

THE WRITING BEHAVIORS OF SELECTED FIFTH-GRADE  
STUDENTS CONSIDERED AT-RISK FOR FAILING THE  
LITERACY PASSPORT TEST

by

Ann K. Wilson

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**APPROVED:**

Patricia P. Kelly  
Patricia P. Kelly (Co-Chair)

Robert C. Small  
Robert C. Small (Co-Chair)

Thomas C. Hunt  
Thomas C. Hunt

Donald J. Kenney  
Donald J. Kenney

Jan K. Nespor  
Jan K. Nespor

Jerome A. Niles  
Jerome A. Niles

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Blacksburg, Virginia

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Committee Co-Chairs: Robert Small and Patricia Kelly

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**ABSTRACT**

During the second semester of the 1989-90 school year, all of Virginia's 65,000+ sixth-grade students were the first to take literacy tests in mathematics, reading and writing as part of a new Virginia Assessment Program mandated by the legislature. Passing scores on all three of these literacy tests is now mandatory for admission to ninth grade. The writing portion of the assessment requires that students construct a writing sample in response to a writing prompt. For the three years prior to 1989-90, school systems within the state could participate voluntarily in a fourth-grade baseline test to determine student potential for failing the sixth-grade assessment. Students whose papers fall into the bottom quartile of all papers scored each year are considered at-risk for failing the Literacy Passport Test at the sixth-grade level. This study examines the writing behaviors

and the characteristics of the papers written by four fifth-grade students identified by the Virginia Department of Education as at-risk for failing the Literacy Passport Test.

The author chose to function both as researcher and as participant/observer in the study, functioning in both of these roles for a twenty-one week period during the fall and early winter of 1989-90. Data was collected during a three hour per day, three day a week time period. Collection sources included field notes, interviews with students and teachers, and student papers, including the fourth-grade baseline assessment, papers written during the twenty-one weeks of data collection and a simulated Literacy Passport Test writing sample.

Findings include a description of each student's approach to writing and an analysis, both analytical and domain-based, of the writing of selected papers of each of the four students. Implications for teaching, as well as suggestions for further research, are included in this document.

## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Helen and Ted Krell



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I owe a special thank you to Judy Self in the Virginia State Department of Education Language Arts Service for her guidance in understanding the Literacy Passport Test as well as for her willingness to score the papers of the four students in the study. I also would like to thank the elementary teachers, students, and staff of the school where I conducted my research. Their encouragement and enthusiasm made my study both informative and enjoyable.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

During the second semester of the 1989-90 school year, all of Virginia's 65,000+ sixth-grade students were the first to take literacy tests in mathematics, reading and writing as part of a new Virginia Assessment Program mandated by the legislature. Passing scores on all three of these literacy tests is now mandatory for admission to ninth grade. The writing portion of the assessment requires that students construct a writing sample in response to a writing prompt. For the three years prior to 1989-90, school systems within the state could participate voluntarily in a fourth-grade baseline test to determine student potential for failing the sixth-grade assessment. Students whose papers fall into the bottom quartile of all papers scored each year are considered at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test at the sixth-grade level. Based on this quartile, a cut score considered "passing" on this test is determined each year.

## Genesis of the Study

I became interested in students who have been identified as at-risk in writing as the result of an article which appeared in the "Today" section of the Rosemont Review on January 3, 1989. The writer of the article had been asked by a teacher in a local elementary school to respond to a set of rough drafts written by the fifth-graders in her class. In response, the writer spent four hours "bleeding" over the papers and then generating an article for the Rosemont Review in which she bemoaned the students' lack of both creativity and correctness.

Over breakfast that morning, I read the article and immediately recognized that the classroom to which the article referred was the one in which my daughter was a student. I knew that the children in that class were good writers because my daughter and her friends had shared many of their papers with me, and I had been impressed by both their depth and sophistication. I concluded that the reporter had misunderstood her task and had responded to a set of rough drafts as if they were final products.

I decided to write a letter to the editor in response to the article. Several hours and multiple drafts later, I had a response that I believed was printable. My concern



deepened that afternoon when my daughter, returning home from school announced, "Mommy, no one in my class can write--the Roanoke Times says so!" I knew that something had to be done to correct this misconception immediately; consequently, I printed two more copies of my letter to the editor and drove to the local elementary school where I deposited one copy in the mailbox of the teacher who had been maligned in the article and one in the principal's box. I also made an appointment to speak with the principal the following morning.

When I arrived at the school the next morning, I discovered that the principal had received numerous phone calls in response to the article and that he was concerned about the impact of the article on the teacher and the students in her class. As I was a teacher trained in writing process as well as a concerned parent, I volunteered to work with these students. The principal and I had both been English teachers at a local high school many years before, and he told me that he believed I had both the expertise and the enthusiasm to work with the students. We agreed that I would work not only with the students in that particular classroom but also with all of the other students in the fifth-grade. I would be working, therefore, with 97 students in three classrooms.

Although I had only considered the impact of the article on the students, I was not surprised to receive a note that

day from the teacher who had asked the reporter to respond to the drafts. This teacher had read my letter to the editor and wrote to tell me how devastated she had been by the article. I knew how dedicated this teacher was to teaching writing through the method that has come to be called "the writing process," and I realized that my approach to teaching in the fifth-grade classrooms would be not only to assure the students of their ability to write, but also to affirm for the teachers that writing should be taught as a process and that the contentions of the article were wrong.

Within the next week, I met with all three fifth-grade teachers to find out what kinds of writing activities would be helpful to them. Although each teacher had a different expectation of my role, they were willing to let me spend forty-five minutes per week with each of their classes. After observing in each classroom three times during the following week, I began to formulate lessons I thought would encourage the students as writers. I presented these lessons to all three classes.

Although originally I had planned to work in the classrooms for no more than three hours a week, I found that I was spending ten or more hours a week in the school as the semester evolved. Working strictly as a parent volunteer was a strange kind of limbo for me. Because I was not paid by the school, there were certain things that I could not do, but there were also many things that I could do because I was

not assigning grades to the students. I found my situation to be the best of both worlds because the students regarded me as a teacher, but I gave no grades. I was very careful when I worked with the fifth-graders to provide only positive feedback. For the first few weeks that I was in the classrooms, I felt that my message had to be--"Yes, you are writers!" It took a very long time to get rid of the negative feelings that had arisen as a result of the newspaper article.

As I worked with the students in the three classrooms, I discovered that I was especially interested in the potential for enhancing the scores of the twelve students in this group who, as a result of the fourth-grade baseline assessment, had been identified as at-risk for passing the actual Literacy Passport Test as sixth-graders. If, indeed, these students failed the sixth-grade test, they would be the first students whose failing scores would prevent them from entering high school. As these students had been identified in fourth-grade as at-risk, it seemed logical to me that the most effective strategy would be to provide enhancement at the fifth-grade level, and, therefore, I designed a series of activities which I expected would increase the students' writing capabilities to the level necessary for success on the sixth-grade test.

As I continued to work with these students, I realized that I was particularly interested in studying the writing

behaviors of those at-risk students. I recognized that the first step in helping these students to pass the Literacy Passport Test was to begin to understand the problems which they experienced as writers. Because I had already spent a semester as a fifth-grade parent volunteer at Grover Elementary, I asked and received permission from school personnel to return in the fall of 1989 to conduct a study. The text which follows discusses how I conducted my study and what I discovered about the writing of these students.

#### An Explanation of the Study and the Research Questions

This study, which took place in two classrooms at Grover Elementary School over a twenty-one week period during the fall and early winter of 1989-90, was designed to examine the writing practices and characteristics of the papers of selected fifth-grade students considered at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test. When these students took the fourth-grade assessment in February, 1988, the cut score was set at 45 by the Virginia State Department of Education; students who scored below 45 on this test were considered at-risk for passing the actual sixth-grade test. (An explanation of the setting of this score is provided in Chapter Two.) Of the 97 students who took the fourth-grade baseline assessment at Grover Elementary School, thirteen

students scored lower than 45 points and thus were considered at-risk for failing the actual Literacy Passport Test to be taken during the 1990-91 school year.

I felt that more information about writing practices could be obtained if I were to study these students both from the perspective of observer and of participant. Therefore, I taught one class during the first hour of the two-hour language arts block each day and observed in the other class during the second hour. At the end of nine weeks, I reversed my participant and observer roles and spent nine more weeks teaching the class I had observed previously and observing the class I had taught. I spent a third hour each day for this eighteen week period in observation of these students in other classrooms and in interviews with the students and their teachers. The lessons I developed and taught during this study were designed on the premise that students who were encouraged to feel good about themselves would grow as writers. The process approach to writing was also encouraged.

The following questions served as a guide to my research:

1. What are the writing practices of these at-risk fifth-grade students?
2. What are the characteristics of the papers written by these at-risk students?

In the remaining four chapters I discuss how I conducted my study and what I discovered about these students as

writers. Chapter Two is an overview of the Literacy Passport Test and a discussion of some of the literature which affected the development of the test. In Chapter Three I discuss the methodology that I used in conducting my study. Chapter Four consists of the case studies of four students considered at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test. Chapter Five includes a discussion of my findings, some implications for further research and some suggestions for further research with at-risk writers.

## CHAPTER 2

### SUPPORTING LITERATURE

#### The Literacy Passport Test

##### History of the Literacy Passport Test

The results of the NAEP Writing Assessment (1984) reported in the headlines of the Washington Post proclaimed that fourth-graders could not write. Virginia legislators, already concerned about the reputed poor writing ability of State school children, decided that an assessment of student literacy was necessary. Although the State had previously mandated basic literacy assessment at the secondary level, legislators were convinced that testing at that level was too late. In 1986 the Governor's Commission on Excellence in Education published Excellence in Education: A Blueprint for Virginia's Future, which made the recommendation for a Literacy Passport Test in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Concerned that the writing test might assume merely an objective format, the Virginia Writing Project Directors recommended to the Board of Education that:

The writing portion of the Literacy Test take place over two consecutive days, the first day to include a 45-minute period to write in response to a prompt or a question; the second day to include a 45-minute period to revise and edit the draft of day one. Should the exigencies of testing make it impossible

to provide two days, we strongly recommend that students be allowed ample time for reflection and revision (Virginia Writing Project Testimony to the Virginia Board of Education, February 26, 1987).

The Virginia Writing Project Directors, in the same testimony, recommended that each student develop a Writing Portfolio by the end of sixth-grade to include the following:

1. one example of the student's best writing to be decided upon jointly by the teacher and student;
2. a letter written by the student describing his or her progress as a writer through elementary school;
3. one timed essay;
4. one writing which gives evidence of the student's ability to revise and edit (a revised and edited version of the #1 recommendation would suffice); and
5. one "writing-to-learn" sample in a subject other than language arts.

Although these recommendations of the Virginia Writing Project Directors were not adopted by the Virginia Board of Education, the Research and Testing Division of the Department of Education responded in part to the concerns of the Writing Project Directors. Portfolio assessment, however, was not included as part of the Literacy Passport Test.

The pilot of the Literacy Passport Test--Writing (1988) included both an objective test and a writing sample. The analysis of the pilot data, however, indicated that the domain scoring employed in the assessment of the writing



sample provided sufficient data for documenting students' knowledge of writing conventions and mechanics as well as other features of writing competency and that the objective test added no further information. As a result, the State dropped the objective portion of the Literacy Passport Test (Kelly, 1989). Although the Literacy Passport Test writing sample was scheduled to go into effect in 1988, a delay was granted until the spring of 1990 to enable more data related to equating the prompts and students' performance in Virginia to be obtained from the pilot studies.

#### The Prompt

The Virginia Department of Education mandates standards of learning, K-12, in language arts which define the foundation for the development of local curriculum. Students at the sixth-grade level are expected to achieve a sixth-grade "degree of competency" on the Language Arts Standards of Learning Objective 6.4: "The student will prewrite, write, revise, edit and proofread compositions of more than one paragraph." The writing prompt based on this standard of learning is designed to assess each student's level of competency in approaching writing as a process.

The writing section of the Literacy Passport Test consists of one writing prompt to which all students must write. Table 1 is the prompt used for sixth-grade assessment

## Table 1

## Literacy Passport Test Writing Assignment

**WRITING ASSIGNMENT**

**Write about something you wish you had.** Use your planning time to think about what you will write. Think about something you wish you had. This could be something that would make your school work easier or something that would help you get your chores done at home. There might be something else that you wish you had. Think of ways to tell about something that you wish you had and why you wish you had it. Use the scratch paper your teacher gave you to make notes or to list ideas.

When you finish planning, turn to page 7 and begin writing your paper. The people who will read your paper are adults, like your teachers. Be sure to write so that these people will know what you want and why.

When you finish writing, read your paper to be sure it makes sense. Be sure that you have used the best words to say what you want to say. Make all of the changes that you think will help your paper, and correct all the mistakes that you can find. Make your changes and corrections neatly so that your paper will be easy to read.

**CHECKLIST FOR WRITERS**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I planned for my paper before writing it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I revised my paper to be sure that
- \_\_\_\_\_ the subject of my paper was clear;
- \_\_\_\_\_ everything in my paper told about my subject;
- \_\_\_\_\_ my paper was logically organized so readers would understand my message;
- \_\_\_\_\_ my words and information made my paper interesting to readers; and
- \_\_\_\_\_ my sentences made sense, sounded like me, and read smoothly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I edited my paper to be sure that
- \_\_\_\_\_ I used good grammar;
- \_\_\_\_\_ I used capital letters and punctuation marks correctly;
- \_\_\_\_\_ I let my readers know where I started new paragraphs; and
- \_\_\_\_\_ I made my spelling correct.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I proofread my paper to make sure that my paper was the way I wanted readers to read it.

in February, 1990 ("Virginia Literacy Testing Program Student Response Booklet," 1990).

The writing prompt is designed to encourage students to follow the stated directions in order to create an effective writing sample. Although the prompt does not use the words "prewrite," "compose," "revise," and "edit," explicitly, the desirability of using the stages of writing as a process is evident within the prompt components. The checklist that reminds students to revise and to edit their work was added after the field-test (Self, 1990).

The writing part of the Literacy Passport Test is untimed. In schools where students at the sixth-grade level change classes every hour, the bells are held in order to permit students to complete the test at their own pace. Students may take the entire school day to complete their writing, if they so desire; the only stipulation is that the writing must be completed within one sitting. Students in the pilot study spent an average of 45-60 minutes completing the test (Self, Spring 1989). Excerpts from the "Grade Six Examiner's Instructions," which address the issue of timing, are included in Appendix A.

### Scoring

The Language Arts Service of the State Department of Education, in discussion with the Virginia Writing Project Directors, determined that the scoring of the writing sample

should be more than merely holistic. They further concluded that a system which provided specific feedback on components of writing could serve as the basis for instructional decisions. Such a system had to be useful for student placement, evaluation of instruction, and the development of appropriate remedial strategies. The Language Arts Service, in discussion with the Virginia Writing Project Directors, concluded that an analytic system, such as primary trait scoring, was an impractical type of assessment for these purposes as the results could never be returned in time to use the feedback to guide specific instruction for the tested students (Kelly, 1989).

Consequently, the State of Virginia contracted with Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) of Minneapolis, Minnesota, which subcontracted with Kathryn Kelly of Planning, Development and Evaluation Association, Inc., to work with the State to develop an informative scoring model. Kathryn Kelly was primarily responsible for developing prompts to be field-tested during the two-year planning phase. The resultant scoring model, called "domain scoring," is a synthesis of holistic and analytic scoring. It is characterized as a form of focused holistic scoring and is designed to evaluate the sample in terms of pre-defined criteria, a criterion-referenced procedure (Self, Fall 1990). Two readers, trained analytically to recognize quickly the features in each of the five domains--Composing, Style,

Sentence Formation, Usage, and Mechanics--score each writing sample.

The scoring scale included in Self's "The Literacy Passport: What Happens to the Writing Sample" (publication scheduled for June, 1990) explains that each domain is scored independently using the following scale:

- 4 = The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control of almost all the domain's features.
- 3 = The writer demonstrates reasonable control of most of the domain's features, but enough inconsistent control exists to indicate some real weakness in the domain.
- 2 = Enough inconsistent control in several features exists to indicate significant weakness in the domain.
- 1 = The writer demonstrates little or no control of most of the domain's features.

The State Department of Education of Virginia mandated that the domains of composing and style be the ones upon which elementary students should be focusing and, therefore, that these domains be weighted more heavily than the other domains in order to produce the total score for each student. The composing domain is, therefore, weighted by a factor of three; the style domain is weighted by a factor of two; and the domains of sentence formation, usage and mechanics are weighted by a factor of one. A student receives a score from two readers in each of the five writing domains; the total of the two readers' scores is the student's total score.

Fractional scores indicate an average of the two readers' scores in each domain. Therefore, a student can score between 6-24 points in the composing domain, between 4-16 points in the style domain, and between 2-8 points in each of the domains of sentence formation, usage and mechanics. The student's total raw score on the writing sample may range from between 16 to 64 points. The resultant derived scores are obtained by multiplying the number scored in each domain by the number of readers (2) and then multiplying again by the assigned weight. Thus, the scores in each domain are presented in Table 2.

A student who demonstrated consistent control in all five domains would have his/her paper scored as presented in Table 3.

Although students at the sixth-grade level are not expected to handle any or all of the features in each domain "perfectly," they must exhibit control of all domains in order to achieve a passing score on the Literacy Passport Test. Self in "The Domains of Writing: What is Scored on Virginia's Literacy Passport to High School?" defines "control" as "the ability to use a given feature of written language effectively for a given developmental or grade level" (1989:67). According to information I received during several Literacy Passport Test training sessions I attended, sixth-grade papers are scored based on the degree of control

Table 2  
Domain Scores

Composing	Style	Sentence Formation Usage, Mechanics
24 = 4.0	16 = 4.0	8 = 4.0
21 = 3.5	14 = 3.5	7 = 3.5
18 = 3.0	12 = 3.0	6 = 3.0
15 = 2.5	10 = 2.5	5 = 2.5
12 = 2.0	8 = 2.0	4 = 2.0
9 = 1.5	6 = 1.5	3 = 1.5
6 = 1.0	4 = 1.0	2 = 1.0

Table 3  
Scores With Consistent Control in Each Domain

	Scores	Readers	Weight	Totals
Composing	4	x 2	x 3	24
Style	4	x 2	x 2	16
Sentence Formation	4	x 2	x 1	8
Usage	4	x 2	x 1	8
Mechanics	4	x 2	x 1	8
TOTAL SCORE				64



exhibited by the students in each of the categories shown in Table 4.

#### Uses of the Assessment

As of 1990, all sixth-graders will have to pass the Literacy Passport Test for high school admission. The fourth-grade assessment is optional and is designed as a diagnostic tool to permit school divisions to consider some of the problems their students may encounter. This fourth-grade test also provides an opportunity for school divisions to develop intervention activities for students whose scores fall into the bottom quartile and who are thus identified as being "at-risk" for failing the actual writing test at the sixth-grade level. To date, the State Department of Education has not mandated enhancement activities for students identified as "at-risk" based on their fourth-grade assessment; however, remediation within the regular seventh and eighth-grade Language Arts classrooms is mandated for students who score below 45, the passing score for the sixth-grade writing assessment for 1989.

For purposes of assessment, individual schools receive three documents--the Individual Student Performance Report, the actual writing sample of each student, and a School Summary Report. The School Summary Report (Appendix B) lists student scores delineated by gender and ethnicity for the individual school and the school division. School systems

Table 4  
Components of Each Domain

<b>Composing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*a central idea that is apparent to the reader</li> <li>*a purposeful and even elaboration of the central idea</li> <li>*a logic structure that facilitates presentation of the central idea</li> <li>*a lack of digressions, a consistent point of view and the presence of closure</li> </ul>
<b>Style</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*selected vocabulary</li> <li>*selected information which propels the reader purposefully through the writing</li> <li>*voice that retains the quality and characteristics of the child's own speech patterns</li> <li>*obvious tone which conveys the writer's attitude</li> <li>*a variety of sentence beginnings, lengths and rhythm</li> </ul>
<b>Sentence Formation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*standard word order</li> <li>*complete sentences</li> <li>*degree of avoidance of enjambment</li> <li>*sentence expansion via standard coordinating and modifying structures</li> <li>*sentence embedding via standard coordinating and modifying structures</li> </ul>
<b>Usage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*control of number, tense consistency and sounding possessives</li> <li>*subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement</li> <li>*control of the standard American English conventions of a/an, I in compound subject situations, them/those and good/well and avoidance of the double negative</li> <li>*word use that fit the sentence position and meaning of the message being conveyed</li> </ul>
<b>Mechanics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*visual formatting, including paragraph indentation or line spacing and word division</li> <li>*the spelling of words typical and functional within the literate school environment</li> <li>*capitalization of sentence beginnings, and proper names of people, places and things</li> <li>*end punctuation</li> <li>*internal punctuation including apostrophes in possessives and contractions, commas: in a series, with certain conjunctions, with interruptors, in dates, between city and state, and after introductory clauses or long phrases, and quotation marks around the direct words of speakers</li> </ul>

can use this summary to assess how well the students in a particular school are doing in comparison to others in the same division and also to compare scores by gender and ethnicity.

The Individual Student Performance Report (Appendix C) provides parents, teachers, and administrators with each child's writing score in each domain. If a student's total score indicates that he/she is at-risk for passing the sixth-grade test, the feedback provided by the individual domain scores, the writing sample of the child, and other papers representative of the student's actual writing ability can be examined; and such an analysis can guide the development of enhancement activities to improve the student's chances for passing the mandated sixth-grade test.

### Writing Assessment

#### Pressures for Writing Tests

The State of Virginia is not alone in its move toward accountability in writing instruction. The concern over American students' ability or inability to write has become a national obsession and, as a result, many states have mandated writing assessments. Maine tests all students in fourth and eleventh grades by means of a writing sample scored by in-state language arts teachers (Takacs, 1987:34). New York State established the "Basic Competency Test in

Writing Skills" in 1976, which evaluated spelling; mechanics; and sentence, paragraph, and letter writing. In 1980, this test was replaced by the "New York State Competency Test in Writing," which assesses writing fluency on the basis of three writing samples (Cooper, 1981:3).

The California Assessment Program began using writing samples in 1987. Twenty "exemplary" California writing teachers wrote prompts, scored essays in a trial assessment of 20,000 students, selected anchor papers, and wrote scoring and writing guides. These guides were used in conducting workshops to train teachers to teach writing and to administer and score the tests (Simmons, 1987:28).

#### Purposes of Writing Assessment

Researchers see various purposes for writing assessment. Larsen (1987:2) stated that the purpose of writing assessment is to identify students who are evidencing educationally significant writing problems and to isolate these problems into various sub-areas which are particularly troublesome to the individual student. Cooper and Odell (1977:12) maintained that writing evaluation has administrative, instructional and evaluative uses. Administratively, school personnel use writing evaluation to place, track or exempt students from English courses. Instructionally, school personnel use writing evaluation to make an initial diagnosis of students' writing problems and then to guide and foster

feedback to student writers as they progress through English courses.

The purpose of writing assessment can be viewed both summatively and evaluatively. The ability to measure student writing growth over a period of time, to analyze the performance of a writer in a case study and to describe the writing performance of individuals or groups in developmental studies are summative purposes for writing assessment. Evaluative purposes include using writing assessment to determine the effectiveness of a writing program or teacher, to measure group differences in writing performance in comparison-group research and to score writing to study possible correlates of writing performance (Cooper and Odell, 1977:14). The Literacy Passport Test has both summative and evaluative purposes.

### Concerns About Writing Assessment

Regardless of the rationale for implementing writing evaluation, such assessment is now a reality. There are, however, several concerns with the methods used in obtaining and assessing student writing. Writing assessment can be categorized as either standardized assessment, which uses primarily an objective format, or assessment of a writing sample, which provides a quantifiable score on a student's written product. Both forms of writing assessment pose some concerns in measurement. These concerns were addressed by

the Virginia State Department of Education Language Arts Service in its development of the domain scoring model for the Literacy Passport Test.

Assessment must first consider growth. Writing growth is measured through a determination of writing competence, but such a determination is often difficult. Odell defines competence in writing as "the ability to 1) discover what one wishes to say and 2) choose the appropriate language, sentence structure, organization, and information to achieve a desired purpose with a given audience" (1981:107). Yet to design tests that adequately measure competence is difficult because administrators and public officials must be satisfied that tests are rigorous; students and their parents, that the tests are fair; and teachers, that tests are appropriate to their curricular goals. A further problem in test development is the conflict between those who support multiple choice writing tests, favored by non-specialists in writing for their low cost and objectivity, and those who argue for writing samples, preferred by writing specialists who claim that they are representative of students' actual writing abilities (Bizzell, 1987:576).

Researchers have cited several concerns with writing assessment. Donald Graves (1983:31) concluded that the single most important determiner of how well someone writes is his knowledge of a topic. However, if students are to produce successful papers, they also need to understand the

purpose for their writing, know who the expected audience is, and be able to understand something about the sets of criteria that will be used to assess their writing. The second paragraph of the Literacy Passport Test writing prompt attempts to address this concern by stating both the purpose and the audience for the writing sample.

Research has produced various suggestions for improving writing evaluation which need to be considered as the Literacy Passport Test is refined. These suggestions include ideas about the timing of the test, the purpose of the evaluation and the analysis of multiple writing samples.

Odell (1981:108) suggests that a good sample of writing performance can be obtained by having students write under circumstances that approximate the conditions under which important writing is done and by basing judgment on an adequate amount of student writing. A clearer picture of the student's actual writing ability can be developed by asking students to produce more than one kind of writing for more than one purpose and for more than one audience. The Literacy Passport Test, based on a single writing sample, does not meet these conditions. Portfolio assessment, however, does meet that criteria, which is a compelling reason for advocating its use as a way of assessing writing.

How long a student is to spend on a writing sample is another concern cited by researchers. Writing samples taken from a single timed session measure only how well students

write under pressure on topics that they know little about or in which they have little interest (Richards, 1989:26). Writing samples often require that students complete the entire writing process in a brief writing period; consequently, students who write well under a time pressure may be more successful than students who do not. Such time constraints create an artificial barrier because they do not apply to other writing tasks (Odell, 1981:109). The untimed nature of the Literacy Passport Test writing sample is an attempt to address the concern with the negative impact of a time constraint on the writing sample.

The time of year when the test is administered must also be considered. Chew's (1985:86) suggestions for improved evaluation of student writing include recognizing that, as there is a definite loss in writing skill over the summer, papers written early in the school year are of poorer quality than papers written later in the year. Consequently, writing analysis should be based on papers written in the spring of the school year. The Literacy Passport Test supports this recommendation.

Students need to understand the purpose for their writing and to write about subjects with which they are familiar. Chew (1985:87) suggests that students be encouraged to write from personal experience because such writing produces the best results. He concludes that poor writing often results when students are asked to project into the future, or to



write about something with which they have no direct relationship. Fantasy topics often produce the poorest writing as they often force students to resort to a rehash of familiar TV or film story lines. Such concerns were considered in the development of the prompts for the Literacy Passport Test.

Research has suggested that writing assessment should be based on the evaluation of multiple samples of a student's writing. Newkirk and Atwell (1988:236-244) and Neill and Medina (1989:690) maintain that effective analysis of student writing needs to be based on more than one writing sample, and should incorporate the teacher's knowledge of the student's overall writing ability with the teacher's understanding of the student's behavior beyond the writing task (Wilkinson, Barnsley, Hanna and Swan, 1983:881). Writing is not one ability, but a combination of many--experimenting, organizing, planning, choosing, questioning, editing, etc. One piece of writing cannot provide an accurate picture of a student's abilities but merely represents one step in a writer's slow growth (Newkirk and Atwell, 1988:237). Many experts argue that objective tests, which typically require preparation in the form of drills and exercises, are an ineffective way to assess writing ability because such skills do not transfer to real-world writing (Brennan, 1987:280). It must be further recognized that a writer's success in doing assigned writing

varies from day to day and topic to topic (Odell, 1981:107). Thus, an effective assessment of student writing must evaluate the student's written product at various points along the educational continuum (Chew, 1985:84).

Odell (1977:96) recommends that an effective way to collect student work is through the use of writing folders that teachers can examine during the school year, passing the folders from teacher to teacher as the student changes grade levels. The Virginia State Department of Education Language Arts Service recommends that writing folders be kept and passed on in such a manner so that the papers included in the folders can be used to assess writing problems.

One of the biggest concerns with the Literacy Passport Test is that the determination of writing competence is based on one example of a student's writing ability. Faigley maintains that efforts to test writing have failed because they seek to reduce a complex activity to a single standard of judgment (1985:205). Although the Literacy Passport Test is a writing sample assessment rather than an objective test, it still is based on a single standard of judgment and, consequently, some suggestions for improvement must be considered. Although the State of Virginia recognized that multiple sample evaluation was preferable, academic time and economic factors were considerations in selecting the single sample format. An equally important consideration was that a second writing sample would still not represent writing

with a real audience as Odell (1981:108) suggests, and, therefore, would in all probability add little, if any, to the data collected from a single sample.

### Scoring

Many researchers have suggestions related to the scoring of writing assessment. Chew (1985:88) suggests scoring tests at the local school level by teachers who have been trained in the scoring technique determined for the test. While teachers in the state of Virginia will not be trained or employed to score the sixth-grade assessments, the State Department of Education Language Arts Service does provide scoring sessions to train teachers to score the fourth-grade baseline assessments. Odell (1981:113) recommends that writing samples be analyzed through a combination of pre-determined scoring scales. He suggests that the aspects of holistic scoring be melded with either a primary trait or an analytic scale to produce an effective measure of student writing ability. This approach is the basis of the domain scoring model used in the Literacy Passport Test.

Although the Literacy Passport Test is not a perfect instrument for measuring student competence in writing, current research was considered in the development of the test. The concerns with purpose and audience are addressed within the prompt, the writing itself is untimed, and the scoring model is based on the recommendations of Odell and

others, combining holistic scoring with a form of analytic assessment. When the fourth-grade baseline tests are returned, school personnel can use the scores, as well as the actual tests themselves, in conjunction with other student papers to consider the writing practices of students considered at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test. On the basis of this information, enhancement activities can be developed to encourage more effective writing practices by at-risk students.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study examines the writing behaviors and the characteristics of the papers written by students identified by the Virginia State Department of Education as at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test. I chose to function both as researcher and as participant/observer in the study for three reasons. First, I was able to examine these students from the perspective of both teacher and observer, roles that gave me a fuller understanding of how the students worked in the classroom and how they related to a teacher of writing. I had an opportunity to interact with them and to question them about their writing practices as well as about their papers, perspectives not fully possible when the observer is not involved in the classroom. Secondly, the dual role permitted me to establish a similar context for observation in both classrooms because I controlled the lessons while I was teaching. Thirdly, my teaching of these classes permitted me to assign the kinds of writing which I felt would provide me with the data that I needed.

In this chapter I give an overview of the school in which the study took place and discuss how I selected the four students for the study. I also explain how I collected my data in a two-phase process, and I outline the lessons I

presented in the classes. Finally, I discuss the analysis procedures I used to develop the four case studies in Chapter Four.

## The Writers and Their Environment

### The School Setting

With 595 students in grades K-5, Grover Elementary School, located in the mid-size community of Preston, Virginia, is one of four elementary schools in the local area. The students are mostly from middle to upper middle class families with many parents employed in some capacity by Western University, which is located in the town. The University has a large number of foreign graduate students; and, because of its location near the University, many of their children attend this elementary school. The twenty-six year old school building is generally cheerful: the reading/writing center outside of the main office signals to visitors, to staff, and to students alike the importance that the school places on reading and writing.

The school staff consists of forty individuals, including a principal, an assistant principal, a counselor, a librarian, a secretary, twenty-five classroom teachers, and eleven other support personnel including four disability resource teachers, a part-time art instructor, a physical education teacher, and a music teacher. At the time of the

study, five student teachers from the University were also in the building. All members of the staff, including the janitors and cafeteria personnel, participate in school functions such as "Reading Month" and "Arts in the Schools."

The fourth and fifth-grade classrooms are located on one long hall beyond the main office and the library. Ninety-seven students are enrolled as fifth-graders in four heterogeneous classrooms. Students are tracked on the basis of standardized test scores and teacher recommendation for language arts and mathematics from level one (top) to level four (bottom). The four fifth-grade teachers each teach one section of language arts, two teachers instructing a combination of levels one and three, and the other two teachers instructing a combination of levels two and four. The students in this study were members of the two classes categorized as two/four language arts levels.

#### Classroom Description

The two classrooms used in this study are located directly across the hall from each other. Although physically these two classrooms are of the same configuration and contain similar furniture and supplies, the classroom environments are very different.

Ms. Williams' Classroom. Ms. Williams is a thirty-five year old teacher with twelve years of teaching experience. The year that this study took place was her second year at

Grover and her first year teaching fifth grade at that school. She had, however, taught grades three through five during the ten years that she was at her previous school, which was located in a neighboring town but in the same school district. During the year of the study, Ms. Williams talked frequently about returning to graduate school for a master's degree in gifted and talented education. She had already taken several classes in educating the gifted and in whole language instruction, and she believed that the strategies taught in these courses could be employed at any instructional level. Writing was a primary emphasis in Ms. Williams' lesson plans for all of the subjects that she taught.

Ms. Williams' instructional style mandated active learning by students. The classroom frequently overflowed with papers, projects and supplies. The students' favorite spot was the reading corner, a rug-covered section of the room which contained a rocking chair, numerous bean bag chairs, and a large bookshelf filled with paperback and hardback books, magazines, and newspapers. Although I had not worked with her previously, Ms. Williams welcomed my study in her classroom. She drew me into her lessons while I observed in the classroom. During several weeks of my observation time, she encouraged me to read aloud to the students for a few minutes of the transition time between classes. During the nine weeks that I taught in her room for



an hour each day, Ms. Williams tailored the rest of the language arts period to support my instruction. Frequently she spoke to me, to other teachers in the building, to the principal and to parents, about "our" classroom and emphasized that we were working "together." Toward the end of the study, Ms. Williams and I collaborated on the presentation of a workshop to the parents of elementary students in the county entitled "Families Writing."

Mrs. Anderson's Classroom. Mrs. Anderson is a forty-five year old white teacher who has taught for eighteen years, the past six years as a fifth-grade teacher at Grover Elementary. Prior to that time, Mrs. Anderson taught "all over the place" because her husband is in the military and they have moved frequently. She told me that her favorite teaching experience was the year that she served as a mathematics resource teacher, providing small group instruction for students with math deficiencies. In fact, she frequently expressed her preference for teaching math to teaching language arts.

Mrs. Anderson's instructional style was primarily teacher-directed. She assigned students to desks and did not allow changes in those assignments unless she moved them for disciplinary reasons. One small corner of the room was designated as a reading corner. It was rarely used, however, except when Mrs. Anderson needed to speak privately with a

student as Mrs. Anderson did not permit students to read in the reading corner.

After the first three weeks that I was in her classroom, Mrs. Anderson confessed to me that she felt very frustrated because my lessons were taking away from her instructional time, although she said that she was glad that I was there to show her how to teach writing. She said that she would change her method for teaching writing when she "knew how to do it" and that she hoped the University could send someone like me to her class every year to "help the children." Mrs. Anderson also indicated that she would like to take "some workshops" in writing instruction but that she "didn't really want to take a class." She said that she did not like to write herself and, therefore, assumed that her students did not enjoy it either. She admitted that she believed that some students "just can't write."

#### Case Selection

Grover Elementary School participated in an optional fourth-grade writing assessment conducted by the Virginia Department of Education during the 1988-89 school year. The purpose of this assessment was to determine which students might fail the actual Literacy Passport Test in writing at the sixth-grade level. Students submitted a writing sample in February, 1989, which was scored by Data Recognition

Corporation. The scores were returned to the school in May, 1989, so that teachers and administrators would be aware of the scores before the end of the school year. The school requested that the writing samples be returned to the school for assessment purposes and received the papers in October, 1989. The school was then able to correlate the scores with the papers in order to begin to understand the writing problems of students who performed poorly on the test.

Thirteen students were identified as at-risk of failing the Literacy Passport Test as sixth-graders because they scored below 45 on the fourth-grade baseline writing sample. Potentially, scores could range from 16-64, but none of the students in this at-risk group scored below 30 or above 40. Of these thirteen students, three moved during the summer and were not enrolled at Grover when I began my study. Two of the remaining ten students were classified as level one (high ability) in language arts on the basis of standardized test scores and teacher recommendation. After consulting with both the fourth and fifth-grade teachers and looking at the fourth-grade writing sample papers as well as papers written by these students during the first month of school, I decided that these students were not truly at-risk but had simply performed poorly on one writing task. Consequently, I did not include them in my study.

The remaining eight students were members of the two language arts classes taught by Mrs. Anderson and Ms.

Williams. Although I began collecting data on all eight students, at the end of the first nine weeks of data collection, I reduced the number of students in my study to four. I decided that I would focus on two students in each classroom, one male and one female. All four students were white, two were diagnosed with learning disabilities, two of the students were from affluent homes, two were not. I chose these particular four because each of them approached a writing task in a different way and all four were articulate and willing to participate in my study.

### Data Collection Procedures

#### Introduction

The study took place over a twenty-one week period (see Table 5). I spent the first week observing in the two classes in which my study took place. Data were collected in two general phases from September 5, 1989, through February 8, 1990. I spent one week between the two phases of the study and another week at the end of the study in synthesis of the data. During the first of these weeks, I analyzed the lessons that I had taught, scheduled follow-up interviews to clarify data, and planned the lessons for the next phase. At the end of the study, I spent that week re-examining student documents, conducting follow-up interviews, and

Table 5  
Time Line of the Study

	PHASE ONE		PHASE TWO		
Sept. 5-7 1989 1 week	September 11, 1989 - November 9, 1989  9 weeks	Nov. 14-17 1989 1 week	November 27, 1989 - February 8, 1990  9 weeks	Feb. 13-16 1990 1 week	
O B S E R V A T I O N	1st hour - taught Mrs. Anderson's class 2nd hour - observed Ms. Williams' class 3rd hour - Completed daily field notes, conducted interviews, observed students in other classrooms	S Y N T H E S I S	1st hour - taught Ms. Williams' class 2nd hour - observed Mrs. Anderson's class 3rd hour - completed daily field notes, conducted interviews, observed students in other classrooms	S Y N T H E S I S	

observing the students in my study outside of the language arts classroom.

I felt that, in order to understand how the students in my study approached their writing, it was necessary for me to function both as teacher and as observer in the study. Such practice has been reported successfully in the work of Bissex and Bullock (1987), Mohr and Maclean (1987), and Myers (1985). I modified the plan described by Ray, Lee and Stansell (1986:152), which called for data collection by two researchers, as I assumed the role of both researchers, one who observed the transactions in the classroom between the teacher and the students and one who designed and implemented demonstrations intended to illustrate some specific elements in process writing.

Using Perl's recommendation (1983:20) that a minimum of three days per week be spent in the classroom, I taught and observed in the two classrooms on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays during the two-hour language arts block. I chose to use a split-halves approach in collecting the writing that would be analyzed for the study. During the first nine-weeks' phase, I taught for the first hour of the language arts block in Mrs. Anderson's class, and I observed during the second hour in Ms. Williams' class. During the second nine weeks observation phase, I reversed this practice. I spent an extra hour on each of those days interviewing students, teachers, and other school staff

members. I taped and transcribed all interviews. I ate lunch both with the students and with the teachers. I observed the students in my study during their recess time, physical education class, and in the library. I also observed both the Written Language Remediation and the Chapter I Reading classes on two different occasions because two students in my study were involved in these programs. I attended two faculty meetings, a meeting between the principal and the four fifth-grade teachers, and three meetings of the Parent-Teacher Association in order to understand more fully the academic environment in which the students in my study functioned.

I also kept a field notebook in which I recorded all of my observations. During the time that I was teaching, I wrote down how my four students interacted in the classroom, engaged in the assigned activities, and responded both orally and in writing to each day's lessons. I watched them and recorded their behaviors during writing tasks as well as during group work. I also noted any oral interchanges between myself and the students. During the hour each day in which I observed in the classroom, I recorded the activities that were taking place in class each day, what was written on the board, and how each of the students in my study performed in class. During the third hour each day, I wrote down the activity that I was observing, tape-recorded any interviews that were later transcribed and included in the

field notes, and listed any follow-up activities that I felt would be necessary to complete my field notes. I also spent time each day analyzing the lesson that I had taught that day, including in the analysis how each of the students in my study had responded and how I would modify the lesson if I were to teach it again.

During the course of the study, I participated in various activities related to Literacy Passport Testing. I attended four training sessions in scoring the writing section of the Literacy Passport Test sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education Language Arts Service and a two-day workshop for teachers and administrators sponsored by the Research and Testing Division of the Virginia Department of Education that focused primarily on administrative preparation for the Literacy Passport Test.

#### Observation Prior to Data Collection (September 5-7)

Prior to collecting data, I spent the first week of the 1989-90 school year observing in the two classrooms in which my study would take place and serving as a volunteer teacher's aide to the two teachers. As I had worked with Mrs. Anderson the previous year and had observed in Ms. Williams' fourth-grade class the year before, I had already established a working relationship with these teachers. I felt, however, that it was necessary that I view the initial interactions between the teachers and their students during this time.



This observation time allowed me the opportunity to become part of the routine academic setting, as well as the chance to examine student files to gather information about each student's testing and educational history. After the first week of observation, I began collecting the actual writing done by the students in the two classes.

During the first week I was introduced to the two classes by each of the teachers. Each teacher said, "This is Mrs. Wilson. She is interested in how fifth-graders write and she will be working in our classroom this year." I was also introduced to the parents during the second week of school at the fall Open House. The teachers said, "Mrs. Wilson is working with our fifth-graders this year on their writing in order to prepare them for the Literacy Passport Test. Tonight, she is going to explain to you how students should approach the writing on this test and how this test is scored."

#### Phase One (September 11-November 9)

Date Collection Sources. The data collection sources I used during this period included: (a) writing samples produced both as a result of the instruction I gave to the students and the assignments produced for their assigned language arts teacher, (b) the test results as well as the actual writing sample produced for the fourth-grade Literacy Passport Test baseline assessment, (c) the fourth-grade

results of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, (d) interviews with students and teachers, (e) my daily field notes, and (f) a simulated Literacy Passport Test experience administered at the end of the study to all students in both classes.

The most extensive data that I collected were composed of the actual writing of the at-risk students in my study. Olson (1982) asserts that "when we begin working with inexperienced writers, our first concern is to get them to produce written language. We cannot teach them much about improving their writing until they can produce it with relative ease" (cited in Rhodes and Dudley-Marling, 1988:211). I gave students folders in which to keep the papers they wrote in response to my lessons, the writing done during the language arts class taught by their assigned language arts teacher, and written reflections on their own writing which they did at my request.

Another technique used in my data collection was the interview. Interviews "provide a convenient way of obtaining perceptions that a person has about a situation or event that is current or historic" (Larsen, 1987:16). I used the interview technique of prompted recall, a form of modified protocol analysis in which the researcher watches a student write and observes the physical actions of the student. After the student completes the writing task, the observer questions the student about what he/she was thinking about as he/she wrote, where his/her idea for writing originated,

and what were his/her thoughts during the writing. I audio-taped each of these interviews; and, after I had transcribed them, I reacted to them in my field notes. I also conducted informal interviews with the students about their perceptions of school, their teachers, and their home environment. In order to collect information about how the students were perceived by the adults with whom they worked, I also conducted interviews with the two teachers in the study, the student teacher in Ms. Williams' class, and the Written Language Resource teacher.

Participant/Observer Strategies. As I taught Mrs. Anderson's language arts class, I used the model described by Calkins (1986:173-175), beginning each class with a mini-lesson that provided short, focused whole group exposure to one piece of information that might be useful to them as writers. I was available during the writing portion of each class period to work individually with any student who requested help. I also encouraged peer interaction. Although the students began to write each day after the mini-lesson, time was so limited that students often took their writing home to complete. The results of this writing were shared during the first five to ten minutes of each class period, prior to the daily mini-lesson. Students were encouraged, but never coerced, to share their writing at this time.

I collected samples of student writing over the entire nine-week period of teaching in the classroom. I collected samples of student work, photo-copied the papers, and returned them to the students for sharing. I did not grade any of the students' papers but responded either orally or in writing to all student papers. Applebee, Langer and Mullis (1985:56) assert that more effective writing results when teachers respond through extensive comments rather than merely assigning a grade. All of my comments were positive and focused primarily on content rather than on mechanics.

Lessons. The following is a discussion of the lessons I taught during the nine weeks in Mrs. Anderson's classroom. My knowledge of writing process theory and the domains of the Literacy Passport Test influenced the development of these lessons. Some major tenets of the writing process that I used in developing these lessons include an understanding that all people learn to write and thus to gain control of their own learning by composing and by experimenting with a number of different writing genres and forms of discourse (Perl, 1983:19). Students should be permitted to initiate writing for their own purposes in order to regard writing as both meaningful and enjoyable (Rasinski and Deford, 1985:299). A writing process approach classroom accommodates the individual pace of each student, creating a rich language environment that encourages increased skill in both oral and written communication. A positive attitude, growing out of

success as a writer, is transferable to other tasks (Avery, 1987:74).

In developing my lessons, I recognized that writing as a process instruction required that the teacher gradually give up "control" of the classroom (Ray, Lee and Stansell, 1986:159). Consequently, although my lessons began with a mini-lesson, individual writing time was the primary focus of class time. I further recognized that my role in the classroom was to provide a rich writing environment that promoted positive self-concept through an emphasis on response to student writing based on content rather than on mechanics (Avery, 1987:74).

The nature of the writing prompt of the Literacy Passport Test sample assumes the necessity for following directions explicitly. Given the characteristics of the prompt (topic, stimulation, expectation, and frame) as well as the research I reviewed in the writing of this paper, I created a series of teaching strategies that model application of the writing process and provide ways of addressing the prompt.

The program which I developed was based on three elements: (a) knowledge of, and facility with, writing process; (b) the nature of the Literacy Passport test and the fact that it assumes students will employ writing process in their approach to the prompt; and (c) analysis of the nature of writing characteristics of students identified as "at-risk."

The following is an outline of the units which were taught:

- First week: Setting up a writing folder, getting organized to write, prewriting, brainstorming.
- Second week: Free-writing with an emphasis on writing for different audiences.
- Third week: The importance of the reading/writing connection: the writing of a dinosaur story.
- Fourth week: Revision, including peer collaboration and revision strategies to use with readers and writers, sentence-combining.
- Fifth and Sixth weeks: Writing stories with first graders.
- Seventh week: Editing, The Literacy Passport Test--domains and scoring.
- Eighth and Ninth weeks: Publishing.

(Appendix D provides a more detailed description of these lessons.)

Non-Participant/Observer Activities. During the second hour of the language arts block over this nine-week period, I observed in Ms. Williams' class. I chose to sit in several different places in the room so that I could view the students from different perspectives. During group activities, I walked around the room listening to different groups as they interacted. I wrote my observations in my field notes as unobtrusively as possible, often completing these notes during the hour that followed the class.

During the third hour each day, I wrote my field notes regarding the lessons that I had taught, completed my field notes for Ms. Williams' class, and interviewed students and teachers. As this time block included recess and the lunch period, such interviews were easy to pursue. I also observed in the Chapter I class and in the Written Language class. On two occasions, I observed the Written Language class on Mondays so that I could see two of my at-risk students in that classroom setting.

#### Phase Two (November 27, 1989-February 8, 1990)

During phase two, my procedures for data collection remained similar to those in phase one except for three changes. First, as explained in the introduction to this chapter, I decided to collect data on only four students for my study. Secondly, I revised lessons based on field notes of students' reactions to the content or approach of the lessons in phase one. A detailed explanation of the lessons used in phase two are included in Appendix D. The third change in phase two was that I gave a simulated Literacy Passport Test writing sample to all 97 students in fifth grade at Grover Elementary School.

## Data Analysis Procedures

In my analysis, I used Hoagland's (1984:58-59) method of data triangulation, a three-fold procedure, (a) analysis of my field notes, (b) analysis of my interviews with students and teachers, and (c) my analysis of documents including the fourth-grade baseline assessment, papers written in response to my lessons as well as the lessons of the actual language arts teacher, and the simulated Literacy Passport Test.

### Field Note Analysis

I divided my field notes into three main categories: (a) student behavior, (b) language arts teacher behavior, and (c) researcher behavior. In the category of student behavior, I created the sub-categories of (a) behavior within the language arts classroom, (b) behavior outside of the language arts classroom, (d) behavior during the writing task, and (e) behavior when the writing task was completed. In the category of language arts teacher behavior, I divided my notes on teacher/student interactions into the sub-categories of (a) interactions during group instruction, (b) interactions during individual work time, and (c) interactions outside of the language arts classroom. In the category of researcher behavior, I created sub-categories of (a) a description of the lessons taught in each class, (b) what I did outside of the class during the third hour each



day, (c) how I interacted with each of the students in my study, and (d) how the students responded to my interactions.

### Interview Analysis

In the category of student's response, I subdivided transcription of the student interview data into (a) information provided by the student about his/her life outside of class, (b) student perceptions of themselves in class, (c) how the student approached writing, (d) reactions to specific papers, and (e) how the student thought he/she could improve as a writer. With the teacher interviews, I sub-divided my transcriptions into (a) information about the student outside of class, (b) teacher perception of student behavior unrelated to writing, (c) teacher perception of student behavior related to writing, (d) teacher perception of student work, and (e) teacher suggestions for improving the writing of each student.

### Document Analysis

The primary focus of my case studies, the analysis of student papers, was centered on three papers from each of the four students. The first paper in the set was the actual writing sample of the student on the fourth-grade, baseline Literacy Passport Test. The second paper was the one judged "best" among all the papers written during the eighteen weeks of the classroom portion of my study. As each student wrote

between 25-30 papers during this time, I collected, photocopied, and then returned them to the student. I carried out a general impression reading of each of the papers in each student's writing folder and chose the best one, based on the quality of the information, from the group of papers for each student. The third paper selected for in-depth analysis was the writing that each of the four students did in response to the simulated Literacy Passport Test sample administered to each of the students in the fifth-grade during the last week of the study.

Data Recognition Corporation scored the fourth-grade baseline writing samples using the domain-scoring method developed for use on the Literacy Passport Test. Judith Self of the Virginia Department of Education Language Arts Service used the same method to score the "best" papers and the simulated Literacy Passport Test papers (papers two and three), for each of the four students in the study. I scored the remaining 93 fifth-grade papers at the sixth-grade level of assessment using the same method of domain-scoring.

Analytic Assessment. I also carried out an analytic assessment of each of these papers, based in part on the features which Shaughnessy (1977:90-93) terms "common errors" and in part on sentence weighting. Sentence sophistication is a major concern in the domain of elaboration on the Literacy Passport Test. Sentence weighting permitted me to measure the level of sophistication in each of the student's

sentences. I chose to use sentence weighting rather than T-unit analysis because sentence weight analysis permits the researcher to quantify writing ability by measuring the depth of elaboration in each sentence within the student's composition. DiStefano and Howie consider sentence weight analysis to be a "more sophisticated measure for looking at syntactic complexity than the T-unit" (cited in Nutter, 1981:17).

In performing sentence weight analysis, the researcher locates the base clause in each sentence and assigns each of those words, excluding all prepositions and articles, a weight of 1. Each of the modifiers of the base clause is weighted a 2. Modifiers of the 2-weight words are weighted a 3 and so on. When all of these words have been weighted, the researcher adds all of the numbers together and divides by the number of words in the sentence to arrive at a sentence weighting. The higher the number, the more syntactically sophisticated the sentence. A paragraph weight is determined by adding each of the sentence weights together and dividing by the number of sentences.

I conducted a sentence weight analysis on each of the 25-30 papers written by the four students in the study as well as on the simulated Literacy Passport Test writing samples of the other 93 fifth-graders at Grover Elementary School. The lowest level of syntactic sophistication found in this analysis yielded a sentence weight of one--the

sentence had only base words and no modifiers. In all of the papers I analyzed, I found that a moderate level of syntactic sophistication yielded a sentence weight of two: the sentence consisted of one base clause and one subordinate clause. The highest level of syntactic sophistication in all of the sentences I rated yielded a sentence weight of 2.82. This sentence consisted of one base clause and a highly elaborated subordinate clause. The examples in Table 6 were extracted from the papers I rated. The first example is from a paper written by one of the four students in my study. The second and third examples are from the papers of the other 93 students that were written in response to the simulated Literacy Passport Test because the four students in my study did not write sentences at those levels of syntactic sophistication. The purpose of designating sentences at three levels was to put into perspective the kinds of sentences written by the four students in the study in relation to the writing of other students at that grade level.

Domain Analysis. I analyzed each of the student papers using the domain assessment used in scoring papers for the Literacy Passport Test. Data Recognition Corporation scored the fourth-grade, baseline test in Spring, 1989. As they were written by fourth-graders, the scoring was based on the features which should be considered "consistent control" at that level. Self scored the "best" paper and the simulated

TABLE 6

## Examples of Levels of Syntactic Sophistication

**An example of a sentence of low syntactic sophistication is:**

1 1 1 1 1  
It was raining cats and dogs.

weight: 5  
words: 5  
sentence weight 1

**An example of a sentence of moderate syntactic sophistication is:**

2 3 2 2 3 1 1 2  
Because my uncle is in the navy, they live in Europe.

weight: 16  
words: 8  
sentence weight: 2.0

**An example of a sentence of high syntactic sophistication is:**

2 2 2 4 3 3 2 7 6 5  
If you purchase a very fluffy, sassy hamster at your neighborhood pet  
4 1 1 2 1 1 2  
shop, it might not want to be held at first.

weight: 48  
words: 17  
sentence weight: 2.82

Literacy Passport Test writing sample for each of the four students in my study. The Literacy Passport Test domain scoring criteria are designed to measure student achievement of fourth-grade and sixth-grade students. Because these students were fifth-graders, the papers were scored at both levels. The primary difference between the two levels is in the level of control in the domains of composing and style. For example, at the fourth-grade level of assessment, a score of "consistent control" in the domain of composing would not be expected to include as many details (elaboration) as would be expected at the sixth-grade level to indicate the same level of control. The example which follows will help to explain how the papers are rated.

The following is an example of a sixth-grade paper used in training by the Virginia Department of Education Language Arts Service to show the features inherent in the writing of a sixth-grade student and to highlight developmental aspects. The explication of the domains that follows was written by Judith S. Self as part of a forthcoming publication on remediation to be published by the Virginia Department of Education (June, 1990). The underlined features are the ones that are considered indicators of consistent control at the sixth-grade level. I obtained this document from Judith Self:

One day I was walking on the road and I saw the coolest candy apple red car. I looked at the back to see the name of the car, and the name is a

PORSHE. I kept looking at the car because I liked it so much.

Then about 1 minute later the owner of the car came out of the store. He said, "What are you doing?" I'm looking at your cool car. He said, "Well, do you like it?" I love it. Well I'd better go, Bye.

When I got home I went straight to my room and thought about that car with me in it. When I got to the good part mom called me down to ask me what I wanted for my birthday. My 12th birthday was coming up, so I said a PORSHE. My mother said, "You are not getting a PORSHE until you are older and can drive!" She also added that I would need a job with alot of money and that I would get a PORSHE only in my dreams! I got serious and said anything would suit me.

I woke up on March 19th 1989, and do you know what was sitting in the driveway a mini PORSHE! I said to mom and dad Ha Ha Ha! Very funny! Then we all laughed.

I got more than that. I got clothes and all kinds of things but my favorite was the mini apple red PORSHE!

What follows is an analysis written by Judith Self in an unpublished document designed to inform teachers about the scoring of these papers:

**Composing:** The writer has consistent control over Composing features, rating a 4. He creates a story around Porsches (central idea), telling the readers how he came to notice real Porsches, and why he got a toy Porsche for his birthday. The time-sequence organization has no lapses, and is fully and evenly elaborated. He does not digress, maintains one point of view, and creates a clever closure--all unifying the anecdote.

**Style:** The writing earns a 4 for consistently controlling the features of style. He constructs a variety of sentences to yield a rhythmical reading. He manipulates his vocabulary to be occasionally visual ("candy apple red"), sometimes audible ("Ha Ha Ha"), and often

specific ("1 minute later"). His deliberate selection of information (for example, instead of saying that he and the store owner "talked," he related the conversation), his deliberate placement of information (for example, the conversation with his mom), and his deliberate crafting of images to convey information (for example, "...thought about that car with me in it.")--all of these enhance the volume of his voice and create the pieces' playful tone. This writer shapes language to form a stylistic piece.

**Sentence Formation:** The writer's control of this domain is consistent, a 4. His shaping of language creates very sophisticated syntax. He subordinates (for example, "...because I liked it so much.", "When I got home...", "...that I would need a job...") coordinates (first sentence), and performs other embedding and expanding at will (for example, instead of using separate sentences "It was one minute later. The owner of the he imbeds one idea within the other: "Then about 1 minute later the owner of the car...").

**Usage:** The writer is also consistent in his control of this domain, a 4.. The two tense inflection errors ("...is a Porsche" should be "was"; "...is coming up" should be "was") pale in comparison to the total display of other correct usage in inflections, agreements, conventions, and word meanings.

**Mechanics:** The writers' control of this domain is reasonable, a 3. While formatting, capitalization and spelling are intact mechanics (Porsche is a hard word!), some punctuation skills are not yet internalized. He does not mark conversations and he occasionally needs commas after an interrupter (well[,]) or after an introductory clause (When I got to the good part [,]... .") Lack of these surface features sufficiently distract the reader to warrant a score of reasonable rather than consistent control.

(Judith S. Self, unpublished, 1990).

Thus, the Porsche paper would be scored as presented in Table



Table 7  
Scoring of the Porsche Paper

	Scores	Readers	Weight	Totals
Composing	4	x 2	x 3	24
Style	4	x 2	x 2	16
Sentence Formation	4	x 2	x 1	8
Usage	4	x 2	x 1	8
Mechanics	3	x 2	x 1	6
TOTAL SCORE				62

The three papers I analyzed for each student in this study were scored in the same manner. Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) had scored the fourth-grade papers during the spring of 1989. I prepared a narrative explanation for each of these papers, based on the training that I received during the four training sessions that I attended. The second and third papers were scored by Self using both fourth and sixth-grade standards. In February, 1990, I interviewed her, and I based the narrative for each of these papers on her comments regarding how she had scored the papers. I then prepared a discussion of the problems that each student encountered in each writing task.

## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDIES

This chapter includes case studies of four children who were identified as at-risk for passing the sixth-grade Literacy Passport Test in writing. Each case study includes seven sections of information on each student. An overview of the student in the school setting and a vignette that characterizes the typical classroom behavior of the child comprise the first two sections of the chapter. Based on interviews with the language arts teacher and the writing resource teacher, the next section gives their perceptions of each child. Interviews with each student provide the information for a section on how the student perceives himself/herself within the classroom. My observations of the child within the school environment are the focus of the fifth section. The sixth section of each case study is an analysis of three papers written over a one-year time span. Each paper has been assessed both analytically and by domain scoring. All of the analytical assessment is my own. The domain scoring was done by Developmental Research Corporation and by Judith S. Self of the State Department of Education. The first paper is the actual Literacy Passport Test fourth-grade assessment sample. The domain analysis of this paper includes the actual scores provided by DRC and my

assessment based on the features which exhibit control in each domain. The second paper in this section is one of the twenty papers produced by each student during the twenty-one weeks that I was in the classroom. This paper is one I selected as the student's best work, based on a holistic analysis I did on each of the papers produced. Self scored this paper and the analysis which follows is based on an interview with her in which she explained why she had scored each paper as she did. The final paper in this section is the sample produced in response to a simulated Literacy Passport Test writing prompt. Again Self scored the paper and I prepared the assessment. Because the students in the study were fifth-graders, Self provided a score at both the fourth and the sixth-grade levels of assessment.

The final section of each case study discusses the implications for instruction for each student based on classroom behavior and writing instructional needs. The information which serves as a basis for this section was provided by the classroom teachers, my observations of the child and by my assessment of each writing sample. Table 8 provides demographic information on each of the four students in this study.

Table 8

Demographic Information on the Four  
Students in the Study

<b>Student</b>	<b>Date of Birth</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Postion in Family</b>	<b>Special Designation</b>
Andy	02/79	M	1st of 1	None
Peggy	10/78	F	2nd of 5	LD
Eric	06/79	M	3rd of 3	LD
Jane	07/78	F	2nd of 3	None

## ANDY

Smaller than most of the other children in his class, thin and wiry, Andy is in fifth grade for the first time. He has been at Grover Elementary School since kindergarten where his grades have remained consistently in the mid-C range. This year his grades in social studies, science and health have been lower, and he has received several "U's", the lowest grade. Andy does "B" work in math, the subject he considers to be his favorite. His language arts scores have remained at the "C" level this year. His principal did show a sample of Andy's writing to the writing resource teacher earlier this year, but no formal evaluation of his abilities has been initiated. Andy works with a volunteer reading tutor for thirty minutes twice a week.

## Vignette

As language arts begins, Andy saunters into the room, his face alive with anticipation. Although he seeks the recognition of several of the boys in the class, they are already paired off and try their best to ignore Andy. After two full circles of the room, during which time he rearranges the chalk on the tray, replaces two stick pins on the bulletin board and types staccato on the classroom computer, Andy flops in his chair and sits for a moment with his arms

folded on his desk. His eyes continue to roam around the room.

Andy is unprepared for the bi-weekly spelling quiz; and, although most of the children are now studying their words independently, Andy fills this time borrowing a pencil from the teacher and begging paper from Andrea, his desk mate. For a few moments he rifles in his desk, then stands and takes the long way around the room to the pencil sharpener. On the way, Andy stops to tell to Ms. Williams that he's forgotten his words, playfully bats Ned's spelling words from his desk, and pauses momentarily to read a magazine in the reading corner. After Ms. Williams tells him to sit down and get back to work, Andy finishes sharpening his pencil and returns to his desk in an opposite pattern from his first trip. As the quiz begins, Andy furrows his forehead, clutches his pencil in his right hand and pushes down so hard that the lead breaks. Andy announces this fact loudly as he stands up to resharpen his pencil. The class waits patiently as Andy completes this task; and, sighing audibly, Ms. Williams tells Andy that this is absolutely the last time that he will be permitted to leave his seat until the quiz is over. Andy nods and bends intently over his paper.

As Ms. Williams read the words, Andy frowns intently, mouths the letters, and writes quickly and deliberately. The quiz ends and, as the class begins to exchange papers, Andy announces that he's probably made a hundred even though he

forgot to study. He contends that the words this time were "really easy." As the papers are corrected, Andy interrupts the teacher twice to ask her to clarify something in the paper that he's correcting. When Andy's quiz is returned to him, he's disappointed to discover that he's missed eight of the twenty words, but he consoles himself by promising aloud that he'll work harder next time.

#### School Personnel Perceptions of Andy

At the beginning of the year, Ms. Williams characterized Andy as "a low student all around. He lacks a lot of skills. Plus, he likes to talk a lot and be wiggly and that kind of thing." Ms. Williams credits Andy's passing grades in her class to what she calls the "whole language structure" of her classroom. She said that the workbook pages and skill sheets so often required in the typical language arts classroom would be difficult for Andy. She noted that he was particularly enjoying reading the Narnia Chronicles and seemed to benefit from the volunteer, one-on-one, tutorial help provided by a parent in the school.

Ms. Williams attributes Andy's problems to his inability to stay on task. She said

Work-wise, he doesn't have it. He's just not getting it. I would like to think that he knows what to do on an average level, but getting him to sit down and to put his attention on it and to work through--he's not going to do it. I just



don't see him doing it because I don't think attention-wise he can stand it--just sitting down and doing it. By himself. If I sat down and said 'Ok, Andy, let's write a story,' then we'd be done in no time, like the story he wrote with Tim (the student teacher). But for Andy to sit at his own desk and do it for himself...I don't think he'll do it.

Ms. Williams did not think that retaining Andy in the fifth grade would do him any good. When I asked Ms. Williams what she thought Andy's chances were for passing the Literacy Passport Test in the sixth-grade, she said simply, "If he continues the way that he is, I don't think that he will."

Mrs. Carpenter, the written language specialist, said that, although an earlier teacher had referred Andy for case consultation, his referral had gone no farther. She had never observed him or worked with him. She knew about Andy's behavior in class because she said that he had been a frequent subject for discussion in the teachers' lounge over the years. Mrs. Carpenter laughed and said, "I know about Andy because everyone knows about Andy!"

Teacher expectation of Andy's behavior appears to be a fine example of what Brophy and Good (1974:39) term "self-fulfilling prophecy." Ms. Williams considers Andy a "low student" as a result of her perception of his inability to stay on task. Consequently, she has little confidence that he can perform well in a typical language arts classroom.

Although Mrs. Carpenter has never worked with him, she has heard Andy discussed frequently in the teachers' lounge over the years and shares Ms. Williams' impression that Andy is a poor student. Research (Brophy and Good, 1974:34-39) has shown that a student responds to a teacher with behavior that complements and reinforces the teacher's particular expectations for him. Andy's behavior reflects the expectations his teachers show for him. Neither appear aware of Andy's creative potential nor of his perception of self.

#### Andy's Perception of School

I interviewed Andy informally at one of the outdoor picnic tables on the school grounds on a bright sunny day in February. He appeared pleased to be outside, particularly when the other students were eating lunch in the noisy cafeteria and he was permitted to eat with me alone. As a result of both my observations and my interactions with Andy, I realized that most of his responses would be the ones that he expected I wanted to hear. He confided to me that he really enjoyed writing. When I asked him why, he responded:

I like to write because it's fun and I got a good imagination and I like writing and there isn't nothin about why I don't like writing and so--nothin about that.

I asked him about the dinosaur story that he had worked on for two days in class and he said:

I wrote that story here at school. I didn't work on it none at home 'cuz if I work on it at home I'm not gonna have no time to work on it. So I kind of left it at school and did it at school 'cuz I have time to did it here 'cuz when you come here to class you take it and tell us how to write and stuff.

I asked Andy if he were enjoying my working with his class and he smiled and nodded his head. When I questioned him about whether or not he felt that he was writing better than he had before he said:

My handwriting used to be sloppy, but since you've been coming in and teaching us how to write, it's been getting better.

When I asked Andy what kinds of things he liked to write about he said:

Just stuff that's not true, 'cuz I've got a great imagination as people tell me. Just a while ago in language arts, me and Bobby we wrote a story about a dwarf in a picture. We had to write a story and we couldn't tell that we had a picture and we wrote about a dwarf that went into this magical door and this magical door was like a book called The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. He went to this magical land and how Lucy met the Phonic and the lightpost, well the dwarf met an orange frog singing 'Mary had a little frog' and after he got done singing he said 'Burp, how do you do?'...The burp was my idea.

Andy said that he thought that the only area where he needed to improve in writing was to learn how to indent, although he couldn't remember what it was called and had to draw in the air what he meant.

Andy told me that besides language arts he really enjoyed science because they did lots of experiments and he liked

math because he was good at it. When I asked him how well he was doing in school this year he said:

Well, not too good this six weeks. I didn't do good on my report card, but you know Ms. Williams is on my back. She said she'd stick on me like white on rice and since she did that my behavior has went up like ten times better. So now I'm doing better in school, lately...She watches me and talks with me about how I've been doing better. My mom says that she's glad she said that and that I'm doing better in school. And on my weekly papers--I got A and B papers on my weekly papers--on my frog sheet. Ms. Williams wrote "Andy has been doing better on his behavior than he was."

When I asked Andy why he thought his behavior was a problem he responded:

It's 'cuz like it runs in the family that one of my grandparents, well my grandmother, used to talk a lot 'cuz they worked in like a kind of a radio station and they used to announce and so they got used to talking a lot and then they had my dad and then he talked just a little much and then I just got it from my grandmother, but I'm doing better now.

Andy said that he had lots of friends in school and that David was his best friend in the class, but some of the other boys liked him, too, although none of the girls did. He was quick to add that some of the girls in the lower grades liked him, though, because he had known them since they were small.

We continued to chat until lunch was over and then as we got up to return to the building, Andy hugged me and told me how much he would miss me when I was no longer teaching his class.

## Classroom Observations of Andy

During the twenty-one weeks in which I observed and taught in Andy's language arts classroom, I had an opportunity to discover much about his character and his actions within the classroom. Andy appeared to enjoy being the center of attention and, if he could not be a positive attention-getter, he settled for the negative attention which he received for misbehavior. Andy seem to have difficulty sitting in his seat for extended periods of time and sought opportunities to move about the room, to go to the bathroom or to run errands for the teacher. Andy tended to rely on his verbal skills and enjoyed reading aloud and engaging in oral activities. If the oral activities were ones which were performed immediately, Andy participated eagerly, but, if they required outside class work, he was not prepared.

During one class period when I asked the students to brainstorm a list of potential topics for a storytelling activity on family stories, Andy did not write down a single idea until I sat down next to him and took notes while he told me a story about his father teaching him to drive a bob-cat. The written story which emerged from my notes was three lines long.

Ms. Williams isolated Andy to encourage him to do his work independently. Andy appeared to dislike the isolation and usually did little work during these times. During one

of these punishment sessions at the beginning of the school year, I observed Andy during a journal writing session. He wrote three lines during the first five minutes, stopping frequently to gaze around the room, count on his fingers, stand up to sharpen his pencil, stand up again to get a drink from the fountain. He sat down resignedly when Mrs. Williams told him that he would have silent lunch if he didn't get to work. At the end of class, Andy had written eight sentences.

One activity in which Andy engaged joyfully was the recitation of a poem. I had taken several books of poetry into the classroom and realized that for over a week Andy had hoarded Shel Silverstein's Light in the Attic in his desk. As this activity was part of an oral language component to my lessons, I told the students that we would tape record their recitations and play them back in order to respond to the presentations. On the day of the recitation, Andy recited a five-line poem from Silverstein. Then, pleased with his performance, Andy recited it again and, retrieving my book from his desk, he read a two-page poem from the book into the tape recorder.

During a class exercise in sentence combining, Andy announced that he didn't really think that anything needed to be combined because he liked it just the way it was. It sounded "kind of country" to him, and he approved of that form of writing. When I encouraged him to work a little harder on the assignment, he insisted on coming up to my desk

to show me each change that he had made. It soon became obvious that Andy did not fully comprehend the purpose of this activity. As I was unable to work one-on-one with Andy at this time, Andy finally gave up and wandered off to the reading corner looking for someone with whom to talk.

Andy did not stay "on task" on tasks that isolated him for more than five minutes at a time. As long as I or Ms. Williams could provide him with consistent and frequent feedback, preferably by sitting next to him during the writing task, Andy would work, at least minimally. Andy wrote most successfully on narrative assignments that included a good deal of action. He did not write well on activities which were either expository or descriptive. On those days when other students required more of my or Ms. Williams' time, Andy would do little or no work and would wander around the room until reprimanded.

### An Analysis of Andy's Papers

#### Fourth Grade Baseline Assessment

Andy was recognized as at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test on the basis of his total writing score of 36 on the fourth-grade baseline assessment (Appendix E) which he took in February, 1989, when he was a ten-year-old fourth grader. The following is a copy of his response to the prompt, "What is your favorite animal?"

I like cats. There neat and fary. I have a cat his name is Midnight. My family has three more cats. Their are lots more cats like the lion and the tiger. I like the tiger the best. With his stirps. Lots of cats have stirps. Same plan cats do. Tigers do to. Lions have mains not stirps.

As I was not present to observe Andy's writing to this prompt, I am unable to comment on the circumstances under which he wrote his paper. I can, however, provide an analysis both from the perspective of an analytic assessment and of a domain-scored assessment.

#### Analytic Assessment

This selection consists of one paragraph with ten sentences containing one run-on and two fragments. There are no incorrect verb tenses; seven words are spelled incorrectly. (Words which are misspelled more than once in a sample are only counted one time.) The sentence weight for this selection is 1.36 which indicates a low level of sentence sophistication. An explanation of the determination of sentence weighting is found in chapter 3. A detailed analysis of this weighting is found in Appendix E.



Domain Assessment:

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

Composing	1.5
Style	1.5
Sentence Formation	3.0
Usage	4.0
Mechanics	<u>3.5</u>
Total	36

(See Table 2 for an explanation of how the total score is derived.)

Composing. The treatment of the central idea, "I like cats," lacks unity because there is no logical progression between the statements. The sentences could be rearranged in any order and are simply a list of his ideas about different kinds of cats.

Style. The paper digresses from the central idea and has an unclear tone and a weak selection of details. Although some voice is discernible, it is not consistent.

Sentence Formation. The paper uses a repetitious sentence structure, includes one example of enjambment and two sentence fragments.

Usage. The writer makes no errors in usage. At the fourth-grade level "there" and "their" are counted as spelling errors.

Mechanics. The writer does not use paragraph formatting. The spelling errors and the shortness of the selection determine this score.

### Discussion

Although Andy asserts early in his paper that his family has three cats, he does not mention them again and digresses into a random listing of the characteristics of other cats. He lacks an ability to retain a focus on his central idea, a problem which probably could have been addressed if Andy had done some pre-writing before he began to write. Although the prompt paper included space for prewriting, nothing was written in that space on Andy's paper thus indicating that he had done no transcribed prewriting. His problems in composing and style resulted in his low score.

### Best Writing

The following paper was written as a result of a lesson in elaboration which was based on the analysis of a Ray Bradbury short story. The students were asked to write a story which developed the idea that a dinosaur was walking out of the jungle.

It was a Stormy Cold day. It was raining cats and dogs. The lightning was crashing trhogh the sky. Thund was banging wildly. The dino was scard of the Bully dinosaur. The dino ran out of the Jungle. He ran as fast as he cuould right into the street coner. Not the street corner is called the Chip off the old block. There was one child there who just got out of school. He through the bannana pill down the dino sliped on the bannana pill and fell down. The dino got back

up and chaced the boy. he chased and he cased.  
 Then he cought the Boy. Well He ate the Boy too.  
 Then he got realy realy sick. The people said  
 he had to go to the Doctor. I will not go to the  
 Doctor said the dino. So he ate another human  
 to keep the Doctor away. Months Later the dino  
 grow up to a dinosaur. He ran back into the  
 Jungle. And he killed the Big Big dinosaur  
 Bully! The end.

### Description of Writing Behaviors

Andy's second writing was done on the second day of school after the Christmas holiday. It was also the second day that a student teacher, Tim Pitt, was in the room. Andy immediately sought the attention of the student teacher. After the mini-lesson, while other students worked independently at their desks, Andy moved over to sit next to the student teacher at a round table near Ms. Williams' desk. The student teacher was there to observe the class but made suggestions to Andy as he wrote diligently for the entire thirty-minute session. When class was over, Andy brought his paper for me to see, and I immediately made a photocopy, since I was not sure that Andy would have the paper in class the next day, although he insisted that he was taking it home to work on it overnight. I saw several notes jotted on the bottom of Andy's paper which were obviously in Mr. Pitt's handwriting. These notes included "dino chases, catches and eats the boy," "gets real sick," "eats another human to keep the doctor away," and "months later dino grows into a dinosaur and kills the dinosaur Bully."

To my surprise, Andy still had his original paper the next day and volunteered to read aloud to the class what he had written. Although Andy frequently volunteered to read aloud, his writing was usually so confusing that the other students rarely paid attention to what Andy was reading. This oral reading was no different, and the class virtually ignored him until I initiated the clapping when he had finished reading. Ordinarily, the class claps spontaneously to every oral reading selection, a practice initiated by Ms. Williams and continued by me. Andy grinned, sat down and continued to write diligently for the rest of the period, although I was reading aloud to the class, an activity which Andy usually enjoyed. Andy consulted with the student teacher at least once during this class period.

At the end of the period, Andy handed me his completed piece which I quickly photocopied, because I was still sure that the original would be lost before he came to class on the following day. I realized that all four of the ideas which Mr. Pitt had jotted on the bottom of Andy's paper the day before served as the basis for the rest of Andy's story.

Again, I was surprised when Andy came to class clutching his original draft. He read the completed selection to the class, but the class again failed to respond without my initiating the clapping. This selection was by far the most sophisticated piece that Andy had produced in class. It was obvious to me that Andy had benefitted from the scaffolding

technique (Langer and Applebee, 1986:173) which Mr. Pitt used to encourage Andy to think beyond his original thoughts. Andy became excited about the project which allowed him to use his favorite writing form (narrative) and to create a highly active story in which the central character ultimately is successful.

### Analytic Assessment

This selection contains one paragraph of nineteen sentences, no fragments and one run on. There is one example of an incorrect verb tense and thirteen misspelled words. The sentence weight for this sample is 1.66, still fairly low but better than his other writing. A detailed analysis of the weighting is found in Appendix E.

### Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

	Fourth Grade	Sixth Grade
Composing	4	2
Style	4	3
Sentence Formation	4	3
Usage	4	3
Mechanics	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
Total score	60	41

(See Table 2 for an explanation of how the Total scores are derived.)

Composing. Although this story is not evenly elaborated, the elaboration is sufficient to warrant a 4 at the fourth-grade level but is reduced to a 2 at the sixth-grade level. The lack of organization, although typical at the fourth-grade level, demonstrates inconsistent control at the sixth-grade level.

Style. There is an attempt to select information. The lack of sentence variety, however, leads to the lower score at the sixth-grade level.

Sentence Formation. The sixth-grade score of 3 is a result of overcoordination in sentence structure.

Usage. The writer demonstrates consistent control of this domain.

Mechanics. Inconsistent control at the fourth-grade level is indicated by the lack of paragraph formatting and random capitalization. Little or no control at the sixth grade level is determined by the misspelling of functional words and the inconsistencies in capitalization and punctuation.

### Discussion

Overall, this is a far more sophisticated writing than any other that Andy has done either before or since. Although Mr. Pitt provided many of the ideas for this sample, both orally during the initial collaboration, and in writing at the end of that first day, Andy organized and expanded

upon the ideas to produce a coherent piece. Mr. Pitt wrote "dino chases, catches and eats the boy," and Andy expanded that idea into four sentences. Mr. Pitt then wrote "gets real sick," and Andy connected that idea with a dialogue between "the people" and the dino concerning whether or not the dino should go to the doctor. Mr. Pitt wrote "eats another human to keep the doctor away," which Andy connected to his earlier dialogue with the word "so." Mr. Pitt's final written suggestion was "months later dino grows into a dinosaur and kills the dinosaur Bully." Andy wrote that the dino grew up, and then he added that the dino ran back into the jungle before killing the "Big Big dinosaur Bully." Andy wrote a story with an identifiable beginning, middle and end, and he added details to Mr. Pitt's suggestions to expand the story line. In all of his writing, Andy had difficulty generating ideas, but this experience indicates that, when permitted to work collaboratively, Andy is capable of taking suggestions and turning them into a highly elaborated piece. Such collaboration, which would be beneficial to Andy, is not permissible on the Literacy Passport Test.

Although Andy can no longer locate this paper, his obvious pride in its accomplishment has led him to refer frequently to it as the best writing that he had done all year. It is the only one of the three papers analyzed for Andy's case study that produced a passing score at the fourth-grade level of assessment. His lack of control in the

domains of composing and mechanics, however, produced a failing score when the sixth-grade criteria were applied.

### Simulated Literacy Passport Test

Andy wrote the following paper as a response to the prompt "Write about the best day you ever had."

The Best day of my {"life" was omitted} is going to Be on my Birthday Feb. 11 1990 this Sunday. Because all my life I took my birthday to Showbiz. I am so excited I can't wate. It is going to be sad because Miss Willson is going to live us.

### Description of Behavior

The third sample was written in February, 1990, on the next-to-last day that I was in his classroom. We had done several prompted writings prior to this time; and, as I reviewed the process to follow, Andy announced that it was not necessary for him to plan, because he already had his idea in his head. Instead of using the bottom of the prompt page to brainstorm, as did every other child in the classroom, Andy immediately began to write his draft there. It became obvious to me that although I had explained the purpose of brainstorming many times, Andy still did not grasp its purpose. I provided students with several pieces of blank paper on which to write their drafts, but Andy's pages



were returned blank. His only draft was written directly on the bottom of the prompt sheet.

Andy wrote three sentences and brought his paper for me to read. I told him that I thought that he needed to spend more time on his paper and again suggested that he spend some time pre-writing since he complained that he could not think of anything else to say. He shook his head and returned to his desk where he stared around the room for over a minute and then added one more sentence. The total elapsed writing time was seven minutes. Andy brought his four-sentence draft to my desk again. I read it and encouraged him to work on it some more. He smiled and returned to drop his paper on his desk. Andy then moved into the reading corner and read for the rest of the period. At the end of the period, I picked up Andy's paper from his desk. He never looked at it again.

### Analytic Analysis

Andy's one paragraph paper consisted of four sentences, as defined by punctuation and capitalization, which contained two run-ons and one sentence fragment. There are two misspelled words in the selection and one incorrect verb tense. The sentence weight for this sample is 1.96, far higher than either of his previous papers. Andy is beginning to subordinate and consequently his level of syntactic

sophistication is increasing. A detailed analysis of the sentence weighting is found in Appendix E.

### Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

	Fourth Grade	Sixth Grade
Composing	1	1
Style	1	1
Sentence Formation	4	3
Usage	4	3
Mechanics	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
Total:	32	26

Composing. At the fourth-grade level, the selection is merely a list; at the sixth-grade level, there is even less control because of the digression in the final sentence and lack of point of view.

Style. The paper indicates little or no control as there is no attempt to select information, a weak vocabulary, and a lack of tone.

Sentence Formation. Although the paper exhibits consistent control of this domain at the fourth-grade level, a rating of reasonable control is assessed at the sixth-grade level because of the brevity of the sample. Although Andy's sentence weight for this sample is high, his syntactic sophistication impacts only in the domain of sentence

formation and not in the domain of style because his ideas remain simplistic.

Usage. The paper shows consistent control at the fourth-grade level, but only reasonable control is indicated at the sixth-grade level because the sample is too short to judge consistency.

Mechanics. This piece indicates reasonable control at the fourth-grade level because of the lack of paragraph formatting. At the sixth-grade level the writer demonstrates inconsistent control in capitalization, punctuation and spelling.

### Discussion

This final writing from Andy is disappointing to me. Several of the other writings which I analyzed to choose Andy's "best" writing, showed that he is capable of writing far more sophisticated pieces. For this sample, Andy chose to write about an event which had yet to happen and found himself unable to provide sufficient detail. His lack of planning prior to writing and his decision to begin with the first idea that entered his head, a very common behavior with Andy, limited his writing fluency. It was obvious to me that the context of this writing assignment had a negative impact on Andy's fluency. Andy had written everything that he could think of about his topic when he brought his paper to me the first time. His three sentences were all that he could

generate about an event that was yet to happen. Although I recognized that in the actual Literacy Passport Testing situation I would be unable to respond to Andy's paper, I encouraged Andy to write some more. I did not give Andy any specific suggestions. He returned to his desk and began to think about the help that I had given him in the past weeks that I was in his classroom. His final statement reflects his sadness with the fact that I will soon be leaving as well as his desire to please me. This desire to please is evident not only in his written comments but also in his need for frequent hugs and oral praise. When he brought his final paper to me and again received encouragement from me to continue, he could not: he had said everything that he knew to say.

Although this is the shortest of Andy's writing samples, it does exhibit the highest level of sentence sophistication as measured by sentence weight. Because Andy is beginning to subordinate his ideas, his sentence weight and, as a consequence, his score in the domain of sentence formation increased. Syntactic sophistication does not impact, however, in the domain of style and, consequently, Andy's score remains low. If Andy had spent some time in prewriting and had chosen a topic which would have been easier for him to elaborate, his piece might have been longer.

## Implications for Instruction

Andy does not perceive of himself as a poor writer. Near the end of my instruction in Andy's class, I asked the students to write about how they saw themselves as writers.

Andy wrote:

I've got a great imagenation like the story I wrote called When the dino walked out of the Jungle. There isn't nothing I do like about writing.

by Andy the imagenation king

When Andy brought me his response to this assignment, I asked him if he really meant that he did not like anything about writing. He grinned and returned to his desk to change "do" to "don't" and handed in his paper.

Andy's characterization of himself as "the imagenation king" is interesting. Despite poor scores, as measured by the domains of the Literacy Passport Test, on all three of the papers analyzed here, Andy has potential as a writer. Andy perceives that he has great imagination, terming himself "the imagination king." Andy is an intelligent kid who enjoys reading, particularly science fiction, reciting poetry, and working in a collaborative environment. He does not work well in isolation, a practice which his teacher employed assuming it would increase his productivity when in reality it had the opposite effect. For Andy to be successful, he must be encouraged to write about topics which

he perceives as important and permitted to work collaboratively both with peers and with adults.

As exhibited by his domain scores on all three of his samples presented in this case study, Andy has fewer problems in the domains of Sentence Formation, Usage and Mechanics. His primary problems, and the ones which, considering their relative weights, will deter his passing the writing assessment in the Literacy Passport Test, are features in the domains of Composing and Style. To increase Andy's chances for success Andy needs to be made aware of the features measured in these domains.

Andy's perception of himself as imaginative could be used to advantage in prewriting lessons designed to permit him to select information from a larger knowledge base. For example, a lesson that focused on Andy's considerable knowledge of speed skating would ask him to list everything he could think of about speed skating and then to categorize his list into areas such as equipment, competition, famous skaters, and events in which he has been involved. Andy could then be asked to choose the area in which he had the most information and to write his assignment based on the information only in that category. Most importantly, Andy needs to be integrated into the social activity of the classroom.

Andy's chances for success on the Literacy Passport Test will be enhanced if he is placed in a writing environment

that allows for his understanding of the writing task, and provides positive reinforcement for his efforts. His best chance for growth in writing would be to develop confidence in such an environment.

### ERIC

With blonde hair, blue eyes and a dimpled grin, ten-year-old Eric is a handsome fifth-grade boy. Eric has attended Grover Elementary School since kindergarten where his grades have remained consistently low. Both his kindergarten and first-grade teachers were unsuccessful in their requests that he be retained because his parents refused to accept the teachers' recommendations. This year Eric has received several "U's", (the lowest grade), which has led to renewed argument for retention. His teachers are particularly concerned about his low grades in math and science as these are areas in which he scores well above average on standardized tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. His language arts grades have been in the "D" to "U" range, a level that was expected by his language arts teacher because Eric has a diagnosed learning disability in written language. He receives written language resource help for thirty minutes per day, five days a week. His parents also employ a college student to help him with his homework three days per week.

## Vignette

A minute late already, Eric pauses at the door, arms out-stretched as if to announce "I'm here!" to the class who ignore him completely. Eric glides to his seat, only to discover that, once again, Mrs. Anderson has moved him. His teacher tells him to sit alone at a side table so that, after completing his daily work, he can catch up on some of his missing assignments. Glancing up at the missing assignment board, Eric lets out a squawk, "I've done that assignment. You lost it. You're always losing my papers!"

When Mrs. Anderson does not respond to Eric's reaction, Eric sighs loudly, locates pencil and English textbook and glares at the teacher.

Mrs. Anderson hands out the photocopied worksheets which comprise the day's English lesson and explains, slowly and carefully, how to fill in the blanks on these sheets, which are a follow-up lesson for the previous day's English textbook assignment on nouns. She tells the class that they may refer to their books if they have any questions about the information required to complete the worksheets. As Mrs. Anderson talks, Eric stares around the room, drums his pencil on the desk, slaps himself playfully in the face, stands up to stretch, and grins broadly when Linda glances over at him.



Mrs. Anderson completes her directions, and the class begins the assignment silently. For a moment, Eric, too, stares down at his paper and then waves both hands wildly in the air as he announces loudly that he has absolutely no idea how to complete the worksheet. Mrs. Anderson comes over to the table where Eric is sitting, sits down in the chair next to his, and repeats exactly what she has told the class in her directions. At the end of her three-minute personal explanation to him, Eric nods, picks up his pencil and begins to write on the worksheet as Mrs. Anderson walks around the room answering other students' questions.

Eric works intently for two minutes and then, like the other class members, opens his English book. He props it up in front of his paper so that the book serves as a blind from Mrs. Anderson's watchful eye. Eric completes the first three items on the worksheet and proceeds to doodle on the side of the paper. He twirls his pencil baton-style until it finally drops on the floor, breaking the lead. Sighing, Eric stands up and goes to the pencil sharpener. On the way back, Eric pauses at Linda's desk to bop her on the head with a sheaf of papers. Linda's cry of indignation arouses Mrs. Anderson's attention; she reminds Eric that he must finish the worksheet before he leaves for resource help. Eric nods his head and for the next fifteen minutes sits quietly hidden behind his book-blind, doodling and staring off into space. One minute before he is due in the resource room, Eric stands

up and announces loudly that it is now time for him to go to Mrs. Carpenter. Mrs. Anderson nods, not looking up from her papers, and the class continues to work silently. Eric leaves, the unfinished worksheet still on the table.

#### School Personnel Perceptions of Eric

Ms. Williams had taught Eric in language arts in the fourth-grade. In an interview, Ms. Williams said that, Eric was a "smart ass" who wanted to be the center of attention in all situations. She cited his frequent habit of making grand entrances into the classroom as if to announce that someone special had arrived. Ms. Williams said that she felt that Eric was capable of better work than he produced and that he was "running a con game." Although she recognized that Eric had a diagnosed learning disability in written language, Ms. Williams said that she felt he used his disability as a way to avoid doing his work.

Eric's Written Language resource teacher, Mrs. Carpenter, said that, although Eric could produce sophisticated, syntactically correct oral language, he could not transfer that language to paper. She said that he did not like to write anything and that he would avoid writing "like the plague." In her explanation of why he was so reluctant to write she said:

It's just such a struggle for him to get it down on paper. His writing is not neat, you know--it's just his coordination. I think if it were easier for him to physically put the letters down, I think he could do well. He could organize his thoughts on paper very well if he didn't fight it so much.

Mrs. Carpenter said that Eric had been referred for written language resource in May of fourth-grade. Although she had worked with him five days a week for seven months, she had not seen any improvement in his written work, a fact which she found very discouraging, particularly in light of the fact that Eric scored above average on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and on the ability test from the psychologist that are required as part of the evaluation for resource help. Mrs. Carpenter said that he had barely qualified for learning disability help and only in the area of written language, not in reading, a phenomenon she termed unusual. She characterized him as a "bright boy" but with an "I don't care" attitude.

Mrs. Carpenter said that she really couldn't understand why Eric was not progressing because he had good reading comprehension skills and that she had seen him demonstrate his ability in math. He simply refused to do most work. Mrs. Carpenter said that, although long written responses were difficult for him to transcribe, there was no reason why Eric could not do the work required in fifth-grade.

Mrs. Carpenter did not feel that Eric should be retained in the fifth-grade. Although she did not see that resource

help had improved Eric's ability to write, she indicated that he would be recommended for learning disabilities help in written language in sixth-grade and that she would prepare his IEP plan in conjunction with the sixth-grade teacher. Mrs. Carpenter felt that Eric would pass the Literacy Passport Test in sixth-grade.

Mrs. Anderson, Eric's language arts teacher, spoke about him on two separate occasions, once during the earlier part of the semester and once near the end of my observation. Although the first interview took place less than four weeks into the school year, Mrs. Anderson had already determined that Eric should be retained because of his immaturity, and she said that she had spoken to his mother about it. Although Mrs. Anderson said that the mother acknowledged that Eric probably should have been retained in kindergarten or first grade, she said that his father would not permit it, nor would the father permit such retention in fifth-grade.

Mrs. Anderson did not think that Eric would take the Literacy Passport Test in the sixth-grade because of his learning disability. When I told her that Eric would not receive a regular high school diploma if he did not pass the Literacy Passport Test, a fact of which Mrs. Anderson was unaware, she said that perhaps Eric could pass the test eventually.

## Eric's Perception of School

I broke a school rule unintentionally when I took Eric outside to eat lunch during what was to have been a "silent lunch" period for him. I had received permission from Eric's teacher to take him outside, but I had not checked with the individual in charge of silent lunch since I had no idea that this punishment had been imposed upon Eric. Although the lunch monitor remonstrated with me for removing him from the disciplinary table, she permitted Eric to remain with me. Eric explained that he'd been assigned silent lunch by Miss Henderson, his homeroom teacher, for failing to check his answers on a math paper. He added that it was really Miss Henderson's fault because she had not told him to check the answers. Again I realized that Eric's answers to my questions would be based on what he thought I expected to hear.

I asked Eric how he perceived himself as a writer and he replied, "I stink." When asked why, Eric replied:

Because I don't like writing. Well, it's annoying. Every time you mess up you have to do it again and people are always saying "go faster, go faster." But sometimes I like it, though. If you get to a good subject and you have something good to write and nobody is yelling at you it's fun. But when you have to write worksheets and stuff, I hate that! You don't really want to do it, but you have to.

He said that his writing was not normally as good as he wanted it to be because the assignments that Mrs. Anderson

gave were really boring and that she made him recopy messy papers and spell correctly. He complained:

She always tells me that I'm not working hard enough and that I never do my work. That's just really annoying. I wish Mrs. Anderson was more like Mrs. Carpenter. We never do any work in her [Mrs. Carpenter's] class.

Eric explained that he did poorly in school because he had a learning disability. He pointed out, however, that he was smart. He said that he liked science the best although this year they were studying things he already knew about, so it was "boring." He asserted that he really hated English and math. When I asked him why he disliked them so much, he said:

Well, you see, I go to see Mrs. Carpenter and sometimes I don't get the homework and I ask people and they just give me stuff and Mrs. Anderson yells at me and I mean it's not fair because I ask Carl (a friend in the class) and he tells me "English p--" and that's what I write down and that's all I have on my assignment sheet and Mrs. Anderson will sign it and she won't tell me to write down something else and so I get really in trouble for not doing stuff. And math just takes me a million years. I mean, I know how to do it, but it just takes so long, because I have so many distractions.

Eric said that his parents wanted him to do well in school so that he could go to college. Although he had no idea what he would study, Eric said he was thinking about becoming a "mad scientist." Although his parents yelled at him about not doing his homework, Eric indicated that it was difficult for him to do because his house was so noisy and

that his parents made him do so many chores that he never got to his homework until it was late.

I asked Eric how he thought he could improve in school, and he said that he wished he had more time in school because he hated doing homework. Eric said that he wished his teachers would let him do his work outside because of all of the distractions in class. He was distracted because

The teachers are always lecturing you when you're trying to work and that's really annoying and people are always asking questions and stuff. That's annoying, too.

Eric said that the best thing he'd written during the year was a story he'd written at home on his computer. He said that it was a special story for his mother and that she had been very proud of it. Eric said that he felt that his writing would be much improved if he were allowed to use a computer in school.

#### Classroom Observation of Eric

Observations of Eric were difficult to obtain because he was frequently absent from school and was "pulled out" for help in written language during language arts each day. Eric liked oral activities. Toastmaster's activities, a more sophisticated version of "Show and Tell," were particular favorites. Often, however, Eric would misbehave while other students were presenting their Toastmaster speeches. On one

particular occasion, Eric jumped up and down, cheerleader fashion, during the entire five-minute presentation that Jonathan did on stamp collecting. Mrs. Anderson did not react.

During daily class discussions, Eric always had a personal story to share, although often his stories were not related to the topic. When we shared family stories, he told about the time that he used red paint instead of spray wax when he was asked to dust a table. Eric thought the story was particularly amusing, and he chuckled frequently while relating it. Several students muttered, "pretty stupid."

Although he told me that he had lots of friends in the class, he was often without a partner during group activities. One of the reasons for this isolation may have been that Mrs. Anderson moved him frequently. Eric did not get along well with several of the students, and they often complained that he "picked" at them while they were trying to work. Eric especially enjoyed poking, bopping and generally annoying Linda, the most popular girl in the class. For the most part, Linda ignored him.

When we wrote stories with first-grade partners, Eric was the only fifth-grader who had two partners, at his choice, both of whom were girls. The story that they produced was entitled "Barbie and the Rockers" and was an exact replica of a cartoon episode that had been shown on television the previous week, according to several other students in the



class. Although Eric assured me that he had worked "for hours" on the story at home, it still was not complete the day that we went to give the first-graders an opportunity to illustrate their stories. Mrs. Anderson remained in her classroom to help Eric to complete his story while I took the rest of the students to the first-grade classroom. At the end of the hour, Eric brought his completed story to his first-grade partners. One of them completed the illustrations at home, and the book was completed the next day when we shared the stories with the rest of the class.

Eric often drew pictures during writing time. He appeared to pay little attention to my mini-lessons and often needed help to clarify my directions. As a result, Eric lost valuable drafting time and had to rush to complete his assignments before he had to leave for resource help. As Eric wandered around the room frequently, I found that the best way to keep Eric focused on his assignment was to sit next to him while he worked.

Eric never completed my assignments at home. Even if he took the assignments with him, they were never returned the next day and he said he had no idea what had happened to them.

Because of Eric's low grade average, he was required to have an assignment sheet signed by both of his teachers indicating what assignments and homework he needed to complete. Never once while I was in the class did Eric remember on his own to fill out the sheet and to give it to

Mrs. Anderson to sign. She had to remind him to do it and, more often than not, he would say that he had lost it.

The final project for the reading of Tuck Everlasting was to design a game or a word search based on some aspect of the book. Although Mrs. Anderson explained the assignment while Eric was present in class, handed him an assignment sheet that further clarified the assignment, wrote the assignment on the board, and reminded the students of the assignment daily for a week, Eric did not have his project when it was due. His response to Mrs. Anderson was "I must have been absent the day that it was assigned."

During one daily journal sharing time, Eric read his description of a class skating party the night before. He was particularly proud of winning first place in the limbo contest, but he said that he had hurt his knee as a result. As if to illustrate his misfortune, Eric limped for the rest of the period. Mrs. Anderson did not comment on Eric's malady nor on the other contents of his entry, but she did remind him to make sure that he had corrected all of his spelling mistakes and had written his paper in cursive. Eric did neither.

On one occasion when Mrs. Anderson asked the class to do an extended writing, Eric never settled down to task. He wrote for two minutes, and then put his head down on his desk until Mrs. Anderson reminded him to get back to work. He then sat up, picked up his pencil, and wrote again for another

minute before he turned to Jessica, his desk mate for the day, and asked her a question. When Jessica ignored him, Eric began drumming on his desk with his pencil and lifting his desk up and down with his legs. Mrs. Anderson, walking around the room, put her hand on Eric's shoulder and told him to get back to work. Eric nodded, and began to write, grimacing occasionally and whispering the words that he was writing on his paper. Jessica glared at him. He smiled at her. Mrs. Anderson returned to Eric's desk and scanned his paper. She pointed out to him that, although fifteen minutes had elapsed since the class began writing, he had written only four lines. She told him that he had misspelled six words and had forgotten to write in cursive. She then told Eric to begin again on another sheet of paper. As Eric had no other paper, Jessica provided him with a new sheet. Eric then smiled and began to copy over what he had written. Within five minutes, Eric left for Mrs. Carpenter's room. The unfinished assignment was on his desk. The following morning Eric's name appeared on the board, indicating that he had not turned in the assignment.

Eric worked best when either I or Mrs. Anderson sat next to him as he wrote. He never wrote more than five or six sentences on any one assignment but was willing to dictate longer stories if someone else would transcribe them, as had happened when Mrs. Anderson helped him with his "Barbie and the Rockers" assignment. On two different occasions, Eric

showed me longer papers that he had written at home on his computer with the help of his mother; but since these assignments were written for his social studies class, I did not analyze them for this study. I did read these papers, however, and found them to be longer and more sophisticated than the ones which Eric wrote during class.

### Analysis of Eric's Papers

Eric wrote thirty papers during the twenty-one weeks of my case study. As in the other case studies, I will present analyses of only three of them here. The first of these papers is his response to the prompt that comprised the fourth-grade baseline Literacy Passport Test Assessment. The second paper is the one that I considered the best of his writing, based on my own application of the domain scoring used by DRC. The final paper presented here is Eric's response to the simulated Literacy Passport Test assessment, which I administered to all of the fifth-graders at Grover Elementary School.

### Fourth Grade Baseline Assessment

Eric was recognized as at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test on the basis of his total writing score of 36 on the fourth-grade baseline assessment (Appendix F) he took

in February of 1989 when he was a ten-year-old fourth grader. The following is his response to the prompt: "What is your favorite animal?"

I like panda bears. I think their very cute bears. Their mostly white with black legs. They can be found in the south and southwest of china.

As I was not present when Eric responded to this prompt, I can not comment on the circumstances under which he wrote his paper.

#### Analytic Assessment

This selection consists of one paragraph with four complete sentences. There are no incorrect verb tenses, but one word is misspelled twice. The sentence weight for this paper is 1.48, a rating that indicates a low level of sentence sophistication. A detailed analysis of this weighting is found in Appendix F.

#### Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

Composing	1.5
Style	2
Sentence Formation	3
Usage	4
Mechanics	<u>2.5</u>
Total score	36

(See Table 2 for an explanation of how the total score is derived.)

Composing. Eric's response to his central idea "I like panda bears" results in an unelaborated list.

Style. Both language and details are very general.

Sentence Formation. This selection is too short to demonstrate reasonable control of this domain.

Usage. The writer makes no errors in usage. At the fourth-grade level "their" is counted as a spelling error, not a usage error.

Mechanics. Although the paper is relatively free of mechanical problems, the brevity of the sample determines the score of inconsistent control. The assumption in the assignment of this score is that had the student written a longer sample, more errors would have been made.

### Discussion

Eric's paragraph is simply a list of some of the characteristics of panda bears and fails to support his contention that he likes bears. This paper is typical of Eric's practice of writing as little as possible in response to a writing assignment.

### Best Writing

Later, Eric wrote the following paper based again on a repetition of the prompt, "What is your favorite animal?"

My favorite animal is a monkey. The reason Why my favorite animal is a monkey is because they are smart. The monkey is the closest form to mankind. The monkey is a very skillfull animal the monkey can climb trees and walk bars even. Some monkes are very cute Others are not. Some are very strong and broad and thats why my favorite animall is the monkey. The end.

### Description of Behavior

Eric wrote his paper in less than ten minutes. During that time, he often put his head down on his desk and twice got up to sharpen his pencil. When he finished writing, he turned his paper over and picked up a novel which was on his desk. He stared at the pages, but, as he never turned a page, he did not appear to be reading the book. For the next thirty minutes, Eric alternated staring at the book with gazing around the room. As soon as he realized that his seat partner was finished writing, Eric attempted to engage him in conversation. He stopped talking when I spoke softly to him. Eric turned in his paper without looking at it again.

### Analytic Assessment

This selection contains one paragraph with seven sentences, no fragments and one run-on. There are no incorrect verb tenses used, but five words are misspelled. The sentence weight for this paper is 1.51, a fairly low level of sentence sophistication. A detailed analysis of the weighting is found in Appendix F.

Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

	Fourth Grade	Sixth Grade
Composing	3	2
Style	2	2
Sentence Formation	4	4
Usage	4	3
Mechanics	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
Total score	48	36

Composing. The selection is merely a list with no apparent organization. The elaboration is uneven. These features should be intact at the sixth-grade level and thus Eric's score is lower at that level of assessment.

Style. The selection exhibits no obvious tone or voice. There is no variety in sentence patterns. He shows some ability to select information, although it is inconsistent.

Sentence Formation. The paper shows some nice examples of embedding. There is, however, one example of a fused sentence.

Usage. The paper shows consistent control of this domain although an agreement error lowers the score to reasonable control at the sixth-grade level.

Mechanics. At the fourth-grade level, this paper exhibits reasonable control. The spelling, punctuation and



capitalization errors lower the score to inconsistent at the sixth-grade level.

### Discussion

Although I scored this paper as Eric's "best" one, it was really not any better than any of his other papers. It may, however, reflect the kinds of reading material which Eric is exposed to in his written language class. Eric's practice of writing no more than a few sentences in response to a writing assignment can be attributed in part to his difficulty with transcription, but may be characteristic of his "I don't care" attitude, noted by both Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Carpenter, as well as myself. As in his first response to this prompt, Eric has provided a list of some of the characteristics of monkeys instead of an explanation of why they are his favorite animal. He signalled that he had done all that he wished to do by ending his paper with "the end."

### Simulated Literacy Passport Assessment

Eric wrote the following paper as a response to the prompt "Write about the best day you ever had."

The day we all went to disny world. We first went to epcot and saw the giant shere. Then we saw a movie that was 3D We went to shops we went to the fun rolercoaster. Space moutain. Then we went to the hotel to change to go out to eat.

Description of Behavior

Eric spent less than five minutes writing his story. He did no written prewriting. Although paper for the final draft was provided, he wrote his first and only draft directly on the prompt sheet. For this assignment, Eric wrote steadily, occasionally stopping to put his head on his desk. When he finished his paper, he put it on the side of his desk and opened a book. He then asked to be excused to the rest room and was gone from the class for four minutes. When he returned, he browsed for another book in the reading corner and finally returned to his seat, where he remained until the class finished the assignment. Eric turned in his paper without looking at it again.

Analytic Assessment

This paper consists of one paragraph with five sentences. There are two sentence fragments and one run-on sentence. There are no incorrect verb tenses, but four words are misspelled. The sentence weight for this assignment is 1.55. A detailed analysis of the sentence weighting is found in Appendix F.

Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

	Fourth Grade	Sixth Grade
Composing	1	1
Style	1	1
Sentence Formation	3	3
Usage	4	3
Mechanics	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
Total score	30	26

Composing. The selection is merely a listing of events, a "diary day."

Style. There is no apparent voice or tone. It is not even obvious that this was a day that he particularly enjoyed.

Sentence Formation. The writer exhibits reasonable control of subordination and coordination. The last sentence indicates a higher level of sophistication.

Usage. There are no errors in usage. At the sixth grade level the score is lower because, as a result of the shortness of the piece, it is impossible for the scorer to determine consistent control.

Mechanics. The scores reflect problems in capitalization and punctuation.

### Discussion

As in Eric's other two papers, minimal time has been spent in response to this prompt. He listed some of the things that his family did at Disney World in a chronological fashion, but never explained why this was his best day. Eric's response to this prompt is a typical completion response which he may have been conditioned to write in earlier language arts classrooms.

### Implications for Instruction

Eric has many barriers to achieving success on the Literacy Passport Test. An analysis of both his fourth-grade baseline Literacy Passport Test assessment and his fifth-grade simulated assessment reveal that he has made little progress in his writing. His sentence sophistication, as measured by sentence weight analysis, has improved only slightly. His fourth-grade assessment score was 1.48, and his fifth-grade simulated assessment score was 1.55. His total domain score has, in fact, dropped: his total score at the fourth-grade level was a 36, whereas his fifth-grade score, based on the fourth-grade scoring model, was a 30 and, based on the sixth-grade model, was a 26. None of Eric's three papers, based on the sixth-grade scoring model, produced a score above 44, the minimum score required to pass the Literacy Passport Test.

All three of the teachers involved in this study reflected their concern about Eric's lack of progress during the school year and his seeming lack of concern with his poor achievement. At this point it appears that Eric will not pass the Literacy Passport Test in the sixth-grade unless some intervention is provided.

The school, however, needs to accept some of the responsibility for Eric's negative writing behaviors. His papers, particularly his "Best Writing," reflect the limited scope of reading material to which Eric has been exposed in his classes as the simple subject-verb patterns and limited detail mirror the kinds of reading material available in the second, third, and fourth-grade textbooks which had been used by Eric. Eric's written responses further reflect the typical question/response form of writing most common in the predominantly workbook format in Eric's classroom.

If Eric is to become a more effective writer, the school must take the initiative to provide him with more complex and fully elaborated reading materials as well as to encourage Eric to read widely in the areas which he finds interesting including science and science fiction.

Further, the school must provide Eric with a broader range of writing experiences including extended stories and collaborative work. It is obvious that Eric can write more effectively in a collaborative environment but such experiences have not been typical in Eric's classroom. Eric

should be encouraged to write at home and to use a computer in his writing. If Eric is ever to be a successful writer, his exposure to more sophisticated reading and writing experiences must be broadened.

### PEGGY

With short, curly, auburn hair, an abundance of freckles and a dimpled smile, Peggy bubbles with energy. She has attended Grover Elementary School since kindergarten and is now an eleven-year-old, first-time fifth-grader. Peggy's third-grade teacher noticed Peggy's inability to transcribe the thoughts that she could share orally and referred Peggy for testing. After that testing, she was diagnosed with learning disabilities in both reading and writing; and, consequently, she has received resource help since the second semester of third grade. This year Peggy tested out of the Learning Disability Reading Resource pull-out class, but, for thirty minutes per day, five days per week, attends the same written language resource class as does Eric. Peggy's test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills indicate that she is of above average intelligence. Her Literacy Passport Test score in writing, the lowest score of any student in the fifth-grade, was a 31.

Although school work has always been difficult for Peggy, she has worked hard to maintain a consistent B/C average.

For the first time, Peggy achieved Honor Roll status during the second six weeks of the fifth-grade.

Peggy is a school safety patrol. The fifteen members of the school safety patrol are chosen at the end of fourth-grade on the basis of teacher recommendation, an essay written by the student, and an interview with a panel consisting of teachers and the school principal.

### Vignette

Smiling broadly, Peggy enters the room exclaiming, "Today is a Mrs. Wilson day!" She pauses to hug me tightly and whispers that she wrote something in her journal at home that she would like for me to read. I promise to do so during lunch. I am pleased because Peggy does not often choose to share what she has written in her home journal.

Peggy speaks to several of the girls in the room before sitting down to whisper with Caroline while the class gets organized for the day's lesson. When I am ready to start, Peggy sits with her hands folded on her desk, smiling happily. Today the class will be acting out several well-known fairy tales, and Peggy volunteers to be part of the group presenting "Goldilocks." When Peggy realizes that Hae-Kim, a student from Korea who understands little English, has not volunteered for a group, she suggests that the Goldilocks group have four bears and, taking Hae-Kim by the hand, leads

her out into the hall where the group has gone to practice. For the next ten minutes, Peggy serves as group leader, making sure that Hae-Kim understands what she is to do and that all of the "Goldilocks" cast members are prepared for their production.

When the play is presented, Peggy takes the part of Mama Bear and guides her group in an excellent rendition of the "Goldilocks" story, which includes a very pleased, but very quiet, Korean older sister bear. When the play ends, Peggy explains to the class that the moral of the story is "Don't mess with things that don't belong to you!" The class votes Peggy's play the winner of the day. She smiles as the cast takes a curtain call.

When it is time for Peggy to go to Mrs. Carpenter's room, she sighs as she gathers up her books, muttering quietly that she always has to leave "just when class is getting fun." She pauses to hug me again and to offer me her journal. I promise not to share it with anyone else. She smiles and bounces out the door, with a parting "See you at lunch--have a good morning!"

#### School Personnel Perceptions of Peggy

"Peggy is a doll!" exclaimed Ms. Williams the first time that we talked. It was still the first month of school, and Ms. Williams said that, although writing was a serious



problem for Peggy, she was a hard worker and, as a result, was doing fairly well in language arts class. Ms. Williams felt that, although Peggy was hindered by her learning disabilities, she would probably be able to pass the Literacy Passport Test as a sixth-grader.

When I interviewed Ms. Williams four months later, she had begun to doubt whether Peggy would, indeed, be successful on the test. She said:

Peggy is so conscientious and so sweet and so L.D. that, bless her, I don't think that she'll ever pass. She tries so hard, and it's just like with her spelling words... she's able to do it orally but when it comes to writing them down on paper, she just can't do it.

Ms. Williams said that Peggy was able to hide her disability fairly effectively in class because of her oral facility. She said that Peggy's good grades were a result of her hard work and parental support.

Ms. Williams expressed great concern with Peggy's inability to transfer to the written page what she constructed in her mind. Although Peggy could state complete thoughts orally, it was very difficult for her to transcribe those thoughts. Ms. Williams said that Peggy was aware of her problem and often sought her help to reconstruct sentences effectively.

Mrs. Carpenter, the writing resource teacher, had worked with Peggy for over two years. Peggy qualified for resource help as a result of a discrepancy between her ability scores

and her score on the writing test administered by Mrs. Carpenter. According to Mrs. Carpenter, Peggy's primary problem was her inability to coordinate her thoughts on paper in a coherent sentence structure. Unlike Eric, Peggy's learning disability was not one of fine motor coordination: her penmanship was excellent and she seemed to enjoy the writing task. Mrs. Carpenter said that children with difficulty in transmitting complete thoughts to paper usually could not express such thoughts effectively orally. As Peggy has excellent oral facility, Mrs. Carpenter was confounded by Peggy's difficulty in producing effective written prose.

Mrs. Carpenter said that, when Peggy first began coming for resource help as a third grader, she refused to write at all. Mrs. Carpenter worked with Peggy's third-grade teacher and with her parents to encourage Peggy to write in a journal at home. As a result, Mrs. Carpenter stated, Peggy's writing improved, although such improvement was very slow. The fact that Peggy seemed now to enjoy writing was considered a very good sign by Mrs. Carpenter.

Mrs. Carpenter did not believe that Peggy would pass the Literacy Passport Test in writing as a sixth-grader. She felt that, although Peggy tried very hard, and had "great ideas," she was not capable of exhibiting the level of writing proficiency necessary to produce a passing score on the test. Mrs. Carpenter indicated that she would recommend

that Peggy receive learning disability resource help in writing as a sixth-grader.

### Peggy's Perception of School

I interviewed Peggy informally during the lunch period after she had asked me to read the story that she had written in her journal. I complimented her on her story about her sister, and I asked her how long she had kept her journal. She said that, in the third grade, she had decided to become a reporter when she grew up and that she thought that keeping a journal would be a good way to build up her skills. She said the idea of keeping a journal had been her own, not one which either her teacher or her parents had suggested.

Although she usually wrote stories about nature, her family and her friends, Peggy said that her journal was "kind of a diary, too." She laughed and blushed when she told me that she liked to write about how much she liked Tom Cruise and "The New Kids on the Block" and how much and why she would like to see them in concert.

Peggy said that she liked to write because:

I can express my feelings on paper better than I do in words. When I write, I feel that I am in another world, just like reading. I can write poems on paper. I can write stories on paper.

Peggy said that she did her best writing outside under a tree in her back yard. She told me that was where she had

composed the poem that she recited for the class. The poem, entitled "What Is Life?" had been her submission in the school arts fair during third grade. Although her poem had not won a prize, several people had complimented her on her work and the poem had remained her favorite writing. She had memorized it as a third grader and could still recite it with ease. Peggy said that she preferred writing in her journal at home to writing in school because in her journal she could "just write and not have to worry about my spelling." She said that spelling was very difficult for her and that she had to "use a dictionary a lot." Once she had looked a word up, she would memorize it so that she wouldn't have to look it up again. She said this practice had been particularly helpful on a report she had written that had one particularly difficult word that she had to use several times. She said "I looked it up and then I could write it right for the story and then I just kept repeating that right form."

When I asked Peggy how she went about writing a story she said:

It depends on what the subject is. If I'm writing about Tom Cruise I'd just list the things that he would do and that he wouldn't do--that's my brainstorming. And then when I get it in paragraph form, I just think about how I want it to sound and if it will sound right. When I'm done, I go back and I edit it. I usually have my dictionary and my thesaurus there, too. They help a lot.

I told Peggy that I noticed how much she had enjoyed my reading of Winnie the Pooh to the class during Reading Month.

She laughed and told me that her parents had decorated her room with a Winnie the Pooh motif when she "was little" and that they still read the stories to her brothers and her sister "all the time." Peggy said "Winnie the Pooh and the Tight Place" was her favorite story and that she was glad that I had chosen to read that one to her language arts class.

Peggy said that she loved to read and usually read "for about thirty minutes" before she went to bed each night. Her favorite books were mysteries, particularly "Nancy Drew" stories and the "Babysitter's Club" series. She admitted, however, that although most of the "Babysitter's Club" books are really exciting, some of them are not that good. But, they're a series and I like to read a series."

Peggy said that she really enjoyed school and that she was happy to be doing so well this year. She admitted that she had to work "real hard," but that her family helped her a lot. She said that safety patrols was "a lot of fun" and that she had lots of friends, although she didn't like it when the boys, especially David, teased her. Peggy said that she is looking forward to middle school next year because she hopes to work as a reporter on the school newspaper.

## Classroom Observations of Peggy

As Peggy was "pulled out" of language arts class for part of the period each day, it was difficult to obtain long observations of her classroom behavior. Peggy did her work steadily and enthusiastically. She always had her homework, and unlike Eric, always managed to turn in work that she missed as a result of the time she spent in resource. Peggy missed four days of school as a result of illness during the twenty-one weeks that I observed in her classroom. Her make-up work was completed each time.

Peggy often served as Ms. Williams' "teacher's helper," passing out and collecting materials during class and running errands to the office. She also ran errands for the school secretary and was responsible for distributing late notices from the librarian. Never once did Peggy forget the time for writing resource, although she occasionally had to remind the other two students in the room who received written language resource help that it was time to go. Although Peggy was conscientious about attending resource help, she regretted having to leave the room. On one occasion she became angry when I said that I would be reading to the class from Ray Bradbury's The Halloween Tree later in the period. Peggy complained that she had missed "too much" of the story and calmed down only when I promised that she could take the book home over the weekend to "catch up" with the reading. From

that time on, I made sure that I read to the class early enough in the period so that Peggy did not miss out again.

Peggy did not enjoy reading aloud to the class. Her writing resource teacher mentioned this fact also. On the day that we read our family stories into the tape recorder, Peggy asked to be excused. As I never forced any child to do an assignment for me, I told her that she did not have to read. On another day when the class did a choral reading of Eloise Greenfield's poem, "Harriet Tubman," Peggy again asked to be excused. When she realized that she would not have to read alone, but could read as part of the group, Peggy participated enthusiastically.

Peggy enjoyed writing poetry. On a snowy December day, Ms. Williams asked the class write in their journals about an individual snowflake. The following is Peggy's poem which she wrote in response to Ms. Williams' assignment:

Snowflake friends  
Doing pirouettes in the air  
Spinning everywhere  
Coming to a stop.

Using free verse poetry as her format permitted Peggy to express her ideas without having to worry about sentence structure. Although Peggy has one spelling error, it does not detract from the meaning of the poem.

As the first ten minutes of every class period were devoted to the oral reading of the writing done in class the day before and often finished at home, Peggy shared her work

frequently in class. She did not, however, enjoy peer revision sessions and always chose Kitty, another student with a diagnosed writing learning disability, as her revision partner. As Kitty was not one of Peggy's "special friends" in the class, I was puzzled at first that the two of them worked together during revision sessions. It was only when I realized that the two of them were not willing to share their revisions with others in the class, did I understand why they chose to revise together. Neither one of them wanted to expose her writing problems to the class.

Peggy was an enthusiastic participant in any activity which did not require that she read aloud orally. She was always prepared for class and did her classwork quietly and seriously. Although writing activities were difficult for Peggy, she never used her learning disability as an excuse to avoid doing work in class, but she avoided instances when her disability would be made obvious to her peers.

### An Analysis of Peggy's Papers

#### Fourth Grade Baseline Assessment

Peggy was recognized as at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test on the basis of her score of 31 on the fourth-grade baseline assessment (Appendix G) which was taken in February of 1989 when Peggy was a ten-year-old



fourth-grader. Her score was the lowest of any student at Grover Elementary School. The following is a copy of her response to the prompt, "What is your favorite animal?"

One day there was a mommy dog. And she had a puppy, and it was real furry. So the mommy puppy had her puppy in a house. And everyday the kids would bring milk to the mommy dog and her puppy. The puppy felt warm and cuddly and they feel real furry. And so the puppy grew up to be a strong dog.

As I was not present to observe Peggy's writing to this prompt, I am unable to comment on the circumstances under which she wrote her paper. The following is an analysis of the paper from the perspective of an analytic and of a domain-scored assessment.

#### Analytic Assessment

This selection consists of one five-sentence paragraph. There is one incorrect verb tense; no words are misspelled. The sentence weight for this selection is 1.74. A detailed analysis of this weighting is found in Appendix G.

Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

Composing	1.5
Style	1.5
Sentence Formation	1.5
Usage	2.5
Mechanics	<u>3.0</u>
Total	31

(See Table 2 for an explanation of how the total score is derived.)

Composing. The central idea of the piece does not address the prompt. Although it is characteristic of young writers to use a narrative form even when doing so means that thereby they fail to address the specified writing task, (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen, 1975:19), such a failure impacts negatively on her control score in this domain.

Style. The selection of details is weak. There is no obvious tone or voice to the piece. The choice of vocabulary is anemic.

Sentence Formation. The sample uses a repetitious sentence pattern, exhibits enjambment and demonstrates a lack of understanding of sentence combining. The use of "and" as a sentence beginning should be disappearing at the fourth-grade level (Hunt, 1970:16).

Usage. The paper demonstrates inconsistency in verb tenses. The paper exhibits some inconsistencies in inflection.

Mechanics. The paper lacks a paragraphing format as Peggy does not indent. The paper demonstrates reasonable control of the domain although the length is too short to demonstrate consistent control.

### Discussion

Peggy's simplistic narrative does not address the prompt. The language, choice of detail and sentence structure are far too simplistic for a fourth-grade writer. I believe that Peggy chose to write this story because of her limited writing abilities. Peggy limited her writing to a simplistic pattern that allowed her to control her errors. She was able to use simple sentences, limited vocabulary and a narrative style, which Peggy believed would help her to produce a "correct" piece. Peggy recognized the importance of producing an effective piece and did her best to write one which was both complete in narrative format and correct in spelling, usage and sentence structure. Peggy's story has a central idea and a limited selection of detail. It fails primarily because of her inability to focus her writing to the assignment and her fear of failing in the attempt.

Best Writing

Peggy's best writing was written in response to a journal assignment by Ms. Williams in which students were asked during the fourth week of the school year to talk about how they thought their school year was going. The following is Peggy's response to the assignment: (Note: The names of the teachers and the student in this writing sample have been changed to assure anonymity.)

The school year is going finie so far. I realy enjoy my teachrers. The prjects are outrageous!! L.A. is Long but exsighing. Ms. Williams is great I realy enjoy Mrs. Long for my homeroom. School is grate Julie and I are in the same L.A. class. I so/so like the people in my homeroom. I haved some homework I do not like homework as much as I like school.

Description of Behavior

When Ms. Williams assigned the topic, Peggy immediately opened her class journal and began to write. She made a list at the top of her paper which included the names of her friend and of her teachers. She also wrote down the words "homeroom," "homework" and "projects." Peggy began to write, stopped and scratched out what she had written. Then she closed her eyes, and put down her pencil. After one minute, she consulted the list at the top of her paper and began writing again. Peggy then wrote steadily for seven minutes, pausing occasionally to read what she had written. She closed her eyes twice during that time. When she was

finished, Peggy opened her dictionary and checked and corrected the spelling of "outrageous." She did not check the spelling of any other words. Peggy reread her paper twice before closing her notebook and placing it in her desk. Peggy did not ask me to read her paper.

### Analytic Assessment

This paper consists of one paragraph with seven sentences, no fragments but four run-ons. There is one example of an incorrect verb tense and seven misspelled words. The sentence weight for this selection is 1.61, which is lower than that of her baseline assessment. A detailed analysis of the sentence weighting is found in Appendix G.

### Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

	Fourth Grade	Sixth Grade
Composing	1	1
Style	2	1
Sentence Formation	3	3
Usage	4	4
Mechanics	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	32	28

Composing. This writing is merely a list which could be cut apart and reassembled in any order. There is no attempt to provide an organization that supports the central idea.

Style. At the fourth-grade level of assessment, the paper is scored as inconsistent control because although there is no real selection of information and no sentence variety, there is some evidence of voice. The score is assessed as little or no control at the sixth-grade scoring level because the vocabulary is considered to be anemic and there is no purposeful selection of information.

Sentence Formation. The paper is assessed as reasonable control although there is some evidence of enjambment as well as a comma splice.

Usage. The paper exhibits consistent control of this domain because there is evidence of control of number, tense consistency, subject-verb agreement and the word choice is appropriate to convey the desired message.

Mechanics. The sample is assessed as reasonable control of this domain at the fourth-grade level of assessment but as inconsistent control at the sixth-grade level because of errors in capitalization, punctuation and spelling.

### Discussion

Once again, Peggy takes few risks in her writing. She chooses simple details and, although she did some pre-writing, was only able to produce a list of examples rather than an organized explanation of why her year was going well. Thus, her composing score is extremely low. Peggy is more willing to take risks with her vocabulary and includes more

mature words than she did in her baseline assessment. Unfortunately, her style score is still low as a result of the inability to select information as well as her still limited vocabulary. Her sentence patterns are maturing as she no longer uses "and" as her sole connector but has moved into a more sophisticated coordination of her ideas, (Hunt,1970:32). Since both her language arts and her writing resource teacher have expressed their concerns to Peggy about the need to produce complete sentences, Peggy often sacrifices detail for the production of what she perceives as complete thoughts.

#### Simulated Literacy Passport Test

Peggy wrote the following paper in response to the prompt, "Write about the best day you ever had."

One of the best days of my life is when Leanna came to school. This is my frist time seeing her. When I got off partil I came in the lunchroom to see a black haired baby and a cubby cheaked sweetheart. When I held her she culdelt up to me like she know me wich she nver shal me before. That day was full of love like any day at our house with Leanna.

### Description of Writing Behavior

Peggy wrote for six minutes before raising her hand to ask if the paper needed to be in cursive. When I told her that it did not, she nodded her head and then wrote steadily for five more minutes. Peggy then got up from her desk and came up to ask me how long the paper needed to be. I told her that it was up to her to determine the length. She went back to her desk and wrote for four more minutes before returning to my desk to ask me to read what she had written. Although under the circumstances of the actual testing situation I would be unable to do so, I suggested to Peggy that she needed a closure to her paper. She nodded her head, went back to her desk and sat for over a minute with her eyes closed before picking up her pencil and writing the final sentence of her paper. Peggy reread what she had written, turned her paper over and came up to ask me if she could be excused to the rest room. She was gone from the room for two minutes. Upon her return, Peggy chose a book from her desk and read quietly until time to turn in the papers. She did not read her paper over again before turning it in.

### Analytic Analysis

Peggy's paper consists of one five-sentence paragraph containing no run-ons or sentence fragments. There are seven misspelled words and four incorrect verb tenses. The sentence weight for this sample is 2.26, far more



sophisticated than either of Peggy's other samples. A detailed analysis of the sentence weighting is included in Appendix G.

### Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

	Fourth Grade	Sixth Grade
Composing	3	2
Style	3	3
Sentence Formation	4	4
Usage	3	2
Mechanics	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
Total	50	40

Composing. At the fourth-grade level of assessment, Peggy's paper is assessed as reasonable control because she fails to provide the necessary elaboration to explain who Leanna is, and the reader is told, not shown, why this day was such a happy one. At the sixth-grade level of assessment, Peggy's paper is considered even lower because it is expected that more elaboration should be present to explain why Peggy considered this day to be such a happy one. The reader needs to understand why Leanna was brought to school and why Peggy has never seen her before.

Style. At both the fourth-grade and sixth-grade levels of assessment, the paper is assessed as reasonable control because, although the vocabulary is primarily simplistic, it

is specific and even vivid in places, for example "cubby cheaked" and "black haired." There is some evidence of voice in the piece.

Sentence Formation. At both the fourth-grade and sixth-grade levels, this sample is scored as consistent control because the writer evidences an ability to subordinate and to manipulate the embedding of participles.

Usage. At the fourth-grade level of assessment the paper is assessed as reasonable control of this domain although there are some errors in verb tense and the lack of understanding of the meaning of the words "partil" and "shal" distracts the reader. These errors lead to an assessment of inconsistent control at the sixth-grade level which holds papers to a higher standard.

Mechanics. Although this sample is assessed as reasonable control at the fourth-grade level, it is considered evidence of inconsistent control at the sixth-grade level as a result of errors in capitalization, spelling and punctuation.

### Discussion

The scorer of this paper had no way of knowing that Leanna was Peggy's new adopted sister. Had Peggy explained Leanna's identity, the purpose of this piece would have been clearer. The scorer also had difficulty understanding that "partil" was "patrol," the slang term for "safety patrol

duty" and that "shal" was a misspelling of the word "saw." Because I had spent twenty-one weeks with Peggy, I understood all of these things and, therefore, had less difficulty understanding this piece. Unfortunately, the individuals who do the actual scoring of the sixth-grade Literacy Passport Test have no more knowledge of the writer than did Judith Self of the State Department of Education who scored Peggy's paper.

When Peggy turned in her paper, I saw that she had spent her prewriting time in producing the following:

When Leanna came Christmas  
 When I made the Honor Role  
 When I made safety patrol

One of the best days I ever had was when I saw Leanna for the frist time. When I saw Leanna I said to myself she is aborle. My frist thoug was I have fliny have a sister when I held her I felt like cring, and I did. When Leanna puuls my hair I think to myself how lucky I am.

Peggy had begun her prewriting by choosing four events which she considers to be potentially the best days of her life. She then wrote a first draft about Leanna and the reader can hear in Peggy's voice how happy she is to have a sister. The only word which is unintelligible in this draft is "aborle," a misspelling of "adorable." When Peggy finished writing this first draft, she raised her hand to ask if she needed to write in cursive. Although her final draft, written on the paper which I provided, is neatly printed, it does not include much of the information which she wrote in

her first draft. In Peggy's mind, she had already said those things and chose not to say them again. As a result, both her composing and her style scores suffer.

Peggy's ability to subordinate her sentence patterns results in a scoring of consistent control. Although there is one instance of enjambment, it does not imply lack of control. Peggy's sentence weight for this piece of 2.26 indicates that her sentence patterns are becoming more sophisticated.

Peggy has more problems in the domain of usage, specifically in her errors in verb tense and in the inability of the reader to understand the meanings of two words. Peggy's errors in spelling and punctuation continue to keep her score at the inconsistent level of control.

Peggy followed the directions established in the prompt to prewrite and used the bottom of her page to list her ideas and even to write a first draft. When she began to write her paper, she failed to include many of the details which she had written in her first draft. Although Peggy circled some words in her rough draft that she apparently realized that she misspelled, she did not show evidence of having done so on her final draft, nor did she consult a dictionary during the editing of her paper. There is no evidence of erasure in her final draft.

The event that Peggy describes in this writing sample was obviously important because she had spoken and written about

Leanna's adoption often when I observed in her class.

Peggy's excitement is evident in her rough draft but absent from her final one, a factor which affects the feature of voice.

Although Peggy understands that she needs to approach writing as a process, she is still unable to organize her thoughts effectively enough to produce a paper which exhibits control in the domains of composing and style.

#### Implications for Instruction

Although Peggy's score on the fourth-grade baseline was the lowest of any of the students at Grover Elementary, her simulated Literacy Passport Test, taken a year later, scored a 40, 16 points higher than either Andy's or Eric's papers based on sixth-grade scoring criteria. Such a score is still not passing for the actual test.

Peggy's problems are in the domains of composing and style, although her work over the year has shown improvement in those domains. In her practice of both prewriting and revision, Peggy shows that she understands how to approach writing as a process. In my interview, Peggy said that she was aware of her disability in writing and that she tried to write everything as simply as possible so she "won't make so many mistakes." As a result, she is reluctant to take the risks necessary to produce a higher level of elaboration and

an adequate number of specific relevant details that support her general statements in order to develop the major idea of her piece. Such a practice will impede her ability to achieve a passing score on the Literacy Passport Test.

Ms. Williams and Mrs. Carpenter felt that Peggy has a problem with sentence formation. An analysis of her "best writing" and her "simulated Literacy Passport Test assessment," however, indicate that Peggy does not have a problem with sentence formation; she has control of the domain of sentence formation, scoring a 3 (reasonable control) on her "best" paper and a 4 (consistent control) on her final paper. Peggy writes fairly sophisticated sentences as evidenced by her final paper sentence weighting of 2.26. Peggy could probably write even more sophisticated sentences if her fluency problems in mechanics were not so great. The comma splices evidenced in Peggy's writing are not uncommon for students at the fifth-grade level (Self, 1990).

Peggy's most obvious problem in her writing is her inability to spell. She told me that she is aware of her problem and that she chooses words that she believes she can spell correctly. Although Mrs. Carpenter felt that a computer would help Peggy in the composing process, I do not think a computer is the solution for Peggy. Unlike Eric, Peggy has no problems in transcription. A computer spell-checker, however, might be an asset to Peggy during the revision process.

Peggy's potential for failing the Literacy Passport Test at the sixth-grade level is related primarily to her problems in the domains of composing and style; low scores in usage and in mechanics, primarily as a result of her poor spelling, cause some of her words to be unintelligible as well as misspelled, and may contribute to a lower score. Failure on this test will devastate Peggy. She has worked so hard to mask her disability and such a failure may destroy completely her positive attitude toward writing which she has developed.

#### JANE

Tall and thin, Jane is an eleven-year-old, first time fifth-grader. She has been at Grover Elementary School since the second semester of first-grade when her family moved from a neighboring community to be "closer to kin." Jane maintains a consistent "B" average and has missed making the Honor Roll only once during the past year when she received a "C" in language arts during the third six weeks. She has never been referred for learning disability diagnosis.

#### Vignette

Although most of the other students are still milling around the room when Mrs. Anderson announces that it is time for class to begin, Jane is sitting in her seat with her hands

folded. She has already consulted the assignment board and laid out the books and other materials which she knows will be used during the period. When Mrs. Anderson asks Jane to hand out the workbooks, Jane does so, silently.

The first thirty minutes of class is devoted to filling out three worksheets in the English grammar workbook. Jane finishes in fifteen minutes and reads silently over her work, her lips moving as she reads. When she finishes, Jane closes her workbook, placing it neatly on a corner of her desk, and opens a library book to read silently for the rest of the work time. Although other students begin to whisper when they have completed their work, Jane does not look up. When Mrs. Anderson announces that it is time stop working in the workbooks and to begin their book projects, Jane closes her book, lays it neatly on top of her desk, and retrieves the papers for her book project from her desk.

Most of the other children are working in groups, but Jane works alone, head down, on an independent project; she is creating a word search from the vocabulary list. Jonathan comes over to speak to her and she looks up, smiles and shakes her head. Jonathan moves on, and Jane resumes her word search. As Jane continues to work, she sings softly to herself.

Although Mrs. Anderson moves around the room interacting with the different groups, she never once stops to speak with Jane. Nor does she comment on the fact that Jane is sitting



with her legs tucked up under her, although Mrs. Anderson reminds several other children to "sit with both feet on the floor." Jane continues to work alone and uninterrupted. When group time ends, Jane straightens up her papers and places them neatly under her workbook on the corner of her desk.

During the last thirty minutes, the class watches an educational television program. Jane sits enrapt, laughing softly at a humorous anecdote. During the question and answer period which follows, Jane sits with her eyes cast down, playing with a pencil. Eyes flicking upward, Jane volunteers once, a correct answer. She smiles shyly and continues to play with the pencil. When class is over, Jane gathers all of her materials, turns in her workbook, and walks silently out of the room.

#### School Personnel Perception of Jane

Although school personnel had a great deal to say about Andy, Eric and Peggy, no one had much to say about Jane. Mrs. Carpenter had never worked with her, although she did know about her because Jane's older sister had received writing resource help. Mrs. Carpenter said:

Jane apparently doesn't qualify for special help. No one has ever mentioned her to me as a possible referral so no teacher along the way has ever thought that she had a problem. She kind of blends in, so it's real easy to overlook her.

It's easy to refer a kid like Eric because he's driving you crazy in class. Even if there were no problem, a teacher would be more likely to refer a kid like Eric because she figures something must be wrong!

When I asked Mrs. Anderson why Jane's language arts grade had dropped from a "B" to a "C" during the third six weeks, Mrs. Anderson indicated that she didn't know what had happened and ascribed the problem to Jane's "moodiness."

When I asked Mrs. Anderson about Jane's chances for passing the Literacy Passport Test in the sixth-grade, she said that she thought Jane could pass, but that it would "depend upon her day." Mrs. Anderson said that she thought that Jane was a much stronger student than Eric was and, consequently, would do better on the test than would he.

#### Jane's Perception of School

Jane and I spoke frequently about her work in class, and I think that she felt very comfortable with me the day that I interviewed her informally. Because it was raining, we ate our lunches in the school clinic, a place not particularly conducive to conversation, but quiet. Jane smiled often and seemed pleased that I had asked to talk with her.

Jane began by telling me about her friends. She displayed a necklace with half a heart and said that her friend Morgan wore the other half as a necklace. She said that she and Morgan had been best friends since the first

grade and that they did lots of things together. Jane said that her other good friend was Paula, the first-grader with whom Jane had written her children's story.

Jane said that she enjoyed Grover Elementary, "particularly the teachers," and that she liked her fourth-grade teacher "the best." Jane volunteered that her older sister had also had the same fourth-grade teacher, but that her sister "got in a whole lot of trouble." I asked Jane if she felt that it was important that she stay out of trouble, and she nodded and said, "I always try to do what I am supposed to do."

She said that her favorite subject was math but that she also was enjoying the projects that the language arts class was doing. She said that she particularly enjoyed "Toastmasters," although she had not had to do a presentation yet. She added that having to talk in front of the class made her "real nervous." Jane expressed excitement about the project that she was doing on the book that the class had just finished reading. She said that she was making a game that had cards with questions on them. When the players answered the questions correctly, they could move around the board. Jane agreed to show me the game when she finished it.

When I asked Jane what kind of writing she enjoyed doing, she told me that she liked to do most of her writing at home. She said that she wrote stories about herself and about what

she planned to do when she grew up. She said that she planned to be the President of the United States some day.

Jane said that she liked writing stories with other people. She said that she did a lot of writing with Paula, the girl who had been her first-grade partner. Jane said that she and Paula were working on a story about a girl who had a horse but was afraid to ride it. Jane said that she and Paula had worked on the story "very hard." She said that they had no plans to show the story to anyone at school.

Jane said that lately she had started to write more at home because she had enjoyed all of the writing done while I was teaching her class. She said her favorite activity was the story that she and Paula had written together. Jane said that she had saved all of the handouts that I distributed during my lessons and that she referred to them when she wrote at home. She said that the "yellow checking thing" that the class had developed to use during revision was particularly helpful to her. She told me that the writing that we did while I was teaching the class had been "a lot of fun."

When I asked Jane what kinds of writing she was doing in Mrs. Anderson's class now that I was no longer teaching, she said that mostly they just wrote workbook pages, which she found "pretty boring," although the work was not difficult and she usually finished quickly. When she finished, she said she just read until everyone else was done.

Jane said that Mrs. Anderson had just started having the class keep diaries. She said that she really enjoyed writing in her diary because she could write about herself and what she was doing during the day. Jane was sorry that the class did not have an opportunity to write in their diaries every day, but they could not, "because of people going out of the room. So we only write on certain days." Jane said that she did not like to read her diary aloud in class, a practice which Mrs. Anderson required.

#### Classroom Observations of Jane

When I read back through my field notes, I found that the term I used most often to describe Jane was "quiet." I realized that I had real concerns for Jane because she was one of those kids who blended into a classroom. She was never disruptive: she did her work and she kept her mouth shut. Consequently, no one paid very much attention to her. Jane worked persistently, often remaining on task long after other students had lost interest. One day when the class was involved in a dictionary drill with Mrs. Anderson, Jane continued to search for the words diligently even though she was never once asked for an answer by Mrs. Anderson.

Although Jane preferred to work alone, she did help two girls, at their request, in the class with their work on several occasions. Jane was particularly helpful to these

girls during the two weeks that we worked with first-grade partners. One day, Jane transcribed the first-grade story for one of the girls and on another day helped the other fifth-grade girl to edit her story.

The one time that Jane became actively involved in a classroom activity while I was teaching her class was when I asked students to bring in their favorite children's books to share. Jane brought in an oversized book which she announced had been hers when she was "little," and her mother had found it in her grandmother's attic. Not only did Jane read the entire book aloud to the class, but she posed for a picture which became part of my slide collection. Jane blushed bright red the day that I shared my slides with the class. I realized that Jane only appeared in that one slide. As in the classroom, Jane was virtually invisible in this visual record of my experience.

### An Analysis of Jane's Papers

#### Fourth-Grade Baseline Assessment

Jane was recognized as at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test on the basis of her total writing score of 37 on the fourth-grade baseline assessment (Appendix H), which was taken in February 1989, when Jane was a ten-year-old

fourth-grader. The following is a copy of her response to the prompt, "What is your favorite animal?"

My favorite animal is a skunk. It has a black bushy tail and has two white stripes along its back. When frightened or attacked it sprays a liquid that is verry smelly. I usually go camping and see thee a lot. I would like one for a pet. I chase skunks.

As I was not present to observe Jane's writing to this prompt, I am unable to comment on the circumstances under which she wrote her paper. The following is an analysis of the paper based on an assessment of the mechanical errors of the piece and its sentence weight and also a domain-scored assessment.

#### Analytic Assessment

This selection consists of one paragraph with six sentences, no sentence fragments or run-ons. There are no incorrect verb tenses; two words are misspelled. The sentence weight for this paper is 1.39, which indicates a low level of sentence sophistication. A detailed analysis of this weighting is found in Appendix H.

Domain Assessment.

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

Composing	1.5
Style	1.5
Sentence Formation	4.0
Usage	4.0
Mechanics	<u>3.0</u>
Total:	37

(See Table 2 for an explanation of how the total score is derived.)

Composing. The central idea is not supported in this paper which is merely a list of unelaborated details.

Style. The paper digresses from the central idea, lacks tone and voice. The selection of details is weak.

Sentence Formation. The writer demonstrates consistent control of this domain showing evidence of her ability to use standard word order, complete sentences and sentence expansion via coordinating and modifying structures.

Usage. The writer demonstrates consistent control of this domain through her ability to maintain consistent verb tenses, consistent control of subject/verb agreement as well as her ability to use words which convey her intended message.

. Two spelling errors, and a lack of internal punctuation determine this score.



Discussion

Although Jane demonstrates consistent control in the domains of usage and sentence formation and reasonable control of the mechanics domain, this sample received a low score. Jane's problems are in the domains of composing and style. A lack of prewriting may have been a factor in Jane switching from an expository to a narrative mode in the fourth sentence of the paragraph. Composing and style scores are particularly impacted by the brevity of her piece.

Jane states that her favorite animal is a skunk, but does not explain why; she merely describes the animal physically and then tells where she has seen skunks and what she does when she sees them. Interestingly, Jane told me in her interview that, although her family went camping a lot, she had never accompanied them. Jane's inability to elaborate when she switches to the narrative mode may be directly related to the fact that she knows very little about camping and, more specifically, about the skunks which might be found there.

The details that Jane selects to support her central idea are not relevant. The only indication that the reader has that the skunk is Jane's favorite animal is her assertion that she would like one for a pet, but she says further that when she sees a skunk, she chases it, presumably away from her.

There is no clear structure to Jane's writing. She begins, report-fashion, to describe the skunk and its reaction when frightened. There is no clear transition to her next point that she sees skunks when she is camping, although the reader can assume this is where Jane would see one that had been frightened. There is no definitive beginning, middle and end to this sample. Jane makes her points and then stops.

Jane scores low in the domain of style primarily because of her limited vocabulary choice as indicated by her description of a skunk's spray as "verry smelly." Jane's inability to select details that support the central idea is shown by her failure to explain why the skunk is her favorite animal. The only evidence of voice in the piece is indicated in her assertion that she would like one for a pet. An elaboration on this assertion would have increased her score both in the composing and in the style domain. The tone in the writing is confused. Although Jane seems to indicate that skunks are smelly animals that she chases, she says they are her favorite animal and she would like one for a pet. In no way is the writer able to see why Jane chose this particular animal as her favorite one.

If Jane had maintained either a consistent narrative or an expository mode in her writing, and had elaborated her central idea, this sample would probably have received a higher score. The lack of unity may be a result of failing

to transcribe any prewriting and certainly indicates a lack of revision as evidenced on the paper she turned in for this task.

### Best Writing

The following paper was written in response to a prompt given by Mrs. Anderson to "Talk about your family." Jane wrote this response in January, 1990, as a classroom diary assignment:

My anut, uncle, and cusienes live in OKINAWA. They live their because Jessy my uncle he's in the navy. They come in every summer or ever other Summer. When ever they come in they bring us things-- (meaning the whole family.) In the summer of 89 in August they came in but only this time they wern't leaving for good they were coming back, coming back to stay. Now they live in North Caralina. So now they come to visit any time they want well not any time but almost any time. I'm very happy now that they live closer to us.

### Description of Writing Behavior

Mrs. Anderson began having the students keep diaries right after Christmas break. Jane's paper was the third diary prompt given by Mrs. Anderson. There was no discussion prior to assigning the topic; it was written on the board when the students entered the classroom. As usual, Jane had read the assignment board and had her diary open ready to begin when Mrs. Anderson began class.

Jane immediately began to write. She titled her piece "Family in Okinawa" and then wrote for two minutes, pausing after the fourth sentence. Jane then switched pencils and drew the parentheses around "meaning the whole family." Jane put her head down on her desk and closed her eyes. Almost immediately, Jane sat up and began to write again. She wrote without pausing for three more minutes, then read over what she had written, making no changes. Although Mrs. Anderson moved around the room reading other student's responses and making comments, she did not read Jane's. Jane then wrote "Finished" at the bottom of her paper, closed her diary and picked up a book to read. She did not look at her writing again.

#### Analytic Assessment

This paper consists of one seven-sentence paragraph. Three of the sentences are run-ons. After the fourth sentence, there is a shift from present to past tense. Six words are misspelled. Because of the punctuation, "Meaning the whole family" is not considered a fragment: it is merely an immature attempt at a subordinate clause. The sentence weight for this sample is 2.0, more sophisticated than either of the other samples which were assessed for Jane. A detailed analysis of the weighting is found in Appendix H.

Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

	Fourth Grade	Sixth Grade
Composing	1	1
Style	2	1
Sentence Formation	3	2
Usage	4	4
Mechanics	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
Total score	36	28

Composing. Jane exhibits little or control of this domain at both the fourth and the sixth-grade levels of assessment because of a lack of organization and the digression in time. The central idea is unclear and there is a question of exactly what the writer is trying to write about. The paper tends to be repetitious.

Style. This paper is assessed as inconsistent control at the fourth-grade level of assessment because of the general language and the lack of deliberate selection of vocabulary. Although some voice is evident, the tone is non-existent as a result of the general language of the piece. At the sixth-grade level of assessment, the paper is considered to have little or no control because of the limited vocabulary.

Sentence Formation. This paper is scored as reasonable control at the fourth-grade level, but the obvious examples

of enjambment indicate inconsistent control at the sixth-grade assessment level.

Usage. This paper indicates consistent control of this domain, although the verb inflection errors are evident at the sixth-grade level of assessment.

Mechanics. Although this paper is scored as consistent control at the fourth-grade level of assessment, the errors in formatting, spelling and internal punctuation lower the score to reasonable control at the sixth-grade level.

### Discussion

This paper received a failing score at both the fourth and the sixth-grade levels of assessment despite consistent or reasonable levels of control in the domains of usage and mechanics. Jane's slowly emerging ability to subordinate results in the comparatively high level of enjambment; three of her seven sentences are run-ons. Therefore, Jane's assessment in sentence formation is inconsistent control at the sixth-grade level. As in the fourth-grade baseline assessment however, Jane's problems lie in the domains of composing and style.

Little or no control of the domain of composing is evident from the lack of organization in the paragraph. Jane has titled her piece "Family in Okinawa," and she begins to chronicle who they are and why they live there. Jane's family has few material possessions, which makes her

assertion that "they bring us things" very important. At that point in the writing, however, Jane stopped and created her parenthetical expression. Realizing that, in reality, Jessy's family no longer lived in OKANIWA, Jane digresses to a discussion of the family's return to North Carolina. This digression results in the reader's inability to understand what is happening in this writing. Jane is apparently unaware of the time digression. If Jane had begun her paper with the fifth sentence and explained within that context where the family had lived previously, the paper would have shown a better organization. It must be remembered, however, that this was first draft writing.

Jane's major problems in the domain of style are related to her inability to de-select information and her lack of specific vocabulary. Jane tells, but does not show, how happy she is to have her family living closer. It is not necessary that the reader know that Jessy's family always "brings things" for the whole family or that they visit "almost anytime." The anemic vocabulary--Jane uses the word "come" in five different sentences--and the repetition of certain phrases impact negatively on the score in this domain.

Jane did this assignment quickly. Because Mrs. Anderson did not assign grades to diary responses, Jane may have spent even less time than she might have on a graded assignment. Although Jane did read over the assignment, she made no

changes and added no information. If Jane had worked with a revision partner, or if Mrs. Anderson had asked Jane for more information, the piece might have been stronger. She signalled that she was done by writing "Finished" across the bottom.

### Simulated Literacy Passport Test

Jane wrote the following paper in response to the prompt, "Write about the best day you ever had."

The best day that I ever had was on the Christmas of '89. What happend that was so special was that I got what I had been asking for about three to for years. That was a remote control car but instead of a car I got a truck.

I like the truck don't get me wrong but I would rather have a car. I think that thier more fun trucks are fun too but I have always wanted a care. My truck was broken when I had gotten it. It wouldn't go backwards and the antana fell completely off.

So two to three days latere we picked up a new one. It's a real nice truck it looked like it was built better than the other. I realy like the look more I realy can't say witch truck ran better because I didn't get to run the other truck. My sister liked my so well my parents got her one just like it but they were diffrent frequncyes.

### Description of Writing Behavior

The third sample was written in February, 1990, when I had been out of Jane's classroom for nine weeks. Although Mrs. Anderson administered the prompt, I was in the room to



observe the writing. Jane was aware that I was watching her throughout the time period and, based on my observations, I believe that she wrote for a longer period of time because of this awareness.

Jane began by making a list of possible topics. They included a camping trip, an overnight at her grandmother's house, the day she gave her DARE report and the Christmas of 89. She chose to write on that Christmas. Jane did no other prewriting and did not choose to give her story a title.

Jane wrote for five minutes, stopping occasionally to re-read what she had written and to count the number of sentences. At the end of the first paragraph she wrote "about 3 sentences" in the margin. When she finished the second paragraph, she was at the bottom of the page. She stopped and looked over at me. Then she smiled, laid down her pencil and her paper and put her head down on her desk and closed her eyes. Two minutes later, she opened her eyes and again looked over at me to make sure that I was still watching her. Smiling, Jane picked up her paper and re-read what she had written. She then turned her paper over on the back and continued to write.

Jane wrote the final paragraph of her paper in much smaller writing than she had used in the first two paragraphs. She spent four minutes writing, stopping twice to erase what she had written. She consulted the dictionary for the spelling of "frequencies," but when she did not find

it quickly, she quit looking. She did not use the dictionary again. Jane re-read her paper twice, each time glancing up to make sure that I was still watching her as she worked. She continued to look at what she had written, although she did not write anything else, until all but three of the students had turned in their papers. She then turned her paper in, smiling at me as she walked past my desk.

### Analytic Assessment

This writing sample consists of three paragraphs which includes fourteen sentences. There are three run-ons and no fragments. Nine words are misspelled and three verb tenses are incorrect. The sentence weight for this paper is 1.88. A detailed analysis of the sentence weighting is found in Appendix H.

### Domain Assessment

Key: 4 (consistent control)  
 3 (reasonable control)  
 2 (inconsistent control)  
 1 (little or no control)

	Fourth Grade	Sixth Grade
Composing	3+	3
Style	4	3
Sentence Formation	4	3
Usage	4	3
Mechanics	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
Total	58	48

Composing. This paper is assessed as reasonable control of the domain because, although the central idea is stated, more than one particular day is discussed. This lack of focus is more pronounced at the sixth-grade level of assessment.

Style. Although the language is general, at the fourth-grade level of assessment the language is specific enough to be considered consistent control of the domain. At the sixth-grade level, however, the lack of specific language as well as a lack of evidence of an attempt to de-select details, result in a rating of reasonable control.

Sentence Formation. As the paper exhibits a variety of sentences of varying length and form that are appropriate to the grade level, it is scored as consistent control at the fourth-grade level of assessment. At the sixth-grade level, several examples of enjambment lower the score to reasonable control.

Usage. At the fourth-grade level of assessment, this paper exhibits consistent control of the domain. At the sixth-grade level, several verb inflection errors result in the lower rating of reasonable control.

Mechanics. Although the errors in punctuation and spelling are assessed as consistent control at the fourth grade level, a higher level of control is expected at the sixth-grade level. This paper, therefore is assessed as reasonable control at that level.

### Discussion

This is by far the best writing that Jane did during the entire twenty-one weeks of my study, based on my analysis of the thirty papers that she wrote during this period. It is the only paper written by the four students in the study that received a Literacy Passport Test passing score at both the fourth and sixth-grade levels of assessment. Jane's paper was scored as consistent control in all of the domains except composing at the fourth grade level. At the sixth-grade level, Jane's paper scored reasonable control in all five domains.

Jane's paper is successful because she stated her topic and then structured her narrative around the topic. Her primary error was to digress from her central idea by extending her discussion of the truck that she received over a period of several days. A further digression was to state that her sister also received a similar truck. The paper lacks a strong closure.

Jane's vocabulary is fairly anemic. The choice of words such as "fun," "real nice," and "built better" do nothing to create a picture in the mind of the reader. The vocabulary that she does choose tends to be repetitious.

Jane's sentence patterns are evolving nicely; and, although she has several examples of enjambment, she is past

the "on and on" stage (Self, 1989:63) and is at an appropriate sentence developmental level for fifth-grade (Hunt, 1970:7). If she continues to develop at a similar rate, as evidenced by the differences in sentence formation between the fourth-grade assessment and the simulated Literacy Passport Test assessment, Jane should have little problem with this domain on the actual test.

Jane's problems with usage and mechanics are minimal. If Jane spends more time on the revision of her papers and uses a dictionary consistently to help with her spelling, she might score well in these domains at the sixth-grade level.

#### Implications for Instruction

Jane has been permitted to remain invisible and disconnected in the classroom. Although Mrs. Anderson expressed concern that factors outside of school were affecting Jane's in-class behavior, (Mrs. Anderson cited mood swings in Jane--a phenomenon which I never observed), neither she nor any other school personnel had referred Jane for intervention by a school counselor or social worker. As Jane did well academically, as evidenced by her consistent Honor Roll achievements, and is never a discipline problem in class, she is left alone within the classroom.

I do not think that Jane will fail the Literacy Passport Test. If she continues to improve her writing as she has this

year, she may pass, although I predict that her score will fall somewhere between the 50th and 75th percentile, correlating roughly with her Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores in written language.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE CASES

In this chapter, I discuss my cases in relation to the research questions. Drawing on these results, I discuss some of the possible implications for teaching writing to students considered at-risk for passing the Literacy Passport Test, and I also offer some suggestions for further research.

#### Discussion of Cases Regarding the Research Questions

I undertook this study out of anger toward the woman whose perception of children as writers I believed to be very wrong, as well as out of concern with how the Literacy Passport Test would impact on my own sixth grade child's potential for entering high school. I chose to conduct my study in a personal way, serving both as teacher and as researcher, because I felt I could come to understand more fully the students in my study. As I observed and taught those students and as I analyzed my data, I began to comprehend the problems that are faced by at-risk students and to understand there is no one set of writing behaviors that constitutes a designation of "at-risk in writing." Although all four of the students in my study held the

designation of "at-risk," they each exhibited very different behaviors both in and out of the writing context.

### Research Questions

In response to the first research question, I discuss the ways that the students in this study wrote, their approaches to the writing task, their concern with surface correctness, and the time they spent on each writing task. I reflect on the findings that the students enjoyed collaborative writing and that three of the four wrote outside of the classroom.

In response to the second research question, I compare the papers of the four students in the study to the papers written by the other 93 students in the fifth grade. I examine the problems that the students demonstrated in the domains of composing and style and discuss the finding that the four students in the study wrote few sentences above the low level of syntactic sophistication.

#### **1) What are the writing practices of these at-risk fifth-grade students?**

Like the students studied in Britton, et. al. (1975:19-41), when the four students in this study began to write, they wrote fairly quickly for a short period of intense concentration, during which time they did not wish to be interrupted. Next, they stopped, looked back over what they had written, and often put their heads down on their



desks or closed their eyes. Then they would begin to write again.

During interviews, Jane and Peggy each told me that stopping to think while they were writing was an important part of organizing their thoughts as they wrote. Neither Andy nor Eric said they were aware of what they did when they put their heads down or when they stopped writing. Andy said that he stopped writing when he became tired or when he ran out of things to say in his paper. Eric said that he stopped writing whenever his "hand hurt." Unlike the students in the Britton study, however, the students in my study made few significant changes in their work as a result of these periods. It appears that the non-writing time was not a period of reflection for these students. For Jane and Peggy, this time served as a period of organization rather than one of revision; and, for Eric and Andy, the time served merely as an interval of off-task behavior.

Writing Style. All four of the students wrote as briefly as possible in syntactically simplistic sentences and were reluctant to take risks with their writing. Eric exerted minimal effort in all of his writing: his writing was characteristic of the "don't care" attitude evident in all of his school work, a classic motivational problem. Peggy was so concerned with her problems in spelling and sentence construction that she wrote as simplistically as possible in order to have a measure of control over her errors. Andy

often had little to say because he always wrote on the first topic that occurred to him and thus was limited by his initial ideas. Jane's practice of writing only brief responses was characteristic of her desire for a low profile.

Surface Correctness. All four of the students were concerned with the superficial features of their writing. Peggy and Jane felt that spelling errors were a primary problem; Andy and Eric considered their handwriting to be a major problem in their writing. Yet, Jane, Andy, and Eric all scored well in the domains of the Literacy Passport Test that measure facility in the areas usually stressed in the writing instruction they had experienced and, therefore, considered important to these students--usage, mechanics and sentence formation (see Table 9). In contrast the predominant problems for these students were in the areas of composing and style. These problems were a result of the students' inability to select sufficient details to support the central idea of their writing and their lack of specific vocabulary necessary to produce a sufficiently elaborated writing product as measured by the features of the Literacy Passport Test. These students seem to be unaware that the domains upon which they are focusing are really the ones over which they have the most control, as defined by the Literacy Passport Test.

Peggy's problems, however, are more complex. Although she and Jane received the same score in the domain of style

TABLE 9

The Comparative Scores of the Students on All Three Samples

PEGGY				JANE			
	1st Paper	2nd Paper 4th 6th	3rd Paper 4th 6th		1st Paper	2nd Paper 4th 6th	3rd Paper 4th 6th
Composing	1.5	1 1	3 2	Composing	1.5	1 1	3 3
Style	1.5	2 1	3 3	Style	1.5	2 1	4 3
Sentence Formation	1.5	3 3	4 4	Sentence Formation	4.0	3 2	4 3
Usage	2.5	4 4	3 2	Usage	4.0	4 4	4 3
Mechanics	3.0	3 2	3 2	Mechanics	3.0	4 3	4 3
TOTAL	31	32 28	50 40	TOTAL	37	36 28	56 48

ERIC				ANDY			
	1st Paper	2nd Paper 4th 6th	3rd Paper 4th 6th		1st Paper	2nd Paper 4th 6th	3rd Paper 4th 6th
Composing	1.5	3 2	1 1	Composing	1.5	4 2	1 1
Style	2.0	2 2	1 1	Style	1.5	4 3	1 1
Sentence Formation	3.0	4 4	3 3	Sentence Formation	3.0	4 3	4 3
Usage	4.0	4 3	4 3	Usage	4.0	4 3	4 3
Mechanics	2.5	3 2	3 2	Mechanics	3.5	2 1	3 2
TOTAL	36	48 36	30 26	TOTAL	36	60 41	32 26

Class average on Simulated Literacy Passport Test

Mrs. Anderson 46  
 Ms. Williams 49  
 All four classes 52

and Peggy actually received a higher score than did Jane in the domain of sentence formation, Peggy has serious problems in the other three domains of composing, usage and mechanics, scoring at the level of "inconsistent control" in all three. Although Peggy scored higher than did Eric and Andy in the domains of both composing and style, Peggy's low score on the Literacy Passport Test, unlike the scores of Eric and Andy, is compounded by her low scores in usage and mechanics, domains directly impacted by her learning disability. Her inability to spell, to punctuate correctly, and to show consistency in agreement, result in a lower score than would be received by a similar student without a learning disability.

Time on Task. These four students spent less than the average time of their classmates on the simulated Literacy Passport Test. The average time spent by the other students in Mrs. Anderson's class was twenty-five minutes. Jane, who is in that class, spent twenty minutes on her writing sample, but Eric, who is also in the class, spent only four minutes. Peggy spent twenty-three minutes on her writing, whereas Andy spent seven minutes. However, the average time spent by the other students in Ms. Williams' class on this same writing task was thirty-three minutes. Although the average score in Mrs. Anderson's class was a 46 and in Ms. Williams' class was a 49, Peggy scored a 40 while Eric and Andy each scored a 26. Only Jane's score of 48 was above average for her

class. Jane and Peggy spent longer on this writing task than did Andy and Eric, Jane's score was the only passing score of the four, but Peggy's score is reasonable for a fifth-grade student being scored by sixth-grade standards. (Table 9 provides the student's scores on all three assessments.) Although Peggy actually spent longer than the other three students on the writing task, her score was also related to her problems in the domains of usage and mechanics, which can be attributed to her learning disability in written language.

Jane and Peggy spent longer on all of their writing tasks during my study than did Eric and Andy, and the girls usually produced better papers, as measured by the domains of composing and style. Jane was often the last student in her class to complete a writing task and her papers were often more elaborated than those of most of the other students in the class. Peggy, however, who struggled with the superficial features of writing including spelling and usage perhaps as a result of her learning disability, spent more of her writing time dealing with these features than in elaboration of her central idea. Although increased writing time may impact on the amount of writing produced, writing time is not always a measure of writing success. Some of this writing time, as it was particularly in Peggy's case, may be used for dealing with problems not directly related to elaboration, problems such as spelling, usage and mechanics

areas which may be particularly difficult for students with diagnosed disabilities. Although spending a longer period of time on a writing task does not assure a more elaborated sample, elaboration does require time. It is not possible for a student to write an elaborated paper without having spent sufficient time writing that paper.

Collaborative Writing. Three of the four students produced good writing collaboratively, a practice, however, not permitted on the Literacy Passport Test. Jane wrote stories at home with her first grade partner as well as with her best friend. Andy wrote his best paper while working collaboratively with the student teacher. Eric wrote effectively when Mrs. Anderson worked with him individually to complete his "Barbie and the Rockers" story. Only Peggy resisted collaborative writing, a fact again related to her reluctance to alert students to her learning disability. When Peggy was compelled to work in a collaborative environment, she worked only with one other girl in the class who also had a learning disability. Although collaborative writing may help some students to write more effectively, not all students are comfortable in such a situation (Lopate, 1978:137). Students like Peggy who are primarily concerned with the superficial features of their writing may be unwilling to share what they have written, particularly with students whom they perceive may judge them to be inferior (Rhodes and Dudley-Marling, 1988:234).

Free Writing. Three of the four students enjoyed writing outside of class. Peggy kept a journal where she was able to "just write" and did not have to worry about spelling and sentence formation. Despite her family's encouragement that Peggy keep a journal, her writing does not appear to have been improved by the practice, according to both her language arts and her learning disabilities teachers. Jane often wrote at home with her friends. Eric, who admitted that he did not like to write, said that the best writing he had done during the year had been written on his home computer as a gift to his mother. Andy did not write at home, nor did he do any other school work at home as evidenced by his consistent zero homework grades.

**2) What are the characteristics of the papers written by these at-risk students?**

The four students in my study scored lower than any of the other students in the fifth grade on both the fourth-grade baseline assessment, and three of the four scored lower than any of the other students on the simulated Literacy Passport Test that I gave to all of the 97 students in the fifth grade. The average score on the fourth-grade baseline test was a 48; the four students in my study produced total scores ranging from a low of 31 for Peggy to a 36 for both Eric and Andy and a 37 for Jane (see Table 9). On the simulated Literacy Passport Test, based on the

sixth-grade level of assessment, the average score in Mrs. Anderson's class was a 46 and for Ms. Williams' class a 49. The average of all four fifth-grade classes was a 52. Eric and Andy both scored a 26, the lowest score in any of the classes. Peggy's score was a 40, and Jane's score was a 48. Of the four, only Jane received a score that would be considered passing on the Literacy Passport Test.

Composing and Style. All four of the students exhibited serious problems in the domains of composing and style, the domains weighted most heavily on the Literacy Passport Test. On the fourth-grade baseline assessment, each of the four scored a 1.5 (little or no control) in composing. Three of the students scored a 1.5 (little or no control) and one a 2.0 (inconsistent control) in the style domain. As these two domains are weighted more heavily than the other three domains, these students scored poorly on the fourth-grade baseline test. Their scores in the other domains, however, were in the reasonable or consistent range (see Table 9) except for Peggy's scores in sentence formation (1.5--little or no control) and usage (2.5--inconsistent control) and Eric's mechanics score (2.5--inconsistent control). Their problems in the domains of composing and style, however, would prevent them from passing the test although they perform at a reasonable or consistent level in the domains that have been stressed in their previous writing instruction.



Low scores in the domains of composing and style continued to characterize the writing of all of these students on at least one of the other two samples studied. Peggy and Jane both scored a 1.0 (little or no control) at the fourth- and sixth-grade levels of assessment in the domain of composing and a 2.0 (inconsistent control) at the fourth-grade level of assessment in the domain of style on their "best" writings. Eric and Andy both scored a 1.0 (little or no control) at both grade levels of assessment in the composing and style domains on their simulated Literacy Passport Tests. Of the other 93 students who took this simulated test, 82 had difficulty with one or more of the domains of composing and style, although none of the scores of these 82 students was as low as those of Eric and Andy. Thus, although the features of the domains of composing and style may be difficult for most students, the students in my study, particularly Andy and Eric, had more difficulty controlling the features of these domains, particularly the elaboration of a central idea in a unified manner, than did the other students in these fifth-grade classrooms.

Sentence Weighting. Of the twelve papers written by the four students and analyzed in this study, only two papers yielded a sentence weight at the moderate level of syntactic sophistication; none of the papers yielded a sentence weight at the highest level of syntactic sophistication. Of the 93 papers written by the other fifth-grade students in response

to the simulated Literacy Passport Test writing sample, 54 percent of the sentences yielded a sentence weight at the low level of syntactic sophistication, 39 percent yielded a sentence weight at the moderate level of syntactic sophistication, and 7 percent yielded a sentence weight at the highest level of syntactic sophistication. Clearly, then, the four students in this study wrote less sophisticated sentences than those written by most of the other students in the four fifth-grade classrooms. A low level of syntactic sophistication impacts negatively on the scores in the domains of style and sentence formation because these papers lack sufficient detail and effective coordination of ideas.

### Conclusion

The students I studied did not seem to be prepared adequately to pass a test that stresses facility in the domains of composing and style, two areas which may not have been stressed in traditional writing instruction. The writing programs presented to them, therefore, did not effectively prepare them for the Virginia Literacy Passport Test. Yet, current research suggests that, such programs should stress collaborative writing practices (Rhodes and Dudley-Marling, 1988:215); encourage reflection during the writing process (Calkins, 1986:214); and provide an

understanding of the purpose of each writing assignment (Rosebery, Flower, Warren, Bowen, Bruce, Kantz and Penrose, 1989:141). The Virginia Literacy Passport Test emphasizes this approach to writing (Self, Spring, 1989). Therefore, students should be encouraged to regard school as a community for writers, all of whom are engaged in making meaning from their writing (Bissex and Bullock, 1987:65).

Writing is an important part of a student's total language development. Educators must continue to examine the writing practices of students at all levels of schooling and to provide the kind of instruction that will encourage success and fluency for every student in every classroom. If students such as Jane, Andy, Eric, and Peggy are to be successful on the Literacy Passport Test, they must receive appropriate instruction that will encourage their success as well as effective remediation if, indeed, they do fail the test. Growth in writing is slow and difficult to measure over a limited period of time; but students, particularly ones who are not writing at the level necessary to "pass" a writing test, need to be given the time and the help they need to succeed.

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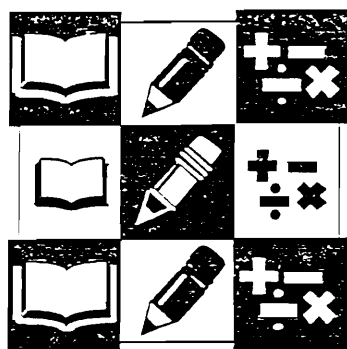
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**APPENDIX A**  
**GRADE SIX EXAMINER'S INSTRUCTIONS**



## Virginia's Literacy Passport Program

### Grade 6 Examiner's Instructions 1989-90 Testing Program

#### SCHEDULE AND PURPOSE

The Virginia Literacy Testing Program must be administered consistent with the schedule established by your Division Director of Testing. The writing test is to be administered during the period February 19-23, 1990. The mathematics and reading tests

are to be administered during the period March 19 - April 13, 1990. The purpose of the tests is to determine whether or not students are prepared for success at the more demanding level of secondary education. The results of the program will be used to identify students who may benefit from remedial instruction and to determine the awarding of the Literacy Passport and subsequent promotion to ninth grade.

The assessments should be administered in the order that they are numbered below. At the beginning of the writing assessment, students are asked to print and grid **ONLY** their names on their answer sheets. Completing Identifying Information is scheduled as a separate session to be administered second. This schedule is a consequence of concern for security of the writing prompt coupled with the need to have the students fresh at the beginning of the writing assessment.

**Length of the Testing Sessions:** There are no time limits on the tests. Every student must be allowed sufficient time to complete the tests. For scheduling purposes, block out at least a two hour time period for each assessment. You may find the following information to be helpful, also.

	Directions	Approximate Working Times	
1) writing assessment	20 minutes	45-60 minutes	} to be administered } February 19-23
2) completing identifying information	15 minutes	--	
3) reading assessment	10 minutes	50 minutes	} to be administered } March 19 - April 13
4) mathematics assessment- part A	10 minutes	45-60 minutes	
5) mathematics assessment- part B	10 minutes	45-60 minutes	

Test anxiety may cause some students to be unable to conclude. Therefore, although the tests have no time limits, you may terminate testing when you believe that every student has had an opportunity to fully attempt each test/test item and to check his/her work. **You should not stop any student before twice the suggested working time has been allowed.**

**Each assessment must be conducted in one sitting/session. Do not begin testing unless sufficient time exists for the slowest working student to complete his/her work.** It may be useful to conduct each testing session in two stages. For example, the session could be terminated for those who have finished at the end of the suggested time period, and the other students would be allowed to continue. The administration directions provide oral instructions for concluding the testing sessions in this way. Use these at your discretion.

#### MATERIALS CHECKLIST

The student response booklets, reading test booklets and mathematics test booklets will come to you in unbroken shrink-wrapped packages containing 35 copies of each item. Do not break the wrapping until the date and time of testing.

Materials Needed by Examiners to Give the Tests

1. Virginia Literacy Testing Program Examiner's Instructions (these instructions)
2. Local instructions supplied by the Division Director of Testing
3. Extra, sharpened, No. 2 pencils to give students
4. Scratch paper for students to use during the writing assessment
5. Dictionaries for students to use during the writing assessment
6. Timer
7. A "Testing. Do Not Disturb." sign

Materials Needed by Each Student

1. 1989-90 Virginia Literacy Testing Program Student Response Booklet (grey)
2. Virginia Literacy Test in Mathematics, one of Forms 1-6. (There are six forms of the mathematics test. Each form contains the same items for credit but different sets of experimental items. The booklets will arrive collated in series of six throughout the package of 35. Please ensure that the sequence is maintained in distribution and administration.)
3. Virginia Literacy Test in Reading, Grade 6 (*Degrees of Reading Power*)
4. Two No. 2 pencils, sharpened, and an eraser
5. Scratch paper for the writing assessment
6. A dictionary for the writing assessment
7. Reading materials for early finishers

Materials Needed by Examiner After Testing

1. Directions for Organizing and Returning Materials After the Writing Assessment and The Completion of Identifying Information (page 11 of these instructions)
2. Directions for Organizing and Returning Materials After the Reading and Mathematics Assessments (page 12 of these instructions)
3. Classroom Information Sheet (green)

**ADMINISTRATION DIRECTIONS****DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING ASSESSMENT ADMINISTRATION**

All text that is to be read aloud to the students is preceded by "SAY" and printed in bold-faced type. Additional information (which is not to be read aloud) is printed in standard (not bold-faced) type. It is essential that you are familiar with these instructions and that you follow them exactly as they appear.

**SAY:** This week and again in [March or April], you will be taking some tests that are part of the Literacy Testing Program in Virginia. These tests will help you and your teachers know how well you can read, write, and solve mathematics problems. It is important that you do your best on these tests. I will now give each of you a response booklet which you will use for each test. Do not open or mark on the booklet until I tell you what to do. You must use a No. 2 pencil which makes dark marks. Do not use a mechanical pencil or a pen. Distribute response booklets to students.

**SAY:** Now, on the front of your response booklet, find section A. At the top part of the section there are 13 boxes over the words "Last Name." Print your last name in these 13 boxes, starting with the left box and printing only one letter per box. If there are more than 13 letters in your last name, print only the first 13 letters. Pause.

Beside the 13 boxes, over the words "FIRST NAME," you will find nine more boxes. Print your first name in these boxes. If there are more than nine letters in your first name, print only the first nine letters. Pause.

Beside the nine boxes, over the letters "MI," you will find one more box. Print your middle initial in this box. Pause.

Now, fill in the matching circle beneath each letter in your name. Be sure you fill in only one circle for each letter. If there is no letter in a box, fill in the blank circle at the top of the column. Make sure that you do not mark outside the circles when you are darkening them. Pause and monitor.

THEN SAY: Today, you are going to take a test to show how well you can write a paper. I am going to give you a dictionary and some scratch paper. Do not open or mark on the response booklet until I tell you what to do. Give students dictionaries and scratch paper.

WHEN EVERYONE HAS THE MATERIALS SAY:

Now, we are ready for the test. For this test you are going to write a paper. Open your booklet to page 7. Near the top of the page, it says "WRITING PAGE." This sheet is for your paper. Use all of the lines on this page you need. If you need more room, turn the page over and write on page 8. Only what you write in the lined spaces on pages 7 and 8 will be scored. This means that you must plan carefully so that you can write everything you want to say on pages 7 and 8. You do not have to use all of the space if you don't need it.

Your paper will be read by two different people and each one of them will give it a score. These people like reading what students write. Here are some things that they think make a good paper:

- The subject of your paper is clear, and everything in your paper tells about the subject.
- Your paper is organized so that they can understand what you are saying.
- You use words and include information that make your paper interesting.
- Your sentences make sense and are written correctly.
- You use good grammar.
- You use capital letters and punctuation marks correctly.
- And you let them know where you are starting a new paragraph.

Now, look at page 6 of your Student Response Booklet. On page 6 is your writing assignment and a checklist you can use to help you write your paper. Read your writing assignment silently while I read it out loud.

READ THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT ALOUD TO THE STUDENTS, THEN SAY: The first sentence tells you what to write about. Be sure your paper is written about this topic. Now look at the checklist. Read the checklist silently while I read it out loud. READ THE CHECKLIST ALOUD TO THE STUDENTS, THEN SAY: Once you have thought about how you will write about this assignment and have planned your paper, you may open your Student Response Booklet to page 7 and write your paper. Remember to continue

your paper on page 8 if you need more space, and to make it complete on these two pages.

You may print your paper or write it in cursive. You may use the dictionary if you need to. And, you may give your paper a title if you wish, but that is not necessary.

You may have as much time as you need to do this writing. Don't rush. It takes time to plan, write, and revise a good paper.

Does anyone have questions about what you are to do? Resolve questions, then say:

When you finish, leave your paper on your desk and sit quietly or read if you wish.

Now, relax, re-read your writing assignment, and begin planning. You may begin now.

After students have begun the test:

- Check to make sure that each student is following directions.
- You may help individual students, as long as assistance is limited to clarifying directions, reading the prompt, and finding the right place in the response booklet. DO NOT assist with planning, writing or editing. Do not assist with spelling or using the dictionary.
- Do not take up any papers until after 45 minutes unless ALL students have finished.

AFTER 45 MINUTES, SAY:

If you have finished writing your paper, raise your hand and I will collect your materials. If you have not finished, continue writing, and take as much time as you need. When you do finish, leave your paper on your desk and sit quietly.

Collect the response booklets from the students. Make sure all students have accurately completed the name grids.



### DIRECTIONS FOR COMPLETING IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

Identifying information must be completed prior to storing the documents after the writing assessment to ensure that each student uses the same response document for all three tests.

Some of the information is designated to be completed by the examiner. However, examiners may prefer to fill in and grid all of the information themselves. If students are to enter identifying information, the examiner should print the information on the chalkboard exactly as it is to be recorded on the response document.

The following oral directions should be used to direct students in the completion of the identifying information requested on the student response booklet. These instructions should be administered in a separate session. All text that is to be read aloud to the students is preceded by "SAY" and printed in bold-faced type. Additional information (which is not to be read aloud) is printed in standard (not bold-faced) type. It is essential that you are familiar with these instructions and that you follow them exactly as they appear.

**APPENDIX B**  
**LITERACY TEST SCORES 1989**

# Literacy Testing Program 1988-89

D-S Code:  
Division: /  
School: /

Date of Testing: FEBRUARY, 1989  
Grade: 4

		Number of Students Scored	Obtained Score												Number of Students Scoring in Bottom Quartile - Based on State Norms*				
			Total			Comp.			Style			S.F.				Usage		Mech.	
			M	S.D.		M	S.D.		M	S.D.		M	S.D.			M	S.D.		M
ALL STUDENTS		School Div.	95 593	48 48	8.07 8.69	16 15	4.61 4.60	11 11	2.70 2.87	7 7	1.15 1.37	8 7	0.69 0.90	7 7	0.97 1.25	13 121			
ALL NON-EXEMPTED STUDENTS		School Div.	95 592	48 48	8.07 8.67	16 15	4.61 4.60	11 11	2.70 2.87	7 7	1.15 1.36	8 7	0.69 0.89	7 7	0.97 1.25	13 120			
By Gender																			
Male		School Div.	52 308	47 46	7.30 8.60	15 15	4.15 4.42	11 10	2.39 2.81	7 7	1.28 1.42	8 7	0.69 0.92	7 7	1.08 1.35	8 81			
Female		School Div.	43 283	50 50	8.84 8.23	16 16	5.14 4.65	12 12	2.98 2.79	7 7	0.98 1.26	8 8	0.71 0.85	7 7	0.80 1.05	5 39			
No Response		School Div.	0 1	44 44	0.00 0.00	15 15	0.00 0.00	10 10	0.00 0.00	5 5	0.00 0.00	8 8	0.00 0.00	6 6	0.00 0.00	0 0			
By Ethnicity																			
Asian or Pacific Islander		School Div.	8 12	48 48	7.46 7.57	15 16	4.54 4.21	11 11	2.39 2.63	7 7	1.64 1.50	8 8	0.46 1.17	7 7	0.74 0.67	1 2			
Hispanic		School Div.	1 5	54 53	0.00 6.38	24 18	0.00 3.67	16 12	0.00 2.19	8 7	0.00 1.10	8 8	0.00 0.45	8 8	0.00 0.45	0 0			
Black (Not of Hispanic Origin)		School Div.	6 22	42 45	8.48 9.12	12 15	5.02 4.71	9 11	2.45 3.07	7 6	1.22 1.52	7 7	0.98 1.32	7 6	0.98 1.41	3 6			
Native American		School Div.	0 0													0 0			
White (Not of Hispanic Origin)		School Div.	80 552	49 48	7.82 8.68	16 15	4.47 4.62	11 11	2.68 2.88	7 7	1.10 1.35	8 7	0.69 0.86	7 7	1.00 1.25	9 112			
No Response		School Div.	0 1	44 44	0.00 0.00	15 15	0.00 0.00	10 10	0.00 0.00	5 5	0.00 0.00	8 8	0.00 0.00	6 6	0.00 0.00	0 0			
ALL EXEMPTED STUDENTS		School Div.	0 1	30 30	0.00 0.00	12 12	0.00 0.00	6 6	0.00 0.00	2 2	0.00 0.00	5 5	0.00 0.00	5 5	0.00 0.00	0 1			

\* "State" is defined as being those divisions that contracted with DRC to score their fourth-grade writing assignments. These results may not be representative of the performance of all fourth-grade students in Virginia.



**APPENDIX C**  
**INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PERFORMANCE REPORT**

## APPENDIX C

**VIRGINIA**  
**Literacy Testing Program**  
**1988-89**

**INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Date of Testing: FEBRUARY, 1989  
 Grade: 4

D-S Code:  
 Division:  
 School:  
 Group:

FOR:

SS#:

ID#:

WRITING				
	Possible Score Range	Obtained Score	Average Rating Score	Local* Obtained Score
Total Writing	16-64	64	4.0	48
Composing	6-24	24	4.0	
Style	4-16	16	4.0	
Sentence Formation	2- 8	8	4.0	
Usage	2- 8	8	4.0	
Mechanics	2- 8	8	4.0	

\* The score achieved by the middle-ranking local student at this grade level.

**WHAT THE LITERACY WRITING TEST MEASURES**

The scores in this report represent how well the student is able to write an essay on an assigned topic. Listed below are the areas or domains of writing which are scored and some skills or features which are measured in each domain.

**Composing:** The student

- presents a central idea (or feeling) and stays with it throughout the paper.
- has a clear structure which helps present the central idea.
- uses an adequate number of specific, relevant details that support general statements and help develop major ideas of the essay.

**Style:** The student

- selects vivid vocabulary to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- selects and uses information to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- uses a tone which fits the purpose and shows an awareness of audience.
- uses real voice.
- uses a variety of sentences that interest the audience and suit the nature and purpose of the message.

**Sentence Formation:** The student

- uses standard word order patterns.
- writes sentences of varying length and form appropriate for this grade level.

**Usage:** The student

- applies the rules of grammar and usage taught at this grade level.
- uses words which fit the meaning dictated by purpose and sentence structure.

**Mechanics:** The student

- formats paragraphs.
- shows control of spelling skills appropriate for this grade level.
- applies the rules of capitalization and punctuation taught at this grade level.

**DESCRIPTION OF DOMAIN RATING SCALE CATEGORIES**

- 4 = The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control\*\* of almost all the domain's features.
- 3 = The writer demonstrates reasonable control\*\* of most of the domain's features, but enough inconsistent control exists to indicate some real weakness in the domain.
- 2 = Enough inconsistent control\*\* in several features exists to indicate significant weakness in the domain.
- 1 = The writer demonstrates little or no control\*\* of most of the domain's features.

\*\* Control: The ability to use a given feature of written language effectively at the appropriate grade level.

**APPENDIX D**  
**LESSONS TAUGHT DURING THE DATA COLLECTION**

## APPENDIX D

## LESSONS TAUGHT DURING THE TWO PHASES OF THE DATA COLLECTION

Phase One

## FIRST WEEK

Tuesday: The mini-lesson modeled Graves' (1983:17) method of setting up the product log. The title on the front cover read "What I've written". Inside the folder on the left hand cover the title read "What I find interesting". On the opposite side of the inside cover, the title read "Skills I want to learn". The back cover title read "What I'm an expert on". Students returned to their desks and spent time filling in their folder titles and beginning to list the components of each section. The last ten minutes of class included a group sharing of the folders.

Wednesday: The mini-lesson modeled Nancie Atwell's (1987:78-80) idea for topic search. Students reflected in their process logs, shared their reflections with a partner, and began to write. The last ten minutes of class included a group sharing of their writing.

Thursday: The mini-lesson was a closed-eye exercise. Students returned to their desks to write their responses. Students then used the response to draft a story in their product logs. The last ten minutes of class included a group sharing of their writing.

## SECOND WEEK

Tuesday: The mini-lesson included an exercise in clustering to which students responded. Students shared their clusters on the overhead. After an introduction to cubing, students returned to their desks where they wrote in response to a piece of hard candy. After the students completed their cubes, they chose their response to one side of the cube and expanded it into a longer writing. Students shared responses with whole group.

Wednesday: Students need to be aware that different audiences have different informational needs. Too often writing is evaluated in terms of an absolute audience which assumes that the writing be formal and the audience the same. Students need to understand that the formality of the audience, the background of the audience and the needs of the audience all must be reflected in a writing task (Rhodes and Dudley-Marling, 1988:215).

Utilizing The Jolly Postman by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986) the students wrote a response to Goldilocks' letter to the Three Bears from the viewpoint of either Mama, Papa or Baby Bear. Students shared their responses with the whole group.

Thursday: Again utilizing The Jolly Postman, the students assumed the role of attorney to the Big Bad Wolf and responded to Meeny, Miny, Mo and Co. on behalf of the Big Bad Wolf. Students shared their responses with the whole group.

### THIRD WEEK

Tuesday: The mini-lesson began with my writing the sentence "The dinosaur walked out of the jungle." on the board. As a group the class brainstormed possible ways to expand the sentence. When the board was filled, the students worked in dyads to write their own stories. The students then shared their stories with another dyad and each group decided which of their stories was to be read aloud to the whole group. As each story was read, the class discussed why they liked each story and suggested possible elaborations. Students completed these stories as homework.

Wednesday: I began the class by having students share their elaborated stories. During the mini-lesson, I read students the selection from Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" and they drew what they thought that the author was describing. I then handed out copies of the selection and the students analyzed the effectiveness of Bradbury's description of the Tyrannosaurus rex.

Students then returned to their desks to edit their elaborated pieces in dyads and then to write a prediction of what might happen next in the Bradbury story. Students shared their predictions with the class.

Thursday: I began the lesson by having students read aloud their final drafts of their dinosaur stories. I read the entire "A Sound of Thunder" story to the class during the mini-lesson. Students returned to their desks to write what they thought might happen if the story were to continue. Students shared their reflections with the group.

### FOURTH WEEK

Tuesday: During the mini-lesson, I introduced the Literacy Passport domains of composing and style. The class devised a list of revision strategies. As a group, students used these strategies to revise a story that I had written. Students returned to their desks where they chose a piece of their

own writing to revise in dyads. I collected these revisions, photocopied them and made overheads for the Wednesday class.

Wednesday: Students began by sharing their revisions on the overhead. The class provided revision further suggestions to each student. Students then returned to their desks to write final drafts. At this point, I told students that final drafts are to be done in ink and in cursive. This was in response to the compromise that I reached with Mrs. Anderson concerning cursive writing.

Thursday: During the mini-lesson, students were introduced to the Literacy Passport domain of sentence formation. After an introduction to sentence combining as a whole group, the students returned to their seats to do a sentence combining exercise on a passage. Since all of the students were rewriting the same passage, all of the responses were similar. What differed was how they said it. These outputs were strictly comparable. (Hunt, 1977:5) Students then shared their writing with the whole group.

#### FIFTH AND SIXTH WEEKS

This two week block was used for an exercise similar to Brause and Maher (1985). Students wrote a children's book for and with a first grader.

Tuesday: Students discussed the assignment and formulated interview questions to use with their first grade partners. Students then met with their first grade partners for the interviews to collect information about the younger student which then was incorporated into the fictional story which they wrote.

Wednesday: Students spent the period in the library reading picture books to get a "feel" for the kind of literature enjoyed by first graders.

Thursday: In the mini-lesson, the students shared their story ideas with the class. After receiving suggestions from other students in the class the class decided that "network partners" needed to be established. Such "partners" were individuals considered experts in the particular fields which were being addressed in the writing. "Network partners" in the areas of skiing, soccer and Barbie dolls were particularly sought after. Students then returned to their desks to write their stories. Network partners were consulted frequently.

Tuesday: Students met with their first grade partners to read the stories and to revise together. The fifth graders wrote the final drafts at home.

Wednesday: The fifth graders share their final drafts with their first grade partners. The first graders illustrated the stories.

Thursday: The first and fifth grade groups met together to share the stories. Stories were then displayed in the school library.

#### SEVENTH WEEK

Tuesday: In the mini-lesson I introduced the domains of usage and mechanics. The students generated a check list for editing. I showed the students one of the Literacy Passport Test anchor papers on the overhead and the students edited the paper as a group. The students were then given a copy of another anchor paper which they edited in dyads using the checklist for editing which the group had generated. Students shared their editing efforts with the whole group.

Wednesday: The mini-lesson included a reminder of the editing check list. Students chose one of their papers out of their folders and edited in dyads. As students finish editing, I had the classroom teacher make photocopies. These copies were shared with the group.

Thursday: During the mini-lesson students were introduced to the scoring of the Literacy Passport Test. I showed students how the papers were scored and they scored an anchor paper as a group. Students then returned to their desks, chose a paper from their product logs and scored these papers in dyads. The students shared their scored papers with the group.

#### EIGHTH AND NINTH WEEKS

These two weeks were spent in modeling the publishing of student work (the final stage in the writing process).

Tuesday: Students generated a list of ways to publish student writing during the mini-lesson. Students returned to their desks and went through their product logs to chose three pieces that they wanted to publish.

Wednesday: The mini-lesson was a reminder lesson on revising and editing. Students then returned to their desks to revise and to edit with a partner the three pieces that they wished to publish.

Thursday: Students continued to work on final drafts of their three pieces. I collected one piece from each student for inclusion in the class anthology. I word-processed and photo-copied all selections over the weekend.

Tuesday: Students spent the class period creating displays of their work in the classroom and in the school halls.

Wednesday: Students "published" by reading what they had written in other classrooms, in the school reading corner and to parents who had been invited to participate in the activity.

Thursday: Students wrote a simulated Literacy Passport sample based on the identical prompt used at the fourth grade level.

## Phase two

### FIRST WEEK

Tuesday: I mini-lesson modeled Graves' (1983:17) method for setting up a writing folder which was discussed in phase one.

Wednesday: Using Nancy Atwell's (1987:78-80) idea for a topic search, the students reflected on family stories which they might relate to the class. The students shared their reflections with a partner, chose one idea upon which to write and began to draft their stories. The first drafts were completed at home.

Thursday: The class began with an oral reading of the family stories which were tape-recorded. The mini-lesson dealt with altering a written story for an oral telling. The students listened to their own stories on tape and discussed ways to make the telling of the stories more effective than the reading of them. The students rewrote their stories in response to the discussion.

### SECOND WEEK

Tuesday: The class began with the students' sharing of the second draft of their family stories. Students were told to begin to memorize their stories to present during the "publishing" at the during the ninth week of my lessons. The mini-lesson dealt with the changing of a prose piece to



a script. The students were each given copy of a story from Arnold Lobel's Fables (New York: Harper and Row, 1980) to script for reader's theater. The rest of the period the students scripted the fables.

Wednesday: The class began with a sharing of the stories which the students had scripted. The students were told to choose a group to present their reader's theater projects during the final week of my teaching. The mini-lesson and writing, dealing with Goldilocks in The Jolly Postman were the same as those outlined in the discussion of Mrs. Anderson's lesson.

Thursday: The lesson, a response from the perspective of the Big Bad Wolf's attorney, was the same as described in Mrs. Anderson's class.

### THIRD WEEK

The lessons for this week were conducted exactly as described in the third week of Mrs. Anderson's class.

### FOURTH WEEK

The lessons for this week were conducted exactly as described in the fourth week plan for Mrs. Anderson's class.

### FIFTH WEEK

Tuesday: In order to further their understanding of writing for different audiences, the students did an exercise with the writing of a story line for a wordless picture book, Hiccup, by Mercer Mayer (New York: Dial Books, 1976). With the pictures displayed on the overhead, the class composed a story which would be appropriate to the reading comprehension level of a first grade child. Students then could choose to re-create the story for a fifth grade reading level, an eighth grade reading level and an adult reading level. Models of books at these different levels were provided for the students. The students worked in dyads to write their stories. During the last ten minutes of class, students shared their stories with the class.

Wednesday: The mini-lesson included an oral reading of The Teacher from the Black Lagoon by Mike Thaler (New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1989) and a discussion of the different perceptions that students have of their teachers. Students were then asked to close their eyes and to visualize a teacher that they recalled. The students then opened their eyes and drew a picture of that teacher. Students then

listed terms which described that teacher. Based on their picture and the descriptive terms which they listed, the students wrote to describe an encounter between themselves and the teacher. Students completed their drafts as homework.

Thursday: Students began the class by sharing their writing which had been completed the evening before. As this was the kick-off week for National Reading Month, the mini-lesson dealt with writing a persuasive letter asking their parents to read to them for fifteen minutes each evening. The students wrote their letters, shared them with a revision partner and took them home to their families.

#### SIXTH WEEK

Tuesday: The lessons for this week focused on student awareness of the depth and beauty of regional dialects. The mini-lesson for the day began with my recitation of "The Cremation of Sam McGee," by Robert Service, (Toronto: Kids Can Do Press, 1986) a poem which I had learned from my father. The class discussion centered around how the dialect in the poem created the visual images. The class discussed the different dialect patterns with which they were familiar. Students then returned to their desks to write the story of Sam McGee using a different dialect.

Wednesday: The class mini-lesson focused on the reading of Cynthia Rylant's When I was Young in the Mountains (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982). Students discussed the images created through the dialect in this story. Students returned to their seats to construct their own stories, each section of which began with "When I was young..." The students were told that these stories would be performed using small props or pictures to illustrate in the "publishing" program during the last week of my teaching.

Thursday: The mini-lesson for the day focused on constructing dialogues. Students were divided into pairs and each pair was given the names of two famous, but unrelated persons (i.e. Roger Rabbit and the school principal). The students then constructed a dialogue between these two individuals. The students performed their conversations in front of the class.

#### SEVENTH WEEK

The activities for the seventh week were identical with those described in Mrs. Anderson's plan.

## EIGHTH WEEK

During this week the students worked in groups to prepare for their "publishing" during the next week. Parents, students in other fifth grade classes and students at other grade levels were invited to come to class on either Tuesday or Wednesday of the following week to see oral and written "publishing" of student work. Some of the students worked on their family stories which they were to tell. Other students practiced the fables which had been scripted for reader's theater presentation. Several conversations between unrelated persons were practiced. A few students chose to work on presentations based on their "When I was young..." stories. All students completed the revision of at least two pieces of writing which were displayed within the room.

## NINTH WEEK

Tuesday and Wednesday: The students in the class "published" their work orally and in written form for invited guests on both of these days.

Thursday: The students wrote a simulated Literacy Passport Test sample.

**APPENDIX E**  
**ANDY'S SCORES AND SENTENCE WEIGHTINGS**

Literacy Testing Program  
1988-89

Date of Testing: FEBRUARY, 1989  
Grade: 4

D-S Code:  
Division:  
School:  
Group:

FOR:

SS#:

ID#:

WRITING				
	Possible Score Range	Obtained Score	Average Rating Score	Local* Obtained Score
Total Writing	16-64	36	2.3	48
Composing	6-24	9	1.5	
Style	4-16	6	1.5	
Sentence Formation	2- 8	6	3.0	
Usage	2- 8	8	4.0	
Mechanics	2- 8	7	3.5	

\* The score achieved by the middle-ranking local student at this grade level.

#### WHAT THE LITERACY WRITING TEST MEASURES

The scores in this report represent how well the student is able to write an essay on an assigned topic. Listed below are the areas or domains of writing which are scored and some skills or features which are measured in each domain.

##### Composing: The student

- presents a central idea (or feeling) and stays with it throughout the paper.
- has a clear structure which helps present the central idea.
- uses an adequate number of specific, relevant details that support general statements and help develop major ideas of the essay.

##### Style: The student

- selects vivid vocabulary to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- selects and uses information to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- uses a tone which fits the purpose and shows an awareness of audience.
- uses real voice.
- uses a variety of sentences that interest the audience and suit the nature and purpose of the message.

##### Sentence Formation: The student

- uses standard word order patterns.
- writes sentences of varying length and form appropriate for this grade level.

##### Usage: The student

- applies the rules of grammar and usage taught at this grade level.
- uses words which fit the meaning dictated by purpose and sentence structure.

##### Mechanics: The student

- formats paragraphs.
- shows control of spelling skills appropriate for this grade level.
- applies the rules of capitalization and punctuation taught at this grade level.

#### DESCRIPTION OF DOMAIN RATING SCALE CATEGORIES

- 4 = The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control\*\* of almost all the domain's features.
- 3 = The writer demonstrates reasonable control\*\* of most of the domain's features, but enough inconsistent control exists to indicate some real weakness in the domain.
- 2 = Enough inconsistent control\*\* in several features exists to indicate significant weakness in the domain.
- 1 = The writer demonstrates little or no control\*\* of most of the domain's features.

\*\* Control: The ability to use a given feature of written language effectively at the appropriate grade level.

APPENDIX E

FOURTH GRADE BASELINE ASSESSMENT

FEBRUARY 1989

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
1 1 1 1. I like cats.	3	3	1
1 1 1 1 2. There neat and fary.	4	4	1
1 1 1 3. I have a cat.	3	3	1
2 1 1 1 4. His name is midnight.	5	4	1.25
2 1 1 3 2 1 5. My fmaily has three more cats.	10	6	1.66
1 1 2 1 2 2 6. Their are lots more cats like the lion and the tiger.	9	6	1.5
1 1 1 2 3 2 7. I like the tiger the best with his stirps.	10	6	1.66
1 2 1 2 8. Lots of cats have stirps.	5	4	1.25
3 2 1 1 9. Some plan cats do.	7	4	1.75
1 1 2 10. Tigers do to.	4	3	1.33
1 1 1 1 2 11. Lions have mains not stirps.	8	5	1.6
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.36			

APPENDIX E  
BEST PAPER  
JANUARY 1990

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
1. It was a stormy cold day. 1 1 3 2 1	8	5	1.6
2. It was raining cats and dogs. 1 1 1 1 1	5	5	1
3. The lightning was crashing through the sky. 1 1 1 1 2	5	4	1.25
4. The dino was scared of the bully dinosaur. 1 1 1 3 2	8	5	1.6
5. The dino ran out of the jungle. 1 1 2	4	3	1.33
6. He ran as fast as he could right into the street corner. 1 1 2 3 3 6 5 4	25	8	3.13
7. Now the street corner is called ship off the Old Block. 2 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	12	10	1.2
8. There was one child there who just got out of school. 1 2 1 2 3 4 3 4	20	8	2.5
9. He through the bannana pill down. 1 1 2 1 2	7	5	1.4
10. The dino slipped on the bannana pill and fell down. 1 1 3 2 1 2	10	6	1.5
11. The dino got back up and chased the Boy. 1 1 3 2 1 1	9	6	1.5
12. He chased and he chased. 1 1 1 1 1	4	4	1

2 1 2 1 13. Then he caught the boy.	5	4	1.25
1 1 1 2 14. Well he ate the Boy too.	5	4	1.25
2 1 1 3 2 1 15. Then he got really sick.	10	6	1.66
1 1 2 2 2 3 16. The people said he had to go to the doctor.	11	6	1.83
1 1 2 1 2 1 1 17. I will not go to the doctor said the dino.	9	7	1.29
2 1 1 2 1 2 2 3 18. So he ate another human to keep the doctor away.	14	8	1.75
3 2 1 1 1 1 2 19. Months later the dino grow up to a dinosaur.	10	6	1.66
1 1 2 3 20. He ran back into the jungle.	7	4	1.75
1 1 1 4 3 2 1 21. And he killed the Big Big dinosaur Bully.	12	6	2
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.63			



APPENDIX E  
SIMULATED LITERACY PASSPORT ASSESSMENT

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
2 1 2 1 1 3 2 1. The best day of my ( ) is going to Be on my Birthday	19	9	2.1
2 4 3 February 11 1990 this Sunday.	21	9	2.33
2 5 4 3 1 1 2 1 2 2. Because all my life I took my birthday to Showbiz.	14	8	1.75
1 1 2 1 2 2 3 2 3. I am so excited I can't wait.	20	12	1.66
1 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 4. It is going to be sad because Miss Wilson is going to 2 2 live us.			
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.96			

**APPENDIX F**  
**ERIC'S SCORES AND SENTENCE WEIGHTINGS**

**VIRGINIA**  
Literacy Testing Program  
1988-89

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PERFORMANCE REPORT

Date of Testing: FEBRUARY, 1989  
Grade: 4

D-S Code:  
Division:  
School:  
Group:

FOR:

SS#:

ID#:

WRITING				
	Possible Score Range	Obtained Score	Average Rating Score	Local* Obtained Score
Total Writing	16-64	36	2.3	48
Composing	6-24	9	1.5	
Style	4-16	8	2.0	
Sentence Formation	2- 8	6	3.0	
Usage	2- 8	8	4.0	
Mechanics	2- 8	5	2.5	

\* The score achieved by the middle-ranking local student at this grade level.

**WHAT THE LITERACY WRITING TEST MEASURES**

The scores in this report represent how well the student is able to write an essay on an assigned topic. Listed below are the areas or domains of writing which are scored and some skills or features which are measured in each domain.

**Composing:** The student

- presents a central idea (or feeling) and stays with it throughout the paper.
- has a clear structure which helps present the central idea.
- uses an adequate number of specific, relevant details that support general statements and help develop major ideas of the essay.

**Style:** The student

- selects vivid vocabulary to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- selects and uses information to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- uses a tone which fits the purpose and shows an awareness of audience.
- uses real voice.
- uses a variety of sentences that interest the audience and suit the nature and purpose of the message.

**Sentence Formation:** The student

- uses standard word order patterns.
- writes sentences of varying length and form appropriate for this grade level.

**Usage:** The student

- applies the rules of grammar and usage taught at this grade level.
- uses words which fit the meaning dictated by purpose and sentence structure.

**Mechanics:** The student

- formats paragraphs.
- shows control of spelling skills appropriate for this grade level.
- applies the rules of capitalization and punctuation taught at this grade level.

**DESCRIPTION OF DOMAIN RATING SCALE CATEGORIES**

- 4 = The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control\*\* of almost all the domain's features.
- 3 = The writer demonstrates reasonable control\*\* of most of the domain's features, but enough inconsistent control exists to indicate some real weakness in the domain.
- 2 = Enough inconsistent control\*\* in several features exists to indicate significant weakness in the domain.
- 1 = The writer demonstrates little or no control\*\* of most of the domain's features.

\*\* Control: The ability to use a given feature of written language effectively at the appropriate grade level.

APPENDIX F

FOURTH GRADE LITERACY PASSPORT ASSESSMENT  
1989

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
1 1 2 1 1. I like panda bears.	5	4	1.25
1 1 1 1 3 1 2. I think their very cute bears.	10	7	1.43
1 1 2 1 3 2 3. Thier mostly white with black legs.	10	6	1.66
1 1 1 1 2 3 4. They can be found in the south and southwest of China.	11	7	1.57
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.48			

APPENDIX F  
BEST WRITING  
DECEMBER 1989

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
2 2 1 1 1 1. My favorite animal is a monkey.	7	5	1.4
1 3 3 2 2 2 1 2 2. The reason My favorite animal is a monkey is because 2 2 2 they are smart.	22	11	2
1 1 2 1 2 3. The monkey is the closest form to mankind.	7	5	1.4
1 1 3 2 1 4. The monkey is a very skillful animal.	8	5	1.6
1 1 1 1 1 1 1 2 5. The monkey can climb trees and walk bars even.	8	7	1.14
2 1 1 2 1 6. Some monkes are very cute.	7	5	1.4
1 1 2 7. Others are not.	4	3	1.33
1 1 2 1 1 8. Some are very strong and broad.	6	5	1.2
1 1 1 4 3 2 2 2 9. And thats why my favorite animall is the monkey.	17	8	2.13
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.51			

APPENDIX F

SIMULATED LITERACY PASSPORT ASSESSMENT

FEBRUARY 1990

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
1. (The best day i ever had was...) 1 2 3 2 3 The day we all went to disny world.	11	5	2.2
1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2. We first went to epcot and saw the giant shere.	10	7	1.43
2 1 1 1 2 2 2 3. Then we saw a movie that was 3D.	11	7	1.57
1 1 2 4. We went to shops.	4	3	1.33
1 1 2 1 1 5. We went to the fun rolecoster Space Mountain.	6	5	1.2
2 1 1 2 1 2 2 6. Then we went to the hotel to change to go out to eat.	11	7	1.57
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.55			

**APPENDIX G**  
**PEGGY'S SCORES AND SENTENCE WEIGHTINGS**

**VIRGINIA**  
**Literacy Testing Program**  
**1988-89**

**INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PERFORMANCE REPORT**

D-S Code:  
 Division:  
 Date of Testing: FEBRUARY, 1989 School:  
 Grade: 4 Group:

FOR:

SS#:

ID#:

WRITING				
	Possible Score Range	Obtained Score	Average Rating Score	Local* Obtained Score
Total Writing	16-64	31	1.9	48
Composing	6-24	9	1.5	
Style	4-16	6	1.5	
Sentence Formation	2- 8	5	2.5	
Usage	2- 8	5	2.5	
Mechanics	2- 8	6	3.0	

\* The score achieved by the middle-ranking local student at this grade level.

**WHAT THE LITERACY WRITING TEST MEASURES**

The scores in this report represent how well the student is able to write an essay on an assigned topic. Listed below are the areas or domains of writing which are scored and some skills or features which are measured in each domain.

**Composing:** The student

- presents a central idea (or feeling) and stays with it throughout the paper.
- has a clear structure which helps present the central idea.
- uses an adequate number of specific, relevant details that support general statements and help develop major ideas of the essay.

**Style:** The student

- selects vivid vocabulary to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- selects and uses information to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- uses a tone which fits the purpose and shows an awareness of audience.
- uses real voice.
- uses a variety of sentences that interest the audience and suit the nature and purpose of the message.

**Sentence Formation:** The student

- uses standard word order patterns.
- writes sentences of varying length and form appropriate for this grade level.

**Usage:** The student

- applies the rules of grammar and usage taught at this grade level.
- uses words which fit the meaning dictated by purpose and sentence structure.

**Mechanics:** The student

- formats paragraphs.
- shows control of spelling skills appropriate for this grade level.
- applies the rules of capitalization and punctuation taught at this grade level.

**DESCRIPTION OF DOMAIN RATING SCALE CATEGORIES**

- 4 = The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control\*\* of almost all the domain's features.
- 3 = The writer demonstrates reasonable control\*\* of most of the domain's features, but enough inconsistent control exists to indicate some real weakness in the domain.
- 2 = Enough inconsistent control\*\* in several features exists to indicate significant weakness in the domain.
- 1 = The writer demonstrates little or no control\*\* of most of the domain's features.

\*\* Control: The ability to use a given feature of written language effectively at the appropriate grade level.



APPENDIX G

FOURTH GRADE LITERACY PASSPORT ASSESSMENT

FEBRUARY 1989

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
<div> <div>4</div> <div>3</div> <div>2</div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>1</div> </div> <div>1. One day there was a mommy dog.</div>	13	6	2.16
<div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>3</div> <div>2</div> </div> <div>2. And she had a puppy, and it was real furry.</div>	10	7	1.43
<div> <div>2</div> <div>2</div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> </div> <div>3. So the mommy puppy had her puppy in a house.</div>	11	7	1.57
<div> <div>2</div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>3</div> </div> <div>4. And everyday the kids would bring milk to the mommy</div>	16	9	1.77
<div> <div>4</div> <div>3</div> <div>2</div> </div> <div>dog and her puppy.</div>			
<div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>2</div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> </div> <div>5. The puppy felt warm and cuddly and they feel really</div>	14	8	1.75
<div> <div>2</div> </div> <div>furry.</div>			
<div> <div>2</div> <div>1</div> <div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>3</div> <div>2</div> </div> <div>6. And so the puppy grew up to be a strong dog.</div>	11	6	1.83
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.74			

APPENDIX G

BEST WRITING  
SEPTEMBER 1989

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
2 1 1 2 4 3 1. The school year is going finie so far.	13	6	2.17
1 2 1 2 1 2. I realy enjoy my teachers.	7	5	1.4
1 1 2 3. The prjects are outrageous!!	7	3	1.33
1 1 2 3 2 4. L.A. is long but exsighing.	9	5	1.8
1 1 2 5. Mrs. Williams is great.	4	3	1.33
1 2 1 1 3 2 6. I really enjoy Mrs. Ronald for my homeroom.	10	6	1.66
1 1 2 7. School is grate.	4	3	1.33
1 1 1 3 3 2 8. Jackie and I are in the same L.A. class.	11	6	1.83
1 2 1 1 3 2 9. I so/so like the people in my homeroom.	10	6	1.66
1 1 2 10. I haved some homework.	5	4	1.25
1 1 2 1 1 2 3 3 3 11. I do not like homework as munch as I like school.	17	9	1.88
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.61			

APPENDIX G  
SIMULATED LITERACY PASSPORT ASSESSMENT  
FEBRUARY 1990

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
1 3 2 4 3 1 1 1 1 1. One of the best days of my life is when Leanna came to 2 school.	19	10	1.9
1 1 2 2 1 2 2 2. This is my first time seeing her.	11	7	1.57
2 2 2 2 1 1 2 3 3. When I got off partil I came into the lunchroom to see a 5 5 4 6 5 4 black haired baby and a cubby cheaked sweetheart.	44	14	3.14
2 2 2 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 4. When I held her she culdelt up to me like she know me 3 3 4 3 3 4 wich she nver shal me before.	40	17	2.35
2 1 1 2 3 2 4 3 5. That day was full of love like any day at our house with 3 Deanna.	21	9	2.33
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 2.26			

**APPENDIX H**  
**JANE'S SCORES AND SENTENCE WEIGHTINGS**

**VIRGINIA**  
**Literacy Testing Program**  
**1988-89**

**INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Date of Testing: FEBRUARY, 1989  
 Grade: 4

D-S Code:  
 Division:  
 School:  
 Group:

FOR:

SS#:

ID#:

WRITING				
	Possible Score Range	Obtained Score	Average Rating Score	Local* Obtained Score
Total Writing	16-64	37	2.3	48
Composing	6-24	9	1.5	
Style	4-16	6	1.5	
Sentence Formation	2- 8	8	4.0	
Usage	2- 8	8	4.0	
Mechanics	2- 8	6	3.0	

\* The score achieved by the middle-ranking local student at this grade level.

**WHAT THE LITERACY WRITING TEST MEASURES**

The scores in this report represent how well the student is able to write an essay on an assigned topic. Listed below are the areas or domains of writing which are scored and some skills or features which are measured in each domain.

**Composing:** The student

- presents a central idea (or feeling) and stays with it throughout the paper.
- has a clear structure which helps present the central idea.
- uses an adequate number of specific, relevant details that support general statements and help develop major ideas of the essay.

**Style:** The student

- selects vivid vocabulary to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- selects and uses information to support the central idea and purpose of the writing.
- uses a tone which fits the purpose and shows an awareness of audience.
- uses real voice.
- uses a variety of sentences that interest the audience and suit the nature and purpose of the message.

**Sentence Formation:** The student

- uses standard word order patterns.
- writes sentences of varying length and form appropriate for this grade level.

**Usage:** The student

- applies the rules of grammar and usage taught at this grade level.
- uses words which fit the meaning dictated by purpose and sentence structure.

**Mechanics:** The student

- formats paragraphs.
- shows control of spelling skills appropriate for this grade level.
- applies the rules of capitalization and punctuation taught at this grade level.

**DESCRIPTION OF DOMAIN RATING SCALE CATEGORIES**

- 4 = The writer demonstrates consistent, though not necessarily perfect, control\*\* of almost all the domain's features.
- 3 = The writer demonstrates reasonable control\*\* of most of the domain's features, but enough inconsistent control exists to indicate some real weakness in the domain.
- 2 = Enough inconsistent control\*\* in several features exists to indicate significant weakness in the domain.
- 1 = The writer demonstrates little or no control\*\* of most of the domain's features.

\*\* Control: The ability to use a given feature of written language effectively at the appropriate grade level.

APPENDIX H  
FIRST PROMPT  
FEBRUARY 1989

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
<p>2 2 1 1 1 1. My favorite animal is a skunk.</p> <p>1 1 2 2 1 1 2 2 1 2. It has a black bushy tail and has two white stripes along</p> <p>3 2 its back.</p> <p>2 2 2 1 1 1 2 2 3. When frightened or attacked it sprays a liquid that is</p> <p>3 2 very smelly.</p> <p>1 2 1 1 1 1 2 4. I usually go camping and see thee a lot.</p> <p>1 1 1 1 2 5. I would like one for a pet.</p> <p>1 1 1 6. I chase skunks.</p> <p>PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.39</p>	<p>7</p> <p>18</p> <p>18</p> <p>9</p> <p>6</p> <p>3</p>	<p>5</p> <p>11</p> <p>10</p> <p>7</p> <p>5</p> <p>3</p>	<p>1.4</p> <p>1.64</p> <p>1.8</p> <p>1.29</p> <p>1.2</p> <p>1</p>

APPENDIX H  
BEST WRITING  
JANUARY 1990

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
2 1 1 1 1 2 1. My aunt, uncle, and cousins live in OKANIWA.	8	6	1.33
1 1 2 2 2 2 2 3 2. They live their because Jessy my uncle he's in the navy.	18	9	2
1 1 3 2 4 3 2 3. They come in every summer or every other summer.	16	7	2.29
2 2 2 1 1 1 1 2 4. When ever they come in they bring us things (meaning 3 2 the whole family.)	17	10	1.7
2 2 2 2 1 1 1 4 5. In the summer of 89 in August they came in but only this 3 2 2 2 3 time they weren't leaving for good.	27	12	2.25
1 1 1 2 1 2 3 6. They were coming back, coming back to stay.	11	7	1.66
2 1 1 2 7. Now they live in North Carolina.	6	4	1.5
3 2 1 1 1 3 2 3 3 4 8. So now they come to visit any time they want, well not 3 2 4 3 2 any time but almost any time.	37	15	2.46
1 1 3 2 3 3 3 4 5 9. I'm very happy now that they live closer to us.	28	10	2.8
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 2.0			

APPENDIX H  
FINAL PROMPT  
FEBRUARY 1990

Sentence	Weight	Words	Sentence Weight
1. The best day that I ever had was on the Christmas of 89. 2 1 2 2 2 1 2 3	18	9	2
2. What happened that was so special was that I got what I had been asking for about three to four years. 1 1 2 2 3 2 1 1 1 2 2 2 4 4 3	36	18	2
3. That was a remote control car but instead of a car I got a truck. 1 1 3 2 1 2 1 1 1	13	9	1.44
4. I like the truck don't get me wrong but I would rather have a car. 1 1 1 2 2 2 3 1 1 2 1 1	18	12	1.50
5. I think that thier more fun. 1 1 1 1 3 2	10	7	1.43
6. Trucks are fun too but I have always wanted a care. 1 1 2 2 1 1 2 1 1	12	9	1.33
7. My truck was broken when I had gotten it. 2 1 1 2 3 3 3 3	21	9	2.33
8. It wouldn't go backwards and the antana fell completely off. 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 3 2	14	9	1.55
9. So two or three days later we picked up a new one. 3 2 4 3 2 1 1 1 2 1	22	10	2.2
10. It's a real nice truck. 1 1 3 2 1	8	5	1.6
11. It looked like it was built better than the other. 1 1 2 2 2 3 3 4	20	9	2.22
12. I really like the look more. 1 2 1 1 2	7	5	1.40
13. I really can't say which truck ran better because I didn't get to run the other truck. 1 2 1 2 1 2 2 3 4 4 5 4 5 4	50	17	2.94
14. My sister like my so well my parents got her one just like it but they were different frequencies. 2 1 1 1 3 2 4 3 3 3 4 4 1 1 2 1	44	18	2.44
PARAGRAPH WEIGHT: 1.88			



## VITA

Ann K. Wilson

I was born on May 30, 1950, and lived most of my life in northern Virginia where I attended public schools. I received my B. A. degree in English, Speech and Drama from Mary Washington College in 1972 and then taught secondary English, speech and drama for the next five years in Montgomery County, Virginia. In 1976, my family moved back to northern Virginia where for the next eleven years, I taught every age level from infants to retired adults. In 1980 I received my M.A. in English Education from Virginia Tech. From 1983-1987 I taught World Civilization and Transitional English at McLean High School in Fairfax County. In 1987 I enrolled in the doctoral program at Virginia Tech. While I pursued my Ed.D. degree, I worked as a graduate assistant in the reference department of the University library and in the division of Curriculum and Instruction. I am the mother of two children, Andrew James and Kelly Ann Wilson.

I have studied as a fellow in both the Northern Virginia and the Southwestern Virginia Writing Projects. I am a member of the District M Teachers of English, the Virginia Association of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of English where I serve as the treasurer of the Doctoral Student Assembly, the Virginia State Reading Association, ALAN, SIGNAL, Phi Kappa Phi, and Phi Delta Kappa.

*Ann K. Wilson*