In semistructured interviews, 20 men and women (10 deaf and 10 hearing) between the ages of 18 and 28 recalled instances of instrumental, social, and expressive writing from their childhood. In contrast to earlier research, we found that instrumental writing occurred as frequently between deaf children and their hearing parents as between deaf children and their deaf parents and that all homes with a deaf family member had telecommunication devices for the deaf (TTYs). Whereas all respondents engaged in some form of social writing, deaf respondents did less personal or expressive writing than their hearing peers. Implications for literacy instruction and further research are that (a) teachers should take advantage of the writing experience that students bring to the classroom, (b) writing should be used as a tool for learning and classroom communication, and (c) the effects of experience, genre, school setting, and technology on the writing of deaf students should be examined.

If English literacy is defined according to the results of standardized reading tests, one would have to conclude that the level of English literacy in the deaf population is low. Yet, as Madeline Maxwell pointed out in 1985, the oft-quoted statistics about reading levels indicate little about the use of English literacy in this population. After observing and interviewing 40 deaf adults and 12 teachers of the deaf across the United States, she concluded that the socialization of deaf children into the Deaf community (in families where both parents and children are deaf) included the adaptation of writing to personal interaction as well as the acquisition of sign language (p. 216).

Comparing the experiences of children born to deaf parents with those of children born to hearing parents, she found that little intentional written communication occurred between hearing parents and their deaf children, whereas deaf parents and their children regularly left notes for each other about their whereabouts and plans (216). Regarding the availability of new technologies in the home, Maxwell reported that few hearing parents owned telecommunication devices for the deaf (TTYs), whereas the deaf parents she talked to usually mentioned "the impact of this technology on their lives and on the use of English among the adult deaf" (p. 214). Also purchased by many of the deaf and few of the hearing parents were caption decoders for the television. Two possible educational implications of these differences are that deaf children of deaf parents may bring more experience using reading and writing for communicative purposes to the classroom and that teachers who are aware of this early experience may be able to capitalize on it.

It has been 10 years since Maxwell's study of the function of writing in the Deaf community appeared. In that time, the population of deaf students has shifted from residential to mainstreaming programs; the
proportion of children from non-Eurocentric, non-English-speaking homes has increased dramatically; communication technology has advanced in sophistication and affordability; and significant changes in writing instruction have occurred. In their 1993 study of communication modes (American Sign Language, signed, spoken, and written English) across three generations, Mallory, Zingle and Schein confirm at least one of Maxwell's conclusions and hint at possible changes with regard to writing practices. The deaf adults, the middle generation in this study, reported that their hearing parents had not owned TTYs (nor were message relay services available). When these same hearing parents became grandparents, they relied on their hearing grandchildren to interpret phone calls for the middle generation rather than a TTY. Mallory et al. did note, however, that "writing back and forth" (in face-to-face situations) was a common mode of communication between deaf children and their hearing parents.

In this study we were interested in whether changes in society and advances in technology have been accompanied by changes in writing practices in the home. Specifically, we wanted to determine whether the differences between families noted by Maxwell in 1985 remain true today. We began with three research questions: (a) Do deaf parents use writing to communicate with their children (whether or not their children are deaf) more than hearing parents? (b) What kinds of writing ("writing back and forth," kitchen notes, letters from school, etc.) are used at home or in social situations? (c) What effect, if any, has technology had on the kind or amount of written communication in childhood?

**Method**

**Respondents**

Twenty individuals between the ages of 18 and 28 were interviewed for this study. Two criteria were used to select these individuals—their hearing status and that of their parents. For purposes of analysis, four groups were formed.

The first group consisted of five deaf adults who had at least one deaf parent (we refer to this group as Deaf of Deaf or DOD); the second, five deaf persons with hearing parents (Deaf of Hearing or DOH); the third, five hearing persons with at least one deaf parent (Hearing of Deaf or HOD); and finally, five hearing adults born to hearing parents (Hearing of Hearing or HOH). In selecting respondents we also strove for a balance of gender and socioeconomic status, as well as ethnic diversity. The sample consisted of 10 women and 10 men, and 2 of the men came from Spanish-speaking homes (Mexican-American and Puerto Rican). Many of the respondents had a relationship to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester Institute of Technology. That is, either they were students there or their parents worked there. Drawing respondents from a university community could have had the effect of biasing the sample slightly in favor of writing in the home. However, only 9 of the 20 had parents with some college experience or undergraduate or graduate degrees; 11 came from working-class homes.

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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Salvador</td>
<td>S, E, ASL</td>
<td>E</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>ASL</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lucy</td>
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<td>Randall</td>
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<td>Paul</td>
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<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOH</td>
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<td>E, ASL</td>
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<td>Camille</td>
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<td>HOD</td>
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<td>HOH</td>
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<td>Marie</td>
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<td>Roland</td>
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<td>Delores</td>
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<td>Jocelyn</td>
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</table>

DOD = deaf children of deaf parents, DOH = deaf children of hearing parents, HOD = hearing children of deaf parents, HOH = hearing children of hearing parents

L = Languages used at home (Spanish, English, American Sign Language)

Ed = Parents' highest education level (E = elementary, S = secondary, U = undergraduate, G = graduate)
with parents who had gone no further than high school. It is also possible that the sample was biased in the direction of more favorable attitudes toward writing, because respondents were told the topic of the interview, writing in childhood, in advance.

Procedure

At the beginning of the 30- to 60-minute interview, each respondent was asked to fill out a short background questionnaire and read over the one-page list of interview questions (see Appendix). All participants were encouraged to respond to all of the questions, elaborate, and "go off the point" as their memories dictated. Finally, the respondents were paid for their participation. After each interview, the interviewer transcribed his or her notes and sent a transcript to the respondent for approval and, if necessary, editing. This was done to check for possible comprehension errors or misinterpretations on the part of the two interviewers, both hearing learners of American Sign Language (ASL) as a second language.

The two investigators then analyzed the 20 approved transcripts independently for major themes. Occurrence and frequency of the following types of writing were tabulated: kitchen notes, TTY conversations, thank-you notes and letters, personal (journal or creative) writing, and writing to friends (passing notes) or for extracurricular activities in the school. The frequency of each type by group was then noted and comparisons drawn. The names of all respondents were changed, and a rough draft of the paper was sent to them for their critical comments or suggestions. There were two reasons for this second review. The first was to seek verification of our interpretation of respondents' experience, and the second was to elicit their comments on the generalizability of our findings. Comments received have been incorporated into the Discussion and Implication sections of this article.

Results

The reported writing activities fell into three broad categories of function, with certain forms (e.g., TTY calls) serving more than one function: 1) an instrumental function, that is, writing to convey information or greetings (kitchen notes to and from parents, TTY calls, minutes, reports and correspondence for school organizations, and some notes passed in school); 2) a social function, that is, writing to maintain or build a relationship (thank-you notes, letters to family and friends, notes passed in school, and some TTY calls); 3) an expressive function, that is, writing to record personal feelings or thoughts and experimental writing (journals and some letters to family and friends). We conclude the Results section with examples of a fourth category, respondents' descriptions of current writing activities.

Instrumental Writing

The two varieties of note writing that occurred between parent and child were the familiar practice of leaving notes and "back-and-forth" writing for face-to-face communication between deaf and hearing family members. We found widespread use of the first type and only two instances of back-and-forth writing.
Thus, only incidence of notes left—usually in the kitchen—were tabulated, and we have called these "kitchen notes."

The frequency of writing kitchen notes (from none to several a day) depended mainly on whether or not the parents worked. When parents left notes, they did it for three reasons: to leave information, instructions, or greetings. The information usually concerned their whereabouts, family plans, or emergencies:

- We're at . . . Don't get into trouble. (Donald)
- Will see you tonight. (Larry)
- We're going to Grandma's house tonight. (Marie)

Parents were always leaving lists of things to do:

- Start dinner for your father. (Diane)
- Clean your room. (Marie)
- The dog has been fed. (Randall)
- Please feed Rosy. (Randall)

Both children and parents wrote greetings for each other on yellow self-stick notes. The short, sometimes coded messages were left on pillows, chairs, and alarm clocks, on the bathroom mirror; and in briefcases and lunch boxes:

- eye—heart—U (drawn) (Delores)
- MMS (make many sales) (Delores)

Children wrote notes to tell parents their whereabouts or to ask for something ("Can you give me $5?" [Gerald]). Children also took phone messages, or "If the telephone flashed when no one else was home, I would tell them someone called but I didn't answer it. Or if someone stopped by, I would leave a note." (Diane)

Two of our respondents reported notes written in Spanish. Salvador left notes for his mother in Spanish; José's mother left notes telling him where the house key was. She wrote in Spanish so no one else would understand the notes.

In virtually all the homes it was common for parents and children to leave notes when parents were not at home. The two respondents who had no memory of leaving notes reported that one of the parents was usually at home. An indication of the importance of such notes is the fact that three informants cited instances when the absence of a note caused anxiety. Tim remembered being alone in the house during a storm and not knowing where his parents were; Lizzy upset her mother by staying out late and forgetting to leave a note; and when Camille's sister borrowed her truck without leaving a note, Camille called the police.

Fourteen of the fifteen respondents from deaf households had TTYs at home. The parents of two respondents, Randall and Ben, had them at work as well. TTYs were used for calling family and friends, the doctor, or the loan department at the bank, that is, for the same range of instrumental and social functions as voice phones in hearing households. Although the primary function of TTY calls was instrumental, one deaf child of hearing parents (Lizzy) noted that acquisition of a TTY at age 14 enabled her to make more deaf friends and to live more effectively in both the hearing and the Deaf worlds. Others associated it with learning or play. Susan (HOD) and siblings called it, "the green machine because it was big and noisy and we weren't exactly sure what it was for." Linda and Amanda (HOD) "typed" on it without turning it on. Randall (DOD) started playing with it when he was about two ("My parents let me poke the keys and feel the noise."); when he was 14, he taught himself the keyboard by typing in the dark. When Randall visited hearing cousins in another part of the city, they communicated by sitting next to each other and typing on the TTY, an improvement perhaps to paper-and-pencil note writing.

One kind of nonacademic writing done primarily during high school years was related to clubs and organizations. All but one of the deaf respondents reported belonging to extracurricular organizations. Six of the deaf respondents reported writing minutes of meetings or reports to give to their constituents. The others said they were required to prepare agendas for meetings and to correspond with members and advisors.

When I was in the mainstream high school, I was the representative for the deaf students on the Student Council. This job involved writing down the problems of the deaf students and informing the Student Council about them. Then I would have to take notes about what was going on at the Student Council meetings and report them to the deaf students. (Salvador)
Social Writing

Thirteen respondents reported writing thank-you notes, six said they wrote none, and one did not respond to the question. Of those who wrote them, nine were hearing and four were deaf. Over half said that the notes were required. Three of the deaf respondents who did not write thank-you notes (two of them from Hispanic homes) reported “delivering their thanks” in person along with a kiss or a hug. Most wrote letters to relatives or friends in other states or countries; those at residential schools or at summer camp wrote home. Attitudes toward letter writing varied. Paul (DOD), Delores (HOH) and Camille (DOH) said that they liked getting letters but did not like writing them. Donald and Diane said that they wrote letters until they discovered the phone or electronic mail and that now it was much easier to call family and friends. Some respondents said they expressed personal feelings in the form of a poem or described an experience at length in their letters.

Sixteen of the respondents reported writing and passing notes to friends, primarily during their high school years. Two did not respond and the two who reported not writing notes to friends were deaf students in mainstreamed classes. The notes were about gossip or flirting or “what’s up?” Many notes were passed between individuals, but in some instances the note passing became more sophisticated:

In school there was a game that we played that was really not allowed. It was called “Grapevine.” On small pieces of paper we would all write secrets and gossip about people, sex, etc. Then fold up the papers and collect them. Because the game was not allowed, we would take the papers home and read them. (Paul)

The notes were also about teachers. “Three friends and I would pass around a paper where we would guess how much the teacher’s shoes cost. Not just his shoes, but his clothes too” (Larry). One respondent remembers, “We always passed notes about a teacher or other students. Some in elementary and middle school, mainly in high school. We couldn’t stand our Physics teacher so we plotted against him in notes.” (Roland)

Students also invented interactive writing games to use among themselves.

We had a game we played in school. There were no teachers involved. One person would explain the meaning of a word to friends and then write the definition and the word on a piece of paper and hide the paper. The others would have to guess ... the word. . . . (Paul)

There was a writing activity that a teacher used as an ice-breaker for a class one time that we adapted. One person would start a sentence and then pass the note to the next person who would add a sentence and then pass the note to the next person who would continue. As the note went around the class, people would add their ideas to the story. (Donald)

In high school, I had this awful science teacher and I sat in the back of the room. A good friend of mine sat in the front of the room and we used to pass notes to each other like this: “He’s as funny as a kangaroo because he . . . .” Then I’d pass the note to the front of the room and the other person would fill it in. Anyone who was in between could see the note and add anything if they wanted to. After class we’d save the note and show other kids what we had gotten away with in class. (Marie)

These note-writing activities were a way for students to keep in touch with one another socially as well as bond against the common enemy. Secondarily, notes were also used for instrumental purposes, that is, to arrange a meeting and a ride home from school.

Expressive Writing

Over the past 15 years, writing teachers, some content teachers, and students have been experimenting with writing in journals. Three prominent types in the literature are dialogue journals (Albertini & Meath-Lang, 1986; Peyton, 1989), reading journals (Bertoff, 1988; Shannon & McMahon, 1989; Walworth, 1990; Zamel, 1992), and academic journals (McMahon, 1994; Murray, 1984). Each type was mentioned in our interviews. Significant here is that several respondents collected
this writing in a specific place. Donald Murray (1984), in describing his own "daybook," says it is a place where he can talk to himself and think on paper.

As shown in Table 2, three deaf and nine hearing respondents reported keeping a diary or journal. Using these terms interchangeably, respondents said that an enjoyable, effective journal was a place for personal thoughts, reactions, and creative responses to what was going on around them.

My diary is personal. I tell what happened to me . . . any personal thoughts I might have. I'm thinking about a Photography degree and going into photojournalism, so, sometimes, I write about my photography projects. If I read a good book, I write noteworthy things about it. (has kept a diary for 10 years) (Marie)

I tried journal writing in my first two years of high school. It never really panned out. I didn't want a day-to-day record. I wanted to record my thoughts and reactions to things. I remember seeing that they were making a movie of Lord of the Flies. I had read the book and didn't like the idea of having a movie made from it. Racism was an issue at our school and there would be something in the school paper about it. I would think about it and just write about it. (Donald)

One respondent continues to keep a journal, but not in a paper notebook:

Now I keep a journal on the computer in story format. For example, my mother had a Pap smear and the results came back abnormal. She then had to have a cervical scraping. Since I'm in biotechnology, I was concerned, and I wrote about my photography projects. If I read a good book, I write noteworthy things about it. (has kept a diary for 10 years) (Marie)

One respondent declared, “I hate journals,” but she went on to detail a poetry journal that she has been keeping for five years. (Delores)

One young woman declared, “I hate journals,” but she went on to detail a poetry journal that she has been keeping for five years. (Delores)

None of the deaf children of deaf parents kept a journal in high school or elementary school. One third-year college student had started his first journal during the previous summer, when he took a cross-country bi-

cycle trip with three friends. Another said that he had not kept a journal up to now but would like to start one so that in the future he would be able to see what was going on in his life.

Among the deaf children of hearing parents, one said that she had never kept a diary but would like to so that she could see the changes in her English as well as the changes in her life. She is sure that she would encourage her future children to keep a journal to enrich their own lives. This respondent said that she did write stories and poems for herself when she was alone (Diane). The other four respondents in this group had various stories to tell about keeping journals. One young man was encouraged (and helped) by his father to keep a diary.

From 1976 to 1979 I kept a diary. It was my father's idea. I told my father what I wanted to go in the diary and he would write in the diary for me. Then he told me to try writing myself and said that my attempts were good, but I look at the diary now and I can't understand it because of my lousy handwriting. In the diary I mostly wrote about what happened to me and what I did everyday. Mostly, I wrote about good experiences, but sometimes bad experiences . . . like the time I walked on the roof with my brother. . . . It was very steep! (Tim)

In spite of her negative experience keeping a diary at camp, another respondent tried to keep a diary of her own in high school: “I tried to keep a diary for a few months and I didn't like it. I wrote my problems and feelings. I thought it would help to throw out feelings . . . but it didn't.” (Camille)

Another young woman said that she had kept a diary for three years when she was 11 or 12. “I recorded what I saw and did. When I read it now, I don't remember the things that happened to me. I look at my old handwriting and language.” (Lucy)

The last respondent in this group declared diaries to be a “girl thing”:

I got a diary from my sister in 12th grade and tried to write in it. I wrote about two pages; didn't have time to continue. My sister wrote in one, about boys. You know, it's a girl's thing. (Juan)
Two aspects of journal writing were distasteful to the respondents. If a journal was required for a class or written to be read by a teacher or counselor, then the students did not enjoy writing in the journal. Delores said that “everyone hated” the journals that they were required to keep in high school. Camille recalled being required to keep a diary at a school-sponsored camp in junior high school. She did not mind keeping the diary, but she thought that the counselors were just being nosy by reading them. Additionally, if a journal was merely a recap of what the writer did during the day, the writer soon discarded the activity. No one mentioned ever having used a dialogue journal in school; however, Jocelyn (HOH) did recall keeping a “Stacy/Jocelyn book,” a spiral notebook that was passed back and forth, “one page for my letter, one page for hers.”

Current Writing

When asked about the kinds of writing they were currently doing, our respondents reported that professional and academic writing took up much of their time. Nevertheless, personal correspondence and personal writing (journal keeping or creative writing) were also noted. Eighteen said they corresponded with family and friends, preferring to use the TTY, electronic mail, and the fax machine, but also using letters, postcards, and greeting cards. One respondent writes to her parents (to save on long distance charges) but calls her sister and sister-in-law. Another writes to his Spanish-speaking mother, who has trouble understanding English-speaking relay operators. Ten respondents reported doing some personal writing on a regular basis: Four were hearing children of hearing parents, and only one deaf child of deaf parents reported doing it.

Several of those not currently doing personal writing said they wanted to in the future. Such statements may be taken as an indication that the respondents have a desire or need to do this kind of writing. Thus, we decided to review the transcripts again for other indirect and direct statements of attitude towards personal writing. We found that the closing questions of the interview about current writing and its connection to past experience elicited explicit connections to the past, plans for the future, and attitudinal statements from everyone. The comments regarding attitude fell into three categories: likes, dislikes, and self-evaluation.

The overall impression one gets from the self-evaluation comments is one of confidence in current writing ability. Typical comments were: “I can write. I like to write imaginative stories” (Lucy). “I really enjoy it now. It’s a good way to pass time” (Amanda). In all, we found only four comments that expressed dislikes and these concerned specific kinds of writing (for example, letter writing). The four comments that were self-evaluative all concerned the grammar and mechanics of the respondents’ writing:

“I like to write now. But even now, there are times when I hate to write. Those are the times when a teacher criticizes my mistakes.” (Salvador)

“I write fine. I finished English Composition Winter Quarter. I had some problems with subject/verb agreement, passive voice, etc.” (Larry)

“I have poor writing skills; I don’t know punctuation, where to end the sentence. . . . I get my point across when I have to.” (Amanda)

“Here, I ask my professors and sometimes my girlfriend to proofread my writing.” (Randall)

In one group, hearing children of deaf parents, the speaking-writing connection seemed especially strong. As one in this group put it, “I write to feel like I’m talking to someone.” Three others in this group said that they felt more confident writing than speaking. One prefers to rehearse difficult or exacting conversations in writing, and two would rather write than speak in emotionally charged situations with a boyfriend or family member.

When asked about possible connections between their current feelings about writing and childhood experiences, most mentioned the influence of parents and teachers. One drew a connection between his desire to write about space and rocket stories his father told him; another attributed both a dislike of letter writing and a love of creative writing to different classes in grade school; one noted that his parents but not his teachers
were proactive about his writing. Also mentioned in this context was the important role that reading played in connection to writing for three respondents.

Ten respondents (distributed evenly across the groups) talked about the future: six cited specific plans for future writing (journals and autobiography, science fiction, and psychology), three thought that their writing would continue to improve, and one said she would encourage her children to keep a diary.

Discussion

Maxwell's study prompted us to ask whether there were differences in literacy practices among deaf families, whether advances in technology had been accompanied by changes in writing practices in the home, and what kinds of writing occurred in deaf families. In 1985, she reported that there were differences between the literacy practices of hearing parents with deaf children and those of deaf parents with deaf children. Specifically, she mentioned that "kitchen notes" were more likely to be found in families where both the parents and children were deaf. Ten years later in interviews with 10 deaf and 10 hearing young adults, we did not find this to be true. Members of all the families except two left notes for one another. In these two cases, at least one parent was home most of the time and messages were relayed directly. The deaf children of hearing parents in this later generation remembered kitchen notes as often as those in all of the other groups.

Maxwell found that TTYs were likely to exist in homes where the parents were deaf and not in homes where the parents were hearing. According to our respondents, this situation also has changed over the last 10 years. Of the 15 people interviewed who had at least one deaf family member, all but one remembers having had a TTY at home. This change is no doubt related to the increase in availability and affordability of TTYs over the last 10 years (Lang, 1995).

The practice of writing thank-you notes seemed related to the hearing status of the person interviewed and family custom. While the hearing children of hearing and deaf parents said thank-you notes were the "law of the land" (9 of 10 wrote them), only 4 of the deaf children wrote thank-you notes. Within these two groups of deaf students, however, family custom may have played a role. The 2 respondents from Spanish-speaking homes and 1 other said that they delivered their thank-yous to relatives in person, "with a kiss or a hug," instead of writing a note.

The practice of letter writing in elementary and high school was common across all four groups. Only four respondents did not recall writing letters as children, and the reason was that they had seldom been away from their families or friends. They did not go away to school or camp nor had their families moved. As with kitchen notes, the need or occasion to write letters had not arisen.

The difference in the practice of writing journals or diaries was striking. Among the hearing respondents, 9 of 10 reported having started a journal or diary in school. Some had been forced to keep a journal or diary in their classes and even though they had not particularly liked the activity as it related to their class work, had continued to keep a notebook (electronic or written) for personal writing. There they recorded their activities and their thoughts and kept their creative pieces. Some continue this practice now. Among the deaf respondents, 7 of 10 reported never having kept a journal in school or out of school. Two of the 3 who did keep journals started them because a parent or teacher had recommended it. Thus, the difference may be due in part to schooling. Another factor in this sample is parental education. The parents of the hearing children (HOD and HOH in Table 1) generally had more formal education than the parents of the deaf children (DOD and DOH).

Notes to classmates were very common across all groups and although their primary function was to maintain social networks among students, they also encouraged playful and figurative writing. The respondents' attitude toward the passing of notes was one of enthusiasm; mention of it seemed to light up people's faces. It was not seen as real work—or real writing. One person said, "Oh, notes... Do they count?" Whereas the practice of passing notes in class may have interfered with the lesson, the anecdotes we heard suggest that such written interactions may also have been educational. One respondent and her friend taught one
another foreign languages during a boring class. Others invented discourse games to pass the time in class. The two respondents who reported not writing notes to friends during school were both in mainstream classes. They said it was too hard to write notes, pass them, and pay attention to the interpreter and teacher.

When asked about other nonacademic writing in school, 9 of 10 of the deaf respondents mentioned their involvement in clubs or student council. As officers in these organizations, many had had writing responsibilities, such as preparing meeting agendas, writing up the minutes after a meeting, and conducting correspondence.

An unexpected function connected to note and letter writing that emerged in the analysis was the didactic use of writing in deaf households. Randall (DOD) noted that, in addition to kitchen notes, his mother had labeled everything in the house with three-by-five cards; even cards with the words “Mom” and “Dad” were pinned to their shirts. Susan (HOD) remembers that her grandmother (hearing) corrected and returned the letters she and her deaf mother sent her. Paul’s (DOD) father and sister corrected his letters before they were sent. In addition to overt correction and labeling, there appeared to be modeling in two households: Tim’s father began a journal for him (DOH), and Diane (DOH) decided as an adolescent to write thank-you notes after watching her mother write them. Another new theme connected to writing, suggested by one respondent from each group (two deaf and two hearing), was the importance of reading. For example, Lizzy maintained, “Writing is very important to me because every day my writing changes. If you read, you can still improve. Your writing improvement never stops. The key to good writing is reading.”

The attitude toward writing expressed by respondents in all of the groups may be described as confident and optimistic. Those concerned with the form of their writing did not see it as a barrier to communication or self-expression. Most thought they could write well and, though unable to at present, looked forward to doing personal writing in the future.

In summary, writing was an important activity in all of the households represented here. Whether the respondents had deaf or hearing parents, writing was used for a variety of functions in the home. All working parents left kitchen notes for their children. The influence of technology, that is, an increase in TTY use over that reported by Maxwell (1985), was evident in all of the deaf households. Two differences in writing for social functions that emerged were that deaf respondents tended not to write thank-you notes and deaf students in mainstream programs did not pass notes. The striking difference in writing for expressive purposes was that fewer deaf respondents kept journals. The overall attitude of all respondents toward their writing was one of confidence, and most expressed a need or desire to continue writing. A concern for the grammar and mechanics of their writing, however, was voiced by those from deaf households. Finally, a didactic use of writing in deaf households was mentioned.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for literacy instruction, and they also raise questions for future research. First, all of the respondents in this study brought extensive experience in instrumental writing to school. This type of writing occurred both in households where parents were deaf and in those where they were hearing. To take advantage of students’ experience with kitchen notes, that is, to build on a form and function of writing that is familiar to young students, teachers might exploit the use of notes in the classroom. They could, for example, assign individual work or classroom chores via self-stick notes on students’ desks, expect students to respond in kind with questions or comments about progress or completion, and write individual notes of praise or encouragement.

Given the enthusiasm for passing notes and the frequency of letter writing reported here, writing for social purposes in school might also be encouraged, particularly in mainstreaming programs. By using networked computers, teachers can tap into the social aspect of writing in at least two ways. Using an “electronic network for interaction” (also called ENFI), students can meet in a computer lab and carry on a conversation with fellow students and teachers in real time (Beil, 1991; Bruce, Peyton, & Batson, 1993). Additionally, access to electronic mail is increasing throughout the world, and teachers can design assign-
ments in which students communicate with the teacher and each other asynchronously.

Since instrumental writing is so familiar and social writing so enjoyable, these would be natural and logical starting points for a writing curriculum. In a bilingual setting, children will use and value both languages if contexts are created where both are used for purposeful and meaningful interaction. Thus, one implication of this study for an ASL-English bilingual classroom is that writing—as well as ASL—be used for daily interaction among students and teacher(s).

The major difference that emerged among the groups, a difference that was linked to schooling and parental education rather than to the parents' hearing status, concerned expressive writing. Almost all of the hearing respondents had kept journals at one time or another, whereas few of the deaf students had. Possible reasons for this difference are one, that fewer deaf students are introduced to journal writing, or two, that deaf learners of English as a second language do not find this medium a useful and satisfactory means of expression. In response to a draft of the results of this study, Randall commented,

_Maybe the reason why deaf people don't rate high in journal writing is our language is not "written." We know our grammar skills may not be that proficient so we become more self-conscious at journal writing rather than being expressive._

Given the reported frequency of using written English for instrumental and social purposes, we suspect that such self-consciousness about writing in journals may result from an intense focus on grammar and mechanics in many writing classes for deaf students. Though the reaction to journal writing was mixed, upon reflection, several respondents in this study saw it as valuable and ultimately satisfying. Thus, teachers might try more journal writing with deaf students. Journals provide the setting for a wide variety of experimental and expressive writing. For example, journal entries may resemble letters where a student addresses the teacher as consultant or mentor (as in dialogue journals); they may describe a physics demonstration (as in science journals); or they may record sensations, dreams, and scraps of language (as in creative writing journals). In journal writing, the focus is on meaning; entries are not graded nor are grammar and mechanics corrected. Students may be encouraged to draw and to use more than one language. In ASL/English bilingual programs, journals might consist of both written and videotaped entries. In her description of dialogue journal use with deaf junior college students in Georgia, Bruni (1994) reports that when it becomes too difficult to discuss a sensitive and personal topic in English, a switch to video and ASL allows the conversation to continue.

Questions raised by this study concern the generalizability of its results and the relationship of writing practices to skill and learning. Concerning the former, what varieties of writing are currently practiced by young deaf students at home and at school? Is there a general effect of school setting on the kinds of curricular writing and noncurricular writing that deaf students do? Specifically, do deaf students in fact do less journal writing than hearing students, and do students in mainstreaming programs do less passing of notes (or more writing of minutes for organizations) than hearing students? Students in mainstreaming programs who do not pass notes may be excluded from what David Barton (1991, p. 183) has called a "literacy network."

This study has focused on writing practices for instrumental, social, and expressive purposes. Educators are concerned with the development of skills. Thus, it is important to ask what relationship, if any, exists between "literacy events" (Barton & Ivanić, 1991, p.5) in the home and the learning of writing in school. Would there be an effect on skill development and self-perception if the teacher drew conspicuous links between writing in the home and in the classroom? How do situation and context affect deaf students' classroom writing? Finally, what role can new technologies play in the teaching and learning of writing? How effective are grammar checkers? Does written communication via electronic mail differ from that on paper?

Contemporary writers and writing teachers define good writers as those who have a clear sense of audience, write confidently about their subject, and write with an individual voice. We suggest here that much of the writing done in childhood fosters such qualities. Writers of self-stick notes and the minutes of student senate meetings know their audiences; they know what
must be stated explicitly and what may be implied. Their audience and purpose dictate differences in length, style, and format. Those who use writing to record experience and sort through complex emotional situations in journals and personal letters are moving in the direction of objectifying and understanding that experience. For them, timely and meaningful response is important. The value of such response is that it encourages continued writing. Continued writing, in turn, leads to fluency and the development of a personal voice.

Appendix

Interview Questions

(We're interested in how you used written communication when you were growing up.)

Family:

Did you write notes for face-to-face communication with your parents?
With your siblings?
Did your parents leave notes for you?
Did you write notes to them?
Did you have a TTY at home? Did you use it often?
With whom?
E-mail, FAX, or other?
Did you have to write thank-you notes?
Did you write letters or postcards to your parents/siblings (from camp, summer vacations, college)?
To your grandparents, etc.?
Did your parents ask you to write other things?

Personal/Social:

Did you write in a journal or diary? (at home or on vacation)
Did you write notes or letters to friends?
Call them on a TTY?
Club meetings? Jr. NAD?
Sunday School? Temple? Church?
Private/secret notes in school?
Slam books in school?

How is that connected with the writing you did in childhood?

References