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Maureen Elliott Hook  
*Old Dominion University*

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AN INQUIRY INTO THE INFLUENCE OF  
EXPRESSIVE WRITING PRACTICE ON THE  
TRANSACTIONAL WRITING ABILITIES OF  
SELECTED FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## ABSTRACT

### AN INQUIRY INTO THE INFLUENCE OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING PRACTICE ON THE TRANSACTIONAL WRITING ABILITIES OF SELECTED FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS

Maureen Elliott Hook  
Old Dominion University, 1986  
Director: Dr. Denny T. Wolfe

The study is an inquiry into the influence of expressive writing practice on the transactional writing abilities of selected fourth grade students. It is based on the ideas of James Britton, an English theoretician concerned with writing. The study was formulated to investigate how the process of writing occurs. Writing research is at an early stage, and this study will expand the knowledge of the field.

The study consisted of a treatment group receiving intensive practice with expressive writing over the course of one semester while the control group did not. A posttest was administered which involved the students having to write an essay on a transactional topic. The essays were then rated by three experts for the presence of three expressive characteristics. The ratings were treated as scores and used to calculate t-

tests for matched groups since subjects from the treatment group were matched with subjects from the control group. The data were then used to determine the degree to which the study's two hypotheses are true.

The first hypothesis that characteristics of expressive writing would be found in the final writing samples on a transactional topic of both the treatment and control groups was proven correct. This would lend support to Britton's theory that good writing of all kinds tends to have an expressive dimension. The implication for the teaching of writing, then, would be that any writing program or sequence of writing instruction should include expressive writing as a primary component.

The second hypothesis that the treatment group would have significantly more characteristics of expressive writing in their transactional writing was partially proven. One of the three expressive characteristics defined in the study clearly revealed that the treatment group possessed significantly (at the .10 level of confidence) more characteristics of expressive writing than did the control group. An additional measure, a holistic quality rating of the writing samples, revealed that the treatment group wrote significantly better than did the control group. These findings lend support to Britton's theory that practice with expressive writing will improve other kinds of writing such as the transactional.

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I am greatly indebted to my husband, Andrew, and to my daughters, Alexis and Lauren, for their sustained support, encouragement, patience, and understanding. They were denied many hours in order that this endeavor could be accomplished, and I am truly grateful. Appreciation is also extended to the rest of my family for their encouragement and support.

Finally, deepest appreciation is expressed to the two teachers who participated in this study -- Miss Carol Daley of Norfolk Highlands Elementary, Chesapeake, Virginia and Mrs. Rebecca Young of Georgetown Elementary, Chesapeake, Virginia. Appreciation also is extended to Mrs. Janice Orenduff for her time and expertise in the typing of this dissertation.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Overview of the Chapter

This chapter serves as an introduction to this dissertation study. The study is an inquiry into the influence of expressive writing practice on the transactional writing abilities of selected fourth grade students. It is based on the ideas of James Britton, an English theoretician in the field of writing.

The chapter begins by discussing the existence of a problem in the area of writing in this country among the student population from the elementary to the college level. Several leading researchers will be presented who have already begun work to investigate how the writing process occurs and how writing can be improved in an attempt to ameliorate the crisis.

James Britton has been an important figure in the field of writing. His theory of the influence of expressive writing on the development of other kinds of writing is unique. Therefore, this researcher chose to formulate a study based upon his ideas in order to offer some concrete evidence that his theory is worthwhile to our understanding of how the process of writing occurs. Validation of his theories would have implications for how writing tasks are sequenced in writing instruction.

Statement of a Problem

The presence of a writing crisis in American schools has been evident since the early 1970's. In an interview that Jerome Bruner gave in 1972, he wondered "whether written language, used to its full limit, may not eventually become the medium of the intellectual elite."<sup>1</sup>

Donald Graves in a 1978 report to the Ford Foundation noted that what writing instruction there is in the schools is on the mechanics of writing: punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary. However, the writing crisis is not in the area of writing mechanics. It is in the area of writing clarity and ingenuity.<sup>2</sup>

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, a federally-supported monitoring program which issued reports in 1970, 1975, and 1980, assessed the writing abilities of seventeen, thirteen, and nine-year olds. One of the ways writing is assessed in the reports is through the method of holistic rating. To judge a piece of writing holistically means to rate it with regard to whether the piece accomplishes its purpose and is understood by its reader. Using a pre-stated scale with a range of 1-4 or 1-8, for example, with the largest number representing the highest score, the rater assigns one score to the piece. No comments are made. A score

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Sanacore, "School-Wide Writing Strategies," Clearing House 13 (April 1980): 391.

<sup>2</sup>Marcia Farr Whiteman, "What We Can Learn from Writing Research," Theory into Practice 19 (Summer 1980): 150.

alone is given on the basis of the overall sense of the piece without regard to any other preconceived evaluative criteria.

In 1975, for seventeen-years olds, there was a decline as compared to 1970, in the quality of the essays written when they were judged holistically. The mean holistic score on an eight-point scale dropped from 5.12 in 1970 to 4.85 (statistically significant at .05 level).<sup>3</sup> The percentages of seventeen-year olds ranked four or better on an eight-point scale declined from 85% to 78%.<sup>4</sup>

These same results in 1975 largely held true for thirteen-year olds. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, "The mean holistic score dropped from 5.0 to 4.7 [statistically significant at the .05 level] ...., and the percentage of thirteen-year olds writing papers ranked four or better declined from 79.6% to 76.6%."<sup>5</sup> Only the nine-year olds showed an improvement from 1970 to 1975. Their mean holistic score remained about the same, and the percentage of nine-year olds writing papers ranked four or better rose from 51% to 57%.<sup>6</sup>

By 1980, the decline in scores slowed. For seventeen-year olds and

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<sup>3</sup>Education Commission of the States, National Assessment of Educational Progress, Writing Mechanics, 1969-1974, by Roy H. Forbes, Director, Writing Report No. 05-W-01 (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, October 1975), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

nine-year olds there was not a statistically significant change in the mean holistic score for the period 1970 to 1980. Thirteen-year olds, on the other hand, showed a significant decline in the mean holistic score, although most of the decline appeared between the 1970 and 1975 assessment and then stabilized.<sup>7</sup>

The weaknesses in student writing go hand in hand with a decline in student reasoning abilities. The 1975 National Assessment of Educational Progress also began to draw a connection between the two deficiencies. It suggests that when writing improves, so, too, will critical thinking skills.<sup>8</sup>

The findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress are echoed by Dr. Ernest L. Boyer, principal author of a report on secondary education released in the fall of 1983 by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. In Dr. Boyer's opinion, writing instruction should be given more emphasis than science and mathematics instruction. According to Dr. Boyer, "Students who do not learn to write clearly are not likely to think clearly and thus cannot prepare themselves well for their role in society and in the leadership of the nation."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Education Commisison of the States, National Assessment of Educational Progress, Writing Achievement, 1969-1979, by Roy H. Forbes, Director, Writing Report No. 10-W-01 (Washington, D.C. : U.S. Government Printing Office, December 1980), p. 51.

<sup>8</sup>Gene I. Maeroff, "Teaching of Writing Gets New Push," New York Times, 8 January 1984, sec. 12, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p.1.

The problem continues. A national survey of 1,269 colleges by City University of New York found in 1983 that 31% of the institutions they surveyed reported basic writing deficiencies in large proportions of their student bodies. The state of Maryland discovered in December 1983 that 52% of the 57,000 ninth graders who took a sample writing test failed it.<sup>10</sup>

Clare Silva, director of the Old Dominion University Writing Center, notes that all of the community colleges in Virginia and generally all institutions of higher learning across the country with open admission policies offer courses in remedial writing.<sup>11</sup> In addition, several colleges such as San Francisco State University and all public colleges and universities in the State of Georgia require proof of writing competency through an exam prior to graduation.

There are many factors that are responsible for this writing crisis. Among them are the following:

1. The current emphasis on standardized testing, which uses multiple choice questions to assess competency in a given area, has shifted some attention away from holistic scoring of writing samples, the method preferred by writing experts and utilized in the three National Assessments of Educational Progress and by the Educational Testing Service.<sup>12</sup> Those

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<sup>10</sup>Maeroff, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup>Clare Silva, telephone interview, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia, July 1982.

<sup>12</sup>Marcia Farr Whiteman, "What We Can Learn from Writing Research," Theory into Practice 19 (Summer 1980): 150.

that prefer standardized testing ignore the ample data of the high reliability of holistic scoring. According to Charles Cooper,

When raters are from similar backgrounds and when they are training with a holistic scoring guide - either one they borrow or devise for themselves on the spot - they can achieve nearly perfect agreement in choosing the better of a pair of essays; and they can achieve scoring reliabilities in the high eighties and low nineties on their summed scores from multiple pieces of a student's writing.<sup>13</sup>

2. Reading has been heavily emphasized in teacher training, while writing has received little if any attention;<sup>14</sup>

3. Writing instruction is considered by most teachers to belong only to English teachers;<sup>15</sup>

4. Little school time is actually devoted to writing. Only three percent (3%) of classroom time and three percent (3%) of homework assignments in high school involve having students create written work of at least a paragraph in length, according to Arthur Applebee of Stanford University;<sup>16</sup> and

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<sup>13</sup>Evaluating Writing, quoted in Miles Myers, "Introduction," A Procedure for Writing Assessment and Holistic Scoring (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup>Whiteman, p. 150.

<sup>15</sup>Education Commission of the States, Writing Report No. 10-W-01, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup>Maeroff, p. 36.

5. The campus liberalizations of the 1960's swept away many of the rigorous basic requirements such as expository writing. These liberalizations filtered down into high schools and produced many students, at all ability levels, who could not write well.<sup>17</sup>

Gene I. Maeroff states rather humorously that the crisis situation

... could no longer be ignored when college instructors began to observe that their freshman classes were reacting to expository writing requirements as if they were one of the more arcane vestiges of medieval scholarship.<sup>18</sup>

It seems even our best institutions of higher learning have been affected by the writing crisis. In the fall of 1983 the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, among other schools, put into effect a writing requirement. The requirement is two-tiered. Students must pass the first phase during their freshman year. The second phase must be completed by the end of a student's junior year. "There was a feeling," said Kenneth R. Manning, who headed the Committee on the Writing Requirement, "that writing wasn't as good as it had been or as good as it should be."<sup>19</sup>

As a result of the writing deficit problem, the study of writing has become a serious academic pursuit. From the study of problem writers has

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<sup>17</sup>Maeroff, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Suzanne Daley, "Colleges All Over the Country Turning to Remedial English," New York Times, 8 January 1984, sec. 12, p. 39.

come much information on how the writing process can best be taught to all students. Some of the early pioneers in writing research in the past two decades have contributed to an understanding of how writing might be best taught.

Janet Emig, in her 1969 study of adolescent writing, was one of the first researchers to examine the process of writing rather than the end-product. Studying in depth the process of writing of eight students, she theorized that there are two types of writing: reflexive (writing for oneself) and extensive (writing for an audience with a purpose).<sup>20</sup>

Another study by an Englishman, James Britton, appeared in 1975. It also examined the writing process. It involved eleven to eighteen (11 to 18) year old students. Britton extended Emig's classifications and renamed them. He also added a third type: the poetic. Britton classifies writing, then, into three types: expressive (diary and journal writing, writing for the self), transactional (essay writing and other writing for external audiences to accomplish a specific purpose), and poetic (poetry and other literary writing such as novels and short stories).<sup>21</sup>

Mina Shaughnessy of City University of New York in 1974 headed that school's first Instructional Resource Center. One of the main functions of the Resource Center was to study the writing process. Her work "... helped

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<sup>20</sup>Janet Emig, The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1971), p. 3.

<sup>21</sup>James Britton et al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18), (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975; reprint ed., London: Schools Council Publications, 1979), pp. 88-91.

make the teaching of remedial writing a legitimate academic enterprise and a subject of scholarly investigation."<sup>22</sup>

Sondra Perl and Lynn Troyka, who were associated with the City University of New York, did their doctoral dissertations in the area of remedial writing. Perl's findings provided much valuable information about the mental processes utilized in creating a piece of writing. She studied five unskilled college writers in an attempt to learn what is involved in the act of writing. Each met with her for four ninety-minute sessions in which the students were taped as they composed aloud. Two of the sessions involved transactional types of writing and two involved expressive writing. A fifth session consisted of an open-ended interview of each writer.<sup>23</sup> Thus emerged the idea of having each student keep a journal to explore ideas for further development and to jot down ideas for revision. Teachers found they could better aid their students through reading students' journals in combination with reading the students' compositions.<sup>24</sup>

Troyka used simulation games in which students had to assume a variety of roles. Before they committed their experiences to paper, however, their ideas were challenged in a verbal discussion. Again, the emphasis was on utilizing students' actual writing processes to improve

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<sup>22</sup>Maeroff, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup>Sondra Perl, "The Composing Process of Unskilled College Writers," Research in the Teaching of English 13 (December 1979): 318.

<sup>24</sup>Maeroff, p. 36.

their writing if given the appropriate guidance.<sup>25</sup>

The knowledge gained from these researchers has had great influence which is still in the process of trickling down from the university level to textbook publishers to high schools and elementary schools.

Another influence that has had a great effect on educators' collective knowledge about writing is the National Writing Project. Begun in San Francisco as the Bay Area Writing Project, it is now known as the National Writing Project with one hundred sixteen (116) sites in forty-four (44) states.<sup>26</sup> The Bay Area Writing Project began as an attempt by the University of California to improve the level of writing of incoming freshmen. The university recognized that more and more students were having to take a special writing class during their first quarter to improve their writing. By bringing together area teachers to devise strategies to improve the teaching of writing in the elementary and secondary schools, it was thought, says James Gray, the project's director, that improved writing would eventually be accomplished at all levels.<sup>27</sup>

The idea eventually expanded into the National Writing Project. The project was unique in using the input of classroom teachers, and it was one

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<sup>25</sup>Maeroff, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup>Carole Rafferty, "National Project Helps Teachers of Writing," New York Times, 8 January 1984, sec. 12, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

of the first to stress the importance of having teachers of all disciplines, including mathematics, science and physical education, utilize writing in their instruction.<sup>28</sup>

In 1983, 70,000 teachers nationwide participated in the summer institutes of the National Writing Project. Its influence has not yet been formally charted, but it seems certain that a program of such scope will eventually improve many students' writing ability. Another discovery the project has made is that for many teachers, the neglect of writing instruction had not been the result of a lack of interest; rather the neglect resulted from a lack of knowledge and of the training to teach writing effectively.

It is quite evident, then, that a national writing problem does exist. However, it is also equally evident that much research and energy are currently being devoted to solve this problem.

#### Why this Study was Chosen

This study was chosen, then, to help shed some light on how best to improve writing instruction. The theories of James Britton, an English theoretician, were chosen to be examined because he is a seminal figure in the field of writing, and because the aspect of his theories examined in the present study has not been rigorously tested.

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<sup>28</sup>Rafferty, p. 40.

This study seeks to test the validity of Britton's theory that good writing of all kinds tends to have an expressive dimension, for example, a dimension in which the writer's voice -- feelings and opinions -- is present. Britton further postulates that what he calls expressive writing (for example, diary and journal writing, writing for the self) precedes the development of other types of writing such as the transactional. Britton says that "...the expressive is a kind of matrix from which differentiated forms of mature writing are developed."<sup>29</sup>

This study will be described in detail in later sections of this paper. In brief, however, a treatment and a control group will be used in order to gather data concerning the influence of expressive writing practice on the transactional writing abilities of selected fourth grade students. The treatment group will have intensive practice with expressive writing over the course of one semester. In contrast, the control group will primarily engage in transactional writing. At the end of the semester both groups will be given a posttest writing task on a transactional topic. The writing samples of both groups will then be analyzed by three expert raters for the presence of expressive characteristics. The writing samples will also be given a holistic quality rating by the raters.

It is hypothesized that 1) characteristics of expressive writing will be found in the final writing samples on a transactional topic of both

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<sup>29</sup>Britton, p. 83.

the treatment and the control groups. 2) It is also hypothesized that the treatment group will have significantly more characteristics of expressive writing in their transactional writing than the control group will have. Each writing sample will be given a holistic quality rating to determine whether there is a significant qualitative difference between the two groups.

The reasons the area of writing was chosen for investigation are many. First, writing is a critical thinking skill, and learning more about it is a worthwhile endeavor. In the words of Donald Graves at a conference at the College of William and Mary (February 1985), writing not only teaches critical thinking, but "writing brings personal breakthroughs in learning."<sup>30</sup>

Janet Emig would agree. William F. Imscher, in an article in College Composition and Communication, says,

She [Emig] sees writing as unique in the learning process because it combines in one act numerous attributes that psychologists and philosophers have traditionally associated with learning strategies: it integrates the working of hand, eye, brain. We learn by doing, we learn by seeing what we have done, and we learn by representing experience symbolically in words. Further, writing provides both immediate and long-term feedback, it makes connections, and it engages us in a personal, self-rythmed process.<sup>31</sup>

Imscher further says,

Writing places upon us the ultimate demand for precise and accurate expression. To this end, writing is both learning and relearning.

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<sup>30</sup>Donald Graves, speech given at a conference on writing, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, February 1985.

<sup>31</sup>"Writing as a Mode of Learning," quoted in William F. Imscher, "Writing as a Way of Learning and Developing," College Composition and Communication 30 (October 1979): 242.

Rehearsing the thought again and again. Rehearsing it. Reconceiving it. Clarifying it. Settling finally on a configuration of meaning.<sup>32</sup>

Irmscher continues,

When we move beyond writing as a skill, beyond writing as habit formation, we can see writing as a way of promoting the higher intellectual development of the individual in the same sense that the human being's capacity for verbal symbolic behavior is responsible for the superiority of our culture over that of other creatures.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps, however, Vygotsky sums up all these researchers' points when he writes, "The relation between thought and word is a living process: thought is born through words. A word devoid of thought is a dead thing, and a thought unembodied in words remains a shadow."<sup>34</sup>

A second reason for choosing to do research in the field of writing is to contribute to understanding the process of writing. Many experts agree with Sondra Perl who says,

Composing does not occur in a straightforward, linear fashion. The process is one of accumulating discrete words or phrases down on the paper and then working from these bits to reflect upon, structure, and then further develop what one means to say. It can be thought of as a kind of 'retrospective structuring;' movement forward occurs only after one has reached back, which in turn occurs only after one has some sense of where one wants to go. Both aspects, the reaching back and the sensing forward, have a clarifying effect.... Rereading or backward movements become a way of assessing whether or not the words on the page adequately capture the original sense intended.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>William F. Irmscher, "Writing as a Way of Learning and Developing," College Composition and Communication 30 (October 1979): 244.

<sup>33</sup>Irmscher, p 242.

<sup>34</sup>Thought and Language, quoted in Irmscher, p. 243.

<sup>35</sup>New York University Education Quarterly quoted in Donald M. Murray, Learning by Teaching (Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1982), pp. 20-21.

One aspect of the composing process, revision, is sometimes not accorded the importance it should receive. Mimi Schwartz says that

... journeys of discovery [writing] require that rewriting, not just initial writing, be viewed as a creative act, one in which the writer is, still in the process of 'discovering meaning,' not just packaging it for others. Since these discoveries can occur late as well as early in the composing process (often after time has provided distance from the work), writers must have extended writing experiences that encourage them to build sufficient revision time into the composing process.<sup>36</sup>

As evidenced by the researchers cited thus far, we know much about the composing process, but we still have more to learn. That is why the theories of James Britton will be examined: to help shed further light on the question of what types of writing should be engaged in first to facilitate the development of a mature writer.

A third and final reason for undertaking a study in the field of writing, and for investigating James Britton's ideas in particular, is that the topic of expressive writing (diary and journal writing, writing for the self) is a relatively new one. Thus, a study in this area should prove to be very productive from both the researcher's point of view and from the point of view of others in the field of writing instruction.

According to James Kinneavy, a noted linguist,

... concern for the expressive function of language is a modern phenomenon. Unlike literary theory, or rhetoric, or dialectic, or science, there is no long tradition for expressive discourse with established disagreements or schools of consensus.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Mimi Schwartz, "Two Journeys through the Writing Process," College Composition and Communication 34 (May 1983): 198.

<sup>37</sup>James L. Kinneavy, A Theory of Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 394.

Kinneavy defines discourse as

... the full text ... of an oral or written situation .... It can be a poem, a conversation, a tragedy, a joke, a seminar, a discussion, a full-length history, a periodical article, an interview, a sermon, a TV ad.<sup>38</sup>

### Significance of the Study

To date, the theories of James Britton have never before been rigorously tested. One researcher, Stephen Judy of Michigan State University, has hinted that Britton's theories may be true. He says, "The structuring of writing is learned as one shapes ideas and experience, first, for himself or herself, and second, for an audience."<sup>39</sup> In the Writing Workshop course he taught there recently, he began his students with expressive writing and then had them gradually move to transactional writing. Judy's experience as a writing instructor led him to the conclusion that practice with expressive writing improved students' other kinds of writing. Never before, however, has a careful, scientific study been done to test this theory.

### Summary

This chapter has served as an introduction to this dissertation study. The study is an inquiry into the influence of expressive writing

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<sup>38</sup>Kinneavy, p.4.

<sup>39</sup>Stephen Judy, "The Experimental Approach: Inner Worlds to Outer Worlds," in Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition, eds. Timothy R. Donovan and Ben W. McClelland (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1980), p. 41.

practice on the transactional writing abilities of selected fourth grade students. It is based on the ideas of James Britton, an English theoretician in the field of writing.

The chapter began by discussing the existence of a problem in the area of writing in this country among the student population from the elementary to the college level. Several leading researchers were presented who have already begun to investigate how the writing process occurs and how writing can be improved in an attempt to ameliorate the crisis.

James Britton has been an important figure in the field of writing. His theory of the influence of expressive writing on the development of other kinds of writing is unique. Therefore, this researcher chose to formulate a study based upon his ideas in order to offer some concrete evidence that his theory is worthwhile to our understanding of how the process of writing occurs. Validation of his theories would have implications for how writing tasks are sequenced in writing instruction.

## CHAPTER II

### THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Overview of the Chapter

This chapter focuses on the theories of James Britton and explains in detail his two-dimensional model of writing which includes function and audience. By function Britton means the type of writing: expressive, transactional, and poetic. The expressive is diary and journal writing, writing for the self. The transactional is essay writing and other writing for external audiences to accomplish a specific purpose. The poetic is poetry and other literary writing such as novels and short stories.<sup>1</sup> By audience Britton means to whom a piece of writing is directed or for whom it is written. His types of audience in the school context are self, teacher, known audience, and unknown audience.<sup>2</sup>

Several researchers such as Emig, Martin, Moffett, and Kinneavy influenced Britton. Their theories are discussed, as well as how they

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<sup>1</sup>James Britton et al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18), (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975; reprint ed., London: Schools Council Publications, 1979) pp. 88-91.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

affected Britton's conception of the writing process. One aspect of Britton's theories reflects a consideration of the role of speech in the development of expressive writing. In turn, his theory of the influence of expressive writing on the development of other kinds of writing is unique. It is the latter theory which led to this inquiry into the influence of expressive writing practice on the transactional writing abilities of selected fourth grade students.

### An Examination of Britton's Theories

The preponderance of research on writing has concentrated historically on the end-products of writing. Janet Emig, in her study of adolescent writing, reported "of the 504 studies written before 1963 that are cited in the bibliography of Research in Written Composition, only two deal even indirectly with the process of writing among adolescents."<sup>3</sup> Her 1969 study was one of the few that did focus on the writing process. In it, she refers to two types of writing - reflexive (writing for oneself) and extensive (writing for an audience with a purpose). Her terms, respectively, are similar to Britton's use of the word expressive to define personal writing and his use of the word transactional to define public writing.

Britton's study, which appeared in 1971, acknowledged Emig's two

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<sup>3</sup>Janet Emig, The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1971), p. 3.

types. However, heavily influenced by the work of several researchers in the area of speech (notably Roman Jakobson with his hierarchy of speech functions and Edward Sapir who coined the word expressive),<sup>4</sup> he added a third type - the poetic - and further subdivided these three as to function and audience. Britton classifies writing, then, into three types -- expressive (diary and journal writing, writing for the self), transactional (essay writing and other writing for external audiences to accomplish a specific purpose, and poetic (poetry and other literary writing such as novels and short stories).<sup>5</sup>

Britton believes that, to some extent, speech and expressive writing patterns are parallel processes. What has been termed expressive speech (conventional or everyday) is the type of language written by a child who is learning to write or the type of language written by an adult in a journal or in a diary. Expressive speech in the adult also includes the inner speech one engages in while creating new ideas.

Britton comments that expressive speech

...appears to be the means by which the new is tentatively explored, thoughts are half uttered, attitudes half expressed, the rest being left to be picked up by the listener, or reader, who is willing to take the unexpressed on trust. Its use is not, of course, always exploratory, but exploratory situations seem to call for it.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, a study of the expressive characteristics in writing has been a continuing theme in his work.

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<sup>4</sup>Britton, pp. 81-82.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-91.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

Another theorist in the field of writing, James Moffett, agrees with Britton about the importance of speech to the development of writing ability. Moffett says,

Most discourse, as a matter of fact, is dialogical--conversation. Reading and writing have an oral base which is another way of saying that monologue [writing] emerges from dialogue [speech]. And that is itself another dimension of growth. To take into account this progression from talk to print, from dialogue to monologue, I must pick up a point made at the outset--that we abstract for as well as from.<sup>7</sup>

Moffett defines discourse as "...any verbalizing of any phenomena, whether thought, spoken, or written, whether literary or non-literary." <sup>8</sup>

Therefore, Britton like Moffett, sees the expressive as the central mode of writing from which the transactional and the poetic modes evolve. He theorizes,

...it must be true that until a child does write expressively he is failing to feed into the writing process the fullness of his linguistic resources - the knowledge of words and structures he had built up in speech and that it will take him longer to arrive at the point where writing can serve a range of his purposes as broad and diverse as the purposes for which he uses speech.<sup>9</sup>

He adds further,

It must surely be the most accessible form in which to write, since family conversation will have provided him [the child] with a familiar model. Furthermore, a writer who envisages his reader as someone with whom he is on intimate terms must surely have very favorable conditions

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<sup>7</sup>James Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), p. 31.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Britton, p. 82.

for using the process of writing as a means of exploration and discovery.<sup>10</sup>

James Kinneavy affirms Britton's ideas when he says,

Since the expressive component of a discourse is, in effect, the personal stake of the speaker in the discourse, there is naturally an expressive component in any discourse....In fact, any discourse will have some dosage of the expressive; and conversely, discourse that is preponderantly expressive will also have some informative or persuasive or literary or scientific aspects.<sup>11</sup>

As stated earlier in Chapter I, Britton views expressive writing as "... a kind of matrix from which differentiated forms of mature writing are developed."<sup>12</sup> Figure 1 below represents Britton's ideas.

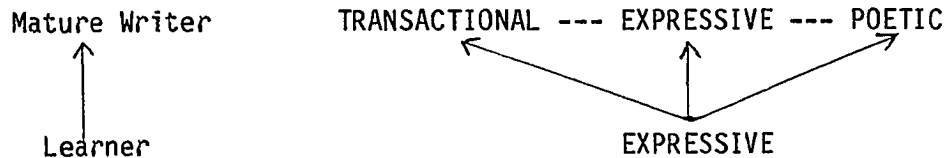


Fig. 1 Britton's Matrix for the development of the types of writing<sup>13</sup>

It could be said, then, that Britton considers the expressive thoughts of the writer as the wellspring of expressive writing. Expressive writing, in turn, then forms the base from which all other types of writing emanate.

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<sup>10</sup>Britton, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup>James L. Kinneavy, A Theory of Discourse (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 393.

<sup>12</sup>Britton, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Britton also believes that a firm background and much experience with expressive writing can affect the caliber of a written piece. He observes that "...the expressive and the communicative [i.e., transactional] are intimately related"<sup>14</sup> as to quality.

Britton takes the importance of expressiveness a step further, when (influenced by Sapir's language theory) he says that, not only is expressive writing the pivot of all writing, but there is even an expressive stage in all thinking whether the writing ends up being in the transactional or poetic modes. It is up to the writer to use these expressive beginnings to fashion his thought processes in order to produce a piece of writing.<sup>15</sup>

Other researchers, such as Marvin Klein, agree about the importance of expressive writing. Klein says that young children in the primary grades and beginning writers of all ages write best when they are allowed to write on a topic of their own choosing or when the topic is something within the purview of their daily experiences (both of which would be classified by Britton as expressive writing).<sup>16</sup>

Nancy Martin, who collaborated with Britton on some of his research and who has done some research independently, sees expressive writing as an

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<sup>14</sup>Britton, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>16</sup>Marvin L. Klein, "Teaching Writing in the Elementary Grades," Elementary School Journal 81 (May 1981): 324.

important tool in the schooling and learning process. To her, expressive writing is "...an important means of coming to grips with information and making sense of it."<sup>17</sup> For her, expressive writing provides

...a low-risk situation free of the demand for a polished and final-looking performance, and so will, like talk, be likely to display features of looseness and informality and communicate a personal response to the topic.<sup>18</sup>

The characteristic of personal response to the topic is what she feels engages the student in "committed inquiry" in which facts can be made relevant to the student's unique personal background.<sup>19</sup> For example, she provides the following as an expressive writing exercise. Instead of asking a student to write a Bolshevik political pamphlet, the teacher asks the student to jot down some ideas for such a pamphlet. It is acceptable in this way for the student to write down ideas that do not have to be completely organized into a coherent, finished product. Expressive writing allows the student to create as many ideas as possible without having to have them all fit in a unified piece. The emphasis is on the ideas produced, not on how they are presented. Expressive writing, in this sense, becomes prewriting: what writers do in preparation for writing to an audience beyond the self.

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<sup>17</sup>Nancy Martin et al., From Information to Understanding: What Children Do With New Ideas, (Glasgow: Robert MacLehose and Co., Ltd., 1973; reprint ed., London: Schools Council Publications, 1977) p. 26.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

Further Elaboration on Britton's Theories

The field of writing research is in a relatively early stage of development. Britton himself admits to having developed at the time of his major work, The Development of Writing Abilities, published in 1975, only a two-dimensional model including function and audience. However, he states that he realizes a writing model should be multi-dimensional, and, in fact, he and his staff have already undertaken enough investigation on other dimensions to be able to state that further expansion of the model is possible.<sup>20</sup>

Britton's two dimensions of function and audience include the following. Function, as stated earlier, is subdivided into three areas: the transactional, expressive, and poetic. The transactional is the type of writing that is used to accomplish a specific purpose. In Britton's own words, it "...is used...to record facts, exchange opinions, explain and explore ideas, construct theories; to transact business, conduct campaigns, change public opinion."<sup>21</sup> He further subdivides the transactional into the informative and the conative.

The informative is used to record and report, to classify and compare, to infer and deduct and hypothesize, to ask and answer questions, to assert, to explain, and to evaluate.... Its information may be used if the reader so chooses.

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<sup>20</sup>Britton, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

The conative, on the other hand is used to order, instruct, advise or persuade someone (though it does not follow that he should, in fact, carry out the instruction or be persuaded).... We have deliberately defined the conative as a fairly narrow category so that it will only include cases where an attempt to change someone's behaviour, attitude or opinion can be easily discerned.<sup>22</sup>

Expressive writing, another type of writing in Britton's categories of function, differs greatly from transactional writing. Whereas, transactional writing by its very nature is extremely structured, expressive writing is not. It is guided by spontaneous ideas and feelings of the writer. Other characteristics of expressive writing are that its language reveals the writer's self and that it often is not explicit, sometimes containing references and words that only the writer would be able to interpret.<sup>23</sup> Some examples of expressive writing provided by Britton are:

- a) The kind of writing that might be called "thinking aloud on paper". Intended for the writer's own use, it might be interpreted by a reader who had shared much of the earlier thinking, but it could not be understood by one who was not 'in the context'.
- b) The kind of diary entry that attempts to record and explore the writer's feelings, mood, opinions, preoccupations of the moment.
- c) Personal letters written to friends or relations for the purpose of maintaining contact with them (as a substitute, so to speak, for being with them). Where the writer deals with his own affairs and preoccupations, the letter may read very like the diary entry, and a close relationship with the reader is claimed or assumed by regarding him as a 'second self'. At other times, the writer may more actively invoke a close relationship with his reader, firstly by importing... references to shared experiences in highly implicit terms and, secondly, by implying strongly held shared opinions and values in the way he refers to people and events in general.

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<sup>22</sup>Britton, p. 94.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

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d) Writing addressed to a limited public audience assumed to share much of the writer's context and many of his values and opinions and interests (e.g. topical newspaper commentary in a conversational manner, some editorials, 'interest' articles in specialist journals, gossip columns).

e) Writing, intended to be read by a public audience, in which the writer chooses to approach his reader as though he were a personal friend, hence revealing much about himself by implication in the course of dealing with his topic (e.g. some autobiography).<sup>24</sup>

Britton's third and final function of writing is the poetic which includes poetry and other literary writing such as novels and short stories. He declares, "Poetic writing uses language as an art medium."<sup>25</sup> It has the following characteristics.

First, the writing is phonically arranged; however, the arrangement is more pronounced in a poem than it is in a novel. Second, the writer's feelings (which would be casually expressed in expressive writing), are arranged to create a discernable pattern. In the case of a narrative, the events mentioned form the pattern. Third, there is a pattern of ideas which adds a poetic dimension to the writer's thinking. Lastly, it can be said that poetic writing exists in and of itself without concern for whether or not it is achieving some purpose.<sup>26</sup> It is language raised to the

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<sup>24</sup>Britton, pp. 89-90.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 90-91.

level of art.

Britton considers audience to be an important dimension of a writing model because of its effect on the outcome of a piece of writing. One writes differently when one knows one's work will be read by a fellow student from when one knows it will be read by a judge in an essay contest.

Britton agrees with Mead that a characteristic of a mature writer

...is the growth of a sense of audience, the growth of the ability to make adjustments and choices in writing which take account of the audience for whom the writing is intended. This accommodation may be coarse or fine, highly calculated or totally intuitive, diffused through the text or explicit at particular points in it; but, whatever the form of its realization, a highly developed sense of audience must be one of the marks of the competent mature writer, for it is concerned with nothing less than the implementation of his concern to maintain or establish an appropriate relationship with his reader in order to achieve his full interest.<sup>27</sup>

Influenced by Dell Hymes, Britton includes in his model the conception of the influence of social relationships on audience. Just as one learns to communicate first with a few significant others and then gradually moves on to be able to communicate with a larger group, so too does Britton's model reflect a progression of developing competence in communicating with an audience that moves from the self all the way to an unknown audience.

His classifications of audience in the school context, which was the area of his study, are the following:

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<sup>27</sup>Britton, p. 58.

1. Self

Child (or adolescent) to self

2. Teacher

- 2.1 Child (or adolescent) to trusted adult
- 2.2 Pupil to teacher, general (teacher-learner dialogue)
- 2.3 Pupil to teacher, particular relationship
- 2.4 Pupil to examiner

3. Wider Audience (known)

- 3.1 [Child as] Expert to known laymen
- 3.2 Child (or adolescent) to peer group
- 3.3 Group member to working group (known audience which may include teacher)

4. Unknown audience

Writer to his readers (or his public)

5. Additional Categories

- 5.1 Virtual named audience
- 5.2 No discernible audience<sup>28</sup>

5.1 (Virtual named audience) Britton clarifies as being distinct from category 2 (teacher as audience) when the named audience is someone the child feels a personal relationship to, and therefore, the tone of the writing would be more intimate than if the piece had been written to the teacher as the audience.<sup>29</sup>

Britton's progression in his classifications of audience from self

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<sup>28</sup>Britton, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

to unknown audience is very significant. Britton has said in order to successfully meet an audience's needs, the writer "...must carry out a procedure of self-editing, of arresting, reorganizing and adjusting his message for his absent audience. He will be unable to do this unless he can internalize his audience."<sup>30</sup> Britton elaborates,

The individual must be able to call out in himself the responses which his gestures evoke from others. He begins by being able to internalize individuals and finally internalizes a 'generalized other' who speaks for society at large. This must be close to what the mature writer has to do when he addresses a public audience. We may say, then, that a writer's capacity to adjust to his audience is dependent on the degree to which he can internalize that audience.<sup>31</sup>

Mead very much agrees and even goes a step further, for he believes that the ability to internalize an audience is an essential part of all thinking. <sup>32</sup>

The significance of Britton's concept of audience is, however, that the progression from self to unknown audience underscores again the importance of the expressive function of writing. Only when the child (or adolescent) is able to be successful in representing his ideas to himself (the essence of expressive writing), will he be able to internalize his audience, and thus be able to become a mature writer able to accomplish all his aims in communicating with the desired audience.

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<sup>30</sup>Britton, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Mind, Self and Society, quoted in Britton, p. 62.

### The Early Stage of Writing Research

Researchers such as the aforementioned Emig, Britton, Martin, Perl and others clearly are pioneers in the field of writing research. As Kinneavy states,

The field of discourse is still in what Kuhn, a notable historian of science, has called the preparadigm period. That is, there has not yet been erected a comprehensive system of the discipline which has received some general acceptance and which would serve as a framework for research, further speculation, innovation even repudiation. Kuhn sketches the pattern of development of some other disciplines before the advent of a workable paradigm, and the sketch looks very much like a portrait of the field of composition at the present time.<sup>33</sup>

Kinneavy defines discourse as

...the full text (when feasible) of an oral or written situation; it does not denote necessarily a rational or logically coherent context; the discourse can be directed to any aim of language or refer to any kind of reality; it can be a poem, a conversation, a tragedy, a joke, a seminar discussion, a full-length history, a periodical article, an interview, a sermon, a TV ad.<sup>34</sup>

Kinneavy has defined the aims of discourse in four categories. These categories correspond to Britton's three functions of writing, although two of Kinneavy's aims are subsumed under one of Britton's functions. Kinneavy's aims are the expressive, referential, literary, and the persuasive.<sup>35</sup> The expressive corresponds to Britton's expressive. The

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<sup>33</sup>Kinneavy, pp. 2-3.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

referential and persuasive are what Britton combines under the heading of the transactional. The literary corresponds to Britton's poetic function.

Kinneavy comments that investigation of the expressive dimension of language is relatively new. While rhetoric and literary theory, for example, have been analyzed in detail, this has not been the case with expressive language and writing. Perhaps the expressive function will never be formally dissected into subcategories. For he says,

Given the individual character of expressive discourse, it might seem almost foolhardy to discuss any general organizational patterns. Benedetto Croce believes this to be true in an important sense: since each expression is a species to itself, expression cannot function as a genus.<sup>36</sup>

#### Related Research on the Process of Writing

##### Speech and Writing Compared

As much as Britton compares the similarities of speech with writing, particularly expressive writing, he agrees with Vygotsky that as many similarities as the two have, there are also many dissimilarities. Britton himself says,

Writing is rarely just a matter of transferring spoken words to written words, nor is it often accompanied by saying the words out loud. Typically, in writing, what is in our minds becomes words on the page without any audible articulation; we have to hear the words in the head. There are, therefore, very considerable differences between the processes of speaking and the processes of writing.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Kinneavy, p. 423.

<sup>37</sup>Britton, p. 19.

It is helpful to distinguish, as Vygotsky does, between two kinds of speech - inner and external. Vygotsky says,

Inner speech is not the interior aspect of external speech - it is a function in itself. It still remains, i.e. thought connected with words. But while in external speech thought is embodied in words, in inner speech words die as they bring forth thought. Inner speech is to a large extent thinking in pure meanings.<sup>38</sup>

Oral or external speech, Vygotsky feels, precedes inner speech. Inner speech precedes written speech or writing. So even though inner speech immediately precedes written speech, oral or external speech then would be the kind of speech that Britton compares to expressive writing. However, even using external speech as the basis for comparison, there are still many dissimilarities between speech and writing, as Britton would agree. According to Vygotsky, writing

...is a separate linguistic function, differing from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning. Even its minimal development requires a high level of abstraction....In learning to write, the child must disengage himself from the sensory aspect of speech and replace words by images of words. Speech that is merely imagined and that requires symbolization of the sound image in written signs naturally must be as much harder than oral speech for the child as algebra is harder than arithmetic.<sup>39</sup>

Vygotsky continues with the following:

Writing also requires deliberate analytical action on the part of the child. In speaking, he is hardly conscious of the sounds he pronounces

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<sup>38</sup>Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, Thought and Language, trans. and eds. Eugenia Haufmann and Gertrude Vakar (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1962; reprint ed., November 1962), p. 149.

<sup>39</sup>Vygotsky, pp. 98-99.

and quite unconscious of the mental operations he performs. In writing, he must take cognizance of the sound structure of each word, dissect it, and reproduce it in alphabetical symbols, which he must have studied and memorized before.<sup>40</sup>

Piaget's studies concerning the stages of child growth and development have validated what Vygotsky says about the child mastering speech before he understands the underlying rules and logic. Vygotsky writes, "The child learns relatively late the mental operations corresponding to the verbal forms he has been using for a long time."<sup>41</sup> Piaget would agree, since he has found that reasoning ability occurs only around age 11, the beginning of the stage of formal operations. Vygotsky further explains:

Communication in writing relies on the formal meanings of words and requires a much greater number of words than oral speech to convey the same idea. It is addressed to an absent person who rarely has in mind the same subject as the writer. Therefore, it must be fully deployed; syntactic differentiation is at a maximum; and expressions are used that would seem unnatural in conversation.<sup>42</sup>

Other researchers such as Anne Haas Dyson, while not disagreeing with Vygotsky, make the distinction in comparing speech and writing between adult or mature writing and young children's or beginners' writing. Certainly, the language of adult or mature writing and speech have similarities and dissimilarities; however, speech and the writing of young

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<sup>40</sup>Vygotsky, p. 99.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-47.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

children or of those who are just learning to write are remarkably alike.

Dyson describes it like this:

...children must represent their ideas in oral language which is then encoded into written language. Gradually the necessity for language as an intermediate step in writing disappears, and written language again directly represents meanings.<sup>43</sup>

Dyson's theories are based in part on detailed observation she undertook of kindergarten children during a three-month period. The children wrote at a writing center or area within their own classroom and had been asked to write according to their own definition of writing.

Dyson found that the children's first writing attempts were merely to label objects. This process involved a great deal of talk. However, a few students were aware that writing could do more than label objects, that it could also show meaning. This awareness was revealed when they attempted to write an entire sentence about a conversation on paper. For example, one student named Vivi did not just write flower while telling Dyson, "This flower's for you." Vivi tried to translate the entire sentence into written form.<sup>44</sup> Thus,

Talk provided both meaning and, for some children, the systematic means for getting that meaning on paper. Any thematic content of the written products often evolved in the talk preceding writing.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Anne Haas Dyson, "The Role of Oral Language in Early Writing Processes, Research in the Teaching of English 17 (February 1983):3.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

In summation, then, speech and writing have many similarities and dissimilarities. The degree of likenesses and differences depends largely upon linguistic maturity. Britton, however, while acknowledging the differences, is in the forefront of the group that emphasizes the importance of speech to writing. As Nancy Martin, a fellow researcher with Britton, who did subsequent research later with another project team, has written,

...if talk has a regular and valued place in the classroom and its agenda is wide open, and if the talking and writing are of the sort that enables the children to conduct their own unsystematic explorations without a fear of censure and to communicate what they most have to say when they want to say it; then the themes and ideas that, differently for different individuals, have a potential for calling up their deep concerns and interests and thereby motivating committed inquiry, stand a good chance of being hit upon frequently....<sup>46</sup>

#### Stages of Writing

Another main tenet of Britton's theories is that the writing process itself includes three phases: 1) conception 2) incubation and 3) production. During conception, the writer decides in a general way what he is going to write or what is included in an assigned topic, as is usually the case in a school situation. During incubation, the writer formulates his ideas as to how he will proceed in developing the piece of writing. In the school context, these two processes of necessity must often be abbreviated especially in a testing situation, but they are there nonetheless. Also,

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<sup>46</sup>Martin, p. 30.

he points out that these first two stages are not discrete entities that do not overlap. They are very fluid stages, and they do not end when the production of writing commences. To use Britton's exact words, "...the redefining, the planning and sorting are still going on."<sup>47</sup>

The third stage of writing--production--is a little more complex to describe. It is hard to describe because oral discussion of the process with the writer while a piece of writing is being produced is basically an interruption of the process, i.e., an artificial phenomenon. If this method is not used, however, the other methods that remain are a bit more removed from the writing act. They are to talk to the writer after a piece of writing has been completed or to make inferences about the process from the piece of writing.<sup>48</sup> The stage of the research, at the present time, however, is such that a definitive outline of the process of writing cannot be made, other than to say there are some generalized phases through which each writer must pass.

Donald Murray calls the phases prewriting, writing, and rewriting.<sup>49</sup> Britton, as we have seen, calls them conception, incubation, and production. Regardless of the terminology, the terms generally refer to the same phases. In the end, each individual will pass through the various stages

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<sup>47</sup>Britton, p. 26.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>49</sup>Donald M. Murray, Learning by Teaching (Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1982), p. 15.

in his own way, depending upon the type of writing task before him. As Murray likes to tell his students, "The student should know there is a basic process of writing, practiced by most writers, but ultimately he has to learn the process for himself."<sup>50</sup>

One aspect of the production stage that has received a lot of attention by researchers is the process of the writer scanning back or rereading phrases or words that have already been written. This procedure has been validated by several researchers, including Britton. His research team of four members used inkless ball-point pens to write on paper. Carbon paper had been placed between the top sheet and another piece of paper so what was written could be read later. The team found it nearly impossible to compose a poem or write anything of a theoretical or philosophical nature because of the inability to reread or scan back to what had already been written. They found more success with this technique in attempting to write a letter to a friend, tasks of a less complicated nature. It appears that scanning back over previously written work is necessary to help the writer to keep his thoughts organized and to keep the thread of his ideas progressing to a conclusion.<sup>51</sup>

Sondra Perl has written extensively on this process, which she calls "retrospective structuring."<sup>52</sup> She says the process occurs in one of three

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<sup>50</sup>Murray, p. 12.

<sup>51</sup>Britton, p. 35.

<sup>52</sup>Sondra Perl, "Understanding Composing," in The Writer's Mind - Writing as a Mode of Thinking, ed. Janice N. Hays, et al. (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1983), p. 48.

ways. First, she says the writer may reread a portion of his writing. It will depend on the individual whether what is reread is a phrase, a sentence, or a unit of thought.

Second, the writer may return to a key word related to the topic or to the topic itself as a way to end a temporary block of ideas. Sometimes in this process the writer may even change the wording of the topic to better apply to what has been written, but more often he will change what he has written to comply with the implications of the topic.<sup>53</sup>

Third, the writer may call upon his "felt sense" about the piece of writing. The term was coined by Eugene Gendlin, a philosopher at the University of Chicago. What it means is that the writer

...draws on sense experience, and it can be observed if one pays close attention to what happens when writers pause and seem to listen or otherwise react to what is inside of them. The move occurs inside the writer, to what is physically felt.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, he is calling upon his felt sense about the writing. As mentioned earlier, these three aspects of scanning back over what has been written has been called by Perl retrospective structuring. In her words, "It is retrospective in that it begins with what is already there, inchoately, and brings whatever is there forward by using language in structured form."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Perl, p. 45.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

Perl sees the other half of the writing process as the writer's attempt to meet the needs of his reader or audience, which is to have before them an intelligible, interesting piece of work to read. She calls this "projective structuring."<sup>56</sup> So, in essence, the writing process is a balancing act in which the writer strives to do two things: 1) communicate his thoughts and ideas and 2) at the same time, make his writing understandable to an audience. Britton agrees and says, "In holding the balance between these two forces, he [the writer] learns a great variety of roles and strategies, and these must very largely be worked out anew for each new kind of task."<sup>57</sup>

Perl's definition of retrospective structuring, however, could be considered to be a synoptic, mini-definition of the entire process of composing. The writer starts with an idea not completely defined and develops it into a finished piece. Sometimes, along the way the writer even learns from the experience. Perl comments,

In writing, meaning is crafted and constructed. It involves us in a process of coming-into-being. Once we have worked at shaping, through language, what is there inchoately, we can look at what we have written to see if it adequately captures what we intended, often at this moment discovery occurs. We see something new in our writing that comes upon us as a surprise. We see in our words a further structuring of the sense we began with, and we recognize that in those words we have discovered something new about ourselves and our topic. Thus, when we are successful at this process, we end up with a product that teaches us something, that clarifies what we know (or what we knew at one point only implicitly), and that lifts out or explicates or enlarges our

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<sup>56</sup>Perl, p. 50.

<sup>57</sup>Britton, p. 47.

experience. In this way, writing leads to discovery.<sup>58</sup>

Other writers, such as Murray, agree with Perl. Murray feels that an inexperienced writer or reader may look at a piece of writing and think that the author had an idea and then simply wrote it down. On the contrary, an experienced writer or reader, he says, knows the arduous journey of discovery that the author has taken with many twists and turns along the way to arrive at a finished product.<sup>59</sup> He comments further,

Writing is an act of recording or communicating and much more. Writing is a significant kind of thinking in which the symbols of language assume a purpose of their own and instruct the writer during the composing process.<sup>60</sup>

The English poet and novelist C. Day Lewis agrees with Perl and Murray when he says,

I do not sit down at my desk to put into verse something that is already clear in my mind. If it were clear in my mind, I should have no incentive or need to write about it, for I am an explorer....We do not write in order to be understood, we write in order to understand.<sup>61</sup>

Britton interprets the above authors by saying that in the writing process there is an interaction of language and thought. One influences the other in the writing process. He says,

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<sup>58</sup>Perl, p. 48-49.

<sup>59</sup>Murray, p. 10.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>61</sup>C. Day-Lewis quoted in Murray, p. 4

It is true that a writer may not completely know what he thinks until it is fully formulated in words, but it is also true that he can tell when the words he has used have not achieved the embodiment of his thoughts sufficiently to provide the satisfaction he must feel before he is prepared to let the completed writing go to the reader.<sup>62</sup>

However, in the final analysis, writing is a very idiosyncratic skill. Certain school tasks such as summary-writing or description can, for the most part, be taught. He comments further,

But the part that can be taught may be very small and is possibly trivial in relation to the task as a whole. A writer draws on the whole store of his experience, and his whole social being, so that in the act of writing he imposes his own individuality.... No two people can ever write exactly alike.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps, however, the uniqueness of the process for each individual is what makes the field of writing such a challenging one to study.

### Summary

The field of writing, then, is a complex one with a host of dimensions. Only recently have theorists such as Emig, Moffett, Martin, Perl, Murray, and Britton begun to systematically explore it in terms of research. This is especially true of the expressive dimension of writing, the focus of this dissertation.

Britton, on whose ideas this study is based, has addressed in his

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<sup>62</sup>Britton, p. 47.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

investigations a wide range of topics concerning writing. He has been one of the first theorists to stress the importance of speech (including inner and external) to the development of expressive writing and other types of writing as well. His theories in regard to function which includes the three types of writing -- expressive, transactional, and poetic -- and in regard to audience have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the writing process. However, by Britton's own admission, much more study needs to be done. His two-dimensional model, including function and audience, is capable of expansion to encompass other dimensions, and he has already begun investigation toward accomplishing that goal.

Finally, Britton has postulated ideas about three phases of the writing process which would apply to all types of writing. They are conception, incubation, and production. Others agree with Britton, such as Murray and Perl, although sometimes they discuss the subject using different terminology. All would agree, however, that during the writing experience, the writer -- as well as the piece of writing being constructed -- is undergoing a process of evolution toward imparting the meaning he intends to the work he is composing. Perhaps no two people will ever go about this process in precisely the same way, but all must pass through various phases.

It is evident, then, that Britton has made enormous contributions to the field of writing. His theories are supported by data he has gathered, and he has stimulated further study by others interested in validating his

ideas. Such is the case with this study, which is an inquiry into the influence of expressive writing practice on the transactional writing abilities of selected fourth grade students.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Overview of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the design of this research study. It is the posttest - only control - group design with matching. It utilizes intact groups to form both the treatment and control groups, and it utilizes a posttest measure. Fourth grade student subjects of the treatment group were matched with fourth grade student subjects of the control group in order to calculate t-tests for matched groups at the conclusion of the study. The data were then used to determine the degree to which the study's two hypotheses are true.

The study consisted of a treatment group receiving intensive practice with expressive writing over the course of one semester, while the control group did not. A posttest was administered, which involved the students having to write an essay on a transactional topic. The essays were then rated by three experts for the presence of three expressive characteristics in order to determine the influence of expressive writing practice on the transactional writing abilities of selected fourth grade students. At the end of the chapter, the procedures are discussed that

were used to safeguard the rights of the student subjects who participated in the study.

### Hypotheses

The experiment that was conducted to test Britton's ideas involved a total of twenty-six fourth grade gifted and talented students at two different schools within the Chesapeake Public Schools, Chesapeake, Virginia. (Hereinafter, the gifted and talented students are referred to as GATE students. GATE is an acronym for Gifted and Talented Education.) GATE students were selected to be the subjects because test data for matching purposes was available on them that could be used in statistical formulas at the conclusion of the study. Fourteen GATE students at Georgetown Elementary comprised the treatment group, and twelve GATE students at Norfolk Highlands Elementary comprised the control group.

It was hypothesized that 1) characteristics of expressive writing would be found in the final writing samples on a transactional topic of both the treatment and the control groups. As stated earlier in Chapter I, it is Britton's theory that good writing of all kinds tends to have an expressive dimension, a dimension in which the writer's voice -- feelings and opinions -- is present.<sup>1</sup> The treatment group received 3x weekly practice with expressive writing over a semester's length (approximately sixteen weeks) while the control group had almost no practice with expressive

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<sup>1</sup>James Britton et. al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18), (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975; reprint ed., London: Schools Council Publications, 1979), p. 83.

writing. 2) It was also hypothesized that the treatment group would have significantly more characteristics of expressive writing in their transactional writing than the control group would have.

In addition, the transactional writing samples of both the treatment and the control groups were holistically scored on a scale of 1-4 (4 being a high score) by a trio of professional raters for an overall qualitative rating to determine whether there was a significant qualitative difference between the two groups. No hypothesis with regard to the overall qualitative rating was presented, since there were too many uncontrolled variables in this research setting (which are discussed in Chapter V) to be able to attribute success or lack of success of one of the groups to teaching method or writing experience only. However, this researcher did treat the holistic ratings of the writing samples as scores and used them in a t-test for matched groups in order to produce some information from which to discuss Britton's belief that there is a relationship between practice with expressive writing and writing quality.

### Research Design

The form of this research experiment is the posttest -- only control group design with matching. It utilizes intact groups to form both the treatment and control groups, and it utilizes a posttest measure. GATE placement measures used by the Chesapeake Public Schools are used to match the student subjects of the treatment group with those from the control group in order to calculate t-tests for matched groups. This design appears as follows:

x 0 1	x	=	intervention
- - - -	- - -	=	non-random assignment of group with matching
0 2	0	=	observation or test measure

This design was selected because it is the most robust design available which is also suitable for gathering information concerning the aforementioned hypotheses. Random assignment was not possible because this researcher, as would be the case with most researchers using an actual school setting, did not have the power to assign students to groups. However, the lack of random assignment as a design feature is mitigated by matching subjects which permit a special t-test, the t-test for matched groups, to be used. A posttest only measure rather than a pretest/posttest measure was chosen because other data were available, such as a group IQ score for each student, to provide pre-data about the similarity or dissimilarity of the groups. It was, therefore, not necessary to have two sets of essays to rate.

Both the treatment and control groups composed of GATE students were administered a writing sample on a transactional topic as a posttest. The topic for each group was the same. The writing samples of both groups were then evaluated by three professional raters for the presence of these characteristics of expressive writing: a) use of the first person, b) expression of values, and c) the self-revealing tone of the piece. The raters tallied the number of characteristics found, and this researcher, via the t-test for matched groups, then was able to determine the statistical difference between the two groups.

The definition of the expressive characteristics are the following:

- a) use of the first person - Raters counted how many times the student writers used the words I, me, my, or mine - any words that denoted first person.
- b) expression of values - Raters counted how many times the student writers made a statement indicating his/her opinions, attitudes, or feelings. Supporting data of why an opinion, attitude, or feeling was held were not counted as one of the statements.
- c) self-revealing tone of the piece - Raters scored the pieces of student writing using a Likert scale of 1-4 on the basis of whether the piece was not self-revealing, a score of 1, all the way to a high score of 4 if the piece was very self-revealing.

Rating expression of values and self-revealing tone of the piece were somewhat subjective tasks. Therefore, the raters received specific guidelines on how to score these items. While it was not possible for all three raters to sit down together and practice rating a few sample essays so that inter-rater reliability could be calculated, each was in the Norfolk area during the summer of 1985 when the actual rating was done, and the researcher and dissertation chairperson were available to clarify their

questions. The three raters were: 1) Janet Miller, Associate Professor of Education and Human Services, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York, 2) Collett Dilworth, Associate Professor of English, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, and 3) Joseph Milner, Chairman, Department of Education, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

In most cases, there was agreement among the raters on the scoring. However, in those cases where two of the raters agreed, or where all three had rated an item differently, their three scores were averaged together to yield one score for the item in question. These scores were then used to determine the degree of significance between the treatment and control groups via the t-test for matched groups. Students were matched on the basis of group IQ scores from the Cognitive Abilities Test, scores on the Welsh Figure Preference Test, and an adjective checklist -- all criteria used in placement in the GATE program by the Chesapeake Public Schools.

The writing samples also were given a holistic rating of 1-4 (with 4 being the highest score) by the three professional raters to obtain an overall qualitative rating of the writing of the two groups. The data gathered, while not connected with a formal hypothesis, were analyzed via the t-test for matched groups to try to determine whether or not there is a relationship between practice with expressive writing and writing quality. Once again, where lack of agreement among the raters occurred, their ratings were averaged together to yield one score for the item in

question.

Additional information was gained through the administration of a questionnaire to the teachers and students of both the treatment and the control groups before the start of the treatment conditions. This was done to provide information concerning their level of enjoyment of the tasks of writing, previous experience with writing, what types of writing are preferred, and how the task of writing is approached or begun by each. The two teachers also kept a log of the writing assignments made during the course of the experiment. This enabled the researcher to check whether or not instructions were being followed as to the type of writing to which each group was to be exposed. Statistical data set forth in Chapter IV will be interpreted in light of the information gained from the questionnaires and the logs.

#### Methods of Gathering Data

The primary means of gathering data were: 1) administering a questionnaire to both teachers and students in the treatment and control groups before the start of the project, 2) having the teachers of both the treatment and control groups keep a log of the actual writing assignments that were given to their students during the course of the project, 3) administering the posttest writing sample to both the treatment and control groups, 4) rating the posttest transactional writing sample of both the treatment and control groups for the presence of expressive characteristics, and 5) obtaining the scores (group IQ, creativity, and

adjective checklist) of each of the GATE students in both the treatment and control groups so that student subjects in both groups could be matched with one another for purposes of calculating the t-test for matched groups.

Data Method 1 - Questionnaire - Two questionnaires were designed: one for the two teachers involved in the study and one for both sets of students. While the questions were similar for both questionnaires, each was tailored specifically to apply to the particular characteristics of these two different groups -- teacher and student. The questionnaires were administered to teachers and students in late January before the start of the treatment conditions. As stated earlier, the purpose of the questionnaires (with eleven questions for teachers/thirteen for students) was to gather some information concerning level of enjoyment of the task of writing, previous experience with writing, what types of writing are preferred by the participants of the study, and how the task of writing is approached or begun by each. This information is to be used in interpreting the statistical data yielded in the study by either strengthening or by qualifying the results found. A copy of the teacher questionnaire and a copy of the student questionnaire appear in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Data Method 2 - Log - Each of the two GATE teachers involved in this reasearch kept a log of the types of writing activities their students performed throughout the duration of the project, approximately one

semester beginning at the end of January and ending in late May. The log served as a check for the researcher so that she could be sure that the teacher of the treatment group did engage in sufficient expressive writing exercises (3 times per week) and that the teacher of the control group primarily dealt with other types of writing. In the log was recorded exactly what writing assignments were given, length of time allotted to complete the assignment, and the date of the assignment.

Data Method 3 - Writing Sample - The assignment that was made to both the treatment and the control group as the post-test or final writing sample was the following transactional topic. Students were given one-half hour to complete the task.

Write an essay, one-half to a full page, telling your teacher what this poem means.

The Coin

By Sara Teasdale

Into my heart's treasury  
I slipped a coin  
That time cannot take  
Nor thief purloin,\*  
Oh, better than the minting  
of a gold-crowned king  
Is the safe-kept memory  
Of a lovely thing.<sup>2</sup>

\*steal (explanation provided by researcher to student subjects)

Data Method 4 - Rating Writing Sample - The final writing sample or post-test on a transactional topic was administered to both the treat-

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<sup>2</sup>Blanche Jennings Thompson, ed., Silver Pennies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), p. 67.

ment and control groups. To test the hypothesis 1) that expressive characteristics are found in the writing of both groups and 2) that the treatment group will possess significantly more expressive characteristics in their writing, it was decided to define expressive characteristics as use of the first person, expression of values, and self-revealing tone of the piece, all of which have been defined in the research design section of this chapter. In this way, the expressive characteristics could be quantified and tallied to figure into a t-test formula for matched groups to determine whether or not there is a significant difference between the treatment and control groups. Details on how the professional raters actually scored the writing samples are also included in the research design section of this chapter.

#### Data Method 5 - Obtaining GATE Scores And Matching Student Subjects-

The researcher obtained the scores of the participant GATE students in the treatment and control groups so that they could be matched with one another for purposes of determining significance of the hypotheses via a t-test for correlated or matched data. Subjects were not able to be randomly assigned in this study. Therefore, it was felt that matching students according to certain criteria would be the best way to equalize the two groups so that the effect of the experimental treatment could be analyzed.

GATE students were selected for this study because they represent an identifiable population of individuals who are comparable to one another without additional testing. All GATE students in grades 4-6 in the public

schools of the City of Chesapeake have been tested with a group IQ test (the Cognitive Abilities Test) and a test of creativity (the Welsh Figure Preference Test). Teacher ratings of students on an adjective checklist are also considered for placement.

Generally, all those that are accepted into the Chesapeake Public Schools' GATE programs have an IQ of 120 or more. Thus, this population was appropriate for a study such as this, where two groups as similar as possible were desired to form the treatment and control groups. The two schools selected -- Georgetown Elementary (the treatment group) and Norfolk Highlands Elementary (the control group) -- were chosen because they have roughly the same numbers of GATE students and because the staff at each school consented to participate in the study.

Three data measures -- a group IQ, an adjective checklist, and the Welsh Figure Preference Test -- were used, then, to match the fourteen subjects of the treatment group with the twelve subjects of the control group. These data measures were selected because the things they attempt to measure -- intelligence, personality, and creativity -- are qualities related to writing ability. As Lee Odell, Charles Cooper, and Cynthia Courts have written, "The cognitive process of composing are complex and not directly observable. Consequently, we must study them in ways that generate data from which we can make strong inferences about the processes."<sup>3</sup> We will probably never know all the factors that influence an

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<sup>3</sup>Lee Odell, Charles R. Cooper, and Cynthia Courts, "Discourse Theory: Implications for Research in Composing," in Research on Composing, eds. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1978), p. 7.

individual in the writing process, but most people would agree that these three factors -- intelligence, personality, and creativity -- influence the writing process. Hence, they are excellent variables on which to match students.

The three measures were used separately to form three sets of matched pairs in order to compute a correlated or matched t-value for significance with regard to the following: 1) the holistic ratings of the posttest, 2) use of the first person in the posttest, 3) expression of values in the posttest, and 4) self-revealing tone of the posttest. When IQ was used as the basis of matching, ten pairs of subjects were yielded. When the adjective checklist was used, seven pairs of subjects were yielded. When the Welsh Figure Preference Test was used, eleven pairs of subjects were yielded. The t-values computed for each matching group with regard to the four areas of significance in question in this research study will be reported in a table and discussed in Chapter IV.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

This research study conforms to guidelines established by Old Dominion University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB). Approval for the study was given in May 1984 by the chairperson for the School of Education's Committee on Human Subjects, Roger A. Johnson, Ph.D. A copy of the approval letter appears in Appendix C.

The IRB based its decision on the following information which was submitted to it along with the researcher's dissertation proposal.

1) The subjects participating in this study -- fourth grade gifted and talented (GATE) students -- will not know they are participating in a research study. This researcher does not feel the subjects need to know of the study, since their participation requires only the writing of essays and other literary forms that normally are required in the course of one semester. To inform them of the project would likely cause them to perform in a way other than they normally would.

2) The required tasks -- a posttest for both groups and, for the treatment group, the production of writing pieces in which feelings and opinions are expressed -- are not experiences unusual for students this age. In fact, the teacher of the treatment group has already been doing many of the things that she will repeat for this study in the course of her job as a teacher of fourth grade in the Chesapeake Public Schools.

3) There are no risks to the students participating in this study. The raters will not know from which group the writing samples came. Results of the study will not name particular students. Instead, data will be reported in terms of the group -- the treatment and the control.

Permission was granted by ODU's IRB in May 1984. The actual study was begun January 28, 1985 and concluded May 28, 1985. As a result of this study, this researcher hoped to gain more knowledge about the writing process: to be specific, about whether or not one type of writing

(transactional) has characteristics of expressive writing and whether practice with expressive writing will positively affect one's transactional writing. If it is the case that expressive writing is shown to have a relationship to transactional writing -- the type of writing in which most of us as adults engage -- it would have important implications for how writing in the future should be taught.

### Summary

This chapter discussed the design of this research study. It is the posttest - only control group design with matching. It utilizes intact groups to form both the treatment and control groups, and it utilizes a posttest measure. Fourth grade student subjects of the treatment group were matched with fourth grade student subjects from the control group in order to calculate t-tests for matched groups at the conclusion of the study. The data were then used to determine the degree to which the study's two hypotheses are true.

The study consisted of a treatment group receiving intensive practice with expressive writing over the course of one semester while the control group did not. A posttest was administered which involved the students having to write an essay on a transactional topic. The essays were then rated by three experts for the presence of three expressive characteristics in order to determine the influence of expressive writing practice on the transactional writing abilities of selected fourth grade

students. At the end of the chapter, the procedures were discussed that were used to safeguard the rights of the student subjects who participated in the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Overview of the Chapter

This chapter discusses the five major aspects of data collection involved in this research study. They are: 1) administering a questionnaire to teachers and students of both the treatment and control groups before the project began, 2) having each teacher keep a log of the writing assignments made to each group, 3) administering a writing sample on a transactional topic as a posttest to both the treatment and control groups, 4) having the writing samples scored by three professional or expert raters, and 5) obtaining the scores on GATE placement measures of the student subjects and matching them for purposes of calculating t-tests for matched groups. Each will be discussed in detail below.

The data gathered from the t-tests for matched groups are displayed in a table. This allows for ease of interpreting the results found. The data yielded are related to the two hypotheses of the study which are: 1) that characteristics of expressive writing will be found in the posttest transactional writing samples of both groups and 2) that the treatment group will have significantly more expressive characteristics in their

transactional writing than did the control group. At the end of the chapter, the external and internal validity threats which apply to this study are also presented.

### Questionnaires

#### Teacher Questionnaires

The teacher questionnaire revealed similarities and dissimilarities between the teachers of the treatment and control groups. Similarities were as follows:

1. Both enjoy writing.
2. Both feel confident in all areas of writing and both feel comfortable in teaching all kinds of writing, including writing about feelings and emotions, essays, and short stories. In Britton's terms, both feel confident about teaching expressive, transactional, and poetic types of writing.
3. Both occasionally attempt the writing assignment that has been given to their students.
4. Both utilize all the prewriting activities which include outlining, brainstorming, and jotting down ideas in teaching their students how to write.
5. In the creation of the written piece, both guide their students to structure and organize their writing.

6. Both provide time for the revision process to be an integral part of writing instruction.

7. Lastly, both grade holistically for creative writing, and analytically (for spelling and mechanical errors) for other work such as subject area assignments.

The questionnaire revealed three key differences between the two:

1. The teacher of the treatment group has had more extensive writing training than the teacher of the control group. The treatment teacher has attended two workshops on the teaching of writing. The workshops were sponsored by area universities. The control teacher has had only writing inservice training provided in a brief session at the school where she teaches.
2. The treatment teacher teaches her students how to edit each other's work and provides time for peer editing while the control teacher does not.
3. In the semester preceding the experiments, the treatment teacher engaged her students in the act of writing two-four times per week for at least fifteen minutes and sometimes as much as thirty minutes each session. The control teacher, on the other hand, only involved her students in the act of writing once per week in the semester preceding the experiment.

### Student Questionnaires

The student questionnaires did not reveal vast dissimilarities between the fourteen students of the treatment group and the thirteen students of the control group. There were thirteen control student questionnaires and only twelve control student, posttest writing samples because one control student moved mid-way during the experiment. The data on the additional control student's questionnaire will be involved in this analysis. The data are presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE I

#### RESULTS OF STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

	<u>Treatment</u>	<u>Control</u>
Question #1 - Do you like to write:	11 - yes 3 - no	10 - yes 3 - no
Question #2 - Do you write on your own, for instance, when no assignment is given by a teacher?	6 - yes 3 - no 5 - sometimes	7 - yes 4 - no 2 - sometimes
Question #3 - Do you keep a diary or journal?	7 - yes 7 - no	4 - yes 9 - no
Question #4 - In what grade were you first given the chance to write a story of your own choice?	4 - first grade 10 - second or third grade	9 - Kindergarten or first grade 4 - second or third grade
Question #5 - Last semester, how many times each week and for how long did one of your teachers give you	Neither groups' answers coincided with their respective teachers' answers. Both groups cited considerably less time than did	

writing experience, not their teachers.  
including answering  
science or social studies  
textbook questions?

Question #6 - Does your GATE teacher ever try herself to write the writing assignments?  
3 - yes  
8 - no  
3 - sometimes  
5 - yes  
3 - no  
5 - sometimes

Question #7 - Do you feel your GATE teacher enjoys writing?  
12 - yes  
2 - no  
9 - yes  
4 - no

Here student perceptions matched teacher perceptions. One student from the treatment group commented, "She sometimes smiles after she checks someone's writing," as evidence of her teacher's enjoyment.

	<u>Treatment</u>	<u>Control</u>
Question #8 - Do your parents encourage you to write?	10 - yes 2 - no 2 - sometimes	8 - yes 2 - no 3 - sometimes
Question #9 - Do your parents do much writing?	8 - yes 6 - no	10 - yes 3 - no
Question #10 - If your parents do write, what kind of writing do they do?	Both groups cited very basic types of writing activities such as writing notes, paying bills, and writing for their jobs which would all be classified as transactional writing. The only type of expressive writing listed by both groups was letter writing.	
Question #11 - When you write, do you begin to write right away or do you think a while and make notes about what you are going to write?	4 - right away 10 - think and make notes first	3 - right away 10 - think and make notes first
Question #12 - What kind of writing do you enjoy most - essays, letters,	Students from both groups cited in almost equal numbers the following as their preferred type	

editorials, journal  
writing, poetry,  
novels, etc.?

of writing: letters, essays,  
poetry, stories, and journal  
writing.

Question #13 - How do you feel about yourself as a writer, confident, afraid?	11 - confident	9 - confident
	1 - afraid	3 - afraid
	2 - both con- fident and afraid	1 - both confi- dent and afraid

Some of the students' comments are as follows:

A student from the control group explained why he felt confident by saying, "Some people that are older than me can't read or write." A student from the treatment group explained why she felt both confident and afraid during the writing process. She wrote, "At the start scared, but more confident as writing goes on."

### Teacher Logs

The teacher of the treatment group and the teacher of the control group kept a log of the writing activities in which they engaged their respective students during the course of the study from January 28, 1985 until May 28, 1985. This task comprised actually sixteen weeks, since students did not attend school for one week because of spring holidays. Included in the log were the date the assignment was given, length of time allotted to complete the assignment, and a description of the assignment.

### The Treatment Teacher

The teacher of the treatment group spent approximately ninety to one hundred minutes per week on expressive writing activities. This practice

was verified by a review of her log. She assigned only expressive writing topics as she was directed to do, excluding the minimal transactional writing required by the reading series. Approximately twenty percent of all the questions that students must answer in the fourth grade level book of the reading series require a written response of at least a paragraph in length. Half of the twenty percent are of a transactional nature.

The teacher of the treatment group conducted these activities during the students' reading/language arts period. At that school, Georgetown Elementary, students change classes and have three different teachers for 1) reading/language arts, 2) mathematics, and 3) social studies/science. The mathematics and social studies/science teachers were given no special instructions and continued with their usual activities. Most teachers in those subject areas utilize, by and large, only transactional writing at this age level. Ten percent of the questions in the fourth grade science text require a response of at least a paragraph in length and all ten percent would be classified as transactional writing. Three-fourths of the twenty percent of social studies textbook questions that require a response of at least a paragraph in length would be classified as transactional writing.

The treatment group spent approximately ten minutes per day in keeping a journal. In addition, twice a week the group was given a topic to write about for twenty to twenty-five minutes each session. Therefore, the treatment group received much practice with writing in the expressive mode. Three such assignments were as follows:

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February 19, 1985 - You drink a potion that makes you one inch tall. Now you can ...

February 22, 1985 - Your teacher arrives in class wearing roller skates. You know today is going to be different ...

April 10, 1985 - Pretend you are a scientist and you have just created a new and unique animal. Describe the way it lives its life, the way it looks, and any other characteristics it might have. What valuable lesson could your animal teach to people?

### The Control Teacher

The control teacher, on the other hand, was responsible for teaching the control students all subject areas except mathematics. Students at the control school, Norfolk Highlands Elementary, change classes only for mathematics. Therefore, she was instructed to avoid all expressive writing for the semester of the experiment, except for what might be required from subject area texts, normally very little at this age level. Approximately half of the twenty percent of reading textbook questions requiring a response of at least a paragraph in length are of an expressive nature. Some examples of expressive writing assignments in the reading text are the following. They are taken from a story about a dancer named Arthur Mitchell.

- D. Why do you think dancing with the New York City Ballet was so important to Arthur Mitchell?
- E. In order to help others dance, Arthur Mitchell gave up his own dancing career. Do you think his decision was a wise one? Explain why you think as you do.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William K. Durr et al., Gateways (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), p. 429.

The science text requires no expressive writing, while one-fourth of the twenty percent of social studies text questions that require a response of at least a paragraph in length would be classified as expressive writing.

In examining the log of the control teacher, this researcher found that she did precisely as she was instructed. She devoted approximately ninety minutes per week to some transactional writing activity, such as discussion of a topic and brainstorming, preparing a first draft, and preparing a second draft. She did this in three thirty-minute sessions per week for the duration of the experiment. Therefore, the control group received approximately as much writing practice as did the treatment group. However, the type of writing done by the control group was transactional writing, and the type of writing done by the treatment group was expressive writing.

The control teacher chose to have her students do most of their writing during the social studies/science period of the day. She transformed many of the discussion and short-answer questions in the social studies and science texts into writing assignments of at least a paragraph in length. A typical week's assignments are the following:

May 1, 1985 - Background information on George Mason was presented. Students brainstormed for writing ideas from information in their texts on p. 107.

May 2, 1985 - In a brief paragraph, explain what George Mason's contributions to the history of our country were.

May 3, 1985 - Find the section in the newspaper called the "Editorial Page" and describe in a brief paragraph how an editorial is different from the articles in the rest of the paper.

Results of Rating the Writing Sample  
and the Statistical Tests of Significance

As stated earlier in Chapter III, students in both the treatment and control groups were administered a posttest writing sample on a transactional topic at the conclusion of the study. The samples were then scored by three professional raters for the presence of three expressive characteristics: 1) use of the first person, 2) expression of values, and 3) self-revealing tone of the piece. The raters also holistically graded each sample, giving each an overall qualitative rating. The information yielded was used to determine whether the two hypotheses postulated were correct. Hypothesis #1 is that characteristics of expressive writing would be found in the final writing samples on a transactional topic of both the treatment and control groups. Hypothesis #2 is that the treatment group would have significantly more characteristics of expressive writing in their transactional writing than the control group. The holistic quality rating data were collected in order to investigate one of Britton's premises that practice with expressive writing will improve other types of writing, such as the transactional (which was tested here.)

With this data, the researcher was able to calculate t-tests of significance which appear in the following table. A t-test for matched groups was used, since subjects from the treatment and the control groups were matched with each other. The purpose of the matching was to eliminate certain potential interfering variables on the effect of the experimental treatment, since intact groups in an actual school setting were

used. Thus, experimental randomization was not possible.

Three data measures - group IQ, adjective checklist, and Welsh Figure Preference Test - were used, then, to match the fourteen subjects of the treatment group with the twelve subjects of the control group. The three measures were used separately to form three sets of matched pairs in order to compute a correlated or matched t-value for significance with regard to 1) use of the first person in the posttest, 2) expression of values in the posttest, 3) self-revealing tone of the posttest, and 4) the holistic ratings of the posttest. When IQ was used as the basis of matching, ten pairs of subjects were yielded. When the adjective checklist was used, seven pairs of subjects were yielded. When the Welsh Figure Preference Test was used, eleven pairs of subjects were yielded. Table 2 reveals the t-values computed for each expressive characteristic and for the holistic rating.

TABLE 2

STATISTICAL DATA REGARDING HYPOTHESES

<u>Expressive Characteristic - Use of the First Person</u>			
	<u>Treatment</u>	<u>Control</u>	<u>t-value</u> <u>(1-tailed test)</u>
Welsh Match	- Mean	.27	.33
	- Standard Dev.	.67	
	- N (size of group)	11	
Adjective Checklist Match	- Mean	.29	0
	- Standard Dev.	.54	
	- N (size of group)	7	

IQ Match	- Mean	.63	.3	1.22
	- Standard Dev.	1.22	.55	
	- N (size of group)	10	10	

Expressive Characteristic - Expression of Values

		<u>Treatment</u>	<u>Control</u>	<u>t-value</u> (1-tailed test)
Welsh Match	- Mean	.78	.65	
	- Standard Dev.	.85	.88	.65
	- N (size of group)	11	11	
Adjective Checklist Match	- Mean	.76	.62	
	- Standard Dev.	.81	.804	.639
	- N (size of group)	7	7	
IQ Match	- Mean	.795	.597	
	- Standard Dev.	.88	.8	.83
	- N (size of group)	10	10	

Expressive Characteristic - Self-Revealing Tone

		<u>Treatment</u>	<u>Control</u>	<u>t-value</u> (1-tailed test)
Welsh Match	- Mean	1.42	1.24	
	- Standard Dev.	1.52	1.3	.8
	- N (size of group)	11	11	
Adjective Checklist Match	- Mean	1.33	1.3314	
	- Standard Dev.	1.389	1.378	.01
	- N (size of group)	7	7	
IQ Match	- Mean	1.63	1.3	
	- Standard Dev.	1.7	1.35	*1.435 p .10
	- N (size of group)	10	10	

Holistic Rating

		<u>Treatment</u>	<u>Control</u>	<u>t-value</u> (2-tailed test)
Welsh Match	- Mean	2.38	1.97	
	- Standard Dev.	2.44	2.05	*1.67 p .20
	- N (size of group)	11	11	

Adjective	- Mean	2.4	2.114	
Checklist	- Standard Dev.	2.5	2.18	.77
Match	- N (size of group)	7	7	
	- Mean	2.49	2.07	
IQ Match	- Standard Dev.	2.54	2.13	*1.615 p .20
	- N (size of group)	10	10	

\*indicates statistical significance

A one-tailed test was utilized for determining significance for each of the three expressive characteristics because prior to the beginning of the experiment a prediction was made that there would be a significant difference between the treatment and control groups on each of these characteristics. A two-tailed test was utilized for determining significance with regard to the holistic rating because no prediction as to significance was made prior to the onset of the experiment.

The only expressive characteristic in which significance between the treatment and the control group was found was self-revealing tone when matched on the basis of IQ. Its t-value was 1.435 with the level of significance being at the .10 level. IQ appeared to be the best and most accurate basis on which to match as it produced the highest statistical differences between the treatment and the control group for the other two expressive characteristics as well. The expressive characteristic of use of the first person using IQ as the basis of matching was nearly significant for the treatment group at the .10 level. Its t-value was 1.22 A t-value of 1.38 would have been significant. Matching on the basis of the Welsh Figure Preference Test and the Adjective Checklist did not produce

any significant results with regard to any of the expressive characteristics. Why this is so is not known, although for the Adjective Checklist, the small N size produced in the matching process was most probably the reason.

With a two-tailed test of significance, t-values must be higher than in a one-tailed test to produce significance. Nevertheless, using a .20 level of confidence, significant differences were found on the holistic ratings of the writing samples when students were matched on the basis of the Welsh Figure Preference Test and IQ. The t-values, respectively, were 1.67 and 1.615.

Therefore, Hypothesis #1 that characteristics of expressive writing would be found in the final writing samples on a transactional topic of both the treatment and control groups was proven correct. Both groups exhibited expressive characteristics in all three areas -- use of the first person, expression of values and self-revealing tone -- as an examination of Table 2 will reveal. This would lend support to Britton's theory that good writing of all kinds tends to have an expressive dimension, a dimension in which the writer's voice -- feelings and opinions--is present.<sup>2</sup>

Hypothesis #2 that the treatment group would have significantly more characteristics of expressive writing in their transactional writing than the control group was partially proven. The expressive characteristic of self-revealing tone using the basis of IQ as a way of matching students was

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<sup>2</sup>James Britton et. al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18), (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975; reprint ed., London: Schools Council Publications, 1979), p. 83.

the only one that clearly revealed that the treatment group possessed significantly (at the .10 level of confidence) more characteristics of expressive writing than did the control group. Its t-value was 1.435. The expressive characteristic of use of the first person using IQ as the basis of matching was nearly significant for the treatment group at the .10 level. Its t-value was 1.22. A t-value of 1.38 would have been significant.

With regard to the holistic quality rating of the samples (using a .20 level of significance), it was found that the treatment group wrote significantly better than did the control group when students were matched on the basis of the Welsh Figure Preference Test and IQ. It cannot be stated absolutely, then, that practice with expressive writing will lead to better writing quality in all instances, since there were too many variables that could not be controlled in this experiment (they are discussed in Chapter V), and because the experiment was of relatively short duration. These findings do lend support, however, to Britton's theory that practice with expressive writing, which he considers to be the matrix of writing from which all other types of writing develop,<sup>3</sup> will improve transactional writing.

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<sup>3</sup>Britton, p. 83.

### Threats to Validity

#### Threats to Internal Validity

The design of this research study is the posttest - only control group with matching. By definition, certain internal validity threats to the experiment are controlled by the design itself. By internal validity threats, this researcher means the extent to which extraneous variables interfere with the effect of the experimental treatment. When extraneous variables interfere in an experiment, doubt is raised as to whether or not the change in the treatment group was due to the experimental treatment or to the extraneous variable.<sup>4</sup>

Generally, eight potential threats to internal validity are recognized.<sup>5</sup> They are the following:

- 1) History - The existence of a control group rules out history as an extraneous variable in this study. Any outside events that occurred during the course of the experiment would have influenced both groups. Therefore, any significant findings could not be attributed to the factor of outside history.
- 2) Maturation - The variable of maturation of the subjects may or may not be controlled for in this design. If randomization had been possible, the factor of maturation would have been controlled. Matching is an attempt to approximate randomization, but it is uncertain whether it always achieves its goal.

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<sup>4</sup>Walter R. Borg and Meredith Damien Gall, Educational Research, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, Inc., 1979), p. 522, citing "Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research on Teaching," in Handbook of Research on Teaching.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 522-524.

- 3) Testing - This variable is not a threat since there is no pretest. Testing refers to the effect of the pretest on the posttest.
- 4) Instrumentation - Once again, the fact that there is no pretest rules out this as a validity threat. In this research design, since there is only a posttest, significant findings cannot be in doubt because of a possible difference between a pretest and a posttest.
- 5) Regression - The lack of a pretest eliminates regression toward the mean as a threat to internal validity. Since there is only the posttest, the subjects' performance on the posttest cannot have been influenced by its performance on the pretest.
- 6) Differential selection - In this study, subjects were matched according to three factors -- IQ, scores on an adjective checklist, and scores on the Welsh Figure Preference Test, a creativity measure. Matching is the best alternative when randomization is not possible. In this study, matching of subjects probably eliminated the threat of differential selection by insuring that the treatment and control groups did not differ except for their exposure to the experimental treatment.
- 7) Mortality - This factor is sometimes called attrition or loss of subjects during the course of the project. Matching eliminates this as a validity threat, since only matches composed of subjects from both groups are used in statistical formulas at the conclusion of the study.
- 8) Selection - maturation interaction - This threat refers to an interaction of two previously-mentioned validity threats -- differential selection and maturation. As stated earlier in discussing the two individually, the only way to completely eliminate this threat is through randomization. However, the matching procedure used in this experiment probably eliminated this threat.

### Threats to External Validity

External validity concerns the issue of whether or not the findings of the study are generalizable to other situations and other population groups. The four most commonly recognized threats to external validity are

the following:<sup>6</sup>

- 1) Interactive effect of selection and treatment - This threat refers to whether or not the results of the study are applicable to other population groups. Since this study involved only GATE students, it is not certain whether its significant findings would also be true for students of average and low abilities. Future studies will have to ascertain this.
- 2) Threats of innovation - This threat is sometimes referred to as the Hawthorne effect or the novelty effect. This variable was not a threat since the student subjects did not even know they were part of an experiment. Also, what was asked of them was part of their normal routine.
- 3) Reactive effect of testing - This threat refers to how regression toward the mean affects generalizability of the study's findings to other places and groups. Since there is no pretest, the subjects' performance on the posttest cannot have been influenced by its performance on the pretest. Regression did not occur in this experiment, and it should not occur in similarly replicated studies.
- 4) Multiple program interference - This threat concerns the matter of unknown factors influencing the outcome of the experiment. There is always this possibility. Researchers should try as much as possible before the start of the project to identify and then to eliminate the influence of any possible interfering variables. This researcher is not aware of any interference from concurrent programs in this study.

That is why many studies must be done to validate a theory. The more proof that can be gathered about a theory, the more confidently it can be asserted. A single study is open to the criticism that a unique set of circumstances may have been operating in that instance. This disseration study is a pioneer study and that is why future studies will be needed to validate its findings.

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<sup>6</sup>Borg and Gall, p. 525.

### Summary

This chapter has discussed the five major aspects of data collection involved in this research study. They are: 1) administering a questionnaire to teachers and students of both the treatment and control groups before the project began, 2) having each teacher keep a log of the writing assignments made to each group, 3) administering a writing sample on a transactional topic as a posttest to both the treatment and control groups, 4) having the writing samples scored by three professional or expert raters, and 5) obtaining the scores on GATE placement measures of the student subjects and matching them for purposes of calculating t-tests for matched groups.

The data gathered from the t-tests for matched groups are displayed in a table. This allows for ease of interpreting the results found. The data yielded are related to the two hypotheses of the study, which are as follows: 1) that characteristics of expressive writing will be found in the posttest transactional writing samples of both groups and 2) that the treatment group will have significantly more expressive characteristics in their transactional writing than did the control group. At the end of the chapter, the external and internal validity threats which apply to this study were also presented.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Overview of the Chapter

This final chapter discusses the significance of the data collected in this pioneer study based on the ideas of James Britton. Included in the chapter is a discussion of which internal and external validity threats are operational in this experiment. The chapter concludes with 1) suggestions on how future studies could expand on this preliminary study and with 2) a summary of the entire study, including implications for the field of writing research.

#### Significance of the Findings

The statistical results of this experiment, although not significant in every category, nevertheless have great import for the field of writing research. The first hypothesis that characteristics of expressive writing would be found in the final writing samples on a transactional topic of both the treatment and control groups was proven correct. Both groups exhibited expressive characteristics in all three areas -- use of the first

person, expression of values, and self-revealing tone, as an examination of Table 2 in Chapter IV will reveal.

This finding lends support to Britton's theory that good writing of all kinds tends to have an expressive dimension, a dimension in which the writer's voice -- feelings and opinions --- is present.<sup>1</sup> The implication for the teaching of writing, then, would be that any writing program or sequence of writing instruction should include expressive writing as a primary component. Practice with expressive writing generally allows the writer to express himself in writing without fear of judgment or criticism. Thus, it can provide the amount of practice one needs to improve at the skill of writing. For what is true of most abilities or skills is also true of writing -- practice improves the product.

The second hypothesis that the treatment group would have significantly more characteristics of expressive writing in their transactional writing than the control group was partially proven. The expressive characteristic of self-revealing tone, using the basis of IQ as a way of matching students, was the only one that clearly revealed that the treatment group possessed significantly (at the .10 level of confidence, one-tailed test) more characteristics of expressive writing than did the control group. The expressive characteristic of use of the first person using IQ as the basis of matching was nearly significant for the treatment group at the .10 level. Its t-value was 1.22. A t-value of 1.38 would

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<sup>1</sup>James Britton et. al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18), (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975; reprint ed., London: Schools Council Publications, 1979), p. 83.

have been significant.

With regard to the holistic quality rating of the samples (using a .20 level of significance, two-tailed test), it was found that the treatment group wrote significantly better than did the control group when students were matched on the basis of the Welsh Figure Preference Test and IQ, two of the three matching variables. A two-tailed test was utilized for determining significance with regard to the holistic rating because no prediction as to significance was made prior to the onset of the experiment, due to the number of variables that were beyond the researcher's control. With a two-tailed test of significance, t-values must be higher than in a one-tailed test (used with the three expressive characteristics) to produce significance.

It cannot be stated absolutely, then, in spite of the encouraging results from the holistic rating, that practice with expressive writing will lead to better writing quality in all instances, since there were too many variables that could not be controlled in this experiment. Some of the variables that could not be controlled are as follows: 1) equality of students' prior writing experience and exposure in relation to the treatment and control groups, 2) equality of writing knowledge on the part of the two teachers involved in the study, 3) relative short duration of the study, and 4) the comparatively small numbers of subjects involved in the study. These findings do lend support, however, to Britton's theory that practice with expressive writing, which he considers to be the matrix of

writing from which all other types of writing develop,<sup>2</sup> will improve other kinds of writing, such as the transactional.

While these results may not seem dramatic at first glance, they are important in light of the following considerations.

1. This was a pioneer study. Never before had these ideas of James Britton been tested. A single researcher attempted the study and, thus, the scale of the study was small.
2. A larger sample size undoubtedly would have produced results of greater significance. It will be for other researchers to verify whether or not a larger sample size would have produced statistical significance for all of the three expressive characteristics and would have produced results at even higher levels of confidence.

In addition, what was attempted in this project -- the measurement of the effect of a particular type of writing instruction -- is a bold undertaking. Besides the fact that this specific project never had been attempted, it involves the measurement of a rather subjective, complex ability -- writing. Had the experiment involved something more concrete, such as the effect of Method "A" of teaching French as contrasted with Method "B," undoubtedly more of the aspects that were measured would have been found to be statistically significant and significant at higher levels of confidence. A .10 level of confidence, however, should be considered very adequate to determine significance for this type of experiment which involved the measurement of a skill such as writing.

Finally, the expressive characteristic that was found to be signifi-

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<sup>2</sup>Britton, p. 83.

cant at the .10 level of confidence -- self-revealing tone of the piece -- is probably the expressive characteristic, as defined in this experiment, most closely related to a general definition of Britton's concept of expressiveness. Therefore, the fact that this characteristic was found to be significant is indeed a very important finding; it strengthens Britton's theory of the critical role played by expressive writing in the development of writing ability.

Britton defines expressive writing as writing that is guided by the ideas and feelings of the writer. This includes diary and journal writing, personal letters, writing which might be considered thinking aloud on paper, and writing addressed to a limited public audience. Expressive writing reveals the writer's self and sometimes is not explicit, often containing references and words that only the writer would be able to interpret.<sup>3</sup> Self-revealing tone was described in similar terms to the three professional raters. Therefore, since this characteristic yielded significant results distinguishing the treatment from the control group, it appears that practice with expressive writing can affect the outcome of other types of writing, such as the transactional. Once again, the implication for the teaching of writing is that any writing program or sequence of writing instruction should include expressive writing as a primary component.

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<sup>3</sup>Britton, p. 83.

Some factors that strengthen the significant results of this study are the following pieces of information revealed through the teacher and student questionnaires. As stated earlier in Chapter IV, the teacher questionnaires pointed out three differences between the two teachers in the study. 1) The teacher of the treatment group had more intensive writing training than the teacher of the control group. 2) The teacher of the treatment group taught her students how to edit each other's work and provided time for peer editing, a relatively new technique in the field of writing instruction. 3) In the semester preceding the experiments, the teacher of the treatment group engaged her students in the act of writing two -- four times per week for at least fifteen minutes and sometimes as much as thirty minutes each session. The control teacher only involved her students in the act of writing once per week in the semester preceding the experiment.

These factors are counterbalanced, this researcher feels, by a fact revealed through the student questionnaires in Question 4. The control group was given the chance to write a story of their own choosing in kindergarten or first grade, while the treatment group was not given the chance until second or third grade. Writing a story of one's own choosing would be an indicator of when writing instruction began because students would not be allowed to write on their own topics if they had not first been instructed in some fashion or another on how to write.

Therefore, despite the control group's earlier exposure to the

writing experience, the treatment group, after intensive practice with expressive writing, was judged to have one of three expressive characteristics to a more significant degree in their transactional writing than did the control group. There were also indications through a holistic rating that the treatment group wrote significantly better with regard to quality than did the control group on two out of three matching criteria -- IQ and the Welsh Figure Preference Test (see Table 2 in Chapter IV).

Question 4 was the only item in the student questionnaires that revealed a significant difference between the two groups of students. The other questions showed the following similarities between the two groups:

1. Both like to write in almost equal numbers.
2. Both groups have approximately the same numbers of students who write on their own, when no assignment is given by a teacher.
3. 50% of the treatment group keep a diary or a journal while 31% of the control group do.
4. Both groups cite considerably less time than did their teachers concerning the writing practice assigned by their teachers.
5. 86% of the treatment group feel their teacher enjoys writing while 70% of the control group feel their teacher enjoys writing.
6. Both groups feel their parents encourage them to write.
7. Both groups perceive their parents as engaging in the writing process often, although both groups cite as evidence very basic types of writing activities such as writing notes, paying bills and writing for their jobs. These would be classified as transactional writing. The only type of expressive writing listed by both groups is letter writing.
8. Most students in both groups think a while before beginning to write. They do not begin to write right away when given a topic.
9. Students from both groups cite in almost equal numbers the following as their preferred type of writing: letters, essays, poetry, stories, and journal writing.

10. Most students in both groups feel confident as writers. A small minority in both groups feels a) afraid and b) both confident and afraid.

### Threats to Internal and External Validity

By internal validity threats is meant the extent to which extraneous variables interfere with the effect of the experimental treatment. When extraneous variables interfere in an experiment, doubt is raised whether or not the change in the treatment group was due to the experimental treatment or to the extraneous variables.<sup>4</sup>

The existence of a control group in this study rules out the internal validity threat of history. Any outside events that occurred during the course of the experiment would have influenced both groups. Since there is no pretest, the threats of testing (the effect of the pretest on the posttest), instrumentation (possible difference between the pretest and the posttest), and regression (pretest performance influencing posttest performance) are nonexistent.

Matching of subjects eliminates the threat of mortality and probably eliminates the threats of maturation of subjects, differential selection of subjects, and the selection-maturation interaction. Matching eliminates mortality or attrition as a validity threat, because only matches composed of subjects from both groups are used in statistical formulas at the

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<sup>4</sup>Walter R. Borg and Meredith Damien Gall, Educational Research, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, Inc., 1979), p. 522, citing "Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research on Teaching," in Handbook of Research on Teaching.

conclusion of the study. Randomization would have controlled the threats of maturation (differing rates of maturing of the subjects), differential selection (possible difference because of the selection process between the treatment and control group or other factors besides exposure to the experimental treatment), and the selection-maturation interaction (an interaction of the threats of differential selection and maturation). Matching is an attempt to appropriate randomization, but it is uncertain whether it always achieves its goal.

External validity concerns the issue of whether or not the findings of the study are generalizable to other situations and other population groups. Two external validity threats -- the threat of innovation or the novelty effect and the reactive effect of testing -- are not threats in this study. There was no novelty effect since the student subjects did not even know they were part of an experiment. Also, what was asked of them was part of their normal routine. The reactive effect of testing refers to how regression toward the mean affects generalizability of the study's findings to other places and groups. Since there is no pretest, the subjects performance on the posttest cannot have been influenced by its performance on the pretest.

The other two external validity threats possibly could be operational in this study. It is not known whether they are or are not. The interactive effect of selection and treatment refers to whether or not the results of the study are applicable to other population groups. Since this

study involved only GATE students, it is not certain whether its significant findings would also be true for students of average and low abilities. Multiple program interference concerns the matter of unknown factors influencing the outcome of the experiment. There is always this possibility. Researchers should try as much as possible before the start of the project to identify and then to eliminate the influence of any possible interfering variables. This researcher is not aware of any interference from concurrent programs in this study.

That is why many studies must be done to validate a theory. The more proof that can be gathered about a theory, the more confidently it can be asserted. A single study is open to the criticism that a unique set of circumstances may have been operating in that instance. This dissertation study is an early one, and that is why future studies will be needed to validate or to refute its findings.

#### Future Studies

Future studies could expand this preliminary study by pursuing the following procedures. The study could be of a longitudinal nature, for example, involving students in expressive writing practice over a two-year period or longer instead of one semester's duration, as was the case in the present study. Such an extended experiment would, if significant statistical data were yielded, provide extremely strong evidence for Britton's

theories. Significant statistical data produced in a longitudinal study would also counter some of this study's weaknesses discussed below.

First, significant results yielded over an extended period of time would be highly regarded, since an interfering variable such as student maturation would not be confounding the results. In a study of relatively short duration, as is the case here, the effect of the variable of student maturation is not known. Second, significant statistical data in a longitudinal study involving a subjective area such as writing is more impressive than in a short study. This is so because repeated evaluations of student work are necessary, and the consistency of superior student performance in the treatment group that must be present to produce significance is more convincing. Third, a longitudinal study would probably utilize a larger sample size to allow for subject loss. With a larger sample size, results with higher significance values are usually found.

An additional feature that a future study could incorporate in its design to improve on the current one would be to have the three judges who rate the writing samples on expressive characteristics and who rated them holistically work together in rating the essays. Typically, the way this would be done would be to have them first practice rating a few sample essays so that inter-rater reliability could be calculated. Then, they would begin to rate the actual student essays, and any questions as to definition of terms of the expressive characteristics could be resolved among them with the help of the principal researcher. Also, any differen-

ces occurring among the raters of more than two points on a particular expressive characteristic or on the holistic rating could be resolved by having the rater in question re-grade the essay to reflect greater agreement with the other raters.

Such a technique is respected research procedure, which tends to insure that the three experts will accurately rate the essays in question. This is a particularly critical procedure in a longitudinal study where the same raters are not likely to be used throughout the entire study and where quite a volume of essays will be rated over a period of time. It was not as critical a research design procedure in this dissertation study, because the number of essays to be graded was relatively small. With a small number of essays, less variability among raters is likely to occur. Also, all the essays to be graded were in the possession of each rater at one time. This might not be the case in a longitudinal study.

Finally, a future study should include students with a range of academic ability when forming the treatment and control groups. This study utilized only gifted students because pre-existing data were available for matching purposes. However, any significant results obtained would be more convincing if they were gathered from a heterogeneous ability grouping of students, thus providing more basis to make the positive results generalizable to the entire population.

### Summary

This preliminary study has examined some of the ideas of James Britton, a British researcher in the field of writing. Specifically considered were his theories regarding the importance of expressive writing in the development of writing ability in general. For purposes of this study, therefore, two hypotheses were stated regarding expressive writing and its effect on another type of writing defined by Britton -- the transactional. Also, data were gathered in regard to the quality of writing of the student subjects after the treatment group's exposure to intensive practice with expressive writing over the course of one semester.

It was found, in relation to the first hypothesis, that characteristics of expressive writing were present in the final writing samples on a transactional topic of both the treatment and control groups. With regard to the second hypothesis, the treatment group possessed in their transactional writing one of the three expressive characteristics considered -- self-revealing tone -- to a significant degree above the control group. The holistic quality rating of the writing samples showed that the treatment group wrote significantly better than did the control group when students were matched on the basis of the Welsh Figure Preference Test and IQ, two of the three matching variables.

The major implication from this study for the field of writing research is that the ideas of James Britton merit closer attention. His theory of the three types of writing -- expressive, transactional, and

poetic (with the expressive as the matrix for the development of the other two) -- provides a meaningful way of looking at the evolution of one's ability to write.

Despite imperfections in the study, significant statistical data were generated that lend support to Britton's other ideas, such as 1) good writing of all kinds tends to have an expressive dimension; and 2) practice with expressive writing will improve other kinds of writing, such as the transactional. Future studies will expand this research project and provide the additional verification that is needed to assert Britton's ideas more confidently. However, this preliminary study has served to focus attention on the worth of Britton's ideas. Perhaps soon, writing programs everywhere, or at least in the English-speaking world, will be incorporating expressive writing as a primary component. Improved writing performance would enhance the academic functioning of all students, whether they are in urban, suburban, or rural settings.

Expressive writing seems to be especially appropriate in the urban setting for underprivileged children, in that its informal quality and its element of personal feeling and emotion seems to bridge the gap from the reality of the children's backgrounds to the formality of the school setting. They know they are performing an important school skill when they write, yet with expressive writing they are able to do so with little formal instruction or fear of evaluation. By engaging in expressive writing, they unwittingly are undergoing the necessary groundwork for more sophisti-

cated types of writing, or at least for the kinds of writing that are more often demanded in academic settings.

Herbert Kohl demonstrated in his book, 36 Children, which chronicled his experiences in teaching in Harlem, that expressive writing can be the key to spark interest in learning which then leads to more conventional writing and the study of more traditional subject matter. Grace was the success story in Kohl's book. She eventually attended a New England prep school.<sup>5</sup> But there were other less dramatic successes that ended up with more reading and writing abilities than they otherwise would have had, were it not for their sixth grade experience with Herbert Kohl, who promoted expressive writing.

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<sup>5</sup>Herbert Kohl, 36 Children, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1967), p. 226.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
Teacher Questionnaire

### TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you like to write? Please explain.
2. Do you feel confident about yourself as a writer? If so, in all areas of writing or just certain areas.
3. Which type of writing do you feel most confident about teaching -- journal writing, writing about feelings and emotions, essays, editorials, poetry, short stories, and/or novels?
4. Do you attempt the writing assignment you have given your students and then share your writing with your students?
5. Have you taken a course in writing instruction or attended a workshop on the teaching of writing? If so, how many?
6. Do you use prewriting activities in the teaching of writing ie., activities to prepare students for writing -- outlining, brainstorming, jotting down ideas?

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE continued

7. Do you help students structure and organize their piece of writing so that it is unified as to topic and understandable to the reader?
8. Is the revision process an integral part of your writing instruction?
9. Do you teach your students how to edit each other's work and provide time for peer editing?
10. Do you grade student work holistically (for the overall sense of the piece) or analytically for spelling and mechanical errors in the evaluation grade?
11. Last semester, how many times per week and of what duration did you give your students writing activities? Include examples of the types of writing in which you engaged your students.

APPENDIX B  
Student Questionnaire

### STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you like to write? Explain.
2. Do you write on your own, for instance, when no assignment is given by a teacher? Explain.
3. Do you keep a diary or journal?
4. In what grade were you first given the chance to write a story of your own choice?
5. Last semester, how many times each week and for how long did one of your teachers give you writing experience, not including answering science or social studies textbook questions?
6. Does your GATE teacher ever try herself to write the writing assignment she has given you?
7. Do you feel your GATE teacher enjoys writing?

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE continued

8. Do your parents encourage you to write? Explain.
9. Do your parents do much writing?
10. If your parents do write, what kind of writing do they do?
11. When you write, do you begin to write right away or do you think a while and make notes about what you are going to write?
12. What kind of writing do you enjoy most -- essay, letters, editorials, journal writing, poetry, novels, etc.
13. How do you feel about yourself as a writer, confident, afraid? Explain.

APPENDIX C

Human Subjects Research Approval Letter



Gordon School of Education  
Department of Educational Curriculum and Instruction • (804) 440-3283 • Norfolk, VA 23509-2508

Ms. Hook,

My committee see no problem with your protection of human subjects.

*Roger A. Johnson*  
Roger A. Johnson, Ph.D.  
Chairperson, Human Subjects

*rec'd 5-31-84*

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Maureen Therese Elliott Hook  
Born: Detroit, Michigan, August 8, 1950

### Educational Background

St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana - 1972 - B.A. Humanistic Studies  
College of William and Mary - 1974 - M.Ed. Special Education  
University of Virginia - 1980 - Ed.S. - Administration and Supervision

### Professional Experience

Teacher of the Mentally Retarded  
Teacher of the Learning Disabled  
Elementary Assistant Principal  
Elementary Principal

### Honors

U.S. Office of Education Scholarship 1973 - 1974  
Member of Phi Delta Kappa 1983 -