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IMPLEMENTING A PROCESS WRITING UNIT
IN A GRADE ONE FRENCH IMMERSION CLASSROOM:
A CASE STUDY OF WRITING SKILLS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD WRITING

by

Caroline Beth Dobkin-Kurtz

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
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University of Toronto

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Abstract

This study analyses the impact of an approach to teaching writing, that incorporates elements and strategies of process writing, on the letter writing skills and attitudes of grade one French immersion students. The students' abilities to write recount (the retelling or recounting of personal past experiences) in a friendly letter format, was what formed the basis of this study. Seventeen students taught by the teacher-researcher, participated in the study. All students completed letter-writing activities over an eight-week period. The first and last writing assignments were collected to assess growth in writing skills. Pre- and post-study attitude questionnaires were administered to the students to determine if there had been any change in their attitudes toward writing. The results of this study support the implementation of process writing strategies in grade one French immersion, since significant gains were found in student writing skills, and student attitudes toward writing improved.
This thesis is the culmination of eighteen months of perseverance and encouragement. Several people helped me along my path of discovery and learning. I would first like to thank Dr. Sharon Lapkin, for taking me in under her wing and giving me the chance to accomplish this Master's thesis. I am most grateful for her practical and direct approach, and for her positive guidance and feedback. I would also like to thank Dr. Antoinette Gagné and Dr. Miles Turnbull for being committee members and for offering their insight and support.

This thesis is dedicated to my students – past, present and future. You are the driving force that compels me to reject mediocrity and seek continual growth and improvement. A special thank you is owed to the grade one students who participated in this study.

I extend my sincere thanks to Lili Gillespie for the endless hours she spent marking writing samples with me. You are a cherished friend and colleague.

I would especially like to thank my parents Martin and Michele for their unconditional love and for instilling in me the values of a hard work ethic and setting high goals. To my husband Rob – I could not have done this without you. Your incredible support, love and belief in my abilities are ultimately what got me through this. Thank you.
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Introduction

Teaching writing in a grade one French immersion classroom is a challenging and somewhat daunting task. Children are faced with learning how to write (already an ambitious task in one's first language) in a language that they can not even speak fluently. It is likely that many French immersion teachers, especially those teaching primary grades, are perplexed as to how they should teach writing. There is no question that to teach effectively, teachers in second language settings need to understand what writing in a second language entails. As Silva (1990) suggests, teachers need coherent perspectives, principles, models, and tools for thinking about teaching second language writing, and for analyzing and evaluating competing views on the teaching of writing.

The purpose of this thesis is to answer many of the questions that French immersion educators may have, regarding language acquisition and writing proficiency. Many of these questions plagued me for three years, while teaching grade one French immersion for the North York Board of Education. Lapkin, Swain and Shapson (1990) have addressed a few of my concerns. In the French Immersion Research Agenda for the 90's, they state that the written proficiency of French immersion students is far from native-like French. In an attempt to minimize student weakness in writing, Lapkin, Swain and Shapson propose that French immersion teachers develop innovative curriculum that provides more opportunities for sustained expressive language use. They believe that process
writing is a vehicle for nurturing expressive language. However, they claim that research is needed to investigate whether the written product of the process writing approach is superior to the written product of traditional writing programs.

There is currently minimal literature that focuses directly on teaching writing and how students learn to write in primary level French immersion classrooms. My research will hopefully offer some insight for educators into this area of education. This thesis study is an attempt to discover and evaluate the results of a grade one French immersion writing program that incorporates elements of process writing. The following questions formed the focus of this thesis:

1) Does an approach to teaching writing that incorporates process writing strategies improve the letter writing skills of grade one French immersion students?

2) Does an approach to teaching writing that incorporates process writing strategies impact positively on student attitudes toward writing?
Chapter 1
Empirical studies and related theory

1.1 Introduction

    After careful consideration of the literature, I hope to (a) explain different approaches to teaching writing, with a focus on process writing, (b) clarify the difference between first language, second language and French immersion settings, (c) highlight some of the shortcomings of writing instruction in French immersion over the last two decades, and (d) suggest how primary level French immersion teachers can develop a successful writing program in their classroom.

1.2 Approaches to teaching writing

    Several researchers have written historical summaries describing the different schools of thought regarding philosophies and approaches to teaching writing in English as a second language (ESL) (Raimes, 1983; Raimes, 1991; Silva, 1990; Zamel, 1987;). Silva (1990) clearly explains several writing methodologies that evolved between 1945 and 1990. He consolidates these methodologies into three main approaches to teaching ESL writing. For this reason, I have chosen to highlight his article.

    Controlled composition is one approach. In this model, language is seen as speech, and learning is habit formation. Therefore, writing is not seen as a
primary focus, but as a “reinforcement for oral habits” (Silva, 1990; p.12). The writer works with language structures that have already been learned. There is no importance given to ideas and expressiveness, nor to audience or purpose.

The approach that Silva labels “current-traditional rhetoric” was developed in the mid-sixties. Current-traditional rhetoric bridged controlled and freewriting. Writing is seen as “arrangement”, fitting sentences and paragraphs into prescribed patterns. The writer fills in a preexisting form with provided or self-generated content (p.14). Although this approach has been widely criticized, it is still alive and common in instructional strategies and materials.

Third is the process approach, which surfaced in the early 1980’s with advocates such as Graves (1983) in the first language setting and Zamel (1982) in the ESL setting. This approach was an alternative to the older traditional approaches, which many educators felt were not adequate in dealing with issues in writing.

In the process approach, writing is not seen as a linear process but as an exploratory and generative process (Silva, 1990; p.165). There are three stages in process writing: prewriting, writing and postwriting. In the classroom, students are given a lot of time for authentic, meaningful writing in a collaborative, non-intrusive, environment. They are able to write about topics of their own choice. The teacher’s role is to be a facilitator of writing, helping students begin, revise
and edit their written work. The primary focus is on purpose, ideas, content, and audience, rather than grammar and spelling. Grammar, spelling, revising and editing are not completely dismissed, but only come into play during the writing and post-writing stages of writing.

As mentioned above, it is believed that the process writing approach facilitates writing, and results in meaningful text and experiences for writers. One may question whether these meaningful experiences affect the disposition and attitude of process writers. There is evidence in the L1 (first language) setting that process writing programs foster positive attitudes among students.

Monteith (1991) compared writing scores and attitudes of grade two students in traditional vs. process writing classrooms. Monteith found that students in the process writing class obtained significantly higher writing scores than the students receiving traditional instruction. As well, more students in the process writing class than the traditional class considered themselves writers, placed an emphasis on thinking and learning from mistakes and indicated a purpose for writing. All students in the process writing class expressed that they felt happy about what they wrote, whereas this was not the case in the traditional group.
1.3 Learning to write in a second language classroom

It is probable that the effects of process writing on attitude, writing scores and disposition are transferable from an L1 to an L2 (second language) setting. Students in ESL and French immersion settings may develop more positive attitudes and become better writers in a process writing classroom. Perhaps it is for these reasons that there has recently been much support in the ESL literature for instructional programs that adopt all or many elements of the process writing approach in L2 and ESL settings (Hudelson, 1989; Edelsky, 1989; Edelsky and Jilbert, 1985; Hedge, 1988).

Hedge (1988) has published a teacher’s resource book to help ESL learners overcome the difficulties they experience in developing clear, effective writing in English. She outlines an approach to teaching writing in ESL settings, which is applicable to both young and adult learners. Hedge’s approach is based on the following assumptions, which reflect the principles of the process writing approach:

- Writing should reflect the goal of enabling students to write whole texts which form connected, contextualized and appropriate pieces of communication.
- Students need opportunities to practice various forms and functions in writing, and to develop the different skills needed in producing written text.
- Students should know how to go through the writing process of planning, organizing, composing and revising.
- Teachers need to create authentic contexts and provide audiences for writing.
- Students should be a part of the marking process, and a shift away from error-correction needs to occur.
- There needs to be time allocated in class for writing activities.
- Collaboration, class discussion and modeling are ways to encourage effective process of writing.

Hedge’s belief (1988) that there needs to be a shift away from error-correction and that students need time to write, is corroborated by Hudelson (1989) and Calkins (1994). In Hudelson’s report on a year-long study of the writing growth of two second grade ESL students, she concludes that priority should be given to encouraging and establishing fluency and willingness to write. Focusing on what is wrong, as opposed to the expression of ideas, may cause the ESL writer to become more insecure and unwilling to take risks.

Calkins (1994) states that “the most important thing we can do for students is to help them write freely and unselfconsciously. No one learns well while feeling afraid and ashamed” (p.290). I refer to a student’s fear of risk-taking as “pencil paralysis.” I believe that “pencil paralysis” can delay a writer’s growth and hinder productivity. Students in my grade one French immersion class were so fixated on spelling correctly, that it often impeded them from producing written texts that were rich in content or length. As a result, I tried to
nurture more risk-taking during the writing of first drafts, and suggested to the children that we edit spelling later, after they had expressed themselves adequately. I wanted them to write first, and get their ideas down on paper. Calkins believes that it is necessary to teach students the conventions of writing, but that a beneficial approach to improve their syntax, spelling and penmanship is to “help them write often and with confidence” (p.290).

Hudelson (1989) also explains that although we can support, encourage and facilitate children’s writing development, we can not control it. When children determine that they are able, they will write (p.96). The growth pattern is different for every individual. Some of the ways in which teachers can facilitate children’s writing development include collaboration, conferencing, class discussion and modeling (Graves, 1983; Hedge, 1988).

Hudelson’s (1989) findings may lead one to question if, in general, L2 writers learn to write at the same rate as L1 writers, or if it is confusing for L2 writers to learn how to write. More specifically, is bilingualism a limitation in learning written language? Edelsky (1989) states that it is a myth to view bilingualism as a limitation in learning written language. Edelsky and Jilbert (1985) provide further evidence for this belief in their article based on Edelsky’s (1982) year-long examination of the in-class writing of grade one to three students in an English/Spanish bilingual program in the Southwest United States.
Edelsky and Jilbert found that the children in the study were acquiring two language systems without confusion. When writing in their second language (English), if the students did not know how to express themselves, they simply filled in the gaps using their knowledge of their first language (Spanish). As their knowledge of the second language developed, there were fewer gaps to fill, and the majority of the text was written in the second language.

Edelsky and Jilbert (1985) also believe that code-switching (switching between Spanish and English when writing), which occurred rarely in the children’s texts, did not illustrate an incompetence in both languages. Rather, bilingualism improved the children’s options for making meaning. Knowing a term in two languages often provided the students with additional synonyms, or opportunities to emphasize a message. Edelsky and Jilbert (1985) conclude that the writing samples they examined allowed them to more clearly understand the use and acquisition of writing. They claim that “writers of any ability are always invoking tacit knowledge and hypothesizing about some aspect of the system and its uses” (p.70).

In other literature regarding writing acquisition, there is specific reference to the relationship between second language proficiency and writing ability. Cumming (1989) claims that second-language proficiency does not affect the processes of composing. In fact, second-language proficiency and composing (ie. quality of written content, discourse organization) are two distinct
psychological abilities. Yet, although second language proficiency may not affect the thinking processes used for writing, it does lead to the production of more effective texts.

Furthermore, Fagan and Eagan (1990) conducted a study about the writing skills of grade three French immersion students. They found that there is a transfer of processing behaviour across languages, but that how the transfer occurs is not clear. Similarly, Krapels (1990) states that one’s first language writing process transfers to, or is reflected in one’s second language writing process. Therefore, if a writer is a skilled composer in his/her L1, it is likely the writer will be a skilled composer in his/her L2.

However, if one examines the cultural composition of students in a North York French immersion classroom, it is likely that aside from L2 learners, there will also be L3 (third language) learners. These are students who are learning French as a third language (in addition to their native/heritage language and English). Studies cited earlier in this section claim that children can acquire two language systems without confusion. One may question whether this claim can be applied to students learning a third language. A study by Swain, Lapkin, Rowen and Hart (1990) states that if students are literate in their mother tongue, the first language literacy actually enhances third language learning by contributing to a generalized higher level of proficiency in the third language.
Even if being an L2 or L3 writer does not affect the processes of composing, or hamper writing development, it still seems likely that learning to write in a language that one can not yet speak fluently must be more challenging than learning to write in one’s mother tongue. As well, despite the promising language growth of the immersion students described by Edelsky and Jilbert (1985), one can not assume that all immersion programs are the same, and will produce the same results.

In fact, there appear to be significant differences between the philosophy of the American immersion program described by Edelsky and Jilbert (1985) and the North York Board of Education French immersion program. The ESL literature I reviewed does not address whether the success of the process writing program is transferable to other immersion settings.

To illustrate, the American immersion program is “bilingual”, and emphasizes literacy in the students’ first language (Spanish) before second language literacy (English) is begun in grade three. The official program philosophy allows the child to choose which language to use for speaking, reading and writing. Therefore, samples collected from Edelsky’s (1982) study were written by the students in both Spanish and English.

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1 The North York Board became a part of the newly amalgamated Toronto District School Board in January 1998.
However, French immersion in North York is practically the reverse in philosophy. The program was introduced in North York schools in 1972. It is "unilingual" for the first three years of the program (senior kindergarten to grade 2); the L2 (French) is the only language spoken in the classroom. Formal L1 (English) instruction begins in grade three. Students and teachers are strongly discouraged from communicating in English (the L1 of most students and many teachers). Therefore, when learning how to write or speak in French, students are not encouraged to "fill in the gaps" with English. As well, they are not allowed to communicate in their L1 with their peers in the classroom, although they inevitably do out of necessity to communicate.

Moreover, as Tardif and Weber (1987) claim, the findings of different bilingual programs can not be automatically applied to French immersion because of other important differences between the programs. The setting in which minority Hispanic children learn the majority language (English) is quite different from the setting in which majority English speaking children learn the minority second language (French).

To expand on this last point, the French immersion classroom is an artificial setting. Outside of the classroom, the school and home environments are usually English speaking. Therefore, the French immersion student is not exposed to French language in an authentic environment of interaction with family and friends, shopping, and multimedia. Due to these reasons, I believe
that it is even more difficult for French immersion students to write during the early years of language acquisition. The students have not yet gained full command of their first language, yet they are thrust into writing in a new language that they can not speak. As noted earlier, Cumming (1989) states that being more proficient in the second language does improve the overall quality of the writing produced, as the writer can create more effective texts.

In spite of these additional hurdles, the students in my grade one French immersion class tried to overcome their French language deficiency with whatever strategies they had. When writing, they were often willing to take risks to use invented spelling, and to sound-out words. They tried to make meaning as they wrote. They drew pictures in place of, or to enhance text. However, their creativity and expressiveness were often stifled by the fact that they did not always have the French vocabulary to express themselves. Therefore, how could they write what they did not know how to say? Would a writing program that emphasizes elements of process writing be as effective and successful in a North York French immersion program as in the American bilingual program?

Pringle (1986) describes a phenomenon similar to my experience. She reports her observations of the development of written composition in French by her grade one and two anglophone French immersion students in Ottawa. Pringle believes that L2 writers are faced with challenges in addition to the ones faced by L1 writers. She observed that “the children in my French immersion
class certainly had the same desire to express themselves and to write and create, that has been documented in anglophone children learning how to write. However, ...this was severely restricted by the fact that they were learning to write as French immersion students. The result must have been an enormous feeling of frustration, far greater than anglophone children learning to write in English” (p.43).

It is encouraging to note that, notwithstanding the extra challenges faced by French immersion students, Pringle claims that her students seemed to enjoy writing. This was in spite of their limited French proficiency, which consequently made expressing themselves more difficult. Overall, she feels that her students made remarkable growth in writing. Her students were “constantly experimenting with language, forming hypotheses about how the written language works, and testing their hypotheses by putting them into effect” (p.44). These observations parallel my experience teaching French immersion, as well as the experiences of Edelsky and Jilbert (1985).
1.4 Comparison of the French and English writing skills of French immersion students

Thus far, I have established that there is much support for process writing programs in L1 and ESL classrooms. I have dispelled some of the myths regarding bilingualism and writing acquisition. In addition, I have described some of the challenges faced by French immersion students during the early years of oral language and writing acquisition. Finally, I have questioned whether process writing programs would be successful in French immersion settings. It is now appropriate to discuss in greater detail, what is known about French immersion students and writing on a larger scale. In this next section, I will address whether the additional challenges (in language acquisition) that French immersion students face, have an impact on their writing proficiency. More specifically, I will examine whether French immersion students write equivalently in both French and English. Several relevant studies will be reviewed in the pages to follow.

In her article, Hall (1993) cites studies on writing by Swain (1975) done with grade three French immersion students and Maguire (1987) done with grade five and six French immersion students. Based on these two studies, Hall concludes that French immersion pupils are able to write compositions in French equivalent to their English ones in terms of creativity, technical quality, coherence, and length, but that writing the same composition in French will take more time and effort.
A study carried out by Fagan and Eagan (1990) contradicts Hall's (1993) conclusions. Fagan and Eagan designed a study to assess the writing behaviour of French immersion students in French and English. Participants were twelve anglophone French immersion students in grade three, who for the last three years, received instruction only in French. The subjects wrote compositions about topics of their choice, in both French and English.

Fagan and Eagan (1990) observed the behaviour of the participants as they wrote, and then analyzed their compositions. Overall, the students wrote better in English than in French. Fagan and Eagan discovered that most of the differences that occurred across languages tended to occur during the transcription stage (composing and editing while transcribing). Transcription is the act or process of writing in full (i.e. re-writing notes/ideas as full sentences). When writing in English, the students wrote almost twice as much text, wrote more quickly, provided more cohesion within their texts, paused less frequently when writing, and actually made more changes in the text (p.166). According to Fagan and Eagan, the results, which showed differences between writing in French and English, suggest a greater writing fluency in English, although the students had not yet had any formal English writing instruction at school. Fagan and Eagan also discovered that when the students wrote in French, they would often pause to think of the French equivalent for an English word. They believe
this behaviour indicates that the students were composing in English during both compositions, which again reflects greater facility with English.

It is significant to note that when the children were questioned regarding audience awareness (if they would write the assignment differently for someone else), certain trends were apparent in relation to the language they wrote in (p. 160). When writing in French, few children could identify how they would adapt their writing for a different audience. When writing in English, students were able to describe several adaptations. This is probably best explained by the students' limited exposure to francophone audiences outside of the classroom. Fagan and Eagan claim that the importance of students having audience awareness and a sense of purpose when writing, is that a sense of audience and purpose can affect the students' motivation and writing.

Crawford (1984) reports on French immersion programs in North York. She summarizes a series of tests and written compositions assigned in the spring of 1983 and 1984 to students in grades two, four, six, eight and nine. Students' writing in English was compared to their writing in French. It was found that the English writing skills of immersion students in grade four did not differ significantly from those of students in the regular English classroom. However, there were differences between the French and English writing skills of immersion students. Despite being enrolled in a French language program, the French immersion students' English writing skills were superior to their French
writing skills. Grade four French compositions had fewer complex sentences and had fewer varieties of nouns and verbs. As well, the French compositions had a greater number of vocabulary errors, syntactic errors, and spelling errors. Grade eight French compositions were also of a poorer quality than the grade eight English compositions. They too, contained a greater proportion of vocabulary, syntax and spelling errors, as well as errors related to the use of adjectives, articles, prepositions, adverbs and pronouns.

Furthermore, the North York French immersion students completed three tests to assess their development of French language skills. The Modern Language Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education developed two of the tests for French immersion students. The French Comprehension Test (Barik, 1975) is a listening comprehension test that measures the students' understanding of oral French. The Test de Lecture (Barik, Swain & Schloss, 1979) is a reading test that measures comprehension and inferencing skills. On both of these tests, it was found that grade two pupils in North York were performing at a level comparable to students in immersion programs across Ontario. However, the North York French immersion students also completed a test developed for francophone children in Montreal. On the Test de Rendement, (a traditional, grammatically based test) the grade two pupils performed below the average obtained by the children on whom the test was normed (p.3).
The research presented in this section suggests that French immersion students do not write French compositions equivalent to their English ones. French compositions have a greater number of lexical and syntactical errors. As well, students do not demonstrate Francophone audience awareness.
1.5 Comparison of the writing of anglophone French immersion students and native French speakers

I have just reviewed several studies that compare the differences between the compositions of French immersion students in both French and English. Now I will investigate how the French writing skills of anglophone immersion students compare to the French writing skills of their francophone peers. Finally, I will establish if there is support for process writing in the French immersion literature.

Lapkin, Swain and Shapson (1990) state that French immersion high school graduates achieve native-like proficiency in the receptive skills of listening and reading comprehension, but they are lacking in the productive skills of speaking and writing. Lapkin (1984) shows that when writing, French immersion students are prone to gender and preposition errors, and use far more anglicisms than do francophones. In addition, Swain (1985) claims that grade six French immersion students’ oral grammatical performance is not equivalent to that of native French speakers. These findings are echoed throughout the French immersion literature (Clipperton, 1984; Harley & King, 1989; Swain, 1994).

Moreover, after reviewing several studies on writing and oral proficiency, Clipperton (1994) states that the L2 lexical knowledge of immersion students falls short of that of native speakers. Clipperton cites two studies carried out by
Vignola and Wesche (1991) and Wesche (1992), who discovered that the vocabulary scores in written compositions of anglophone graduates of francophone schools were higher than the scores of anglophone graduates of French immersion programs. In fact, the scores of anglophone graduates of francophone schools were not significantly different from those of native francophones.

Harley and King (1989) examined the lexical proficiency of French immersion students. They too, concluded that French immersion students are behind in lexical development in written compositions. They found that grade six native French speakers produced more text and verb types than French immersion students did in writing compositions. Native speakers also outperformed immersion students in lexical accuracy, richness and variety.

It is evident that French immersion students are somewhat lacking in their writing skills. Swain and Carroll (1987) state that traditional teaching methods have not eradicated the written errors of French immersion students when writing in French. One may question what is causing the lexical and grammatical deficiencies of French immersion students when speaking and writing in French? Swain (1985, 1994) provides insight into what she believes is causing oral and written deficiencies in French, and offers suggestions as to how educators can address the problem. She argues that immersion students do not demonstrate
native-speaker competence because they do not have enough opportunities for comprehensible output.

Swain (1985, 1994) posits the construct of comprehensible output to complement Krashen's (1981) notion of comprehensible input. Krashen believes that speaking emerges over time, and can not be taught. He views comprehensible input as sufficient for L2 learning to occur. Lyster (1990) restates the opinions of many researchers that comprehensible input, alone, is not a sufficient condition for L2 learning at school. What is missing in this language learning model is comprehensible output.

Swain (1994) claims that besides enhancing fluency, output has the potential for promoting syntactic accuracy in the target language. The functions of output are (a) noticing the gap between what one wants to say and what one is able to say; (b) hypothesis testing how a language works and testing it out; and (c) controlling and internalizing one's linguistic knowledge. By focussing on output in speaking or in writing, students may be required to confront themselves with what they know and do not know about their second language.

In sum, the importance of output is that it forces learners to process language with more mental effort than input. This is because with output, the learner is in control, as opposed to input where the teacher is in control (Swain,
Output requires learners to engage in complete grammatical processing needed for accurate production.

Some of the reasons for the lack of output experiences could be that no French is spoken or heard outside of the school, and that there are limited opportunities for L2 learners to converse or correspond with francophones. One merely needs to glance at a French immersion student’s language environment in order to see why there are minimal output experiences. Anglophone French immersion students simply do not have the same exposure to the target language (French) as anglophone students of francophone schools. French immersion classrooms are usually situated in English schools. Most students speak in English as soon as they leave the classroom threshold. As well, students speak an “interlanguage” (Swain & Lapkin, 1995) with their classmates and teacher in the classroom. This is contrary to anglophone students attending a francophone school, where there are considerably more interactions with native French speakers, both inside and outside of the classroom.

As well, teaching approaches in which teachers talk and students listen, are still prevalent. In the early grades, students develop strategies in which they can express themselves adequately given the circumstances; a situation where they are not “pushed” in their output to express themselves more appropriately or precisely (Swain, 1985; p.249). Therefore, teachers must provide many opportunities for extended and lengthy student talk and writing. As a facilitator of
language learning, it is crucial to ask open-ended questions and to plan enough open-ended writing activities. Writing tasks and oral questions of the “fill in the blank, write a one word answer, or copy the predictable pattern type”, will simply not “push” students to extend their output.

Additional strategies to improve the lexical base of French immersion students are recommended by Clipperton (1994). He promotes the explicit teaching of vocabulary, in which there is a greater emphasis on form, and the use of techniques where the students’ native lexicon serves as a foundation for new vocabulary learning. Clipperton also suggests that vocabulary be taught and reviewed in a multitude of contexts. The implication of Clipperton’s suggestions for immersion teachers is that there should be a focus on vocabulary learning both during and outside of the language arts period. Students should be encouraged to use new vocabulary in other activities and subjects. Vocabulary should be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Finally, Clipperton advocates vocabulary instruction within a communicative approach. The communicative approach to language teaching emphasizes student control of topic, sustained speech, focus on message vs. code, substantial content and contextualization of linguistic content (Hall, 1993). There is currently a lot of support in the literature for the communicative teaching approach in L2 classrooms. However, Lyster (1990) believes that while communicative strategies are crucial, they are not sufficient.
In addressing the weaknesses of French immersion students in grammatical and sociolinguistic competence, Lyster (1990) advocates a model for French immersion learning that integrates analytic and experiential (communicative) strategies with language and culture. Analytic features include a focus on the phonology, grammar and sociolinguistics of the L2, practice of language skills, attention to accuracy and diversity of social interaction. Experiential/communicative features include diversity of social interaction, student participation in purposeful activity, authentic topics, and a focus on meaning transfer and fluency.

In addition, Lyster calls for the development of a new French immersion curriculum. He feels that there is a lack of authentic teaching methods and materials designed for French immersion programs. In principle, immersion programs promote experiential language learning because the L2 is learned incidentally through the study of subjects in that language (p.163). However, the subject content in immersion classes has often been translated from English resources into French, and does not usually promote the use of French as an expression of cultural identity. This results in “functional bilingualism.” Immersion graduates know enough French to communicate and perhaps find employment, but they are lacking in cultural knowledge and native like proficiency (p.163). Lyster states that greater interaction with francophones is a
necessary component in overcoming the weaknesses in both grammatical and sociolinguistic competence.

Lyster (1990) supports a curriculum in which authentic communication is prevalent. Analytic teaching should stem from the students' language needs, and inaccuracies observed in their interlanguage. In sum, Lyster believes that analytic teaching would be most beneficial to L2 learning when "integrated into a truly communicative context, which continues to promote extensive language production through techniques such as co-operative learning activities and process writing" (p.172).
1.6 The process writing approach: A remedy for the writing problem?

If current teaching practices are not amended, French immersion students will continue to develop a scant lexical and grammatical base that is consequently transferred to their written composition. In light of the fact that there is a need for an improvement in immersion students’ writing, how can the aforementioned research and theories be translated into everyday practice?

There appears to be a lot of support for teaching methods like process writing to augment communicative opportunities in the classroom (Clipperton, 1994; Hall, 1993; Lapkin, Swain & Shapson, 1990; Lyster, 1990). Hall (1993) claims that the teaching of process writing techniques enhances writing skills and the quality of authentic and purposeful written texts, in addition to providing opportunities for communicative teaching as advocated by Clipperton (1994), (p.262). There is further support for Hall’s recommendation. Lapkin, Swain and Shapson (1990) advocate teaching approaches like process writing, group work and co-operative learning which encourage the use of expressive language and more varied vocabulary, or “comprehensible output” by students (p.652). This may help to extend their oral and written discourse, thereby minimizing lexical and grammatical deficiencies.
Lapkin, Swain and Shapson (1990) also claim that process writing, introduced at the early stages, is a "promising beginning." I believe that process writing programs yield fruitful results in a primary French immersion classroom because there is a lot of built-in support for the developing writer. To illustrate, a lot of importance is given to pre-writing activities (such as discussions, brainstorming lists, writing detailed charts and modeled group writing of texts). As well, considerable amounts of time are devoted to reflecting on and revising written texts, and conferencing/dialoguing with peers and teachers. These activities in combination with one another help set students up for success. Moreover, due to the nature of process writing programs, it is likely that many lexical and grammatical input/output experiences will be created because of the varied opportunities for verbal interaction.

However, as explained earlier, some strategies and principles used in second language programs must be tailored to meet the unique needs of French immersion programs. Hall (1993) provides several suggestions for implementing a process writing program in the elementary grades of French immersion (pp. 266-270). To begin, a great deal of time and attention should be given to pre-writing activities. Catalysts for writing could come from classroom experiences (since they occurred in the target language). French vocabulary and spelling should be addressed during this stage. Lists of theme-related words can be created. Students could read songs or poems and copy them out. These lists or songs could then be used to discuss phonetic rules or sentence structure.
During the writing stage, quality pieces should be written as a class together on big chart paper. Teachers should build on what the students know orally. Correctly spelled vocabulary should be visible and accessible. Posting word lists, charts and creating word walls (a classroom wall covered with commonly used words displayed in alphabetical order) will help to do this. It would be beneficial to provide the students with a personal dictionary, as they are valuable resources for recording words that are useful to them.

Furthermore, authentic French-speaking audiences should be found to provide purposeful contexts for writing. Penpals and correspondence with other French immersion or francophone classes are successful ways of achieving this goal. Students can write to French speaking government officials or other famous francophones. French language websites are an additional option for schools that have Internet access, as French immersion classrooms can find other classrooms to dialogue with.

To build on the point of writing letters, other literature sources provide support for this idea. Roen (1989) claims that personal letter writing is an appropriate beginning for elementary grade students, if they are eventually to learn how to write other forms of discourse. Roen describes letter writing as providing authentic, real purposes for real audiences. Johnson (1989) suggests that it is important for teachers to acknowledge children's social and academic
lives. By encouraging letter writing, and perhaps even setting up a “mailbox” postal system, collaboration and motivation for writing are fostered.

In the post-writing stage, teachers should focus more on editing. Students should be encouraged to check over their work, but it should not be expected that each draft be perfectly edited. Students could be encouraged to proofread their work for details that they have already learned. Then, each student could conference with the teacher regarding the written work. Ultimately, the teacher could correct remaining mistakes.

Snow (1987) supports Hall’s suggestions. In the Immersion teacher handbook, Snow advocates communicative immersion classrooms. She claims that immersion teachers must possess certain language and instructional strategies to teach the language effectively. For example, teachers must build review and repetition into their lessons, emphasize vocabulary development, model language, use visual aids, link new learning to what the students already know, diversify activities and integrate French culture into the curriculum. These strategies are all feasible within a process-oriented approach to teaching writing.
1.7 Support for process writing at the board level – Policy into practice

The former North York Board of Education, also advocates process writing. The principles of process writing are stated in many board documents regarding writing outcomes and philosophies. The *French immersion guideline: French in the primary division* (1981) states that “The teacher’s role is to encourage each child to write what he/she can by giving the children the possibility of communicating their own messages written at their own level of personal development. The teacher will propose collective as well as individual activities to the children; the aims of such activities being the improvement in mastery of the techniques of the written medium” (p.17).

In *Elementary writing guidelines* (1990) the North York board suggests that teachers establish writing programs which: encourage the expression of children’s meaningful experiences in their writing; provide opportunities for talk and clarifying ideas before writing; include activities that provide a genuine purpose and audience for writing; attend to conventions of writing but do not expect every piece of work to be revised or edited; provide opportunities for student-teacher conferencing (p. 9). It also lists the writing process as including stages of pre-writing, writing, revising, editing and sharing.
Further evidence for the board’s support of process writing is the recent purchase and implementation of a writing program for teachers across the board which uses the *First steps: Writing resource book* (1996b) and *First steps: Writing developmental continuum* (1996a) developed by teachers and professors in Australia. The philosophy behind the *First steps* writing program is based on the principles of the process writing approach.
Chapter 2
Design of the study

2.1 Research design

The study was designed as an action research descriptive case study. I assumed the role of participant-observer due to the fact that I was teaching the students, in addition to observing and collecting data. Assuming the role of participant-observer enabled me to examine the children's writing, attitudes and interactions holistically, as they naturally occurred, without much interference.

The purpose of a case study is to describe a case in its context or natural setting. Case studies are very useful and appropriate for studying issues such as learning and teaching strategies and attitudes about literacy. Johnson (1992) claims that the case study approach has been widely used to investigate writing processes in first and second language settings. A case study is appropriate for the present study because my research stems from a desire to remedy two things; my limited knowledge about writing instruction and an ensuing dissatisfaction with my pedagogical practice. I wanted to discover what I could do to improve my classroom practice, thereby helping the students. I also wanted to be able to share my findings with colleagues teaching the same grade, as there is a considerable void in the literature concerning writing instruction in primary French immersion classes.
2.2 Research setting

The study was carried out at a public school in North York, Ontario. The school houses students from junior kindergarten to grade six. It is a dual track school, where 53% of the students are enrolled in early French immersion and 47% are enrolled in English classes. Early French immersion is a program in which students receive instruction in all subjects in French, until the end of grade two. English instruction begins in grade three.

2.3 Participants in the study

The participants in this study were 17 grade one French immersion students. I taught these students. There were 8 girls and 9 boys. All of the students were born in Canada, and 11 were first generation Canadians. All students spoke English fluently. Six students had a first language other than English including Cantonese, Mandarin, Farsi, Romanian and Hindi, therefore French was their third language. I generally believe that literacy was valued in the homes of all of my students, but it is not known if the L3 (third language) students learned to understand literacy activities in their heritage language. Therefore, their heritage language might not be their language of initial literacy. While most of the children in my class were from middle to upper middle class families, a few were from low socio-economic families.
A letter was sent home requesting permission from parents for their child’s participation in the study (see Appendix A). To preserve anonymity and confidentiality, all names that appear in this study are pseudonyms.

2.4 Procedures

Structure of the writing instruction

Prior to implementing the process writing unit, my approach to teaching writing was quite different. Although some activities and lessons had elements of process writing (such as discussion, modeling, or brainstorming vocabulary and ideas), many did not. There was not as much time spent on effective pre-writing activities, and post-writing revision was not usually done. As well, the students were never given extended blocks of time to write quality texts. For the most part, students worked out of booklets, which I created to reflect the theme of the month. In these thematic booklets, the students drew pictures, filled in the blanks with thematic vocabulary and copied sentences from the board to supplement their illustrations. On occasion we would create class books about field trips, in which every student would contribute one page with a drawing and simple sentence. Every Monday, the students would record their weekend experiences in their journals. The only letter written by the students prior to the study was a letter to Santa in which they listed their desired Christmas gifts.
Now I will describe the essence of the pedagogical approach during the process writing study. The study was conducted over a six-week period during April and May, 1997. Students wrote letters twice a week. Every Monday they wrote a letter to a classmate or myself, recounting/retelling what they did during the weekend. As well, on another day each week, they wrote letters to different audiences such as students in the grade one class next door and to penpals from a local French immersion school. They also wrote letters to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and to a representative from Greenpeace.

All letter writing was preceded by a language lesson. Language lessons were taught two mornings per week and promoted vocabulary growth and the expression of ideas. Topics for the language lessons originated from (a) the ongoing monthly themes and curriculum units, which at the time of the study were "Canada Facts" and "Whales"; (b) from recounts/retelling of what the students did on their weekend; and (c) student generated ideas.

The language lessons included orally-based prewriting activities that lasted approximately twenty minutes. During this time there was a focus on ideas and content, with a variety of brainstorming, webbing, discussion, ordering, recalling, reading, listening and modeling strategies.

During the first language lesson of the process writing unit, I explained what a letter was and when a letter was the appropriate form of writing to use.
We examined the First steps (Raison, Rivalland et al., 1996b) model for writing which states that the "purpose and audience determines the form of text." For example, if the purpose of the writing is to communicate what one did on the weekend, and one wants to communicate that to a friend (audience), then the best form of text to meet the purpose would be a personal recount in the form of a letter.

Once the purpose, audience and form of text are determined, a framework/ graphic organizer can be designed. A framework consists of pre-labeled sections that can be filled with text. This facilitates the composition of the students' letters, because once ideas are generated, the students record their information in the appropriate section. Therefore, for the next language lesson, we examined a letter framework, and discussed how the text of a letter needed to be organised. I made the students aware of the proper beginning and ending for a letter (Cher and de). I explained how the introductory paragraph informs the reader of the nature of the letter, the main body is where the writer recounts past experiences and/or events, and the closing paragraph is where the writer communicates any additional information, and makes salutary remarks.

After the students developed a general understanding of what a letter was, I tried to challenge them in subsequent lessons by stating specific expectations for each letter. For example, I often required the students to incorporate specific
(target) vocabulary which related to the monthly theme into their letter. First, I would explain what the words meant, and I would model how to use the words properly in a sentence, both orally and in writing. The students would verbally repeat the modeled sentences. Then, the students and I would read aloud a passage that demonstrated correct use of the target vocabulary. Next, the students were asked to incorporate the target vocabulary orally in a sentence. Sometimes, letter writing was preceded by filling in a graphic organizer together with the class and then independently.

After these repetitive exercises, the students went back to their seats and began independent letter writing that lasted for a forty-minute block before recess. Most students did not finish during this time period and were given extended periods either in the afternoon or the next day to continue their work.

Every student was given a mailbox, made from a shoebox. All letter mail was sent and received via the mailboxes. When students wrote letters in their free time, they could choose to whom to send their letter. During language arts letter-writing, students picked a classmate's name out of a can to determine who they would write their letter to. Picking a name out of a can ensured fairness because every student would receive one letter during teacher directed activities, as opposed to some students receiving several letters and others receiving none.
Students were taught how to take a letter through the three stages of the writing process, which includes pre-writing, writing and post-writing. However, not all letters were subject to the post-writing stage, which has a focus on editing, teacher-student conferences, and teacher revision.

Teacher-student conferences were an integral part of the post-writing stage for my students. Conferencing provided the students with a private moment during which they could read me their letters and they seemed proud to share the results of their hard work. Conferencing also generated additional output experiences because as they read aloud, students were forced to recognize semantic, syntactic or lexical difficulties in their work. According to Swain (1994) output experiences will help French immersion students become more fluent and accurate writers.

Many letters only went through the pre-writing and writing stage because not every draft needs to be perfectly edited. During the writing stage, I emphasized to the students that the most important thing was the expression of ideas, and not perfect writing conventions. However, they were taught the value and importance of grammatical and syntactic accuracy, and all letters that were sent outside the school were subject to post-writing revision and editing. I also believe that the elements of each process writing stage are not “carved in stone”, and it is possible to adapt the activities as deemed necessary. For instance, I sometimes conferenced with students during the writing stage. The purpose was
not error correction, but to give the students an additional opportunity to read their writing aloud and to generate more ideas.

In addition to the letter writing sessions that focused on content and ideas, I also taught mini-lessons of approximately ten minutes in length, twice a week in the afternoon. The mini-lessons focused on a topic related to grammar, writing conventions, or spelling strategies. For example, during the first mini-lesson, I taught the students linking words (e.g. après, avant, hier, pendant, puis, mais, tout d’abord, etc.). The importance of linking words is that they provide the students with options for ordering and listing events, instead of always having to use the word “et.” During the second mini-lesson, I demonstrated how to write verbs in the past tense to help students recount or retell their past experiences. The third mini-lesson focused on what a sentence was, and how to mark the end of a sentence (i.e. period, question mark or exclamation mark). The ensuing mini-lessons explicitly reviewed the proper use of upper and lower case letters, appropriate spacing between letters and words, and the use of adjectives and adverbs to add detail and embellish ideas.

Finally, the students were taught specific strategies to use if they did not know how to write/spell certain words. These spelling strategies were especially important because I wanted the students to become more independent and resourceful writers. I wanted to change the way in which my students were entirely dependent on me to spell every unfamiliar word for them. The strategies
became an integral part of each student’s approach to writing. Students knew that before they could ask the teacher for help, they had to (1) try to decode/sound out the word; (2) look in their journal; (3) look in their personal dictionary; (4) check the word wall; (5) review the vocabulary lists in the classroom; (6) ask a friend.
2.5 Analysis of the data

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed. Data collection and analysis were achieved using several different instruments. In fact, Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) state that when a conclusion is supported by data collected from a number of different instruments, its validity is enhanced. Triangulation is the attempt to arrive at the same meaning by at least three different independent approaches. Triangulation helps to prevent relying on initial impressions, and corrects observer biases (Johnson, 1992; p.90).

Data analysis in case studies usually involves a continual process of looking for meaning by sorting reiteratively through the data (Johnson, 1992; p.91). In this study, I examined each source of data in an attempt to find significant changes or patterns in writing skills or attitudes. I tried to determine if the process writing approach impacted on writing results and attitude. The following sections will describe the data collection instruments and data analysis used in the study.

2.6 The scoring rubric

In order to assess any improvement in the students’ writing, two writing samples were collected and evaluated by an independent rater (a French immersion teacher teaching the same grade at my school) and myself using a descriptive scoring rubric (Appendix B). The descriptive rubric used to assess the
samples was adapted from two sources: the North York Board of Education’s (1995) *Literacy assessment profile: Primary writing outcomes* rubric, which was designed to assess fifteen specific writing skills according to three stages of writing acquisition, and Raison and Rivalland’s (1996a) *First Steps: Writing developmental continuum*.

The rubric used in this study was adapted to assess seven writing skills according to five stages of writing acquisition. The descriptive indicators for each writing skill correspond to a numerical rating scale from 1-5 representing the five stages of acquisition. Stage one represents beginning acquisition, stage 3 represents partial acquisition and stage 5 represents full acquisition of a writing skill. It is important to note that the descriptors for the five stages of acquisition are based upon the expectations for a grade one writing program. Therefore, the descriptors that constitute each stage of acquisition should be applied differently in other grade levels. The following writing skills were derived from the North York rubric: sequencing of text, use of print resources (students’ abilities to use word lists, charts, dictionaries etc to help formulate their text), complexity of vocabulary, punctuation, and use of upper and lower case letters. The following writing skills: using appropriate spacing and writing complete sentences, were selected from Raison and Rivalland (1996a).

The first writing sample was collected one week prior to beginning the letter writing unit, and the final sample was collected on the last day of the unit.
The two writing samples were first drafts written by the students. Both samples were letters written to a classmate in which students recounted what they did on the weekend. An attempt was made to establish consistent results by having a second rater (a colleague teaching the same French immersion grade) mark the same pre- and post-treatment writing samples using the rubric.

The writing samples were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. First, qualitative analysis was conducted by assessing the writing samples according to the descriptive indicators on the rubric, which corresponded to a number from one to five. Quantitative analysis involved taking each individual student’s pair of scores from the pre- and post-writing samples and completing a paired t-test, to determine if there were any significant gains in the sample group for each specific writing skill.

2.7 The attitude questionnaire

An attitude questionnaire (Appendix C) adapted from the North York Board of Education Literacy assessment profile reading attitude interview (1995) and Gagné’s (1994) writing attitude interview, was administered to each student twice. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions. To ensure test-retest reliability, an appropriate time interval should be chosen. Since Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) view stability of scores over a two-month period as sufficient, the attitude questionnaire was administered two weeks prior to beginning the letter
writing unit and eight weeks later at the end of the unit. Analysis of the questionnaire was qualitative and results from the pre and post questionnaire are presented on the following pages in tables and graphs. Moreover, answers were coded/categorized to see if there were patterns in behaviour or attitude across the group.

The questionnaire was administered orally in English to ensure that the students understood the questions clearly. Questions were grouped into two sections. The first section obtained background information on the students (eg. how often they wrote at home, or, if their parents participated in writing activities with them). The second section obtained data on attitudes toward writing, as well as how the children perceived themselves as writers. I attempted to determine how much the students enjoyed writing, what writing activities they liked, and what their feelings toward writing were. For 11 of the questions, students were given a choice of 3-4 predetermined answers. The remaining 5 questions were open-ended.

2.8 Anecdotal notes

Several times per week, I recorded anecdotal observations on individual students and the whole class. These provided me with an opportunity to reflect on events or patterns in writing growth that I saw evolving. I made a conscious effort to record factual, and "specific or concrete descriptive statements"
(Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996; p.125). Recording anecdotal notes gave me an outlet to reflect on my own teaching and approach and how they impacted on the students, both individually and as a whole group.

2.9 Performance checklist

A class checklist (Appendix D) was used daily to record student behaviours such as whether students used writing resources/aids, whether they asked to write, if they completed their work, if they chose writing as a free time activity, the frequency of students sending letters to each other, etc. These checklists helped form the basis of my reflection notes that I often wrote in the evening.
Chapter 3

Writing results

3.1 Introduction

Chapter three presents the results of the pre- and post-treatment writing results, as determined using a scoring rubric. A sample scoring rubric is provided in Appendix B. Pre- and post-treatment letter writing samples of a strong writer (student #12), an average writer (student #10) and a weak writer (student #11) are provided in Appendix F.

3.2 The scoring rubric

As explained in chapter two, the writing samples were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. First, qualitative analysis was conducted by assessing the writing samples according to the descriptive indicators on the rubric, which corresponded to a number from one to five, with 1 representing beginning acquisition, 3 representing partial acquisition and 5 representing full acquisition. Quantitative analysis involved taking each student’s pair of scores from the pre- and post-writing samples and completing a paired t-test to see if there were significant gains in any of the seven writing skills.
The statistical analyses were conducted on the writing samples that I marked, and not on the samples marked by the independent rater. The writing samples marked by the independent rater were essentially used as a tool of comparison, to ensure that my assessment was not biased or too divergent. It is important to note that in all of the writing samples marked, the independent rater and myself never had more than 2 different scores per rubric (out of a possible total of 7 scores), and of the differences scored, they were never more than one level of acquisition apart.

The paired t-test was conducted in the following way: For each writing objective on the scoring rubric, the difference between the pre- and post-scores was computed. This resulted in one observation (gain score) per person. The gain scores were totaled and divided by 17 (the number of students) to discover the mean. Next, the standard deviation was calculated. Then, the standard error of the mean was calculated. Finally, “f” was calculated by dividing the mean by the standard error of the mean. According to the critical value of f, significant gains were found in each of the seven categories of writing skills. The level of significance α (probability of concluding that an effect exists when in fact there is none) was maintained at .01 or .001 for all analyses.

Group results for each writing skill are displayed in Table 3-1. Individual student results for each writing skill are displayed in Tables 3-2 through 3-8, and are followed by explanation of results.
Table 3-1  Group results of writing skills from pre- to post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Skill</th>
<th>Pre-Test Mean</th>
<th>Post-Test Mean</th>
<th>Gain Score</th>
<th>t value</th>
<th>Level of Significance α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Sequence Ideas</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>17.68</td>
<td><em>p &lt; .001</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Print Resources</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td><em>p &lt; .001</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of Vocabulary</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td><em>p &lt; .001</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Sentences</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td><em>p &lt; .001</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td><em>p &lt; .001</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper and Lower Case Letters</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td><em>p &lt; .01</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spacing of Text</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td><em>p &lt; .01</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* Please note that for the writing skill descriptor *Ability to Sequence Ideas*, the interval between each level of acquisition is not necessarily equidistant.

*b* Please note that for the writing skill descriptor *Complexity of Vocabulary*, the interval between each level of acquisition is not necessarily equidistant.
3.3 Text organization, content and contextual understandings

Table 3-2 presents the individual scores of each student pre- and post-treatment in the category of sequencing content and ideas. Prior to teaching the writing unit, 16 students (94% of the class) scored at the beginning acquisition level. They did not yet demonstrate full sequence of recording a series of events. One student demonstrated partial acquisition, by making an attempt to include events in sequence, and by using the proper format for writing a letter. At the end of the study, 15 students (88%) had attained full acquisition. The remaining two students (12%) had attained levels of partial acquisition.

Table 3-2 Ability of students to sequence text content and ideas:
Pre- and post-scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Score</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Score</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-3 presents the individual pre- and post-scores of each student in the category of using print resources to compose text. Prior to teaching the unit, 35% of the class had already attained full acquisition in this category. Full acquisition means that a student can compose written text using print resources (such as charts, dictionaries, the word wall, etc.) in addition to at least 50%
personally written content (written text that is not copied). At the end of the unit, 88% had attained full acquisition.

Table 3-3  Use of print resources to compose text: Pre- and post-scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Score</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Score</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only students who had not attained full acquisition were three individuals who were in the beginning acquisition category prior to the study. They had attained partial acquisition of this skill by the end of the study, which was a considerable improvement for them. As illustrated in Table 3-3, the average growth per student was two points, or one level higher on the rubric.

This category of writing skill is particularly important. One of the main goals of the study was to get students to write more independently. I felt that because of the weak French verbal lexical base of the students, they were really limited in what they could write. To compound this problem, my students appeared to have a fear of putting anything on paper if they were not 100% sure it was spelled and/or expressed correctly. Therefore, when prior to the study, if
only 6 students out of a possible 17 could write independently, and that number grew to 14 students writing independently, that is very promising growth.

Table 3-4 presents the individual scores of each student pre- and post-treatment in the category of complexity of vocabulary. At the end of the study, all but one student had attained at least partial acquisition of this skill, meaning 16 students could use action verbs and common linking words such as _et_, and _mais_. Six students had attained full acquisition and could use adverbs and adjectives, and often used linking words.

**Table 3-4 Complexity of vocabulary in written text:**
**Pre- and post-scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-Score</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-Score</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-5 presents the pre- and post-scores of each student in the category of writing complete sentences of a variety of lengths. Before the treatment, only one student had attained full acquisition and could write 6 or more full sentences of varying sentence lengths, and only 2 students had attained partial acquisition. Therefore, 82% of the class was at the beginning acquisition level. At the end of the study, six students had attained full
acquisition and 3 more students attained partial acquisition. Just over half (53%) of the class could now compose a text with at least 4 complete sentences of varying lengths.

Table 3-5  Ability to write complete sentences of a variety of lengths: Pre- and post-scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Score</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Score</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While not every student showed growth in their ability to write complete sentences of a variety of lengths, it is evident that if the students are given a lot of opportunities to write, in substantial blocks of time, they will begin to compose longer and more complex texts. This is because they begin to take more risks and feel comfortable doing so. More importantly, although some teachers may want students to take the initiative to write more lengthy text and state minimum requirements (i.e. two pages), I believe the more important skill to focus on is the content and ideas in a composition, and not a predetermined length.
3.4 The conventions of writing

Table 3-6 presents the individual pre- and post-scores of each student's ability to use punctuation. In this category, students were assessed on how consistently and correctly they could use periods, commas, question marks and exclamation marks. At the end of the study, 94% (sixteen students) of the class had attained at least partial acquisition of this skill, compared to 47% before the study. Eight students (47%) had achieved full acquisition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
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<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Score</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Score</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I believe it is important for students at this grade level to be aware of commonly used punctuation marks in written text. According to Raison and Rivalland (1996a), children need to understand that punctuation is used to clarify meaning and to help the reader know how the writing is meant to sound when it is read aloud. The gains in this category suggest that by making students conscious of the different types of punctuation and their uses, they will make more of an attempt to incorporate punctuation into their compositions.
When explaining the uses for a period, I explained to the students that it means a “full stop” and that it marks the end of an idea or statement. When teaching the uses for a comma, I explained that it means a “pause” and that it is sometimes used to list information. Commas help to prevent having boring sentences containing the word ‘and’ too many times. For example, students would often write sentences in their journal such as: *Je suis allé au magasin avec ma mère et mon père et ma sœur et mon frère* (I went to the store with my mom and my dad and my sister and my brother). If the students used commas, the sentences could be rewritten as: *Je suis allé au magasin avec ma mère, mon père, ma sœur et mon frère* (I went to the store with my mom, dad, sister and brother). The students quickly understood the concept of using a comma, and made an effort to incorporate this knowledge into their writing. I found that the overabundant use of the word *et* was greatly diminished.

The students also learned when to use a question mark more easily than learning when to use an exclamation mark. However, while punctuation can be learned in a simplified form, I do not believe that the students can really understand it completely until they are much older.
Table 3-7 presents the individual scores of each student pre- and post-treatment in the category of writing upper and lower case letters consistently and correctly. This writing skill was included on the scoring rubric because I believe it is an important part of the conventions of writing. Even at a young age it is important to raise awareness that some letters need to be different than others. Children should know that a capital is always written for the first letter of a name, and at the beginning of each sentence, but that letters at the beginning of other words, or in the middle of a word, need to be lower case.

Table 3-7  

| Student Number | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
|----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Pre-Score      | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1  | 3  | 1  | 2  | 5  | 3  | 5  |    |
| Post-Score     | 5 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3  | 5  | 4  | 5  | 4  | 4  | 2  |    |

At the end of the study, 88% of the class had reached at least partial acquisition, with 35% reaching full acquisition. There is a possible explanation for why students #2, #15 and #17 did not improve. For the first writing sample collected, the majority of the text written by students #2, #15 and #17 was copied from classroom print resources. They wrote less personal content than other students in the class. However, for the final writing sample, these three students
were more independent and they were able to write an increased amount of personal content. Therefore, there was more opportunity for error.

Table 3-8 presents the pre- and post-scores of each student’s ability to space text. In this category, students were assessed on their ability to space letters and words correctly and consistently. Students were taught that there needs to be a “finger-sized” space between individual words, but not between the letters in a word.

Table 3-8 Ability to use appropriate spacing consistently and correctly: Pre- and post-scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Score</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Score</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the end of the study, 76% (14 students) had achieved full acquisition, whereas prior to the study only 35% (6 students) had achieved full acquisition. Once again, I believe that the negative difference in the gain scores of students #8 and #17 can be accounted for. These two students only copied from the board for the first writing sample collected. By the end of the treatment, they were writing more independently and therefore there was more opportunity to make errors.
3.5 Summary of results

According to the critical value of $t$, significant gains were found in each of the seven categories of writing skills. The level of significance $\alpha$ (probability of concluding that an effect exists when in fact there is none) was maintained at .01 or .001 for all analyses. The writing skills which were most sensitive to the instruction were the students' ability to write a sequenced and coherent letter, their ability to use punctuation appropriately, and their ability to incorporate both print resources and personally written content into a text. The writing skill that was least sensitive to instruction was the students' ability to space letters and words.
Chapter 4

Attitude questionnaire results

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four presents the results of the pre- and post-study attitude questionnaires. A sample attitude questionnaire is provided in Appendix C. The pre- and post-study attitude questionnaires of a strong writer (student #12), an average writer (student #10) and a weak writer (student #11) are provided in Appendix F.

Qualitative analyses were used to analyze if there were changes in the students’ attitudes toward writing. Several changes and trends were noted in the children’s attitudes toward writing and in their perception of themselves as writers. The questionnaire consisted of sixteen questions. For eleven questions, the answers were structured and students had to choose one answer from three or four possible choices. The remaining five questions were open-ended. Tables 4-1 to 4-7 presented in this chapter display the results of the pre- and post-treatment attitude questionnaire for the eleven questions with structured responses. The remaining five open ended questions have been analysed and will be discussed in this section as well.
4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Section I of the attitude questionnaire

The purpose of Section I was to discover background information about the children. Section I was comprised of three questions. I wanted to learn (a) how many children were writing independently at home, (b) how much parental involvement the children experienced in learning how to write, and (c) if the students ever wrote letters to their friends and family. These results are listed in table 4-1.

Table 4-1 Student literacy experiences at home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pre-Study</th>
<th>Post-Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you do writing by yourself at home?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do your parents teach you writing at home?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you write letters to your friends &amp; family?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the post-study questionnaire, an increase was noted in all three areas. More children were writing independently at home, more parents were “teaching” their children writing and more students were writing letters to their friends and family. I believe that these three areas are interrelated. Perhaps immersing
children in positive writing activities in the classroom can influence how children spend their time at home. If students feel more comfortable, capable and happy when writing in the classroom, they may also write at home. Children would not spend free time writing at home if it were not for a genuine interest in the activity. This trend can perhaps explain the increased number of parents teaching their children writing at home. If more children are writing at home, and they need help or have questions, they will ask their parents for assistance. Therefore there are more opportunities for parents to “teach” their children writing.

Furthermore, there were an increased number of students who said they were writing letters to their friends or family. Sixteen students said they wrote letters either sometimes or always, compared to twelve students who did so before the unit. If more students are writing letters to their friends or family, that illustrates that more children are enjoying writing.
4.2.2 Section II of the attitude questionnaire

The purpose of Section II was to determine the children’s thoughts and feelings about writing. There were thirteen questions in Section II. Findings will be discussed and displayed in tables 4-2 to 4-7.

The children were asked whether they liked writing a lot, a little or not at all (see table 4-2). At the end of the study, 65% of the class liked writing a lot. This is a notable increase from the pre-study questionnaire where only 47% of the students reported liking writing a lot.

Table 4-2 Attitudes toward writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Pre-Study</th>
<th>Post-Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>A little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like writing?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like writing letters?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think writing is fun?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the unit, one student claimed he did not like writing at all, which was not surprising, as he was the weakest student in the class. This student was completely dependent on my assistance to read, write or speak French. However, at the end of the writing unit, this student claimed to like writing a lot,
which indicated an important change in attitude. I believe that his self-esteem was higher, because at the end of the unit, this student could write a very basic letter on his own, which was a considerable improvement. He could not write without teacher assistance or resources to copy from prior to the study. His newly acquired skills may have resulted in his liking writing a lot.

The students were asked if they liked writing letters to their family and friends a lot, a little or not at all (see Table 4-2). There was not much change in attitude in this area. The majority of the class said they liked writing letters a lot. Only one student changed his mind during the course of the study. He originally claimed not to like writing letters at all, and liked it a lot at the end of the study.

I also wanted to determine if the students thought writing was a lot of fun, a little fun, or not fun (see Table 4-2). On the pre-study questionnaire, eight students (47%) felt it was a lot of fun, seven students (41%) felt it was a little fun and two students (12%) felt it was not fun. Once again, there was a change in attitude on the post-study questionnaire. Fourteen students (82%) now claimed that writing was a lot of fun, three (18%) students felt it was a little fun and zero students claimed it was not fun.

Once it was established whether or not the students liked writing, I made an attempt to discover why they liked writing as much or as little as they did. In response to an open-ended question on the pre-study questionnaire, common
answers emerged. Five students cited the chance to improve and learn more about writing and reading. I felt it was most impressive and insightful for six-year-old children to realize and explain that writing could help them learn more about literacy. Three students (all of whom liked writing a lot) believed that writing was fun. Four students claimed they did not know why they felt the way they did.

There were a few complaints from three children who had indicated they liked writing a little. These complaints included: “writing is not too much fun”, sometimes it “hurts my fingers when you do it too much” and that “sometimes I get tired and I think I can’t do it.”

I noted a change in attitude on the post-study questionnaire as to why the students liked writing. At the end of the study, eight students felt that writing was fun. Four students claimed they could learn more. One student even said that when she was bored she could write some letters for the classroom mailboxes. Three students did not know why they liked writing.

Students were asked if they preferred writing in French or English (see Table 4-3). I assumed that more students would state a preference for writing in English because of their linguistic deficiencies in French. However, more students preferred writing in French. On the pre-study questionnaire, ten students (59%) preferred writing in French. On the post-study questionnaire, twelve students (71%) preferred writing in French.
Table 4-3 Language preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What language do you prefer writing in?</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-study</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Study</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although many students stated a preference for writing in French, I observed many students on a daily basis, writing in English during their free time in class (see Appendix E). This contradiction may be explained by the fact that all of the students speak English fluently, but do not yet speak French fluently. Since the nature of writing during free time periods is usually spontaneous and unstructured, students concern themselves with expression of ideas and social interaction, rather than finding French equivalents for English vocabulary. Or, while they enjoy and prefer the challenges of learning and writing in a new language, perhaps during free time they relax, and simply write what comes to them easily.

Question seven asked the students to explain their preference. Of the students who preferred writing in French, a common theme evolved. Students claimed they could learn more by writing in French because they already knew English. Interestingly, one student preferred French because it was similar to her
mother tongue of Romanian, making it easier to pronounce. Moreover, five students claimed spelling in French was easier than in English. Three students said French was more fun. All of the students who preferred English stated it was easier because they understood it better.

Table 4-4 Self-assessment of writing ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you think you are a good, okay or bad writer?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each student had to identify him/herself as a good writer, an okay writer or a bad writer (see table 4-4). The writing unit showed a positive influence on the children's perception of themselves. On the pre-study questionnaire, 41% (7 students) felt they were good writers, and 59% (10 students) felt they were okay writers. However, at the end of the writing unit, 59% (10 students) felt they were good writers, and 41% (7 students) felt they were okay writers. No students identified themselves as bad writers.

The distribution of answers for the self-assessment was interesting. I thought that the two weakest students in the class, who struggled with writing
assignments and always needed teacher assistance, would identify themselves as bad writers. However, neither student felt that he was a bad writer. As well, many of the strong writers classified themselves as okay writers, rather than good writers.

This made me aware that a student’s perception of his/her ability does not always parallel the teacher’s opinion of that student. Two explanations are possible. First, a weaker student usually receives more program modification, help and encouragement than the self-sufficient student does. The self-sufficient student, while also enjoying encouragement and positive feedback, may receive more constructive criticism about how to improve. Could the extra encouragement and support given to weak students foster a perception of success and competence, while the constructive criticism given to the stronger students lower their perception of their abilities?

An alternate and more plausible explanation could simply be that younger children have not yet developed a sense of what “good” work is. Therefore their perception of their ability is not accurate. It is important to know how children perceive themselves, because teachers can provide extra encouragement to those students with low self-esteem. However, it is also important to investigate the factors influencing a child’s perception of his/her abilities.
After the students assessed their writing ability, they were asked (question nine) how they knew that they were a good, okay or bad writer. Very clear trends emerged from the answers. The most common answer stated by more than half of the class was that the student knew he/she was a good or okay writer because someone told him/her. In seven of these cases, that person was a parent. In two cases, it was a sibling. These findings reaffirm the impact that praise from family members has on a young child. It is likely that praise from teachers may have the same positive impact.

The notion of a “self-fulfilling prophecy” is supported by these findings. Children who receive positive feedback and encouragement are more likely to be confident, believe in their abilities and have higher self-esteem. Children who do not receive much positive feedback or those who receive only negative feedback will most likely think poorly of themselves and may not believe they are capable of achieving success.

The second most common answer given for question nine was that being a good or “okay” writer meant that the student did not make “too many” mistakes. Seven students gave this answer. This highlights that students believe that good writing means text without mistakes, as opposed to text that is rich in content. I believe that parents and teachers are responsible for this belief. When students begin writing, we are overly concerned with neatness and spelling, rather than the expression of ideas, or the purpose and authenticity of the written task. This
results in students developing “pencil paralysis.” Students become so obsessed with spelling words correctly, that they are actually frightened to write a word if they are not completely sure it is spelled correctly. Consequently, children produce short, boring, “sterile” text instead of rich, varied and interesting written work.

Other answers given for question nine included: writing fast, writing neatly, and writing a lot. Eight students did not know why they were good/okay writers. Two students gave an answer that illustrated their understanding of the basics of writing. They stated that they “sounded out” words, and therefore they spelled more words correctly and they learned more.

Students were asked to indicate their favourite writing activity (see Table 4-5). Within the classroom context, stories were classified as narrative pieces written by the students. Journal writing occurred weekly on Monday mornings, and involved students recording their weekend experiences. Making cards, (for birthdays, holidays, etc.), was a regular classroom activity. Writing letters was something the students did not do regularly in class prior to the study.
Table 4-5  Favourite writing activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Cards</th>
<th>Letters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Study</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Study</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The shift in answers between the pre- and post-study questionnaire gave evidence of the positive impact that the writing unit had on the students. Prior to the letter writing unit, just over half the class (9 students) preferred creating cards (holiday/birthday). The next most popular activity was story writing, followed by writing letters and finally, journal writing.

On the post-study questionnaire, seven children selected writing letters and an additional seven children selected creating cards, making both the most preferred writing activities. Three children chose story writing as their preferred activity. No children chose journal writing as their preferred activity. This is further evidence of the positive impact that the letter writing unit had on the students. It is interesting to note though, that during the unit, the majority of letters written were in the form of recount. Yet, journal writing is a type of recount as well. However, one is viewed as more favourable than the other by the students.
Why is this so? Perhaps because writing letters is more authentic. There is a purpose and an audience. In addition, there is the bonus that the recipient of the letter will acknowledge you by sending back a reply. The nature of the weekly journal writing was recount, which at times could be boring and redundant. These journals were not a vehicle for dialogue between teacher and student.

The students were asked which emotion they felt when they were writing (see Table 4-6). There were four answer choices: happy, angry, bored or frustrated. On the pre-study questionnaire, 16 students claimed that they felt happy and one student claimed that he felt bored. On the post-study questionnaire, the entire class said that they felt happy when they wrote.

Table 4-6  Emotions elicited by writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you feel when you write?</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Angry</th>
<th>Bored</th>
<th>Frustrated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Study</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-study</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The students were asked whether they thought writing was very hard, a little hard or easy (see Table 4-7). There was minimal attitude change evident in this question. Prior to the study, zero students thought writing was very hard, thirteen students thought writing was a little hard and four students thought writing was easy. At the end of the study, zero students thought writing was very hard, twelve students thought writing was a little hard and five students thought writing was easy.

**Table 4-7  Perceived degree of difficulty**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Hard</th>
<th>A little hard</th>
<th>Easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Study</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-study</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One thing I attempted to discover was whether it would be the strong writers who claimed that writing was easy. This was not so. Only two of the stronger students in the class claimed that writing was easy. The other students were of weak or average ability. I also observed a shift in opinion. Of the initial four students who claimed that writing was easy, only two maintained the same opinion after the study. However, the two students who maintained the same
opinion were both strong writers. On the post-study questionnaire, the additional three students who felt that writing was easy were very weak writers.

I believe these data suggest that even though students may enjoy writing or feel that it is fun, most of them still consider it to be a challenging task. As well, it is interesting that once again, there appears to be no consistent or obvious relationship between a student’s actual ability and the way in which he/she judges him/herself or the academic task at hand. If this were so, all of the strong writers in the class would have viewed writing to be an easy task.

The two final questions on the attitude questionnaire probed when writing was hard and when writing was easy for the students. On the pre-study questionnaire, many students claimed writing was hard when they could not spell words. Answers that indicated this difficulty included: “when I have a lot of words that I don’t know; when I can’t do the word; when you don’t know the exactly right letters; when I try to spell words; in our journal it’s hard to spell it on our own; when I write hard words I’m a little mixed up.” Other explanations for when writing was hard included: “when people talk a lot (I suppose it can be distracting.); when my mom does not help me; when I write the letter Q and K; when I write the letter G; when I write long sentences.” Two students did not know when it was hard.
On the post-study questionnaire, similar answers were recorded. Some answers included: “when I can't spell the words; when we have to write by ourselves; when there are confusing words; when I have to write a lot; when I write long words and I can not spell them; when I write words that are not spelled the way they sound; when I get to the hard parts; when I can’t remember what to write next.” Overall, a common theme is evident. Writing is hard when students have to write a lot and when they can not remember, or do not know how to spell the words they wish to communicate.

When students were asked on the pre-study questionnaire when writing was easy, certain common answers emerged, including: “when I know the words; when I get it right; when I remember the words better; when I write easy/short words; when I write a little bit of words.” Other common answers were that writing was easy when a parent or teacher helped the student.

On the post-study questionnaire, students claimed writing was easy when: “the teacher writes the words on a paper; when I can spell the words; when I don’t get mixed up; when I write short/little words.” Once again, the common theme is that writing is easy when students know how to spell the words and when the words or quantity of writing is small. Other answers included: “when I sound it out and then it is easy; when I write a letter to someone; when I write my name and when I do French writing.” I believe that these three answers resulted from the impact of the letter writing unit.
4.3 Summary of results

At the end of the study, an increase was noted in the number of children writing independently at home, the number of parents teaching their children writing at home, and the number of children who claimed to write letters to friends and family. The post-study attitude questionnaire also revealed an improvement in the children's attitudes toward writing. A greater number of students claimed to like writing a lot and a greater number of students thought writing was a lot of fun. Furthermore, the entire class claimed that they felt happy when they wrote, and there was an increase in the number of children who perceived themselves as good writers. Finally, more children claimed to like letter writing a lot, and stated that letter writing was their favourite activity on the post-study questionnaire.
Chapter 5
Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the main research questions are reviewed in light of the results of this study. Overall, the findings of the present study support process writing programs in French immersion education in early grades.

5.2 Letter writing skills

Many researchers have noted the need for teaching practices like process writing as an effective way to improve students' writing skills, because process writing encourages the use of expressive language and more varied vocabulary, (comprehensible output) by students (Clipperton, 1994; Hall, 1993; Lapkin, Swain & Shapson, 1990; Lyster, 1990). The findings in the present study support the claim that process writing is an effective instructional approach that improves student writing skills, even in grade one.

First, this study confirms Hall's (1993) claim that a great deal of time should be given to prewriting activities. During the present study, every writing activity was preceded by a prewriting activity. Prewriting activities include
discussion, brainstorming, modeled writing, shared writing, analysing text forms in written context, webbing, recalling, guided reading and shared reading.

In each prewriting session, I would focus on one writing skill, convention, or strategy and engage the students in appropriate interaction to teach that learning goal. The benefit of spending time on prewriting activities is evident in several findings. The students improved their ability to use punctuation properly, sequence text content and ideas, to use upper or lower case letters appropriately, and to space letters and words correctly.

As well, the findings of this study support Clipperton's (1994) belief that there needs to be an explicit teaching of vocabulary if students are to improve their lexical base. I spent a lot of time developing vocabulary in the pre-writing sessions. As well, to facilitate vocabulary acquisition and to help bridge the gap between the students' French and English lexical base, vocabulary was displayed on word walls, word lists, charts, and in personal dictionaries. Consequently, the students were able to acquire and incorporate more complex vocabulary into their written assignments. Fifty-three per cent of the students attained at least partial acquisition of vocabulary and could use action verbs and common linking words. Thirty-five per cent of the class attained full acquisition of this writing skill and could write using adjectives, adverbs, action verbs and linking words.
Furthermore, lengthy and frequent blocks of time were planned for writing every day. Students need time if they are to compose quality writing and take their writing through the different stages of the writing process. If teachers only allot short unconnected blocks of time in which students are to compose text, they will write short unconnected pieces. As a result, the students in the study were able to compose longer text that consisted of at least 4 complete sentences. This finding confirms the claim made by researchers (Graves, 1983; Hedge, 1988; and Hall, 1993) that students must be given a lot of time in class for authentic, meaningful writing.

5.3 Attitudes toward writing

At the end of the present study, the children's attitudes toward writing were more positive. First, the majority of the class claimed to like writing a lot. Additionally, 82% of the class felt that writing was a lot of fun, compared to only 47% of the class on the pre-study questionnaire. These findings confirm claims made by Graves (1983), Monteith (1991) and Zamel (1982), that process writing programs facilitate writing and result in meaningful, positive experiences for writers.

The students in my study placed an emphasis on thinking and learning from mistakes, and more than half of the class considered themselves to be good writers. Every student stated that they felt happy about writing. These findings
are similar to Monteith's (1991) discoveries about the attitudes of children in process writing classrooms.

As other process writing researchers suggest, teachers should help students to write often and with confidence (Calkins, 1994; Hudelson, 1989). The impact of providing students with positive feedback and encouragement was reflected when over one half of my students stated that they knew they were either good or okay writers because "someone told them." This finding that encouragement is crucial because if we believe in our students' abilities to succeed, and instill that faith in them, they will feel confident about themselves. Moreover, when students feel confident and secure, they will take risks.

The findings of the attitude questionnaire confirm Hedge's (1988) belief that there needs to be a shift away from error correction. Several students cited "not making too many mistakes" as a characteristic of being a good writer. While not negating the importance of writing conventions, one must question which is more important. Is it written text that is rich in content, but is not written with the greatest attention to conventions? Or is a text that is short and uninteresting, but perfectly written?

It is crucial to emphasize to students that the most important thing about writing is the ability to effectively communicate one's ideas. As Clipperton (1994) states, educators need to teach language using a communicative approach that
focuses on message vs. code and substantial content. Editing text for writing conventions should be done after students have communicated their ideas in the first draft.

Lyster (1990) states that interaction with francophones is a necessary component in overcoming weaknesses in both grammatical and sociolinguistic competence. When there are limited opportunities for verbal interaction with francophones, teachers should try to maximize written discourse experiences. One way to accomplish this is through letter writing and pen pal correspondence with francophones. An additional advantage of letter writing is that it provides authentic, real purposes for real audiences (Hall, 1993; Roen, 1989). When authentic French-speaking audiences are found (i.e., penpals at another French school, government ministries and officials, or bilingual organizations), students have more opportunities to engage in comprehensible output, and extend their written discourse.

Moreover, the results of this study support the suggestion made by Johnson (1989) that letter writing fosters collaboration and motivates the students to write. The effects of encouraging letter writing and setting up a "mailbox" postal system in the classroom were clear; there were positive changes in the students' opinions and behaviour. After the study, the entire class claimed to like writing letters a lot. As well, 94% of the class claimed to write letters to
their friends or family and 41% said that letter writing was their favourite writing activity.

Additionally, the way in which the students chose to spend their free time changed considerably. Prior to the study, not one student would write during free-time periods. During and after the study, a minimum of one quarter of the students were observed writing letters and stories during their free time everyday (see Appendix E – May 8, 1997). As well, the entire class stated that they did writing at home by themselves.

On the attitude questionnaire, students were asked when writing was difficult. The majority of the class claimed writing was difficult when they could not spell words, when they had to spell independently, or when they did not know the French vocabulary for what they wanted to write. Students claimed writing was easy when the teacher wrote words on a paper, and when they could spell the words. This finding supports claims made by Hall (1993) and Snow (1987) that when teaching vocabulary, correctly spelled vocabulary should be visible, accessible and reviewed on an ongoing basis. Teachers must be aware of the importance and necessity of having visual and writing aids available for the students’ use.
5.4 Additional teacher-researcher discoveries

Teacher research is sometimes called action research in the field of L2 acquisition and teaching. According to Johnson and Chen (1992) action research is an effective way to bridge the gaps between theory and practice and contribute to knowledge. Through daily interaction with students, teachers have first-hand information about their struggles and progress in learning and using a language (p.218). Moreover, Johnson and Chen state that teacher involvement in research has numerous positive outcomes. Teachers who inquire, reflect and improve their teaching, grow in their personal professionalism. Classroom improvements can be extended school wide. Finally, when teacher-researchers share their discoveries through workshops, articles, books or conferences, other educators can benefit.

I too, believe that it is beneficial for teacher-researchers to share their discoveries. In this section, I will discuss additional knowledge that I gained from reflecting on my daily observations and experiences during the process writing study.

Early on in the study, I realized that the most successful lessons I taught were well planned in advance, had one simple objective, and were not too long in length. My grade one students could not focus once a lesson extended beyond twenty minutes. It is also important to assign a task that is manageable in size
and scope. If a certain writing task involves a lot of procedural information, it is necessary to divide the instructions in two parts. After the students complete part of the task, they can receive the rest of the instructions. As well, the time of day that a lesson is delivered is crucial. Teaching something new forty-five minutes before the bell rings at the end of the day is simply going to be counter-productive.

Similar to Pringle's (1986) action-research discoveries, I noticed a slow but distinct transformation as my students changed from non-writers to writers. I observed some of the growth when the students wrote during their free time, and sent letters to each other via the mailboxes. To illustrate, during the early stages of the study, drawing was a very important part of communication for the students. All of the "letters" written by the students during free time were pictures. I now believe that if drawing pictures in their letters helps the children to communicate their ideas, there is nothing wrong with that. However, after a week of intense writing lessons and blocks of time spent writing, I started to notice one or two words written in addition to the pictures. Eleven days later, students started writing one or two simple sentences in their letters. Two weeks later, several students starting writing more substantial compositions such as narrative stories and books with endless lists of things such as telephone numbers, names of friends, types of animals, etc. Some students even started using the computer to write stories with special graphics software that had remained untouched until that point. In spite of the fact that several students
continued to write in English rather than French during their free-time, I did see a growing number of students begin to take more risks with French writing.

Simultaneously, during the teacher-directed work periods, I observed further growth in the students’ independent writing capabilities. Initially, when writing structured letters, many students only copied phrases from the visual aids in the classroom. After a short while, they started using the visual aids as a point of reference, and their letters were a combination of copied phrases and personally written content. It was as if they moved from a “copying only” stage, to a “glance, internalize and write” stage.

Furthermore, I became aware that a student’s perception of his/her ability does not always parallel the teacher’s opinion of that student. Some of the weak writers in my class identified themselves as good writers, and several of the strong writers identified themselves as average writers. It is possible that the extra encouragement and support given to the weak students may foster a perception of success and competence, while the constructive criticism given to the stronger students may lower their perception of their abilities. Another possibility is that some students are unable to reflect on, compare and assess their work in relation to the teacher’s expectations and the work of other classmates. Nevertheless, this finding illustrates that it is important for teachers to balance constructive criticism with praise, and reinforces the belief that praise and encouragement can impact positively on how students perceive themselves.
My observations taught me several things. First, as mentioned earlier, vocabulary lists must be visible and accessible. This will help children minimize their lexical deficiency, and provide them with the security of knowing they do not have to complete the writing task by themselves. It appears that as beginning L2 writers become more confident and secure, they will take more risks and rely less on the visual aids. Second, by viewing the children's writing during the initial stages of my study, I realized that young children copy text from the board exactly as it appears, including the amount of space between letters and words. Therefore, I began to make more of a conscious effort to model text on the board exactly as it should appear in their work. Third, it is more important to focus on content and ideas, rather than predetermined length requirements for writing activities (ie. the students must write a minimum of one page). This is because children may write meaningless text just to fill the page.

Finally, my observations reinforced the belief that if children are immersed in a literate environment with many opportunities to practice writing, if they have autonomy and choice in what they are writing, and if teachers make explicit the knowledge and skills needed to be a successful writer, these conditions will facilitate writing development (Calkins 1984; Graves, 1983). In fact, as I observed the students interacting with each other during structured writing periods, I noticed that they began to identify with and emulate skills and strategies that I taught them. For example, I often witnessed students helping
each other to locate a word on the word wall. I also heard students arguing about the use of proper spacing. These behaviours did not occur prior to the study.

5.5 Limitations of the study

As mentioned in chapter three, a control group could not be arranged. This is a possible limitation to the study since without a control group one can not be sure whether a student's improvement in writing or a change in attitude is due to the treatment or to other validity threats such as maturation.

Furthermore, validity of the attitude questionnaire may be questionable to some degree because some children may have been reluctant to give entirely honest answers in order to please me. As well, the maturity or mood of some students may also have affected how they answered the questions.
Chapter 6
Instructional implications

This study provides evidence that an approach to teaching writing that incorporates elements of process writing improves the letter writing skills of grade one French immersion students and impacts positively on student attitudes toward writing.

It is apparent from the analysis in this study that the writing necessitates several things, namely, encouragement, persistence, time, and problem solving. Teachers must plan appropriately, and provide positive feedback so that students feel confident and are motivated to work hard independently. Without encouragement and nurturing, students will not persist when writing is challenging for them. They will feel helpless and give up.

As well, teachers must provide students with frequent and lengthy opportunities to write. It can sometimes take a while for students to get on track. If writing periods are plagued by repeated interruptions, students may lose valuable ideas and work time.

Finally, students need to be taught strategies (i.e. what to do if they cannot spell a word, how to edit written work etc.) because students feel empowered when they are in control of their writing. The findings of this study provide
evidence that if grade one French immersion students are to become independent writers, teachers must create and post lists of thematic words and high frequency vocabulary. Students need to be taught how to use these lists and dictionaries. Without visual aids or strategies such as these, only a small percentage of the class will be able to write anything independently. The rest of the students will remain dependent on the teacher to do the translating and spelling for them.

This study suggests that students must be taught how to take a piece of writing through the writing process. During the prewriting stage, students need additional writing tools like graphic organizers/frameworks to help them record and classify information. Most students are not able to independently write a first draft without having completed prewriting activities.

Moreover, in order to prevent “pencil paralysis”, it is imperative that young students be reassured that it is acceptable to make mistakes on first drafts because the purpose of a first draft is to communicate ideas. However, students need to learn editing skills, including peer editing. The students should know that the importance of editing is that it enables their intended audience to read the text more easily.

This study suggests that teachers should build conferencing into the writing process. Conferencing is another effective way to facilitate comprehensible
output experiences. When a student reads his/her written text aloud to the teacher, that student is required to notice the gap between what he/she wants to communicate and what he/she is able to communicate. In addition to providing opportunities for output, conferencing enables the teacher to have a clear notion of each child's abilities and enables students to dialogue freely and receive feedback in privacy, out of earshot of other classmates. Privacy can be ensured by conferencing with students one at a time, and not permitting other classmates to wait in line while the conference is taking place.

Finally, this study illustrates how important it is for teachers to make writing fun for the children. When the children enjoy something, they spend time doing it. Things that make writing fun are planning authentic writing activities, which are purposeful and have a real audience. By extending opportunities for written and oral discourse through pen pals, co-operative games, group work, web site visits, etc., teachers are not only making writing fun, but they are simultaneously creating enriched and additional opportunities for comprehensible input and output.
References


Appendix A

Letter of Permission

March 16, 1997

Dear Parents,

I am presently working towards the attainment of my Master of Arts in Education at the University of Toronto. Part of the requirements for this degree is the completion of a Master’s thesis. For my thesis study, I am interested in learning how primary French immersion teachers can better help students acquire the skills and confidence needed to write successfully. The study will take place in the classroom for six weeks during April and May. As usual, the children will be learning vocabulary related to our theme. In addition, they will learn how to write a letter. We will write letters twice a week. I will be collecting several writing samples to look for growth in writing skills. As well, I will be conducting an attitude survey. The goal of the attitude survey is to see how the children feel about writing, and how they view themselves as writers.

This study has been approved by the North York Board of Education’s Research Review Committee and by our principal. When the study is complete, a report on the findings will be available to interested parents in the school library. This study does not diverge from the goals and outcomes of the regular language arts program. The only difference is that in addition to documenting information for report cards, I will also be thoroughly documenting the information for analysis in my study. Please note that your child’s work and responses will not be identified by name, and complete confidentiality is guaranteed. The school name will also be identified by a pseudonym.

To indicate whether you will allow your child to be included in the study, please complete the form attached to this letter and return it to me at school by Friday March 21. I sincerely appreciate your co-operation. If you would like to receive more information about the study, please contact me at school.

Thank you,

Caroline Dobkin
Please return by Friday March 21, 1997.

CHILD’S NAME_____________________________________________________

CHECK HERE

_____ I give permission for my child to participate in the thesis study conducted by C. Dobkin.

_____ I do NOT give permission for my child to participate in the thesis study conducted by C. Dobkin

Signature of parent/guardian _______________________________________

Date ________________________________
### Appendix B
#### The Scoring Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning Acquisition</th>
<th>Partial Acquisition</th>
<th>Full Acquisition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Organization, Content and Contextual Understandings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>does not yet demonstrate full sequence of recording a series of events; shows awareness of beginning and end, only copies print from environment; does not add any personally written content uses simple vocabulary to express ideas writes 1-2 simple sentences; sentences not necessarily complete</td>
<td>attempts to establish time, place and participants of recount and attempts to include events in sequence, includes format of Cher &amp; de mainly uses print resources in the classroom (charts, lists, modeled examples) in addition to minimal (25%) personally written content uses adverbs and adjectives and often uses linking words including (puis, après) able to write 4 complete sentences and a variety of sentence lengths</td>
<td>writes a sequenced letter coherently recording a series of events in chronological order uses print resources in addition to at least 50% personally written content uses adverbs and adjectives and often uses linking words including (puis, après) able to write 6 or more complete sentences of a variety of sentence lengths</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conventions of Writing**

uses periods, commas, question marks and exclamation marks with limited accuracy. (8 or more mistakes) uses upper and lower case letters with limited accuracy (8 or more mistakes) uses appropriate spacing with limited accuracy (8 or more mistakes) uses periods, commas question marks and exclamation marks with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes) uses upper and lower case letters with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes) uses appropriate spacing with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes) uses periods, commas question marks and exclamation marks consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes) uses upper and lower letters consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes) uses appropriate spacing consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)
Appendix C

Sample Attitude Questionnaire

Section I

1. Do you do writing by yourself at home? always, sometimes, never
2. Do your parents teach you writing at home? always, sometimes, never
3. Do you write letters to your friends or family? always, sometimes, never

Section II

4. Do you like writing? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
5. Why?
6. What language do you like writing better in, French or English?
7. Why?
8. Do you think you are a good writer, an okay writer or a bad writer?
9. How do you know that you are a ______ writer? (self-assessment question)
10. What is your favourite writing activity? (preference question)
    ie. Stories, journal, making cards, letters, etc.
11. Do you like to write letters to your friends and family? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
12. Do you think writing is a lot of fun, a little fun, or not fun? (attitude question)
13. When you write, do you feel happy, angry, bored or frustrated? (attitude question)
14. Do you think writing is very hard, a little hard or easy?
15. When is it hard?
16. When is it easy?
## Appendix D

### Performance Checklist

<table>
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<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Asks to write</th>
<th>Writes in free time</th>
<th>Writes Spontaneously</th>
<th>Perseveres/on task</th>
<th>Uses resources/aids</th>
<th>Collaborates</th>
<th>Wrote letter</th>
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Appendix E
Teacher reflections and perceptions

March 24, 1997

Today I started collecting data for my thesis study. I collected the pre-treatment writing sample for the unit. We have just returned from March break holidays, so I thought it would be a good opportunity to have the students write a letter. That is because they always write in their journal on Mondays about what they did on their weekend and they are familiar with the content (they know what is expected). All I said to the students is that I wanted them to write une lettre à Mlle. Dobkin (a letter to me). I repeated the “a Mlle. Dobkin” several times. I also gave them lined paper, which I will be using for all of the letter writing during this unit. I told them that they could include a picture if they wanted to. I tried not to lead them in any way. I did not explain what a letter was. Some students may have known what a letter was, others may have not known. I gave the class a good-sized writing block (amount of time) that day.

When verbally sharing in circle time what we did that weekend, I wrote down words that were not common, such as names of movies, sports or activities that the kids did over the break. I also wrote on the board the phrase “Pendant les vacances” as a starter, but not even all of the kids used it.

When marking samples with Lili, (my co-rater), we thoroughly discussed beforehand by looking at some samples anonymously how the criteria were to be
defined in order that we would mark the samples using the same criteria. For example, what exactly constitutes increasing vs. beginning accuracy in spacing, punctuation etc?

We feel that we achieved success in marking the samples because we understood the criteria, and after comparing marked samples, our assessment was quite similar. Often it was identical.

April 2, 1997

Today I officially began my letter writing unit. I began the unit by introducing the writing model from First steps. I adapted it so that letter writing had two parts: who the letter is for (audience) and why are we writing the letter (purpose). These two components determined the writing form (a letter): Audience + Purpose = Form. This was used as a frame of reference when writing our letters. I displayed a model on the board of a letter I wrote earlier to my friend (audience) that was a recount of my weekend and previous week at school (purpose). Points of emphasis for this very first lesson were how to properly begin and end a letter (date, Cher(e), de).

Then we wrote a letter to the vice principal together using the same format and topic. The lesson lasted 20 minutes. I had already organized mailboxes (made from shoeboxes) for each child. They were very excited about their personal mailboxes.
Each child drew a name from a can. The name would determine who each child was going to write to about the same topic (what they did on their weekend). I will introduce a new topic for the next lesson. I wanted to begin the unit and lesson with a topic that they are somewhat familiar with, so that they have some vocabulary with which to write.

The students appeared very excited about the whole activity. I was very pleased with how smoothly the lesson went. I suppose it was well planned out and not too long. Most students got right to work, but some were not sure how to begin. Some copied word for word what was on the board. Others were able to work quite independently. I stressed that if anyone had a lot of trouble writing words, they could start and end the letter with “Chef” and “de”, and they could instead draw a picture of what they did on their weekend. Chris chose this option.

The students were very excited about mailing their letters in the right box and kept asking me when they could read them. I said that they could read them tomorrow. Many students used their dictionaries to find words and I wrote several words in their dictionaries for them. However, I tried to encourage inventive spelling and told them that I would not be marking the samples.
April 4, 1997

Today's writing session did not go so well. Well, I suppose the lesson was fine, but I taught in the last ¼ of the day. I had no other time during the day and therefore did the activity from 2:30pm to 3:45pm on a Friday. What a big mistake! The students were exhausted. Naka even said to me: "Mlle, I can't do this. Je ne peux pas écrire. Je suis très fatigué!!" As much as the students tried to remain focused and on task, they were all too tired to think. As well, I did not really give them enough time to write the letter, only about 25 minutes. More than half of the students did not have enough time to finish writing their letter. They also had difficulty concentrating during the lesson.

For the lesson, I introduced that a letter has three parts: a beginning, a middle and an end. In the beginning, we write a salutation, and a general or brief statement about the reason/purpose of the letter (pour qui, pourquoi est-ce qu'on écrit la lettre). Then, we write the events in sequence (les événements) and then the ending (de ________, Écris-moi vite, etc.)

For the lesson, I gave them a photocopy of a letter I had written to my mom about my day at school. We divided my letter into three parts on chart paper. I then had the students divide the letter with a pencil at their tables. Next, we brainstormed and recorded on chart paper, activities we did in the morning and activities we did in the afternoon. Then the students were asked to write a letter to their mother or father about what they did at school. Some students
asked if they could copy my letter. I told them certain parts such as the salutation were okay to copy, but that I preferred that they wrote their own version. Some students still copied my letter anyway, which was fine if that was what they felt most comfortable doing.

Two students did not understand the purpose for writing the letter. It is worthy to note that two more advanced students asked me an interesting question. One student (Nazman) asked me how to write “cher” if the letter was addressed to both of her parents. She realized that if there was a masculin and feminin version, perhaps there was a plural version. Another student (Vani), asked me where to place the comma when the letter was addressed to both parents. Was it after both names, or just one of them? It is very neat to see the students experimenting with the conventions of the language and actually thinking these things through.

Several students asked me if they could draw on the front or back of the page as well. I said that they could. Personally, I feel that while I am trying to get them to write, drawing at this early stage in writing acquisition is a very important part of communicating for the students. Perhaps it helps to ease the transition from pure drawing to pure text. If drawing helps them to communicate their content, that is fine with me.
I asked the students to take their letters home to their parents. About five students responded “Mlle, my mother doesn’t know how to read French!” To this I responded “So read it to her.” “Oh” they said. It had not dawned on them.

I also wrote back to any students that had written me a letter. I could only reply to 4 of 6 letters because two students had not written “de ________”, so I did not know who the letter was from. I used the letters that were missing a closing statement as a lesson. The students to whom I wrote back were very excited. All day long, various students were checking the mailboxes to see if they received a letter. They appear to be very excited by this activity. I wonder how long it will take until it wears off!!

When the students left, I reminded them that they could write letters to their friends or to me during the weekend. Then they could mail the letters on Monday. We’ll see if any of them do.

April 8, 1997

Today we wrote a rough draft of a letter to Prime Minister Jean Chretien. This letter was an extension of our Canada Facts unit, and he was also a Francophone audience.
I started the lesson by asking the students what kinds of things they would like to write in a letter to the Prime Minister. I gave them some ideas. ie. My name is ______, I am 6 years old, I am in grade one etc. They also contributed some ideas. One student suggested that we ask him to write back to us. I wrote down her suggestion. I gave the students a framework for a letter, where they had to fill in some blanks. I also asked each child to include additional personal information such as whether they had siblings etc.

I am still finding it difficult to get the students to write a whole letter independently. I have realized that unless the letter relays information that they are very familiar with (such as what they did on their weekend), it is very hard for the students to write. They are simply lacking the French vocabulary to write about unfamiliar things.

The pre-writing activities, plus visible word lists and charts are absolutely crucial. The students still really need these aids at this point in time. Interestingly, some students use the charts as a point of reference or starting point. The evidence that this is happening, is that many of the phrases from the chart paper are written in their letters, but they are not only copying teacher phrases because the phrases will have words added or deleted. As well, there are many mistakes, which illustrates that these students are past the “copying only” stage, and are more into the “glance, internalize and write” stage.
I had the students write two drafts today. The first draft I corrected, and the second draft incorporated the revisions. Using the second draft, they will write a final copy tomorrow. I really tried to make it clear that I did not care about spelling mistakes on the first draft. The students should only be concerned with getting their ideas on paper.

One thing I learned today is that students will copy text from the board exactly as I have written it. Therefore, I have to be very careful of how I write and model things. It is very important that the model look perfect. For example, I had jotted down ideas of what could be written in their letters to the Prime Minister. I wrote one idea per line, and did not fill the whole line with text when I was writing. The students all copied me. They wrote the same amount of text per line, leaving half of each line empty.

Overall, I felt that today's activity and lesson were successful for the following reasons. First, I gave the students a manageable task in size and scope. It is important to pick one simple objective for each lesson. Second, I gave the students a lot of time to work on the writing task (100 minutes). They worked on it all morning, and some used another work period in the afternoon. Third, the students were excited by the purpose of the task, and felt happy about writing to the Prime Minister. I also showed them a newspaper clipping with a picture of the Prime Minister to help concretize the experience for them. The
letter was not pretend, it was authentic. The fact that it was authentic was reflected in their enthusiasm.

April 9, 1997

During today’s work period (in which the students finished the good copy of their letters), the class was very relaxed. Atmosphere makes a big difference. There was no noise because the class next door was in the gymnasium. Therefore, there were no distractions, and all students were on task.

Students can orally define a period, “point” in French. It goes at the end of a sentence. Ultimately though, they don’t really understand where to place it. How do you teach grade ones to put it at the end of an idea or statement? They write a period when they are copying my work, but if I ask them to write it on their own - can they do it appropriately every time?

April 10, 1997

Students are mostly sending pictures to each other, but all of the pictures have the Â____and De ________ letter format.
April 14, 1997

Vani wrote and photocopied a letter for every child in the class about what she did on her weekend.

April 15, 1997

I think that I have been trying to cover too many different objectives in each writing lesson. I’m finding it more effective to deliver 5-10 minute mini-lessons every afternoon to teach about various conventions of language such as grammar, spacing and punctuation. Then, during my morning lesson I can focus solely on the language/vocabulary, content/ideas, communicating and purpose of the letter or activity.

I started today’s activity by asking the students what they wanted to write a letter about, as opposed to me providing a topic for them.

Everyone was on task.

April 16, 1997

Cristin wrote 2 postcards while away on her trip to Cuba. One postcard was for the class, and one postcard was for me.

Interestingly, Vani wrote a storybook today but it was in English. Some kids also write on their pictures To_______ and From _________ instead of À____ and De _______. We speak to the students in French, and model writing in
French, but they still revert to English when speaking or writing. I suppose that this is a reminder of the influence of the anglophone environment that we live in.

April 17, 1997

Today's lesson stressed:
(1) Sounding out words.
(2) Content and ideas.

The lesson today was 20 minutes. The work period started at 9:50 to 10:10 and 10:35 to music at 11:20. Most students started finishing at around 11:00, which is about a 45-50 minute time frame.

I've been conferencing with the students. I believe that an advantage of conferencing is that when they read me what they have written, they are forced to recognize when their writing does not make sense, and a few students are starting to develop self-editing skills although on a basic level. It's also extra reading practice for them. All but two of the students were able to read their letter to me. Kenneth read ½ and Chris read one word. However, that was huge progress for them. I think that they feel proud about what they are accomplishing.

The word wall really helps and the students really use it. Although my focus today in the lesson was how to sound out words that you need to spell and, to
just write, it appears that the word wall helps because very few kids came to ask me how to spell words. As well, 9 children were using their dictionaries.

I noticed that during the work period two students were discussing and arguing about proper spacing and filling in the line.

April 18, 1997

Today there was an excited frenzy around the mailboxes. About 6 children were running back and forth dropping in letters and then checking to see if the receiver picked it up and then sending another one. Three students were giggling crazily, they were having so much fun. I noticed today that every letter that was mailed during free time was addressed to the person properly using “À” and “de”.

I’ve been getting a lot of remarks from students lately (2 complained today) who have written me a letter and have not yet received a response. Mlle., they say, “I wrote to you and you never wrote me a letter!” So I must quickly apologize! It’s just a little hard writing back to some many frequent writers. Of all the letters written in one day, the trend so far seems to be that ½ of the letters are sent to me and ½ are sent to classmates. Another student (Tom) complained that a classmate whom he had written to had not yet responded. I told him to go
and ask that classmate when they were going to write back. It’s really cute!
They actually care.

April 21, 1997

Several students continue to send me letters daily. Of course, their version of a letter often is simply a picture with “À Mlle Dobkin” “de ________.” Some go a step farther to write something simple like Je t’aime! One student (one of the weakest in the class) approached me and announced “Il y a une lettre pour toi.” Oui? I said, “De qui est la lettre? And he just shrugged his shoulders. So I went to check my box, and it was from him. It was quite heartwarming. This has happened before where they are so excited about the fact that they wrote me a letter, they can’t wait for me to open it and read it. They want an immediate reaction!

When I came in this morning, I checked the mailboxes. One student (Naka) had put her telephone number in another student’s box (Scott). The students are using the mailboxes to send all messages and notes and pictures now, rather than handing it to each other personally. They send “I love you” notes and “Tu es mon ami” notes and other nice things.

Four girls (Cristin, Vani, Jenny and Nazman) were all standing around excited and giggling, next to the mailboxes in their free time. They love watching
each other send and receive letters via the mailbox. They find it the funniest, most amazing thing when they try to sneak and put a note in a friend’s box when that friend is not looking, and then they wait and see if the friend notices. When the friend notices and runs to collect his/her mail, the sender squeals with delight.

One student (Jenny) who was very involved in the letter writing activity during her free time, and who had received several letters, patted her desk and said with a little jump in the air “J’ai toutes ces lettres!”

April 28, 1997

We discussed this morning what we did on the weekend. Instead of recording it in their journals like most weeks, I asked them to recount their weekend to a friend in letter format. The lesson was highly verbal. The focus of today’s lesson was to brainstorm strategies on what one can do when one can not spell a word. The students developed 7 strategies independently. They are:

1. décode
2. regarde dans ton journal
3. regarde dans ton dictionnaire
4. regarde le mur de mots
5. regarde les listes de vocabulaire
6. demande à ton ami(e)
7. demande à Mlle. Dobkin

decode
look in your journal
look in your dictionary
check the word wall
review the vocabulary lists
ask a friend
ask Mlle. Dobkin
I wrote "ask the teacher" last, as I wanted this strategy to be their last resort. A huge goal for me in this study was to make the students less dependent on me for writing words. I wanted to nurture independence and teach the students how to be more self-sufficient. I don’t want them to continue feeling paralyzed when writing because they can’t spell the words. I want them to feel more confident and less inadequate, so that they can write the best that they can initially to get their ideas on paper. Let’s worry about expressing oneself first. The corrections can come later.

As a result of today’s lesson, and what it produced, I observed a lot of students using the strategies. Only 3 students asked me how to spell a word and they had even brought their dictionary up to my desk with them. I guess they brought it up to my desk to show me that they had already looked and also so that I could write the word for them in their dictionary. I also noticed today that while the students were working, a few of them were helping each other to spell a word or to find a word at the word wall.

April 29, 1997

There was no lesson today. During free time, one student (Cristin) wrote a storybook in English again. Two other students (Marlee and Naka) made a phone book labeled in English. I suppose that in their free time they write what they know, and they either don’t think to - or don’t bother to ask for the translation
of the vocabulary. They write spontaneously in the language that is still their prime vehicle for communication. Another student though (Kenneth) is making an animal book, similar to a glossary, and he is labeling it all in French. He has even asked me for French vocabulary and how to spell it. Other words he has found on his own. It’s quite remarkable that one of the least proficient students in the class chose to create a French animal book.

I also observed Nazman creating a book titled My friends’ names, in which she is writing all of her friends names.

May 1, 1997

I have learned that it is important to have visual aids, with information and strategies. These should be visible to students to access at all times. Discussing points/information is obviously important, but I learned that the kids forget things, so if I write it out and hang it up, its always there to access. For instance, I hung up “WHAT TO DO WHEN I CAN’T SPELL A WORD”. It had 7 ideas/strategies written on it and the students really did use it- DAILY AND A LOT!!! When they would ask me how to spell a word, I would ask them if they had already tried the strategy chart. Often they would go back to it and we would go through the steps together.
After a while, it became routine that they would look and use the strategy chart and only resort to asking me (#7 on the chart) if they were really stuck. I also put up the framework for writing and for writing a letter so that they could refer to it. I also have reading strategies up if they can't read a word.

May 4 1997

I've noticed that the students are beginning to write real things. For example, they are writing storybooks, phone books, books titled “my friends” etc. This is a considerable change from my observations on April 10, when most students were creating drawings and April 21 when they only wrote one or two line messages. The storybooks are elaborate 5-10 page stories that are written mostly by Vani and Cristin, but Naka, Nazman and other students write the other things.

It's interesting that the students still write in English. When I asked Cristin why she was writing in English, if it was because she did not like French, she said no, it wasn’t that. She was writing it for her mom and her mom can not read French. So by doing it in English she will understand. I suppose that as for the other kids, when they are writing in their free time and that writing is spontaneous, they just write in what they are comfortable in and lets face it, English is their first language. Although they may have had more exposure to phonics and spelling patterns in French words, the majority of their vocabulary is
still English. Moreover, the minute they leave the classroom they enter an English environment. So maybe they still feel more comfortable writing in English.

This is the first week that the students were not involved in a frenzy of activity around the mailboxes and were not sending a lot of notes to each other every day. This could be a result of the class trip and my absence for two days last week. I wasn’t able to do any letter writing with them and then this week we did but we seem to be involved in so many other things with open house coming up. Could it be that the novelty is wearing off? I’ll watch this week to see if it continues.

I am getting a little tired of the unit. Writing letters twice a week is really pushing the students to their limit. Although I do not require the students to complete an edited draft for each letter, only for every second or third letter we write, it is still very time consuming. It still takes the entire morning, about two hours, to complete a first draft of a letter. I think that it is a lot of hard work for them. Although they are getting used to all of the writing, and there is no doubt that they are more comfortable with it, each letter still requires a lot of effort from each student.

I am seeing direct results though. Some students, such as Kenneth, who prior to this unit could not even write one or two words independently, are now
writing two sentences!! That is huge progress. That, to me, shows a lot of growth. But I suppose that is what writing is all about. Real writing anyway. Real writing takes time, effort, and thought. It is always much easier to just copy from the board. When the students are faced with having to compose a letter, they really have to think and problem solve.

One way that I try to challenge them, and attempt to incorporate my outcomes into their work, is by stating specific expectations for each letter. For example, “Everyone must use the following words – “puis” and “après” in today’s letter.” However, I always teach about the outcome first. I do this by discussing what the words mean, and then modeling how to use the words properly both orally and in writing. We will read together aloud, a passage that demonstrates the correct use of the word. Then I ask the students to use the words orally in a structured exercise where they must incorporate the new vocabulary into their sentences. Only after all of these exercises do they go back to their seats and begin independently writing.

It is always hard the first few times one tries something new. One thing I have learned is that practice makes perfect. Especially with young children, the first time they do something new, it is always hard. But the more that they are exposed to something, and the more that they do it, they feel increasingly comfortable and confident. This results in the eventual mastery of the task. It is
really important in teaching to provide many opportunities for students to practice, so that they can improve and hopefully master the task at hand.

For the most part, I think that the class is quite focused. With the exception of two students who are weak in language (Chris and Amarjit), they are all on task and do their work.

On my attitude checklist, when I check off if the students are spontaneous or not, what I use to judge this behaviour is whether they start writing a lot of text right away. All of the students begin by writing the proper form now (the date, Cher), but most of them need to think for a while. They need to contemplate the task, whereas a few students are able to just start writing. It would be interesting to analyze whether the students who delay writing text for several minutes, are planning and thinking about what they want to express, or whether the task is so difficult for them that they are simply not able to start writing so quickly.

One unfortunate thing is that we still have not received a letter back from the Prime Minister, the grade one class next door, or our penpals at Pearson Public School. I try explaining to the students that it takes time for people to reply to letters, but it seems that we have been doing a lot of writing lately. Yet, we are not getting any feedback.
I try to have the students write letters for an audience other than us, because only writing to each other can get boring. I want to make this unit exciting, challenging and realistic. I want the students to have the sense that an audience can be a multitude of individuals. Thus, we have been writing formally to a classmate once a week and some outside audience once a week. Picking names out of a bag seems to be successful. No one complains, and there is excitement in the air due to the anonymity of the activity. Everyone wonders whom he or she will get a letter from. Most importantly, is that no student will be left out — everyone receives a letter.

May 5, 1997

Today's letter writing activities seemed to go quickly. The students were quite independent. We followed the regular format:

(1) Circle time discussing what we did on the weekend.

(2) Incorporating specific vocabulary, which helps the students to sequence and put things in order so that they aren't just saying “et-et-et-et.” (ie. Je suis allé au parc et j'ai joué et je suis allé à McDonalds et ma soeur a acheté de nouveaux souliers.)

At this point in time, the letter writing recount on Monday mornings goes very smoothly. The students know what to do and are writing both greater quantity and quality.
May 6, 1997

There was no lesson today. We wrote stories about our whales, which we had made the day before with plasticene. The students chose the whale that they wanted to make. I felt that this was one of the most - if not the most, successful story writing I’ve done all year. The students wrote independently. Very few asked me for spelling help. I keep re-emphasizing that the rough copy is just for writing ideas and not to worry about mistakes. It seems to be working.

In reflecting on why I thought today's writing was so fruitful, it’s probably for a few reasons. First of all, and probably the main reason is that we’ve been studying whales for 4 weeks now, which includes 4 whale vocabulary spelling tests. We’ve really worked the vocabulary in sentences, glossaries, stories, songs etc. Therefore the students are familiar with it and can access it easily from their personal memory bank. Second, the students could pick the whale of their choice, and I’ve noticed that whenever I give them choice or autonomy, they just love it. Third, they had a concrete model of their whale in front of them on their desks to look at, describe and write about. This is why I think writing went so well today.
May 7, 1997

No letter writing today. We wrote a recount. Edward came to ask me if he could write the word “and/et” twice in his sentence. I asked him what context he wanted to use the words in. He explained that he wanted to write a sentence about his family (“my mom and dad and my brother”). This showed a clear understanding and an awareness of what I’ve been teaching.

May 8, 1997

The letters that the students are writing in their free time are beginning to have more content. They now have 1 or 2 line messages instead of only Cher and De. There is no doubt that more students are choosing writing as a free time activity. No student did before, whereas now 4 - 7 students are engaged in writing and drawing activities each free time period. In fact, certain students who never played with anything other than lego and blocks are even writing stories now during free time. There is no question that their writing ability overall has improved. As well, I still observe children excited and giggling when sending letters to friends during their free time.

During free time, some students are writing stories on the computer. They use “Story Writer” software with the program called My Own Stories. They create a picture and type a sentence to accompany it.
The other grade one French Immersion class finally wrote back to us today. The kids were so excited when they returned to class after lunch and discovered letters in their mailboxes. They were shouting and smiling and telling each person as they entered the classroom that there was a letter in their box.

The lesson today was a bit different. We wrote a letter to our mothers for Mother’s Day, which incorporated an acrostic poem, plus a thank you for all the things our moms do for us. They had to put it in order using the sequencing vocabulary (ie. Tout d’abord, en suite, de plus etc.). It went well although I had to call the group back to the carpet because I needed to clarify some things. As well, there was quite a bit that I wanted incorporated in the letter so I didn’t want to explain the 2-step process all at once. I’ve learned that overloading the students with information is detrimental to their production. So, I first explained the acrostic poem and then the thank you part of the letter. I think the kids did quite well, and most finished prior to our music period.

May 9, 1997

There was no lesson today. During free time, 11 students chose writing activities. Every time that a student put a letter in my mailbox, they would do so secretly (they would check to see that I wasn’t looking). Then they would come over and tell me “Mlle, there’s a lettre dans ta boîte."
May 12, 1997

Today was the last session of the study. The children wrote me a letter about what they did on the weekend. Once again, as the children were working, I observed the following behaviours. Several children would correct themselves. For example they would realize that they forgot to write the date, sign their name, or that they used a lower case letter when an upper case letter was required. Several students brought me their dictionary to confirm whether they had found the word they were looking for. That was a huge change from before when they just bring it up and ask where it was. Now they attempted to find it and usually did, but just wanted reassurance or confirmation.

Regardless, the kids need the vocabulary lists, word walls and personal dictionaries as a crutch and springboard. The way I see it, students only know a few of the words they wish to express (approximately 20%). If I can give them another 40% in the way of visual aids, they will feel more comfortable taking a risk with the remaining 40% that they do not know at all. However, if they are given no words or grammar structures, or visual aids, they are paralyzed. I find now that I have given them a solid foundation. Today, they can write so much more fluently and easily than 6 weeks ago. As well, the oral exercises, as the foundation of the lesson is really necessary to give them the catalyst for writing.
Overall, I am so happy with the results in this short-term study. I have learned so much about the students and from them, and I know that in return, they too, have learned a lot. I mean, to see a couple of students, who prior to this study could barely manage to write their name on a piece of paper, and can now write 2 words or a very short sentence that makes sense. Wow! That is so exciting. That is real results.

I think the best thing of all, aside from fostering more independence in all of the students by giving them the tools that they needed to progress from non-writers to beginning writers, is that I have learned how to be a more successful writing teacher. This is transferable from year to year and class to class. My way of teaching has been reformed and fine-tuned for the better I believe. For this I am grateful.
Appendix E

Student writing samples, scoring rubrics and attitude questionnaires:

Pre- and post-study

Pre-study Letter – A Weak Student (#11)

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<td><strong>Text Organization, Content and Contextual Understandings</strong></td>
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<td>does not yet demonstrate full sequence of recording a series of events; shows awareness of beginning and end,</td>
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<tr>
<td>only copies print from environment; does not add any personally written content</td>
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<td>uses simple vocabulary to express ideas</td>
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Pre-study Attitude Questionnaire – A Weak Student (#11)

Section I

4. Do you do writing by yourself at home? always, sometimes, never
5. Do your parents teach you writing at home? always, sometimes, never
6. Do you write letters to your friends or family? always, sometimes, never

Section II

4. Do you like writing? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
5. Why? _I don’t know why._
6. What language do you like writing better in, French or English?
7. Why? _I don’t know why._
8. Do you think you are a good writer, an okay writer or a bad writer?
9. How do you know that you are a good writer? (self-assessment question)
   _I write a lot._
10. What is your favourite writing activity? (preference question)
    ie. Stories, journal, making cards, letters, etc.
11. Do you like to write letters to your friends and family? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
12. Do you think writing is a lot of fun, a little fun, or not fun? (attitude question)
13. When you write, do you feel happy, angry, bored or frustrated? (attitude question)
14. Do you think writing is very hard, a little hard or easy?
15. When is it hard? _I don’t know when._
16. When is it easy? _At school._ _I don’t know why._
Chère Mlle. Darokin,

J'ai joué au fair après.

Je suis allé à le restaurant.

J'ai mangé les chicken fingers et les frites.

de


# Post-study Scoring Rubric - A Weak Student (#11)

<table>
<thead>
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## Text Organization, Content and Contextual Understandings
- **Beginning Acquisition**
  - does not yet demonstrate full sequence of recording a series of events; shows awareness of beginning and end.
  - only copies print from environment; does not add any personally written content
  - uses simple vocabulary to express ideas
  - writes 1-2 simple sentences; sentences not necessarily complete

- **Partial Acquisition**
  - attempts to establish time, place and participants of recount and attempts to include events in sequence, includes format of Cher & de
  - mainly uses print resources in the classroom (charts, lists, modelled examples) in addition to minimal (25%) personally written content
  - adds action verbs and common linking words (et, mais)
  - able to write 4 complete sentences and a variety of sentence lengths

- **Full Acquisition**
  - writes a sequenced letter coherently recording a series of events in chronological order
  - uses print resources in addition to at least 50% personally written content
  - uses adverbs and adjectives and often uses linking words including (puis, après)
  - able to write 6 or more complete sentences of a variety of sentence lengths

## Conventions of Writing
- **Beginning Acquisition**
  - uses periods, commas, question marks and exclamation marks with limited accuracy. (8 or more mistakes)
  - uses upper and lower case letters with limited accuracy (8 or more mistakes)
  - uses appropriate spacing with limited accuracy (8 or more mistakes)

- **Partial Acquisition**
  - uses periods, commas question marks and exclamation marks with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes)
  - uses upper and lower case letters with increasing accuracy correctly (4-5 mistakes)
  - uses appropriate spacing with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes)

- **Full Acquisition**
  - uses periods, commas question marks and exclamation marks consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)
  - uses upper and lower case letters consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)
  - uses appropriate spacing consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)
Post-study Attitude Questionnaire- A Weak Student (#11)

Section I

7. Do you do writing by yourself at home? always, sometimes, never
8. Do your parents teach you writing at home? always, sometimes, never
9. Do you write letters to your friends or family? always, sometimes, never

Section II

4. Do you like writing? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
6. What language do you like writing better in, French or English?
7. Why? It's easier to talk that way.
8. Do you think you are a good writer, an okay writer or a bad writer?
9. How do you know that you are a good writer? (self-assessment question)
   I write fast.
10. What is your favourite writing activity? (preference question)
    ie. Stories, journal, making cards, letters, etc.
11. Do you like to write letters to your friends and family? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
12. Do you think writing is a lot of fun, a little fun, or not fun? (attitude question)
13. When you write, do you feel happy, angry, bored or frustrated? (attitude question)
14. Do you think writing is very hard, a little hard or easy?
15. When is it hard? When you can’t see the words from that far.
16. When is it easy? I don’t know.
Pendant les vacances,
Je suis allée à la tour CN.
Je suis allée à la Spaghettili Frenède.

la tour CN

A. Mlle Dobkin Dates: MAR 1997
## Pre-study Scoring Rubric- An Average Student (#10)

<table>
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### Text Organization, Content and Contextual Understandings

- **Beginning Acquisition**: does not yet demonstrate full sequence of recording a series of events, shows awareness of beginning and end.
- **Partial Acquisition**: attempts to establish time, place and participants of recount and attempts to include events in sequence, includes format of Cher & de Cher.
- **Full Acquisition**: writes a sequenced letter coherently recording a series of events in chronological order.

- **Beginning Acquisition**: only copies print from environment; does not add any personally written content.
- **Partial Acquisition**: mainly uses print resources in the classroom (charts, lists, modeled examples) in addition to minimal (25%) personally written content.
- **Full Acquisition**: uses print resources in addition to at least 50% personally written content.

- **Beginning Acquisition**: uses simple vocabulary to express ideas.
- **Partial Acquisition**: adds action verbs and and common linking words (et, mais).
- **Full Acquisition**: uses adverbs and adjectives and often uses linking words including (puis, après).

- **Beginning Acquisition**: writes 1-2 simple sentences; sentences not necessarily complete.
- **Partial Acquisition**: able to write 4 complete sentences and a variety of sentence lengths.
- **Full Acquisition**: able to write 6 or more complete sentences of a variety of sentence lengths.

### Conventions of Writing

- **Beginning Acquisition**: uses periods, commas, question marks and exclamation marks with limited accuracy. (8 or more mistakes)
- **Partial Acquisition**: uses periods, commas question marks and exclamation marks with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes)
- **Full Acquisition**: uses periods, commas question marks and exclamation marks consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)

- **Beginning Acquisition**: uses upper and lower case letters with limited accuracy (8 or more mistakes)
- **Partial Acquisition**: uses upper and lower case letters with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes)
- **Full Acquisition**: uses upper and lower letters consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)

- **Beginning Acquisition**: uses appropriate spacing with limited accuracy (8 or more mistakes)
- **Partial Acquisition**: uses appropriate spacing with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes)
- **Full Acquisition**: uses appropriate spacing consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)
Pre-study Attitude Questionnaire - An Average Student (#10)

Section I

10. Do you do writing by yourself at home? always, sometimes, never
11. Do your parents teach you writing at home? always, sometimes, never
12. Do you write letters to your friends or family? always, sometimes, never

Section II

4. Do you like writing? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
5. Why? I don’t know.
6. What language do you like writing better in, French or English?
7. Why? I’m English and I don’t know French, so I know it (by writing in in) and
   so it’s fun.
8. Do you think you are a good writer, an okay writer or a bad writer?
9. How do you know that you are an okay writer? (self-assessment question)
   I know how to write.
10. What is your favourite writing activity? (preference question)
    ie. Stories, journal, making cards, letters, etc.
11. Do you like to write letters to your friends and family? a lot, a little or not at
    all (attitude question)
12. Do you think writing is a lot of fun, a little fun, or not fun? (attitude question)
13. When you write, do you feel happy, angry, bored or frustrated? (attitude
    question)
14. Do you think writing is very hard, a little hard or easy?
15. When is it hard? I don’t know.
16. When is it easy? I don’t know.
Chère Mlle. Dobkin,


De
### Post-study Scoring Rubric - An Average Student (#10)

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**Text Organization, Content and Contextual Understandings**

- **Beginning Acquisition**
  - does not yet demonstrate full sequence of recording a series of events; shows awareness of beginning and end.
  - only copies print from environment; does not add any personally written content
  - uses simple vocabulary to express ideas
  - writes 1-2 simple sentences; sentences not necessarily complete

- **Partial Acquisition**
  - attempts to establish time, place and participants of recount and attempts to include events in sequence, includes format of Cher & de
  - mainly uses print resources in the classroom (charts, lists, modeled examples) in addition to minimal (25%) personally written content
  - adds action verbs and and common linking words (et, mais)
  - able to write 4 complete sentences and a variety of sentence lengths

- **Full Acquisition**
  - writes a sequenced letter coherently recording a series of events in chronological order
  - uses print resources in addition to at least 50% personally written content
  - uses adverbs and adjectives and often uses linking words including (puis, après)
  - able to write 6 or more complete sentences of a variety of sentence lengths

**Conventions of Writing**

- **Beginning Acquisition**
  - uses periods, commas, question marks and exclamation marks with limited accuracy. (8 or more mistakes)
  - uses upper and lower case letters with limited accuracy (8 or more mistakes)
  - uses appropriate spacing with limited accuracy (8 or more mistakes)

- **Partial Acquisition**
  - uses periods, commas question marks and exclamation marks with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes)
  - uses upper and lower case letters with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes)
  - uses appropriate spacing with increasing accuracy (4-5 mistakes)

- **Full Acquisition**
  - uses periods, commas question marks and exclamation marks consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)
  - uses upper and lower case letters consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)
  - uses appropriate spacing consistently correctly (0-1 mistakes)
Post-study Attitude Questionnaire - An Average Student (#10)

Section I

13. Do you do writing by yourself at home? always, sometimes, never
14. Do your parents teach you writing at home? always, sometimes, never
15. Do you write letters to your friends or family? always, sometimes, never

Section II

4. Do you like writing? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
5. Why? I don't know.
6. What language do you like writing better in, French or English?
8. Do you think you are a good writer, an okay writer or a bad writer?
9. How do you know that you are an okay writer? (self-assessment question)
   I don't know.
10. What is your favourite writing activity? (preference question)
    ie. Stories, journal, making cards, letters, etc.
11. Do you like to write letters to your friends and family? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
12. Do you think writing is a lot of fun, a little fun, or not fun? (attitude question)
13. When you write, do you feel happy, angry, bored or frustrated? (attitude question)
14. Do you think writing is very hard, a little hard or easy?
15. When is it hard? I don't know.
16. When is it easy? I don't know.
Écrivez une lettre à une copine

Pendant les vacances,

j'ai joué à internet avec mon père et mon cousin.

et j'ai fait du toboggan.

et j'ai joué avec mon père.

et j'ai mangé de la pizza.

et j'ai visité mon ami, j'ai dansé avec mon ami et j'ai fait le Macarena avec mon ami. et j'ai regardé deux films, une sa Little foot et The Hank Bake Of

Notre dimanche et qu'on je reven

Je veu a une goro McDonald de!

De: [signature]

Mar 17 1997
## Pre-study Scoring Rubric - A Strong Student (#12)

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**Pre-study Attitude Questionnaire - A Strong Student (#12)**

Section I

16. Do you do writing by yourself at home? always, sometimes, never  
17. Do your parents teach you writing at home? always, sometimes, never  
18. Do you write letters to your friends or family? always, sometimes, never

Section II

4. Do you like writing? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)  
5. Why? *If you write different things, you learn more.*  
6. What language do you like writing better in, French or English?  
7. Why? *We already know English, so if we want to learn another language, then you can.*  
8. Do you think you are a good writer, an okay writer or a bad writer?  
9. How do you know that you are an okay writer? (self-assessment question)  
   *We learn things like sounding out things and then you get more words right and you get better.*  
10. What is your favourite writing activity? (preference question)  
   ie. Stories, journal, making cards, letters, etc.  
11. Do you like to write letters to your friends and family? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)  
12. Do you think writing is a lot of fun, a little fun, or not fun? (attitude question)  
13. When you write, do you feel happy, angry, bored or frustrated? (attitude question)  
14. Do you think writing is very hard, a little hard or easy?  
15. When is it hard? *Never.*  
16. When is it easy? *Every time I write.*
Chère Mlle. Dobkin

Bonjour, comment ça va? Je viens bien.

Pendant mon weekend j'ai fait beaucoup de choses. Samedi tout d'abord je suis allée au bain, parce que la fête de l'ami de papa. Après, je suis allée à une autre fête. Se l'ami de mon papa m'a donné à mangé de la popesque. Puis, je suis revenue à Toronto. Après, je suis allée à la maison de mon cousin. Ce que tu tape écres. Moi, vist.

De
### Post-study Scoring Rubric - A Strong Student (#12)

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Post-study Attitude Questionnaire- A Strong Student (#12)

Section I

19. Do you do writing by yourself at home? always, sometimes, never
20. Do your parents teach you writing at home? always, sometimes, never
21. Do you write letters to your friends or family? always, sometimes, never

Section II

4. Do you like writing? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
5. Why? That’s how you learn things.
6. What language do you like writing better in, French or English?
8. Do you think you are a good writer, an okay writer or a bad writer?
9. How do you know that you are a good writer? (self-assessment question)
   I learn a lot.
10. What is your favourite writing activity? (preference question)
    ie. Stories, journal, making cards, letters, etc.
11. Do you like to write letters to your friends and family? a lot, a little or not at all (attitude question)
12. Do you think writing is a lot of fun, a little fun, or not fun? (attitude question)
13. When you write, do you feel happy, angry, bored or frustrated? (attitude question)
14. Do you think writing is very hard, a little hard or easy?
15. When is it hard? When you have to do hard things like writing by ourselves.
16. When is it easy? When we get help from the teacher, when the words are written on a paper.