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The effect of writing to a real audience for a real purpose on the writing skills and self esteem of seventh grade inner city students.

Despina M. Droge

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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THE EFFECT OF WRITING TO A REAL AUDIENCE FOR A REAL PURPOSE ON THE WRITING SKILLS AND SELF ESTEEM OF SEVENTH GRADE INNER CITY STUDENTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

DESPINA M. DROGE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1994

School of Education
THE EFFECT OF WRITING TO A REAL AUDIENCE FOR A REAL PURPOSE ON THE WRITING SKILLS AND SELF ESTEEM OF SEVENTH GRADE INNER CITY STUDENTS

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Approved as to style and content by:

Robert Wellman, Chair

Atron Gentry, Member

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School of Education
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Critical examination of one's life work brings with it anxiety, stress, love and completion. I am delighted to acknowledge those who provided the glue to bring this project to its present state.

The voice of my husband, whose untimely death made my work seem quite unimportant, is always there encouraging me. It must first of all, be recognized.

Dr. Mary Grassa O'Neill conceived Promising Pals and felt its potential for reflection and the improvement of writing skills and self esteem of young authors. As a writer and mentor to many teachers and students, her value cannot be measured.

Dr. Robert Wellman, my committee chairperson, believed in this project and in the concept of writing to a real audience for a real purpose. The other committee members, Dr. Atron Gentry and Dr. Joseph Check offered personal support and thoughtful reading. Thank you.

The teachers in my cluster at the Timilty school gave time, effort, advice and assistance without reservation. Special thanks to Norma Eason, Claire Hogarty, Ann MacNamara, Jean Haddad, James Anderson, and James Fewlass.
For Dr. Nancy Burrel, Dr. Jane Lillienfeld and Toby Goldstein, who helped focus, shared conviction and support, and who waded through re-writes, I have deep gratitude.

A special thanks to my daughters Nancy and Shelly, my sons, Harman and Thomas, and friends Suzanne and Vicki who nurtured, listened, and gave support and pushes as needed. My son-in-law Dick, daughter Janet and friend Hartwell shared their computer expertise, editing talents, graph making skills, and endless patience in a crunch. Thank you.

The students at the Timilty school deserve the admiration of all who read this dissertation. They wrote, rewrote, experienced and believed with great faith in our ultimate desire to prepare them for the next step. They opened up and became ready for everything. They make my work look easy, and without Promising Students, there would be no Promising Pals.

To the Pals themselves, these heartwarming volunteers who just want to be part of the molding of a young person, who take a few minutes to share life with an inner city kid, to these tireless visionaries a tip of the hat and the hope it never ends.
ABSTRACT

THE EFFECT OF WRITING TO A REAL AUDIENCE FOR A REAL PURPOSE ON THE WRITING SKILLS AND SELF ESTEEM OF SEVENTH GRADE INNER CITY STUDENTS

MAY 1994

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The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of writing to a real audience for a real purpose on the writing skills and self esteem of seventh grade students.

Inner city, culturally diverse seventh graders exchanged a series of letters with successful members of an urban community. The study investigated the effects of this exchange on the writing skills and self esteem of the students.

The twenty five seventh graders in the study were matched randomly with the adults. They wrote at least four letters each, over a four month period, and received responses. They celebrated their connection by meeting at the middle school for a breakfast.
The results of the study were documented by pre and post tests, opinion questionnaires from students, teachers and parents, overall grades and grades in English and reading, anecdotal observations, and an exit interview. The data supports the general hypothesis that when seventh grade students in an inner city, culturally diverse middle school write to a real audience for a real purpose, their writing skills improve and their self esteem is enhanced.

After writing at least four letters to caring local adults, many students showed improved overall grades, and better English and reading grades. They used the appropriate friendly letter heading, longer sentences, varied end punctuation, and more interesting topic sentences. Their paragraphs indicated clear thought, and were better organized. Their stories during the exit interview proved to be overwhelmingly in favor of the writing exchange. Their parents and teachers felt the students showed improved self esteem, and a clearer connection to their community.

Students indicated a greater comfort level with school, made friends with their Pals, got advice from them, and enjoyed their company. The study validated the idea that students become more conscious of thinking and learning when their tasks are real and that learning is best achieved in a social context.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Human beings have a profound need to represent their experiences through writing. By articulating experience, we reclaim it for ourselves. (Calkins 1986) This is why Anne Morrow Lindbergh says, "I must write, I must write at all costs. For writing is more than living, it is being conscious of living." Writing can be considered a vehicle by which students potentially become aware of themselves and their community. Writing is used to communicate ideas and share feelings. Writers receive affirmation, feel connected, and experience a sense of power when they write for a real audience.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of writing to a real audience for a real purpose on the self esteem and writing skills of seventh grade, inner city students.
Rationale

Need for the Study on a National Level

There is evidence today (National Assessment of Educational Progress 1990) that students have a written vocabulary of 15,000 words less than they did 40 years ago. Applebee's (1981) investigation of the teaching of writing shows a discouraging national picture:

1. Less than 3 percent of students' time for classwork or homework is devoted to writing a paragraph or more.
2. Of the time spent writing in English or other classes, students are primarily involved in multiple choice and short answer tasks.
3. When students are required to write, the essays are based on previous learning rather than seen as an opportunity to explore and organize new ideas.

These disheartening facts show that children on a nationwide basis are not being taught to write in a manner which promotes thinking, connection to audience, and self awareness.

In A Place Called School, Goodlad states, neither explicit nor implicit curriculum allows students to "become engaged with knowledge to employ their full range of
intellectual abilities.” Good writing requires thinking and decision making, the active development of thought more than the mechanical display of knowledge.

How can students learn to write well if they are primarily being taught to perform repetitive exercises? (Farr 1986) The educational norm in many inner city middle schools is a cyclical, skill based curriculum. Students fill out worksheets reflecting information that has been presented every year since they began school. Capitalization, syllabification, synonyms, homonyms, antonyms, parts of speech, and punctuation are repeated in successive grades of the elementary years, are reviewed in middle years, and reappear in the low track classes of the senior high schools. (Goodlad 1984)

Rather than offering ample opportunity for students to use language as an agent for growth and communication, schools often reinforce student weaknesses in this area, thus rendering them language-poor.

In an address to the National Conference of Teachers of English, James Britton spoke of the importance of writing for children. What matters about writing is that children should write about what matters to them to someone who matters to them. There are two concerns critical to writing: first, that children write about their experiences,
and second, that children have a specific audience clearly in mind when they write. Other reasons for students to write are:

* Because talk is evanescent and limited to one’s short term memory, writing is appropriate for situations that call for a record. A writer can at any point stop to get his bearings and to see where he has come from.

* When talking, it is sometimes difficult to find the right words. Writing provides leisure to search for the best way to say what one means.

* Because no audience is immediately present, writing also can give a person opportunities to explore thought, try out ideas, or to record what is private.

* Writing gives us the chance to explore situations from another’s point of view or to try alternate stances for ourselves.

* Writing promotes a variety of thought processes—informative, reflective, perceptive, appreciative, imaginative and assimilative.

In Language Diversity and Writing Instruction, Farr and Daniels state that in many inner city schools students rarely are challenged to write whole pieces of discourse and to evaluate ideas critically, develop disciplined arguments
and express such ideas and arguments in clear and concise written language. (1986)

Need for the Study on a State Level

Former Massachusetts Commissioner of Education, Harold Raynolds, in a position paper titled "Educating the Whole Student" states that unless the school is involved in the physical, social and emotional development of the child, students will not learn, will not achieve, and will not become productive citizens in our democratic society. Schools must work with the entire community to restructure and reorganize existing resources to provide children with a sense of self worth, high expectations and commitment to their community. (1990)

It appears that beyond academic achievement, positive self esteem may be the foundation for adults who believe they have control over their lives, can think critically and make responsible decisions. (Glaser 1975) When educational leaders can clearly communicate a sense of mission to students and staff, it results in greater academic achievement, overcoming many obstacles a child may have. (Bickel 1986) The position paper challenges schools to lead a joint effort with community members to develop specific ways to enhance the emotional and social development of
children. The Board of Education suggests among other strategies that schools:

1. Offer a variety and flexibility of curricula.
2. Create structured opportunities for students to develop a significant, positive relationship with at least one adult.
3. Enter into partnerships with the community.
4. Include strategies that help develop positive self esteem and self awareness.
5. Provide mentor systems whereby students have regular contact with an adult to discuss issues of concern, whether academic or personal. (Glaser, 1975)

Need for the Study on a Local Level

The infusion of city wide writing across the curriculum in all schools is the result of the Urban Education Plan of (then) Superintendent Laval Wilson. His blueprint for improvement includes a mandate to "improve the teaching and learning of writing across all curriculum areas K-12." Teachers, administrators, parents, high school students, business people, university personnel and members of the cultural community in collaboration agree that the inner city schools reflect the national shame in the teaching of writing. (1986)
Assumptions

It is the researcher’s belief that when inner city, culturally diverse seventh grade students write to a real adult audience for the purpose of response and idea exchange, they will:

1. Write about their personal experiences.
2. Participate in a relationship with an adult.
3. Improve their writing skills.
4. Improve their overall grades for that semester.
5. Demonstrate a stronger sense of their hope for the future.
6. Have a specific personal contact in, and a clearer picture of their larger community.
7. Experience enhanced self esteem.

The researcher believes these experiences have the potential to affirm students. Affirming another person means to communicate to them that they are important or significant. Raising students’ self esteem has a lot to do with affirming what they say or do.
When significant others affirm children’s sense of ....

.. CONNECTIVENESS, they let children know that what they belong to is important.

.. UNIQUENESS, they let children know that what was said or did was special.

.. POWER, they let children know they have influence and are competent.

.. MODELS, they let children know that their goals and standards are appropriate and important. (Bean, Clemes p6)

This study investigated how the program affects the grades, attitudes, and self esteem of the students by asking: What is the effect on the writing skills and self esteem of middle school, inner city, culturally diverse students when they correspond with a real audience (in this case a successful, local adult) for a real purpose - that is to exchange ideas and use written language to communicate?

The Program

The need for improved writing, noted nationally, statewide and locally, led this researcher to investigate the Promising Pals writing exchange, embedded in Project Promise, for its potential to improve the writing skills and self esteem of participating students. Project Promise provided a longer learning and teaching day, flexible scheduling and grade level clusters. This unique, award winning philosophy included a mandate for students to learn to write and write to learn by writing in all subject areas.
The application of improved writing skills translated into a program that would connect the student to the community through writing. Written language then, became the means for communication and connection. The program was named Promising Pals to reflect the writing promise and its relationship to Project Promise. (Appendix, Project Promise description)

The idea of students writing to people outside of school is not new. For generations, young people have had the urge to exchange letters as a way of getting to know others their own age in other parts of the country and world. Across the country "The Great Mail Race" encourages students to combine letter writing with learning geography by exchanging letters with unknown future friends from other cities. The names of pen-pals appear in children's magazines, encouraging youngsters to pick up their pens. "Friendship Sees No Color" is a writing exchange to connect people according to age and race so that those of similar age but different color can connect across the country. The WATT (Writing And Thinking Together) Program connects students in Puerto Rico with students on the mainland by a fax and video exchange of letters. These successful exchanges encourage letter writing as a way to validate and to share experiences and self.
There are many reasons to write letters. They are the best way to organize ideas and thoughts in an orderly fashion. A letter is specific, people only hear what they want to hear in conversation. You can make copies, have a record, and a reason to respond when writing is involved. History is recorded by saving the letters of important leaders, and lovers always seem to put it in writing!

Promising Pals is unique because the program is school oriented, is an extension of specific learning, is structured, and is student to adult rather than student to student. Students write across the curriculum from the first day of school in September. They have writing folders in every class and the cluster teaching team meets to establish common focus correction areas, leaving room for individual subject matter but reinforcing certain skills such as subject-verb agreement and capitalization. Thus, the program reflects accumulated learnings of the first semester. It begins in January for the explicit purpose of allowing enough time to prepare students and to reflect what they have learned. The English teacher uses the show-don’t-tell method described in the appendix to encourage self expression and descriptive writing. In this manner the program becomes totally submerged in the overall curriculum.

Promising Pals involves inner city culturally diverse students and successful local adults interested in education.
and in mentoring young people. Originally, the program was to include only adults who were directly involved by career in the schools. However, the program gained early momentum and soon adults from other careers asked to become part of the process. Teachers brought in friends from the community. Co-workers saw student letters and pictures and asked, "Can I join?" The Promising Pals program was encapsulated into a four month period with students writing for a real purpose to a real audience. The writing was managed in each cluster by the English teacher.

Operational Definitions

Project Promise

Project Promise is a unique program which was introduced to the middle school in the city as a pilot program in the Spring of 1985. It became school wide the following fall. The program’s promise is that below average students will become average, average students will become above average, and above average students will soar to new heights. The program has several components to assist in this process. An extended school day of ninety minutes, and a half day of Saturday school are thought to improve retention time. Interdisciplinary teaching, team teaching, flexible scheduling, clustering and common planning time empower teachers. The program has a mandate for writing across the curriculum and an emphasis on reading writing and math in
all content areas. Writing across the curriculum gives reinforcement of writing skills and methods in every class, and in this case is the most significant curriculum mandate of Project Promise.

Parent and cluster coordinators are included as essential support. Extensive staff development on a weekly basis keeps faculty informed.

Promising Pals fulfills the writing mission of Project Promise, because the program reflects the students' interest in and ability to write. It also brings home the concept that a school is not just four walls, but must see that when the school is brought into the community and the community into the school, doors and promise open for all.

Promising Pals

The program which connects students with successful local adults in a four month writing exchange is referred to as Promising Pals. The writing exchange begins in the second semester, allowing for time to appropriately prepare students. The program has specific components: the exchange is operated through the school and all letters are sent to school, not home; specific genre, such as an introductory letter, a poem, a sample of student's work or report card, an invitation, and a thank you note, are used to encourage a response and to maintain student interest; the program has a
four month time line and always ends with a breakfast reception when Promising Student and Promising Pal meet.

Real Purpose

Where school programs have stressed writing for a broad range of real purpose, students' writing skills have shown substantial growth. Activities that engage students in purpose-explicit writing and exploratory problem solving are "real purpose" authentic activities. Students find writing valuable in accomplishing purposes that they, not just a teacher define as meaningful. "Real purpose" writing is frequently reflected by letter writing as to a newspaper or a pen pal. When students share with their fellow students or for a magazine they are writing for a real purpose. Writing is more effective if the students select their own topics. When teachers read, accept, and respond to the content of what students have chosen to write, they are building a trusting personal relationship that can help sustain the students' commitment to writing.

Real Audience

Closely connected to purpose is the issue of audience. If students are to gain experience by writing for real purpose - that is, to communicate, to think and learn, to create, and to express themselves - these purposeful writing experiences ought to be addressed to real and appropriate audiences. There is energy and motivation that comes from
knowing that the work is real. The involvement of real audiences gives students much needed practice with one of a writer’s most fundamental skills: adjusting discourse to the anticipated needs of the reader. Writing for varied and real audiences exerts a natural pressure to edit and revise work.

Genre

The mode, form, or genre that students writing takes has traditionally been selected by the teacher. When studying letters the students write a variety of letters, such as, friendly, business, social, etc. When students are motivated by appropriate audience and purpose, the mode or genre is frequently obvious. The reverse is also true - when genre is selected first, appropriate purpose and audience can follow.

Holistic Scoring

One of the reasons that various writing programs have not taken hold on a national level is the difficulty in rating samples of student writing in a mass manner using computer scoring. Writing has to be read. When it is read by several teachers, using a one - to - four (best to worst) grade with four as the highest, the overall impression of the writing is rated, as opposed to a specific issue. This is called Holistic Scoring. Usually two readers score the paper, with an average struck for the final mark. There is
some indication that marking writing samples, and in fact labeling students with SAT’s and similar tests may be on the way out. This would probably popularize writing samples as a means of testing skill and comprehension. New computer programs give a general picture of the grade level of the writing, check spelling and grammatical errors, and could conceivably be programmed to produce a holistic score, satisfying both the test conscious and those who believe writing should be tested by a sample of what the student can write.

The teachers who read and scored the student writing in this study were previously trained in holistic procedure by the school system. Letters were read, and discussed. Readers looked for connections between student and Pal, unity, cohesiveness and form.

Self Esteem

Self esteem is a sense of self worth. It comes from all of the thoughts, feelings, sensations and experiences humans have collected about themselves throughout life. Thousands of impressions, evaluations, and experiences add up to a good feeling about self, or conversely, an uneasy feeling of inadequacy.

Many theories about the effect of how students feel about themselves emerge in education. One theory says that
students who are solid in experiences and activities that exercise self examination and allow them to actively participate in their own learning, retain more learned material and seek further information. Promising Pals supports this theory, and all lead activities are based on the real concerns of students. Writing is directed to: Who am I? How am I perceived by others? How am I unique, how similar?

Cumulative Writing Folder

The cumulative writing folder is designed to reduce student and teacher frustration. It consists of four elements: a writing management system and three teaching strategies. It provides schools with a unified set of techniques and expectations about student writing that can be developed and reinforced over a period of years. It works best when the whole school uses the program so students go from grade to grade with known expectations.

Writing Process

When students writing for a real audience produce a final piece that has been shared with one or more peers and revised before becoming "final", they have gone through what is now commonly referred to as the writing process or process writing. Writing process then, is students learning to work at a given writing task in appropriate phases. There are some basic elements to the writing process:
perverting, first draft, sharing with a peer, revising and editing, and final draft.

Lower Track Courses

Tracking is a method by which students are grouped in school and in classrooms. The most common source is the students' reading achievement scores, which in a tracking situation are used to place students of the same measured ability in the same group or classroom. All students are then taught to the perceived ability of the group. There are many choices for the basis of the track, but usually it is the reading achievement score. Lower track courses are those designed for students with perceived lower ability, and are extremely narrow in focus and curriculum.

Repetitive Exercises

These are the mainstay of the lower track. They take the form of drill sheets, frequently reproduced from a book, and the student simply fills in the blanks or selects a correct answer. Teaching is done to the exercise, which is repeated in a variety of forms. Most of our American schools have deferred to this method of instruction, and it has dominated the writing experience of a majority of students.
In order for any kind of teaching to be effective, teachers must understand as fully as possible the resources their students bring with them. In the case of the inner city school in this study the students are predominantly Black and Hispanic and represent the makeup of the community. When a community has a mix of races and color, there is cultural diversity.

Cluster

In the case of this middle school, the cluster concept means that the students of a specific grade level (6th, 7th or 8th) are grouped in one physical section of the school and travel with their homeroom group from class to class within the cluster of classrooms. A group of teachers work together with this specific group of students. In this case, there were eight teachers, including a coordinator who was maintained out of the classroom to handle discipline and act as liaison with the administration.

Limitations

The Promising Pals program is limited in its duration. Its time span is from the end of January until early May. The study was conducted in one urban middle school with a multi ethnic population and the results cannot be generalized beyond this population.
Twenty five of the possible ninety eight students in the cluster participated in the study. The researcher was a participant observer. Evaluation of the students' writing skills was limited to the period of the writing exchange. Carryover was not investigated. Since the program took place near the end of the year, compositions or other writing after its completion were not evaluated.

A seven question survey was sent to twenty five parents. The analysis was performed on fifteen responses. The teacher response sample was based on the answers from the six teachers involved. The program was imbedded into the English curriculum.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Studies concerning the state of education in our country today recognize the importance of writing. Researchers agree that writing reflects thinking and problem solving capabilities. These studies (Boyer 1983, Goodlad 1984 and Sizer 1984) express concern about the perceived failure of American schools to teach writing effectively.

The first curriculum priority is language. Our use of complex symbols separates human beings from all other forms of life.

Language provides the connecting tissue that binds society together, allowing us to express feelings and ideas, and powerfully influence the attitudes of others. It is the most essential tool of learning. We recommend that high schools help all students develop the capacity to think critically and communicate effectively through the written and spoken word. (Boyer 1983, p8)

This mandate has clearly influenced the way we approach writing today, not only at the high school level, but at the more vulnerable middle school (grades 6, 7 and 8) level as well. This review of literature investigates research on early adolescence, writing development, and educational experience and development. Twenty years ago, the only source of knowledge about writing was the teacher's own experience. In academic circles almost no one wanted to study writing. For those who did want to study it, there almost seemed nothing to study. Now there are more research
articles, books on writing theory, and still more on writing pedagogy than any one person can possibly read. As teachers and writers we can welcome the ever increasing amounts and depths and sophistication of materials available to us. (National Writing Project 1987)

If the 1970’s was the decade that discovered the composing (writing) process, the 1980’s was the decade that discovered the important role of social context in the composing process. (Nystrand, 1989) Writing researchers showed increasing interest in the social aspects of written communication.

Current interest in writing to learn across the curriculum and the issue of genre emphasize the writers’ relationship with his audience or reader. There has been a shift in perspective from things cognitive to things social. Today writing instructors and researchers have broadened their focus to consider such issues as:

a) the relationship of composing to text.

b) the relationship of process to the social context of composing.

c) genre.
Peter Elbow (1981) recommends paying attention to the audience and its needs as one writes. "When you attend to an audience from the start and let your words grow out of your relationship with it, sometimes you come up with just what you need, and your words have a wonderful integrity or fit with that audience."

Simon, Hawley, Britton (1973) clearly make the connection between writing and personal growth. They state that the act of composition engages the student in three growth producing activities: reflection, clarification and commitment. By composing their world and communicating insights to others, the students develop as individuals. The students discover information and concepts about themselves and the world that can be tested and enlarged upon. When experiences and feelings are shared, students discover support, and begin to not only feel safer, but to evaluate and change ideas that mold.

The key to the personal growth approach is the choice of subject and the use of audience. A student should be writing because there is something to say that is important to some person or persons of importance to him and because he wants to achieve a particular effect or set of effects on his audience. Audience feedback and the writer’s response to that feedback are crucial. (Simon, Hawley, Britton 1973)
The steps commonly accepted as critical in the process of personal growth clearly parallel the steps followed in process writing:

* Reflection can be translated into prewriting or inquiry.
* Clarification into first draft and sharing.
* Commitment into editing, final draft and publication.

The students' capability for achieving a pattern of personal growth during early adolescence depends largely on their self esteem. Research about self esteem and academic performance shows a strong reciprocal relationship between self esteem and the ability to learn. High self esteem promotes learning. The children who enjoy high self esteem learns more happily and easily. These students will tackle new learning tasks with confidence and enthusiasm. Performance will tend to be successful, since thought and feeling precede action, and he is already set with positive expectations. (Clark, Clemes and Bean 1983)

Anyone who deals with young people quickly becomes aware that the adolescent stage of development is critical. Early adolescence, the first half of the second decade of life, has been the subject of growing interest for researchers in the past 10 years. Blyth and Traeger (1981) believe there
are three major areas of change that educators need to understand.

First, there is the physical change the adolescent encounters. For most individuals, both male and female, adolescence is the time during which their bodies undergo the transformation from child to virtually adult stature and proportion. These changes in the body must also become incorporated in early adolescents' view of themselves. Classical Freudian theory has held that changes associated with pubertal development are quite disruptive and can create serious disturbances in the personality system. This thinking has long been accepted as a basis for understanding the middle school child, and has influenced the teaching approach for the age group. More recent research challenges the assumptions that the student is too biologically fragmented to learn.

Petersen and Taylor (1980) note that there is relatively little support for the view that puberty has direct negative consequences, but a great deal of ambiguity still remains as to what the effects of different aspects of physical development are on the self image of the early adolescent.

Blyth et al. (1981) indicate there is no significant relationship between self esteem and the onset of puberty for girls, but there is a slight positive relationship for
boys, particularly if there is early development. This indicates that self esteem is positively affected during adolescence, and that educators can influence and build confidence during this time.

A second and equally important aspect of early adolescence is that there is a variety of new significant others involved in helping youths learn about themselves. Parents remain critically important, but peers become more important. Teachers must recognize this change in significant others. Further, they themselves may be perceived harshly when compared to students' supportive and warm elementary teachers. Middle school teachers are asked to be both warm and supportive and subject matter competent - a delicate balance that we do not expect of educators at other levels. To the adolescent who is shaping his identity, this balance can be critical.

Early adolescents are absorbing everything around them, from a world that is constantly becoming larger. It is an optimal time for parents and other adults to take an active hand in shaping the youth's future. (Blyth and Traeger 1982)

The third area of change has to do with the adolescents' developing cognitive abilities. How students think at this age is an area undergoing substantial examination by psychology researchers.
Self concept development is not an additive process. Adolescents do not simply add more complex and abstract ideas about themselves to their earlier, childish, concrete conceptions ... earlier notions either drop out or are integrated into a more complex picture. (Monteymor and Elsen 1981 p81)

Once we realize that changes are taking place more slowly and are being incorporated gradually (and usually successfully) by the majority of adolescents, it frees us to work with them in new ways. (Blyth et al. 1981) It allows educators to be in the business of helping youth find and develop competencies they feel good about, which will contribute to them feeling good about themselves. (Beane and Lipka 1979)

We believe our youth do basically feel good about themselves and their abilities in a variety of areas. What we feel less confident about is their feelings about themselves with respect to school and the implications of that lower academic self image for future achievement and confidence. We hope middle level educators will continue to focus on this area of building competencies on which self image can grow. (Blyth and Traeger 1982, p98)

The students' needs to respond to the larger world and to clarify their identity indicate that everyone the student comes in contact with has the opportunity to influence the student as a mentor.

A mentor is a person of greater rank or expertise who teaches, counsels, guides and develops a novice. (Alleman 1986) Mentoring is complex and developmentally important. The mentor is usually several years older and a person of
greater experience and seniority. (Levinson et al. 1978)

They are characterized as guides on a journey who point the way, offer support, and provide challenges. (Daloz 1983)

Anderson and Shannon (1988) define mentoring as:

...a nurturing process in which a more skilled person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends...mentoring functions are carried out within the context of an ongoing, caring relationship between mentor and protege. (p40)

Mentors (teachers) are people who acquire authority through a compact of trust, in which they seek to extend the powers of learners (students). They offer the learners a kind of loan of themselves. David Hawkins (1972) states that the mentor is some kind of auxiliary equipment which will enable learners to make transitions and consolidations they could not otherwise have made. If this equipment is of a kind to be itself internalized, learners not only learn, but begin the process to be their own teacher - and that is how the loan is repaid. So communication is a relationship between persons whose time tracks of involvement in subject matter are sufficiently parallel to have that subject matter before them jointly, or between them, or sustaining them; then they can both teach and learn. (Hawkins 1972)

A nurturing person then, who is aware of the developing, identity seeking adolescent, can have a lasting impact on the youths futures and their choices, and in fact, their self esteem.
How does all of this translate into the writing experiences of the middle school student? To better understand the connection, we need to look at audience selection and the purpose for writing in the first place. Before moving on to that research and its implications, it is necessary to note where educators’ thinking has been (and in most cases still is) in terms of the teaching of writing.

Applebee’s research (1981) reveals that students do extremely little, and few varied kinds of, writing. Applebee’s investigation of the teaching of writing in secondary schools provided us with a detailed but discouraging picture:

1. Less than 3 percent of student’s time for classwork or homework was devoted to writing a paragraph or more.

2. Of the time spent "writing" in English and other classes, students were involved primarily in multiple choice and short answer tasks.

3. Very little time was given to prewriting activities or to writing or revising processes, all of which are crucial
ingredients in the development of fluency and critical thinking.

4. Finally, even when students were given essays to write, the essays were treated as tests of previous learning rather than opportunities to organize and explore new information.

The research of Applebee again in a later more detailed work (1984) and that of Sizer (1984), and Goodlad (1984) all confirm a need to improve, change and incorporate the process of writing into the entire curriculum.

Obviously, unless one has a record of the sequence of one’s thoughts, it is difficult to review or analyze them after the fact. A written essay is such a record...allowing for dissection...For this reason, exercises in writing should be the center of schooling. (Sizer 1984, p103-4)

Fifteen key factors in the research literature associated with effective writing instruction are as follows: (Farr and Daniels, 1986)

1. Teachers who understand and appreciate the basic linguistic competence that students bring with them to school, and who therefore have positive expectations for students’ achievements in writing.
2. Regular and substantial practice in writing, aimed at developing fluency.

3. The opportunity to write for real, personally significant purposes.

4. Experience in writing for a wide range of audiences, both inside and outside of school.

5. Rich and continuous reading experience, including both published literature of acknowledged merit and the work of peers and instructors.

6. Exposure to models of writing in process and writers at work, including both teachers and classmates.

7. Instruction in the process of writing, that is, learning to work at a given task in appropriate phases, including prewriting, drafting, and revising.

8. Collaborative activities for students that provide ideas for writing and guidance for revising works in progress.

9. One-to-one writing conferences with the teacher.
10. Direct instruction in specific strategies and techniques for writing.

11. Reduced instruction in grammatical terminology and related drills with increased use of sentence combining activities.

12. Teaching of writing mechanics and grammar in the context of students’ actual compositions, rather than in separate drills or exercises.

13. Moderate marking of the surface structure errors, focusing on sets of patterns of related errors.

14. Flexible and cumulative evaluation of student writing that stresses revision and is sensitive to variations in subject, audience and purpose.

15. Practicing and learning writing as a tool of learning in all subjects, not just English.

All of the factors defined above are interrelated and in fact hinge on each other; however, numbers three and four relate directly to issues defined here and will be discussed further.
Writing for a Real Purpose

American high school students have a pencil in their hands for about one-half of the school day, but during only three percent of that time are they writing anything as long as a paragraph. (Applebee 1981) Obviously, writing in school is linked to many small purposes: filling in blanks, labeling diagrams, and answering test questions. Far too much is done for purposes that compromise rather than enhance the student’s growth as a writer.

It is possible to describe six main purposes to which writing may be put in schools. (Farr and Daniels 1986)

1. Writing to show learning  
2. Writing to master the conventions of writing  
3. Writing to learn  
4. Writing to communicate  
5. Writing to express the self  
6. Writing to create

As James Britton (1975) and others have confirmed, (NAEP 1981, Applebee 1981) the vast majority of school writing tasks fall into the first two categories; writing that is assigned mainly to check up on students’ learning of the subject matter content, and writing to display their mastery of surface-level conventions. The superficiality,
sometimes even the falseness, of using writing as a mere check on other assignments undercuts the significance of learning to write for other purposes. After all, writing to think and learn, to explore and express the self, to create aesthetically with language, and to get things accomplished in the world are all vital reasons for using writing and offer potentially powerful motivation for striving to master them. (Mayher, Lester, and Pradl 1983)

What Donald Graves (1983) has shown to be true of middle class New Hampshire elementary school students is probably even more true of middle and high school students: they need to develop a sense of control, authorship, and ownership in working at writing. In other words we need to help students find writing valuable in accomplishing purposes that they, not just a teacher, define as meaningful.

In practice this means that students entering a new course should frequently be encouraged to select their own topics. This freedom of choice has both individual and group significance. For each student it offers a chance to write about things that matter, when there is personal investment writing may seem worth the struggle; and as Graves has pointed out, when the teacher reads, responds to and accepts what the student has chosen to write, a trusting relationship that helps foster the student’s commitment to writing is formed.
Offering students the chance to select their own topics may not be so simple for adolescents, however, since many have become dependent on teacher direction and don’t necessarily welcome such freedom. The initial reaction to such freedom may well be: "Look, teacher, just tell me what to write, when it’s due and how you’ll grade it!"

Encouraging students to write about personally significant topics may raise a special challenge for students from poor, inner-city neighborhoods, or students with particularly severe family problems. Ann Murphy (1989) warns: "We are woefully and inevitably unprepared to deal with the explosive personal material writing can produce, both directly and indirectly. Correspondences between our work and that of psychoanalysis must therefore remain theoretical not actual or practical". When we push students to explore their own lives and selves, we may receive material we are unqualified to handle. Murphy adds:

It may be both foolhardy and dangerous to insist that a student probe feelings about his father, his grandmother’s death, his masculinity, in order to provoke a more ‘authentic’ voice. We have the psychological and institutional power to elicit this material, but not the training or the context to handle it. (p178)

Further, personal narrative cannot be the only purpose for writing in school. The signal tasks of a high school writing program are to develop skill in the transactional modes: writing to persuade, to work with subject matter
outside the personal experience, to gather and organize raw materials. Writing activities that bridge the narrative-expressive writing that is stressed in the lower grades to the transactional modes of high school and college, are referred to as transitional activities. Some of these would be: journals, reports from personal interviews, descriptions of objects, places or persons, analysis of social behavior, rituals, notes and letters relating to personal or school issues, letters to members of the larger community. The keys to good transitional writing are:

1. Make the work real and meaningful.

2. Leave plenty of authentic choices and decisions for the writer.

3. Engage students in writing as a tool not as an exercise.

Where school programs have stressed writing for a broad range of purposes, students' writing skills have shown substantial growth. Stallard (1974) and Sawkins (1971) found that successful high school writers reported much more awareness of purpose than unsuccessful writers. George Hillocks (1986) in his meta-analysis of studies on the teaching of writing found that one of the
characteristics of successful writing programs was the use of "writing to learn" activities that engage students in purpose-explicit exploratory problem solving. Such programs showed four times as much growth in the general quality of student writing compared to the traditional teacher dominated mode. Writing then, is currently being viewed as a process embedded in a context.

To say that writing is embedded in a context is to accept that what counts as writing, or as any skill or knowledge, is socially constructed. Our new understanding of writing is found outside individuals and individual cognitive acts, situated within a broader context of institution, community and society. (Glynda Ann Hull, 1989)

Writing for a Real Audience

If students are to gain experience by writing for real purposes - to communicate, to think and learn, to create, and to express themselves - these purposeful experiences ought to be addressed to real and appropriate audiences. The alternative - directing all work to a single, unvaried teacher audience - undermines the integrity, reality and trustworthiness of many valuable writing activities. (Farr and Daniels 1986)
Unfortunately, gearing all writing toward an unvaried teacher-reader is exactly what goes on in most school writing programs, for students of all linguistic backgrounds. (Florio and Clark 1982) In fact, as Britton (1975) points out, students' writing is not only funnelled to a single audience, but this solitary audience - who is, after all, a human being of potentially rich and diverse ways of responding - generally limits himself to one particular role: the examiner. This traditional pattern bears much of the blame for the failure of writing instruction in American schools. It undermines the possibility of students making and communicating genuine meaning for a reader who might be interested in their messages. It replaces these crucial elements of real communication with tasks that result in what Florio calls "dead letters". (1979)

Writing for a real audience provides the energy and motivation that comes with knowing that the work is real not pretend. (Judy 1980) The writer must also adjust discourse to the anticipated needs and response of the reader. If writers always have the same reader and that reader is always and only implicit, they are seriously handicapped in developing conscious habits of thinking about, anticipating, and taking measures to meet the needs of a specific and real audience. Writers learn to ask themselves some specific questions: What do my readers
already know about this subject? What are their attitudes toward it? What sort of tone will be appropriate for them? What terminology do they understand? How severely might spelling and grammatical errors interfere with the reception of my message? (Farr and Daniels 1989)

Student writers are willing to polish and refine their texts, not because a teacher demands it, but because they want their writing to achieve its purpose with a particular audience.

In many cases, writing for a real audience provides students with precious feedback: response about what in the writing was effective and about what did not work as well. Response of this nature has more effect on a student's subsequent writing than red-inked corrections from the teacher. (Hays 1981, Beach 1979, Bamberg 1978)

Part of the teacher's job is to find ways in which students' written work can be addressed to real, distinct audiences. One clear and successful example of this is the study conducted by Heath and Branscombe. (1985) Amanda Branscombe, an English teacher in a Deep South high school, worked with a class of predominantly black ninth-grade students in doing extensive letter writing and community based ethnographic research. The choice of letter writing was based on the assumption that "the development of written language depends upon a rich, responsive context" (p30) and that the students needed to
learn that expository writing requires "linguistic devices and background information in explicated form if the addressee is to understand the writer". (p26)

Over the course of a year, these students wrote long letters to people they did not know, receiving letters in return. They used this experience as language input (as in oral language learning) "to generate the needed internal rules or knowledge about how to make writing work to communicate their feelings and knowledge". (p30)

This project suggests one set of activities and audiences; other researchers suggest many alternatives. (Daniels and Zemelman 1985) The most obvious is a roomful of other students giving various types of helpful responses to each other's work. Students may write for the teacher as examiner, peer editing or response groups, students in lower or higher grades, students and teachers in other grades or schools or cities, in-school publications, letters to the editor, community agencies and/or officials, hall displays, school employees or officials, and many other individuals and institutions farther removed from the school.
Conclusion

The Heath, Branscomb research dramatically showed measurable changes in students’ ability to communicate using written language for different audiences and purposes. (Hull 1989) As they became accustomed to the project, students wrote longer letters, and read more as well: news items, magazines, stories and novels, improving their awareness of the world around them and their ability to communicate in it. One student, Cassandra, started the school year refusing to sit at a desk, choosing instead to sit on a table in the back of the room, her back facing the class. When she later moved to a seat at a desk, she was hostile to students who disturbed her with noise. As the year progressed, she joined the community of the classroom. She wrote more than anyone in the class, and she assumed a leadership role, pressing others to work hard. One of her classmates said, "Cassandra is our number one leader of the group because of her knowledge and skill". (Heath and Branscombe 1985, p9) At the end of the school year, she chose to continue the research project with Heath. Eventually she moved to another high school, where she was put in an honors English class.

Cassandra’s growth is a dramatic example of the impact of writing and mentoring on self esteem. Researchers have come to view writing as embedded within society, depending
for its meaning on social institutions and conditions. Once we accept this concept, we begin to see the role writing plays in people's lives and the conditions under which it is acquired. Understanding writing has increasingly come to mean an understanding that is at once cognitive and social. (Hull 1989) To borrow Erickson's metaphor (1982), we are learning to "focus on the trees without forgetting that the forest is there too". (p15)
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation examined the effect of writing to a real audience for a real purpose on the writing skills and self esteem of seventh grade students. It is a qualitative study using descriptive research. Descriptive research is concerned with conditions and relationships that exist, opinions that are held and processes that are going on. In the sense that the events involved in the study would have occurred regardless of observation or analysis, the study falls into the category of descriptive research. (Best, 1989)

Progress of students as a result of this program was assessed during its tenure. The information was used to estimate the degree of achievement of the involved students and impact on self esteem. Pre and post tests, questionnaires to students, teachers and parents, examination of documented letter grades, anecdotal observations and an exit interview were the methods used to document this progress. These are the questions that guided the research:

1. How does writing to a real audience for a real purpose effect the writing skills of the middle school student?
2. What is the effect on the self esteem of the middle school child when the student corresponds with a local, successful adult?

Subjects

The subjects attended an inner city middle school, located in a part of the city predominantly populated by minorities. 60% of the students walk to school. All of the subjects in the study qualify for and receive a free lunch under the Federal Lunch Program.

Twenty five seventh grade subjects participated in the study. This number represented one fourth of the students in the seventh grade cluster. Included in the group were two subjects previously identified to have special learning needs, but currently serviced in the regular classroom. The subjects range in age from eleven to thirteen. The subjects represent a cross section of the diverse school culture: 55% Black, 35% Hispanic, 8% Asian, and 7% White.

The letter writing samples were from an encapsulated period, January through April. Letters became part of the school's mandatory cumulative writing folder program. The subjects involved in this study participated in a pre writing sample taken in September; maintained a cumulative writing folder in English containing ten skill building
descriptive/ narrative /expository compositions each, completed at least four letters to their assigned Promising Pal (of which at least two were responsive); responded to a questionnaire; responded to an exit interview.

The researcher selected twenty five out of ninety eight possible subjects in the middle school seventh grade cluster. These twenty five all participated in Promising Pals willingly and represented a range in ability according to previous achievement, testing from high to low in performance. They were selected carefully to represent the cultural diversity and for gender balance. Thirteen were black, three were white, two were Asian, and seven were Hispanic. Fourteen were female and eleven were male. They were not members of one homeroom group, but came from five homerooms.

All twenty five were instructed by the same English teacher, but writing of letters took place across the curriculum, that is in reading, math, and science classes as well as in English.

Five other cluster teachers participated in this part of the program. These were the other academic teachers who had been writing with the students in their own subject areas. The subject areas were: math, social studies, science and two reading teachers. The six were teaching veterans,
ranging in experience from fourteen to twenty one years of service. They were between forty five and fifty seven years old. Two were Black, four were white. Three were female, three were male.

Selection of Pals

Names for potential adult Pals were presented to the committee the first year of the program by the principal. Teachers were encouraged to submit names of local candidates who they thought would be an asset to the program. Any interested community person is welcome to become part of the school’s community of writers. Although many famous or locally well known people are eager to participate, the school emphasizes the need for balance by maintaining in the list people who have worked in the school, such as the former custodian and the former school secretary, and people who are simply local and interested. Many neighborhood people seek the opportunity to become active in the school, further promoting a happy relationship between school and immediate environment.

For this study, the names on the Pals list were divided randomly to the four clusters. Each English teacher then assigned students to Pals by placing Pals names on stickers and calling the students alphabetically to receive a sticker from the teacher. This alphabetical calling up of students
was used only to establish order and method of distribution. The names were handed out as received by the English teacher. The students and Pals were not in any way matched for color or gender with their Pal.

Procedure

The inner city, culturally diverse middle school in this study, after a year of working with the recommended cumulative writing folders, implemented a writing exchange with successful community based adults. In January of 1986, the principal of the school invited 80 educators, local business people who had shown interest in education, and politicians to participate in a landmark writing exchange with 6th, 7th and 8th grade students. Their participation was limited to a simple minimum exchange of four letters stretched over a three to four month period. All participants were invited to attend a breakfast celebration where adults and students would officially meet.

In response to the promise of the program, it was aptly named Promising Pals. (Invitation from principal, form A, appendix)

A careful procedure was established so the parameters were clearly stated from the outset. Students were offered an explanation and verbal contract to participate in the program. The teacher said, "This program offers you the
chance to add A's to your grade record, and work to your writing folder. For every letter that is mailed, you will receive an automatic A." This was followed by a question and answer period. Any student concern or objection was addressed on a one to one basis after that. Students agreed by a show of hands to be participants. Sample letter exchanges from other years were shown on overhead to indicate ways in which connections were made. Pictures and a video from other years were shown. Students were given an outline for the first letter. Participating students were to write one letter a month during class time for four months. The program included sending a sample of the student's best work with the second letter, a pencil with the school name on it for the third letter, and a picture of themselves to be included by the fourth letter.

However, before a letter could be sent, it had to adhere to the following criteria:

1. The first letter, considered to be crucial because it set the tone and encouraged response, had to first be written as a draft. The letter followed a specific form. The students had to introduce themselves, then describe the unique aspects of the school and its extended day program, and finally, include questions to encourage a response. The students used their own methods of self description, whether it be a physical description, or simply a statement of name
and grade level. The students made all decisions about how far to go describing families, but the format was clear.

The body of the letter described the school's structure, something the student liked about it, and something the student was working on or had experienced, such as a contest or Science Fair or field trip.

The third part of the letter had to do with setting up the new relationship. The students asked questions that were important to them and reflected their own interests. These opened specific areas for communication to occur. (Writing the first letter, form B, appendix)

2. All student writing prior to this project was peer edited, with students either working in groups or in pairs to analyze their own work. Peer editing for this particular project was abandoned, and the students were requested to do their own initial editing. This was followed by further editing by the teacher. It was made clear to the student that the teacher involvement would be to edit grammatical errors, not to affect content. Many letters went to groups of people in same offices, such as the school committee, so there was careful concern to protect originality. Since one goal of the program was to show students the importance of writing for publication, uniformity of form not information was requested.
School administrators reserved the right to encourage students to deal with positive images, particularly in the first letter, in order to elicit a response. If students expressed the desire to state negative images they were encouraged to reserve those comments for future letters or upon meeting, since they are intrinsically personal. Most students successfully wrote just one edited letter, but occasionally, a student had to write and rewrite to get the letter perfect. Now and then this took up to five tries.

3. All correspondence was in pen or computer on stationary with the promising Pal logo, a flying pen. Only students who had particular handwriting difficulty used the computer. Handwritten letters were determined to be more personalized.

From the beginning, students understood that they were learning to write for publication.

**Administrative Involvement**

The administrator in this case played a very involved role. The school's extended day program, called Project Promise, included a mandate for students to write across the curriculum and to connect with the community. The idea for Promising Pals came from the principal, and although a committee ran the program, she oversaw every aspect.
A letter from the principal greeted each Pal at the onset of the program in January. The letter described the procedure, and informed the Pals of their unique opportunity. If a refusal to participate was not received within two weeks, the Pal was put on a master computer list which included his/her name, title, place of business, name of student Pal, and homeroom of student.

All letters that went out and all that came in were xeroxed twice, once for the student’s folder and once for a general file held in the main office. It was agreed that the principal would read every letter that went out, and every one that came in. Further, she would write positive comments on students’ xerox copies. Whenever a letter came in, the principal or assistant principal would personally deliver it to the student, and after the student read the letter she (the principal) read it to the class.

During the first year of this program, it was agreed that the principal would meet regularly with the program chairperson, and sit in on many of the committee meetings. She would oversee all planning for the reception. She would participate in the reception and describe this unique program and tell anecdotes from many of the letters, thus personalizing it further. After the program was concluded, she sent a second letter to all pals, thanking them for
their participation and inviting them to be a Promising Pal the following year. (Closing letter, form C, appendix)

Testing

Pre and post tests, three opinion questionnaires, grade assessment, anecdotal observation, and an exit interview were the tools for data collection.

Pre and Post testing

Students were asked to write a friendly letter to someone they didn't know but expected to meet. A similar request was made at the end of the program. Both were holistically scored by trained in-house teachers for overall content (is it interesting, cohesive, appropriately arranged as to paragraphs?) and signs of connections, demonstrated by use of similar language and interests. Mechanical aspects, heading, greeting, length of paragraphs, use of question marks and exclamation points which indicate sentence variety, signs of organization, brief introduction, longer body, and brief conclusion were noted for graphing purposes. The readers made categories for each of the above and noted the number of times each occurred.

Opinion Questionnaire

Three teacher made opinion questionnaires were designed to gather information from subjects, parents and teachers.
The student questionnaire had twenty questions, the parent questionnaire seven, and the teacher questionnaire eleven. All three were constructed using a Likert Scale.

The student questionnaire was designed to determine whether the subject felt academically stronger, had a clearer sense of self, and had improved hope for the future as a result of the program. The information from this questionnaire was abstracted and applied to graph form in categories that corresponded with never, rarely, sometimes, most of the time, and always. The researcher felt that a variety of options would give a more definitive result. (Student questionnaire, form D, appendix)

The parental questionnaire was used to determine parent perception of subject achievement, attitude and self esteem. Parental anecdotes also were considered. The same form as the student questionnaire was used, the questions were listed by number and the number of responses in each category was noted. A bar graph was created to show the results for analytical purposes. This questionnaire was sent home by mail with a stamped return envelope for response. (Parent questionnaire, form E, appendix)

The Teacher questionnaire involved those six teachers in each cluster whose students participated in the program. It was designed to assess teacher interest, involvement, and impressions. Data were gathered in the same manner as the
other two questionnaires, bar graphed and analyzed by category of response. (Teacher questionnaire, form F, appendix)

Grades

English and reading grades for a two term period including the duration of the program were collected from report cards. The researcher bar graphed grades from the semester preceding Promising Pals and abstracted reading and English grades for purposes of comparison. Grades from the Promising Pal semester were collected and placed on a bar graph, again recording reading and English grades. The two were then compared to see where changes occurred.

Anecdotal observations

The specific connection made by the students and their Pals was documented in writing from the letters, or by video camera or film. Indications of connection were categorically documented. The categories operationalizing connection included use of similar vocabulary, similarities in likes or dislikes, questions asked and answered, plans for time spent together, and or gifts.

Other indications of bonding behavior and/or change in student behavior or a change in student behavior that could be directly related to the program by anecdote beyond letter information was documented by the researcher. The
documentation took the form of pictures, video, and discussion as the activity took place. The researcher kept a written record of these events and moments for later analysis. She looked for instances of connection: body language, intonation and stress of language, facial expressions and general impressions.

Exit Interview

All subjects participated in an exit interview as a group. The interview was conducted with the video camera, and involved questions and comments about the experience from the students’ point of view. What they liked best and least; what they would like to see changed or kept the same, whether or not their pal and the experience met their expectations. The format for the interview was informal. The interviewer set up a video camera, and said, "Well, now that it’s over, I’d like you as a group to talk to each other about what you thought about Promising Pals. Not just how you liked it, but maybe the best or the worst parts, or, anything that comes to mind." The students talked for an hour, sharing their own personal experiences. The researcher viewed the tape for impressions, attitudes, concerns, and suggestions.
Summary

Twenty-five inner city, culturally diverse seventh graders participated in a study to determine the impact of a letter writing exchange with successful, local adults on their self esteem and writing skills. The subjects were matched randomly with the adults. They wrote at least four letters each, over a four month period, and received responses.

The results of the study were documented by pre and post testing, opinion questionnaires, grades in English and reading, anecdotal observations, and an exit interview. Students and Pals met at a breakfast celebration held at the school. They spent a morning together, listening to a program, eating and touring the school. The breakfast lasted about three hours.

Expectations were that students over the course of the program would:
* Become engaged with a distant audience known only through written communication, and accept that somebody cared about their writing other than the teacher.
* Recognize writing as communication; writing in school did not have to be a way of completing an assignment, it could be an occasion for practicing widely used communication skills needed to reach varied and distant audiences.
* Participate willingly, and with a notion of responsibility to "make sense" in types of writing that had different functions.

* Move beyond initial response in writing to engagement with ideas; to be willing to explain and question their ideas in writing to assist their audiences in understanding their meaning.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

This chapter is a discussion of the data collected from implementing Promising Pals with twenty five inner city seventh grade students and twenty five local successful adults who were interested in education and young people. The study investigated changes in writing skills and self esteem when students write to a real audience for a real purpose.

Pre Test and Post Test

The twenty five subjects in the study were asked to write a friendly letter to a person of their own choice, using accepted friendly letter form before the Promising Pals program began. The pre test letters are dated January 3, 1991. The same request was made on May 29, 1991, using the same criteria for scoring. The letter written on May 29 was after the Promising Pals program was completed. It was the post test. The letters were evaluated for the following components:

1. Accepted heading.
2. Appropriate greeting, correctly punctuated.
3. Indications of a thought out, organized letter as shown by use of topic sentences, introduction, body, and
conclusion in paragraph form, and interesting or creative wording.

4. Variety in punctuation, proper capitalizing and variety in sentence length.

Accepted Heading

The results of pre test category one, of accepted heading were that of the twenty five, only four of the students included the three parts of an accepted heading correctly placed in the upper right hand corner of the paper. That is, street address; city, state, zip; and date. Of those four, one student put the elements in the proper order, the other three used varying orders. One student did not include a heading, the other twenty used one part of the heading, indicating they knew something should go there.

The results of the post test, for the category of accepted heading category were that eighteen students in the post test used the accepted heading for a friendly letter, correctly spaced, and in the right order. Five students left out one element, the date. One student had all the elements in the right order, but on the wrong side of the paper, looking more like a business letter. One student had all the elements on the right side of the page, but had condensed them to two lines instead of three.
All students in the study indicated clear knowledge of writing an accepted heading for a friendly letter after the Promising Pals program was completed. (Table 1)

By experiencing the direct application of use of appropriate heading, and receiving a response with a similar heading, the students automatically incorporated this skill into their skill bank.

### Appropriate Greeting

The results of category two, use of appropriate greeting, correctly punctuated in the pre test were, all subjects indicated prior knowledge of appropriate greeting by starting the letter with "Dear" and using a person’s first name or referring to the person as "Mr.", or "Mrs". No student used "Ms." Sixteen students punctuated correctly with a comma after the name. Five students did not punctuate. Four students used a colon after the word "Dear", again indicating possible confusion with a previously taught business form.

In the post test, all students used an appropriate greeting and punctuated with a comma, except one who used no punctuation.

All students in the study indicated competency in use of an appropriate greeting, correctly punctuated after the
Promising Pals program. (Table 2) Frequent practice in application of skills using an authentic audience reinforces knowledge of the skill according to this study.

Thought Out Writing

The results of category three, indications of thought out organized writing, in the pre test, were that fifteen students began their letters with various forms of, "Hi! How are you doing?". Four students began with, "How is _______?" (school, job, your mother, Aunt Mary) Four began with a description of themselves, Of the remaining two, one was a thank you note, and the other began with, "How did you injure your knee in Japan?".

In the post test, five students began their letters with, "How are you doing?", and the remaining twenty immediately connected with the purpose of their letters. "I’m writing to tell you how things are going in school. And, "I really hope you are feeling better since your operation."

The subjects in the study showed a change in the way their letter began, indicating they were thinking ahead of time about what they wanted to say after their participation in Promising Pals. (table 3)
The results of use of brief introduction and conclusion, and longer body of letter in the pre test were that the letters of twenty subjects were one paragraph long, regardless of content. Three were one long sentence in length. Five students wrote letters with three paragraphs and used topic sentences at least once in the letter, following with details.

In the post test, twenty one students wrote letters with three paragraphs. One student’s letter had two paragraphs, and three students had one paragraph. There are more frequent indications of topic sentences, "We kids in the seventh grade cluster are really disappointed.", the letters of the twenty one students stretch to the second page, and the handwriting is neater.

Length and Organization of Letters

There is a clear connection between the Promising Pals program and improved length, neatness and organization of letters. (table 4) The students involved applied clearer thinking and organization after the program, and indicated overall improvement in presentation of material. Letters become more interesting when they are thought out. Students found that they looked for long answers with questions and things to think about from their Pals.
Punctuation

The results of the pre test in the fourth category, variety in punctuation were fourteen subjects used one question mark. Two used two question marks. One student used two question marks and an exclamation point. The rest ended their sentences with a period. All students ended every sentence with punctuation.

In the post test, six students ended their sentences with no more than a period. Two used two question marks. Three used two exclamation points and three question marks. Four used quotation marks, question marks and exclamation points. The remaining ten students used one question mark. The students who incorporated the use of variety of types of sentences into their post test writing, indicated their understanding of writing for a response. The use of questions is a direct request for response and shows an awareness of audience. Exclamation points indicate lively writing that also may bring about response. The change in presentation is significant because it shows a connection with audience stimulates application of thought and skills. (table 5)

In pre and post testing, all students began their sentences with capital letters, and all proper nouns were capitalized, indicating no change in that category.
The sample group showed stronger development of skills, and more comfortable use of language after the Promising Pals writing exchange. The data indicate that when students engage in repeated letter writing tasks that are authentic they are more alert to their presentation, show clearer thinking and organization, indicate correct use of heading and greeting and incorporate these skills and behaviors into their automatic learning bank. These students leave the program confidant of their ability to produce a response from a letter they have written. Once a student understands this, teachers can begin to build other tasks of responsibility into their learning.

Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire had seventeen questions that were answered by never, rarely, sometimes, most of the time, and always. These questions were followed by three fill in comments areas: list three things you liked about the program, what one change you would make, and write one sentence that tells how you feel about Promising Pals. The students included their name, and stated how many years they had been Promising Pals.

The results were astounding! All students affirmed the program with only one stating he didn’t like it. All but two felt they were more careful when writing to a real audience. Seventy-five percent felt writing to another
person generally helped them to understand themselves. Ninety percent felt their writing improved. Most thought the prewriting exercises helped their writing. Eighty five percent believed they wrote more frequently because of the program. They overwhelmingly affirmed that writing to an adult gave them clearer understanding of the adult. Most received some advice from their Pal. Most did not feel it was easier to talk to someone other than family, and almost all felt their family understood them anyway! They agreed that their Pal helped them to try harder in school, felt their Pal was special and successful, and having an adult other than family or teacher to encourage them was great. There was positive response to feeling they would always be able to write a special letter that gets a response, and feel good about writing. Ninety percent believed that Promising Pals helped them to feel good about themselves, and that the program should continue. (table 6)

Sample reasons why students liked the program ranged from, "It’s an easy A", to "We had good food", to "My Pal was really understanding and we got along." Some suggestions for change were, "Make the food more breakfast like", "I wouldn’t change a thing", "Choose your own Pal", "Not go back to class after the reception and tour." Comments students made about how they felt the program about the program were, "Enjoyable", "I liked meeting my Pal", "I
Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>75</th>
<th>75</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>75</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>85</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students like it</td>
<td>More careful writers</td>
<td>Clearer about self</td>
<td>Well prepared</td>
<td>Writing improved</td>
<td>Write more</td>
<td>Like adults better</td>
<td>Advice from pal</td>
<td>Share out of family</td>
<td>Family understands me</td>
<td>Pal helped me try harder</td>
<td>Pal was special</td>
<td>Helpful pal</td>
<td>Better letter writing</td>
<td>Good to write for response</td>
<td>Adult connection good</td>
<td>Like program to continue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Questionnaire

Like program to continue
Adult connection good
Good to write for response
Better letter writing
Helpful pal
Pal was special
Pal helped me try harder
Family understands me
Share out of family
Advice from pal
Like adults better
Write more
Writing improved
Well prepared
Clearer about self
More careful writers
Students like it

Percent
learned a lot about writing", "My Pal was really good to me."

The student questionnaire supported the belief that students prefer to be involved with authentic tasks that show application of specific skills. They indicated that their writing in general improved, showing they are capable of transferring the specific task to a broader arena. This especially offers significant reason for teachers to use authentic tasks to solidify a skill, then offer wider ranges for application. When a students feel that learning is more than a regurgitation of material, they become engaged in the experience, activate their thinking abilities and see the purpose of the learning. Wide implications for methods of teaching result from this type of study.

Teacher Questionnaire

The Promising Pals teachers answered eleven questions, and added a comment if they chose. Two of the teachers built their whole writing program around Promising Pals, and four did not. All agreed strongly that it was important that their students write a good letter and receive a response. All agreed that they had noticed that their students' self esteem had improved because of Promising Pals. One teacher felt the program was a pain, the rest did not. Two teachers felt the students should write freely and send letters out with mistakes, four felt this was
inappropriate, and letters should be perfect. All agreed that when students participated in Promising Pals, they learned life skills. Five felt they wanted to write with students again, one said once is enough! Five agreed that the program had strong academic value and tremendous social implications, one disagreed. Two teachers felt the students should be carefully matched by teachers with adults who they thought would mentor the particular student best, and four felt students should be placed randomly. All agreed that it is helpful for students to relate to adults in the real world. Four teachers made no further comments, one said he loved the program the way it was, and one cited three changes she would incorporate: to start the program earlier in the year, have a packet ready for teachers, and all writing be done on the word processor.

In general the teachers involved supported the program, even though there was one dissenter. The variation in response indicates to this researcher that the group should get together and discuss differences with the idea of improving the program. (table 7) However, the teacher questionnaire clearly shows that teachers are eager to help students relate to other adults, encourage contact with the real world, support new methods and ideas, and are willing to put in the extra time to achieve significant results.
### Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>percent</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>95</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culmination of efforts</strong></td>
<td>Want students to write well</td>
<td>Self esteem positively affected</td>
<td>Pain but worth it</td>
<td>Just a pain</td>
<td>Less editing</td>
<td>Teaching life skill</td>
<td>Once is enough</td>
<td>Academic value</td>
<td>Strictly mentor program</td>
<td>Good for students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Teacher Questionnaire

- **Good for students**
- **Strictly Mentor Program**
- **Academic Value**
- **Once is Enough**
- **Teaching Life skill**
- **Less Editing**
- **Just a Pain**
- **Pain but Worth it**
- **Self esteem positively affected**
- **Want students to write well**
- **Culmination of efforts**

**Percentage of Teachers who Agree**
Parent Questionnaire

Parents were extremely enthusiastic about the program. They answered seven questions. All were familiar with the program. All said their child talked about it at home and shared their received letters. None felt the program created too much pressure. All felt that an adult who cares about kids can help them understand themselves better. All believed their children felt better about themselves after the program. One parent said her child did not normally talk about feelings at home, but all the rest said their children did. All parents felt their children’s writing was better after the Promising Pals program. One parent referred to the program as a "teachable moment". Comments like, "I wish I had something like this when I was in school", and "My son’s Promising Pal is taking me out to dinner too!" were not uncommon. Most of all, parents expressed pride and involvement in their student’s accomplishment. Letters from famous Pals were read to relatives and friends. Students were held in esteem in the family. The principal and some teachers received letters from parents talking about their children’s excitement.

The parents of the involved subjects enthusiastically supported the program and approved of its goals. (table 8) They noticed changes in attitude and in interest in writing.
### Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>familiar w/program</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student shared</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults can help</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child feels better</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talks more</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes better</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Parent Questionnaire

- **Writes better**
- **Talks more**
- **Child feels better**
- **Adults can help**
- **Too much**
- **Student shared**
- **Familiar with program**

---

**Percent**
They felt the school was interested in education of the whole child. Full parental support is important to both student and parent. The learning process is enhanced when students go home, talk about what is going on at school, show work to their parents and get wide approval.

Comparative Grade Analysis

The grades of the participating students were examined to see what changes took place. The students' English grades either stayed the same, or improved because of the automatic A that went into their folder. All students either remained the same or showed improvement in reading as well. The automatic A that the students received for every mailed letter only effected their English grade. Fifteen of the twenty five showed improvement in other grades as compared to the previous semester. None of the participating students showed lower grades. (table 9) It is important to consider that when a student feels connected to learning, all grades can show improvement, not just the area that is being highlighted. This was unexpected, and happily noted. The idea of authentic tasks as the tool for broad based learning stimulation is an important result of this study.
Table 9

Comparative Grade Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Category A</th>
<th>Category B</th>
<th>Category C</th>
<th>Category D</th>
<th>Category E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students who improved one grade in at least 3 subjects including Reading for that semester</td>
<td>Improved one grade in English</td>
<td>Stayed the same in English</td>
<td>Improved one grade in Reading</td>
<td>Stayed the same in Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of students</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Bar chart showing the number of students in each category](chart.png)
Anecdotal Observations

One male student began his second letter with: "I was glad to receive your letter". The Pal returned with, "I was glad to receive your second letter." The student said, "I was glad to receive your second letter." The two began their letters in an identical manner, quite unconsciously letting each other know of their respect.

One student painstakingly wrote her first letter, and received an answer written in pencil. "Look", she complained, "I wrote my letter carefully in pen, and my Pal wrote back in pencil!" As she read the letter from her Pal she discovered the truth. "I like the school pencil you sent me so much that I am answering your letter with it."

When a student was invited to visit the Senate President’s office because he was a Promising Pal, the student arrived at school wearing a new suit. He had dressed for the occasion, showing not only his respect for the meeting but his awareness of its importance in his life. Another wrote all four letters diligently. A high ranking, sensitive child, he never complained that his Pal did not respond. The day of the reception, the student arrived expectantly hoping his Pal would show up, but he did not. A month passed, and a phone call came for the student. As it turned out, the Pal had been seriously ill, and in fact, had died. Before he died he asked his friend to buy a pen for
the student, and to tell him that the letters he received had given him tremendous joy. Although this sad incident is not common, it showed all of us the power of the program and the unknown value that we shared.

In this particular group there was another medical issue, this one much happier. A Pal who responded but did not come to the reception, and did not offer an explanation, showed up a month later with her new born baby and mother and child met their student. The student was so enchanted, she spoke of the incident often, and after she left the school, would relate the incident as the highlight of her years at the school.

The Promising Student of a local female newscaster could hardly believe that this famous woman not only encouraged her friendship through letters, but came to see her at the reception. Their relationship blossomed and the student became a favorite baby-sitter for the newscaster. Other TV personalities wrote long, frequent letters encouraging students to write, think, and make good choices. The school can call on any of these people to be graduation speakers, to help with special events, to give advice or support. They respond because they are connected to the school.
A well known sports writer is credited to have singlehandedly helped keep a student in school after his mother, his only source of strength, suddenly died. The boy’s interest in sports was encouraged by the writer, and he mentioned the child several times in his column. He went to the school to visit him, took him to games on weekends with his family, and supplied what the student needed to handle his grief.

A young female student wrote to a well known businessman. He and his wife took the girl on bike rides, out for brunch, met her family, wrote about their experiences, and continued the friendship after the program ended officially. The value of this type of friendship can only be assumed and varies in each case, but the fact that phone calls, day trips, and family involvement are included gives strength to the mentoring possibilities.

Twenty of the letter exchanges in the study showed shared language or connections in use of vocabulary. All Pals wanted to know about their students’ family structure. They all connected in areas of sports or favorite subjects. Fifteen students received a gift. Gifts ranged from movie tickets to T-shirts, to books. One student wrote his Pal about his studies of the Humpback Whale. He received a long letter back and a book about the whales. The student was requested to answer some questions and keep the Pal posted
as to his learnings. Another student received four books to start her own library collection. Her Pal was a reading teacher and took the opportunity to inspire the student.

Pictures and a video of the breakfast reception showed students and Pals deep in conversation, their heads bent toward each other, eyes focused on the other, smiles on their lips. The frequent enthusiastic responses from both students and Pals, repeat performances and gifts culminate in a dress-up day that is recorded on film with balloons flying and faces beaming.

The anecdotes, pictures, memories and future plans all support the wide approval of Promising Pals, and indicate clearly that schools and communities can join to create a wider knowledge base for students. When the community supports a student task, and participates actively in it, the student builds confidence and a sense of connection to community. This can be translated into stronger hope for the future and improved self esteem.

Exit interview

The exit interview results were gratifying. The students felt a bit shy at first, discussing their experience, especially since the format was informal. Gradually they began to speak freely. They spoke about what they liked and why they liked it. They said it was fun
to get to know someone new. They felt the interest of the Pal in their school life. Their parents showed renewed interest in their letters, especially if the Pal was well known. Parents had a great deal of respect for what their children were doing. They were proud! Several students said they started out doubting the exchange would be anything but a pain, but were delighted with the results. They seemed to spark each other. If one student referred to an incident, another could hardly wait to comment. They all felt better about a school that provided something like this for them. They all felt that writing had connected them to someone, and that they would never forget the experience.

When animated discussion, smiling faces, open agreement and success are present, something has happened that supports the notion that learning is best when it is experienced, and that one learning links to another. The students involved in this program would be open to other programs that connected them to the real world, and authenticated their learning.

Conclusion

When seventh grade students in an inner city, culturally diverse middle school are engaged in a writing exchange with caring, local adults, they write about their personal experiences, improve their writing skills, and build self
esteem. They improve their grades, effectively use grammar, write longer paragraphs that are more organized, use topic sentences, and indicate an understanding of sentence variety through use.

Students indicate a greater comfort level with school, make friends with their Pals, get advice from them, and enjoy their company. They feel more connected to their community, and each other. The data gathered support the hypothesis that students' self esteem and writing skills have been impacted when they write to a real audience for a real purpose.
The purpose of this study was to measure the effect of writing to a real audience for a real purpose on the writing skills and self esteem of seventh grade inner city students. The findings showed improvement in formal letter heading, appropriate greeting, thoughtful organization, and interesting or creative wording. Student letter writing showed appropriate use of punctuation and capitalization after participating in the program. Their grades in English and reading improved while the program was going on, indicating that the letter writing was not a burden, but in fact, created an environment that fostered a more serious attitude toward related studies.

The need for students to use written language to communicate ideas, information and feelings has repeatedly been validated by the research of Elbow (1981), Applebee (1981), Britton (1973) and Farr and Daniels. (1986) According to studies by Farr and Daniels (1986), students have historically written in school to show learning to teachers, and to master the conventions of writing. Britton (1983) stated that the vast majority of students' writing is used to send information back to the teacher. Research by Stallard (1974) and Hawkins (1971) reported that successful high school
writers were more aware of purpose and audience than unsuccessful writers. The changes that occurred in the writing skills of the seventh grade students in this study support the concept that students who are engaged with a real audience for a real purpose are more conscious of the way they write and what they say.

It is not surprising that once the "threat" of grading is removed, and a significant and authentic task is introduced students will rise to the occasion. Writing to a real audience for a real purpose helps students to accept themselves as functional members of society. This is what education is all about. Educators might look at these statistics and consider ways to connect their students to the world they will enter. When students write for teacher response only, we in fact isolate them in buildings until they are of age, and then wonder why they can't adjust.

Studies conducted by Blyth and Traeger (1982) confirm the impact of an adult other than parent or teacher to support and influence children in early adolescence. The research of Petersen and Taylor (1980) challenges prior ideas that the adolescent is too fragmented to learn. Students of this age bracket simply do better if they are given the tools to connect their learning to the world around them. Programs that direct writing to a real audience encourage students to incorporate their learnings into their memory bank. Post-test
data indicate that skills were absorbed and were successfully applied.

Beane and Lipka (1979) suggest that educators can view their adolescent students in new ways. By developing competencies they feel good about, students begin to feel good about themselves. The questionnaire results and results from the exit interview clearly support this belief. Enthusiastic students who are ready to, and are offered the opportunity to develop contact with the real world feel better about themselves, and more competent as they make the transition into high school. According to Blyth and Traeger (1979) the middle school students are absorbing everything around them and are adjusting to a world that is constantly getting larger. Why not use this information when planning activities for this age group? Why not acknowledge as teachers that we have compassion and tools to deal with their changing minds and bodies? There is ample evidence when reviewing questionnaires from students, parents and teachers, that all feel positively about the respect that is shown them by adults outside of the family and school. The students indicated a strong desire to expand and continue the program, many with the same Pal. Teachers saw it as a positive way to teach skills and encourage broader community contact. In fact, a program with senior citizens from a local home was developed, and students knew they would benefit, so they immediately supported the idea. More field trips, more letter writing,
more genre variety all received student acceptance. The fact that students came up with their own ideas, and encouraged teachers to seek new venues, only further substantiates the adolescents’ hunger for a wider and real audience. Frequently students would say, "Yes! Let’s try it!" or, "Wow! That sounds like fun!"

A study prepared by Farr and Daniels (1986) suggests that transitional writing activities bridge the gap from lower grades to high school and college writing. These activities include journal writing, reports from personal interviews, letters to members of the larger community, and notes and letters regarding school issues. These researchers believe that students should use writing as a tool not as an exercise.

The students who participated in Promising Pals made a leap into the larger world, and confirmed this kind of research. They prepared for Promising Pals by participating in a series of transitional activities which included daily writing, frequent if not daily sharing, response sharing in peer groups, and selection of their own topics. Exercises that stimulated the students’ memories and that showed them how to be observers of the world around them were introduced to encourage topic selection.

Simon, Hawley and Britton (1973) created the "personal growth approach" for the teaching of writing. They were forerunners in the idea that self esteem is enhanced when
students master a task, and put themselves into it. They believed that the key to this approach was that students should write because there is something to say that is important to some person or persons important to them and because they want to achieve a particular effect or set of effects on their audience. They state that audience feedback and the writer’s response to that feedback are crucial. This in fact, is the hope that drives Promising Pals, and more than likely explains its success. One has only to attend a gala reception or participate as a writer or observer to pick up the excitement that students feel. One need only to look at the beaming faces, the dressed up students, to share their feeling of connection and importance. This is not someone patting them on the back because they have written a page or two. These are people who have shared and respected each other’s ideas. These are adults and children who want to please, who believe in each other. Think of the hidden benefits. Think of the student who will someday be a parent, who has learned the value of communication through the written word, who knows that the community is not an unfriendly place, who has experienced the touch of a caring adult other than parent or teacher, and who knows what this means! Are we not modeling adult behavior?

A study by Heath (1985) in which she worked with minority ninth grade students in a letter writing project showed changes in student writing confidence. These students read
more as well, increasing their awareness of the world around
them and their ability to communicate in it.

The study conducted through Promising Pals, to determine
the effect of writing to a real audience for a real purpose on
the writing skills and self esteem of seventh grade, inner
city, culturally diverse students has produced a similar
result. Ripple effects such as the improvement of all
related grades was noticed by an impressed parent, "My child
reads more critically now, because of the way she is being
taught to write". If educators are to prepare students for
several careers, for a thirst for knowledge, for the
challenges of the twenty first century, they will also have to
study how children learn and how to best accommodate their
ever changing world.

One way is to concern ourselves with keeping our schools
open to our communities and our communities open to our
schools. Future studies about writing should be conducted to
determine long term effects of programs such as Promising
Pals. Methods of scoring and evaluating writing need to be
developed. Educators who consider themselves researchers will
find ways to document the value of authentic writing and its
effect on broader learning. When students write well, and
have practice in using language to elicit a response, they
will have precious experience in thinking, organizing ideas,
sharing, and communicating. Students are no longer merely
observers in their world, but active members of their society. As Anne Morrow Lindburg wrote, "...writing is more than living, it is being conscious of living."
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

The results of the effect of a letter writing program between inner city seventh graders and local, successful adults on the writing skills and self esteem of the students proved to be positive. The writing skills, grades and confidence of twenty five culturally diverse students who represented the ethnic and racial makeup of the inner city middle school improved during the four month study.

As measured in pre and post tests, the subjects showed improvement in the specific categories of the writing that were sampled. They wrote longer, more cohesive letters in the post test. They showed knowledge of and clear use of appropriate heading and greeting. They used variety in sentence length and type. More students used end punctuation such as an exclamation point or a question mark, signifying questions or showing excitement. Their post test letters demonstrated an understanding of introduction, body conclusion and topic sentence. All these learnings were taught during and just prior to the Promising Pals program.

The English and reading grades for all students in the study either remained the same or improved during the writing exchange. Overall performance in all subjects, as measured by
grades, including those earned during the semester of the study as compared to the grades of the same students for the previous semester were generally higher.

Three questionnaires from students, parents and teachers revealed overwhelming support for the program. The students believed their conversations in writing gave them a connection in the community and bolstered their hope for the future. Parents were delighted that their children could write well enough to elicit a response from an adult, particularly if that adult were a well known local person. Parents wanted other adults to support them in helping their children understand their relationship to their community. They felt the school acknowledged them as parents because of the program. This in fact turned out to be a hidden benefit that brought more parents into the school.

Students in an exit interview reported pleasure with the results, and support for the program. All students wanted to participate again, and many wanted to keep the same Pal for another year. They did not mind having to be more carefully edited when writing for publication. Rather, they felt that because their letters were well written, their Pal took them seriously and responded more quickly. They understood that two people are responsible for written conversation to occur.
Many students received more than letters. They were included on family trips, were sent postcards from foreign ports, were given books, taken to breakfast, to lunch, to dinner. In fact, two school officials rented a stretch limousine and took their two students to lunch at the city's most famous restaurant. The principal, getting involved in the moment, escorted the students to the limo while others watched from the school windows.

One student was unable to find a summer job. Her Pal was a local cardiologist. He created a position for her in his office, and was so impressed with her that he began negotiations for her to be admitted with full scholarship to a private high school that would meet her needs. Another Pal who was an official at a local college offered full scholarships to any participating student as long as the students met the college's requirements.

The famous president of a large university, who ran for governor, wrote his student a brief note after her first letter to him. He told her he would be unable to attend the breakfast and wished her luck. She was disappointed, and after a discussion with her teacher, decided to challenge this powerful man to be more of a Pal. She wrote and asked him to help her solve her dilemma about whether or not to accept a private school scholarship the following year. He became intrigued, and there followed a lively correspondence. He did
go to the reception, and in fact was truly enchanted with this talented student. She had learned the power of words and he had the joy of being a true mentor.

The possible college scholarships and job possibilities are obvious in their importance to students. With them come the awareness of community and the value of education. Research that investigates writing for a real audience supports the concept of Promising Pals. Learning is social and students who are engaged with their learning improve their writing skills and feel better about themselves.

The model presented through Promising Pals shows what can happen when students are involved in authentic tasks. Particularly, what happens when students write to a real audience for a real purpose. Students who participate in this type of learning are stimulated to think, organize ideas, and clearly express themselves. They expand their learning to other subjects and become more aware of themselves and the world around them. Whether or not schools wish to implement a Promising Pals program is not as important as the idea that learning occurs best in a social context. The implications for revising teacher approach to learning are many. In best case, this study would stimulate an interest in integrated, interdisciplinary learning, team teaching, and writing across the curriculum.
Recommendations

The school involved in this study made the Promising Pals program an annual event. The number of Pals increased so that all students were included. Approximately 500 students exchange letters today. So many of the decision makers of the city are involved that at one of the receptions a speaker asked, "We're all here. Who's running the city?" More than a thousand Promising Pals have written letters, given gifts, and guided students over the past seven years. One Pal was asked why he thought so many adults would take the time to write to children. "That's easy. Everyone loves to be a mentor." he said.

This particular school once was labelled as the worst middle school in the city. Now, when its name is mentioned, people who control budgets, decisions concerning schools, and ideas about education, have all not only heard of the school, they have a personal contact there and have been in the building.

Schools that wish to implement Promising Pals should be aware of certain limitations:
1. Some logistical problems persisted. Each year a small number of Pals were unable to respond for a variety of reasons. Although every attempt was made to protect students, a small percentage were disappointed. Disappointment was
decreased when a response card was sent with the principal’s first letter, asking for commitment and stating the reception date so it could be marked on calendars. Phone calls to confirm attendance and to ask for letter responses decreased ambivalent responses.

2. The program was kept from expanding to all students because neither the auditorium nor the cafeteria held the total number of students and the total number of Pals. In the past two years, all students were involved, and community facilities absorbed the overflow. This had a positive effect on the program, making it a true community effort. The local vocational high school provided the food once prepared in the school’s Home Economics room, and a nearby museum offered its space for the breakfast. Pals now meet in the auditorium with central TV broadcasting the festivities to each classroom.

3. Although the program can hardly be called expensive, especially considering its payoff, there was certain expense. Stationary, xeroxing, stamps, gift pencils, photography, and the cost of the breakfast all had to be considered. In tight budget years, means other than school budgets must be found. An Ad Book with local businesses, parents and faculty participating was one way to defray costs.

4. Some teachers felt the program distracted from the standard curriculum. Even though it was curriculum based,
there was a certain amount of resistance to change. Once the program became an integrated part of the entire school, and workshops were held to support new teachers and to offer possible lessons for some who were having difficulty, attitudes changed. New teachers in the building simply saw Promising Pals as part of the curriculum. Because Project Promise authorized out of the classroom personnel, there were people available to handle the details of the program, such as the Ad Book. Parents also participated to ease the pressure on teachers. Committees handled the various aspects of the reception, so that no one person was overworked. Teacher distress needed to be addressed, but was turned around.

5. Administrative support was critical. It took the form of beating the drum for the program, and infiltrated every area of the planning. It should be clear that when students engage in real writing to real people, they apply their writing skills, improve them, and feel better about themselves. When the administration understands the value of the program, it is much easier to convince resistant faculty and to solicit funds.

If this program is to be successful in any school, it should create a careful format. There has to be a plan in place that covers situations unique to the school. All elements of this particular program, including the thought out letters that elicit response, samples of student work and a concluding reception should be part of any program called
Promising Pals. The program must be curriculum based and must begin when students are appropriately prepared.

There have in fact been two imitations of Promising Pals. In both cases, some of the crucial elements were modified, and both were abandoned as not returning results equal to the energy expended.

One allowed the students to send letters that were written in pencil, and reflected lack of thought by the students. The adults did not respond in equal percentage to the expectations. The other allowed students to have Pals outside of the community. They were unavailable for understanding local issues, and were unable to attend the breakfast. It was determined that these people could not be successful Pals because of location.

Although the concept of writing to a real audience for a real purpose can be administered in many ways, Promising Pals cannot fulfill its promise unless it is carefully planned. This then, is the primary and only significant drawback to attempting a program of this type.

It is the recommendation of this researcher that districts attempting this type of program first assess their student's needs in order to relate the program to their own specific conditions. A program such as this can be altered to respond
to the needs of any district, any school. The idea of an encapsulated program that improves students' writing skills and self esteem while connecting to the community has tremendous value. Horizons expand whenever school walls fall away and learning is viewed in a more natural, social manner.

**Suggestions for Educators**

All students who write will be most successful when they write about topics they know, or uncover ideas and feelings they didn’t know they had. The Promising Pals program was held in January, allowing teachers ample time to work with students to establish an environment in which the students learned to express themselves appropriately.

In the researcher’s classroom this took several forms. First, all students participated in a daily writing program. They had uniform notebooks in which they entered a ten minute writing sample at the start of each class. The entry was called "Show - Don’t - Tell". Students were given five topics each week, and they were asked to write about them by showing their description, rather than telling it. All lessons in grammar were then taken from this writing.

Second, students further enhanced their ability to describe by writing for periods of time to art and/or music
instead of the designated topics. In all cases, classroom sharing took place as well as classroom responding. Response could be verbal or written, but it had to be positive.

Third, compositions based on more inner narrative writing were encouraged by several means:

1. Students made collages from magazine pictures which showed them as they saw themselves to form a backdrop for a paper called "About Me".

2. Semantic Maps encouraged students to organize their thoughts and included all their ideas before they started writing.

3. Use of other prewriting options such as free writing and brainstorming.

4. Digging into memory by writing for ten minutes, starting every sentence with I Remember..... The student ended up with fifteen or twenty possibilities for compositions.

5. Twenty questions, designed to trigger inner feelings and memories were read by the teacher while students wrote the first thing that came to their mind when they heard the statement. The statements ranged from "What is your favorite color" to "A time you told a lie". Some questions were for
humorous response, some for uncovering feelings. They were changed at the teacher's discretion. Students wrote their answers, selected five they liked, narrowed it to one, wrote a free write, made a semantic map, wrote a draft, peer edited and wrote a final. The entire process was folded into a cover and a picture about the story drawn. The student had experienced the writing process, and began to automatically think in a more organized manner.

6. An investigation of and practice in various uses of letter writing, as "Dear Abby", or a letter to the editor, offers other places students can find a real and responsive audience.

Once classroom climate was established, students came up with their own ideas as to how best to meet their needs. This kind of open communication eased students into Promising Pals.

Conclusion

In a study to investigate the effects of an exchange of a series of letters from successful members of an urban community on the writing skills and self esteem of inner city culturally diverse students, it is concluded that writing skills are improved and self esteem is enhanced. When students write to a real audience for a real purpose, they are engaged not only in the writing but in learning and thinking.
Traditionally, students have written for the teacher who grades for grammatical error, punctuation error and reference to context. English classes are frequently instructed through repetitive exercises and drills which are not translated into usage. All too often students are expected to spit out material for a grade rather than show the ability to appropriately apply what they are supposed to be learning. Studies conducted in the past twenty years clearly indicate that students who apply their skills have deeper understanding and better retention. When students actually participate in writing to a real audience for a real purpose studies prove that their skills are stronger than when they write for the teacher alone. Publication then, of many forms is essential in the development of young writers. Letter writing does not have to be limited to adults as in the program examined here. Students can write letters to the editor, to their favorite author, to the director of a film or video, to students in another land, to local politicians, or to students in their own school!

The study involving Promising Pals, where students write, receive mentoring, meet their Pal, and practice social graces showed that learning in a social context is most beneficial. The real world these students enter when their studies are completed is no longer a world they are unfamiliar with. Promising Pals truly brings the community
into the school, the school into the community, and creates a community of writers.

Can this program be successfully duplicated with the same results? Further studies on similar programs that include the mentoring of middle school students must be conducted to determine if the positive effects of the program were due to its specifics. Programs that deal with the idea of learning in a social context and writing to a real audience for a real purpose would reinforce the concept of Promising Pals.
APPENDIX A

THE PERSONAL GROWTH APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF WRITING
| **TABLE I**  
Two Contrasting Approaches to Teaching Composition |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **MOTIVATION** | To develop skills for future use.  
To gain promotion  
To avoid censure.  
To acquire favor.  
To outdo others in competition for grades and status. | The young person’s desire to clarify his own interests, needs, perceptions of self—right now. |
| **CONTENT** | Generally assigned by the teacher.  
Frequently used to check mastery of reading assignment.  
Seldom of vital interest to most students. | Based on real concerns of the student.  
Responses to: Who am I? How am I perceived by others? How am I unique, how similar? |
| **AUDIENCE** | Teacher or lay reader.  
People unlikely to be influenced by the message. | People who may be influenced by the message: self and peers mostly; teacher, parents, politicians, newspaper readers occasionally. |
| **TASK** | Finished, unified compositions; polished writing.  
Emphasis on mechanical correctness and style. | Some finished compositions in form of letters, articles, poems, etc.  
Many bits and pieces—lists, phrases, snatches of dialogue, etc. |
| **REWARDS** | Comments from reader (often negative, often directed toward pointing out errors)  
Publication (occasionally)  
Grades | The task itself.  
Feedback from audience.  
No rating of responses. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Goal Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>To confirm to students that their perceptions are worthy of attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>To help students process their perceptions into words, phrases, sentences, and longer sequences in order to clarify their thoughts and feelings, heighten their self-awareness and personal effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>To show that writing, a tool for extending the power of one’s ears and voice, increases one’s control over his environment and over his own growth and destiny.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>To help students gain access to large bodies of assorted data, facts, images, statistics, quotations, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>To help students draw inferences from large bodies of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>To help master specific skills for communicating their perceptions to others—skills of illustration, organization, emphasis, and comparison.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>To help students develop precise, functional vocabularies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>To help students develop facility with complete sentence structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>To help students master devices for gaining clarity, such as reference, parallelism, agreement, and punctuation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>To help students master such conventions as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE III

Principles of the Personal Growth Approach to Composition

1. The reason for teaching composition is to help the student to know himself and his world.
2. Knowledge of self and world can be divided into three skill areas:
   a. Composing our inner selves to find out who we are. (Identity)
   b. Sharing experience, and growing by sharing with others. (Interpersonal relations)
   c. Discovering what we value, and implementing our values in our daily lives. (Values into action)
3. The act of composition requires a subject perceived as meaningful by the composer.
4. The act of composition requires a responsive audience.
5. Growth through composition is best achieved through descriptive feedback and response to that feedback.
6. Peer feedback is a rich (and usually untapped) resource in the developing of composition skills.
7. Teachers can best stimulate growth through composition in the following ways:
   a. By introducing engaging and stimulating activities and materials and relevant information.
   b. By facilitating the group processes.
   c. By clarifying problems which the students have encountered but cannot solve alone.
   d. By offering additional feedback from a perspective which is experientially different from that of the student's peers.
### Changing Notions about Teaching and Studying Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Do We Define Writing?</th>
<th>Early Research</th>
<th>Recent Work on Process</th>
<th>Recent Work on Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a finished product</td>
<td>As a complex cognitive process</td>
<td>As a cognitive process embedded in a social context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who have the &quot;right stuff&quot;</td>
<td>Those who have a robust writing process</td>
<td>Those who have gained entry to a discourse community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error counts and quality assessments</td>
<td>Process descriptions</td>
<td>Analyses of the interactions among processes and contexts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marking and responding to finished products</td>
<td>Providing practice in the process of writing</td>
<td>Creating discourse communities with authentic tasks and social interaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other Questions
- How Do We Define Writing?
- Who Among Our Students Can Write?
- What Is Writing Research?
- What Is Writing Instruction?
Figure 4). Desires come from basic drives and emotions that are part of our biological nature, and from other emotions that are products of belief and desire. Desires may lead to intentions and actions, resulting in outcomes that are events in the world. Desires may also be satisfied by events that just happen, that are not a result of our own actions. Beliefs come from our perception of these events and other happenings in the world, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly through inference. Needless to say, adults' theory of mind is considerably more detailed and complicated than this outline suggests, but this is sufficient for our present purpose, which is to look at children's understanding.
EMERGENT LITERACY RESEARCH

1. Reading and writing develop together and naturally just like learning to talk.

2. Comprehension and vocabulary are strengthened with repeated readings of stories.

3. Concepts of print, phonics and a decoding strategy are most efficiently developed when students are involved in "real" reading and writing.
APPENDIX B

THE FOUR CONDITIONS OF SELF ESTEEM
HOW CAN YOU RECOGNIZE HIGH AND LOW SELF ESTEEM?

Self-esteem is an unconscious, emotional reflection of children's judgment about themselves. It is always expressed in behavior. Children's level of self-esteem can be determined in their actions and attitudes.

A child with high self-esteem will:

- Be proud of his accomplishments
- Act independently
- Assume responsibility easily
- Tolerate frustration well
- Approach new challenges with enthusiasm
- Feel capable of influencing others

A child with low self-esteem will:

- Avoid situations which provoke anxiety
- Demean his own talents
- Feel that others don't value him
- Blame others for his own weaknesses
- Be easily influenced by others
- Become defensive and easily frustrated
- Feel powerless

"I really like this picture I painted."

"I wrote this story about dinosaurs all by myself!"

"I'll water the plants for you."

"Oooh, this model is hard to put together, but I know I can do it."

"Wow! I get to start learning long division!"

"Let's all learn this new way of playing kickball I know."

"I'm not going to school today; there's a hard test in math."

"Nothing I draw looks any good."

"You guys don't want me on the baseball team."

"Mr. Smith, you didn't give us enough time to study, so I flunked the spelling test."

"Linda, do you think I should wear my red dress or plaid skirt tomorrow? Should I have a pony tail or braid my hair?"

"It's not my fault the kite won't fly -- I'm just going to smash the stupid thing!"

"I can't find the scissors; isn't there any tape? I don't have an atlas -- I'll never finish the social studies project!"
HAVING A SENSE OF MODELS IS ALL ABOUT . . .

* Knowing people whom we feel are worth emulating.
* Feeling confident that we can distinguish right from wrong, and good from bad.
* Having values and beliefs which consistently guide and direct us.
* Having had sufficient experience not to be intimidated by new or unexpected circumstances.
* Feeling that there's something that we're working toward, and knowing, more or less, where we're headed.
* Being able to make sense out of what's going on in our life and around us.
* Knowing the standards of performance by which we will be evaluated in a number of areas.
* Knowing how to go about learning what we need to know.
* Having a sense of order.

Self-esteem waxes and wanes throughout life. How we feel about ourselves is dependent on the way that we respond to circumstances which were unpredictable or beyond our control. Maturity evolves as we become less and less subject to the impact of events. This occurs as we accumulate more experiences which we use as reference points for new experiences; as we become more adept at controlling the kind of experiences which we have; and as we become more skillful at containing our fears and anxieties. Some children who appear to have high self-esteem, depend on a narrowness of experience to support their feelings of self-confidence.
WHEN WE PUT THE CONDITIONS TOGETHER WITH THE DOMAINS, WE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONNECTIVENESS</th>
<th>PERSONAL</th>
<th>INTERPERSONAL</th>
<th>ORGANIZATIONAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Am I satisfied with my relations with others, and do I feel &quot;connected&quot; to the life around me?</td>
<td>Do I treat people in such a way as to enhance their feelings of being related to me and others?</td>
<td>Do the systems in which we live and work improve people's capability to relate well?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIQUENESS</td>
<td>Do I feel special, and can I accept myself the way I am?</td>
<td>Do I make others feel that they are special, and help them to respect their talents and capabilities?</td>
<td>Do the systems in which we live make use of our special qualities, and allow us to express ourselves?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWER</td>
<td>Do I feel in control of myself and my life? Can I influence events?</td>
<td>Do I make others feel that they are competent, and do I help them to feel more capable?</td>
<td>Do the systems in which we live increase our capability to make decisions, and be responsible for what we do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODELS</td>
<td>Do I know where I'm going, and do I have some sense of how to get there?</td>
<td>Do I act as a good model for others, and help them find meaning in what they're doing?</td>
<td>Do the systems in which we live allow us to understand what we're doing, how to do it, and why we should?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

MEAP
### NUMBER OF STUDENTS TESTED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Category</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number Enrolled</td>
<td>Number Included in Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>58759</td>
<td>51859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>8297</td>
<td>4093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>2035</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>48427</td>
<td>47067</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table provides information about the students on which this report is based. The number of students enrolled in each category is listed along with the number included in the report. The “Percentage of Category Included in Report” represents the students in each category who were tested and for whom results are reported. The “Percentage of Students in Report” reflects the students in each category as a segment of the total population of students tested and included in the report.

The “Special Needs” and “Bilingual” categories include those students whose answer sheets indicated their participation in those programs. “Other” includes all remaining students in the school.

Students’ results are included in the computation of school results only if the student completed the entire test. Scores of students in prototypes 502 3 and 502 4 are not included because they generally participate in the regular curriculum for less than half of the school day.

If fewer than 20 students are included in a category, the test results are not reported because they are likely to fluctuate significantly from group to group. This practice of not reporting results for groups of fewer than 20 is consistent throughout the report.

### PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN YOUR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT AT EACH PROFICIENCY LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Below Level I</th>
<th>Level I</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level III</th>
<th>Level IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table, as well as the results reported on pages 3-9, gives the percentage of students in each school or district who achieved at each of four proficiency levels. This statistic, rather than scaled scores, is being emphasized in the 1992 reports because of its greater utility. While scaled scores allow for many different kinds of comparisons, they communicate information only on normative or relative performance. Data regarding proficiency levels, combined with the descriptions of those levels provided on pages 5 through 9, communicate about students’ actual performance, and allow schools and districts to make more informed decisions about curriculum and instruction.
SUMMARY OF TEST RESULTS FOR WRITING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFICIENCY LEVEL</th>
<th>ALL STUDENTS</th>
<th>Special Needs</th>
<th>Bilingual</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State %</td>
<td>School %</td>
<td>State %</td>
<td>School %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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</table>

**Level I:**
Students at this proficiency level demonstrate little ability to communicate with a reader. Their responses are characterized by brevity, often limited to a single run-on sentence. When these students give more complete answers, their sentences often do not follow a logical progression. A rearrangement of sentences, for example, would not alter the meaning of the paragraph. In general, their responses have little or no development, using limited detail. Their sentence structure may be incorrect, with ineffective word choice. Their language is simplistic and their control of surface features (mechanics, grammar, spelling) is weak.

These students do not have a sense of audience and experience difficulty in judging the requirements of the task. Their responses tend to be concrete and personal rather than objective, often incorporating accounts of how their lives and immediate surroundings relate to the question.

**Level II:**
Students at this level are able to communicate in a rudimentary fashion. They attempt to organize their work in order to communicate with the reader and give fuller, more complete responses than students at Level I. Some logical and structural development is evident in their attempts at paragraph structure; for example, they may include introductions and conclusions to the paragraph.

These students are able to provide support for their arguments using contextual evidence, but their responses lack cohesion and completeness. Surface and syntax errors also interfere with the reader's ability to understand their writing.

**Level III:**
Students at this level communicate effectively, providing more developed responses. They seem aware of an intended audience, and their writing tends to be more formal and objective than experiential. The organization of their responses includes a topic sentence and conclusion. They establish a priority in the presentation of their ideas, with the main point(s) supported by appropriate, relevant details. Their writing often benefits from a more comprehensive knowledge of the subject and correct use of vocabulary.

These students have some errors in surface features, but these errors are never great enough to interfere with communication.

**Level IV:**
Students at Level IV communicate with clarity and effectiveness. Their writing conveys an awareness of the reader and, when appropriate, a clear voice. Their responses are well organized, both conceptually and in terms of structure. Different components of their response are clearly demarcated in paragraph form, with an overall coherence. They develop their topics subtly and with perception. They use effective language and a well-developed vocabulary, as well as including rich, interesting details that enhance their discussion and support their purpose.
TO: Leaders and Supporters of Public Education  

FROM: Roger P. Harris  

RE: An Invitation  

January 8, 1990  

As Principal of the Timilty Middle School, I along with the staff and students would like to invite you to participate in our Promising Pals Program. You have been selected because of your commitment and concern for Boston Public School students. We feel that your participation in our program could provide effective positive motivation to one of our students.

As you already know, The Timilty Middle School is in its sixth year of "Project Promise" which is a major initiative of the Boston Public Schools. Project Promise is an accelerated basic skills program that provides intensive instruction in reading, writing and mathematics across the curriculum. Students attend school 90 minutes longer than the regular school day, Monday through Thursday. The additional time combined with highly motivated teachers and innovative teaching techniques has earned the Timilty the National Award of Excellence from the U.S. Department of Education. The Timilty School is the only urban secondary school in New England to ever receive this prestigious award.

Our Promising Pals program is an effort to help students improve their writing skills; give students a real audience for their writing, and acquaint you with a Project Promise student and the Timilty Middle School.

If you accept our invitation, during the next few weeks a Timilty student will introduce himself/herself to you by letter. The student will write to you several times and expect you to write back over the next few months.

On Wednesday, May 8th we will host a breakfast honoring our Pals where you will have the opportunity to meet your student.

We hope that you will be a part of our program. If you do not wish to participate, please phone the school and let us know. As we prepare for our first mailing, we would like to welcome our "New Pals" and renew friendships with those who have grown with us.
May 31, 1991

Dear

I am writing on behalf of the students, teachers, parents, and administrators of the Timilty Middle School to thank you for participating in our 1991 "Promising Pals" Program. This year's program was a huge success because of you and others like you who were willing to share their precious time to help a child.

It is the effort of positive role models like you, who can and will make a difference in the life of a child. Our program runs from January to May but the impact you have made is lifelong.

We look forward to next year's program and hope that you will be able to participate again. We will be in direct communication with our "Pals" in the fall.

Again thank you, and if I or the Timilty Middle School staff can be of any assistance to you please feel free to call.

Sincerely,

Roger F. Harris
Principal

RPH:pc
APPENDIX E
SHOW-DON'T-TELL
APPENDIX F
LETTERS
January 25, 1990

Dear Review Committee,

My experience having a Promising Pal at the Timilty was great. Currently, I am a 9th grader at Snowden International High School, but I remember proudly my experience with my Promising Pal, Liz Walker. She is the news anchor on Channel 4, and she is very popular. I was very lucky to have her. It was also exciting to see her on television before I actually met her. When I found out who she was, I started watching the news every night at 6:00 p.m. or 11:00 p.m.

When I was picked to have her as my Promising Pal I was thrilled. I thought to myself that she would say no, because she is a very busy woman, and she would not have enough time to write to me. But after I wrote to her, a few days later I was surprised with a letter. She wrote back sooner than I thought she would. Then we just continued writing letters to each other.

Finally, the exciting day of the reception came. I was dressed up looking my best, and everyone complimented me. The compliments made me more nervous and meeting Liz Walker made me more nervous. First, I was worried, because I thought she would show up and I would get too scared to go up to her. Then I thought she wouldn't show up and I would be left behind looking embarrassed. When they started calling up the Promising Pals and their partners, I started feeling more worried than ever. Then I finally heard my name and Liz Walker's name. I really got worried, but I just walked down the aisle with a big smile and a lovely dress. When I got up to her we both looked at each other and shook hands with excitement written all over our faces.

After we sat down, we started talking about how we felt about that day. I thought I was the only one worried and nervous, but she told me she was too. I thought this was a piece of cake to her since she appears on television with millions of people watching her, but I guess I was wrong. Then she gave me a picture of her son and told me not to let it be taken or destroyed by anyone. Before she left she gave me a big hug and said that we will keep in touch. Over the summer we continued to write to each other and we still write.

She has influenced me to do three things. The first thing is to finish school and hopefully to one day be somebody who is famous. The second thing is not to do drugs or I will end up on the wrong road. The third thing is to be the best I can be and make the right choices in life instead of the wrong ones. I hope that future Timilty students will gain as much as I did through the Promising Pals Program.

Sincerely,

Erica Askew
forward to seeing you at the Promising Pen-pal breakfast bash coming soon.

Your Promising Pen-pal,
Rayshawn Williams
Dear Mr. Marcusson,

Hello! My name is Rayshawn Williams. I am 13 years old. I attend the 7th grade at the James P. Timilty Middle School. I am your promising Pen-Pal. Over the next few months you'll be hearing from me, and I hope I'll be hearing
from you. I like to dance, and listen to music, and like to go to many places.

My school has a special program called Project Promise. It is a terrific program. It helped me get on the Honor Roll last year, and the honorable mention this year. The longer hours don't bother
me because you learn more than
other kids in the city.

What do you do for a
living? Do you like your job?
What are your hobbies? Are you
married, and do you have children?

Well, I have to go now.

I am hoping to hear from you
very soon. I am also looking
March 26, 1991

Mr. Rayshawn Williams
c/o James P. Timilty Middle School
205 Roxbury Street
Roxbury, MA 02119

Dear Rayshawn,

I am just looking at your very nice letter of February 4th and your artistic Valentine and thinking that you must wonder if you have a Promising Pal or not! YES! YES! YOU HAVE A PAL! He’s just a little bit slow to get started, that’s all. From now on, I pledge to write you back within a couple of days of receiving your letter. If you write me back soon each time, we can manage to get in a few letters before the Promising Pal Breakfast!

From your letter I have decided that you are a very interesting young man. You like music and dance, which I do as well. You like to travel, which I do as well. And, you have been on the Honor Roll ...and so have I! ☻ I think we always find people interesting who are like us. Don’t you?

When I was your age, my favorite kind of music was Rock-and-Roll. I suspect that you probably like Rock music too. I started listening to music on the radio when I was eight years old. A friend of mine in swimming class told me about a really great radio station called K-O-B-Y. In California, where I am from, the radio station call letters start with K’s instead of W’s. In those days, KOBY was really cool. The best disc jockeys. The best music. Even the ads were cool. Of course, you wouldn’t recognize the music! This was even before the Beatles or the Rolling Stones or the Temptations. This was the era of the Platters, the Drifters, Brenda Lee, Fats Domino, and Stevie Wonder wasn’t Stevie Wonder, he was Little Stevie Wonder (because he was even younger than you are!).

I like to dance, but my style hasn’t changed much since Chubby Checker stopped singing “Let’s Twist Again Like We Did Last Summer”. Of course, there was the Jerk (“Do the Jerk, Baby, Do the Jerk Now”), and the Mashed Potatoes, but pretty soon I just started doing my own thing...and I’ve been doing my own thing pretty much ever since.
Actually my interests in music have changed. I like many more types of music than I did when I was younger. I still like Rock, but I also like Folk Music, Jazz, Reggae, and Classical Music. As I get older, I tend to like Classical Music and Jazz more than the others, but I really like them all. I think I'm a little too old for Rap Music, but there have been times when the rhythm of Rap gets through to me. It's hard to resist a good beat.

I am 41 years old. I am not married now, but I was married a few years ago and I have a daughter who is 14 years old (15 in May). My daughter's name is Elizabeth. Elizabeth lives with her mother in Wales, which is part of Great Britain. Wales is right next to England and just across the Irish Sea from Ireland. Elizabeth has lived there since she was six, so she has a strong Welsh accent, which is a little like an English accent. She doesn't say dance like we do. She pronounces it "dawnce". She doesn't "eat her dinner" like we do, she "has her tea" (sometimes she actually says she is going to "eat her tea" and I think one of us must be going crazy!). However, even though she may sound different, she can be very American sometimes. Like when she listens to "Madonna" on her Walkman. Or when she asks for Rollerblades for her birthday!

At least once a year Elizabeth and I have a visit. Usually I go over there and sometimes we go travelling together. Two years ago we went to London to visit the museums, see some shows, and watch the Changing of the Guard at the Queen’s palace, Buckingham Palace. Last year we went to Paris for a week. Paris was very expensive but we had some wonderful food there. The French make great food!

We went to Paris mostly by train, but, when we had to cross the English Channel between England and France, we went on a special boat called a Hovercraft: a very weird kind of boat, which is like a cross between an airplane and a boat. There are propellers under the boat which lift it off the water just a few feet so it skims across the sea like a giant dragon fly. The propellers make so much noise that you can hardly hear the person talking next to you. The good thing about it is that it moves almost as fast as an airplane but doesn’t cost nearly as much.

You asked me what I do for a living. I am an administrator here at the Massachusetts General Hospital. Do you know what an administrator is? I think the best way I can describe what an administrator is that he or she arranges for things to happen. In a hospital, administrators arrange for patients to visit the doctor, nurses to take care of patients, engineers to keep the building warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Administrators arrange for the telephones to work in the special way they need to work in a hospital.
THE JAMES P. TIMILTY MIDDLE SCHOOL
FIFTH ANNIVERSARY
"PROMISING PALS" PROGRAM

Please come to our
reception in your honor

at

The James P. Timilty Middle School
205 Roxbury St, Roxbury, M.A.

on

May 8, 1991

from

8:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Schedule of events:

8:00 - 8:30 - Registration and Coffee
8:30 - 9:30 - Introductions and Program
9:30 - 10:30 - Breakfast and a School Tour
DEAR PROMISING PAL,
ROSES ARE RED, VIOLETS ARE BLUE
I HAD A GREAT TIME!
I HOPE YOU DID TOO!!!!!!

Dear Mr. Nucci,

I really enjoyed your company at the Promising Pal reception and ceremony. I especially enjoyed meeting you after you wrote all those exceptional letters. Mr. Nucci, you have given me wonderful advice and also given me something to look forward to in life. To get a wonderful job, a nice house and a beautiful girlfriend, or wife, I really like the way you showed up just to meet me. I feel that shows that you really care about the inner city kids. It is nice to know that you stand behind us. I would also like to hear from you again.

Thanks,
Your Promising Pal
Melvin,
APPENDIX G

AWARDS AND MEDIA COVERAGE
Dear Dedicated Educator:

Business Week adheres to the century-old mission of its parent company, McGraw-Hill, Inc. in "serving the need for knowledge."

In keeping with this tradition, I am pleased to announce the Business Week Awards for Instructional Innovation -- awarded to over one hundred educators who have designed effective, creative teaching methodologies and are willing to become part of a national "Network to Success" committed to educational excellence in the U.S. during the 1990s and beyond. Business Week is establishing this program because we recognize that teachers are the most crucial link in the educational chain.

Especially as the new decade approaches, the role of American educators is becoming increasingly critical to our nation’s future. The quality of instruction has far-reaching impact not only on our children’s ability to realize their full potential, but also on our country’s ability to remain competitive in today’s global economy. If sweeping systemic reform is not achieved by the end of the century, lack of skills and ambition will threaten the standard of living we enjoy today.

During the next year, Business Week will take measures to draw public attention to our country’s education crisis, including a 4-city conference series, BUILDING A FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN: America’s Teachers and Employers, and a 80-page section in the October 20th issue of Business Week magazine.

A portion of the revenues generated by the special magazine section will be used to reward teachers who are contributing directly to resolving the problem in American schools. These teachers from across the country will receive the Business Week Awards for Instructional Innovation.

The Business Week Awards for Instructional Innovation form the ideological foundation for Business Week’s activities -- with winners becoming members of Business Week’s action-oriented "Network to Success." Each award consists of a two-part $1,000 grant. The first $500 is an honorarium to the educator for innovative talent and dedication to teaching. The remaining $500 is for expenses grantees incur by sharing their winning programs with other educators throughout the nation -- thereby expanding the "Network to Success." Some winners will also personally exhibit their programs at the Building A Future For Our Children conferences and receive national recognition in Business Week magazine. Their award winning programs will become part of a book titled, "Blueprint to Success."

Business Week salutes your commitment to education and helping build a bright future for America. Please complete the attached form in order to have your instructional programs considered for a grant. We look forward to hearing from you.

In appreciation,

John W. Patten
Executive Vice President/Publisher
Your dreams are something special
Something which only you can see.
Without a dream you have no hope
To be what you want to be.
When a dream is lost and forgotten.
It is like the earth's last fruit being eaten.
So we all must keep our dreams.
If our dreams are forgotten.
Life will have no meaning.

These thoughts on dreams were written by Michael Quan, a sixth-grader at the James P. Timilty School. Michael sent the poem to External Affairs's Kenneth R. Rossano, his pen pal.

Mr. Rossano and Michael corresponded several times during the school year as part of the Timilty School's Promising Pals program.

Jeffrey Graham, Public Affairs, wrote to 12-year-old Canal Huie, also a program participant.

According to Daisy Droge, a seventh-grade English teacher and Promising Pals coordinator, the program was designed to improve students' communication skills. About 125 students in the sixth through the eighth grades participated, writing four or five letters in their English classes.

Says Ms. Droge, "The kids were initially hesitant about writing letters, but were thrilled when they got responses. When the principal walked into classes with the mail, the students asked, 'Is there one for me?'"

Some pen pal relationships went beyond the exchange of letters. Mr. Rossano, for example, sent Michael Quan John F. Kennedy's Profiles in Courage. And some pen pal relationships, reports Ms. Droge, are continuing through the students' summer vacation.
THE PROJECT

"Promising Pals" is a whole-language program that develops content area abilities by motivating students to hone their language skills for the purpose of writing a series of polished letters to leading members of the community.

The actual letter writing begins in the second half of the year, after students have been given intensive instruction in the communications skills they will need to participate in the project successfully. They identify their own strengths and weaknesses and use cooperative learning and brainstorming techniques to evaluate their own work and the work of their classmates. They write short and long pieces about various aspects of their lives which are eventually adapted for inclusion in the letters to their pen pals.

Each student does research on the person who is to be his or her pen pal, and plans the content of the first letter carefully so that it speaks specifically to that person's interests and background.

When the pen pals respond in kind, the students feel immediately empowered and enthusiastically compose a second letter.

The final event of the program is a breakfast-reception where Promising Students meet Promising Pals.

THE STUDENTS

Sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders of all abilities participate in this project, which began as part of the regular English sequence but is now used as a unit in science, social studies, and math classes.

THE STAFF

The instructor is a 20-year teaching veteran who will complete her doctorate in education in 1990. She has presented "Promising Pals" both locally and at the state level and has discussed the project on news and feature television programs.

MATERIALS AND FACILITIES

No special materials are necessary.

OUTSIDE RESOURCES

Currently 270 community leaders are active Pals, and the program attracts many effective guest speakers from the business community and communications media.

The Boston Private Industry Council funds the breakfast-receptions.

OVERALL VALUE

Writing to a real audience, and getting a real response, provides a concrete reason for developing writing skills. The program speaks to the child as student, as inner-city member, and as potential leader.

Brighton High a hit, man

Hub pupils introduced to grown-up pen pals

MORE INFORMATION:

Despina M. Droge
James P. Timilty Middle School
205 Roxbury Street
Roxbury, Massachusetts 02119
(617) 445-3114
Principal: Roger Harris
APPENDIX H

VITA
DESPINA M. DROGE  
40 Pinckney Street  
Boston, MA 02114  
(617) 227 - 6876

SUMMARY
- Over twenty years of leadership in education, with extensive involvement in new program development.
- Focus on inner city needs, including highly acclaimed programs such as "Project Promise", a national award-winning extended day program.
- Expertise in thematic teaching, integrating SPED into classroom, and developing collaboratives with area colleges and corporations.
- Extensive staff development experience introducing programs to improve student writing and teacher effectiveness.

HIGHLIGHTS
- Chairperson, Promising Pals writing exchange between students and adult mentors.
- Timilty Middle School/Lesley College Collaborative.
- Presenter, Institute for Writing & Thinking, Bard College, NY.
- Consultant, Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico — Staff Development in Cooperative Learning.
- Presenter, Massachusetts Reading Association.
- "Today Show" and "People Magazine" interviews.
- Kingston, MA Public Schools — Staff Development in Mentoring.
- Presenter, New England League of Middle Schools Conference.
- St. Louis, MI Effective School Teacher Exchange
- Appointed by Judge Garrity as Parent Liaison for desegregation process.

AWARDS & GRANTS
- Rollins Griffith Teacher Award, 1992.
- Commonwealth In Service Grant, 1992.
- School Committee of Boston Citation for Outstanding Service, 1991.
- Massachusetts Department of Education Planning Grant, 1989.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
JAMES P. TINILTY MIDDLE SCHOOL, Boston, MA  
English Teacher  
1985 - Present

MICHELANGELO MIDDLE SCHOOL, Boston, MA  
Computer Education & Home Economics Teacher  
1975 - 1985

PRINCE SCHOOL, Boston, MA  
Home Economics Teacher  
1969 - 1975

OTHER EXPERIENCE
Creator/Instructor of community based workout program for women — 1961 - 1968
Director of women’s activities, Danbury War Memorial — 1959 - 1961

EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, Amherst, MA  
Candidate for Ed.D. in 1992

SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY, Boston, MA  
M.Ed., 1983

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, Oneonta, NY  
B.S. 1954

Studies:
- University of New Hampshire — Writing Program, Summer 1989
- University of Massachusetts — Boston Writing Project, 1988
- Courses at Harvard, Boston University, University of Massachusetts, and Simmons College — studies in Urban Development, Computer Education, and Teacher Effectiveness, 1965 - 1980

AFFILIATIONS
NCTE/MCTE/NELMS; Board Member, Hill House; Chairperson, Freedom Trail Clinic.
DESPINA M. DROGE
40 Pinckney Street
Boston, MA 02114
(617) 227 - 6876

SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS

TIMILTY MIDDLE SCHOOL (1985 - 1992)
Developed a program teaching English through daily student writing. Emphasis on self esteem, team teaching, interdisciplinary teaching, thematic teaching, cooperative learning. Established a research environment in the classroom for such issues as integrating special needs students, working with the same students for all three Middle School years, novel writing, and writing across the curriculum. Current efforts are in developing a parent involvement program, “Parent to Parent.” Use of camcorder and computer as part of ongoing instruction.

PROJECT PROMISE (1986 - 1992)
Member of original pilot team to implement program consisting of longer school day, Saturday classes, cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaching, writing across the curriculum.

CHAIRPERSON, PROMISING PALS (1986 - 1991)
Developed and implemented a unique structured writing exchange through Project Promise to enhance writing skills, improve self esteem, provide local adult mentors, and increase hope for the future. The program is the subject of pending doctoral dissertation.

Four time presenter at annual conference to train and stimulate staff. “Reading and Writing Connection.”

Original member of team to establish collaborative and grant writer for planning grant. Purpose of program is to provide one year internship for Lesley College Master’s candidates planning to become educators.

LESLEY COLLEGE (1989 - 1992)
Served as grant writing consultant and participated in numerous seminars.

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO (1992)
Staff development for the Fort Buchanan Middle School to train teachers in interdisciplinary/cooperative learning methods.

WATT PROGRAM - Writing and Thinking Together (1992)
Cultural diversity addressed in a writing exchange with students in San Juan, PR. Students shared cultures by exchanging monthly videos and letters by fax.

KINGSTON, MASSACHUSETTS (1992)
Assisted Kingston Public Schools in preparing teachers to introduce a mentoring program.
BARD COLLEGE, NEW YORK (1992)
Presentation on Narrative Writing in the classroom. Participation in panel discussion. Result of eighty students each writing five chapter novels in 1991.

HYDE PARK, NEW YORK (1991)
Assisted in developing a cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaching program at the Hyde Park Elementary School.

MASS. READING ASSOCIATION (1989)
Presented Promising Pals to the Association as a reading-writing connection component of Project Promise.

TODAY SHOW (1988 & 1990)
Interviewed by Jane Pauley with student who won award for homeless essay. Part of a photo essay on Project Promise.

PEOPLE MAGAZINE (1988)
Subject of story with student who won award for essay on homelessness.

AUTHOR (1980)
"The My Mother Works Cookbook for Kids," a guide for parents whose "latchkey kids" have to fend for themselves. A tool for parent and child to work together.

PARENT LIAISON (1976)
Appointed as parent/teacher liaison for the CDAC (Community Advisory Board) to assist in desegregation process by Judge Garrity.


