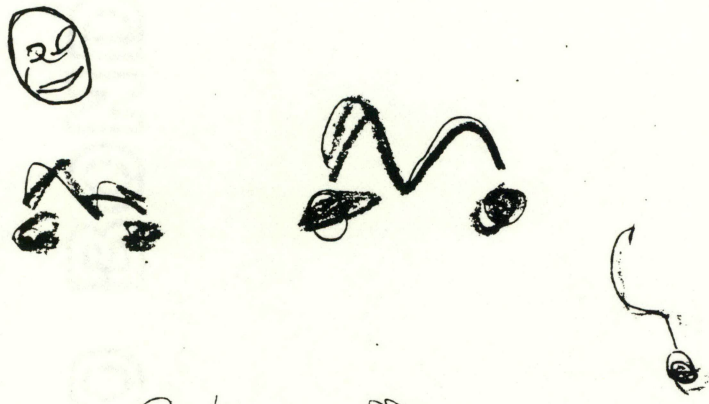
hatho i + o y o t ho r

We gonna go camping. We have to bring some lunch. We have to go on Friday.

Figure 19: November, 1990

November 1990

1-2441



I W C D Y V D W E H A x  
 i H F y c u o I v w e D I f  
 t e v o v D u t t t o v o k  
 I K D A u o o t t o t e

I like to dance in the cafeteria with  
 the man. He has a radio We dance  
 to music.

Figure 20: January, 1991

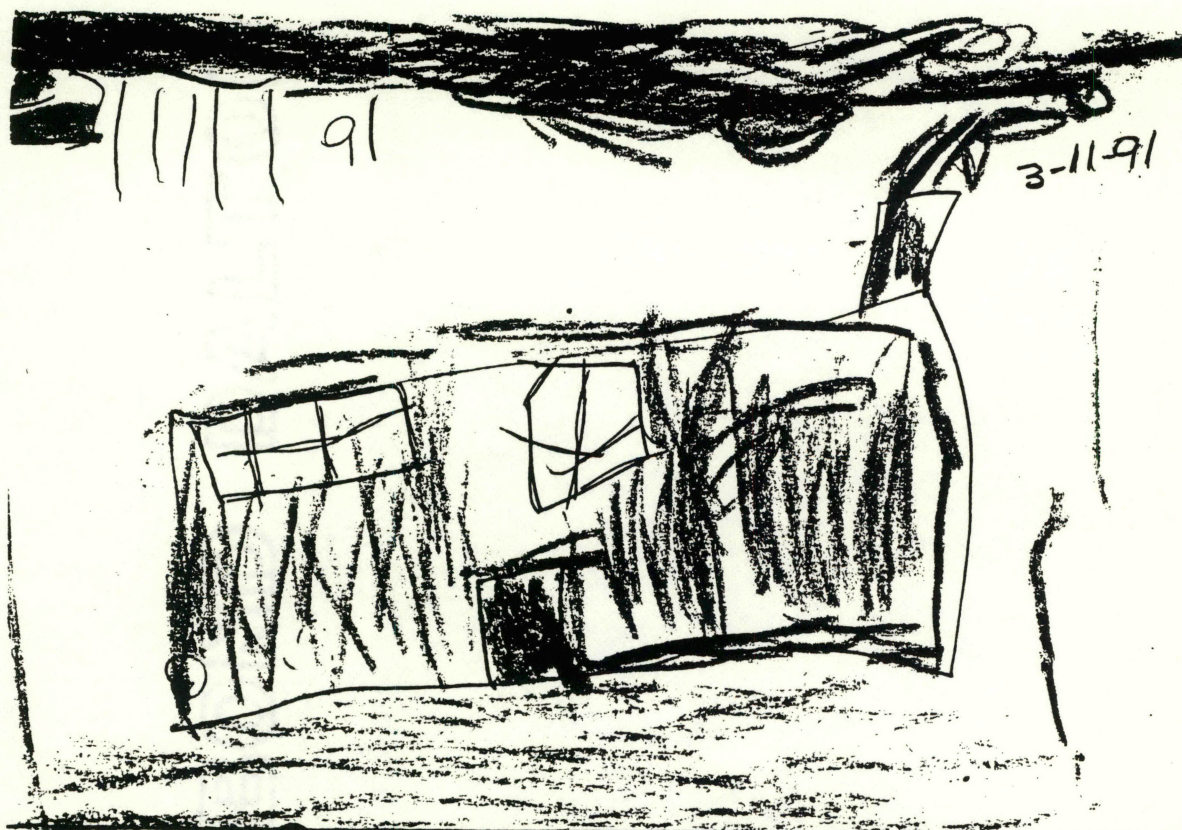
January 1991

word I was written and read back to the teacher. The I was also capitalized. The picture was of two dancers and that was what he read back to the teacher. Matt had put meaning behind his writing and drawing. He drew pictures and then wrote entries that matched his pictures. When the entries were read to the teacher they were explanations of the pictures. His writing was becoming focused on a topic and he was able to stay on the topic for the whole entry.

March, 1991. Matt used the word I three times in this entry (Figure 21). He almost spelled sick--sisk. There were words in this entry that he copied from somewhere in the classroom. The picture and the text matched in this entry also. He was telling why he stayed home, because he was sick.

May, 1991. Most of the words used in this entry (Figure 22) were copied from a poster with the names of colors on it. When Matt read them back to the teacher he did not read the words as they were written. The use of print from the environment was a way Matt used words in his writing.

June, 1991: This was one of the last entries (Figure 23) Matt did before he was transferred to another class. He filled the page with letters and



I F S D W T S I S K O P O I W T V M  
 P T Y F L O P Y K M Q P U M B C H  
 B R I K M O H M M Q T P  
 I stayed home sick. I had  
 a cough. My dad brought cough  
 medicine and I had to go to bed

Figure 21: March, 1991

March, 1991

matt s | 2 | a |

may 1991

STOP HCP Red yellow green

Red, white and yellow, green. A stop sign

SO R L R O S O R P O F M O S R K W K

~~K S~~ Green Pink Purple yellow

green

black

A handicap one person walking on crosswalk  
an arrow is pointing right. I see an  
arrow pointing down and another arrow  
pointing up.

Figure 22: May, 1991

June 1991

matt  
 I will my nintendo and my dad  
 will get me nintendo games at  
 the video store. My dad is going to  
 get the race car tape. And the big  
 foot tape. And my dad took the  
 tape to the video store. My dad went to  
 rent a tape at the new video store.  
 Then we went back home.  
 Then I played with my dog

T W P m n + o q m H P S  
 W D M P O G G W I P F V S T  
 V F W W + V Q M H P S  
 W I P M F M N J O + M H P  
 I W P M S S O A M H P S G + M  
 G M H P S + P M O H P S  
 F W P M P O G Q M M G H P S  
 W I W S + V N I W P M H P  
 F P M Y T O Q M H P S N T V P  
 W I W P M P O G M H P S Z M P M A O H  
 M + P Q M H P S Z N M V T O T  
 Q H P S S I M P O + Q M H P S Z  
 F P M P O G G F W P M O O G G H P

Figure 23: June, 1991

words. The words I and dog were written and read back. He stayed on the topic throughout the entry.

February, 1992: This writing sample was obtained from Matt's current teacher (Figure 24). The sample was written with help from the teacher. Matt spaced between the words and used punctuation and capitalization.

Matt's oral language skills were severely delayed. He had trouble remembering the topic and answering questions. His written language was also severely delayed. When he first began to write he had no purpose behind his writing in terms of communication. He scribbled frequently and often wrote because the teacher told him he had to. He used none of the words he could read and did not copy words from the environment.

His written language matured as he became more proficient in oral language skills. Matt's physical limitations made it very hard for him to learn to manipulate the pencil and paper. In spite of this, Matt made progress in the two years the samples were taken. He began to copy words from the environment and use words he knew how to spell when he wrote. Matt also used letters from his name in his writing.



Mat +  
2-28-92

If I had 17 brothers and  
 sisters to my family.  
 I would need with  
 of bedrooms and beds.  
 There would be lots of birthday  
 all year long. There would  
 be lots of lake and recreana  
 and snow.  
 we would have  
 lots of vegetables  
 and fruits.

February, 1992

Eventually Matt could read his writing to the teacher. The pictures he drew with his entries started to match the text he read. Matt began to use his writing as a means of communication between himself and the reader.

Matt did not show many of the characteristics found in Newman's framework (1988); intention, organization, experimentation, and orchestration when he first began to write. He did begin to experiment with written language in his entries. This led to a greater understanding of writing and he began to use the other parts of the framework; organization, intention, and orchestration. His writing skills did improve and he was able to make decisions about his writing toward the end of the sampling period. The skills he acquired in my classroom became groundwork for further improvement in his written communication.

### Conclusion

This study was done over a period of two years. The students had the same teacher and the whole language model of instruction was used in the classroom. The students wrote in journals every day

during this period. Writing samples were collected from two students to be analyzed. The writing was analyzed for characteristics of intention, experimentation, organization, and orchestration (Newman, 1988).

The size of the sample population used for the study was limited to two students enrolled in my classroom for the period of the study. The study was conducted in my self-contained, special education classroom. The two case studies did prove the hypothesis that students with special needs go through the developmental stages of writing and make slow but steady progress in area of written language.

There is a lack of published research in the area of the written language development of students with special needs. Research in the past focused on the skills based curriculum. The paradigm is shifting from the skills based curriculum to a whole language curriculum. The research needs to move away from skills model and focus on the whole language model.

The field of special education is moving toward holistic instruction. Students with special needs are supposed to be using the same curriculum as regular education students. That curriculum is an integrated,

whole language curriculum. Students with special needs will benefit from the holistic approach and their reading, writing, and speaking skills will develop naturally and in an integrated manner. The study reported in this paper demonstrates that students with special needs respond to a natural, holistic way of teaching.

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