The Influence of Journal Writing on High School Students’ Views of Personal Health Issues

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Abstract

Thirty high school students enrolled in a freshmen Health class at a small, rural high school in Northwest Ohio participated in this study. The purpose of this study was to determine if the use of journal writing would improve student awareness of personal health issues. The study was conducted for a three week period or 15 days. The participants were surveyed before the intervention began and then again after the completion of the intervention. The results of the data indicated a positive change in the student’s attitudes towards personal health issues.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this project was to determine if the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen level health class would improve student awareness of personal health. The research questions for this project were the following:

1. According to the professional literature, how was journal writing defined?
2. According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the benefits of journal writing in secondary classrooms?
3. According to the professional literature reviewed, how had journal writing been implemented in the classroom?
4. Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class improve student awareness of personal health?

Justification

This project was completed to assist health educators in reaching high school students about personal health issues by using writing journals. Obesity rates have continued to rise in the U.S. and have become one of the major health issues facing our country. Reaching students about personal health issues, and getting them to take ownership of their own health has been a difficult task for many health teachers. The implementation of journal writing was done to encourage students to take time to reflect on their own personal health and to make positive adjustments. In addition, the researcher wanted to make the results available to other health educators to inform them of the benefits of journal writing.
**Definition of Terms**

- **Dialog Journal**
  Is a type of writing assignment that encourages communication, between writers, through journal writing.

- **Journal Writing**
  Is a type of writing assignment that requires the writer to think about something, and to record his/her thoughts about it.

- **Reflective Journal**
  Is a type of writing assignment that encourages reflection from the writer through journal writing.

**Limitations and Appropriate Use of Results**

This research project was conducted by the researcher to develop an effective strategy to help students become better aware of their personal health and was limited by several factors. The research was limited to one freshmen Health class in a small, rural, Midwestern school district with limited racial and economical diversity. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to large, urban school districts with more diverse populations. The project was implemented over a 12 week period. Consequently, the results may be different if implemented for a longer period of time. Other limitations that affected the research were the small class size and the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in the classroom. Due to these limitations the results of this research can only be applied to the researcher’s classroom.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine if the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen level health class would improve student awareness of personal health. The research questions were: (1) How did the professional literature reviewed define journal writing; (2) According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the benefits of journal writing in a secondary classroom; (3) According to the professional literature reviewed, how had journal writing been implemented in the classroom; (4) Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class improve student awareness of personal health. In order to answer these questions, a review of the professional literature was complete.

Research Question #1: How did the professional literature reviewed define journal writing?

A review of the professional literature was conducted to answer question #1. Journal writing was considered an activity in which students document their thoughts and feelings about a particular subject. According to Park (2003), a journal was a type of writing assignment that required the writer to think about something and to record his/her thoughts about it. She also stated that a journal consisted of regular entries by which the writer focuses and reflects upon a given theme, or a series of events and experiences. Cisero (2006) added that journal writing was meaningful interaction with information, through writing. She also stated that the information could be analyzed, critiqued, synthesized, and applied to personal experiences and that journal writing could be used as a teaching strategy in which the responsibility for the student’s learning is shared by both the teacher and student. According to the research reviewed, there were two common types of writing journals used by educators and they were reflective journals and dialog journals.
A reflective journal, according to Thorpe (2004), was a type of journal that students created as they thought about various concepts, events, or interactions for the purpose of gaining insights into self-awareness and learning. Thorpe also suggested that journals encouraged the writer to reflect upon an idea and to organize thoughts and by reflecting on their experiences, students begin to analyze their beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions, and promote self-evaluation and change. According to Cisero (2006), students that used reflective journals were able to ask questions, admit confusion, make connections, and grow as a person. Reflective journals were also used to allow the writer to reflect on their concerns, reflect on what excites them, and reflect on what caused them to think (Uline, Wilson, and Cordry, 2004).

Journals not only allowed students to reflect, but they were also used to create a dialog between writers. According to Regan (2003), dialog journals allowed for a written conversation in which two writers communicated regularly over a period of time. When used in a classroom, dialog journals allowed teachers to communicate with their students in a non-threatening manner. She also stated that dialog journals had the following characteristics: 1) Teacher and student write back and forth regularly. 2) Journals take 10-15 minutes to read and respond. 3) Entries include date, greeting, body of letter, and closing. 4) Each entry includes at least five sentences. 5) Entries are not graded. The use of dialog journals allowed the student to write about topics that were important to them and to communicate their thoughts to someone else.

In summary, journal writing was defined by Park (2003) as a type of writing assignment that required the writer to think about something and to record his/her thoughts about it. In addition, Cisero (2006) added that journal writing was meaningful interaction between the student and information, through writing. The research indicated that the two common types of writing journals were reflective journals and dialog journals.
Research Question #2: According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the benefits of journal writing in a secondary classroom?

A review of the professional literature was conducted to answer question #2. Expressing oneself in writing was considered an important skill for all students to learn, and according to the literature reviewed, journal writing has been used as an effective teaching method that has helped students achieve that skill. Journals have been used for many different purposes and have had many benefits. Wanket (2005) stated that when students practiced journal writing, they were practicing for their academic, political, and emotional lives. And according to Graham (2003), when students used writing journals they not only developed confidence and competence in their writing, but also began to see themselves as writers.

Journal writing was considered a form of active learning that could contribute to real understanding. According to Cisero (2006), writing a journal made students more aware not only of what they learn, but also how they learn. By journal writing, students could coordinate new ideas with old concepts they had already learned. Cisero also added that journal writing allowed students to contextualize the new information they were acquiring, allowing them to make sense of what they were learning rather than merely memorizing. These benefits have helped students better understand material and become better learners.

Journal writing not only benefited student learning, but also benefited the student’s mental and emotional well being according to Wanket (2005). Journals allowed students to write down their thoughts and feelings, and to reflect upon what has happened in their lives. Wanket also suggested that journal writing connected students with their emotional selves and core values and helped them become aware of the relevance of their belief systems. In addition, Wanket concluded that journals could be used as effective outlets for students to express their
inner thoughts and concerns, and could become an avenue for students to reveal serious problems in their lives and to reach out for help. Journal writing often evokes an internal conversation and that internal conversation often leads to a better understanding of oneself.

There were other benefits that journal writing had to offer students. According to Wanket (2005), journal writing improved essays, and helped students and teachers bond. Longhurst and Sandage (2004) suggested that daily or weekly journal assignments could serve the same purpose as quizzes, with a slightly less threatening aspect for students than the dreaded pop quiz. And Cisero (2006) concluded that a more far-reaching benefit of journal writing was that students began to see learning as a never-ending journey that did not stop outside the classroom.

The professional literature reviewed identified several important benefits of using journal writing in the classroom. Wanket (2005) stated that journal writing helped prepare students for the future and to become better writers. Cisero (2006) added that journal writing helped students become better learners by helping them make connections between new material and old material already learned. And finally, Wanket (2005) suggested that journal writing benefited students by allowing them to reflect upon their lives and to evaluate what was really important to them.

Research Question #3: According to the professional literature reviewed, how had journal writing been implemented in the classroom?

A review of professional literature was conducted to answer question #3. According to the professional research reviewed, there were a variety of ways to implement journals in a classroom. In a study done by Cisero (2006), students were provided with a journal and were required to reflect upon what they had been taught. The journals were then collected
on several occasions to check their content and format. Students would then receive points for having their journals done on time and with the proper format and students lost points if they were turned in late or not formatted properly. Students were encouraged to make changes to their entries based on feedback from the teacher. The entire journal was then graded at the end of the semester.

Another approach of implementing journal writing in the classroom was done by Regan (2003). Students were given 15 minutes, at least three days a week, to write their entries. The teacher would hand out the journals to the students with a short letter inside. The students would then read the short letter and then write their response or thoughts. The teacher would then collect the journals and grade them by the content of the student responses.

And finally, another method used to implement journal writing in a classroom was done by Thorpe (2004). At the beginning of the semester, students were given written guidelines for their journals and a syllabus to address four major topics: what a journal is comprised of and the value of journaling, the course requirements for the journals, tips on how and when to do journal entries, and references on journaling that were available for the students to refer to. Thorpe then had the students submit their journals on disc and was worth 25% of their final grade. After grading the journals, Thorpe would then give constructive feedback to each student on their disc before returning them and she allowed for general feedback from the students during class.

The implementation of journal writing in a classroom can be done in a variety of ways according to the professional literature reviewed. Cisero (2006) used journals to encourage her students to reflect upon what they had been taught, while Regan (2003) used journal writing to get students to respond to prompts she had given them in a short letter. Thorpe (2004) used
written guidelines, outlined in a syllabus, for the students to follow. All three researchers graded
the journals and the scores were then reflected in each student’s final grade for the class.

*Research Question #4: Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class
improve student awareness of personal health?*

**Conclusion**

In summary, journal writing was defined as a type of writing assignment that required the
writer to think about something and then record his or her thoughts about it (Park, 2003). Cisero
(2006) added that journal writing could be used as a teaching strategy that created meaningful
interaction between the student and information, through writing. Two common types of writing
journals defined by the professional literature were reflective journals and dialog journals.

The professional literature reviewed also identified several benefits of implementing
journal writing in the classroom. Wanket (2005) suggested that journal writing allowed students
to express themselves through writing and helped them prepare for their academic, political, and
emotional lives. Journal writing also helped students contextualize new information, coordinate
new ideas with concepts already learned, and helped students better understand how they learned
as an individual (Cisero, 2006). And finally, Wanket added that journal writing benefited
student’s mental and emotional well being by allowing them to reflect on what has happened in
their lives and to connect with their core values. These benefits along with possible other
benefits varied depending on how well the journal writing was implemented by the teacher in the
classroom.

According to the professional literature reviewed, the implementation of journal writing
in a classroom was done by using a variety of methods. Cisero (2006) used journal writing to
evaluate what her student’s had learned by having them reflect on material taught in class, while
journal writing was implemented by Regan (2003) to encourage her student’s to respond to topics presented to them. And Thorpe (2004) used precise guidelines, handed out to the students in a syllabus, for the students to follow while they wrote their journal entries.
CHAPTER III: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of journal writing in a high school health class would improve student awareness of personal health issues. The research questions were: 1) How was journal writing defined? 2) What were the benefits of journal writing in secondary classrooms? 3) How had journal writing been implemented in the classroom? 4) Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class improve student awareness of personal health?

Participants

The participants in this study were 30 high school freshmen enrolled in a freshmen level health class. The health class was a required course at a small, rural high school located in the Midwestern United States. Of the 30 students enrolled 18 were female and 12 were male. The class included students with mixed academic abilities including four students that received assistance from a special education teacher.

Treatment/Intervention

The intervention used during this project was the implementation of writing journals in a freshman level health class. The intervention was designed to improve student awareness of personal health issues among freshmen health students.

The researcher implemented the intervention with his high school freshmen health class. Course requirements and content standards for nutrition and exercise, set by the school district, were followed during the intervention. After considering these course requirements along with time constraints and professional advice, the researcher decided to have students write in their journals 15 times over a three week period.
At the beginning of the intervention the students were given their journals and their instructions for journaling. The journals consisted of 15 sheets of notebook paper stapled together by the researcher. Instructions for journaling were then presented to the students by the researcher. Students would be allowed 10 minutes at the beginning or at the end of class to write their journal entries. Each journaling assignment would begin with the researcher writing a journal prompt on the chalk board so the students knew what to write about. Some of the journal prompts included: 1) How would you rate your overall health? 2) How much of an effect will your actions now have on your health in the future? 3) Who or what are the main influences in your life when it pertains to health issues? (see Appendix A, Journal Prompts). After the journal prompt was given, students were then instructed to write the date in the left hand margin of their journals and then write the journal prompt on the first line following the date. Before writing, the students were encouraged to think about the journal prompt and then reflect upon course content, prior knowledge, and past experiences. After reflecting on the journal prompt, the students were to then write their journal entry. When the students had completed their journal entries for the day, they had the choice of either keeping their journals in the researcher’s classroom or taking their journals with them and adding to the day’s journaling assignment on their own.

The journals were collected and evaluated, using the grading rubric created by the researcher, every Friday by the researcher and these evaluations were then used as a portion of the students overall grade for the nine week grading period.
Instruments

The researcher used two different techniques to collect data during this project. They were personal health surveys (see Appendix B, Personal Health Survey) and student evaluation rubrics (see Appendix C, Journal Writing Rubric). These data collection techniques were developed and implemented by the researcher to determine if student awareness of personal health issues improved following the intervention.

The student survey was developed by the researcher to measure student awareness of personal health issues. The survey consisted of a series of questions that were designed to evaluate how each student felt about their own personal health. Survey questions included: 1) How would you rate your overall health? 2) How important is regular exercise to you and your overall health? 3) Is drinking enough water each day important to your health? (see Appendix B, Personal Health Survey). The survey was administered to the students at the beginning of the project and then again at the end of the project.

The student evaluation rubric was used to grade the effort of each student while completing their journaling assignments. The grading rubric (see Appendix C, Journal Writing Rubric) was designed to evaluate each student in three categories; completion of journal assignments, effort and organization. Each student in the class was evaluated each week of the intervention in all three categories and received three points if they exceeded the standard, two points if met the standard, one point if they barely met the standard, and zero points if the standard was not met at all. The points were then totaled for each week’s journal writing rubric, with a scoring range from zero to nine points. A percentage grade was then awarded to each student based on the number of points they received. The weekly journal writing rubric grades
were then averaged for each student to determine their journal writing rubric grade. The journal writing rubric grade was then used as a portion of each student’s nine week grade.

**Procedures**

Before the project was started a consent form (see Appendix D, Consent of School Principal) was sent to the building principal for her to sign. The consent form explained that the researcher was involved in the Masters of Arts in Education degree program at Defiance College and would like to use his freshmen health class to conduct his research for the degree project. After the consent form was signed, the students in the researcher’s classroom were then informed of the upcoming intervention that was going to take place in their classroom.

At the beginning of the intervention all the students in the researcher’s classroom were given a personal health survey for them to fill out (see Appendix B, Personal Health Survey). Instructions for filling out the survey were given to the students and they were allotted 20 minutes to complete the survey. After the surveys were completed by the students and collected by the researcher, a copy of the grading rubric that was to be used by the researcher was handed out for the students to view (see Appendix C, Journal Writing Rubric). Journals were then handed out to all the students and instructions for journaling were then presented to the students by the researcher. Each day of the intervention, a journal prompt was given to the students and they had 10 to 15 minutes to write their entries. At the end of each week, the journals were collected and graded by the researcher. At the conclusion of the intervention, the personal health survey (see Appendix B, Personal Health Survey) that was administered to the students at the beginning of the intervention was once again administered to the students.
**Timeline**

The research plan was presented to the building principal and approved on April 2, 2007. Students in the researcher’s classroom were informed of the journal writing activities that were to be incorporated into the class on April 5, 2007. On April 16, 2007 the personal health survey was administered to the class followed by the instructions for journaling. Journaling assignments began in the classroom on April 17, 2007 and concluded on May 4, 2007. After the final journaling assignment was completed on May 4, 2007, the personal health survey was again administered to the students and this concluded the project intervention.

**Data Analysis**

The data from the personal health surveys were used to compare pre-journaling attitudes to post-journaling attitudes of the students on personal health issues. The same personal health survey was administered before journaling began and after journaling was completed. The survey consisted of 15 multiple choice questions designed to have each student rate themselves on how they felt about certain health issues. The data from the pre-journaling survey and the post-journaling survey were charted on a graph for each question on the survey. The results of each survey question were then compared by the researcher to determine if student awareness of personal health issues had improved, declined or remained the same.

Data was also collected for the entire class for their participation and quality of responses in the journal writing intervention. The journal writing rubric grades received by each student were put into letter grade categories of A, B, C, D, & E. A score of 90 to 100 percent received an A grade, 80 to 89 percent received a B grade, 70 to 79 percent receive a C grade, 60 to 69 percent received a D grade and 59 percent and below received an E grade.
Summary

The purpose of this project was to determine if the implementation of journal writing in a high school health class would improve student awareness of personal health issues. The research questions were: 1) How was journal writing defined? 2) What were the benefits of journal writing in secondary classrooms? 3) How had journal writing been implemented in the classroom? 4) Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class improve student awareness of personal health? After thorough analysis of the data gathered, the researcher was able to determine what the results of the project.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of journal writing in a high school health class would improve student awareness of personal health issues. The research questions were: 1) How was journal writing defined? 2) What were the benefits of journal writing in secondary classrooms? 3) How had journal writing been implemented in the classroom? 4) Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class improve student awareness of personal health?

In order to answer research question #4: “Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class improve student awareness of personal health?” data was collected and analyzed by the researcher.

There were two data collection techniques used in this study. The techniques were developed and implemented by the researcher to determine if students’ awareness of personal health issues had improved. The first technique was a survey of personal health issues (see Appendix B, Personal Health Survey). The survey was given to all the students before the intervention took place and once again after the intervention was completed. There were 15 questions divided up into four categories on the survey and the categories were: 1) Overall Health. 2) Nutrition. 3) Exercise. 4) Smoking.

The results of the survey questions are shown in figures 1 through 15.
1. How would you rate your overall health?

![Bar chart showing comparisons between Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results](chart.png)

**Figure 1.** Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results of Survey Question #1.

The data revealed an overall increase on how students viewed their own level of health. The number of students that responded good or very good increased from 15 in the pre-survey to 18 in the post survey.
The data indicated a slight improvement in the student’s attitude for question #2. 25 students either agreed or strongly agreed with the question in the pre-survey compared to 28 in the post-survey. There were also two students that disagreed with the question in the pre-survey compared to zero in the post-survey.
3. What is the stress level in your life?

![Bar chart showing stress level comparison](image)

**Figure 3.** Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results of Survey Question #3.

There was very little change in the data from the pre-survey to the post-survey for question #3.
4. How much of an affect does a lack of sleep have on your daily performance?

![Graph showing survey results for question 4.]

Figure 4. Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results of Survey Question #4.

The data revealed that student awareness of the importance of sleep improved after the journaling intervention. 17 students responded on the post-survey that a lack of sleep either had a lot or quite a lot of an affect on their daily performance compared to only ten on the pre-survey.
5. How much of a risk do you feel obesity (20 lbs. or more overweight) is to your health?

Figure 5. Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results of Survey Question #5.

The data revealed a slight improvement in the student’s awareness of how much of a health risk obesity is to their health. Six students thought obesity was either a low risk or no risk at all on the pre-survey compared to three on the post-survey.
The data on personal hygiene changed very little from the pre-survey to the post-survey. Most of the students agreed on both surveys that personal hygiene was important or very important to them.
The data for question #7 changed very little from the pre-survey to the post-survey. Most of the students agreed on both surveys that it is important or very important to drink enough water each day.
Figure 8. Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results for Survey Question #8.

The data for question #8 indicated a slight improvement in the student’s attitudes about eating healthy foods each day. Eight students responded on the pre-survey that they occasionally or never make an effort to eat healthy compared to only six on the post-survey.
Figure 9. Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results of Survey Question #9.

The data for question #9 definitely showed an improvement in the student’s attitudes towards limiting fats, cholesterol, sodium, and sugar in their diets. 16 students responded on the post-survey that they make an effort most of the time or about half the time to limit these items in their diets compared to only 12 in the pre-survey. Also, the number of students that responded that they never try to limit these items in their diets went down from five in the pre-survey to two in the post-survey.
The data for question #10 revealed very little change in the results from the pre-survey to the post-survey. A majority of the students in both surveys agreed that regular exercise was either important or very important to their overall health.
11. How much of a priority is personal fitness in your life?

The data for question #11 revealed a slight decrease in the student’s awareness of the importance of personal fitness in their lives. 19 students responded that personal fitness was either a high priority or an above average priority in their lives on the pre-survey compared to only 17 on the post-survey. The number of students that responded that personal fitness was an average priority did go up in the post-survey by two from the pre-survey.
12. Do you think young people risk harming themselves if they smoke from 1 - 5 cigarettes per day?

The data revealed that a majority of the students agreed on both surveys that young people risk harming themselves if they smoke 1 – 5 cigarettes per day.

Figure 12. Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results of Survey Question #12.
13. Do you think it is safe to smoke for a year or two, as long as you quit after that?

The data collected for survey question #13 indicated an improvement from the pre-survey to the post-survey. Twenty three students responded definitely no on the post-survey compared to only 18 on the pre-survey.

Figure 13. Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results of Survey Question #13.
14. Do you think people can get addicted to using tobacco just like they can get addicted to using cocaine or heroin?

Survey question #14 revealed an improvement in student awareness about the addiction of cigarette smoking from the pre-survey to the post-survey. Twenty five students responded definitely yes on the post-survey compared to only 18 on the pre-survey that cigarette smoking was just as addicting as using cocaine or heroin.

Figure 14. Comparison of Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Results of Survey Question #14.
The data revealed an improvement in student awareness for survey question #15. Twenty two students either responded probably no or definitely no on the post-survey compared to only 19 on the pre-survey when asked if they thought that they could quit smoking at any time.
The second data collection technique used by the researcher was a journal writing rubric (see Appendix C, Journal Writing Rubric). The journal writing rubric was used by the researcher to evaluate the completion, effort, and organization of each student’s journals. Of the 30 students involved in the intervention, 21 students received an A grade, seven students received a B grade, one student received a C grade and 1 student received a D Grade for their journaling assignments.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of journal writing in a high school health class would improve student awareness of personal health issues. The research questions were: 1) How was journal writing defined? 2) What were the benefits of journal writing in secondary classrooms? 3) How had journal writing been implemented in the classroom? 4) Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class improve student awareness of personal health?

In summary, the data indicated that the use of journal writing in a freshmen level health class did improve student awareness of personal health issues. Student responses showed an improvement of awareness on ten of the 15 questions after pre-survey responses were compared to post-survey responses. There was very minimal or no change on four of the questions and one question showed a decline in awareness from the pre-survey to the post-survey responses.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of journal writing in a high school health class would improve student awareness of personal health issues. The research questions were: 1) How was journal writing defined? 2) What were the benefits of journal writing in secondary classrooms? 3) How had journal writing been implemented in the classroom? 4) Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class improve student awareness of personal health?

**Meaning of Findings**

After reviewing the data collected, the researcher determined that the intervention was an effective way of increasing student awareness of personal health issues. The data collected from the two identical surveys that were administered to the students, one before the intervention began and one after the intervention was completed, indicated an improvement in the student’s attitudes of personal health issues on 9 out of the 15 survey questions. Five questions revealed very little or no change in student attitudes, while only one question indicated a decline in student awareness.

The researcher also noticed a general change in student attitudes about personal health issues and the journal writing assignments as the intervention progressed. While a few students did not like the journal writing assignments from the beginning and never did change their attitudes about journaling, many others embraced the idea and looked forward to the journaling assignments each day. By the third and final week of the intervention, students were anticipating the day’s journaling topic and were looking forward to the assignment. Many students responded in their journal entries that it was beneficial for them to think about personal health issues and how they viewed them. By writing their thoughts down, it made them realize that
they may need to make some changes in their lives. Others used the journaling assignments to reinforce good health habits that they already practice.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if the implementation of journal writing in a high school health class would improve student awareness of personal health issues. The research questions were: 1) How was journal writing defined? 2) What were the benefits of journal writing in secondary classrooms? 3) How had journal writing been implemented in the classroom? 4) Did the implementation of journal writing in a freshmen health class improve student awareness of personal health?

Through this project, the researcher sought to determine if high school students could increase their awareness of personal health issues by using journals in the classroom. The project included 30 students in a small, rural, Midwestern school. Of the 30 students, 18 were female and 12 were male.

The intervention was implemented with these students for a period of 15 days. A personal health survey was administered to all the students at the beginning of the intervention, and then each day of the intervention students were given a journal topic to write their journal entries on. At the conclusion of the intervention, the identical personal health survey was again administered to the students. The data from both surveys was then compared and analyzed by the researcher. The data indicated a positive change in the student’s attitudes about personal health issues on a majority of the survey questions.

Recommendations

It would be the recommendation of the researcher to use the journal writing activity the entire semester and not just for a three week period. Implementing the journal writing
assignment for the entire semester would allow the students to develop a routine for personal
reflection and written documentation of these personal reflections. The researcher would also
recommend that the journals be assigned only two or three times per week. This would allow the
students a break between journaling assignments and would also allow the teacher more
flexibility in their curriculum planning.

In addition to the recommended change of length and frequency of the journal writing
activities, the researcher would also recommend allowing the students to choose a portion of the
journal topics. All students could be given the opportunity to create a list of topics for the
journaling assignments. The teacher could then examine the topics created by the students, and
then choose the one’s deemed appropriate. This would hopefully create some ownership with
the students and would also uncover topics that the students wanted to write about.

Conclusion

The data from this project indicated that there was an improvement in student awareness
of personal health issues after the journal writing intervention was completed. The data
suggested that the journal writing activities provided this particular group of students the
opportunity to improve their views on personal health issues.
References


Appendix A:

Journal Prompts

- What were some things that you did over the weekend that were good for your health?
- How much of an effect will your actions now have on your health in the future?
- What are some changes you could make in your lifestyle that would improve your health?
- Who or what are the main influences in your life when it comes to health issues?
- Think of someone you know who you feel is healthy. Then describe this person and why you think this person is healthy.
- Think of someone you know who you feel is unhealthy. Then describe this person and why you feel this person is unhealthy.
- List in your journals what you ate and drank yesterday for the entire day. Then give yourself a grade (A,B,C,D,F) on your one day diet taking into account daily nutrition guidelines.
- What health issues concern you the most right now?
- What health issues concern you the most about the future?
- Describe some of the things that you feel are important that you have learned in Health class this semester.
- How important is regular exercise to your health?
Appendix B:

Personal Health Survey

Grade: 9 10 11 12 12  Gender: Male  Female

Date: ____________________

Directions: Circle the letter of the response that best describes how you feel.

Section 1: Overall Health

1. How would you rate your overall health?
   A. Very Good
   B. Good
   C. Average
   D. Below Average
   E. Poor

2. Do you feel that what you are doing now with your health will have an impact on your health in the future?
   A. Strongly Agree
   B. Agree
   C. Disagree
   D. Strongly Disagree
   E. Don’t Know

3. What is the stress level in your life?
   A. Very High
   B. High
   C. Average
   D. Low
   E. Very Low

4. How much of an affect does a lack of sleep have on your daily performance?
   A. A lot
   B. Quite a Lot
   C. Some
   D. Very Little
   E. None at All
5. How much of a risk do you feel obesity (20 lbs. or more overweight) is to your health?
   A. Very High
   B. High
   C. Some Risk
   D. Low
   E. No Risk at All

6. How important is personal hygiene to you?
   A. Very Important
   B. Important
   C. Somewhat Important
   D. Not Very Important
   E. Not Important At All

Section II: Nutrition

7. Is drinking enough water each day important to your health?
   A. Very Important
   B. Important
   C. Somewhat Important
   D. Not Very Important
   E. Not Important At All

8. Do you normally make an effort to eat healthy foods each day?
   A. All the time.
   B. Most of the time.
   C. About half the time.
   D. Occasionally
   E. Never

9. Do you normally make an effort to limit the amount of fats, cholesterol, sodium, and sugars in your diet?
   A. All the time.
   B. Most of the time.
   C. About half the time.
   D. Occasionally
   E. Never

Section III: Exercise

10. How important is regular exercise to you and your overall health?
    A. Very Important
    B. Important
    C. Somewhat Important
    D. Not Very Important
    E. Not Important At All
11. How much of a priority is personal fitness in your life?
   A. High Priority
   B. Above Average Priority
   C. Average Priority
   D. Below Average Priority
   E. Not a Priority

Section IV: Smoking

12. Do you think young people risk harming themselves if they smoke from 1 – 5 cigarettes per day?
   A. Definitely Yes
   B. Probably Yes
   C. Probably Not
   D. Definitely Not
   E. Don’t Know

13. Do you think it is safe to smoke for only a year or two, as long as you quit after that?
   A. Definitely Yes
   B. Probably Yes
   C. Probably Not
   D. Definitely Not
   E. Don’t Know

14. Do you think people can get addicted to using tobacco just like they can get addicted to using cocaine or heroin?
   A. Definitely Yes
   B. Probably Yes
   C. Probably Not
   D. Definitely Not
   E. Don’t Know

15. Do you think if you started smoking now that you could quit anytime you wanted?
   A. Definitely Yes
   B. Probably Yes
   C. Probably Not
   D. Definitely Not
   E. Don’t Know
Appendix C:

**Journal Writing Rubric**

**Grading Chart**

**Freshmen Health**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>3 - Exceeds Standards</th>
<th>2 - Meets Standards</th>
<th>1 - Standards Barely Met</th>
<th>0 - Standards Not Met at All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completion of Journal Questions</strong></td>
<td>Student has completed all journal assignments.</td>
<td>Student has completed most of the journal assignments.</td>
<td>Student has completed some of the journal assignments.</td>
<td>Student has completed very little or none of the assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effort</strong></td>
<td>Student's response is very detailed.</td>
<td>Student's response has some details and depth.</td>
<td>Student's response is limited in detail and depth.</td>
<td>Student's response lacks any detail and depth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Journal entries are logical and effective.</td>
<td>Journal entries are generally logical and effective.</td>
<td>Journal entries are generally illogical and confusing.</td>
<td>Journal entries lack logical order and organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Score ____________________
Appendix D:

Consent of School Principal

April 2, 2007

Mrs. Denise Meyer, Principal
Stryker High School
400 South Defiance Street
Stryker, OH 43557

Dear Mrs. Meyer:

During the second semester of the academic school year 2006-07, I will be working on my Master’s project at Defiance College. The purpose of this project is to determine if the use of journal writing in a freshmen level health class would improve student awareness of personal health issues. I ask for your permission to work on this project in my classroom during the second semester of the 2006-07 school year. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Ruffer

Signature of High School Principal

__________________________
Date