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Motivating underachieving students to write

Susan M. Shotthafer

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MOTIVATING UNDERACHIEVING STUDENTS TO WRITE

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

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in Education

by
Susan Shotthafer
November 1992
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Abstract
This project reviews the causes of decreased motivation to write as students grow older and examines causes of writing apprehension and factors which increase underachieving students' desire to write. It discusses fundamental relationships between theory, thought, language, peer interaction, student-teacher interaction, and sociocultural factors influencing adolescent motivation to write. It also specifies critical factors for stimulating adolescent desire to produce meaningful content and elaboration in writing. Additionally, it describes four activities one teacher implemented to foster adolescent interest, ownership, and satisfaction in producing written expression.
Acknowledgments

I wish to thank my husband, Dan, the handy man, for always being able to patiently teach me the use of new word processing functions and commands because computers and I do not easily become friends. Additionally, I am indebted to the laissez faire concepts, entrepreneurs, and the ingenuity of the inventors who harnessed electricity, devised keyboards, computers, word processing, and other essentials related to the reality of home word processing. Without my computer and word processor, completing this project would have been much more toilsome.
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Motivating Underachieving Students to Write

Statement of the Problem

In school, the attainment of writing skills is fundamental to a student's ability to demonstrate that he or she is acquiring knowledge and comprehending other school subjects. The ability to demonstrate the critical thinking and problem-solving skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, through writing, is requisite to academic success and written expression assists critical thinking skills. Furthermore, written expression is a powerful instrument for creativity. Written expression serves as an extension of the basic need of all humans to share experiences and communicate ideas, beliefs, and emotions. However, many at-risk, minority language adolescents and adolescents from working-class backgrounds have not been successful with acquiring writing skills for academic requisites and self-expression.

The sociocultural research of sociolinguistic and ethnographers indicates that contextual and interactional factors of the school setting inhibit or prevent academic success of these types of students because state, district, and teacher criteria and curriculum do not accurately assess their abilities. Moreover, the state's
department of education, school districts, and teachers do not adjust curriculum so that methods, approaches, and activities provide teaching and learning which is relevant to the sociocultural situation of many students. Furthermore, specifically in the area of writing, the natural reason to write, a extension of the need to communicate, is ignored when the state, districts, and teachers plan curriculum, and thus, many students of all backgrounds do not have a motivation to write.

Each September, students attending the middle school at which I teach arrive with the same inadequate writing skills. The writing of a vast majority of these students abounds with mechanical errors. Equally discouraging is their lack of elaboration and their rebellion at assignments requiring more than a half a page of writing. Often, many do not complete in-class writing assignments and frequently not more than half of these students complete writing assignments given for homework.

Every year, students struggle through seventh and eight grade to pass the state-required, minimal, five-sentence paragraph proficiency test. In May of 1990, only 45% of the seventh grade students and 64% of the eighth grade students enrolled at the school where I work had fulfilled this requirement. Teachers who read and score this test concur that students do not pass because of their errors in mechanics, lack of organization, lack
of content, and lack of elaboration. I attribute this situation to students' lack of motivation to write, lack of experience with writing, and insufficient ability to self-correct and clarify what is written. The first logical step for appropriate remediation of this situation seems to be a stimulation of the students' desire to write. A logical expectation is that stimulation of their desire to communicate through written language will become a natural extension of their social need to communicate.

Discussion with other language arts teachers of underachieving students and my review of the literature indicate that motivation to write often decreases as students move to higher grade levels. A report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Shook, Marrion, & Ollila, 1989) found that 66% of students nine years of age found writing enjoyable while 59% of students thirteen years of age and 53% of students seventeen years of age thought writing was a pleasurable experience. Twenty-five percent of the students in the older groups demonstrated negative ideas towards writing and felt incompetent when writing.

In their own survey of first and second grade Canadian students' concepts and attitudes, Shook et al. (1989) found that 77% of these students had positive attitudes towards writing and felt that it was a pleasurable
activity. In her attempts to pinpoint the cause of disinterest and find incentives for adolescent writing, Cleary (1990) found, from her interviews with eleventh grade students, that their attitudes followed a typical pattern of students whose enjoyment of writing and desire to write decreased as they moved to higher grades.

Purpose

With the pressing need to rectify adolescent disinterestedness, feelings of incompetency, and insufficiency in the area of writing, the purpose of this project is (a) to investigate the factors responsible for at-risk and minority language adolescents' disinterest in writing; (b) to examine methods and activities which encourage positive attitudes towards writing and promote adolescent desire to write; and (c) to discover approaches which will motivate students concern for improvement of the mechanics and content of their writing in order to clarify meaning and improve communication; (d) to foster student ownership and enjoyment of writing which is elaborated, meaningful, and valuable to themselves and their readers.
Review of the Literature

This literature review focuses on factors which contribute to and minimize writing apprehension, factors which interfere with and motivate adolescent writing, and sociocultural factors which contribute to positive writing attitudes for at-risk, underachieving, and language minority, adolescent writers.

According to empirical studies, (Sue & Padilla, 1990) the capacity for cognitive and linguistic development is an innate and equivalent quality of all cultures. However, the disparity of success in linguistic and cognitive development of school children from different cultures has frequently been attributed to either biological determinism or cultural determinism. The thesis of biological determinism is that inborn deficiencies cause cognitive, social, economic, and cultural differences which preclude the cognitive advancement of certain cultures. The theory of cultural determinism attributes lack of cognitive development needed for school success to specific cultural circumstances arising from the adjustment to social and environmental impediments.

Diaz, Moll, and Mehan (1990) reject the theories of biological determinism and cultural determinism. These researchers propose, instead, that school must provide students with socioculturally relevant teaching methods
based on an understanding of and appreciation for the experience and abilities that students bring to the classroom.

Vygotsky (1988) maintains that language acquisition and cognition are socially motivated and culturally based. In school, learning is rooted in interaction between the teacher and the child who are motivated by a practical purpose. Learning takes place when problem-solving and other skills, practiced by the student and coached by the teacher, are facilitated by interaction with others and become internalized to the point that the student can independently accomplish a problem-solving activity or perform a skill independently. Vygotsky identified this difference between what a child can do with coached practice and what he or she accomplish on his or her own as the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

Diaz et al. (1990) propose that teachers' accurate assessment of the beginning of this ZPD, for minority language students, is essential to selecting methods which will motivate and enable students to reach the level of internalization of skills designated as learning objectives.

Ethnographic studies demonstrate that differences between the success of students of the dominant and minority cultures occur when the structure and use of language in the home and community contrast with language
structure and use in the school. Diaz et al. (1990) propose that these differences can be corrected through a context-specific approach which studies the students' homes and the communities' cultural environments where learning begins in order to establish appropriate context-specific mediation methods and accurate assessment of students' abilities and accomplishments of objectives. Context-specific performance can be accurately designed by focusing on (a) studying the cultural learning environment of the home; (b) relating the home culture to interaction and expectations in the school; and (c) accurately assessing the child's cognitive development and establishing an appropriate zone of proximal development.

After studying the use of writing in a Mexican-American community of San Diego, Diaz et al. (1990) devised a writing activity and related homework assignments which promoted "literacy-related interaction" between the school and home context through the use of a topic which was of concern to the students, their families, and their community. By selecting a topic which was intellectually challenging, but also reflective of the students' experience, that is, making the lesson context-specific and establishing an appropriate zone of proximal development, these researchers were able to draw interest into the writing activity by making it
culturally relevant.

The concepts and methods of the whole language approach are particularly relevant to the motivation of writing. Whole language has its roots in pragmatist philosophy which emphasize the acquisition of knowledge through experience. John Dewey believed that education should integrate the mind and body or the thinking with the doing of the student. That is, the students' work should be connected with their other thoughts. A pragmatic approach motivates students by meeting the their needs and interests and connecting their experiences with their work. A fundamental premise of whole language is that we learn best when we have a choice in what we learn.

An examination of research dealing with young children's perceptions of writing helps to demonstrate reasons and types of changes in students' attitudes towards writing as they become older. Research finds that beginning writers enjoy and willingly participate in writing activities, but they seem not to clearly agree upon or recognize a fundamental purpose of this activity which is self-expression. Motivation seems to stem from various sources while a role model's appreciation and enthusiasm for a student's topic significantly influence children's voluntary writing activities.

In their interviews with first and second grade
Canadian students, Shook et al. (1990) learned that these writers preferred writing at home because they believed that they received more help at home and thought that their parents, rather than their teachers, were most likely to read what they wrote. Forty-five percent believed that their classmates wrote often while 11% perceived that their teachers wrote often. When asked the reason for writing, 70% percent thought this was to improve or become familiar with words and letters, or because it was an assigned activity, while 20% percent responded that they participated because it was enjoyable. Sixty percent of the children thought that they wrote good stories and 90% percent enjoyed writing stories. It seems that children in primary grades do not perceive writing as a means of self-expression.

Lack of engagement and a disunion with the community proved to be significant factors affecting unsatisfactory progress or underachievement in reading and writing of primary students. In their ethnographic case study of first, second, and fifth grade, at-risk students, Allen, Michalove, Shockley, and West (1991) determined that the whole language approach, including adult literacy models, "real reasons" for reading and writing, regularly scheduled and frequent writing workshops, self-selected topics, and self-selected books help students to become more involved in learning.
These participant-observers noted that their own modeling of enthusiasm for reading and the reading process which includes self-correcting, rephrasing for meaning, discussion of unfamiliar words, and reading of their own favorite authors, increases student engagement. They concurred that opportunities to write about their own lives, solving personal problems, and self-examination activities makes writing more useful to students. Attentive teacher support for risk-taking, when students show lack of confidence in attempting more difficult reading or writing, proved to be vital to student involvement and progress.

These researchers' encouragement of productive membership in the community was founded on their belief that children need genuine reasons for reading and writing, individual responsibility for individual learning, support for risk-taking, and a sense of belonging to the community. Shared reading and writing activities positively influenced participation in the primary grades while reading and writing activities involving personal problem-solving became the most important ingredient for promoting a sense of community for fifth grade students. The opportunity to choose reading and writing partners proved to be another factor in developing community and also in promoting a student's own improvement of his behavior.
B.S. McGuire (1990) found that her underachieving high school students were resistant to writing and new experiences, possessed immature writing skills, had short attention spans, lacked social and problem-solving skills, displayed anti-social behavior, had attendance problems, and experienced numerous personal difficulties. After an unsuccessful school quarter, she considered the relationship between her students and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. She concluded that these underachieving students were unable to give attention to learning because their basic needs for "security and trust" had not been satisfied.

B.S. McGuire (1990) and her partner used daily writing and teacher response dialogue journals to develop security, trust, and a feeling of comfort in her students. She centered journal topics around literature, classroom situations, and the students' own experiences. The practice of daily writing promoted these students' involvement in self-evaluation of their classroom behavior and performance. McGuire's and her partner's sincere daily responses enabled these students to feel comfortable about themselves and begin to change their attitudes.

Many teacher-researchers agree that a chief benefit of uncorrected journal writing is that it gives students daily practice in written expression of daily experiences.
without anxiety about errors. F. Macguire (1990) applies many strategies to diminish students' anxiety and build confidence. He suggests the following: (a) Teachers should respond to student's written work prior to correction. Questions about the student's topic tell the student that he or she has created meaningful content; (b) Focus on something positive (i.e. neatness, spelling, active words, new vocabulary, etc.) prepares students for constructive criticism; (c) Reading well-written student work encourages deserving students and provides models for what is desirable; (d) Pairing of students having different strengths and weaknesses increases student self-esteem and furnishes the opportunity for teaching and sharing skills among students; and (e) A teacher's preparation of his own writing provides a model and demonstrates that teachers do not produce perfect writing on their first drafts. This decreases student apprehension and creates rapport with students.

Cleary (1990) examined the reasons for continued decline of students' interest and desire to write as they became older. She identified several factors which significantly influence older students' attitudes and their desire to write. Cleary determined that inappropriate praising and criticism causes students to lose interest in writing. Feelings of incompetency brought about by failure to please their teacher prompts
many students to develop negative attitudes about writing while dishonest praising and inflated grades result in the students' loss of respect for their teachers.

Through her examination of incentives, Cleary (1990) concluded that praise and rewards for successful students produces a dependency on teacher approval while high grades for the attainment of self-esteem turn writing into a burden or cause total rejection of this activity. Consequently, this leads to the situation where writing in the secondary grades often becomes an end in itself rather than an opportunity to discover, engage in a personal interest, communicate one's feeling to an audience, or provide critical thinking.

According to Cleary, (1990) stimulation of adolescents' sense of efficacy in their world is the most critical factor motivating writing. Self-expression, derived from the ability to be heard and precisely understood by trusted peer audiences, motivates and gives confidence to adolescent writers. A teacher's sincere demonstration of interest and encouragement for the student's topic and the establishment of realistic but challenging expectations are also conducive to enjoyable writing. Additionally, Cleary suggests that students need to see their teachers engaged in reading and writing to demonstrate that the teacher also values these activities.
Cleary (1990) advises that the student-teacher writing conference is a productive method for providing teacher feedback. Conferences create a valuable opportunity to give clear reasons for lack of success and to establish what is needed for improvement. Conferences help the student to understand the precise reasons for lack of success instead of attributing grades to a teacher's arbitrary decisions or the writer's own lack of intelligence or value as a human.

During conferences, Cleary (1990) suggests that the teacher and student should construct goals which they mutually agree upon so that the student will associate goals with mastery and a grade. A sense of mastery of the tools for self-expression and self-determination to gain control over their own lives are the most critical factors in providing the intrinsic motivation which is essential for giving students confidence in themselves and their writing.

Unger (1986) believes that students having the greatest anxiety towards writing "are most often the victims of a low teacher expectancy" (p. 30). He maintains that a student's manifestation of writer's block lessens a teacher's expectation of him or her. Unger emphasizes that there is a tremendous difference between apprehension of a subject such as math and the apprehension of writing. He explains that the
fundamental difference is that "writing is communication..." and stresses that writers perceive a lack of success in writing as an "infinitely more personal" failure than lack of success in math because it delivers the message that he or she is an "ineffective communicator" (p. 31).

Unger (1986) recommends a variety of activities to eliminate writing apprehension. Class memos are one of these activities. In this activity, a sender may write a sentiment "ranging from problems in school work to problems in a budding and complicated romance" (p. 31). The memo may be sent to the teacher or peer and is not evaluated. Responses can be sent weekly or biweekly and provide a way to communicate without fear of evaluation. This activity fosters communication between student and teachers and students and their peers. Unger also suggests that regular journal writing, opportunity to write about personal experiences, emphasis on content rather than mechanics, writing workshops, writing for a purpose, and writing for a specific audience will help students to learn that writing is for self-expression and gradually eliminate writing apprehension.

In her study of the writing of her native and non-native speakers who were apprehensive, basic writers, Buley-Meissner (1989) learned that the majority of these students enjoyed writing because it provided a way to
"see their thoughts on paper" (p. 4). After months of comprehensive instruction and directed practice, students responses to the Daly-Miller measure of writing apprehension (MWA) indicated growth in their personal enjoyment of writing.

Buley-Meissner (1989) states that a primary cause of apprehension for both native and non-native, basic writers is the fear of evaluation, particularly when instructors compare work to that of more competent writers. Basic writers experience anxiety over their own self-imposed standards as well as those of their instructor because they experience great difficulty meeting these standards. However, Buley-Meissner found that her students believed that evaluation was required for learning and improving.

The first stages of writing, such as topic selection, brainstorming, and organizing, accompanied by years of misdirection, also contributed to writer's block. With a sentence-level focus, basic writers have difficulty conceiving and organizing the whole paper and message. Buley-Meissner learned that her non-native writers were more likely to benefit from practice and instruction. She suggests that this might stem from greater acceptance of a teacher's advice and that erroneous patterns had possibly not stabilized as they had with native speakers. Additionally, highly apprehensive writers held low
expectations for themselves. Negative expectations, Buley-Meissner contends, are the greatest obstacle when trying to help students improve their writing.

Negative attitudes are a primary source of procrastination. She found that increased pressure to write further impeded a student's ability to begin writing. Directing students attention towards "imagining, pursuing, and shaping concrete possibilities" for topics helped to change habits of procrastination (p. 7). She advises that students also must be directed towards concentration on the "content and shape" of their writing so that they can suspend attention to error until a draft is ready for revision.

Past misinstruction was another significant source of writer's block. Students who had been taught to (a) separate themselves from the subject; (b) leave out personal feelings, opinions, and ideas not fully formed; and (c) were discouraged from experimenting with a new style, genre, organization technique etc. had acquired the idea that they wrote only to please their teacher. Such impressions seriously interfere with development of voice and sense of audience or connection with the reader, stifle sense of ownership, and discourage the desire to improve.

Buley-Meissner (1989) maintains that apprehensive writers strive to gain a sense of control over their
writing by concentrating on rules and avoiding sentence-level errors. This focus on rules distracts them from producing a clear message which is achieved through conceptualization of the flexible nature of the writing process. She concludes that writers can be most helped by directing their attention towards writing on topics which are meaningful to them, and assisting control "through the meaningful connection of self, reader, text, and intention" (p. 15).

Bettancourt and Phinney (1988) examined writing apprehension and writer's block in college and graduate bilingual writers. From their study of Puerto Rican bilingual college writers (20 enrolled in an English Reading and Composition course), (20 enrolled in an optional Spanish composition course after taking one course of Spanish grammar), and twenty "practiced" bilingual students (English graduate students pursuing Master of Arts in English Education), Betancourt and Phinney found that different groups experienced apprehension for different reasons. The language required for composition, rather than the language with which students had the most experience, determined the type and degree of apprehension.

Undergraduate students demonstrated more negative attitudes when writing in Spanish than English. Betancourt and Phinney (1988) suggest that this
unexpected finding may reflect more rule-governed instruction of Spanish instructors who place greater importance on mechanics than the writing process, content, and organization.

Freshman students writing in English focused on sentence-level errors and edited prematurely. These researchers believe that past ESL instruction, which concentrated on sentence-level grammar, was the source of this difficulty. Confident in the grammaticality of their writing and having considerable writing experience, graduate English students, mostly ESL teachers, were able to focus on the goal of the whole product and did not edit prematurely. Betancourt and Phinney (1988) concluded that teaching methods, teachers expectations, and past writing experiences, are sources of writer's block in bilinguals and that process oriented writing instruction helps to minimize apprehension.

Wolcott and Buhr (1987) administered a writing attitude questionnaire to 100 specially admitted, developmental writing college students (38% male, 62% female and 92% who were Black) and followed the questionnaire with a 50-minute expository essay. Wolcott and Buhr wanted to examine the influence of attitude on writing. The questionnaire surveyed students' anxiety concerned with writing, views of the value of writing, and their interpretation of the writing process as they
used it. The questionnaire sought to examine students' attitudes towards finishing assignments, having peers as readers, teacher evaluation, and conceptualization of the writing process. To assess attitudes about writing growth, these researchers evaluated "pre-post," multiple choice, tests, editing skills, and timed expository essays.

After analyzing these measures, Wolcott and Buhr (1987) concluded that typical attitudes and anxiety towards writing and understanding of the writing process was related to the students' sense of success with writing. More significant progress reflected more positive attitudes, but Wolcott and Buhr also suggested that students with positive attitudes are likely to work harder and that the results reinforces their feelings about writing. Likewise, they acknowledged that students with negative attitudes might also exert less effort or be discouraged from trying because of lack of success. Since their study did not include variables of quality of teaching or reliability of readers using holistic scoring, and examined only one particular group, they cautioned of the need to avoid over generalization. They did, however, emphasize that teaching methods emphasizing the writing process, collaborative learning, and peer review of papers could assist in alleviating writing apprehension.
In their work with basic writers, Williamson and Davis (1987) have determined that apprehensive writers suffer from writer's block because they focus on their very limited knowledge of mechanical rules and the teacher's instruction, but fail to comprehend that the fundamental purpose in writing is communication with others. Because they focus on form rather than content, they fail to recognize the difference between what they meant to write and what they, in fact, have written. Williamson and Davis maintain that a writer's consciousness of the communicative function of writing is fundamental to learning how to write. These instructors allow that changing perceptions of older writers who have not learned the communicative function of writing is "very difficult." (p. 46).

Williamson worked with students who had been enrolled in pre-college reading and writing courses assisted by "extensive tutorial assistance outside of class." These students remained with the same instructor when enrolling in pre-college composition or special developmental section of college composition courses in the fall. Williamson found that after requiring students to continue to rewrite a single draft, six or seven times, students began to change their resistant and indifferent attitudes which had failed to acknowledge their teacher's comments and suggestions. Gradually, students began to
attend to proofreading instead of concentrating on avoiding error.

With new drafts, students began to take risks in both form and content. Williamson believes that this repeated revision by students helped them to realize that "the reader was driven, not by a concern for error, but instead, by a desire to receive a clear message. Williamson and Davis (1987) concluded that although these writers also received considerable assistance from tutors and other trained personnel, persistence in directing students to concentrate on the communicative function of writing was the key to improvement. When teachers refrain from correcting and, instead, encourage students' to communicate effectively because they have meaningful feelings, ideas, experiences, etc., we can help students to improve their writing.

In their discussion of factors required for motivating "at risk" students to read and write, Gentile and McMillan (1990) describe at-risk students as "those who because of basic reading and writing difficulties," will more than likely drop out of school. They advise that this situation deserves serious attention because the at-risk population is "growing precipitously" (p. 383). Gentile and McMillan maintain that these students are especially difficult to motivate because of their past experiences of failure and because few see rewards for
achievement. These researchers allow that at-risk students are "extremely adept at diversion, disruption, helplessness, resistance, and in some cases sabotage" (p. 385).

Gentile and McMillan (1990) suggest that by providing a positive classroom environment, "challenging students, providing tangible rewards, and giving strong verbal reinforcement," teachers can furnish opportunities for at-risk students to gain, accept, and profit from experiences promoting literacy (p. 384). They explain that at-risk students feel threatened when required to read and write and do not perceive a reason to strive when impediments hinder progress. Tangible rewards help distract these students from negative responses and the threat that reading and writing present. However, Gentile and McMillan caution that students "should not be paid to read and write" and advise that tangible rewards should be accompanied by other types of reinforcement (p. 384).

Gentile and McMillan (1990) recommend the following types of motivation: (a) Specify and formulate "reasonable and reachable" goals in reading and writing and gradually implement tasks that are "measurable and provide outcomes;" (b) Provide continuous feedback on outcomes; (c) Provide reading and writing instruction that transfers to academic core curriculum; (d) Assist
students in developing their own incentives to read and write; and (e) Teach students to "monitor their own behavior and reverse their negative self-talk" (p.384). Additionally, cautioning that high expectations are essential for the encouragement of at-risk students, Gentile and McMillan emphasize that teachers should also assess their own attitudes about these students.

Another useful motivational tool is a teacher's careful selection of literature to involve students in critical examination, through reading and writing, which focus on "sociocultural issues and problems of the human condition" (p. 387). These researchers explain that at-risk students have many experiences and background knowledge which facilitate and stimulate reading and writing about and their appreciation of social and ethical issues of "good literature." Examining such literature topics and themes help students to draw relationships between concepts and develop solutions to life's problems. Such literature is "knowledge-based" and assists these students' understanding of themselves, others, and the world in which they live. This literature offers them a sense of identity or control that can "empower the spirit and motivate them to express their thoughts and feelings" (p. 389).

Daly, Vangelisti, and Witte (1988) conducted four studies to assess the relationship between writing
apprehension and instructional practices. Their first study examined the impact of teacher apprehension upon their own classroom behaviors and writing assignments. When Daly et al. learned, from this study, that teachers with higher writing apprehension were likely to assign fewer writing-based assignments, they decided to examine the effects of teachers' writing apprehension upon their evaluation of student writing-based activities.

Daly et al. (1988) focused second study on teachers' concepts of components of "good writing," "bad writing," "best writing assignments," and a "last assignment" (p. 157). This study indicated that highly apprehensive teachers focused upon mechanics and structure of their students' writing assignments while teachers with little apprehension focused upon student expression and effort.

These researchers' third study examined advise from writing teachers. In this study, Daly et al. (1988) found that teachers with less writing apprehension thought expression and content were more valuable while highly apprehensive teachers viewed the teaching of "rules" of writing as more important. Their fourth study, seeking teachers' concepts of a best writing, revealed that low-apprehensive teachers used assignments allowing more creativity, freedom in topic choice, and involved the writing process.

Their fifth study compared the number and purpose of
writing assignments given by low-apprehensive teachers to
the number by assigned by high-apprehensive teachers.
The researchers learned that low-apprehensive teachers
gave assignments with greater variety of purpose and
audience than high-apprehensive teachers.

Daly et al. (1988) concluded that teachers' attitudes
affect the structure of a course by controlling the
amount and type of writing they assign, their
expectations for these assignments, and their evaluations
and views of students.

In summary, teachers' attitudes about writing impact
the social interaction between teachers and students. A
teacher's apprehension of writing can result in
assignments which constrain the student-writer primarily
through a less than positive view of writing, a narrow
evaluation of a student's writing, and a limit of topic
choice. Such constraints have negative affects in the
contextual interaction between teachers and students and the writer's work.

The practice of a teacher's modeling of the writing
process is a common recommendation of a vast majority of
researchers and teachers. Bros (1988) reiterates the
usefulness of teacher modeling for motivating students to
write. A summary of his elaboration on the benefits of
teacher modeling follows: (a) Modeling communicates to
students by teaching to do as the teacher does rather
than as the teacher says; (b) Teacher modeling acquaints students with their teacher and thereby builds trust which makes students less apprehensive about writing because they are not asked to write for a stranger; (c) The teacher conveys a message of pride and pleasure in writing; (d) The teacher establishes credibility by experiencing what he asks the students to do and can detect flaws in assignments before assigning them; (e) By exposing his own writing for criticism, the teacher helps ease student apprehension.

Hudson (1988) studied the writing perceptions of 20 children in first through fifth grade to determine how the following factors: (a) who initiates the writing; (b) setting; (c) audience; (d) purpose of writing; (e) degree of involvement; and (f) genre influenced children's sense of ownership of writing. She places children's writing into five categories. Her discussion of (a) "Official Writing" which is "curriculum constrained," (b) "curriculum-perceived (but distorted)" writing; (c) "curriculum sponsored" writing; and (d) "curriculum surpassed" writing (p. 45) are useful for this project.

Hudson (1988) describes "curriculum constrained writing" as that in which the teacher controls both format and content. This includes published material or dittos which involve such activities as filling in words or copying and is initiated, constructed, and imposed by
the teacher. Hudson suggests that this type of writing provides no reason to write beyond the fact that the teacher requires that it be completed. Such assignments triggered little social interaction and, consequently, produce little involvement and ownership.

Students view "Curriculum perceived (but distorted)" assignments such as writing sentences with vocabulary or spelling words, or the description of an event requiring the use of verbs, as tasks to be completed for a grade, practice to receive some small reward, or as beneficial in some way. Because the purpose is often not clear, learning is seldom seen as an objective. Students are often unsure of criteria for successful completion of this type of work. They feel a lack of control over the outcome and, thus, derive a limited sense of enjoyment or empowerment. Consequently, enthusiasm for such work is also limited. As students become older, their feeling of ownership in these assignments decreases.

"Curriculum-sponsored" writing is writing that includes assignments such as journals, reports, stories, essays, etc. that are initiated by the teacher or curriculum, but which permit considerable original composition by the students, on topics or themes of their concern or interest, with minimum constraints of time. The distinguishing ingredient of this type of writing is that it removes pressure on students and concentrates on
the "making of meaning" and it is more likely to be shared with other students or other audiences. Regularly scheduled time for this curriculum-sponsored writing and choice of materials (such as unlined paper or, perhaps printing or script), also contributes to ownership.

Hudson describes "curriculum surpassed writing as writing which may originate with an assignment, but is written solely for the self-satisfaction of the author and expectation that it will bring satisfaction to his or her audience. Specifically, the writer's genuine desire to communicate meaning to an audience distinguishes such writing. Children wrote because they wanted to or were motivated by an "adult-like need to write" (p. 61) The feeling that this was a self-initiated activity gave writers a genuine sense of empowerment.

Hudson (1988) concluded that a student's feelings of ownership of classroom writing more nearly resembles "an adult's definition of composer rather than initiator of writing." (p. 63). With increased opportunities to write and make meaning, Hudson found that children are more inclined to gain a sense of ownership whether they or their teacher initiate the writing activity.

Fontaine (1988) conducted a case study of four 9-year-old, four 13-year-old, and four 18-year-old students to examine their perspectives of audience. Fontaine gave students the assignment of writing two letters, one to an
imaginary friend and the other to an imaginary great-aunt in France, in which they were to discuss "memorable places that they had visited." Her objective was to determine possible changes in the relationship between (a) writers' concepts of audience and use of this knowledge in writing; (b) writers' perceptions of audiences' perspectives; (c) writers' perceptions of their audiences' knowledge of them or the topic about which they wrote; and (d) the way in which writer's perceptions of the above factors affects their writing.

Fontaine (1988) learned that although 9-year-old students were able to construct details which gave evidence of consideration of audience, because their letters to both the friend and great aunt could have been written to either a friend or a great aunt, they did not show concern for the difference in audience. The 13-year-old and 18-year-old students used a more casual and less polite tone, fragments, and colloquial language in letters to friends. Letters to the great aunt had a polite tone, were more formal, and demonstrated awareness that the great aunt might not be familiar with geography in the United States.

In her analysis, Fontaine (1988) discusses two functions of spoken and written expression which are (a) "to create, express, or sustain human relationships;" and (b) "to express or describe experiences, ideas, or
interpretations" (p. 113). She suggests that while little children easily learn the social interaction resulting from their physical or verbal language, early attempts at putting pen to paper, in the form of scribbles, are not interpreted by adults, as efforts towards communication. As children attempt, and are then taught to write words, phrases, sentences, etc., the correct shape of letters, spelling of words, punctuation, etc. are emphasized instead of the social purpose of writing which is to communicate. Soon, children are taught to write stories. Again, the emphasis is on "expressing ideas and relating experience" rather than communication (p. 113).

This researcher concluded that younger children's inability to show awareness of audience stems from their lack of conception of the social function of the writing process because they do not conceive writing as a social process. Consequently, she sees a need for writing teacher to incorporate the social function of writing in the writing process.

Staton and Shuy (1988) maintain that dialogue journals provide "natural social conditions inherent in oral language to provide the basis for mastering written communication" (p. 196). A dialogue journal is a journal in which a student and his or her teacher carry on written responses to each others' thoughts. They believe
that dialogue journals support the educational principal that children beginning school or a school term, "should start where they are" (p. 213). Such communicative writing furnishes a means for children to develop from intimate to casual and then consultative written language in the same manner that they learn oral language of the home and gradually acquire consultative and formal school language. That is, a primary benefit of this type of journal is that it greatly facilitates the learning of the school register because "written communication can be mastered most easily if the learner's first uses of reading and writing occur in the same sociolinguistic and interpersonal conditions that exist for speaking and hearing" (p. 196).

Staton and Shuy (1988) have determined that the following conditions, found in all cultures, are requisite for language competency. (a) There is support for the learner's utterance by context which includes setting, community members, past events, and topic constructs exist; (b) A "real" audience is known and concerned with the speaker's thoughts or messages; (c) Speakers are able to interact to clarify and elaborate meaning; (d) "Proficient consultants" (teachers) are available to model language use for particular needs; (e) The speaker's message or thoughts have a function, purpose and/or impact upon the community; (f) The
speakers chooses or has concern for the topic; (g) The focus centers on the message and meaning of the communication while the form is questioned only to clarify meaning.

These researchers argue that decontextualization of many writing activities and assignments in school omit the natural language environment and social interaction. Consequently, classroom writing assignments frequently retard students' mastery of written communication.

Staton and Shuy (1988) have identified fundamental strengths of both oral and written communication and contend that dialogue journals capitalize on the critical features of both of these communication forms. As oral communication occurs, there is interaction, function, parties in the communicative act are known, and context is shared. They point out that written speech differs significantly. In written speech there is "reflectivity, lack of interruptions, permanence, privacy," and lack of audience presence (p. 202). While the audience is not immediately present, with dialogue journals, the student writer knows to whom he comments and addresses his questions. Dialogue journals provide interaction, opportunity to reflect, and freedom from interruptions. Lastly, one additional primary benefit of the dialogue journal is the opportunity it provides for teacher modeling in a natural context. Teachers show correct
spelling, grammar, and mechanics without drawing attention to student errors and lead students from informal to school registers through social interaction.

Britton (1987) suggests that a regularly scheduled letter exchange between students who are not acquainted will assist in establishing the connection between the writing process and reading. He maintains that such an activity will affect the writing and reading behavior of participating students. For this activity, teachers do not suggest a topic, manner, or method.

In his examination of this type of letter exchange, Britton (1987) reports that "ninth graders who had no previous opportunity in class of attempting continuous interpersonal communication quite rapidly developed the following interpersonal communication skills: (a) ability to initiate topics; (b) replies to comments in the letters they received; (c) increasing anticipation of their reader's responses and difficulties in responding; (d) use of conventional formats both of address (salutations and signing off); and (e) "recapitulation of signals that, by their cross-referencing, bring coherence to written expression" (p. 9).

Daiute and Dalton (1988) preface their discussion of collaborative writing with Vygotsky's theory that social interaction is requisite to cognitive development. They propose that the lack of interaction in written language
necessitates clear expression, of ideas, awareness of possible situatedness of the audience, and acknowledgment of other points of view. These researchers maintain that collaborative writing experience provides students with the opportunity to learn ways in which audience opinions, interpretations, and misinterpretations may interact to necessitate more planning, more precise expression, and more consideration of audience on the part of the writer.

In their research of literature Daiute and Dalton (1988) find that "social interaction supports cognitive development because interaction leads to cognitive conflict" (p. 252). Their review of research found reasons to believe that fundamental cognitive growth occurs when an individual realizes that his or her own perceptions do not mesh with new information or others' perceptions. Revaluation and adjustment of perceptions to accommodate other information and viewpoints brings about cognitive growth.

Daiute's and Dalton's study (1988) of 48 collaborative writing workshop periods found that collaboration did produce cognitive conflict although the contentions found in playful dialogue of students paired for a writing assignment seemed immature "vague, unresolved, and only implicitly related to planning and evaluating" (p. 265).

The "language play" of the paired students
demonstrated that writing scores improved when students engaged in the following types of talking: (a) talking to suggest alternatives; (b) "monitoring and clarifying form;" (c) "evaluating, explaining and negotiating;" (d) "...expressing rhetorical value;" and (e) "explaining and checking facts" (p. 262). Additionally, the pairs of writers producing a higher quality of writing consisted of one student with slightly higher writing ability while pairs who did not improve were of more equal ability. The pairing of students where one has slightly higher skills than the other established a zone of proximal development. This finding demonstrates that collaborative writing can help students to improve their writing.

Calkins (1986) advises that teachers' goals and imposed curricular goals are frequently at odds with the natural human need for written self-expression. Calkins maintains that curricular and teacher goals often discourage writing because these goals ignore students' desire to use writing for satisfaction of their own needs, but rather, dictate the topic, audience, genre, etc. Topics, genres, audiences, etc. assigned by the teacher, stifle student writing because they are frequently irrelevant to students and ignore authentic reasons to write. She maintains that "'motivating'" is not equivalent to encouraging and assisting a students'
personal involvement in writing and states that students care about writing when it is "personal and interpersonal" (p. 5). Students care about writing when they have freedom to express personal concerns, needs, ideas, memories, and feelings or whatever is important in their lives.

Calkins (1986) believes that teachers must convey, to their students, that topics should reflect what students find significant in their own lives. The ability to impact the readers with whatever is significant in our own lives generates ownership and authorship. Teaching writing differs from teaching in other disciplines because, in this discipline, Calkins argues that teachers must be willing to listen to their students much more and talk much less. Teachers can develop curriculum matched to student writing needs and encourage student involvement by carefully listening to their students. In the writing classroom, students and teachers teach and learn from each other.

Student success in the writing class depends considerably upon its structure. Time designated for writing needs to be regular, frequent, and predictable so students can plan ahead. Calkins (1986) recommends that writing periods should be scheduled at least three time a week. Regular repetition sustains student interest, provides stability, and furnishes students with a sense
of control and power to plan.

Students must become familiar with all the stages of the writing process because it is only through reflection, planning, drafting, revising, consulting others, more reflection, and more revision that most writers can acquire ownership of writing through the satisfaction of complete self-expression. Attention to revision is a critical factor in assisting self-expression. Calkins (1986) suggests that students should ask themselves the following questions for the process of revision.

1. What have I said so far? What am I trying to say?
2. How do I like it? What's good here that I can build on? What's not so good that I can fix?
3. How does it sound? How does it look? How else could I have done this?
4. What will my reader think as he or she reads this? What questions will they ask? What will they notice? Feel? Think?
5. What am I going to do next? (p. 19)

When teachers teach students to ask these questions, students eventually internalize these steps which, then, become unconscious actions in the writing process.

Conferencing appears to be an especially useful method for helping students to teach themselves about writing.
and unifying teacher and student agreement on individual student goals. Harris (1987) believes that such conference should help teachers to understand an individual student's composing process, discover reasons for writing difficulties which cannot be detected by simply reading the student's work, to listen to the writer's plans for his writing, and to manipulate the conference so that the writer may discover for himself, or herself what separates his intentions from his or her actual achievement. The teacher and the writer must perceive that writing is not "a body of knowledge" which can be transmitted from the teacher to the student, but rather, skills and abilities to be attained through practice. Harris maintains that careful listening by the teacher is essential to assist students in transferring what they want to say to their papers.

Harris (1987) advises that the primary benefits of conferencing are: (a) Interaction increases the opportunity to realize the student's intent. Therefore, the teacher does not advise the student to make adjustments which do not meet the student's need for the direction of his paper; (b) Periodic conferencing, while the paper is being written, helps the student to see writing as a process and disposes the view that the teacher is the editor whose chief function is to evaluate the finished product; and (c) The more obvious advantage
is that the teacher's comments are much better understood during interactive conversation than when they are written on the student's work.

In his discussion of feedback on written assignments, Willingham (1990) recommends that the primary criterion for a teacher's response is that it should "encourage the student to be his own editor" and follow the thoughts of a naive reader (p. 10-11). He explains that teachers should concentrate on feedback which encourages an "improved paper and motivates improved writing skills" (p. 10). Teachers should be mindful of this objective when considering the amount of detail they supply in comments about content. He advises that comments should "be specific enough to guide students when editing their work, but not so specific that they simply implement the instructor's suggestions" (p.10). Willingham advises that teachers should rank their concerns from most to least important, and that students should be aware of this ranking.

Willingham (1990) suggests the following approaches: (a) The teacher can simply tell the student his own understanding of what was written without evaluating; (b) Ask "leading questions"; (c) Ask all students to include their own evaluation of their paper which will give students a chance to voice their own concerns and create an opportunity for dialogue about the students' writing;
(d) Always write a positive comment about the paper; (e) For college students, tell students if there are mechanical errors, but require students to find and correct the errors.

Theory and Classroom Context

In addition to this literature review, theories of the relationship between thought, oral and written language, and sociocultural factors have influenced my choices of writing activities for stimulating students' desire to write. In this section I will discuss these theories and explain how they relate to the sociocultural context of my classroom.

In *Thought and Language* (1988) Vygotsky seeks to explain the relationship between egocentric speech of children, inner speech, thought, language, social needs, and cultural environment. Vygotsky argues that egocentric speech, "a running [vocal] accompaniment to whatever a child may be doing" (p. 26) serves to assist the adjustments and adaptations of young children to the reality of their environment.

His own observations led Vygotsky (1988) to conclude that children's egocentric speech increased as they confronted obstacles in their environment which interfered with planned activities. Language, in the form of egocentric speech, verbalizes a perceived need and helps children to adjust and adapt to contextual
realities. Vocal verbalization of perceived needs (cognitive observations) helps children to create solutions to encountered problems. Thus, as children encounter the reality of their environment, verbal language, in the form of vocal speech, mediates thought processes needed to face new situations.

For Vygotsky, a child's association of meaning with the object it represents is a long and gradual process. A child's first sounds and utterances are genetically derived and do not represent thought or objects. When parents mistake sounds for words, parents give meaning to these sounds through vocal verbalization. Young children learn to communicate needs through meaning that parents give to their children's utterances. As children's schemata and memories develop, they continue to match objects with sounds.

Vygotsky (1988) maintains that children never instantly realize that objects are represented by sound symbols. According to Vygotsky, words as sound symbols, represent the characteristics of similar objects long before children realize that a sound symbol represents the object itself. For example, evidence supporting this theory is the reality that a young child will likely categorize all moving vehicles as "car" or identify a cup, glass and pitcher as "cup" because all three hold liquid.
At about the time that children enter school, egocentric speech becomes internalized thought or inner speech. The ordering of inner speech assists individuals in developing behavior which is appropriate to the reality of the new school environment. In school, object, sound, and visual symbols (written words and numbers) unite to form concrete meanings for objects. Children gradually acquire phonetic and morphological representation of objects and grammatical structures. Continued interaction in school, between a child, the teacher's instruction, and his or her peers constructs a child's school language and promotes the development of concepts and mental maturation.

In summary, mind (or cognition), thought, language, and speech have a genetic foundation, but are socially driven. Egocentric speech changes to thought as children begin schooling and combines with verbal language to become mind or cognition. The mind develops and matures out of the child's efforts to meet his perceived physical, emotional, social, and cultural needs through language. Interaction between the child's environment and his verbal thought are critical to the development and maturation of the mind.

Wertsch (1991) elaborates and expands upon Vygotsky's discussion of the relationships between thought, language, and the influence of history, culture, and
institutions upon the individual's need to influence his environment. Wertsch proposes that history, culture, and institutions become inseparably intertwined with human psychological tools which mold the individual mind. The term action is fundamental to Wertsch's theory because of the general philosophical consensus that human interaction with the environment shapes both the environment and further human action. The situation (sociocultural context) of the individual influences his choice of tools and language. In turn, these instruments influence the course and the outcome of the action. The relationship between the situation, the action, and the instruments which facilitate it are so basic and intricately interwoven that any discussion or analysis of the action must also include the situation and the instrument chosen, by an individual, to reach his or her objective of somehow influencing the environment.

Wertsch (1991) appropriates Vygotsky's and Bakhtin's ideas of voice by explaining that voice includes the speaker's choice of semiotic tools (signs and symbols), used to carry out an action, the idea that certain mental processes, even in the intramental plane, are linked to communicative actions, and that mental functioning has a genetic foundation, but is consciously, socially, and communicatively driven. Consequently, an individual's thoughts and utterance reflect at least two points of
view which are derived from his sociocultural situatedness. Because of many variables of sociocultural factors, mediated action requires heterogeneity of approaches to thinking and representation of thought and mediation is requisite to managing sociocultural, institutional, and environmental settings and concerns.

Wertsch (1991) believes that the term mind, rather than cognition, can best be related to mediated action because mind encompasses a greater range of human mental activity. When speaking of the relationships between mind and action, we can also include the act of memory, reasoning, attention, creativity, problem-solving, etc. in connection with the psychological and technical tools, which are also influenced by social situatedness.

For Wertsch, (1991) the term sociocultural is essential to the explanation of mediated action because of the inseparability of the individual, his action, and his chosen mediational instrument from his cultural, historical, and institutional setting. In short, Wertsch emphasizes that mediated action must be understood in analyzing the relationship between the individual's desire to alter his environment and the manner in which the environment influences his choice of instruments to do so.

This review of Vygotsky's and Wertsch's theories form a nexus between the situation of unsolicited student note
writing in my classroom, educational theory, and my selection of activities (mediational means) to encourage elaboration and meaningful content in the writing my students produce.

Teachers of all subjects will concur that a diversion in which students prefer to engage, when they decide that task at hand lacks appeal, is writing notes to their friends. Naturally, I am a little insulted that my students consider messages to friends about last night's party, a new boyfriend, or an argument with a friend as more valuable than what I am trying to teach.

When I notice a student busily absorbed in such activity, I sneak up upon the unsuspecting writer and snatch the clandestine message out from under her (usually, but sometimes his) pen. At this point, the entire class of students want to take part in what was intended to be a private communication and they beg me to read the notes. Explaining that I am trying to gain their attention to the subject at hand, rather than to cause distraction, I never read the notes aloud, but caution that I do save them for parents who might want to know the reasons students have unsatisfactory grades.

Yet, when I consider the content of student notes I have confiscated over the years, I realize that these letters are really more than a diversion. In these communications, students try to solve problems, seek
advice, evaluate a past social event, or plan a future activity. If students did not have a need for this communication of their thoughts, this activity likely would not occur. That is, they communicate to serve their needs, their experiences motivate their communication, and their need to communicate about a past or anticipated experience is great enough that it takes priority over education, which, rationally, seems to be at least as significant of a need.

Many sociocultural factors may influence my students' desires to write letters rather than to listen and pay attention to the task at hand. In the reality of many of my students experiencing early adolescence, relationships with peers are, in fact, more critical than what I want to teach them. Attracting and holding the attention of my students is a greater task for me than it is for teachers in some other classrooms because of my students' situatedness or sociocultural backgrounds. Through an informal survey, I have learned that approximately 61% of my students have suffered the trauma of divorcing parents and broken homes. Many live with only one parent, or one parent and that parent's "boyfriend" or "girlfriend." One boy was arrested for being somehow involved in a armed robbery and attempted murder. Another boy's father was stabbed to death in prison. Several have parents who have been or are in prison.
Others have parents who abuse alcohol or drugs. Several students are members of gangs or are "wannabes". The list of social ailments afflicting my students goes on and on.

It is no wonder that my students' attention strays. It is also no wonder that many of them prefer to write notes instead of attending to what I have planned. Likely, they have a need to communicate their concerns to friends at school because many have no one else with whom to communicate. The economic, social, and cultural situation of my students is inseparably intertwined with their need to communicate their needs, feelings, and concerns in the classroom, through both written and vocal speech. For many, school may be one of the few places where someone is able and willing to hear and respond. Yet, I must try to teach and they must try to learn. For many of my students, learning, and especially learning to write, has been a greatest academic need and also the skill with which they have exhibited the greatest helplessness.

Vygotsky's (1988) explanation of the complexity of writing has helped me to better understand writing difficulties and influenced my choice of mediational activities for this master's project. Vygotsky theorizes that the socially rooted egocentric speech, which accompanies children's play and assists them in dealing
with the realities of their environment, turns inward at about the time a child begins school. Egocentric speech gradually develops into a fundamental structure of cognition. While the oral language of a child beginning school contains the vocabulary and grammatical forms necessary for writing at this time, a child's command of oral speech leads that of his written speech by a difference of as much as eight years.

Vygotsky (1988) maintains that oral and written speech differ in both form and method in numerous and significant ways. Primary differences are: (a) the abstract quality of written speech; (b) its absence of an interlocutor; (c) its requisite of conscious and unconscious effort on the part of the writer; (d) its lack of gestures, intonation, and other non-verbal cues; and (e) its lack of immediacy in response which limits the motivation of the writer. Moreover, while written language is dependent upon the existence of inner speech, syntactically, the linguistic functions are dissimilar.

According to Vygotsky (1988), written speech is the most complex of the human speech forms. It is abstract because, unlike oral speech, it is thought without the aid that gestures and intonation lend to meaning. Writers speak without a visible audience. They do not know when or even if they will be heard or receive a reply.
Because a writer lacks an interlocutor, he should continually remain conscious of the prospective reader's possible lack of understanding of the situation about which he writes. Writers must plan before writing and anticipate several drafts to adjust for clarity, while oral speakers speak spontaneously and seldom self-correct repeatedly.

Once the writer has managed to match the sound and meaning symbols, he must also give more attention to precise meaning because he cannot use gestures and intonation. Additionally, he must choose the correct alphabetical representation for each of his verbal symbols and be much more exact in the use of syntax. Herein, exists a critical difference between the relationship of inner speech and written speech. In comparison to inner speech, a mental activity which is "condensed" and "abbreviated," Vygotsky (1988) describes written speech, of necessity, as requiring precision and conscious elaboration. This contrast arises out of the lack of need for subjects in inner speech because the speaker always knows the subject and, therefore, only uses predicates. Contrarily, all written sentences must have both a subject and a predicate.

Vygotsky's (1988) explanation of the complexity of written expression and its social function has implications for teachers of students who experience
difficulty with writing. He advises that teachers would be wise to consider social and purposeful uses of written language when selecting writing assignments for the classroom. He advises:

Teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something. If they are used only to write official greetings to the staff or whatever the teacher thinks up (and clearly suggests to them), then the exercise will be purely mechanical and may soon bore the child. ....reading and writing must be something the child needs....

Writing must be meaningful... for children, an intrinsic need should be aroused in them, and that writing would be incorporated into a task that is necessary and relevant for life. Only then can we be certain that it will develop not as a matter of finger habits, but as a really new and complex form of speech. (Vygotsky cited in Staton Shuy, 1988, pp. 117-118).

In summary, writing is a more difficult skill for children to master because it is abstract, deliberate, more intricate, demands conscious and conscientious behavior, and relies upon inner speech which has a syntactic form that is considerably different from that of written speech. Moreover, teachers who want their
students to enjoy and value writing must focus attention on its social function and assign writing activities which make writing meaningful to students.

Vygotsky's (1988) and Wertsch's (1991) explanations of relationships between thought, oral and written language, and sociocultural influences support the conclusions researchers have formed about the relationships between writing, apprehensive writers, writer's block, at-risk students, and motivational factors. Theories of Vygotsky, theories of Wertsch, and my review of the literature have fundamentally influenced my choice of methods to establish a classroom context which encourages students to produce writing which is elaborated and meaningful for students and their audiences.

From my review of the literature, I have determined that the following 13 factors are critical to promotion of meaningful written expression.

1. Writing topics must be generated by students and have relevance and significance in their lives.

2. Students must engage in daily writing practice through writing workshop, journals, diaries, reading logs, etc.

3. Teachers must foster intrinsic motivation, to write by helping students to gain a sense of ownership and efficacy in their world through self-expression.

4. Students must know for whom they are writing and
audiences should be varied.

5. Students must acquire a sense of competency by achieving individualized goals which they have helped to establish.

6. Students must envision writing teachers as communication assistants and not error hunters or fault finders.

7. Students must use all stages of the writing process.

8. Students must learn that writing is a messy, flexible, and ongoing process of revision.

9. Teachers must foster the critical perception that the fundamental purpose of proofreading, editing, and revision is to clarify meaning for clear communication and not to make a paper esthetically appealing.

10. Teachers must write to model the practice of what they teach.

11. Teachers must model the value that writing provides for self-expression by writing for their students to communicate to their students.

12. Teachers must use discretion in choosing literature so that reading relates to students' experiences, concerns, sociocultural situatedness, evokes students emotions, stimulates critical analysis and evaluation, and encourages problem-solving skills. Literature which examines sociocultural issues and the
dilemmas of the human condition provide this type of reading.

13. Teachers must be mindful of the sociocultural context of their students' homes, communities, and the classroom when choosing objectives, methods, and activities, and when evaluating the progress of their students.
Project Design

With these 13 critical motivational factors in mind the purpose of this project is (a) to examine methods and activities which encourage positive adolescent attitudes and particularly at-risk students' attitudes towards writing and promote a desire to write among underachieving students; (b) discover approaches which will motivate student concern for clarification of meaning so that content will also improve; (c) foster student ownership and enjoyment of writing which is elaborated, meaningful, and valuable to students and their readers.

Objectives

In designing this project, my objectives were to convey the following messages to students: (a) Writing is an enjoyable means of communication; (b) Writing is a messy process and we must use all the parts of this flexible process to produce writing which is meaningful to ourselves and our readers; (c) We must continually practice writing to improve written self-expression; (d) Writing improves thinking. Our writing and writing of professional authors can influence the thoughts and actions of other people; and (e) Meaningful writing is worth sharing, saving, and analyzing. We can use our own writing to evaluate our own progress and set goals to improve writing.
To accomplish these objectives, I developed and implemented four activities for this project. These are: (a) student letter exchange; (b) writing workshop; (c) literature logs in conjunction with reading *The Crossing*; and (d) student self-evaluations of their writing. These activities are based on theory, my review of the literature, my teaching experiences, and my observations of the attitudes, behaviors, and sociocultural characteristics of the student population of the middle school at which I teach. I will describe these activities in the following section.
Methods

Description of the Setting and Subjects

The nine hundred and seventy-four students attending this city school are from middle-class and working-class families. Twenty-five percent of those enrolled receive government assistance. Thirty-eight percent of the students are Hispanic, 36% percent are Anglo, 18% percent are Black, and six percent are Asian.

Students' assignments to classrooms are intended to create heterogeneous groups, but many teachers note that student behavior, attitudes, academic performance, and records indicate that students in some classes seem to form homogeneous groups of underachieving students.

Approximately 61% of my students have suffered the trauma of divorce and are step-children or come from single-parent homes. This is a high percentage and I suspect that this figure strongly influences student behaviors and student performance in my classroom.

Most students are enthusiastic about the social opportunities that school provides, but the prevailing student attitude does not value scholarship. Most students exhibit what I can best describe as an "anti-scholar" attitude. Each time I complete grade reports, one of my comments for at least eighty-five percent of the students is that their effort and performance is not consistent with their ability.
One of my Anglo students (participating in this project) who was a cheerleader this year, demonstrates the attitude of many students. She wrote in one of her letters, "You have to kiss butt around here to get good grades." Students who carry books, notebooks, participate by answering questions in class, and complete assignments are stigmatized as "nerds," "school girls," or "school boys". Being "cool" by "kickin back" has top priority. Teachers consider themselves fortunate when students arrive with a pencil, and paper contained by a "Peachie" (heavy paper folder) folded and tucked in a back pocket.

The thirteen girls and fifteen boys on whom I focused my attention were in my seventh grade language arts and reading classroom. Of these 28 participants in this project, 14 students were Hispanic, nine were Anglo, and five were Black. Generally, these were underachieving and at-risk students. I can think of only one, an Anglo girl, Ann, who served as a role model though one Hispanic boy, Juan, made considerable progress at improving both his academic and social behavior and may soon become a role model.

Procedures and Activities

From the beginning of this year, I wrote for my students, I modeled the planning stage, brainstorming with a cluster, I modeled drafting, and I modeled
revisions. Together, we practiced the writing process. The stage at which I have always met the most resistance is drafting. As I wrote on the overhead transparency, thought of a better word or better sentence structure, and crossed out to rewrite, students writing at their desks always protested. Moans, groans, sounds of smudging erasers, and cries of, "why don't you make up your mind?" arose. And I would always respond, "It doesn't matter! Don't erase! Just cross it out! This is just a rough draft! This is what your draft is supposed to look like! This is what you have to do if you think of a better way to say what you want to say while you are writing."

Though I have most often assigned writing topics with my obligation to meet curricular requirements in mind, usually for preparation of state proficiency or California Assessment Program (CAP) tests, or to relate writing to literature, my assignments have almost always asked the student to draw from personal experience. This year, as in the past, about one-half to three-quarters of my students complete in-class writing assignments and one-half to two-thirds complete writing assignments given as homework. Many students have balked when told that the completed assignment should be at least one-half page in length. Though I have always asked students to turn in evidence of their brainstorming, rough draft, and at
least one proofread and revised draft, as in past years, I often received only one draft.

The usual length of completed assignments was one-third to one-half of a page of writing lacking organization, containing many mechanical errors, and manifesting content which has usually given me the impression that the student wrote so she or he could say, "Yes, I did my work."

After five years of teaching writing with results which were disappointing to me and my students, my choices of letter writing, writing workshop, and literature logs in conjunction with The Crossing, and student writing evaluations sought to convey the following messages: (a) Writing is enjoyable; (b) Writing provides an opportunity to express our thoughts and feelings about topics that are important to us; (c) Writing improves thinking and we can use our writing to influence the thoughts and actions of other people; (d) We use the writing process of planning, drafting, proofreading, rethinking, editing, revising, and publishing to enable us to communicate so that our readers can clearly understand our messages; (e) Writing is a messy process; (f) We must continually practice writing to improve communication through writing; and (f) Meaningful writing is worth saving, analyzing, and can be used to evaluate our progress.
**Letter Exchange Activity**

I selected letter writing to minimize some of the abstract qualities of written speech and to fulfill several of the requisites I determined as necessary for fostering meaningful and elaborated writing. In his discussion of the complexity of written speech, Vygotsky (1988) explains that the lack of immediacy of response, lack of an interlocutor, and the inability of the writers to know when or if they will be heard or understood are some of the factors which make written speech more abstract and more difficult to master. With paired writing partners, although an immediate response was not available, an interlocutor was waiting to respond so students knew that they had an audience and could be fairly certain that they would be heard and would receive a response.

The student letter exchange served to fulfill the students' communicative needs of sharing, confiding, analyzing, and solving social concerns. My review of literature discussed adolescents' heightened social concerns and their need to communicate these concerns to their peers. Research also shows that the preferred audience of adolescents is more likely to be their peers. Hudson (1988) emphasized the student's need for "adult-like" reasons to write, and many researchers emphasize the benefits that interaction, a real audience, real
purpose, student-generated topics, and freedom from evaluation lend to student writing. Additionally, Britton (1987) suggests that a reoccurring exchange of letters between students will aid students in forming the natural nexus between reading and writing.

My primary objectives of the letter exchange were to make writing enjoyable, provide regular opportunities for student generated topics which would satisfy a genuine student need for a meaningful written communication without evaluation of content or mechanics, to provide a real audience, and to provide quick responses.

I decided to assign points for letter length because of the need for clarification of criteria for evaluating effort, that is, students needed to know my expectations, standards, and requirements for grading purposes. I told the students that the score they received for letters would be based on length and that the highest score would be twenty-five points for a full page of writing. I also told them that if (a) they wrote a letter, three quarters of a page in length, every time they were supposed to do so; (b) completed four writing workshop papers; and (c) completed all the literature log entries I assigned, I guaranteed that they would earn at least a grade of C for the semester.

We began our letters by first making a list of possible topics. I wrote my list on an overhead
transparency and the students made their own lists. Most of the students thought they should begin with some sort of description of themselves. Our lists included about twenty different topics. Next, I wrote a letter to an imaginary friend on the overhead transparency as students watched. Then, students wrote their own letters. As they wrote, I moved around the room assigning letters of the alphabet for identification purposes. I told the students that they could make up fake names if they wished.

I was hoping to keep the partners anonymous. My reason for doing so was to minimize anxiety some apprehensive writers might feel about another student identifying writing faults. I collected the letters from first period students and passed them out to third period students. When each student finished his or her replying letter, he or she stapled this letter to the received letter, these letters were collected, and I evaluated and scored them on their length. A day or two later, students on the receiving end, once again responded and the process repeated. The students wrote letters twice a week for about 25 minutes.

**Writing Workshop Activity**

A systematic implementation of writing workshop, the second component of my writing program, incorporates many factors that I have determined to be essential to
stimulating meaningful and elaborated written communication. Writing workshop combines the benefits of social interaction, real audiences (peers and teachers or others if students choose), student-generated topics, promotion of ownership, and regularly scheduled practice of the writing process prescribed by many authors in the literature review.

Vygotsky, (1988) theorizes that social interaction promotes cognitive development. He explains:

It is the "collision of our thoughts with the thoughts of others that engenders thought and calls for verification....

It is hardly possible to express better the idea that the need for logical thinking and the search for truth in general come from the communication between the consciousness of a child and the consciousness of others... It [the idea] also closely resembles the thesis of Alexander Bogdanov that the objective character of physical reality, as it is present on our experience, is ultimately verified through the social organization of the experiences of others (p. 48).

Stimulation of cognitive development is a serious need of at-risk students I teach and they need the thoughts, opinions, and suggestions, and interest of their peers to encourage their own writing. Moreover there are few
students who will choose to write by themselves when they have the opportunity to enjoy the interaction with friends as they write.

I told the students that I would evaluate their writing workshop papers on their ability to improve clarity, content, details and elaboration in their revised drafts. We discussed clarity, content, and details, and elaboration as we have many times in the past.

Prior to this, I had explained elaborated writing as writing in which the writer specifies, describes, and provides details which express thoughts and/or feelings, or creates pictures. Details include (a) sensory words; (b) original thought; (c) examples; (d) facts; and (f) precise verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc. I have explained writing with meaningful content as work in which the writer demonstrates at least one of the following characteristics; (a) a display of genuine enthusiasm for and commitment towards her or his topic; (b) demonstration of a deliberate attempt to convey her or his thoughts on paper; (c) evocation of an emotional response from the reader by making the reader smile, laugh, cry, fear, feel anger, sympathize, etc.; (d) in some way stimulates an intellectual response; (e) in some way rewards the reader for having read the composition.

For this project, I scheduled writing workshop for at
least three 40-minute periods each week of the last quarter. In this workshop, students practiced all stages of the writing process which include brainstorming for topics, writing a rough draft, reading, contemplating and discussing what they wrote, proofreading, revising, rewriting, and publishing.

I supplied three sheets of workshop guidelines to assist the students as they worked, explained these guidelines, and gave the students an opportunity to ask questions. Then, we brainstormed for topics. I emphasized the need for choosing topics that students thought were important to themselves and that I wanted them to express their feelings about their topics. As I wrote my list on the overhead transparency, students made their own lists. Then, we shared our ideas. Next, on a transparency, I brainstormed about my garden and then began a draft. After I finished my draft, the students began their own brainstorming and then started their first drafts.

During the brainstorming portion of this process, students could work by themselves or with a peer. They drew a cluster (sometimes called a web or a diagram) of their main ideas and supporting details or they wrote an outline. Ideas of the cluster can be numbered to organize the order of ideas for writing the rough draft.

During the drafting stage of writing workshops, the
objective is for the writer to write his thoughts without worrying about errors. While writing the draft or when the draft is finished, students in writing workshops can ask for assistance from peers or the teacher. After finishing the draft, students used their guidelines to have a conference with their peers, to read, contemplate, proofread, and revise their drafts. I usually helped students with their writing after they had completed their first revision. When they completed their second revision, they or one of my student, teacher assistants published (typed) this revision for display or for safe keeping, along with brainstorming, drafts, and revisions, in their writing folder.

I sometimes began writing workshop by asking students to first write without talking for about ten minutes, but realizing the need for flexibility and the possibility that students may need the help of a peer at the beginning of the session, I usually allowed students to hold conferences when they needed to do so.

Although I needed to observe the students as they worked, when I began the workshop, I fully intended to model writing as my students wrote. Perhaps, if my students were more skilled in writing and assisting each other, I would have been able to carry out my intentions. Every time I thought I might begin writing, someone would ask for assistance. Peer editors missed a great many
changes that were needed and so I always spent a considerable amount of time with each student who asked for help.

When a student and I held a conference about a paper, I first asked her or him to read the entire paper to me. Then, I began to question about certain parts that I did not understand or parts that contained mechanical errors. I was usually able to lead the student into finding the areas needing clarification or correction. I tried to help students by having them tell me what they were trying to say, or what the correction should be to clarify meaning. The students made the changes on their papers.

At least once a week, I presented a mini lesson. I made a transparency of one of the best student papers and asked students to select and discuss the best features of this paper. Then, using the same transparency, we proofread to clarify meaning and I tried to use time discussing the most typical types of errors students made. Because I selected examples which were the best writing, other students were positively impressed. The author of the paper being read seemed proud and appeared to have benefited from the comments and students' suggestions for changes.

Though I was often discouraged when students seemed to take advantage of the freedom to converse, and I worried
that progress was so slow, overall I continued to feel that students were benefiting from writing workshop. I was eager to make a thorough comparison and analysis of this writing when the quarter ended.

Literature and Literature Logs Activity

For the third student activity of this project, I selected literature logs in conjunction with reading *The Crossing*. This is a short novel in which Gary Paulson writes of a the relationship between a Mexican orphan who works the streets of Juarez and a emotionally scared, drunken sergeant trying to escape his tragic memories of Vietnam. Here my objective was to stimulate more critical thought and critical writing. Also, I was hoping to increase the connection between reading and writing through thought provoking literature that was relevant to my students.

Gentile and McMillan (1990) suggest that at-risk students have background knowledge for texts focusing on the sociocultural issues and the human condition and that such literature has particular relevance to such students. They advise that at-risk students frequently have chaotic home environments which filled with conflicts. Gentile and McMillan (1990) explain:

> These students have a vast store of prior knowledge and experience which polarizes issues such as good and evil, love and indifference, kindness
and malevolence, joy and sorrow, perseverance and surrender, purpose and aimlessness, belonging and alienation, hope and despair, vitality and lethargy, loyalty and treachery, generosity and greed, forthrightness and dishonesty, proper ambition and exploitation (p. 387).

When I considered the sociocultural context of my student's lives, I decided that The Crossing would provide more relevance than the Red Pony, a required reading for seventh grade students. Because half of my students were Hispanic and likely knew much about the plight of friends or relatives living in Mexico, I thought Paulson's novel would stimulate critical thought for evaluative writing.

I also introduced The Crossing the first week of the last quarter. I told the students that I would evaluate their oral responses and their literature log responses on their ability to show comprehension of the story, their demonstration of critical thinking, and their ability to support responses with evidence from the story where this was appropriate.

As a pre-reading activity for this short novel, to provide more background knowledge for all of my students, we discussed aspects of the illegal border crossings of Mexicans and other Hispanic's from other Hispanic countries. For another prereading activity, I showed
the film, *El Norte*, which deals with the illegal entry and difficult adjustment of two refugees from El Salvador. Next, we discussed the setting of the novel. Then, we took turns reading aloud.

Each day, before we started reading, I wrote recall questions on the board or sometimes just asked the questions. Sometimes students first answered the questions in their literature logs and other times we simply discussed the questions. I frequently stopped to ask questions about what would happen next, why the characters acted as they did, or what the characters might be thinking.

I suspected that because of Paulson’s style in this novel, the students might not know which character's thoughts were being expressed, so I questioned students on this aspect. The students were sometimes impatient with my questioning, but I found, from the great length of time required for us to explain the events and action of the characters, that my student's comprehension of the story would be inadequate without these discussions. However, the novel held their attention, they looked forward to reading it, and few were involved with other activities as we read.

**Student Self-evaluation of Writing**

The fourth activity I incorporated into this project was the students' evaluation of their writing through
written responses to self-evaluation questions. The language arts teachers at my school have been planning for portfolio assessment and I have attended two portfolio workshops. This year, we planned to have the students evaluate their writing through writing evaluation questions. I intended that the purpose of these questions should serve as a metacognitive activity for students and as tool for student self-evaluation and setting goals. Additionally, I realized that such an activity would be especially useful in assisting me to assess student perceptions of the writing activities which were part of this project.

I composed five questions about writing activities and one question which asked students to select three writing workshop papers to save in their portfolios. I asked the students to explain their reasons for saving these assignments. Students completed these evaluation sheets during the last week of school.
Results

For the purpose of examining the results of this project, I evaluated the exchange of student letters, students' completed writing workshop assignments, students' literature journals, and students' own evaluation of their writing which has become part of their writing portfolios.

Student Letter Exchange

The purpose of the student letter exchange was, for the most part, to motivate enjoyment of writing through social interaction, to provide a known and non-threatening audience, and to thereby increase the amount, frequency, and practice of writing. As I had hoped, almost all students looked forward to this activity.

On this first day that students wrote their letters, some students wrote full pages and a variety of other shorter lengths, and spent 10 to 30 minutes writing. Six of my underachieving students, however, did not write at all. Juan, another underachieving student who was beginning to show a little more involvement, wrote a letter one-quarter of a page in length.

The greatest problem resulted from absent students, but we continued with this activity twice a week. Students who did not receive letters became indignant and discouraged. This was particularly frustrating for the underachieving students, but continued switching of
partners was entirely too confusing and also ineffective. I felt their frustration, but with my encouragement and attempts to humor them, most continued to persist with at least a few sentences. Though I told students they should write letters at home if they were absent, no student followed this suggestion. Therefore, absenteeism was a primary factor in the low letter writing rate of some students. The others who seldom wrote, when they were present, were students who continued with their practice of avoidance of writing.

Although many students did not write as much as I had hoped, one student, Juan, who seldom wrote before this project began, wrote thirteen times. Lisa, who had not completed any writing assignments prior to the beginning of this project, wrote regularly and increased the length of her writing time once she was able to write to her friend in the third period class. This last detail demonstrates the beneficial effects of small changes.

Most often, students wrote about their families, friends, memories, and school activities. For the most part, students slightly increased the amount that they wrote as the project progressed. Those who usually completed writing assignments in the past, showed the greatest increase in the amount that they wrote. While students enjoyed sharing responses from their partners with their friends, during letter writing sessions, most
students worked quietly and most were usually on task. Frequently, throughout the quarter, as they entered the room, my students asked, "Do we get to write letters today?" Often, if letters were not in the lesson plan, they expressed disappointment.

Seven out of 28 students in the targeted underachieving group wrote letters in each of the 14 letter-writing sessions of this project. Ten students wrote between 9 and 13 letters, 6 students wrote between 4 and 8 letters, and 5 students wrote 3 times or less.

I consider this letter exchange to be very useful in stimulating enjoyment of writing, providing a definite sense of audience for adolescent writers, and as especially useful in demonstrating the self-expressive and social function of writing.

Writing Workshop

The writing workshop portion of this project served to accomplish several objectives. It was to provide a relaxed, regularly scheduled time for writing, interaction on student selected topics and a definite audience because the students knew their peers and I would be reading what was written. Self-selected topics were to help foster the desire to write.

I frequently worried during writing workshop because I see learning time as extremely valuable and the students I teach tend to talk about other topics when given the
freedom to work together. I also worried that some students might balk as they entered the room and saw that writing workshop was again scheduled on the chalkboard. However, most students began to accept this frequently scheduled writing activity and became engaged from the start. Most students stayed on task and made acceptable progress though some could have used time more wisely.

After three weeks of workshop, some students still had not finished one complete page of writing. Nevertheless, I was extremely pleased with the content, appearance of voice, details, and meaningfulness of some of the writing that some of the students produced. Additionally, a few of the students who had produced little or no writing began, ever so slowly, to write.

Juan who had turned in two writing assignments during the entire past three quarters, finished three papers covering about three-fifths of a page after five weeks. After he turned in his first assignment, I asked him if he knew what he should do next. He replied, "Start another paper."

When I asked what he should use to start writing, he answered, "My topic list. Can I write about my second favorite topic?"

Relieved and pleased that he did not rebel, in a matter of fact manner, I responded, "Sure, any topic you want."
To my amazement he then questioned, "Can I work on one at home?"

This response was a real surprise, but again I replied, "Sure you can." I do not believe that he did ever begin a writing assignment at home, but just his thought of doing so was enough to make a red letter day.

Juan and Enrique sat by each other as they wrote. Enrique also seldom turned in writing assignments. When Enrique asked Juan for advice on his second paper, Juan was able to show Enrique where he had drifted off his topic. Very gradually, while listening and reading rough drafts, I found evidence that some students were helping each other.

Writing workshop provided practice of the writing process. In this activity, students used guidelines and peer and teacher conferences to choose topics, brainstorm, write rough drafts, contemplate, revise, rewrite, and share their writing. They learned and accepted that planning, drafting, proofreading, correction, and revision were flexible processes necessary to clarify meaning. Changes made in rough drafts and revisions demonstrated that peer conferences and student-teacher conferences helped students as they wrote or revised. Students' revised drafts seems to show that peer interaction assisted students in understanding that revision helps to clarify.
Each time, when a student and I held a conference and I hesitantly handed a student a red or green pen for corrections and revisions, he or she made the changes without reservations. The students never seemed to suffer from this process. They continued to return for the same type of help and always rewrote papers at least once. They acknowledged the need for change to clarify meaning. They learned that writing is a messy and malleable process requiring several revisions for the purpose of clear self-expression.

I have become convinced that until the type of students I have gain more experience with and knowledge about clarification of meaning and the myriad of errors that can interfere with clear written communication, teacher corrections by themselves accomplish very little. Consequently, peer editing and correcting, teacher conferences (though very time consuming), and whole class corrections through mini lessons, seem to be the only solutions for the time being.

Thirteen students accomplished the goal of completing the 4 writing assignments for this project. Five students completed 3 papers, 5 students completed 2 papers, 3 students completed 1 paper, and 2 students did not complete any writing workshop papers. However, the success of those who had written at all until this project is more revealing.
Four students who had not completed more than two assignments for the last three quarters of the school year, completed all four assignments. The letter exchange with her friend seemed to have been especially helpful in stimulating Lisa's interest to also write in writing workshop. Though she had not turned in any writing assignment all year, she was one of these four at-risk four students who completed all four of these workshop assignments. Three students who seldom wrote, completed all four assignments, and three who had previously turned in one or no assignments, completed three assignments. Additionally, all of these at-risk students completed at least one revision and a second draft without complaints. The papers of all of the at-risk students were usually about three-quarters of a page in length and were not more than a page in length. Students have who usually turned in writing assignments frequently increased the length of their writing by at least one-half of a page. Some wrote fiction stories over three pages in length.

Moreover, through students' concern for their own self-selected topics, their descriptions using sensory words, examples, more precise vocabulary, and expression of feelings and thoughts, they added elaboration which made their writing meaningful to themselves and their audience.
The Crossing and Literature Logs

Most students looked forward to our reading and discussion sessions of The Crossing and only a few complained that this novel was boring. However, the literature log responses to my questions were, for the most part, disappointing. Nineteen out of the 28 students in the target class turned in their logs for evaluation. One student earned a score of 90%, one student earned an 85%, two students earned 80%, one earned 75%, one student earned 65%, four earned 60%, and the remainder earned from 55% to 5%.

Most of my literature questions for their log entries involved critical thinking. I usually incorporate considerable prompting when the whole class practices discussions in this level of questioning. Because other activities for this project involved cooperative learning and interaction, I selected individual responses for literature journals. I thought that Gary Paulson's fairly simple writing style, topics, and themes would be culturally familiar and relatively easy for the students. On the contrary, many did not respond to my literature questions or did not demonstrate critical evaluation when they did respond. Often students failed to address the most significant parts of questions. The responses of only a few of the more experienced writers and readers gave evidence of critical thinking. However, my students
usually have difficulty with providing written critical evaluation of literature. Lack of success with this particular portion of this project most likely reflects their difficulty with critical evaluation and immature writing abilities rather than their interest in the novel that we read.

**Writing Evaluation Questions**

Though their responses to the writing evaluation questions, students reaffirmed what their changed attitudes and participation in the project activities demonstrated. Because I wanted to give students all available time to write during the quarter, I passed out these writing evaluation questions on the Tuesday and Wednesday of the last week of school. Knowing of the holiday mood that the students would be feeling, I was worried about their response to this requirement assigned at the very end of the school year. However, I was surprised and pleased with the seriousness of their attitudes and effort as they examined the contents of their writing folders and responded to the questions.

In the targeted, low-achieving class, seven students did not respond to the questions of the evaluation sheet and seven others did not respond to all questions. The responses of two students were irrelevant to the questions. I have prefaced the following discussion of student responses with my questions from the writing
evaluation form.

Question 1: Please discuss your opinions of writing. What opinions did you have about writing at the beginning of this school year? Have your opinions changed and, if so, how and why do you think they have changed?

Eleven students answered that they had not enjoyed or valued writing at the beginning of the year, but now did so. One student replied that she had always enjoyed writing and would continue to do so. Two students replied that they still do not like to write.

The students' responses to this question, shown in Figure 1, (p. 83) demonstrate that increased writing practice and self-selected topics significantly influenced their feelings and opinions about writing. Students evince gained confidence and many now believe that writing is an enjoyable process.

Question 2: Have other students in this class helped you with your writing? If so, please explain the ways that someone has helped you.

Eighteen students responded that their friends had helped them to write when they "got stuck," could not spell a word, needed ideas or details, and helped to proofread and find mistakes. One of the more competent students responded that friends did not help with writing. The students' responses to this second
Figure 1. Students' opinions of writing.

An overview of writing in the classroom is discussed in this section. It is stated that writing is an important part of the learning process. Students are encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas through writing. At the beginning of the year, some students found writing difficult, but as the year progressed, they became more comfortable with the process. Writing is seen as a tool for self-expression and communication. The part of the year that was liked best was the end, as it was fun and engaging. Overall, the students found writing to be a positive experience.
question, in Figure 2, (p. 85) verify that they thought their peers were helpful in proofreading, assisting in spelling, making suggestions when they "got stuck," identifying personal qualities of peers who became characters in fiction stories, and by showing each other where to add dialogue.

Question 3: Do you think that your writing has improved this year? Why or why not? Please explain how your writing has improved. Why do you write better now?

Thirteen students thought that they wrote better and believed this was due to changed feelings towards writing, more practice, more time to write, choosing their own topics, more of their own effort, and adding more details. Additionally, the students described evidence of improvement as enjoyment of writing, increased length of their papers, being able to finish, improved writing grades, more details, "better words," and passing their paragraph proficiency test.

In Figure 3, (p. 87) students cite evidence of improved writing as fewer errors, increased length, passing proficiencies, and a raised grade. They believe this improvement results because they now enjoy writing, have been "practicing alot," and have had help from "diferen people."

Question 4: What kind of writing do you think you are best at doing? What are the types or writing we have
Figure 2. Students' opinions about the helpfulness of their peers during writing workshop.

Yes. The way some have helped me is by spelling a hard word or when I am stuck they get me on the right track.

They helped me put more detail and was exposed to more dialog where ever it wanted to. At last I didn't know when to put dialog and now I do.

My friends and Mom helped me with my story The Cat-fight. They helped me by helping me keep quality.

Other students have helped me with writing they have helped me get ideas to write about helped me proofread spells.

Yes they help me proof write in my story.
done that you most enjoy? What are your writing strengths? What problems do you have when you write? What goal or goals do you want to establish (set) for your next quarter (or year) of writing?

Many students thought that writing true stories about their family, friends, experiences, and letters were the most enjoyable types of writing. Some preferred poetry and a few preferred fiction. (Students have a habit of identifying everything they write as a "story" so unless they are specific, I found difficulty in learning the type of writing they most enjoyed). Goals students established were to write longer and more papers, or "stories," add more details, write with fewer errors, write faster, and to improve spelling.

I consider self-selected topics as one of the most significant factors in stimulating the student's desire to write. Student responses to this question, shown in Figures 4 (p. 89) demonstrate that students enjoy writing when they write about topics that matter to them and influence their lives. Repeatedly, students responded that writing about themselves, their friends, their families and their experiences provided enjoyable writing.

Question 5: As your teacher, what have I done to help you with your writing? What, if anything, could I do to be more helpful?
Figure 3. Students' beliefs about their improvement in writing.

Yes, I know my writing has improved because at the beginning of the year I had to write and I hated it. I couldn't pass my proficiency and when I did start liking to write it was easy for me to pass my proficiency.

I think my has improved not that much, but a little because I haven't passed my proficiency. My writing has improved because I can write a story and not have so many errors. I write better because my teacher helps me.

Yes, now I am able to write more words. I write better because I have been practicing a lot.

Yes, I do think it has a prove this year because I had different people helping me do it.

Thinking I writing the is improved very much at first would only write half a page now I write a page/½.

Yes it has improved a lot I raised my grade.
The students replied that I helped most by assisting them in finding their errors, helping them to think of the "right" words, and giving individual help and time to students. Many students did not respond to this question and only a two had suggestions for ways I could be more helpful. One student who said she did not like writing thought I could give more encouragement. Another student wanted more help with spelling.

In their responses to this question, shown in Figure 5, (p. 90) the students acknowledge the malleable quality of the writing process. They have learned that a first draft is destined for revision and this understanding seems to have encouraged expression of ideas, memories, feelings, and imagination with confidence that succeeding drafts will clarify the thoughts they wish to communicate.
Figure 4. Students' favorite types of writing.

I think I am best of doing true stories. I want to enjoy real stories that I can write that has happened to me. I really don't have any problem with my writing. The goal that I want to attain is to write more stories or more paragraphs.

I think I am best of writing about my past from what I already know. The writing that I have done that I enjoyed is writing about myself. My writing strengths are writing about what I know and the details that others give me about something I want to be able to write longer and more interesting stories.

I think I am good at writing stories about my friends and family. The problem is, I need to think about the people written. My goals to write 2 to 3 pages of stories, I think we are nice stories. Good. I am good at writing about myself and about basketball.
Students demonstrate accept and understand the malleable process of writing.
Conclusions

Both my students and I benefited from this project. Although the activities I implemented to stimulate student enjoyment of meaningful writing were not completely successful, I am pleased with the results. In the future, I intend to use all of these activities in my language arts and literature classrooms.

One student, Juan, wrote in one of his writing workshop papers, that my class was fun. I never expected such a compliment from this student who very seldom wrote until the last quarter of this school year, and was a discipline problem throughout the first semester of the school year. I believe that the student letter exchange was instrumental in making writing "fun" for Juan and many other underachieving students. Because I did not evaluate the content or mechanics of these letters, though I did assign higher scores to longer letters, students were not inhibited by fears of mistakes. Because social interaction is a primary objective of these middle school students, they did not perceive this activity as work, but rather as an enjoyable activity fulfilling a social need.

Another noteworthy observation is my students' indifference to the lower grades assigned for shorter letters. Letter length for most of the at-risk students increased little and seems to reaffirm my contention, at
least at this point, that grades are not significant incentives for underachieving students. They wrote until they had expressed whatever they felt the need to express and then stopped writing. The students who expressed desire to earn higher scores on their letters were the ones who had earned a grade of C or better throughout the year.

Because of my past experiences with writing assignments, I expected students to balk when they entered the room, looked on the chalk board, and saw that writing workshop was again a scheduled activity. Twice a week, letter writing usually preceded writing workshop and I think that the enjoyable unconstrained activity of letter writing helped to ease students into writing workshop. In addition, because writing was taking up more class time, I was the center of attention much less of the time. The permitted interaction between students made writing much more inviting than listening to me. Their choice of topics and the advice of peers was an additional boon to this activity.

Student acceptance of the disliked requirement of proofreading and revision and the actual improvement on more than surface-level errors such as spelling and capitalization is more difficult to explain. My difficult self-restraint on prompting students to work faster was likely a factor in promoting a relaxed
atmosphere needed for writing of apprehensive students.

One student, Esteben, sat at his desk with his pencil in hand and a few words on his paper, until the next to the last week of the quarter. At the beginning of that week, I gave the students my grade book report of the number of papers each student still needed to complete. Esteben still needed to complete all four of the required papers. Without a doubt, much of his interaction with peers had not involved discussion of his topic or writing, but I continued to try to be patient.

The next day, he turned in an assignment. Esteben and Luis, another one of my students who was just beginning to learn some basic mechanics and gain confidence with writing, were also enrolled in a study lab. A colleague teaching the study lab informed me that Luis had assisted Esteben with completing his first paper in the study lab. In class, for the next week, Luis sat next to Esteben and helped him to complete two more papers before all papers were due. Consequently, it seems that my restraint in not hurrying the students and their interaction with each other played a primary role in encouraging at-risk students to write. However, after students have acquired confidence with writing, I believe that most students, even those with less experience, should be able to complete more than four papers, (three-quarters of a page in length) in nine weeks.
Although not every student participated in the writing evaluation activity and some did not answer all of the evaluation questions, I believe that the students' efforts towards responding to the writing evaluation questions were successful, useful to themselves, and especially useful to me. Responding to their own writing was easier than responding to literature because they are naturally more familiar with it and they can understand their own writing and their peers' writing more easily than they can understand literature. Though I need to investigate methods for assisting literature responses, I can now see that responses to their own and other students' writing might be first steps towards more successful literature logs.

The students gave serious attention to the writing evaluation task because they had begun to regard writing as a useful, valuable, and an enjoyable activity. The preservation of their work made it more meaningful and motivated responsibility to self-evaluate what they had written. The evaluation process also provides individual benchmarks and goals to start off their next period of writing when they return to school.

I believe that the activities I implemented, for the most part, successfully achieved the objectives of this project (see p. 60). The students' (a) enthusiasm for writing letters; (b) their content with writing workshop
activities; (c) the effort of many to complete the required number of writing assignments; and (4) their responses to the writing evaluation questions demonstrate that they now perceive writing as an enjoyable means of communication and have begun to understand that continued writing practice improves self-expression.

The students' willingness to brainstorm, write drafts, proofread, edit, revise, and rewrite several drafts demonstrates that they now perceive writing as a messy and flexible process of revision which leads to more precise self-expression.

The students' willingness to (a) read, contemplate, rewrite; (b) offer suggestions for improvement of their peers' writing; and (c) their serious participation and responses to the writing evaluation sheet also manifests the process of improving writing through thought. More methods and practice are needed to help students to realize the influence that professional writing has upon the thoughts and actions of others.

Additionally, the students' (a) enjoyment of sharing writing with peers; (b) their serious responses to the writing evaluation questions; and (c) their participation in the collection and selection of writing to save in their portfolios helped them to value their writing, appreciate their progress, and establish goals for improvement.
I can only suggest possible explanations for a few students' continued avoidance of writing. Teachers on my middle school team have implemented both positive and negative reinforcement to change the inappropriate and disruptive behavior of these students which has continued through this entire school year. These students who did not write seem not to relate to other school subjects as well and were also unproductive in other classes. They do not seem to realize the value of learning. Perhaps, they do not perceive their experiences as valuable writing topics or, perhaps, they are not able to translate their experiences into the school language. It may be, that as of yet, they are unable to connect their sociocultural experiences with school's purpose of providing a means for fulfillment of their physical needs, emotional needs, social needs, and future.
Implications

The social need to communicate effectively motivates adolescent and at-risk students to write. The letter exchange activity increased many of my underachieving adolescent students' interest in writing because they did not have to worry about teacher evaluation of their written self-expression and were relatively assured of a known and responsive audience.

Regularly scheduled, unrushed, and frequent writing workshops, in which students helped each other through conferencing assisted by guidelines, seems to have lessened at-risk students' anxiety about writing. Student-teacher conferences, peer conferencing, and manifestations of peer interest in each others' work encouraged at-risk students to write and helped these students to realize that proofreading, editing, and revision are necessary steps in the writing process for the purpose of clarifying meaning so that written expression can be better understood.

Students' freedom to select their own topics and genres significantly reduces the difficulties most student have when writing. The need and desire to convey the significance of personal interests and concerns relevant to their sociocultural backgrounds and feelings stimulates the efforts of many adolescent and at-risk students to produce clear and more elaborated writing
which is meaningful to both themselves and their audience.

Portfolios and student self-assessment provide students with the sense that writing which is to be preserved has value. The collection of improved work, completed over a period of time, manifests student's individual accomplishments. The process in which students choose writing to save in portfolios, and writing to discard, helps students to see their improvements and discover types of writing which satisfy their individual communicative needs. Students' evaluation of their own work helps them to see success and establish writing goals for the future.

This project has implications for state, district and teacher selection of writing curriculum and assessment of student progress in writing. The sociocultural situatedness of students should significantly influence state, district, and teacher decisions about curriculum and methods of writing instruction. With awareness and concern for the sociocultural situation of their students, teachers can provide instruction, objectives, assignments, and activities, which foster a desire to participate, cooperate, and to complete assignments. By taking these measures, teachers can accurately assess student progress and provide many minority, at-risk, and other types of low-achieving students with a sense of
accomplishment needed for further endeavors.

Though state tests and specifically the CAP test do attempt to provide prompts which relate to students' interest or experiences, CAP prompts are considerably lacking when they attempt to evaluate student writing abilities. With the random dispersal of CAP writing prompts at testing time, students are unlikely to be fortunate enough to receive a test prompt which is relative to his sociocultural experiences and situation. Consequently, such testing appears to inaccurately assess the abilities of many students and burdens them with the feeling of failure for which they may not be responsible. Previews of the future CAP writing assessment tests do not appear to be much more promising because of their lack of relevance to the lives of many students.

Moreover, with the pressure for successful class and school CAP scores that the state and local school districts impose on teachers, practice on CAP types of prompts becomes part of the curriculum. Though various types of writing such as the CAP report of information, analysis and speculation of effects, biographical sketch, etc. may be useful to some students in the future and may be types of writing which need to be practiced, writing to succeed on the CAP test frequently becomes an end in itself. Such a practice ignores the natural reason to write and establishes the potential to discourage or
stifle many students' desire to write. In summary, educators should use theory, wisdom, knowledge, available research, and give serious consideration to the sociocultural situation of their students when they plan lessons and assess student writing.

In conclusion, educators who wish to stimulate adolescent desire to write should provide regularly scheduled, unrushed, interactive writing practice which focuses on topics that are relevant to students' needs and sociocultural experiences. Teachers must model writing and convey the message that all stages of the flexible writing process are requisite to clearly express what is meaningful to the writer so that his or her writing will bring self-satisfaction and, in so doing, if he or she so desires, have influence upon the reader.
References


Appendix A: Sample of Student Letters

Dear Stacy A. Madison,

I think that we'll have to write at least one more time. So, what did you pick for your elective? I picked Industrial Design and wood shop. Guess who we have to look out for my class? Mr. Umez. so far midrare has a detention and who ever else talked going to detention. All I have to do to get a 55 dollar aluminum bike called the Panther is save up 50 dollars and I already have 20 dollars. You got 65 points on your paper. What for are you in The Crossing? I've been there for a few weeks now. I'm in the processor reading Nineteen eighty. I'm on chapter 15. Well, see from you later. bye!

Sincerely,

Buddha
Dear S.,

Hello, what up? Nothing much here.

About now I am not feeling so well. My grandmother is in the hospital. I don't know why, I guess it was something about her heart.

The doctor said that she should pull through. I hope she does.

I want to get a better grade on this letter, but I don't have much to say. That sounds like it.

You spell college wrong. You spell it like this: col*ge. That is not how you spell her name, Mrs. Shetterter.

I hope she is pretty nice. I guess you have been doing. I stayed home yesterday because I was sick. Well, I guess another bad grade to send. I don't have anything else to say.

Write so BYE!!!

Your friend,

As, nice writing. I know this is very short.

Sorry.
Sample of Student Letters

Dear E,

Who do you think will be the champs, Bulls or Blazers? You know who I am going with, the Bulls. If the Bulls play the Lakers again it would be just like last year's finals, Bulls 4, Lakers 1.

Did you see the fight after school yesterday? I did. It was girls, and you know that girls can fight. Well, time to go. See ya!

Bulls 1
Appendix B: Writing Workshop Guidelines

ACTIVITIES FOR WRITING TIME

1. Add any new topic you have thought of to your topic list.
2. Add additional ideas you want to use to discuss a particular topic.
3. Begin a new draft, or add to or revise a current draft. (Limit of three different topics at one time).
4. Edit a draft for a problem you have identified.
5. Brainstorm ideas for a new topic from your topic list.
6. Write about any new experiences, observations, or thoughts you have had to help you think of a topic if you are having trouble finding something about which to write.
7. Illustrate one of your completed papers.

ACTIVITIES FOR CONFERENCE TIME

1. Continue with one of the above activities (1-7)
2. Have a conference with a friend for ideas or suggestions about what you are writing.
3. Participate in a group conference.
4. If you can show evidence of good progress in your writing, you may ask for permission to help a friend with an illustration if he or she asks for help.

VARIATIONS OF PEER OR GROUP CONFERENCES

1. Topic Conference: Examine one of your topics with a friend. Try to discover what it is about a topic that is meaningful to you and why. Take notes or make a cluster as you do this.
2. Draft Conference: If you reach a roadblock, consult with a friend for suggestions about how to continue.
3. Revision Conference: Complete any of the activities suggested on your Conference Guidelines sheet.
4. Editing Conference: After first completing your own proofreading and editing, ask a friend to proofread or edit for you and to explain his or her suggestions.
5. Second Revision Conference: Read your proofread and edited paper to a friend for suggestions for further improvements on this paper before you rewrite it.
Writing Workshop Guidelines

CONFERENCE GUIDELINES: Listen to a friend for one of the following purposes.

1. Let your partner(s) tell you the most interesting funny, sad, thoughtful, exciting, frightening, etc. parts of your draft.

2. Read your draft and ask your partner to think about CONFERENCE QUESTIONS 1, 2, 3, etc. (listed below)

3. With your partner's suggestions in mind, revise what you believe needs to be changed.

CONFERENCE QUESTIONS: Make notes as you discuss your draft.

1. Listen to my beginning sentence(s). Does my lead catch your attention? How might I improve it?

2. Are there places where I need more information, details, and explanations? (Make notes on your draft at these places.)

3. Are there places on my draft where you become confused? Where and why? (Make notes at these places.)

4. Have I used too many words or repeated myself unnecessarily?

5. Are there parts of my draft that need more description so that your senses can help you imagine the scene or situation? If so, what sensory words might I use? (Words appealing to sight, taste, touch, hearing, smell). Take notes.

6. Are my sentences and paragraphs organized the best way for my purpose for this particular paper? Take notes.

7. Should I write more about my feelings or thoughts at any particular places in this draft?

8. Do I stay on my topic?

9. Do I have an appropriate ending or how might I improve it?

10. Is my title suitable for my draft?
PROOFREADING and EDITING GUIDELINES: Make corrections as you work.

1. Underline any words you may have misspelled. Pay attention to homophones.

2. Look for mistakes in capitalization or punctuation.

3. Look for run-on sentences and fragments.

4. Have you used pronouns carefully? Remember that pronouns often cause confusion.

5. Look for words which may have been left out.

6. Read to find out if your audience (readers) might become confused. Remember that your audience has not had this experience or may not know anything about this subject.

7. Have you used precise words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) that describe or explain exactly? If not, replace with more precise words.

8. Have you organized the best way for your purpose?

9. Are there places in your draft where you should express your thoughts or feelings about your topic or the situation you are describing?

10. Have you used too many unnecessary words or repeated yourself unnecessarily?

11. Are you satisfied with your ending or should you improve it? Are you satisfied with what you have written or should you improve it?
Appendix C: Samples of Student Compositions

Summer

Summer is fun because I have more time to play. My family and I like to go to the beach. We like to swim in the ocean. This summer we are going to get to the beach for the summer vacation. I like the beach. I have more time to play. I like to swim in the ocean, play frisbee, and build castles. Also, I like to ride on a boat sometimes. We play basketball on the beach sometimes. I bring our food and sometimes we buy our food. I spend time with my family a lot at the beach. That's why I like going to the beach with my family to have fun.

The

D
Air Louis Kelly was drafted first round number four from Duke and is now in the process of signing a contract with the Bulls. Now he is practicing with the Bulls at their training camp for his rookie season. Like Jordan, everyone thinks that he will be the best rookie and player of all times. A lot of people say that he will just bust into the NBA. Just like Michael Jordan, the NBA hasn't been the same since. In fact, no one has ever组织领导 the attention of the nation that Michael Jordan did. What's even worse, Louis will only be 19. There are big plans for him. The Bulls might give him 10 million a year. 10 years later, Air Louis returns because of a bad knee injury but still he was great. He broke every record that was ever made. He even broke all of Jordan's records. He is the greatest of all times.
My two Gardens 5/27/92

I have two gardens. I like to water my garden. My first garden I like the most because I like the smell of roses. I got about 37 rose bushes, and 6 pine trees. Orange trees and lemon tree. I talk to my roses and my trees every day about 5:30 for a half hour. I also water my garden while I talk to them.

My second garden is a little bit smaller but in my second garden I have potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, onions, and pickels. I don't talk to my garden just water it 9 times a week. After a while I look through my tomato plants and pick out all the good tomatoes. Then I pull out a potatoe to see if it's ready to take out. After that I check my pickels to see if they are big enough to eat. Every year I plant the same things and most of the time they taste good and give enough for all my family.
One Day I the Park,

I went to the ducks in the park with my little brother. I and my brother fed the ducks bread. When we stopped feeding, the ducks went in the lake. My brother caught a fish and he was happy. Then we finished feeding, we went to play baseball. I hit the ball and my brother tried to catch it. But it went far out. My little brother wanted to go play at the playground. I had to take him to play. We made some good friends in the park and he wanted to stay there with his new friends. When we finished playing, we left for home. We liked the park.
Dreams

Dreams is one of my favorite things to do. Dreams are sometimes beautiful and sometimes these kind of scary. Once I dreamed that I was lost in the woods all by myself. I also dreamed that one of my puppies was being killed by a crazy man. That's why I say that dreams are sometimes scary. I would never forget this beautiful dream that I had last week. I dream that the sky was so blue with no clouds and that all the people around there who live in little villages started to sing a beautiful song that led them something from the sky started to fall and that something was gold money. So all the people that were wearing hats would take their hats off and started to catch some golden money. That was a wonderful dream but suddenly I woke up and I saw my dog's brother putting money in my face. So that's why I like to dream a lot all day long.
Appendix D: Literature Log Questions

_The Crossing_

Literature Log Questions

1. Again, read page 19 of _The Crossing_. Explain what happened under the bridge in the past and what happens at the present time in the story. Then, in a paragraph at least five sentences in length, explain what you think about this.

2. Do you think the touristas who threw money are trying to help the children? Why or why not? Can you think of a better way for them to help the children? Explain your answer in a paragraph at least five sentences in length.

3. Do you think the illustrator who created the cover of _The Crossing_ read this story? Why or why not? Considering what you know about the story, explain your answer in a paragraph of at least five sentences.

4. How would the presence of a beggar affect you and your actions if you were shopping at the Colton Auction or at the market in Juarez? What might you do differently? Why do you think the operators of the stalls object to the presence of beggars at the market? Explain your answer in at least five sentences.

5. After Manny sees Robert for the second time, as Robert enters the hotel, what do you suppose Manny is thinking? Considering what Manny knows about Robert, do you think he will try to steal from Robert again? Explain your answer in paragraph at least five sentences in length. Support your answer with evidence from the story.

6. Read the third paragraph on page 82 which begins, “Take care that the snake does not get you...” What is Robert trying to tell Manny. In this story, does the snake represent anything or anyone? Explain your answer, using what you know about the story, in a paragraph at least five sentences in length.

7. Find a section in _The Crossing_ that appeals to your senses. Write the page number of this part in your literature log and copy this part in your log. Then, list at least five words that appeal to your senses and then explain which sense each of the words appeal to.

8. Read page 81 in _The Crossing_. Was it Robert, the sergeant, or both of these characters who attended the bullfight? Explain why you decided who it was who attended the bullfight by the way this (or these) characters acted.
Literature Log Questions

9. Why did the sergeant turn back into Robert at the bullfight? What do you think Robert is thinking about when he whispers, "...it means nothing. It is for nothing." Is he glad he came to see the bullfight? Why or why not? Explain your answer in a paragraph of at least five sentences.

10. Why did Manny start telling the truth to the sergeant? On page 105, Robert is thinking the following thoughts: "When even to think the truth was dangerous, was to show weakness in the streets or in war--as Robert knew--the boy was telling the truth."

If you had been a soldier in Vietnam who was ordered to take control of a village, retreat, and then take control of the same village again, after seeing many friends die and suffer, and this happened repeatedly, what might your response and feelings be? What truth might you want to tell, who would you want to tell, and could this be dangerous? Why might telling the truth have been dangerous to the sergeant in such a situation? Explain your answer in a paragraph of at least five sentences.

11. What is the major conflict that Manny faces in this story? Is this an internal or external conflict? Explain your answer in a paragraph at least five sentences in length.

12. Does Manny have a new hero at the end of this story? Why or why not? Use chapter 12 of your book to explain your answer. Be very precise when you explain your answer in three or more sentences.

13. If you were the author and you were writing a sequel to *The Crossing*, what would happen next to Manny after the sergeant gave his wallet to Manny and died? Do you think Manny was able to cross the border? Why or why not? What will Manny be doing a day, a week, a month, a year, and five years form the end of this story? What would happen to Manny if you wrote a sequel to this story?

14. In a paragraph at least five sentences in length, describe what life was like in Juarez. Considering what life was like in Juarez, do you think the conclusion of *The Crossing* was realistic? Why or why not? Explain in a paragraph at least five sentences in length.
Appendix E: Literature Log Responses

The Crossing

Literature Log Questions

1. Again, read page 19 of *The Crossing*. Explain what happened under the bridge in the past and what happens at the present time in the story. Then, in a paragraph at least five sentences in length, explain what you think about this.

   The kids fight for money under the bridge. The drone is muddy and the kids don't drown. Mary gets hurt because she is the smallest one.

3. Do you think the illustrator who created the cover of *The Crossing* read this story? Why or why not? Considering what you know about the story, explain your answer in a paragraph of at least five sentences.

   Yes. The picture is good because it shows Mary trying to cross but now there isn't any water. I think the illustrator read the story.
4. How would the presence of a beggar affect you and your actions if you were shopping at the Colton Auction or at the market in Juarez? Why do you think the operators of the stalls object to the presence of beggars at the market? Explain your answer in at least five sentences.

I wouldn't want to shop there. I would go to another market because the beggars would scare away the customers.

6. Read the third paragraph on page 82 which begins, "Take care that the snake does not get you...." What is Robert trying to tell Manny. In this story, does the snake represent anything or anyone? Explain your answer, using what you know about the story, in a paragraph at least five sentences in length.

The snake might mean nothing at all.

9. Why did the sergeant turn back into Robert at the bullfight? What do you think Robert is thinking about when he whispers, "...it means nothing. It is for nothing." Is he glad he came to see the bullfight? Why or why not? Explain your answer in a paragraph of at least five sentences.

I thought that it was a killing. He didn't want to sit and watch a killing. He didn't think it made any sense.
Literature Log Responses

13. If you were the author and you were writing a sequel to *The Crossing*, what would happen next to Manny after the sergeant gave his wallet to Manny and died? Do you think Manny was able to cross the border? Why or why not? What will Manny be doing a day, a week, a month, a year, and five years from the end of this story? What would happen to Manny if you wrote a sequel to this story?

I think Manny is going to be happy. He will cross the border and probably get some money and some nice people. He will probably get a job and make some nice people will help him. He will go to school and get some education. I think he is going to be rich five years.

14. In a paragraph at least five sentences in length, describe what life was like in Juarez. Considering what life was like in Juarez, do you think the conclusion of *The Crossing* was realistic? Why or why not? Explain in a paragraph at least five sentences in length.

Life in Juarez was very hard for most of the people there was not enough money. Also there wasn't a lot of work because you needed a good education and not many people could. It was a place full of beggars and hungry children. Juarez was not a very pleasant place to live.
14. In a paragraph at least five sentences in length, describe what life was like in Juarez. Considering what life was like in Juarez, do you think the conclusion of *The Crossing* was realistic? Why or why not? Explain in a paragraph at least five sentences in length.

I think the conclusion of the story was very reasonable. It was also very realistic because at the end everything that happened started really make sense. It also made me feel kind of sad because I felt that Rickard didn't have to die.

I think the sergeant didn't deserve to die. I think he wanted to die. He probably wanted to see all of his dead friends in heaven. He death put him out of his misery. He probably wanted to die.

No, I didn't think it was realistic. You wouldn't be able to kill someone by spending them in the face. Unless you had brass knuckles or something like that.
Appendix F: Students' Self-Evaluation of Writing Responses

My opinion of writing this year was cool. I got to write about anything I wanted to. I kind of thought it was going to be boring but when we started writing, I liked it. My opinion changed because I was not writing and now I love to write stories.

I feel good because I wrote a lot of stories.

At the beginning of the school year, I didn't really love to write. Now I really love to write. I enjoy to write about my family and friends. I think my changes because of first I used to write about flowers and gardens. It's comfortable writing about my friends, mostly family.

The part of the year I didn't like to but at the end, it was fun.

At the beginning of the school year I did not like to write at all. When we started writing, I started to like it a little.
Self-evaluation Responses

Other students have helped me in writing they have helped me get ideas to write about helped me proofread spelled.

Yes, the way some have helped me is by spelling a hard word or when I am stuck they get me on the right track.

My friends Tom and Hanna helped me with my story The Cat Fight. They helped me by telling me their opinions.

Yes, they helped me to put more detail and show me now to use dialog whenever I wanted to. At first I didn't know when to put dialog and now I do.

Yes, someone has helped me miss. Shaffer has a she has been very nice to me.

Yes they help me proofwrite in my story.
Self-evaluation Responses

Yes, I know my writing has improved because at the beginning of the year I used to write and I hated it. I couldn't pass my proficiency and when I did start liking to write it was easy for me to pass my proficiency.

I think my has improved not that much but a little because I haven't passed my proficiency yet because I can write my writing has improved because I can write a story and not have so many errors. I write better because my teacher helps me.

Yes, now I am able to write more words. I write better because I have been practicing a lot.

Yes, I do think it has improved this year because I had different people helping me do it.

I started writing and improved very much at first I would only write half a page now I write a page or two.

Yes, it has improved a lot. I raised my grade.
Self-evaluation Responses

I think I am good at writing true stories about my family. The problem is trying to think about the people you know. My goal is to write 2 to 3 pages of stories. I think I am good at true stories. Good. I am good at writing about myself and about basketball.

I think I am best at doing my best. I want to enjoy the true stories that are written. The goal that I want to achieve is to write more stories or more paragraphs.
Self-evaluation Responses

You have helped me to like and enjoy what I write. Before, I would write something and if it didn't seem interesting to me, I would just throw it away. Now, when I write, I just keep going. I don't care anymore. I make it interesting when I am done. I go back over it and if I feel I need to add something, I add it.

You have told me to write more details and to describe a person or an object more. And how to fix run-on sentences. You have helped me fine by taking the time with me and over and over about my stories. You can't do any better.

As my teacher, you have taught me to rewrite and proofread. Also to put myself in the story as the connected and put in my feeling.
One of the stories that I like is "The Man in Lala Land." The reason I like this story is because it is a good story and it is about my sister. And also it is one of the first stories that I write in this class. My 2nd story I like most talks about my brother, Charlie. The reason I like that story because the horse is something special.

I picked that one because it talks about my yard. My yard is my favorite thing.

I picked a rather story about the beach because the beach is fun and my family.
Self-evaluation Responses

**Mr. Garden**

I choose this story because I like my garden. I also liked to explain about my family and picking the different fruits. It was fun baking the pies and eating them. They were really, really good.

**The Catfight**

This story I enjoyed was this one it was fun writing about my friends, Christina and Amy. Would never fight over boy. I got some details from them. Also the fun writing stories that are fiction.

**my Grandma**

I really didn't like writing this story because it's true. I love her and writing this story helped me understand it more. She's lucky she survived.