

A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO THE TEACHING
OF LANGUAGE ARTS THROUGH
LETTER WRITING

By

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PREFACE

This research investigated the idea that if young students felt a need to communicate in written form, their skills would develop in a natural way without structured, formal lessons. The exchange of pen pal letters between a gifted second grade class and teacher education students was the focus of the study. The letter exchange created a natural need to communicate by sending and receiving messages. Pretests and post tests were used to measure attitude toward letter writing. Evaluations were made of first and last letters to measure skill development. The second grade students showed growth in positive attitude toward writing and in letter writing skill.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted to contribute to the research about how children develop writing skills. Much of the research that has been done on writing skills has focused mainly on students in high school and college and has shown a great national need to improve writing skills (Burrows & Jackson, 1984). This researcher investigated the possibility that if young children felt a need to communicate in written form, their skills would develop in a natural way without structured lessons. The study focused on the exchange of pen pal letters between a gifted second grade class in an upper middle class suburb of a major city in Oklahoma and teacher education students at a state university. The researcher used a letter exchange because a need to communicate would be natural when the students were sending and receiving messages. Temple and Gillet (1984) state that letter writing is a natural, functional writing activity since each letter is only one side of a conversation. Rubin (1985) found that children and adults enjoy receiving letters and that letter writing is one of the most frequently used forms of individual writing.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine if a functional approach would be an effective way for children in second grade to acquire writing skills. Functional writing is defined by Temple and Gillet (1984) as writing of expository material which meets a practical purpose or an immediate need. The principle of functional writing is felt by the child as he sees a need in his everyday life to write (Goodman, 1986). Research shows that there is a great national need to improve writing skills (Burrows & Jackson, 1984). Many classroom writing exercises do not meet the children's needs since the child did not determine the purpose for the writing himself. Calkins (1983) and Graves (1984) agree that the child must feel ownership of his writing experiences in order to produce a personally satisfying product. A writing environment that encourages children to develop their communication skills early in childhood will help children reach their communication potential (Karnowski, 1986). Applebee (1986) reported that students who indicated that their family members wrote frequently had higher writing achievement themselves. Hands-on learning of the language arts is proposed by Brazee and Kristo (1986). They recommend this procedure for students from primary grades through college. They propose that an excellent hands-on approach would be for college education majors to correspond with elementary students. Corlett (1985) states that the final purpose of written

communication is to convey messages, ideas and information. Letter writing is a natural, functional writing activity because it is actually one side of a conversation (Temple and Gillet, 1984). Rubin (1985) states that both adults and children enjoy receiving letters and that letter writing is one of the most frequently used forms of individual writing. Applebee (1986) reported that when writers shared their work with others, they were more enthusiastic and confident in their skill. Writers who refused to share were most often disinterested and lacking in confidence about their writing skill. Letter writing is a natural way to share writing.

This study focused upon second grade children actively learning to write by corresponding with university students enrolled in a teacher education course of study. The purpose of this study was to show if, through correspondence with college students, second graders would gain in skill and confidence in their letter writing abilities. Skill gains were measured with the Evaluation Instrument (Appendix C). Confidence gain was measured with the Letter Writing Survey (Appendix A).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine if a functional approach was an effective way to teach letter writing skills to primary grade children.

1. Will there be an increase in positive attitude toward

letter writing exhibited by second grade students who correspond with college pen pals?

1.a. Will correspondence with college pen pals cause a gain in letter writing confidence for reluctant letter writers identified by the attitude pretest?

1.b. Will correspondence with college pen pals cause a gain in letter writing confidence for confident letter writers identified by the attitude pretest?

2. Will there be an increase in letter writing skill exhibited by second grade students who correspond with college pen pals?

2.a. Will letters written by second grade students to college students show improved use of capital letters when the first and last letters of the semester are compared?

2.b. Will letters written by second grade students to college students show improved use of complete sentences when the first and last letters of the semester are compared?

2.c. Will letters written by second grade students to college students show an increase in the number of complete sentences when first and last letters of the semester are compared?

2.d. Will letters written by second grade students to college students show improved use of punctuation when first

and last letters of the semester are compared?

2.e. Will letters written by second grade students to college students show improved use of correct letter form when first and last letters of the semester are compared?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Creating a Writing Environment

In order for children to write well, they must feel a need for written communication (Goodman & Goodman, 1976). Children develop oral language before written language, so they are naturally more comfortable speaking than writing when they begin elementary school. Young children learn to communicate orally without lessons, so they should naturally develop skills in reading and writing without structured, formal lessons (Allen, 1976; Goodman & Goodman, 1976; Smith & Dahl, 1984). Therefore, Graves (1975) recommends that teachers should conduct direct, extended observations of the writing behaviors of children in order to draw conclusions about the developmental stages of writing. If children are given freedom to experiment with writing along with assurance of positive response from an audience, their writing skills will be enhanced (Burrows, Jackson & Saunders, 1984; Graves, 1978). To build an understanding of written language as a form of communication, children need to be observed and encouraged when they make spontaneous efforts in writing. This observation and encouragement will enable teachers to tap the children's natural desire to

write (Fields & Hillstead, 1986).

Writing has four separate parts: handwriting, taking dictation or copying, crafting and authoring (Moffet, 1979). Freedman and Pringle (1980) also state that writing is a creative process where meanings are made through the active involvement of the writer with his text.

Sollisch (1985) sees three stages of the writing development process. Stage one features simple, personal topics to help writers become more fluent. In stage two, topics are selected to make writing become real and cause students to use a combination of reading, writing, critical thinking and dialogue. This stage bridges the gap between personal and academic writing. In stage three, writers deal with abstract concepts and move away from personal writing.

Writing is the basic stuff of education. It has been sorely neglected in our schools. We have substituted the passive reception of information for the active expression of facts, ideas, and feelings. We now need to right the balance between sending and receiving. We need to let them write (Graves, 1978).

Children should be given the opportunity to engage in writing about issues and concerns of their own interest and related to things they know (Graves, 1983 & McClendon, 1987). They need first hand experiences with real things rather than exercises in how to write (Fields & Hillstead, 1986). They need frequent practice which must include planning and thinking time as well as time to actually compose on paper (Hull & Bartholomae, 1986). A 1982 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) report

revealed that on the average, high school students had an opportunity to write only one day in ten (Graves & Stuart, 1985). Applebee (1987) reported that students still are writing very little in school. Forty-seven percent of the fourth graders, thirty-eight percent of the eighth graders and thirty-seven percent of the eleventh graders surveyed reported writing less than one writing assignment every three weeks.

More classroom time is spent on reading instruction than on writing instruction, even though developmentally writing comes before reading for the child (Graves, 1980).

Functional Writing

In 1978 John Merritt classified typical classroom writing as being **Mickey Mouse** or **Gerbil** (Temple & Gillet, 1984). He defined **Mickey Mouse** writing as the cute, clever, yet unreal exercises often used in language arts lessons. **Gerbil** writing, on the other hand, was real, often unpredictable and messy, but often showing much greater depth of feeling and thought. **Gerbil** writing is functional writing. Functional writing is that writing for which there is an immediate need or practical purpose (Temple & Gillet, 1984).

A good example of functional writing is letter writing. Americans write fewer personal letters now than ever before. The U.S. Postal Service predicts the number will continue to steadily decrease (Graves, 1978). The writing most needed

by students is that of letter and note writing, yet it is the least stressed in school. This is a great reason why Americans are becoming illiterate in the art of letter writing (Applegate, 1963).

People write letters for a variety of purposes. Temple and Gillet (1984) suggest that letter writing for real life purposes is an excellent form of functional writing that should be included in a good language arts program. Some advantages or purposes for letter writing are that a letter is personal, immediate, permanent and a dialogue with a person who is not there (Applegate, 1963).

As children mature and develop academically, functional principles develop in their writing (Goodman, 1986). As they see that writing letters is merely a natural extension of talking, they can begin to write short letters to convey messages (Temple & Gillet, 1984). Applegate (1963) stated that creative letters are ones in which the writer shares the feelings, sights and sounds around him with his reader. Yetta Goodman (1985) notes that children's writing will develop as they practice daily, but that a better product is not always the outcome until the child has had many opportunities in which to express himself. Personal topics are essential to increase fluency and confidence (Sollisch, 1985). The 1982 NAEP showed that "basic skills" in writing had increased over the past ten years, but there was a significant drop in the ability to perform activities that required complex thinking (Graves & Stuart, 1985; LaPointe,

1986).

The 1984 NAEP report discovered that of seventeen year olds who were still in school only 20% could write an "adequate" persuasive letter. An encouraging fact was that students and teachers reported spending more time writing than had been reported in 1974. The attitude survey indicated that attitudes toward writing shows steady deterioration throughout the school years. Twenty-six percent of the fourth grade students reported negative feelings toward writing. By the eleventh grade, 42% had a negative attitude (LaPointe, 1986). As students spent more time in school, their negative attitude toward writing increased.

More research about children's writing is needed.

Graves (1980) found that:

For every \$3,000 spent on children's ability to receive information [reading], \$1 was spent on their power to send it in writing. The funds for writing research came to less than one-tenth of one percent of all research funds for education. (p. 914)

More research is being done on writing but it is still far less than is being done in reading (Burrows et al., 1984). The writing research stresses the process of writing, the atmosphere of the classroom, the frequency of writing and a variety of approaches to teaching writing. Current research supports the whole language philosophy and instruction with hands-on learning as an excellent method to teach children to write (Brazee & Kristo, 1986). Although most case study writing research has focused on students over the age of

eight, Graves (1975) noted that seven year old students writing on self-selected topics wrote four times as much as when their teachers assigned the topics. More recent research (Hull & Bartholomae, 1986) focused on the process that takes place in the mind and then on paper as writing is done. Writing contributes to intelligence according to Graves (1978) because it is not like reading where everything is provided. In writing the writer must provide everything. He must select the topic, the information to include, the questions, the answers and the order in which to present the material. When the writer explores ideas and combines thoughts, he becomes a better thinker (Renna, 1986).

All About Letters (1982) reports that the power of letter writing was discovered in 1974 by a group of junior high students at Park View School in Lancaster, California. They wrote letters to governors, historical societies, business people, Montana students, congressmen, newspaper editors and media personnel asking to have frontiersman Jeremiah Johnson's remains reburied in the Big Sky Country of Montana where he had hunted, fished, scouted and trapped in the 1800's. They succeeded after a six month campaign. In June of 1974, over 2,000 people attended the reburial ceremony. Those students do not doubt the power of a letter.

To develop writing skills naturally the child must be free of time pressures and pressure to learn skills. The

environment must be secure and risk free. The teacher needs to accept the child's form of writing and allow his skills to develop naturally as he discovers that he has something to write (Burrows, 1984; McCracken & McCracken, 1986; Renna, 1986). Kristo and Reynolds (1987) stress the importance of a sense of audience for writers. They suggest that sharing written creations with classmates and pen pals will help develop the sense that a real person is able to understand and respond to the child's written messages.

In Roy Peter Clark's book, Free to Write (Raspberry, 1987) it is argued that too often writing is taught as if it is a magical power that some possess and some do not possess. Many times class assignments frustrate students so much that they lose interest in storytelling and lose confidence that they have anything worth writing about. Forms of practical, functional writing include memos, plans, captions, lists, reports and letters (Burrows et al., 1984). All About Letters (1982) lists the following ten answers to the question, "Why write a letter?".

1. Writing a letter is an excellent way to organize your thoughts in an orderly fashion.
2. A letter provides a dated record for future reference of exactly what you said.
3. People tend to hear what they want to hear in a conversation. A letter can be quoted accurately.
4. When you write a letter, the recipient is more likely to take appropriate follow-up action. Phone-call promises are often forgotten.
5. You can easily make copies of letters.
6. What you say in haste or anger cannot be retracted. Before you mail it, you can revise a letter and remove statements you might later regret.

7. Letters carry an individual imprint. You can distinguish yourself from other communicators through your letter.
8. Letters grant their readers time to reflect and consider. Letters are read and reread.
9. Personal letters create family histories and the biographies of friendships.
10. A letter is still one of the most economical ways to communicate. (p. 10)

When children enter school they have usually already experimented with writing and are eager to begin more writing activities. They also have a vast amount of information from their individual backgrounds (McCracken & McCracken, 1986; Milz, 1986). Graves (1975, 1978, 1983) also states that when children start to school for the first time they want to write, but too often teachers underestimate that urge and take away the child's control, thus diminishing the desire. At this stage of development, children are far more fascinated with their own writing than the writing of others. They show more interest in writing than in reading early in their school career, but schools often stress receiving messages more than creating them.

When writing is motivated by the child's felt need to communicate and when writing is valued as something important that needs to be shared, students will work long and hard to write (Graves, 1985; Harms & Lettow, 1986; Hull & Bartholomae, 1986). Purpose is central to the writing process. The needs of the writer must be considered in order to initiate the communication process (DeFord, 1986).

At Boothbay Region Elementary School in Boothbay Harbor, Maine, eleven teachers surveyed their students'

attitudes toward writing. They asked "Are you a writer?" or "Do you know how to write?". Seventy-six percent of entering first graders said "yes". Confidence levels went down in all other grades. Only 40% of fifth, seventh and eighth grade students responded "yes" (Graves & Stuart, 1985).

In order to develop good writers, teachers must understand that research has shown that the foundation for command of language begins in the elementary grades. There the child learns the functional origins of the principles of language structures as the need arises in his writing (Burrows et al., 1984). Writing should have a major place in the language arts curriculum in the elementary grades (Applegate, 1963). Informal instruction in writing is appropriate since success comes from the experience of writing. The teacher should stress content and meaning as the skills gradually develop (Kristo & Reynolds, 1987). Learning to write comes after the writers are allowed to explore the concepts of words, sentences and forms of writing. A rich, meaningful print environment and a supportive audience must be provided for the developing writers (DeFord, 1986). Success can be varied from getting a few words on paper for a beginning writer to publication for a more experienced writer (Renna, 1986). The 1984 NAEP report showed that more opportunities to write resulted in improved achievement. The report agrees with Epictetus who in 100 B.C. said "If you want to succeed in writing: write."

There is a tremendous need to improve the command of the English language in America (Burrows et al., 1984).

Research shows that seeds of good communications skills must be sown in the elementary school (Karnowski, 1986). The writing environment must encourage young children to use their potential for communication in order to make sense of the writing process. Karnowski further states that children must be allowed to explore and experiment with written language and to share their products with other young writers.

Teachers must also gain an understanding of the child's idea of what writing is and let the child experiment with written language before conventional products are expected. Calkins (1983) and Graves (1983) agree with the other cited researchers that children must feel ownership or control of the writing process before they will be able to produce written products that are personally satisfying.

Good writing should be informative, persuasive and imaginative (Applebee, Langer & Mullis, 1987). The NAEP report of 1984 showed that nine-year-old students improved in imaginative writing between 1979 and 1984, yet informative and persuasive tasks remained stable. Applebee, Langer and Mullis (1987) propose that elementary students need to be taught to do informative and persuasive writing tasks as well as creative (imaginative) writing. They believe that teachers must also increase the frequency of all three types of writing instruction and practice.

Purposes for oral and written communication are essentially the same since they should convey messages, ideas and information (Corlett, 1985). Teachers need to be creative and provide writing practice which will motivate the students and give them a feeling of successful communication. Corlett suggests that a variety of useful and practical experiences will be most motivating for young writers. To build self confidence and the desire to write, students need a wide variety of experiences in writing, teachers and students need a high regard for literacy and the students must be able to compose in a positive environment (Burrows et al., 1984). A positive response to the student's writing gives him the courage to continue to develop his writing skill (Graves, 1978).

Letter Writing

Letter writing is suggested as one of the most creative forms of writing since it becomes an exchange of written ideas which can continue over a period of time (Phillips & Steiner, 1985). There are frequent opportunities in elementary school to write letters (Rubin, 1985). Children can compose thank you letters after field trips or special events, write get well letters to someone who is ill, write invitations to classroom functions as well as write to pen pals. Letter writing can begin with writing simple notes and graduate into writing various forms of letters such as thank you notes, friendly greetings and business letters.

Teachers are cautioned by Phillips and Steiner (1985) to remember the child's right to privacy. A child should never be required to share his personal, private thoughts unless he so desires. Temple and Gillet (1984) state that since letter writing is a natural outgrowth of oral language, it can be tied in with many oral language activities that take place in the classroom. Letter writing can be an excellent place to practice the various types of writing such as persuasive, informative and descriptive composition. Sentence structure and spelling can be taught in a natural way as children discover a need for these skills in their writing.

Rubin (1985) suggests some rules for writers in the primary grades as they engage in letter writing.

1. Answer letters promptly.
2. Proofread all letters.
3. Since a letter is a means of communication, make sure your handwriting can be read easily.
4. Make sure your letter makes sense.
5. Know that there are many different kinds of letters.
6. Use proper punctuation.
7. Try to make friendly letters interesting.

For students in the intermediate grades Rubin adds seven more rules.

1. Know all the primary-grade skills listed above.
2. Know the forms for different letters.
3. Know that there are five parts to a friendly letter: heading, salutation, body, closing and signature.
4. Know that a business letter has the same form as a friendly letter, but the inside address is added, in typed letters, the signature identification is added.
5. Know that headings are conventional.
6. Know that the salutation, closing and

- signature in a friendly letter express the relationship between you and the reader.
7. Know that accurate dates and return addresses are important. (p. 240)

Having a pen pal extends the child's audience beyond his own classroom, school and teacher (Brazee & Kristo, 1986 and Milz, 1986). First pen pals can be parents writing notes to include in the child's lunch box. Pen pals show the students a reading and writing connection (Kristo & Reynolds, 1987). Skills in both areas are stimulated in the letter exchange process.

In one 1986 study conducted by Brazee and Kristo university students corresponded with first grade students. The purpose of the study was to determine the influences on the reading and writing processes of the young students as well as to expose the university students to the writing process of young students. The university students saw learning come naturally from within the children, not from formal lessons. They also observed parent support and follow-up through note writing and journals kept by the students. The researchers observed a steady development of reading and writing skills which was directly related to the pen pal letters. Also observed was a great sense of audience and growth in self esteem for the young writers.

Graves (1983) also has suggested that letter writing is an excellent way to help children develop writing skills. He suggested that at the earliest stage children correspond by note writing within their own classroom, then expand to other classrooms, nearby nursing homes and later to famous

people. Letter writers should be strongly encouraged to put "something in your letter that is just like you" (Burrows et al., 1984). Good writing cannot be judged apart from the writer (Applegate, 1963). It must have the personal imprint of the author so that the reader can recognize the writer by his style (Burrows et al. 1984; Graves, 1983; Graves & Stuart, 1985) . The writing teacher must focus on developing individuality in the writing of students. Individuality should be developed in both style and content choice. The writer must be encouraged to be himself (McClendon, 1986; Petty, 1978; Sollisch, 1985). The tangible result of good writing is that the writer shows his own personal feelings, emotions, moods and thoughts (Harms & Lettow, 1986; Renna, 1986). This personal aspect of writing is called voice. "The voice is the frame of the window through which the information is seen" (Graves, 1983). If the student chooses a good subject for himself based on his personal knowledge, experiences and interests, his voice will come through strongly in his writing (Graves, 1983; Graves & Stuart, 1985).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study was done to determine children's attitudes toward letter writing as well as their skill in letter writing at the beginning of the school term. The researcher also wished to determine if both skill and attitude would increase significantly after a series of letter exchanges with university students. The researcher desired to determine if an informal approach to instruction would result in a significant increase in positive attitude toward letter writing as well as a significant increase in skill development.

Population

The population of this study consisted of twenty-four students placed in a gifted second grade classroom in an upper middle class of a major city in Oklahoma. The children at the beginning of the study ranged in age from six years, eleven months to eight years, three months. There were twelve boys and twelve girls. There were two students who attended a developmental class for one year. One boy attended developmental kindergarten before regular

kindergarten. One girl attended developmental first grade between kindergarten and regular first grade. All other children attended only kindergarten and first grade before second grade. Sixteen of the children were identified as gifted at the end of their kindergarten year and were placed in a gifted first grade class. Eight children were identified as gifted at the end of first grade, thus this was their first year in a gifted program. All but two children were identified by scoring an IQ of 130 or more on the group Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test. The other two students were identified by scoring at the same level on the Wechsler Intelligence Test for Children (WISC-R) which was given individually. All of the children were white and had at least one professional parent. Only one child lived with a single parent. This parent married in October giving the child a step-father in the home. There were no children with physical handicaps or emotional problems.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if a pen pal exchange would be an effective way to teach letter writing to primary grade children. The focus was on attitude toward letter writing. Attitude was measured by an attitude survey using a Likert-type scale in a picture format. The survey form is found in Appendix A. Oral directions were given by the teacher to describe each picture on the scale for each item. The survey questions

were read aloud to be certain that all were understood. The attitude survey was administered on the second day of school in September 1987. The same attitude survey was administered again at the end of the fall semester in December of 1987 after six letter exchanges were completed between the second graders and their university pen pals.

Procedure

The first letters were written by the second graders on the second day of school in September 1987 after the attitude survey had been administered on the day before. The students were given class time to write a letter of introduction describing themselves, their interests, their families and any other information that they wished to share. The university students were asked to reply with a letter of introduction which included responses to the child's information.

All letters for each exchange were mailed together in a large envelope after the teacher or professor had carefully checked that there was a letter for each student for each exchange. Each group attempted to respond to the other within one week of receiving letters. If a child was ill, the elementary teacher answered the university student for that one exchange so that there was no delay in group response time. If a university student failed to respond to their pen pal, the second grade student still wrote to the university student. Both groups agreed to respond within

one week of receiving their letters. Encouragement was given to the second graders to share messages and information with their pen pal. Privacy was preserved for any child who did not wish to share his letter with his teacher or classmates.

Many children freely read their letters and responses to the teacher, their parents and classmates. Letter writing days were red letter days in the classroom. Children counted days, eagerly waiting for the mail containing their letters from their pen pals.

The second grade teacher saved copies of all letters for analysis unless a child had objections. In this study all children were willing to have their letters copied.

Class writing time was allowed for each letter exchange. Time was allowed for planning and discussion of what the child wanted to write to the pen pal. No direct teaching of letter writing skills was given. Discussions were held each time second graders received letters. Questions about format that were raised by the second graders were answered. The letter writing time was open ended to assure each child had enough time to fully express himself. The teacher's role was as facilitator to help each child communicate his thoughts. She answered questions and spelled words only if asked. The teacher emphasized communication, allowing skill to develop with practice and time in a natural way.

On the day that each new set of letters was received

the teacher kept a journal of reactions and attitudes of the second graders. These journal notes were consulted when the attitude surveys were analyzed at the end of the semester. After the last letter exchange the same attitude survey that was given in September was readministered. Results were tallied and compared. Written explanations from the teacher are included with each item surveyed. The explanations were based on the journal kept by the teacher on letter writing days. A copy of the attitude survey is in Appendix A.

First and last letters were evaluated by a team consisting of a university professor of education and two elementary classroom teachers. The regular teacher of the students being observed only participated when committee members needed an interpretation of a child's handwriting. This was to prevent bias in the evaluation. Consensus was reached when evaluating each part of the individual letters. The formal results of the study were based on growth over the semester of the study by comparing first and last letters as reported in the research questions.

Oklahoma State Department of Education's book, Suggested Learner Outcomes (1984) was used to determine the definition of terms and expectations for the Evaluation of Letters form.

To determine if a letter included proper use of capital letters, the evaluators consulted item 2.24 which states:

The student will capitalize the first word in a sentence, proper nouns, titles and abbreviations.

To determine if a letter included complete sentences, the evaluators consulted item 2.15 which states:

The student will develop the concept of the sentence as a complete thought.

To determine if a letter used correct punctuation, the evaluators consulted item 2.22 which states:

The student will recognize and write declarative (telling) and interrogative (asking) sentences.

To determine if the student wrote the letter in correct form, the evaluators consulted item 2.17 which states:

The student will identify and write correctly the parts of a letter. (p. 12)

A copy of the Evaluation form is in Appendix C.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will summarize the results of this study. The results clearly demonstrate that second grade students who corresponded with university pen pals increased in positive attitude toward letter writing. Figures 1-10 show the increase in positive attitude developed by the students. The functional approach to skill development proved successful. Figures 11 and 12 and Table 1 show the skill development. Evaluators found that students improved in all skills measured.

In the area of letter form, it was noted that from the first letter exchange, second grade students demonstrated the knowledge that letters must include a greeting. All students also demonstrated from their first letters, the ability to write their communication in the body of their letter. Since there were no errors in the areas of greeting or body in the first letters, no increase in skill was shown on the evaluation form for these two areas. It was noted, however, that students composed more complete sentences in the body of their letters at the end of the study.

Population Change

One boy was dropped from the study because he was absent during the administration of the final attitude survey. He was also absent and unable to write a letter for the final exchange. The population for which data was collected consisted of twenty three gifted second grade students. Eleven students were boys and twelve were girls.

Attitude Survey

The attitude survey is found in Appendix A. The research questions investigated if there would be an increase in positive attitude toward letter writing exhibited by second grade students who corresponded with college students. The overall responses to the attitude survey showed an increase in positive attitude and confidence for the second graders in this study.

The first question was "How do you feel when you need to write a letter?" (Figure 1). On the initial survey which was given before the first letters were written, 30.4 percent of the students chose response number five. An additional 4.3 percent chose response number four. This was a total of 34.7 percent of the students choosing negative responses. On the final survey which was given after the last letters were mailed to the college students, no students selected responses number four or five. On the original survey only 8.7 percent selected response number one and 34.8 percent selected response number two. A total

Attitude Survey Question 1

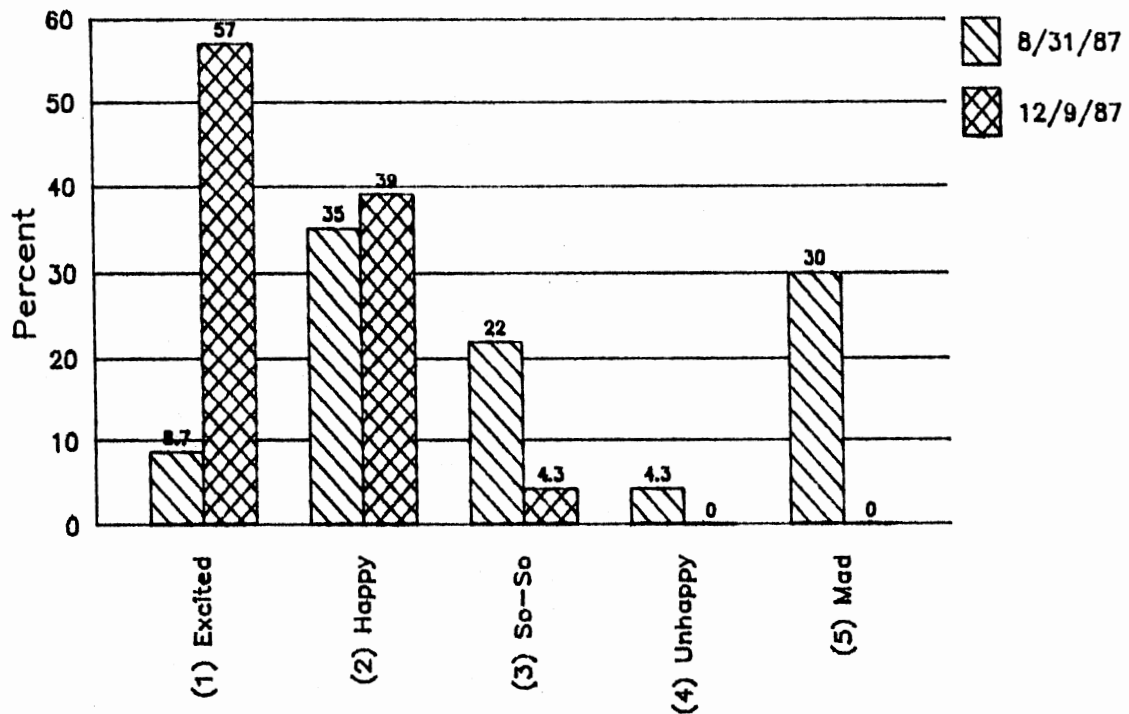


Figure 1. How do you feel when you need to write a letter?

of 43.5 percent gave positive responses on the first survey. On the final survey, 56.5 percent selected response number one and 39.1 percent chose number two. The total positive response on the final survey was 95.6 percent. The increased positive response was 120 percent.

Figure 2 shows responses to the question, "How do you feel when you get a letter addressed to you in the mail?". On the first survey 4.3 percent gave response number three, 26.1 percent gave response number two and 69.6 percent responded with number one. On the first and final surveys

Attitude Survey Question 2

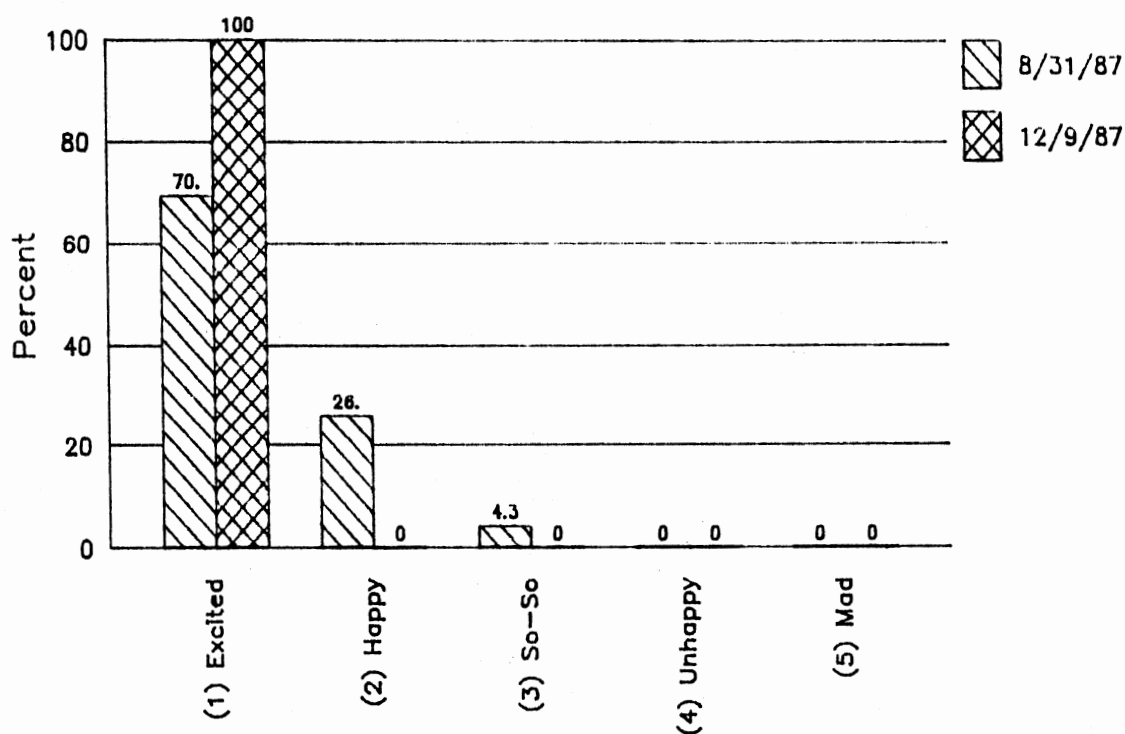


Figure 2. How do you feel when you get a letter addressed to you in the mail?

no students responded to numbers four and five. At the end of the study, 100 percent of the students responded to number one. This resulted in a 43.7 percent increase in students responding that they were excited to get a letter addressed to them in the mail.

Figure 3 shows responses to the question, "How do you feel when someone else gets a letter and you don't get a letter?". Number three received 34.8 percent of the responses on the first survey, while number four received 30.4 percent and number five received 34.8 percent. The

Attitude Survey Question 3

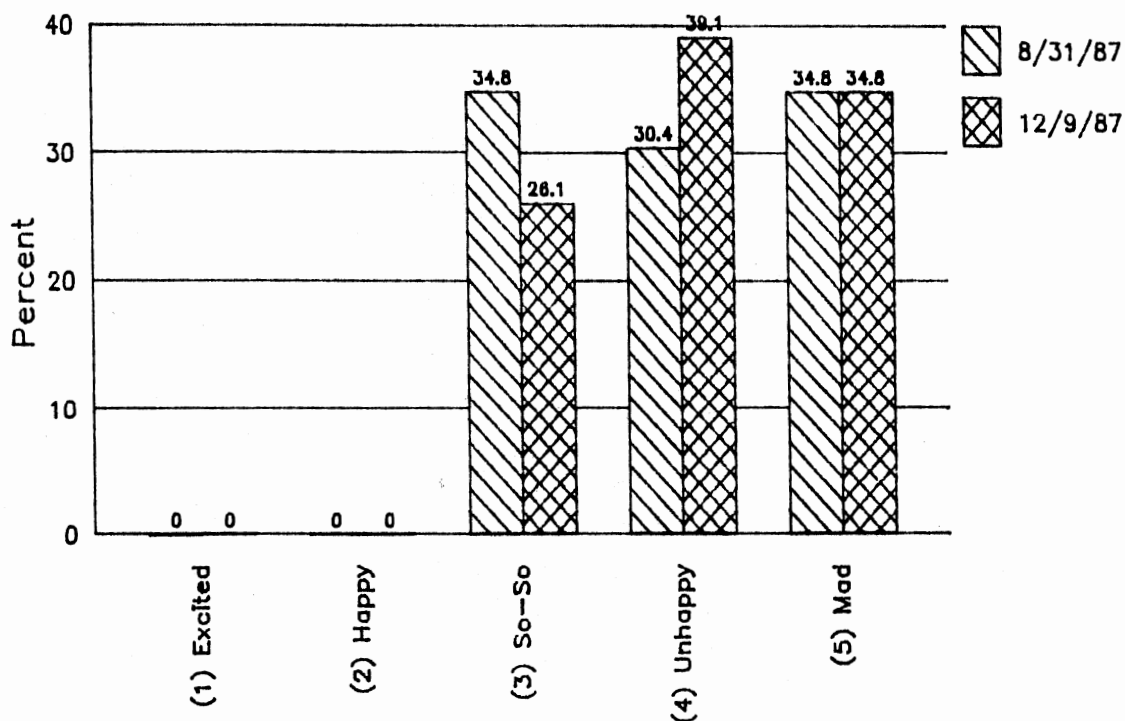


Figure 3. How do you feel when someone else gets a letter and you don't get a letter?

researcher considered responses number four and five to be positive since they indicated that the respondent desired to receive a letter. On the second survey, response number three received 26.1 percent, number four received 39.1 percent and number five remained the same at 34.8 percent. The combination of responses four and five on the first survey gave a total positive response of 65.2 percent. On the second survey, the combination of positive responses totaled 73.9 percent, for a positive response of increase 13.3 percent.

Attitude Survey Question 4

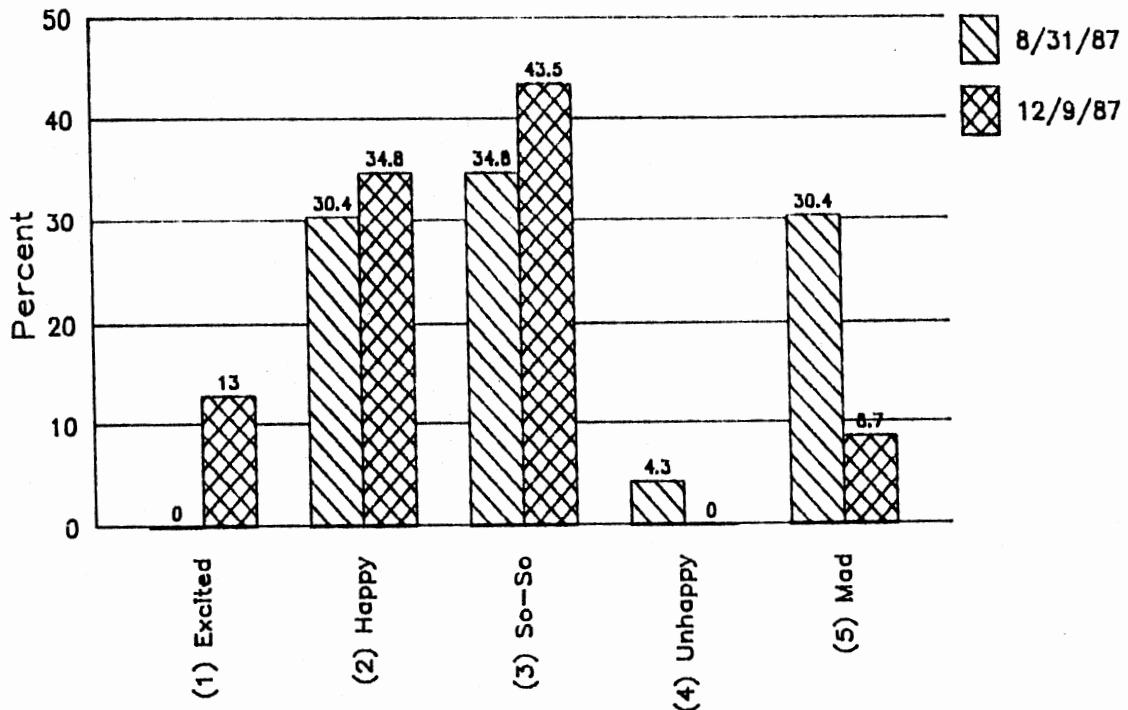


Figure 4. How do you feel when you get a letter addressed to both you and others and you have to share it?

Figure 4 shows responses to the question, "How do you feel when you get a letter addressed to both you and others and you have to share it?". On the first survey no student responded to number one, while 30.4 percent gave response number two. On the first survey, response number four received 4.3 percent and number five received 30.4 percent for a total of 34.7 percent with unhappy feelings. The remaining 34.8 percent selected number three. On the second survey, response number one received 13 percent and number two received 34.8 percent for a total positive response of

Attitude Survey Question 5

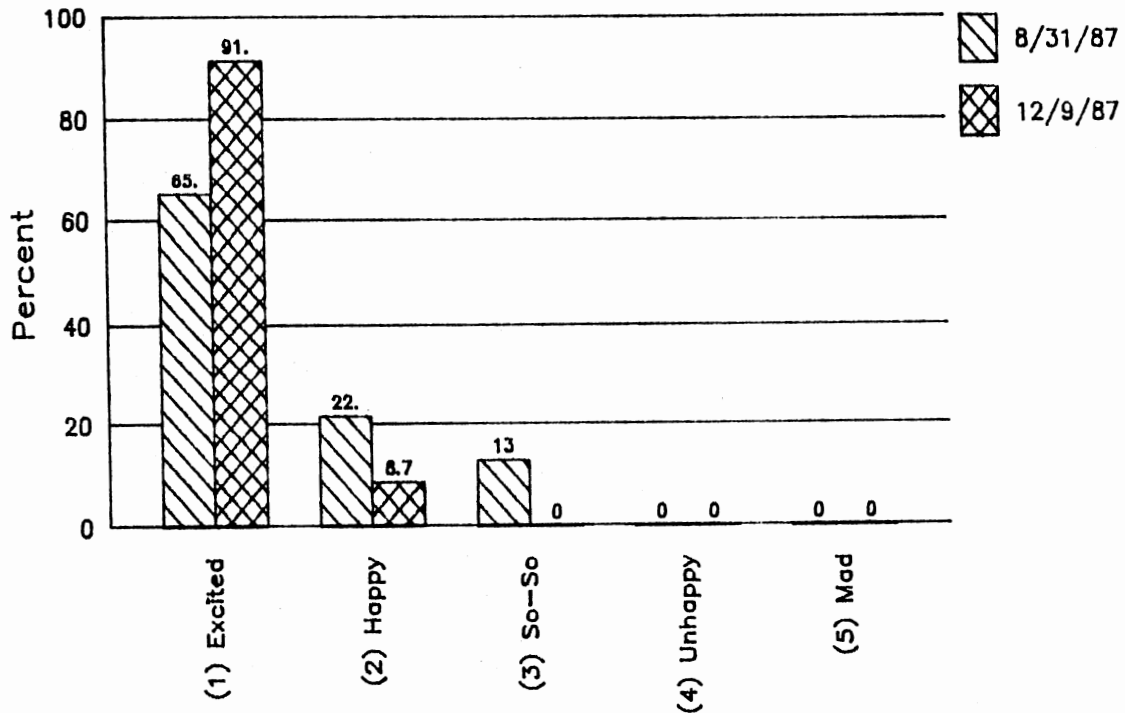


Figure 5. How do you feel about getting your own pen pal?

47.8 percent. On the second survey no student selected response number four and 8.7 percent selected number five. On the second survey 43.5 percent selected response number three. The most significant change on this question occurred on response number five where there was a decrease in negative response of 71.4 percent.

Figure 5 shows responses to the question, "How do you feel about getting your own pen pal?". The response on both surveys was positive, but there was a more positive response after the letter writing experience. On the first survey

Attitude Survey Question 6

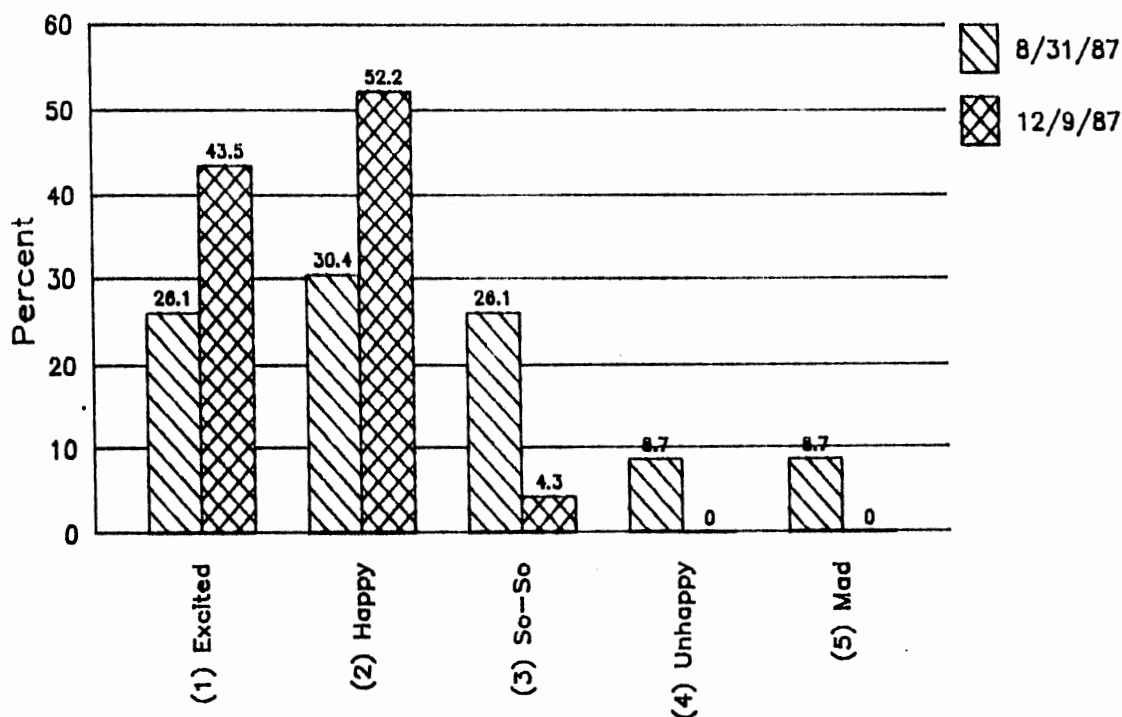


Figure 6. How do you feel about writing regularly to your own pen pal?

only 65.2 percent stated that they felt excited about getting a pen pal, while 91.3 percent had the same response on the final survey. This was an increase of 40 percent. On the first survey 21.7 percent reported feeling happy about getting a pen pal and 13 percent felt neutral. On the final survey 8.7 percent felt happy and no student had neutral or negative feelings. One hundred percent had positive feelings about having a personal pen pal.

Figure 6 shows responses to the question, "How do you feel about writing regularly to your own pen pal?".

Responses were spread among all categories on the first survey reflecting uncertainty toward the new experience. On the final survey, the results were all positive except for 4.3 percent who had neutral feelings. The first survey showed 26.1 percent were excited. This increased to 43.5 percent on the final survey. Happy responses were given by 30.4 percent on the first survey and on the final survey this increased to 52.2 percent. Changes in the neutral category went from 26.1 percent on the first survey to 4.3 percent on the final survey. The fourth and fifth categories accounted for of 17.4 percent of responses on the first survey and none on the final survey. The final survey showed 95.7 percent had happy or excited feelings.

Figure 7 shows responses to the question, "How do you feel about how well you can write a letter?". This question addressed letter writing confidence. Responses were spread among all categories on the first survey. Only 8.7 percent had excellent confidence on the first survey, while 52.2 percent had excellent confidence on the final survey. This was an increase of 500 percent. On the first survey 43.5 percent felt good, 30.4 percent felt so-so, 4.3 percent felt not very good and 13 percent had poor confidence. On the final survey, no student responded to the fourth and fifth categories. Only 17.4 percent responded neutral. A total of 82.6 percent had good or excellent confidence about their letter writing ability. The original survey showed only 52.2 percent felt good or excellent confidence. This showed

Attitude Survey Question 7

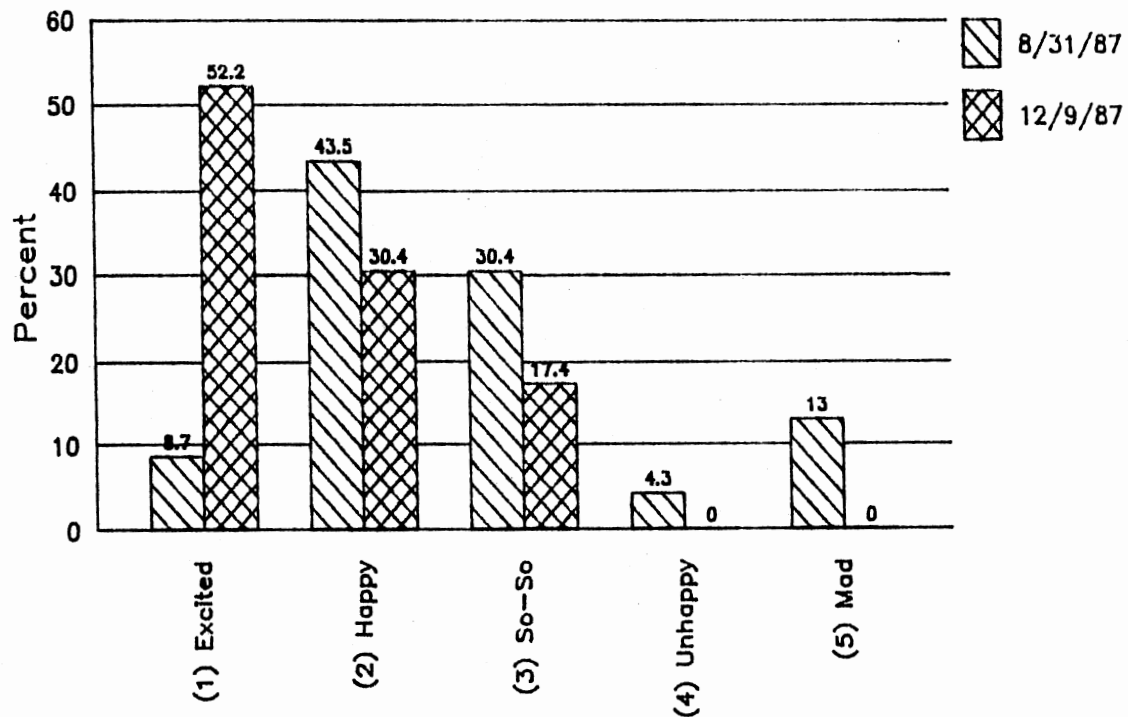


Figure 7. How do you feel about how well you can write a letter?

an increase in confidence of 58.2 percent over the period of the study.

Figure 8 shows students' predictions of their future attitudes. They responded to the question, "How do you think you will feel about writing letters when you grow up?". Responses were spread among all choices except response number four (unhappy) on both surveys. Only 8.7 percent felt they would be excited on the first survey. This increased to 43.5 percent on the final survey. The original survey showed that 13 percent felt they would be

Attitude Survey

Question 8

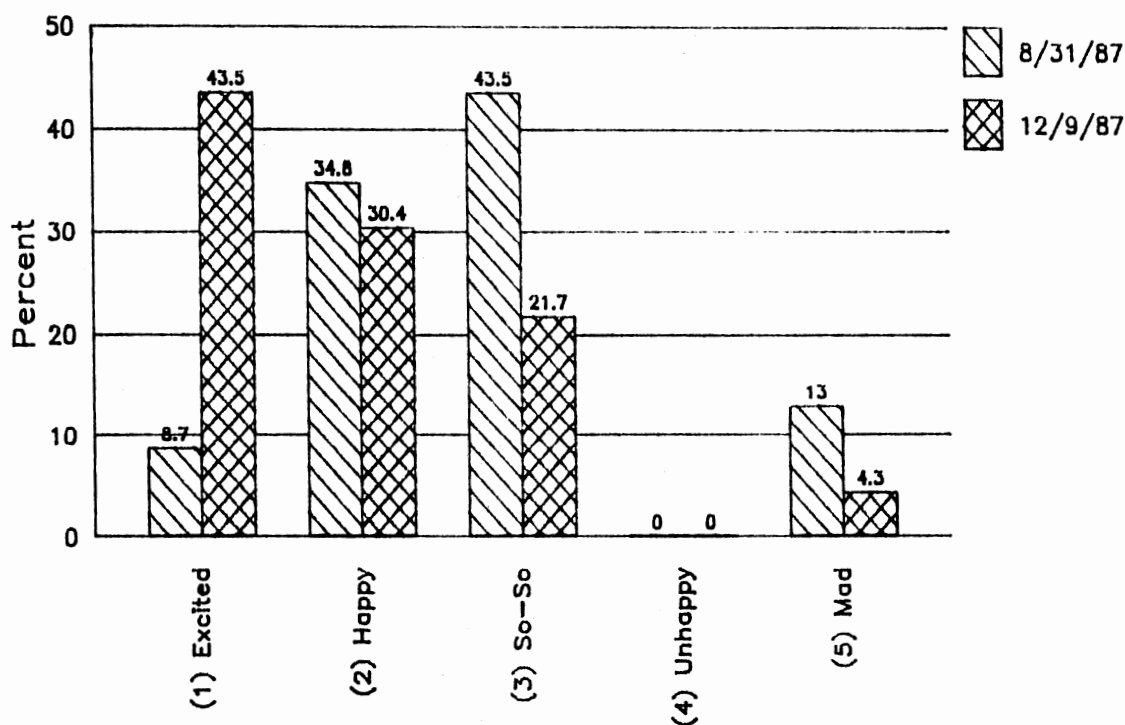


Figure 8. How do you think you will feel about writing letters when you are grown up?

mad if they had to write a letter as an adult. On the final survey this response was chosen by only 4.3 percent. Responses of excited and happy on the first survey were 43.5 percent. On the final survey, 73.9 percent responded excited or happy. This was an increase of 69.9 percent in positive response.

Figure 9 shows responses to the question, "How do you think you'll feel about getting letters when you are grown up?". There were no negative responses on either survey. Students responding to excited or happy combined on the

Attitude Survey

Question 9

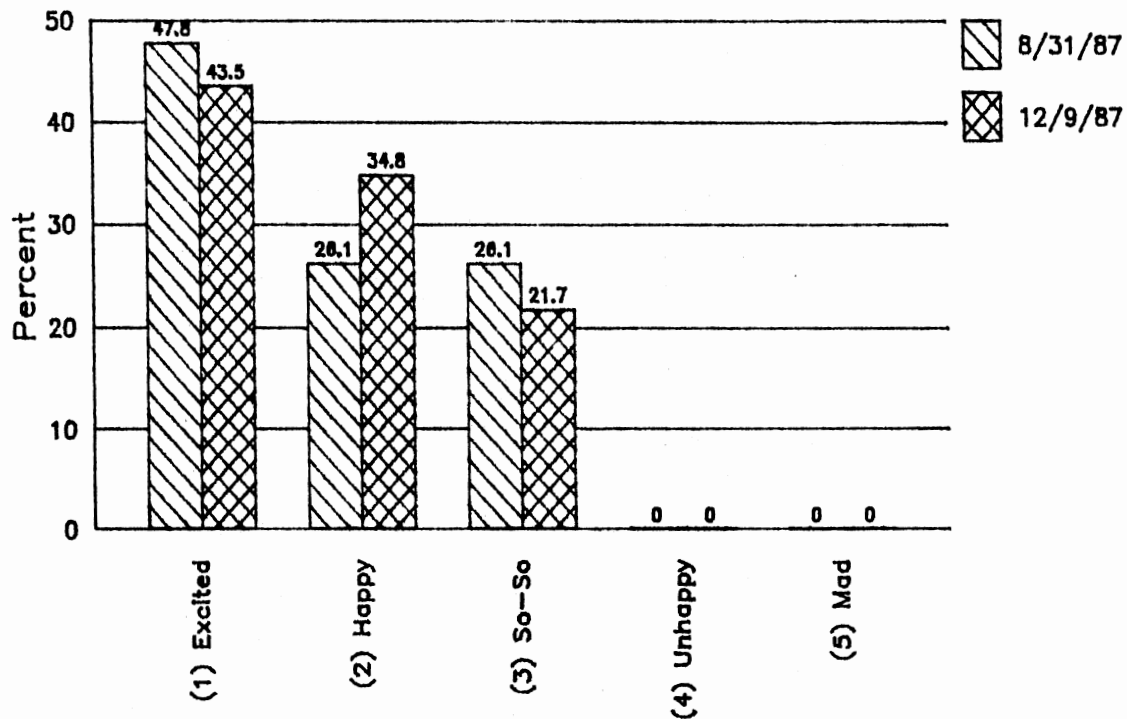


Figure 9. How do you think you'll feel about getting letters when you are grown up?

first survey totaled 73.9 percent. On the second survey the totals of the same two categories was 87.3 percent for an increased positive response of 5.95 percent. The neutral response dropped from 26.1 percent to 21.9 percent.

Figure 10 shows previous letter writing experience. Students were asked, "Have you ever written a letter all by yourself?". On the first survey 69.6 percent stated that they had written a letter without help. No previous letter writing experience was reported by 30.4 percent of the students. At the end of the experience, 100 percent of the

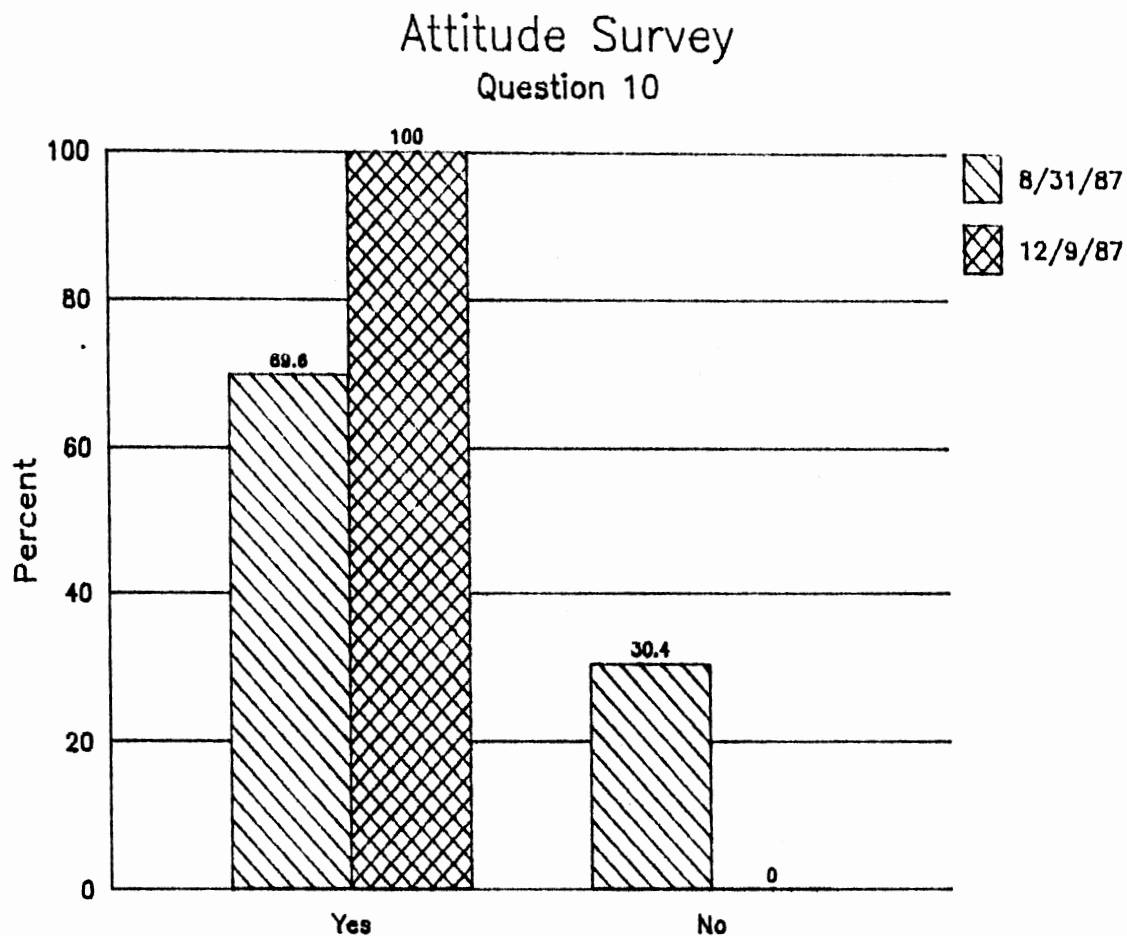


Figure 10. Answer YES or NO. Have you ever written a letter all by yourself?

students reported that they had written letters unassisted.

Evaluation of Letters

First and last letters were evaluated by a three member team consisting of a university professor of education and two elementary school teachers. The classroom teacher of the students surveyed served as a consultant to the committee. A consensus of this group was reached for each

TABLE I
EVALUATION OF LETTER

Error Rate Percent	<u>First</u>	<u>Last</u>
Capitals	32%	21%
Complete Sentences	1%	0%
Punctuation	56%	27%
Letter Form	36%	3%
Heading	100%	5%
Greeting	0%	0%
Body	0%	0%
Closing	53%	5%
Signature	27%	5%

child's letter evaluations. The evaluation form is found in Appendix C. Results are shown on Table 1, Percent of Errors.

Evaluators used the Suggested Learner Outcomes (1984) published by the Oklahoma State Department of Education to make the skill evaluations.

To determine if a student used capital letters properly, the evaluators consulted item 2.24 which states:

The student will capitalize the first word in a sentence, proper nouns, titles and abbreviations.

On the first evaluation there was an error rate of 32

Evaluation of Letters

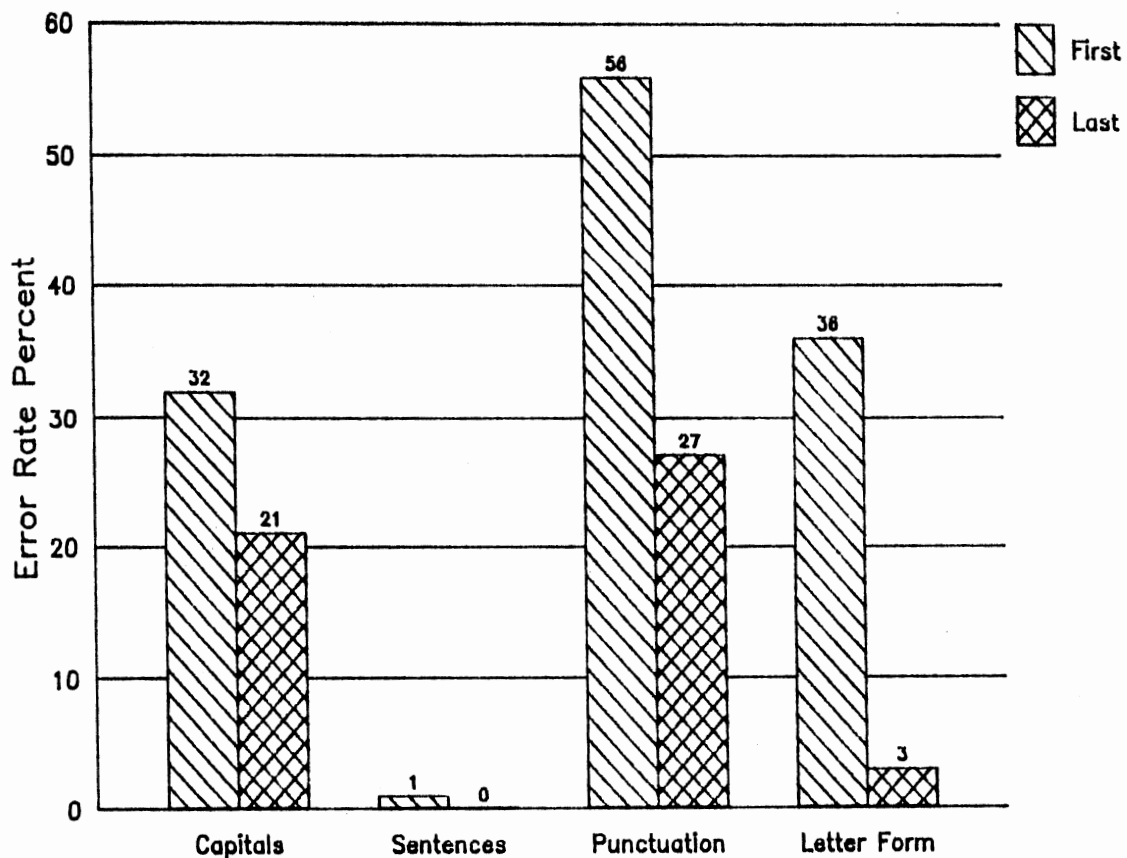


Figure 11. Skills Evaluated

percent and on the second evaluation, the error rate dropped to 21 percent.

To determine if a student included complete sentences, the evaluators consulted item 2.15 which states:

The student will develop the concept of the sentence as a complete thought.

The students in this study had a 1 percent error rate on the first letter and no errors on the final letters.

To determine if a student used correct punctuation, the

Evaluation of Letters

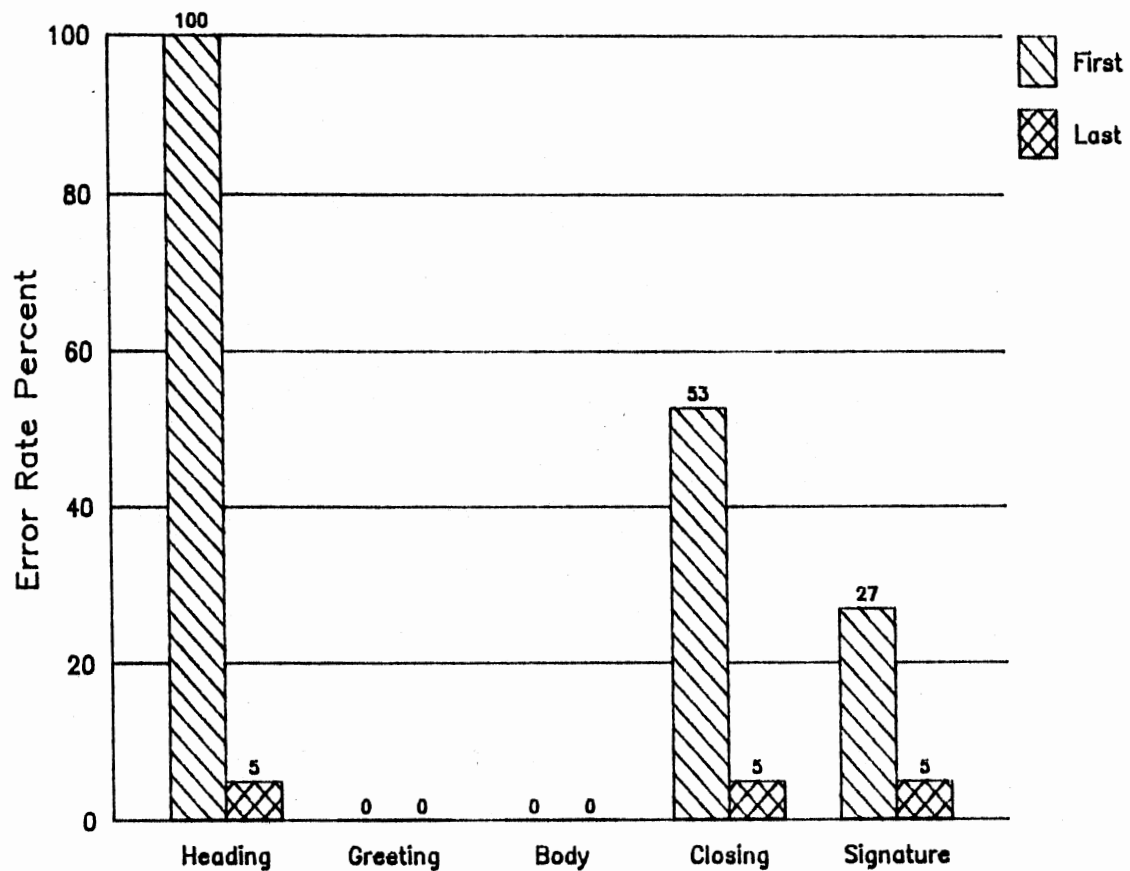


Figure 12. Five Parts of a Letter

evaluators consulted item 2.22 which states:

The student will recognize and write declarative (telling) and interrogative (asking) sentences.

On the first letters there was an error rate of 56 percent.

The error rate dropped to 27 percent on the last letters.

To determine if the student wrote the letter in correct form, the evaluators consulted item 2.17 which states:

The student will identify and write correctly the parts of a letter. (p. 12)

Figures 11 and 12 show the skill development of the students over the period of the study. On the first letter 100 percent of the students did not write a proper heading. The evaluators considered a proper heading to be the date. On the final letter only one student did not include a heading. All students included a proper greeting on both the first and last letters. There was great improvement on using a proper closing on the letters. On the first letters 53 percent made errors by not including a closing. Only 5 percent neglected to include a closing on their final letter. The final item evaluated was signature. A proper signature was the writer's name. On the first letter 36 percent forgot to sign. On the last letter, only 5 percent made that error. The overall percentage of errors in letter form decreased from 36 percent on the first letters to 3 percent on the last letters.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study demonstrated that a functional approach was effective in teaching second grade students to write letters. Students became very interested in their pen pals. Several students have arranged to continue a letter exchange with their university pen pals independently since the official pen pal exchange ended at the semester. The second grade students are eager to write to new pen pals and to relatives and friends. There is even a letter writing club within the second grade classroom. The children in the study felt a need to communicate with their pen pals. With time and practice, both skills and attitudes toward letter writing improved significantly.

Summary

The first research question and its sub-questions asked if there would be an increase in positive attitude and confidence toward letter writing exhibited by second grade students who corresponded with college pen pals. The results shown in Chapter IV, Figures 1-10, clearly showed that writers gained in positive attitude and in letter writing confidence. In addition to the survey, the teacher

noted that the students began to ask frequently if they had received anything in the school mail within two or three days after writing their letters. The teacher had to explain that letters went through a long process before delivery and that the college class did not meet daily.

Another indication of the positive attitude and confidence was when several girls in the class formed a letter writing club. Each girl put her name in a hat and drew out the name of another girl. They then started an in-class letter exchange with much less waiting time for responses.

Second grade students were sorry that this exchange had to end at the semester. They have requested more pen pals for second semester. We made plans to correspond with two other classes of second graders for second semester. One group is in Washington and the other is in Pennsylvania.

The second set of research questions dealt with skill development in letter writing. The procedure used is described in Chapter III. Instead of formal teaching, second grade students and the teacher made observations about the letters received. Parts of the letters were discussed. Discussions were held about the purpose of each part.

Table I and Figures 11 and 12 (Chapter IV) show that the children increased their letter writing skills over the semester of the study. The overall percentage of errors decreased from 36 percent to 3 percent between the first and

last letters.

The researcher wished to discover if the students would show improved use of capital letters between first and last letters. Table I and Figure 11 (Chapter IV) indicate a decrease in errors from 32 percent to 21 percent. It was also noted that students were writing longer letters and thus increasing the number of capital letters used.

Letters written by the second graders to the college students showed that they understood the concept of a sentence as a complete thought from the beginning of the year. They did increase their number of sentences and the complexity of the sentences over the period of the study.

Punctuation errors dropped from 56 percent on the first letters to 27 percent on the final letters (Table I and Figure 11, Chapter IV). Students used more forms of punctuation than the evaluators expected. Suggested Learner Outcomes (1984) from the Oklahoma State Department of Education expected second grade students to properly punctuate declarative and interrogative sentences by the end of the school year. The evaluators noticed that students often properly wrote and punctuated exclamatory sentences. Proper use of commas in the heading, greeting and closing were also included when punctuation was evaluated.

There was significant improvement in use of proper letter form. As Table I and Figure 12 (Chapter IV) indicate, 97 percent of the letters were in proper form on the last exchange. Students drew conclusions about letter

form during informal class discussions each time they received letters. They decided that the heading was useful so the reader would know when the letter was written. It was also useful if the letters were to be saved in chronological order. They decided that the greeting was important to be certain the letter was read by the proper reader. The body was the most important part to the second graders because that was where they sent and received messages. The closing, the students concluded, was a place to express a fond farewell. The signature helped the reader know who had written the letter.

Recommendations for Further Research

It would be valuable to conduct a study such as this using two classes with one class using a traditional language arts textbook approach and the second class using the functional approach with pen pals. Both the attitude survey and evaluation methods should be the same. Results should be compared.

Similar studies could be conducted with groups described below.

1. University students exchanging letters with gifted elementary students in grades other than second, where the students are in an upper-middle class school.
2. University students exchanging letters with children in an upper-middle class, suburban elementary grade where the students are heterogeneously grouped by ability.

3. University students exchanging letters with children in a school in a large urban area, where the students are identified gifted.
4. University students exchanging letters with children in a small rural school where the students are identified gifted.
5. University students exchanging letters with children in a middle class, suburban school where the students are identified gifted.
6. University students exchanging letters with children in a school in a large urban area, where the students are heterogeneously grouped by ability.
7. University students exchanging letters with students in a small rural area where the students are heterogeneously grouped by ability.
8. Two elementary classes of the same grade exchanging letters where students are of similar social class and culture and both classes are identified gifted.
9. Two elementary classes of the same grade exchanging letters where students are of similar social class and culture and both classes are heterogeneously grouped by ability.
10. Two elementary classes of the same grade exchanging letters where students are of similar social class and culture and one class is identified gifted and the other is grouped heterogeneously by ability.
11. Two elementary classes of the same grade exchanging

- letters where students are of similar social class and ability, but of different cultures.
12. Two elementary classes of different grades exchanging letters where students are of similar social class and culture and both classes are identified gifted.
 13. Two elementary classes of different grades exchanging letters where students are of similar social class and culture and both classes are heterogeneously grouped by ability.
 14. Two elementary classes of different grades exchanging letters where students are of similar social class and culture and one class is identified gifted and the other is grouped heterogeneously by ability.
 15. Two elementary classes of different grades exchanging letters where students are of similar social class and ability, but of different racial groups.
 16. Two elementary classes of the same grade exchanging letters where students are heterogeneously grouped by ability, but of different ethnic groups.
 17. Two elementary classes of the same grade exchanging letters where students in both classes are identified gifted and of similar cultures, but of different social classes.
 18. Two elementary classes of the same grade exchanging letters where students in one class are identified gifted and students in the other class are heterogeneously grouped by ability and both groups are

of similar cultures, but different social classes.

20. Two elementary classes of different grades exchanging letters where both classes are identified gifted and of similar cultures, but with different social classes.
21. Two elementary classes of different grades exchanging letters where both classes are heterogeneously grouped by ability and of similar cultures, but of different social classes.

Results from all of these studies could be compared to see if a functional approach was the most effective way to help students develop a positive attitude toward letter writing while increasing letter writing skill.

Teachers could conduct the same type study as described in this thesis and develop a different evaluation instrument to rate growth in other skills which they wanted to increase. It would be useful to include length of sentences in the evaluation instrument. Teachers of older students might wish to evaluate proper paragraph development. Evaluation could be made of how students used the parts of speech. Analysis could be made of how much students actually responded to the content of the letters received.

Results from all studies should be compared to discover if the functional approach was effective.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

ATTITUDE SURVEY

My name is _____

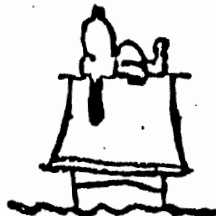
Today is _____

I am a (boy or girl) _____

My birthday is _____

I am _____ years old.

1. How do you feel when you need to write a letter?



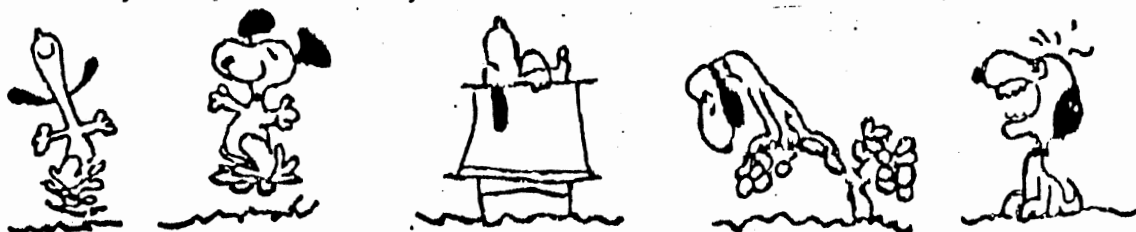
2. How do you feel when you get a letter addressed to you in the mail?



3. How do you feel when someone else gets a letter and you don't get a letter?



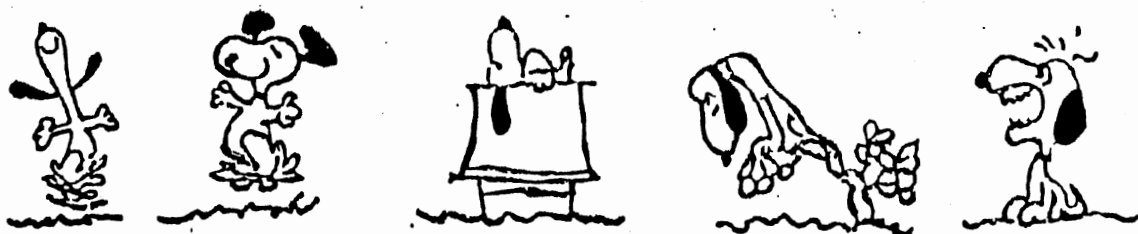
4. How do you feel when you get a letter addressed to both you and others and you have to share it?



5. How do you feel about getting your own pen pal?



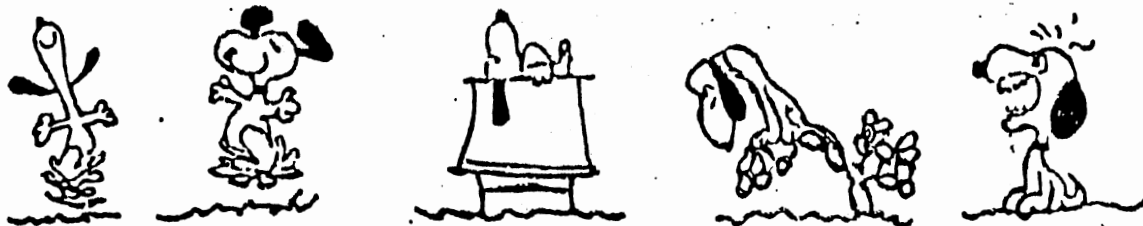
6. How do you feel about writing regularly to your own pen pal?



7. How do you feel about how well you can write a letter?



8. How do you think you will feel about writing letters when you grow up?



9. How do you think you'll feel about getting letters when you are grown up?



10. Answer YES or NO. Have you ever written a letter all by yourself?

Adapted from Reading Attitude Survey, Livonia Public Schools,
1966, by Dr. Paul D. Campbell.

APPENDIX B

SCHEDULE FOR LETTER EXCHANGES

As described in the Methodology section of this thesis, all participants will answer correspondence within one week of receiving letters. Below is a suggested schedule based on the Jenks Public Schools calendar for 1987-1988.

- August 31, 1987 - First day of school - Administer Pretest
- September 1, 1987 - Second graders write first letters to college pen pals
- September 8, 1987 - OSU students mail letters to second graders
- September 14, 1987 - Second graders respond to college pen pals
- September 22, 1987 - OSU students mail letters
- September 28, 1987 - Second graders respond to college pen pals
- October 6, 1987 - OSU students mail letters
- October 12, 1987 - Second graders respond to college pen pals
- October 19, 1987 - OSU students mail letters
- October 26, 1987 - Second graders respond to college pen pals
- November 3, 1987 - OSU students mail letters
- November 9, 1987 - Second graders respond to college pen pals
- November 17, 1987 - OSU students mail letters

- November 23, 1987 - Second graders respond to college pen
pals
- December 1, 1987 - OSU students mail letters
- December 7, 1987 - Second graders respond to college pen
pals
- December 14, 1987 - Finals week for OSU pen pals -
administer post test to second graders
-

***ALL LETTERS WILL BE COLLECTED BY TEACHER OR PROFESSOR AND
MAILED TOGETHER IN A LARGE ENVELOPE FOR EACH EXCHANGE.**

APPENDIX C

EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

Date _____ Writer # _____

	First	Last
1. CAPITALS		
# of capitals used correctly		
# of errors		
% of errors		
2. COMPLETE SENTENCES		
# of complete sentences		
# of errors		
% of errors		
3. PUNCTUATION		
# of correct punctuation marks		
# of errors		
% of errors		
4. CORRECT LETTER FORM		
Heading		
Greeting		
Body		
Closing		
Signature		
# of parts in correct form		
# of errors		
% of errors		

APPENDIX D

BOOKS WITH A LETTER THEME

- The Best of Dear Abby. Abigail Van Buren. Fairway, KS: Andrews & McMeel, 1981.
- The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family, 1762-1784. L. H. Butterfield, Marc Friedlander & Mary-Jo Kline, (Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.
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APPENDIX E

SOURCES OF PEN PALS

International Friendship League

55 Mt. Vernon Street

Boston, MA 02108

Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope. They will send information about their club and will match you with a pen pal from another country.

League of Friendship, Inc.

P.O. Box 509

Mount Vernon, OH 43050

Ages 12-25. \$1 service charge and stamped, self-addressed envelope. You will receive a foreign name and a suggestion sheet for writing.

Letterfriends

C/O Bonnie Hulbert

P.O. Box 372

Bedford Park, IL 60499

All ages. Send name, age, sex and a list of your interests with two 22 cent U.S. stamps.

Letters Abroad

209 East 56th Street

New York, NY 10022

Ages 16 and over. No service charge but contributions accepted. Enclose self-addressed stamped envelope.

Pen Pals Unlimited

P.O. Box 6283

Huntington Beach, CA 92615

All ages. Send \$2, name, address, age, hobbies and a stamped, self-addressed envelope

Student Letter Exchange

910 Fourth Street S.E.

Austin, MN 55912

Ages 10-19. \$1 for foreign name; \$.50 for American name. Orders of 15 or more foreign names, \$.90 each. Enclose self-addressed stamped envelope.

World Pen Pals

1690 Como Avenue

St. Paul, MN 55108

Ages 10-19. \$2 service fee (special group fee, \$1.75 each for six or more names). Allow two weeks for reply. You will receive a foreign name, World Pen Pal newsletter, and suggestion sheet. Enclose self-addressed stamped envelope.

VITA 2

Janet Elaine Reynolds

Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Science

Thesis: A FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGE
ARTS THROUGH LETTER WRITING

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, June 22, 1942,
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Education: Graduated from Will Rogers High School,
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Professional Experience: First grade teacher at
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August, 1964 to October, 1967; Tutor and
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Substitute teacher, Miss Helen's Nursery School,
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