

DIALOGUE JOURNALS IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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SHARON COOK



Dialogue Journals in the Junior High School

by

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of the requirements for the degree
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Abstract

This study statistically evaluated dialogue journal writing as a pedagogical method for encouraging written language development. Little statistical documentation exists to support the use of this written dialogue. This investigation attempted to ascertain if four variables; namely, students' writing proficiency, students' attitudes toward writing, students' perceptions of writing, and reading comprehension ability, were influenced as a result of participating in dialogue journal writing over a ten month period. Due to the organizational structure of the school, groups were intact according to class placement. The sample consisted of 78 grade eight students during the academi.: year 1989-1990. An experimental group of twenty-seven students participated in dialogue journal writing with the researcher outside of class time while a control group of fifty-one students followed the regular Language Arts program. Both groups were tested at the beginning and end of the year. The one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) conducted on the data showed that the experimental groups were not stastically different in any of the variables at the outset of the study but the groups differed significantly in writing competency measures at the end of the year. The analysis of covariance conducted indicated that the dialogue journal experience had a significant influence on students' writing proficiencies over and above the background variables (gender, age and parental education) and the students' prior performance in the written language area but no significant effect was found on the other three outcome variables, attitudes toward writing, perceptions of writing, and reading comprehension ability. Based on the evidence provided by these statistical tests, it was concluded that the students who had been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity attained a higher level of writing competency than those students who were not

exposed to this activity.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

The literacy training offered in schools does not seem to be teaching all children to read and write adequately, as is evidenced by the number of students who lack the necessary reading and writing skills to successfully cope in the classroom. Although every child warrants the right to learn reading and writing, the Southam News Survey, a landmark literacy study conducted in 1987, revealed that five million Canadians, more than one in five, cannot read, write, or compute well enough to handle everyday life. More than one half of those unable to cope with the demands of literacy in today's society claimed that they attended high school and one third reported that they had completed grade twelve. The illiteracy rates differed among the provinces in Canada, with an increase from west to east, escalating from 17 percent in British Columbia to an astounding 44 percent in Newfoundland.

Similarly, high illiteracy rates were reported by the 1990 Statistics Canada Survey of Literacy Skills. It was discovered that 38 percent of Canadians, aged 16 to 69, could not write a letter to a company regarding repairs to an appliance still under warranty and 37 percent experienced difficulty understanding everyday reading material. Furthermore, although consensus does not exist as to the national expenditures imposed by illiteracy, the social and economic costs are considered enormous (Olson, 1988; Calamai, 1988).

For the most part, children enter school armed with oral language abilities. In

a home environment with modelling, support and encouragement they develop the basic oral sentence patterns, extensive vocabularies, listening abilities and other skills necessary for effective communication. Before entry into the school system they have also learned a great deal about reading and writing. Why, then, do so many fail to adequately grasp the written modes?

Unfortunately, as well, many students who have learned to read and write have no interest in reading and writing activities because they fail to understand their utilitarian value and have never experienced the enjoyment these activities can bring. Smith (1981, 1987) maintained that children are fortunate if they make sense of anything during reading instruction because reading in school, all too often, becomes merely a set of skill and drill exercises. In many classes students fill in blanks and answer questions to stories with little time allotted for productive reading. In 1984, Goodlad discovered that junior high students in the United States spend less than three percent of their time in school reading connected discourse.

Researchers such as Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975), Graves (1984), and Murray (1984) have attempted to explain why high school graduates lack necessary writing skills and the desire to write. The proposed explanations were examined by Beebe, in 1988, and condensed into the following major causes. First, students lack the writing skills and motivation to write because teachers, generally, disregard the composing process paradigm - the method which stresses thinking and revising during writing. Second, rather than guiding children through the composing process to produce a piece of writing, many teachers concentrate on the measurable end

product. Third, students are, generally, not given adequate practice in composition within the classroom. Students often produce as little as one piece of writing per month. Fourth, teachers are not suitably trained to teach writing. Very often teacher preparation for writing instruction constitutes only 1/4 to 1/3 of the time in a required language arts course. Finally, the complementary relationship between reading and writing, until recently, had not been considered. Consequently, children were not introduced to writing when they started school.

Literacy teaching in our schools often differs dramatically from the way children should be taught, according to the language learning research of the past two decades. Researchers such as Goodman and Goodman (1983), Smith (1981), Teale (1982), and Harste, Burke and Woodward (1981), relying on research of oral language acquisition, provide a natural learning theory for literacy development. They maintain that written language should be learned in the same way as oral language. Children can learn to read and write by engaging in reading and writing activities that are relevant, interesting and functional within an environment that provides support and encouragement. This is not a new concept; rather, it was suggested by Huey in 1908 when he described the natural curiosity of preschool children that helps them learn to read.

The child makes endless questionings about the names of things, as every mother knows. He is concerned also about the printed notices, signs, titles, visiting cards, etc. that come in his way, and he should be told what these "say" when he makes inquiry. It is surprising how large a stock of printed or written words a child will gradually come to recognize in this way. (p.313)

Books, journals, and conference presentations are currently suggesting that teachers become "kidwatchers" (Goodman, 1980) in order to begin focusing attention on how children

learn and then to help them expand on their uses of language in that learning, rather than concentrating on teaching the skills needed to reach a measurable product in reading or writing. Smith (1975), one of the first to speak against this skills orientation, claims, "... the mistaken notion is that one learns to read through knowing particular skills, not that the skills are learned through reading" (p. 125). These same thoughts were reiterated in 1987 by Altwerger, Edelsky and Flores.

... babies acquire a language through actually using it, not through practising its separate parts until some later date when the parts are assembled and the totality is finally used. The major assumption is that the model of acquisition through real use (not through practise exercises) is the best model for thinking about and helping with the learning of reading and writing and learning in general. (p. 145)

Many teachers and administrators continue to accept the premise that the development of good school programs is analogous to the use of commercial textbooks and manuals. These programs contain an overabundance of selections written for specific grade levels but, all too often, students have no interest in the required reading material and, in many cases, lack the background knowledge needed to help them make inferences and predictions while reading. The repetitious, conscientiously controlled vocabulary in each graded text is often limited compared to how children naturally use language. The teacher directed instruction is also "so carefully structured and compartmentalized that the socially embedded, interactive nature of language and learning gets lost" (Staton, 1986, p. 1). Perhaps it is time to align student's educational experiences with the current philosophy of how children learn (Smith, 1981). This would necessitate working with people, not programs. Placing the student at the center of language instruction would allow for a continued building of language experience, directed by the needs of the learner rather than by a prescribed

text. The problem, then, seems to be that current programs in reading and writing, which rely on a textbook orientation, are not in line with recent research on how children become literate.

Purpose of the Study

Over the centuries many people have written journals, diaries, logs or personal notebooks on a regular basis to record their experiences, thoughts and feelings. The use of journals has been gaining popularity as a powerful addition to the language arts program and is now beginning to extend into other subject areas. The journaling experience can be used to meet a range of educational objectives but is normally assigned to provide the student with practice in written self-expression. Such writing develops fluency as the writer strives to express thoughts, ideas and experiences (Butler, 1981). Recently, a teacher response has been added to the idea of journal writing. In this way, dialogue is introduced into writing. The dialogue journal, an extension of the personal journal, is a form of writing in which the student and the teacher sustain a written conversation for an extended period of time. This type of informal writing permits students to discover and explore topics, to experiment with various writing styles, to enhance perception of written language, to practice fluency in writing and, in general, to develop a better appreciation of themselves as writers (Fulwiler, 1987). The dialogue journal has an added advantage over the personal journal in that it offers the support of responding from a more competent writer who listens, reflects, discusses ideas, and guides. These ongoing conversational responses provide developing writers with individualized feedback and

the opportunities to witness the effect of their work on another person.

This study examined the value of dialogue journal writing as a pedagogical method with grade eight students. The investigation attempted to determine whether dialogue journal writing influenced students' writing proficiency, students' attitudes toward writing, students' perceptions of writing, and their reading comprehension ability. The following basic questions were addressed in this study.

1. To what extent does dialogue journal writing affect writing competency?
2. To what extent does dialogue journal writing influence attitudes toward writing?
3. To what extent does dialogue journal writing influence perceptions of writing?
4. To what extent does dialogue journal writing affect reading comprehension ability?

Many factors, other than dialogue journal writing, are likely to influence the progress students make with regard to the four variables investigated in this study. Before the researcher could credit dialogue journal writing for achievement gains, it was necessary to take into account the influence of four of these correlates; namely, age, sex, parental educational level, and the student's prior performance in the written language area. This study also determined the extent to which these four predictor variables influenced the four outcome variables; namely, writing competencies, attitudes toward writing, perceptions of writing, and reading comprehension ability.

Significance of the Study

Journal writing, specifically dialogue journal writing, is an activity which is believed to be a valuable educational method for encouraging the development of written language ability. This study attempted to demonstrate why this practice would be an advantageous classroom activity. It also contributes to the existing dialogue journal research.

Practical Relevance for Classroom Teachers

In many ways the Journal is a banner-bearer of new, enlightened ideas putting an end to the era of artificial "composition writing" an era characterized by enforced, unpopular writing - one shot drafting, handed in on a set time on a set topic, to a set form with the teacher as marker of surface "correctness" with no real readers. (Walshe, 1982, p. 167)

Recent research has been providing educators with many new insights into reading and writing development. The primary and elementary schools in our province are embracing many of these understandings and are beginning to introduce language instruction through a whole language approach, whereby teachers are more concerned with the child's experiences and the process of learning to read and write rather than concentrating on the textbook and specific skills outlined for teaching. Publishers who wish to remain an integral part of education are being forced to adopt a more holistic orientation toward reading, writing, listening and speaking which are now regarded as interrelated and functional skills. This is evidenced by the new language themes being implemented in our elementary schools. During a thematic unit, students no longer follow a text but explore themes such as adventure, inventions, or relationships and select reading material related to these themes. Students develop an extensive background knowledge and vocabulary for the theme under investigation

which helps them read and complete relevant assignments. Instruction in the intermediate school, however, generally still employs a textbook orientation, where students read literature from the prescribed text and later answer questions in their notebooks, complete worksheets or some other related assignment in attempts to properly analyze the selection. Hence, it is important that educators at this level continue to search for more student-centered modes of instruction.

Dialogue journal writing is a student-based pedagogical practice. It consists of the use of a journal for the purpose of maintaining an on-going written conversation between two persons, in this case a student and a teacher. Students write about their experiences, dreams, interests, etc., and receive individualized instruction through the sharing and modelling involved in the teacher response. It provides a personal kind of writing that is often non-existent in our schools (Applebee, Auten, & Lehr, 1981), but which can help teenagers through difficult years, as well as help them develop a better understanding of written language and how it functions. It seems appropriate at this time to learn more about the usefulness of this activity and to examine its effectiveness with junior high school students.

Theoretical Relevance in Relation to Other Studies

Within the past decade, many studies have been conducted to determine the value of dialogue journals in educational settings. Teachers and researchers, in various contexts, have written about their experiences leading to an extensive ethnographic data collection. To date, however, statistically significant accounts to defend the implementation of dialogue

journals in schools are limited. An experimentally designed study yielding significant results was conducted by Bode in 1988. With 204 grade one children from three schools, Bode compared three teaching methods, namely, dialogue journal writing with a teacher, dialogue journal writing with a parent, and the traditional language arts program. Following a five month period, posttest results of the Standard Achievement Test, the Metropolitan Achievement Test, and the Schonell Spelling Test indicated that both dialogue journal treatment groups performed significantly better than the students receiving the prescribed curriculum. The present study was a response to the need to determine the effectiveness of this activity at the grade eight level.

Limitations of the Study

Sample Size Limitations

This study is limited in that the size of the sample is small. Three classes of students were chosen to participate in the study with 30, 21, and 27 in each group to provide a total sample size of 78 children.

Non-randomization of sample

The groups were not randomly selected. All participants in the study attended a single Corner Brook junior high school where the researcher taught. Because of the organizational nature of schools, the groups of students were established according to heterogeneous class assignment. Each class of students was designated by the researcher

to be one of the following groups: (a) students not required to do anything outside of the regular program; and (b) students writing dialogue journals in addition to assignments in the regular program.

Generalizability of the Results

A third limitation of this study concerns the generalizability of the results. Because the sample was not randomly selected from the grade eight population, it is impossible to generalize beyond the classes in which the study was conducted. To make inferences about the total population one would have to replicate the study with a larger, randomized sample.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Learning the Process of Writing through Journal Writing

In the traditional classroom, children were exposed to carefully structured, repetitive exercises in an attempt to teach them how to write. The emphasis was on mastering a sequence of skills, including such things as penmanship, punctuation, spelling and grammar. To teach these skills the language was fragmented with little time allocated for productive writing and the expression of one's ideas. This more formalized setting has caused many to view writing as a superficial act, one with little relevance to everyday living (Graves, 1983).

The teaching of writing has received careful scrutiny over the past decade and as a result is finally seen as being as important as reading within the curriculum.

One of the most interesting and, I think, promising developments in language arts education is the new emphasis on writing. Writing is the cause celebre in language arts circles today taking its rightful place alongside the time honoured subject of reading. (Tway, 1984,p. 533)

The research of Emig (1971, 1981), Graves (1983, 1984), Calkins (1986) and others has contributed significantly to our knowledge of the writing process and evidence from their research suggests that writing is developmental and is essentially learned rather than taught. Children, it seems, learn how to write in the same way as they learn to walk, talk, or develop any other skill through experience, practice, decision making

and receiving support, guidance and encouragement when appropriate.

Many teachers, especially at the primary and elementary levels, have adopted what has commonly been referred to as the "Graves Method" (although he would strongly disagree that such a method actually exists). Graves (1984) does, however, identify three major phases of a writer's composing process. The first stage, the pre-writing period, immediately precedes the actual writing and consists of the child rehearsing through such activities as thinking, discussion, drawing, notetaking, observing, and reading. The composing phase, beginning and concluding with the actual writing of a message, is a time to explore ideas through writing. Activities such as consulting resources, re-reading, pupil interactions, and self-corrections can be noted in this stage. The final phase, post-writing, refers to behaviors exhibited after the initial composing is complete. Observable behaviors include proof-reading, revising, editing, preparation of the polished copy, and sharing.

In addition to supplying educators with this composing process paradigm, the recent research exploring the acquisition of written language abilities has provided a new set of ideas about writing and the way in which it should be developed. Although these beliefs are similar to those echoed by Moffett (1968) and Emig (1971), they differ dramatically from previously held assumptions which have guided written language instruction. Writing is no longer viewed as a child's ability to imitate effective writers or to master correct conventions; rather, it is thought of as a process of discovering genuine and enduring motivation for writing (Calkins, 1995). Emphasis is now placed on the communicative nature of writing, and writers are encouraged to write to real

audiences about things that are important to them.

The teaching of writing, then, should begin with the individual child and that child's knowledge. Once developing writers begin to express their thoughts, they are then helped, through consultation with peers and conferences with the teacher, to perfect their work and develop abilities to become critical readers and evaluators of their writing. In this procedure, writing is thought of as a process. During the process, revisions are carried out to improve successive drafts and as a result, students develop greater proficiency in their written communication. First drafts are seldom written to be handed in and evaluated so the teacher is no longer the examiner, marking papers after it is too late to help. Instead, teachers model purposeful written language by becoming writers alongside the students in the classroom. Teachers conduct writing conferences where they respond to the writing and become supporters or facilitators by helping children perfect their writing and teaching them what they need to know to improve their knowledge of written language.

It is also believed, in the process approach, that writing provides the writer with a focus for thinking. In an attempt to make sense of their world, writers articulate their thoughts on paper and, in the process, develop meanings for themselves. As Craig, in an interview with Dillon (1983), points out:

Each of us has a tale, a beautiful tale, an exciting tale to tell.
We learn more about ourselves by sharing that tale on paper.
If we offer that to children as one way of getting to know
themselves better, we've given them a valuable tool for life.
(p. 379)

Finally, and perhaps most central to the process approach, is the belief that

learning to write requires practice and more practice. Graves (1983) stressed the importance of frequent writing when he insisted that teachers encourage students to write a minimum of three hours or class periods per week, where students sustain their written work over a period of time so that they have the opportunity to think about their piece when not actually writing. In 1979, Elbow recommended that students free-write for "just ten minutes a day" (p. 9) if they wished to improve writing proficiency. Throughout his book, the message was to "start writing and keep writing" because this free-writing exercise should help students who suffer from "writer's block."

Halliday (1982) maintained that children need to develop language in a variety of contexts. He distinguished between seven functions of language and suggested that children's use of language in school is much too constrained. These children have to accept a stereotype of language that contradicts the insights they have acquired from their own experience (Halliday, 1982). Although oral and written language are ruled by the same grammatical elements, these expressive modes are different because of the change in medium, symbolic units, display, permanence, distance limits, and structure (Goodman and Goodman, 1979). When children enter school they may have mastered the essential grammatical features of the language but when learning to read and write they need to go through a reconceptualization of their language. They have to switch from highly interactive, highly contextualized oral language, which up to this point has been their focus of communication, to a written language where the audience is not present to share in the conversation and the student has to create meaningful texts unassisted. In 1981, Graves discussed the need for children to make a transition from

speech to print.

There is much for children to learn to control in writing that is very different than speech. They must supply the context, write in a certain direction, learn to control the space-time dimensions of writing on a flat surface, understand what the medium of writing can do, know the relation between sound and symbols, know how to make the symbols, learn to put symbols in a particular order, and while composing one operation understand its relation to the entire order of what has been and will be in the message and compose in a medium where the audience is not usually present. (p. 19)

Although the idea of a journal is not new, the use of it in schools as a means of developing student's written language strategies is a recent phenomena. Personal journal writing provides writers with daily, meaningful, free-writing experiences where they can record significant ideas, feelings and observations and then receive a response to what they have written. It relies heavily on the child's natural expressive mode (Britton, 1982) so that the written account is more like talk written down. It is thought that by sharing a journal with a competent model, students will develop writing strategies that assist them in the transition from the oral language to the written language mode.

This form of writing is very different from the expository essay type writing normally done in school settings. The inclusion of this activity into a regular program would no longer present writing, as it frequently does, as a school activity in which students cannot communicate their greatest concerns or explore their real interests (Macorie, 1970, cited in Ruth, 1987). Too often, the writing tasks assigned in schools come with restrictions that take control away from the students. For example, assignments normally pertain to a set topic, one many students may know little about or may lack interest in. The journal activity, because of its authenticity, will, perhaps

for the first time, enable children to take more responsibility for what they write and to feel in control as they express their views on paper. To develop knowledge of and strategies for using written language, it is essential that students maintain control of their own writing. Without the feeling of relevance and ownership, developing writers will not learn to manipulate words and information to present their intended meaning. Journal writing permits students to work at their own level and pace in a nonthreatening, non-corrective environment as they learn to develop the necessary skills to be able to express their ideas clearly, concisely, and coherently in print.

A review of the language learning literature indicates that the practice of journal writing is well supported by theory (Kintisch, 1986; Lund, 1984; Dillon, 1983; Hollowell & Nelson, 1982) and is becoming more widespread as enthusiastic teachers discover the wealth of applications offered by such an addition to the regular program (Heath, 1988; Hipple, 1985; Dawson, 1983; Butler, 1981; Reece, 1980). The format of the journal described in these research studies varied with each group of students and seemed to be as unique as the teacher implementing it. While some teachers encouraged students to write about whatever they wished, others carefully specified topics or assignments which were related to the students' academic experiences. Some students wrote for the first ten minutes of every language class, other students were required to write during another period in the day, while others had access to their journals for the entire day and were free to write in them whenever an idea or concern came to mind.

However, until the early 1980s, empirical evidence defending or disputing its value was scarce. Schatzberg-Smith (1988) attributed this paucity to the fact that

"available research addressed such a variety of journal types that conclusions were difficult to draw; many of these studies lacked theoretical support, used weak research designs, or were inadequately reported" (p. 14). She went on to explain that the introduction of ethnographic techniques into educational research, which allowed for the indepth studies of the dialogue journal, changed the type of research being conducted with journal writing. Schatzberg-Smith believed that two ethnographic studies investigating the processes involved in journal writing were of major importance. Lowenstein (cited in Schatzberg-Smith, 1988) concentrated on the degree of personal and academic growth that was evidenced through the personal journal experience, while Goodkin (cited in Schatzberg-Smith, 1988) focused on the contribution of journal writing to cognitive development and maintained that journal writers would learn more about themselves and their world if the journals were shared with others. Although many of the journal writing articles seemed to imply that some kind of response to journals was occurring, it was not until the introduction of the dialogue journal that sharing was emphasized.

Dialogue journal writing, cousin to the monologue, personal journal, was not a theoretically based technique but originated as a teacher developed practice. Little is known about how, when, or where dialogue journals developed into a classroom activity but it is believed that they are a valuable extension of the personal journal (Davis, 1983). The first comprehensive study of dialogue journals, as a form of discourse, began in 1980 when a University of California at Los Angeles psychology graduate student, Jana Staton, met Leslie Reed, a sixth grade Los Angeles teacher. Mrs. Reed

had been participating in writing dialogic encounters for 17 years. She initially began dialoguing as a means of helping students remember what they had learned every day and saw how journals could develop a better line of communication with her 26 students (Staton, Shuy, Kreeft, & Reed, 1982a).

Because this natural language discourse was more complex and did not resemble anything already in the writing and composition research, Staton sought advice from Roger Shuy, a sociolinguist at Georgetown University, in order to help her develop methods of analysis. A third person, Joy Kreeft-Peyton, a graduate student at Georgetown University, joined the research team to conduct the seminal study, Analysis of Dialogue Journal Writing as a Communicative Event, which was funded by the National Institute for Education and carried out at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C.

Although there are many variations of the dialogue journal and research has not stringently defined what this form of writing should entail, Staton et al. (1982a) identified the following essential attributes. A dialogue journal is a written conversation continued over an extended period of time, with each partner having frequent and equal turns. Each writer is free to introduce topics of personal and mutual interest, with the understanding that their partner will respond to what has been discussed. As with any mutual conversation, shared frames of reference and limits established by each partner determine the realm of personal interests to be addressed. A dialogue journal, in this light, is thought to be similar to the more common, personal journal but has the added feature of meaningful, purposeful interaction with another individual.

Dialogue journals are believed to be an even more valuable writing activity than personal journals because, instead of involving sustained monologue, they require functional interaction and all writing is driven by the desire to communicate. The audience is important since developing writers acquire proficiency when they struggle to express something of importance to another person and then witness the effect of this discourse on the reader (Calkins, 1986). The dialogue journal encourages the author to write for a real audience, most often the teacher, who will read and respond to each message. This form of writing invites the student to use written language to communicate with someone who values everything the child has to say and in turn, through the response, indicates what is effective and what is not as easily understood. As learners receive this feedback, they begin to appreciate how messages must be varied for certain individuals and learn to decide what is most important.

The written conversations are similar to the oral writing conferences, where the teacher often requests elaboration or clarification of ideas and where encouragement and comments are offered. Deviations from conventional writing are never corrected but the teacher models the correct form in the response. This non-corrective, guiding approach offers to children the notion that what they have to say is what really matters.

Dialogue journals allow teachers the opportunity to model writing as a lifelong activity that is purposeful, valuable and something that should be shared. By responding to student entries, the teacher writes and shares ideas for a meaningful interaction while providing extensive and continuing exposure to written language. The teacher responses, if attended to, could prove to be a powerful mode of teaching because they demonstrate

how and why we use written language. If students learn from the supportive modelling of the teacher's response, they should be able to incorporate more accurate conventions into their own writing while developing their ability to create meaning for others. Since learning occurs in the presence of demonstrations (Smith, 1981), students who are exposed to the written language of a more capable writer should eventually incorporate more sophisticated forms into their use of written communication, in the same way that they learned to speak.

Although on the surface, it appears that students are completing first drafts only, dialogue journal writing does expose students to all three phases of the composing process paradigm. The dialogue journal, as described, appears to satisfy the many assumptions about process writing and the way it should be presented. That is, it provides the functional use of written language in a meaningful context with emphasis placed on the expression of student's ideas and concerns rather than on the evaluation of the writing for the purpose of providing a mark or a grade. Students write frequently to a significant audience who also acts as a model or supporter for written expression. The dialogue journal permits students to work at their own level and pace in a non-threatening supportive environment as they learn to develop the necessary skills to be able to express themselves clearly and concisely in writing. Written work is sustained over a period of time so that students have the opportunity to think about their pieces when they are not actually writing. Because the dialogue journal consists of extended conversations, writers create a chronological document with another individual. Revising and editing are normally carried out in subsequent entries as writers clarify or elaborate

earlier thinking or become more accurate with the mechanics of written language, after witnessing the correct forms in the teacher's response. If indeed this new approach to teaching writing does produce competent writers, the dialogue journal could prove to be an indispensable tool in the writing classroom.

The Impact of Dialogue Journals on Writing Competency

Educators interested in implementing dialogue journals into the curriculum would normally question whether the journaling experience is a successful promoter of student's written language competencies. To date, empirical studies are scant and those studies that are available, with the exception of one conducted by Bode in 1988, have not provided evidence to support dialogue journal writing.

Markman's (1984) dissertational research was the first effort to provide statistically significant data defending the use of dialogue journals. Utilizing control and treatment groups, she attempted to determine the extent to which written dialogic encounters improved college students' writing ability and their attitudes toward writing. Five cooperating teachers, teaching two sections of the same course, used dialogue journals with only one of their groups. Journals were exchanged between the teacher and students in the treatment group six times in 14 weeks. Although Markman was unable to detect statistically significant improvements in writing ability and attitudes toward writing, it was thought that the study's duration and the number of entries exchanged were definite limitations of her experiment.

As mentioned earlier, Bode (1988) conducted a five month study, between the

months of November and March, with 204 grade one students from three schools. Participants were matched on achievement levels, socioeconomic status, and the type of language arts curriculum delivered in their classrooms. Bode compared three different teaching methods; namely, the traditional language arts curriculum, dialogue journal interaction with teachers as part of the traditional language arts curriculum and dialogue journal exchange with parents in addition to the traditional language arts program. She utilized the Standard Achievement Test to measure reading achievement (word reading, reading comprehension and work study skills), spelling abilities, vocabulary, and listening comprehension. The Metropolitan Achievement Test evaluated written expression (holistic writing, sentence formation, word usage, content development, and mechanics) and the Schonell Spelling Test determined competencies with dictated spelling. Bode's research supported the value of dialogue journals in beginning literacy. Results on all post-test measures verified that the groups involved in dialogue journal writing scored significantly better than students exposed to the prescribed curriculum.

Ethnographic data have provided insights into how dialogue journal writers' entries have changed with practice. Educators and researchers, enthusiastically promoting the use of dialogue journals, claim that this type of conversational exchange, over extended periods of time, documents progress and helps teachers monitor their students' development toward literacy. The nature of this dialogic activity is believed to facilitate the development of written communication competencies because it allows children to capitalize on their oral language strengths to help them become more proficient in written language. By inviting students to engage in written dialogue as freely as they

engage in oral conversation, they are provided with a natural means by which they can progress from face to face communication, a skill in which they are competent, to a new skill, communicating in print (Kreeft, 1984). Encouraging young writers to use a medium for writing with which they feel at ease permits them to gain experience in this mode of communication and develop knowledge of written language (Newkirk, 1982). Once developing writers express their thoughts, they receive a response from a more capable language user which often models what students require to develop greater written communication proficiency. Purposeful written language is modeled when the teachers become writers alongside the students in the classroom and become supporters or facilitators rather than evaluators. Revisions are often carried out to answer questions posed by the respondent or to refine successive drafts and as a result, students demonstrate improvements in written language development.

Observed improvements found in ethnographic studies do not imply that all students develop in the same way; rather progress is thought to be as individual as the writers themselves, since they determine the direction of the dialogue. While one child's organization of a topic may be further developed, for example, another student's writing may indicate a greater awareness of audience; that is, the writer, considering the effect of the message on the reader, shows concern for the way in which the writing is presented.

To understand this diverse and complex interactive discourse between the student and the teacher, Staton et al. (1982a) immersed themselves in the data from Mrs. Reed's class by intensively reading 26 journals and then sought to provide indepth information

of how the dialogue journals were constructed, developed and maintained. This descriptive-exploratory study identified systematic methods to classify the content of the writing in terms of topics generated, language functions used and the interactional features of both participants which are the basic elements in any form of communication. This landmark investigation, apart from offering classification schemes to analyze and describe specific aspects of dialogue journal writing, also generated a set of ideas or hypotheses to be explored in their more comprehensive report (Staton, Shuy, Kreeft, & Reed, 1982b).

In this continuing research into the journals of Mrs. Reed and her students, a number of observations were noted. Staton et al. (1982b) found that the students incorporated a wider range of language functions into entries written at the end of the year compared with initial entries. As the year progressed, students used their journals for a greater variety of reasons. They would complain, question, make promises, give directives, express feelings/personal opinions, make predictions, evaluate and make challenges in their journals. This development was believed to indicate an improvement in writing abilities because students were broadening their use of written language to satisfy individual needs. Although student's initial entries concentrated on classroom topics, their writing topics shifted to personal and interpersonal matters as the writing partners learned more about each other. Systematic classification of the specific strategies used to initiate or continue conversations showed that, as the journal sharing progressed, students became more active conversationalists by finding new topics to discuss, responding to the teacher's questions and by introducing new and relevant

information. In response, the teacher asked questions to show curiosity in the topic and in the student's interests as well as to help the writers focus their thoughts. Finally, although the intention of this study was predominately to show how the dialogue journal was constructed and maintained rather than analyzing in terms of spelling correctness, a comparison of spelling accuracy in entries at the beginning and end of the year confirmed that children were spelling better in the real-life writing of journals than they were in their spelling tests. Although some might debate that most of the words on the spelling tests are intended to be more difficult compared to those normally found in journals, others might argue that the spelling words are usually reviewed for one week before a test and the words required for journal writing are self-generated in the natural context of writing.

The main conclusion drawn from this study was that this form of writing could help children bridge the gap between oral and written communication. Writing in dialogue journals, the researchers believed, permitted students to draw on oral language competencies in their attempts to communicate in print since this activity included all of the essential requirements for communication. Because dialogue journals are so markedly different, in their form and in their goals, compared to the monologue type of writing normally assigned in schools, students with extensive opportunities to dialogue with another person in print should be better able to integrate the interactive nature of oral face-to-face communication with the solitary aspect of expository writing (Staton, Shuy, Kreeft & Reed, 1982b). Building directly on oral language competencies, this consultative or casual approach invites students to use a wide range of language

strategies already mastered in oral language to help them in the more solitary activity of writing.

In 1984, Kreeft traced the developmental progress of one of Mrs. Reed's grade six student's dialogue journal writing. Analyzing four entries from the months of October, January, March, and April, she discovered that the boy made use of his oral language competencies as a tool to help him learn written language and had progressed in, what she felt were, the main areas of communication. The final writing, more so than the earlier entries, exhibited a greater awareness that he was writing for another person so he would write and edit more carefully to meet the needs of the reader. There was also greater topic elaboration to ensure a meaningful, coherent and interesting message.

Atwell (1985, 1987), inspired by the investigations into Reed's dialogue journal interactions, began exchanging journals with her eighth grade literature class and reported similar observations. Because of this conversational writing, a literate environment had permeated her classroom where, over a two year period, thousands of pages of letters had been exchanged with students writing to Atwell once per week and to their peers on a daily basis. A greater degree of sharing with an audience had helped the students realize that the reader might require more information than had been previously offered and as a result developed competencies with topic focus and elaboration and the creation of more meaningful contexts.

Braig's (1984) ethnographic dissertation supported the idea that dialogue journals facilitate the development of children's written language proficiency. She examined her seventeen grade one students' awareness that they were writing to another individual as

a result of this interactive exchange with their teacher. From an analysis of the journal entries, interviews with the six, seven and eight years olds, and from an observation log, it was evident that these developing writers were much more aware of audience at the end of the nine month dialogue experience. Her young students were more conversational, being clear as to who they were writing and for what purpose. They considered the needs of the intended audience and aimed to meet these needs by writing clearly and editing carefully.

Urzua (1987) conducted a six month observational study of four Southeast Asians who wrote dialogue journals twice weekly. Two were in sixth grade and two were in fourth grade. Towards the end of the observation period, Urzua noted that the children were becoming less worried about errors in their first drafts and as a result were more secure in experimenting with written language in different ways. Her students were taking greater risks in using more complicated language patterns to create and organize meaning. They were making decisions as to what to include or the amount of information to add so that they told the story in the way that they wanted to tell it and which would be understood by the person reading it. Urzua attributed these gains to the fact that these students had an authentic respondent who provided feedback.

Hall and Duffy (1987) noted similar observations. Following a mid-year inservice, Duffy learned of dialogue journals and introduced them to her grade one class. Duffy provided examples of her students' work to illustrate that when provided with the opportunity to write in journals, the distinctiveness of each writer developed. Children were no longer writing in the "cloned fashion" that had been so common before dialogue

journals were introduced, where all students wrote on an assigned topic and there was little evidence of individuality. Duffy's students were writing with a greater purpose, with a more personalized style, and their efforts no longer appeared to be strained and laborious.

Encouraged by a presentation which addressed the issue of learning to write by writing, Heath (1988) replaced many of her grammar lessons with the dialogue journal activity. At the end of the year, she observed considerable improvement in her students' written language skills. Her eighth grade students, she felt, were writing with greater creativity, sophistication and accuracy. Some of the students used more variety in sentence structure and complexity, others indicated a better understanding of subject-verb agreement while others who were constantly misusing pronouns, were by the end of the year using them correctly. Heath also noticed that students were demonstrating a better understanding of grammar rules and usage as a result of participation in the dialogue journal activity. In many cases, students were already correctly using many grammar rules before she had introduced them to the class as a whole. These findings were similar to those detected by Kreeft in 1984. Concentrating on five students' use of grammatical morphemes in their daily journals, over a ten month period, an analysis indicated that their grammatical competence emerged as they informally talked with their teacher in writing. After witnessing the correct forms in the teacher's response, students were able to incorporate more accurate grammar into their written communication.

Crowhurst (1992) informally analyzed the weekly journal entries of 25 sixth graders who dialogued for four months with her university class of teacher education

students. Crowhurst noted that the entries of the grade six children changed in a variety of ways. As the project proceeded, the most obvious difference was an increase in length of the students' letters. Students were writing far more toward the end of the project than they were in the beginning. The initial entries were not as syntactically complex as the successive letters. Letters written at the beginning of the year contained short sentences while later entries included more adverbial and more embedded clauses. Twelve children who did not use paragraphs in their first entry introduced paragraphing in subsequent letters. Students also adopted questioning strategies, strategies for beginning and ending their entries, and strategies for introducing topics which indicated a greater degree of communicative interaction with pen pals.

In 1982, following the completion of the seminal study, Staton accepted a job at Gallaudet College, a school for hearing impaired students. Because of Staton's move, hearing impaired students were also one of the early focuses of dialogue journal investigations. The Gallaudet Research Institute was one of the earliest to support studies investigating the use of dialogue journals and has become actively involved with inservicing teachers regarding the use of this writing and reading activity (Abrams, 1987; Bailes, Searls, Slobodzian & Staton, 1986; Staton, 1985a; Walworth, 1985). Dialogue journals are believed to be a natural way for deaf students to develop competencies in reading and writing because they are much like conversations in print, providing students with a procedure that compensates for the lack of oral communication inflicted by their hearing impairment.

Other authors promote dialogue journal writing because the activity helps to

increase a developing writer's fluency. In 1983, Davis, a consultant on a migrant education project in New Jersey, hoped that dialogue journals would promote written fluency among junior and senior high ESL students as well as provide them with access to career information if they participated in written exchanges with their counsellors. Although the study's procedure was not referred to in the article, Davis did contend that the dialogue journal enabled students to practice their written language skills thus promoting writing fluency.

Danielson (1988), another author to support the use of dialogue journals, in a pamphlet developed to introduce teachers to the activity, devoted a section to fluency improvement as a result of the interactive exchange. Because this activity promoted writing in a non-threatening and supportive environment, students gained confidence in writing, entries became longer, and sentence structure increased in complexity, all of which contributed to greater fluency when expressing ideas in print. Teachers, Danielson maintained, were also equipped with an ideal document for monitoring the written language maturation of individual children.

Developing Motivation for Writing through Journal Writing

The improvement of student attitudes has long been recognized as a major educational goal since attitude has a powerful bearing on learning. Up to 50% of students fail to learn because they have developed poor attitudes towards school (Glasser, 1986). They refrain from working to their potential because they fail to see how school is meeting their needs. Attitudes begin to develop from birth and are

continually influenced as children interact with their environment. Attitude determines the degree of a child's motivation and motivation is essential for learning.

Learning to write does not happen overnight. It requires a great deal of practice and motivation must be sustained during the process of acquisition. Most children learn to speak quite successfully, given time with good models, under relatively stress-free, motivating conditions where experimentation is positively praised and fear of failure is non-existent. Children begin school without language intimidations, feeling successful with their ability to communicate orally. Although one might expect written language to be like talk; joyful, relevant and satisfying, many learn, through experience, that this is not the case.

Children need to experience success if they are to gain confidence in their written language ability. All too often, however, developing writers experience failure, and predictably, failure leads to the lowering of confidence and to unfavourable attitudes. Cochrane and Cochrane (1984) sum up the devastating effects failure can have on a child.

Once that terrible brand of failure is placed upon a child it weighs down his spirit like a millstone. It carries him to the depths of hopelessness, paralysing his will to learn. (p. 141)

Students who become handicapped in this way, need to be freed from these feelings of inadequacy because they will never become writers if they feel threatened whenever they are required to write. If anxious students avoid writing situations, they are not likely to develop the writing skills necessary for effective communication and they will almost certainly lack the confidence normally gained through successful composing experiences

and practice (Book, 1976).

Book (1976) conducted a study examining the effects of writing apprehension on writing performance. University students enrolled in a basic writing course were given the Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) and asked to write about a controversial issue on their campus. Of these 180 students, 19 were identified as having high apprehension with regard to writing, 21 were considered to have low apprehension while 140 students fell within the normal range for the Writing Apprehension Test. A content analysis of certain grammatical elements in the controversial essays of the high and low apprehensive writers revealed that the degree of writing apprehension has a significant influence on the structure, language usage, and amount of information transmitted in a message. Students who did not feel anxious about writing wrote three times as many words, over three times as many sentences, four times as many nouns, more prepositional phrases and twice as many paragraphs which were one and one half times longer than paragraphs of the high apprehensives. If highly apprehensive about writing, subjects offered four and one half times less information, had three times as many spelling errors, more run on sentences and used more words to produce the main ideas. Book concluded that writing apprehension interferes with a developing writer's ability to experiment in print, test ideas, and strengthen written language skills. She went on to suggest that if apprehensive writers could overcome their anxieties, writing skills and confidence in abilities would improve.

Although most school children do not acquire a fear of writing, a significant number suffer from motivational impediments and demonstrate little desire to write

(Calkins, 1986; Spack & Sadow, 1983). They have not learned to value writing and, consequently it will probably never become an integral part of their lives. At best, unmotivated writers may experience temporary excitement for a writing task, but upon completion they return to passivity.

The classroom environment is not always conducive to developing within children a natural desire to write. Rather it often encourages unproductive anxieties toward writing tasks (Veit, 1980). In schools, the greatest amount of writing is done for examination purposes (Britton et al., 1975; Applebee et al., 1981) and in the real world writers simply do not write for that reason. As a result, school writing tends to be more extrinsically than intrinsically motivating. The individual performs for the promise of an acceptable grade rather than the purpose of communicating ideas. Although taking risks to try out new discoveries is important in the process of language development, it does not take long for students to learn how to please the examiner, by playing it safe and avoiding risks wherever possible. For example, students may use words that they can spell correctly rather than using more complex words that they are unsure of and will probably misspell. In journals, students are permitted to communicate in a situation where they are never wrong and are invited to take risks with things such as invented spelling, word choice, and phraseology.

Writing experiences, if they are to be worthwhile, must be intrinsically motivating for students. To develop lifelong readers and writers, schools need to ensure that activities are authentic and meaning-centered. The dialogue journal can provide the student with intrinsic motivation for writing. This student-centered activity, stemming

from the writer's interest and experience, has greater personal meaning and significance than most class assignments. The writer is provided with a reader/respondent who is interested in what the child wishes to express rather than just simply examining the correctness of surface features. This sharing with a caring, significant audience equips writers with a purpose and with encouragement to display their inner voices.

The ungraded, criticism-free journal exchanges can help overcome some of the previously established negative attitudes and feelings of inadequacy with writing. Teachers, stifling their editor instincts, provide a pleasant and realistic response to the students' messages in the hope of becoming influential models.

The teacher, by becoming a co-writer and taking a personal interest in every child, can affect the individual's attitude toward school, toward learning, and toward writing. The relationship formed through dialogue journals between the student and teacher, as they discuss topics of mutual interest, provides the student with a new sense of belonging in the classroom.

The Impact of Dialogue Journals on Attitudes Toward

Writing

Statistically significant effects of dialogue journals on a student's attitudes toward writing are non-existent. In 1988, however, Schatzberg-Smith conducted a project to determine if 12 months of dialogic exchange could facilitate an improvement in study habits and attitudes in general. Students, not successfully completing a basic skills placement test in language and mathematics for entry into the college where Schatzberg-

Smith instructed, were offered a non credit course designed to help students achieve college level skills. Besides offering classes in language and mathematics, this course provided study skills and orientation classes and support services such as counselling and tutoring. Thirty-eight underprepared college students participated in the project and wrote in journals, for 15 minutes per class, commenting on their positive and negative academic experiences and on upcoming assignments. Schatzberg-Smith would reply with questions and feedback that encouraged success. Administration of The Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes to students at the beginning and end of the investigation revealed that students' study habits and attitudes had improved significantly ($p < .001$) after twelve months of this experience.

The only study specifically designed to determine if dialogue journals affected students' attitudes toward writing was conducted by Turewicz in 1983. At the beginning and end of a one month study she administered two attitude toward writing inventories. The first attitude assessment was The Writing Interview which consisted of 14 open ended questions. This questionnaire was initially developed by Atwell in 1977 and later revised by Harste and Burke (cited in Turewicz, 1983). The second attitude assessment was a questionnaire developed by Turewicz. During the month, nine students were asked to write at least one paragraph of approximately 100 lines at sometime during the day. No class time was specifically allotted for journal writing because Turewicz did not want to interfere with the regular classroom activity. In the data obtained from her grade ten students she detected minor attitudinal changes. Some pupils viewed writing more positively, they felt more comfortable with writing, and they were more willing

to allow others to read their written work. She believed these changes in attitude, albeit slight, were quite remarkable given that the study's duration was only one month.

A great deal of other ethnographic research also suggests that, besides promoting language related skills, dialogue journals develop, in students, a more positive attitude toward writing. Much of the literature describes the activity or provides reactions to dialogue journals in educational settings and comments on the extraordinary value of this type of written exchange for fostering positive attitudes toward writing.

It seems that many students are willing to devote more time and energy to journal writing than to other kinds of school writing assignments. In 1988, Kreeft, Staton, Richardson, and Wolfram compared the quantity, complexity, topic focus and cohesion of three assigned pieces of writing with three dialogue entries submitted by 12 grade six students. In-depth analysis indicated that student's proficiency in linguistic expression and the quantity of writing was equivalent to or often more advanced in the dialogue journal than in other kinds of written assignments.

Others, too, noted the positiveness and contentment that students felt for journal writing. Hipple (1985) discussed her kindergarten students enthusiasm for journals, noting that when the children worked in journals there was often a feeling of productivity and gratification everywhere. Hayes and Bahruth (1985) offered fifth grade reluctant and less competent ESL students dialogue journal writing as one activity in the classroom. They were pleased with the students' improvements in reading and writing, but what intrigued them most was the sense of confidence and self-satisfaction the children gained following their achievements. Students were motivated to write in

dialogue journals and this increased motivation seemed to branch out to other school assignments. They soon realized that they could learn English. This is the kind of attitude that every teacher would like to instill in every child.

Staton (1985b) in an editorial in Dialogue, a newsletter which deals exclusively with dialogue journals, discussed a similar discovery.

Even students with a history of poor school performance, who have done very little reading or writing and shown little interest in anything related to school work, have blossomed in the dialogue journal interaction. Their enthusiasm, often confined initially to this context, has eventually spilled over to their other work. (p. 1)

Changes observed in the students' entries and changes in student behavior have led many to believe that a greater self-confidence with written expression is a natural by-product of dialogue journal experiences (Danielson, 1988; Hall & Duffy, 1987; Gambrell, 1985; Hayes, Bahruth & Kessler, 1985; Staton, 1985a, 1988). As children gain more expertise with dialogue journals, writing is viewed as a more natural mode of communication and their anxieties about written language are reduced (Reece, 1980; Steer, 1988).

Hall and Duffy (1987) discussed some of the gains observed in grade one children as a result of dialogue journal participation. Children were no longer restricted by the need to have everything correct in the first attempt but were more concerned with getting their thoughts onto paper. The twelve students, under investigation, were more experimental with their language because they were now free to express themselves and to test new ideas without the worry of perfection. Danielson (1988), in a recently developed teacher's guide advocating the use of dialogue journals in the classroom, also

indicated that experience with dialogue journal writing builds confidence in written language abilities and helps children feel more comfortable with writing.

Staton (1985a), while director of the Dialogue Journal Project at Gallaudet Research Institute in Washington, DC, discovered that the individual, meaningful interaction students have with their instructors in dialogue journals tended to yield positive effects. To enter Gallaudet College, a hearing impaired educational setting, with regular freshman status, students were required to take English placement tests and those who did not obtain freshman rank were required to enroll in an English Language Program (ELP). Staton noted that in ELP classes, where dialogue journals were utilized, students were twice as likely to register for English classes in the following semester as compared with those who did not participate in dialogue journal interactions.

Hayes, Bahruth, and Kessler (1985) also discussed the positive changes occurring in grade five ESL students. Before they were introduced to dialogue journals, these immigrants had extremely low academic self-concepts and felt that academic learning was beyond their reach. These children experienced considerable success with this natural language exchange and positive self-images began to surface.

Moore (1991), with an interest in the role of computers in developing written language competencies, set up a telecommunications link between an elementary school and Eastern Michigan University to provide an adaptation of the pen and paper version of dialogue journals. Following instructions in keyboarding, word processing, and electronic communications, a class of fifth grade students were invited to dialogue, via computers and modems, with teachers taking a graduate university course. With as

many as three correspondences per week throughout the fall of 1989, informal observations and analysis of students' entries revealed that students began to write more as the project continued. Moore (1991) claimed that as students became aware that their writing partners valued what was being written, their motivation and interest in sharing ideas in clear, explicit ways increased. When comparing later entries with earlier entries, there was an obvious increase in the amount children were willing to write and for the most part, students were taking greater risks with language.

Developing Perceptions of Writing through Journal

Writing

Through encounters with varied instances of language use children develop an understanding of how written language works, the various styles involved, and the purposes for which written language may be utilized. Developing these perceptions of writing, learning how to improve writing competency, and developing perceptions of one's ability as a writer are all necessary ingredients in learning to write.

Three different but related variables contribute to a person's perception of any activity and to be in control of learning that activity one must have awareness of the three aspects related to the activity (Baker & Brown, 1984). Students need to be aware of the task and understand its importance. They need to know how to apply strategies to improve proficiency in the task and they need to be able to monitor their performance or determine the extent of development in their performance. If the process of writing is not understood or if student's strengths in writing are not enhanced and monitored,

then writing becomes difficult.

In recent years, perception of reading has been the focus of considerable study. Comparing students' awareness of reading to performance, Johnston and Winograd (1988) learned that poor readers are often more passive or less strategic than efficient readers. This compliance often hinders reading because reading development requires that students become active, purposeful, strategic participants. Passive learners are not likely to take control over their learning; that is, they will not test hypothesis, evaluate the feedback or become directors of their own cognitive activities.

As in reading, people develop an understanding of writing by actively constructing meaning and becoming immersed in the process rather than passively receiving instruction and explanations about writing without the required practice time. When learners become active, purposeful, strategic participants, they become aware of what is needed to perform effectively. It is then possible for the student to take steps to meet the demands of the communicative situation more adequately.

Research investigating student's perceptions of their own writing is limited even though perceptions are thought to be significant predictors of behaviour (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). In 1984, Stansell and Moss monitored student's perceptions of writing to determine if varying types of instruction influenced knowledge of written language. Students from three kindergarten classes were chosen to participate in the study because their learning environments were different in instructional focus and in the availability of various instructional materials.

One group of students was exposed to direct instruction of discrete skills with

the intention that students progress through a prescribed curriculum and set of commercial workbook exercises. The only activity resembling any form of natural text was when the teacher read an occasional story aloud to the students. The second group of students experienced more informal instruction. Students studied various themes, utilized related trade books and used writing to communicate student-generated topics and receive daily feedback from peers and the teacher. The third class of students received similar informal instruction to the second class and extensively used electronic equipment such as microcomputers and commercial software programs, cassette recorders, and electronic typewriters as well. Weekly observations over a six month period for groups one and two, and for three months with the third group resulted in personal notes, videotapes of the working environments, samples of student writing as well as audiotapes of interviews and spontaneous conversations with the teacher and children. Classification and interpretation of the data revealed that all three groups of students viewed writing as a meaning centered activity, regardless of the type of instruction, but the purposes and diversity of literacy were perceived differently, depending on the child's classroom instructional orientation. Children, in the second and third groups, who were exposed to rich literacy experiences and opportunities to actually read and write connected discourse demonstrated a richer knowledge of the diverse forms and uses of written language than their students had been taught through direct instruction in previous years. The students developed insights about literacy and began to view reading and writing as a means to be creative, share feelings and experiences as well as continue the development of personal language and thinking.

Altering instruction with first graders (Nathenson-Mejia, Rasinski, & Deford, 1985) and with third and fourth graders (Rasinski & Deford, 1986), indicated that children perceive writing differently as a result of classroom experiences. Students completed questionnaires that assessed their perceptions, interests and writing habits. The questionnaires revealed that a significant number of students exposed to the prescribed basal reader defined writing at a surface level, an activity assigned in schools requiring correct spelling and good penmanship. Students in the more informal classrooms, utilizing a thematic approach supplemented with trade books rather than the prescribed basal reader, felt that writing was an enjoyable and meaning centered process, an exercise which could be used in real life situations to satisfy specific needs. Students in the more informal classroom were twice as likely to be internally motivated rather than having external motives for writing and tended to write more often, outside of school, than the students in the more traditional classroom.

The dialogue journal experience can expand students perceptions related to writing. They encourage active participation on the part of the student where writing is completed for the purpose of sharing ideas which makes the writing meaningful, functional, and personally significant for the child. The dialogue journal, as indicated earlier, permits the teacher to model writing as a real life activity, a natural and important mode of communication. Illustration of writing in this way can help guide children's perceptions or provide them with insights of the writing process.

The Impact of Dialogue Journals on Perceptions of Writing

Statistically significant effects of dialogue journals on a student's perception of writing are non-existent. Spack and Sadow (1983), dissatisfied with traditional methods of teaching writing, introduced dialogue journals to college freshman ESL students. They discovered, through informal observation, that this experience effectively taught students about the writing process and helped students understand the purpose of writing; that is, to explore, develop, focus, organize, and to share ideas with others.

In 1988, Steer used dialogue journals as an educational tool for encouraging second language acquisition and improved academic writing in her ESL, pre-university students. In questionnaires administered at the end of the project, her students expressed excitement about the dialogue journal activity and believed that they had gained a deeper insight into the writing process and were able to write with a clearer purpose.

Developing Reading Comprehension Ability through Journal Writing

Reading and writing, until recently, have been treated as two separate skills requiring separate instruction. Within the past two decades, studies investigating the relationship between reading and writing have begun to indicate that practice in one can lead to improvement in the other. Loban (1963), in his landmark thirteen year study, discovered high correlations between reading achievement and writing ability. Grade six children who were good readers were also good writers and poor readers tended to be poor writers. This relationship was even more significant by grade nine.

Stotsky (1983) provided a synthesis of correlational studies that investigated the relationship between reading and writing. Many of these studies showed that scores in writing and reading were highly correlated and that an increase in the amount of time spent reading improved a child's writing ability. Stotsky (1982) also reviewed experimental designs which measured the effects of writing instruction on reading, and reading instruction on writing. These studies, for the most part, indicated that instruction for development of one language area positively affected the other language area.

Researchers demonstrating that reading and writing are interrelated and supportive communication skills, advocate that reading and writing be taught simultaneously (Chomsky, 1971; Applebee, 1977; Harste, Burke & Woodward, 1981; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Because these mutually enhancing processes positively influence each other, and competence in both mature naturally as children read and write, language activities combining reading and writing for genuine purposes should replace the type of instruction that continues to keep them separate.

The dialogue journal is one literacy activity that combines reading and writing in a natural and functional context. This form of communication between the student and the teacher places many reading, as well as writing, demands on the students and helps them realize that one process supports the other. Stotsky (1983b) directed attention to dialogue journals as a powerful reading event in the following statement.

They are a practical instance of reading and writing bound together in a single functional experience ... Dialogue journals are like a friendly conversation in which two participants write back and forth to each other, thus constructing a mutually

interesting reading text about self-generated topics, a text which has purpose and meaning for both readers. (p. 1)

Dialogue journals deal with a familiar topic, in a familiar context and with a known audience. This makes dialogue journal text highly predictable and largely comprehensible. Dialogue journal reading will often provide excellent reading comprehension practice because the reading is normally more functional, more individualized, and easier to comprehend than basal readers (Shuy, 1985). Students are normally strongly motivated to read dialogue journal entries because they are dealing with the students' interests, concerns, and vocabulary.

Dialogue journals are gratifying because they enable teachers to individualize each child's reading instruction (Murray, 1985). In 1986, Bailes et al. noted that as the student and the teacher participate in dialogue journals, they create a reading text that continuously conforms to the student's language proficiency. Teachers tended to raise the complexity of responses, to offer an increasingly demanding reading text, as the students developed greater capability with written language.

Staton (1985b), in a comparison of the complexity of these dialogue journal entries and student's basal readers, revealed that the teacher's journal responses with fifth graders contained significantly more advanced vocabulary and grammatical structures than the basal stories. Shuy (1985), however, discovered that despite the complexity of the teacher's writing, in terms of the sentence structure, vocabulary and ideas, the students could comprehend the journal responses easier than they could passages on a standardized achievement test, written at a lower level.

Although the teacher's responses provide valuable reading material, children's

reading ability should also be enhanced through the actual dialogue composing because most writing entails reading and rereading what has been written. Children could very well improve reading ability through writing by monitoring and rereading throughout the composing period (Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1984). Writers need to inspect their work to determine if the message is as clear as is possible.

The discovery that early readers are "pencil and paper children" accentuates the influence writing has on reading (Durkin, 1966). In a six year study of 49 California children in the late 50's, Durkin reported that students who learned to read before entering school experimented early with writing and had continual access to various writing tools such as chalk, markers, pencils, and paper. She believed that reading development was a natural by-product of interest in writing.

Students not only reread writing in progress but will reflect on and re-examine previous ideas in journal entries in order to continue the interaction (Dawson, 1983). This constant shift from reader to writer provides the student with many opportunities to become an insider of written language (Newkirk, 1982). Encouraging students to partake in dialogue journal writing and inviting them to become producers of language will help children generate hypotheses about written language as well as help them develop insights into the reading and writing process.

Although interest in dialogue journals had originally concentrated on developments in writing, research has recently investigated their contribution to improving student's reading comprehension. In December 1985, Dialogue, the professional newsletter published by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington

D.C., drew attention to the rich source of reading entailed in dialogue journals. Shuy (1985), maintained that dialogic interactions provide an excellent means for developing language and reading comprehension for the following reason.

Dialogue journal writing is speech-like in nature. [It captures the natural phrasing children already use in understanding what others say]. It is closer by far to the actual talk of both participants than any of their school writing could be... the teacher's writing is largely comprehended, suggesting that such reading provides excellent comprehension practice. (p. 2)

Shuy went on to discuss a study he had completed in which he analyzed a high school deaf student's comprehension of two texts. The student read at the third grade level, as measured by the Standard Achievement Test for hearing impaired students, but had successfully comprehended 92% of the messages in her dialogue notebook, even though the teacher often wrote beyond the grade three level. The functional, user-responsive, learner adapted dialogue journal, according to both Staton and Shuy, provides excellent reading practice.

The Impact of Dialogue Journals on Reading Comprehension

A study investigating the effect of dialogue journals on reading comprehension, was conducted by Walworth in 1985. Walworth ascertained that college level hearing impaired ESL students were more capable of reading advanced textbooks written in English because of their experience with dialogue journals. Students exposed to this user-responsive, meaning centered activity developed a greater proficiency in reading than those who did not have the opportunity to participate in the dialogue journal

activity.

In the *Dialogue* newsletter, Murray (1985) also commented on her kindergarten students' progress and enthusiasm in reading after she extended personal journal writing to dialogue journal writing. She was particularly satisfied with the mutually created texts because she felt that they allowed for 25 reading groups within her classroom.

In 1986, Peyton produced a teacher's guide to encourage the use of dialogue journals in various educational settings. In this handbook, she recommended journals as valuable reading texts because the teacher's responses seem to conform to the capabilities of each student. She provides examples of replies to different students to demonstrate how varying proficiency levels are accommodated within the classroom.

Hayes et al. (1985) also felt that the teacher's comprehensible relevant responses, in their dialogue journal responses, provided students with daily reading lessons. Referring to the dialogue journal as the "catalytic convertor" for helping their ESL fifth grade students become better writers and readers, they described how one of their struggling readers had grown to be an eager participant in journal writing as well as in other reading and writing activities introduced in class. Practice with writing notes to another person and later receiving responses that could be read without difficulty, positively affected the development of writing and reading skills.

Correlates of Literacy Development

Levels of achievement will be affected by variables other than the type of treatment examined in this study. Before any conclusions regarding the effectiveness

of the treatment are drawn, other variables should be considered. Age, gender, socio-economic status, and the student's prior performance are discussed as correlates of literacy development since these factors seem to influence performance.

Gender

Research investigating the influence of gender on language proficiency maintains that a difference between the sexes does exist. These differences, according to Goldberg and Lewis (1969), can be detected as early as thirteen months. Girls tend to be better than boys their age in both oral and written language. Girls begin to talk earlier than boys and as a result establish a definite pattern of superior verbal performance which continues throughout school and college.

To determine if differences between the sexes were apparent in the area of written language development, Gates (1961) administered the Gates Reading Survey Test to 13,114 students between grades two and eight. This testing, which measured speed of reading, reading vocabulary, and level of reading comprehension, revealed significant differences between boys' and girls' reading abilities. Girls, on average, outperformed boys at the grade two level and the differences increased as the grades increased. Girls at the intermediate level were from one-third to one-half a grade level ahead of boys their age. Gates felt that one possible explanation for the inferior performance of boys might be that more boys than girls pursue a kind of life in which they find little or no early need, incentives, and opportunities for reading. Boys fall behind in the beginning and many continue to lag behind throughout their school life. In 1971, Blom (cited in

Asher and Markell, 1974) confirmed the notion that boys trail behind in written language development. He discovered that sixty to ninety percent of elementary school children referred for remedial reading instruction were boys. The 1987 Southam News Study showed that differences between the sexes with regard to written language ability were evident in the Canadian adult population when statistics revealed that 53.5 percent of identified illiterates were male and 46.5 percent were female.

Asher and Markell (1974) attempted to determine if variations in reading material affected the sex differences in reading ability of eighty-seven fifth grade students. Standardized reading achievement test results gathered one month prior to the commencement of the study indicated that, on average, females surpassed males in reading comprehension ($p < .01$). Data obtained from the rating of pictures to assess student's interests in topics, the completion of cloze passages, with every fifth word deleted, corresponding to the students' three high and three low interest areas, and finally a report of which topics they would like to read more about confirmed that boys read as well as girls with high-interest materials, while lack of interest produced results similar to those reported earlier. Asher and Markell (1974) maintained that boys might need the additional motivation provided by high-interest material to read well.

Age

The age range of students within the same class or grade is often quite extensive due to school entry age requirements and grade repetition. Students who begin school in this province normally range in ages from four years and eight months to five years

and eight months. With such large differences at the start of schooling one might expect some students to be much more knowledgeable and advanced in their thinking than others. Research examining the influence of age variation within grades on performance has found that the older students in classes seem to be more successful in the early grades but this finding appears to reverse as the students get closer to high school completion (May & Welch, 1986).

The older children in a primary class have usually entered school at a later age and are thought to be at a advantage. Campbell (cited in May & Welch, 1986) discovered that the younger children, for the most part, had lower percentile achievement scores than their older classmates. The effect of age on performance seems to be restricted to the early grades (May & Welch, 1986) since by the time a child reaches grade eight the age differences of a few months are not indicative of school performance unless the child has experienced grade repetition. The oldest children in the intermediate classes are often not the highest achievers. At this level the older students tend to have repeated a grade and are among the lower achievers.

Socio-Economic Background

The education level of both parents is a frequent measure of socio-economic background. The home environment, particularly preschool experience, has proven to have a major influence on children's acquisition of language. Homes provide diverse opportunities for literacy development and in environments where books are easily accessed and enjoyed and where parents model reading and writing as useful activities,

children's language development flourishes (Durkin, 1966; Doake, 1987). Others disagree with using SES as a predictor of educational achievement. For example, Kifer (1977) insists that measures of socio-background are general measures and are of little help in explaining the educational settings of pre-school children. Kifer claims that two households sharing similar social class or with similarly educated parents may be significantly different in the way in which the parents and children interact.

Wigfield and Asher (1984), in a review of the pertinent research regarding the social and motivational influences on reading, realized that the home environment is actually a better predictor of children's literacy development than socio-economic background but maintained that social class has proven to be a significant determinant for literacy growth. Sources show that similarities with regard to family lifestyles, interests, values, conversation patterns and attitudes do exist within families of comparable socio-economic status and that differences are observed in children from various socio-economic backgrounds. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to perform less well than children from middle class homes. Middle-class parents have higher performance expectations for their children than do lower-class parents. Compared to middle-class parents, lower-SES parents use less effective teaching strategies with their children, and, as well, many studies indicate the following.

Higher-SES parents are more likely to be involved in the kinds of activities that promote skills and interest in and positive feelings about reading. Middle-class children are more likely to come to school with the idea that reading is an important activity. They are more likely to be familiar with reading-related materials and they have been exposed to parental teaching styles that foster school-relevant cognitive styles and

motivational styles. (p. 433)

Kroll (1983) reported that social class background outweighed the school influences on children's achievement in both reading and writing. He referred to the longitudinal Bristol project initiated by Wells in 1972 with 64 children aged 15 months and 64 children aged 39 months. To examine major influences of oral language development of children, data were gathered on participants' home environments, on social status measures and through conversations tape recorded in each child's home for one day at regular three month intervals over a period of two years and three months. The Bristol research supported the developmental sequence of language learning and showed that the rate of linguistic acquisition is associated with the quality of conversation children experience with family members.

In 1975, Wells and Raban (cited in Kroll, 1983) studied 20 of the older participants in the Bristol project, to determine the extent to which certain major factors contributed to the successful acquisition of reading at the age of seven years. The children's knowledge of literacy at school entry and their home environments proved to be the stronger determinants of reading ability while differences in schooling were not highly predictive of reading acquisition.

Two years later, Kroll (1983) examined 18 of the 20 children involved in the Wells and Raban investigation to determine the effect of oral language ability, preschool knowledge of literacy, home environment, schooling and reading attainment on the writing abilities of students at the age of nine years. As with the reading attainment

study, conducted two years earlier, schooling did not have a significant influence on writing development. The most powerful predictors of writing attainment identified by Kroll were the child's home environment and the student's preschool knowledge of literacy.

The Effects of Prior Achievement

Logically, one would expect that the students' prior performance would have a great impact on their progress in each of the variables under investigation in this study. A student's prior performance normally provides informative and accurate indicators of subsequent achievement.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is fivefold. First it focuses on the hypotheses of the study. Second, the proposed model is presented. Third, the sample is described. Fourth, the variables under investigation and the instruments utilized to measure them are discussed. Finally, the writing and reading programs of the participants are described.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses to be tested in this study stem from the research questions posed in Chapter I. These hypotheses, for the most part, are supported by the related research in Chapter II. The four hypotheses relate to the type of interactive writing under investigation.

Hypothesis 1: Students who have been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity for one year in addition to the prescribed curriculum will attain a higher level of writing competency than those students following the prescribed curriculum but not participating in a dialogue journal exchange for one year.

Hypothesis 2: Students who have been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity for one year in addition to the prescribed curriculum will develop more positive attitudes toward writing than those students following the prescribed curriculum but not participating in a dialogue journal exchange for one year.

Hypothesis 3: Students who have been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity for one year in addition to the prescribed curriculum will develop more accurate

perceptions of writing than those students following the prescribed curriculum but not participating in a dialogue journal exchange for one year.

Hypothesis 4: Students who have been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity for one year in addition to the prescribed curriculum will attain a higher level of reading comprehension ability than those students following the prescribed curriculum but not participating in the dialogue journal exchange for one year.

Other variables besides dialogue journal writing will affect the students' written language development. The correlates; namely, gender, age, socio-economic status, and the student's prior performance will likely influence the four criterion variables investigated. These four variables, then, are used as control variables or covariates during the statistical analysis.

The Proposed Model

The model for this study is depicted in Figure 1. The Dialogue Journal Model may be regarded as a two stage model. In stage one, the four pretest variables, namely, writing competency at the beginning of the year (WRITE1), attitudes toward writing at the beginning of the year (ATT1), perceptions of writing at the beginning of the year (PERC1), and reading comprehension ability at the beginning of the year (READ1) were regressed on the three background or source variables, namely, gender of participants (GENDER), their age (AGE), and their parent's education level (PARED).

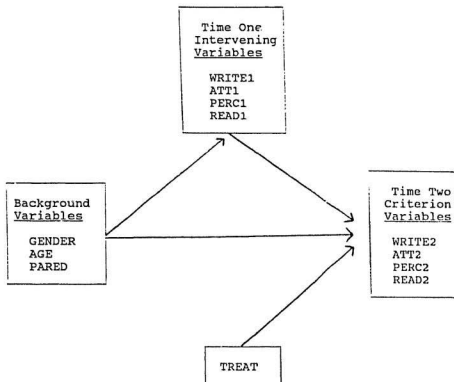


Figure 1. The Dialogue Journal Model

Legend

- GENDER - Gender of students: male(1), female(2)
 AGE - Student's age in months
 PARED - Father's education level plus Mother's education level
 TREAT - Treatment: Students writing dialogue journals(2), other students(1)
 WRITE1 - Writing competency score at pretest period
 ATT1 - Attitude towards writing at pretest period
 PERC1 - Perception of writing at pretest period
 READR1 - Reading comprehension raw score at pretest period
 WRITE2 - Writing competency score at posttest period
 ATT2 - Attitude toward writing at posttest period
 PERC2 - Perception of writing at posttest period
 READR2 - Reading comprehension raw score at posttest period

In stage two of the model, the four criterion variables, namely, writing competency at the end of the year (WRITE2), attitudes toward writing at the end of the year (ATT2), perceptions of writing at the end of the year (PERC2), and reading comprehension ability at the end of the year (READ2) were regressed on all the predictor variables, namely, GENDER, AGE, PARED, WRITE1, ATT1, PERC1, READ1 plus the type of treatment the students received (TREAT). The current research project was undertaken to determine statistically whether the treatment of dialogue journal writing is a successful promoter of students' written language abilities, their attitudes toward and perceptions of writing and their reading comprehension ability while controlling for gender, age, socio-economic status and prior performance.

Sample

All participants were grade eight students attending the same Corner Brook junior high school where the researcher taught during the 1989-1990 academic school year. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal and from the superintendent of the school board governing this school (See Appendix A).

The experimental groups, for this study, were not randomly selected. Due to the organizational conditions of schools, each group of students was established by their class placement. At this school, class placement was determined by the student's choice of courses, to some extent. To accommodate two part-time music teachers, the grade eight choral and instrumental students were scheduled into one class. This group of students was not considered for participation in the project because many of the students who choose

to study choral and instrumental music tend to have a strong scholastic orientation. A second class of grade eight students was not chosen to take part because many of these students experienced difficulties in one or more academic areas and instruction was more individualized than in the other grade eight classrooms. The researcher avoided these two class placements because these samples were homogeneously grouped and not thought to be representative of the general population. The remaining grade eight students were randomly assigned by the administration into four classes and three of these were chosen, at random, to participate in this study. Two of the classes were arbitrarily designated as control groups and followed the prescribed grade eight program while the third class was selected as the treatment group, the dialogue journal group. In addition to following the prescribed grade 8 language arts program, this group engaged in dialogue journal writing with the researcher on two occasions during a six-day cycle.

A total of 78 students participated in the project, 45 or 57.7% were female while 33 or 42.3% were male. The two control groups consisted of 30 and 21 students to provide a total of 51 control subjects, 22 or 43.1% were male while 29 or 56.9% were female. The dialogue treatment group was comprised of 27 students, 11 or 40.7% were male while 16 or 59.3% were female. The participants' ages ranged from 13 years one month to 15 years one month. There was little age difference between the control and treatment students. In the control group two students had repeated one grade in school, whereas in the experimental group three students had repeated a grade.

Research Design

To examine the value of the dialogue journal activity, this study used a quasi-experimental research design because it was not possible to randomly assign students to the control and treatment groups. The students had a total of ten different teachers for their subjects. Even though all of these subject teachers were exposing their students to the prescribed curriculum, there was undoubtedly some diversity in the students' classroom experiences. These variations were impossible to control in the natural setting of a school. To reduce the effect of the differences within each group, information about the students, namely, age, gender, and parent's education levels was recorded and used as three of the four correlate variables within the model. All participants were administered a pre-test in early October and retested during the first week of June to measure progress on the four outcome variables investigated (writing competency, attitudes toward writing, perceptions of writing, and reading comprehension ability). The data obtained from the pre and post-tests was analyzed using an analysis of covariance within the framework of the general linear model. To ensure that the potentially confounding variables of age, gender, parent's educational background, and prior performance were adequately controlled, this statistical technique determined whether the observed differences between the experimental and control groups were statistically significant while taking into account these four correlate variables. These statistical (as opposed to experimental) controls permitted the researcher to attribute gains to the experimental treatment with greater confidence. Because practical limitations within the schools prevented random assignment of subjects, the analysis of covariance permitted a valid evaluation of the outcome of the treatment by statistically

controlling the effects of the uncontrolled variables.

The two classes of students which acted as the control group for the study were administered the assessments, as indicated earlier, but were not required to take part in writing activities outside of their regular program.

The third class of students wrote dialogue journals. The students receiving this treatment were supplied with bound notebooks and asked to keep a journal. It was explained that these books should be considered their personal property and whatever they discussed in them would remain strictly confidential. The students were told that each journal entry would be read and responded to by the researcher and the activity would be somewhat like letter writing. If they really did not want an entry to be read students were advised put an "x" on the left hand margin of that page. They were also guaranteed that nothing would be corrected or graded, that the researcher was interested in whatever they wanted to share and would not be concerned with errors like spelling and punctuation. It was explained that the entries would be submitted every three days and the schedule for indicating when students should submit journals was marked on the inside cover of each book. During the six day cycle, one group of students was assigned days one and four to submit journals, other students were asked to pass in journals on days two and five, while the final group exchanged on days three and six. It was the responsibility of the students to find the time to write the minimum requirement of four lines per entry because this writing would be done outside of class time. The students could place their journals in a box situated in their homeroom classroom or give them to the researcher in the morning when she visited to return journals passed in the preceding day.

Variable Description

Treatment Variable

The two classes of students which acted as the control group for the study were administered all assessments but were not required to take part in writing activities outside of their regular program. This control group of students was coded as one while the treatment group participated in dialogue journal writing, in addition to what was assigned in the regular classroom, and was code number two.

Background Variables

The background variables (GENDER, AGE, and PARED) were measured at the completion of the study to determine the relationship between the background and performance variables. The gender (GENDER) statistic was coded "1" if male and "2" if female. The age of the students (AGE) was recorded in months.

The parent's education level (PARED) was established by combining the mother's education level and the father's education level. In this study, the mother's and father's educational level were coded as follows: 1=elementary school education, 2=some high school, 3=completed high school, 4=some vocational school, 5=completed community college, 6=some university, 7=completed university, 8=some graduate school and 9=completed graduate school. The scores of both parents were added together to provide the PARED scores.

Intervening and Criterion Variables

The four performance variables under investigation were measured at the beginning and end of the study to determine the extent of each student's progress. The instruments used to assess the student's writing proficiency, attitudes toward writing, perceptions of writing, and reading comprehension ability and the procedures followed for gathering this data are outlined below.

Writing Competency

Samples of the subjects' writing were collected at the beginning of the school year before being introduced to the project. During thirty minutes of an English class the students were assigned the task of writing an essay entitled Everything You Always Wanted to Know About.... The examples of skiing, making a dessert, playing soccer, and putting on make-up were suggested but students were encouraged to choose their own topics.

At the end of the school year, students were asked to "tell a visitor about our school" during another thirty minutes of an English class. These titles were chosen because it was felt that they were similar to the expository type assignments normally required in school. The researcher compared the results of both writing assignments to determine if the interactive writing in dialogue journals could help children build the bridge from oral communication to the kind of expository writing assigned in school.

Writing samples were scored using a multi-rating scale developed by the researcher (see Appendix B). The evaluation criteria entails the major dimensions of both content and form that can be found in most writing, namely, quality of ideas, organization, sentence

structure, vocabulary, mechanics and the intensity of the writer's voice. Ideas for the scale were gathered from the study of such scales discussed by Tiedt (1989), McDougal, Littell and Company (1988), and Malicky (1986).

To ensure that the writing samples were consistently graded, the researcher obtained assistance from the supervisor of the thesis to help establish a standard for evaluation. The evaluation criteria was examined to determine levels of acceptance for each writing dimension. Random writing samples were graded until there was a consistency in evaluation for the researcher and thesis supervisor. An English teacher at the same school as the researcher, then evaluated the samples to determine if his scores were similar to that of the researcher. Both the teacher and the researcher were consistent with the grading so the researcher then assigned each piece of writing a score. Finally, a fellow graduate student assisted the researcher in scoring the writing samples. If it was questionable as to what score a writing dimension should receive, the researcher and fellow graduate student discussed the ambiguous item and together agreed on a score that was consistent with scores in other writing samples.

Attitudes and Perceptions Toward Writing

To detect changes in the student's attitudes and perceptions toward writing, an inventory measuring these variables was administered to the three classes of participants at the beginning and end of the project. This 20 item inventory, compiled by the researcher for this study, was a Likert-type scale including positive and negative statements. Ideas for the questionnaire were gathered from a review of the attitude measurements used by

Turewicz in 1983.

The odd numbered statements addressed attitudes toward writing while those with even numbers focused on how students perceived writing. The students were asked to indicate one of four choices by circling numbers corresponding with the headings strongly agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or strongly disagree. The attitude/perception inventory is in Appendix C. The items were coded 1 for strongly agree, 2 for mostly agree, 3 for mostly disagree and 4 when students strongly disagree, which meant that the low scores indicated the more positive attitudes. Since the questionnaire included both negative and positive statements, the negative items were recoded before any statistical analysis was conducted. Recoding, or reverse scoring, in the negative statements resulted in the position of strongly agree being coded 4, mostly agree equalling 3, mostly disagree being 2 and strongly disagree equalling 1. To avoid ambiguity all positions, whether positive or negative, were totalled to provide one number. If this reverse scoring was not done the measures would have been more difficult to interpret because of the questions that were negatively stated. The positive statements would yield a low score while the negative statement would yield a high score. For example, in the attitude scale, a positive statement, such as "Learning to write well gives me a sense of satisfaction", would yield a score of one if the student strongly agreed and a negative statement such as "Learning to write well is difficult for me", with the recoding, would yield a score of four if the student strongly agreed. Without this reverse scoring the negative statement would have received the same score as the positive statement and the measures would have been difficult to interpret.

Reading Comprehension Ability

The Canadian Test of Basic Skills (King, Hieronymus, Lindquist, & Hoover, 1982) consists of a battery of tests with Canadian content and standardization. They are designed to assess educational achievement in the general areas of vocabulary, reading, language, work-study skills, and mathematics. The CTBS comprises primary, elementary, and high school batteries and for each battery a reusable test booklet contains all subtests. The questions use a multiple-choice format and answers are recorded on response sheets. The CTBS can be used for group or individual assessment and grade-referenced norms are available for each subtest. In 1966, the elementary battery was adapted from the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills which had been developed eleven years earlier. To incorporate changes in content and standardization, the elementary battery of the CTBS was revised in 1974 and in 1982.

In Newfoundland, The Canadian Tests of Basic Skills was administered to grade eight students in October of 1989 by the Division of Evaluation and Research at the Department of Education as part of the annual testing program. The Multi Edition, form 7, level 14, was given at this time and the researcher used the results of the reading comprehension sub-test as a pretest score for reading comprehension ability. In May, the researcher used the CTBS reading comprehension subtest, form 8, level 14 as a posttest to determine if students' reading comprehension had improved. For both of these forms, the students were required to read a number of short passages in a test booklet, answer a total of 57 multiple choice questions, with the number of questions for each passage varying from four to twelve. These questions assess 16 skills which are grouped into the three main

categories of facts, inferences, and generalizations.

Methods of Instruction

The students in both the control and experimental groups received a combined literature and language program in seven 41 minute periods in the six day cycle. All three classes were taught by male teachers, ranging in age from mid-thirty to mid-forty. All three programs were very similar with teachers basically following a teacher's manual (Butler, King & Porter, 1982) and a program outline developed by a committee of teachers and one coordinator at a Corner Brook School Board.

Students were introduced to two genres (poetry and the short story) and two themes (taking sides and strange tales) by reading various core selections in a grade level literature anthology entitled Crossings (King, Ledrew, & Porter, 1982) and a Newfoundland anthology named Stages (Norman, Warr, & Goulding, 1983). Each of the four units of study spanned a two and one half month period. In each unit, approximately seven to ten core selections were analyzed. Students were normally introduced to new vocabulary words, participated in pre-reading discussions, read through selections together, discussed ideas and details in the selections, and answered questions in personal notebooks. For further exploration or to extend student's thinking beyond the piece of literature read, students normally completed one or two minor writing assignments, of approximately one page in length, as well as a more lengthy writing assignment, of approximately ten pages. To complete these assignments, students were encouraged to go through the three phases (pre-writing, composing, and post-writing) of the writing process. In these classes, students regularly

helped to revise and edit their classmates work. The students in each class appeared to complete approximately the same amount of writing during the year, as teachers in these courses shared their ideas for assignments.

All students were required to read a book and complete a book report during the study of the two themes, taking sides and strange tales. The only noticeable difference in the programs of the three classes was that one of the control classes participated in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) for one period of 41 minutes in the six day cycle.

Evaluation consisted of an accumulation of marks for daily work completed in notebooks, for writing assignments completed following the reading of the literature selections and for tests/quizzes administered at the end of each unit.

Throughout the year nine boys in the dialogue treatment group were in the researcher's health classes. The researcher also coached four girls in volleyball, two girls in the treatment group and two girls in one of the control classes. With the exception of the pre and post-testing the researcher did not have contact with any of the other participants in the control classes or treatment group, other than the daily visit to the treatment group's homeroom class to pick up journals and return those that had been passed in the previous day.

While some of the students in the treatment group were enthusiastic at the commencement of the study, others needed more encouragement to get started. Most, within two months, were writing regularly. Some who lived very hectic schedules and missed passing the journal in on their assigned day would "make it up" by writing a longer entry for their next due day, or pass it in on a day that was not one of their assigned days. While journals were generally one-half page to one page in length, students were also

known to write three and four pages per entry. Some students were actually apologetic for writing so much. Three values seemed to be inherent in the responses of Mrs. Reed, the teacher who brought the dialogue journal activity to the attention of Staton et al. (1982a). Her replies were found to be consistently sincere and open, interactive/ responsive, and problems seemed to be freely introduced for discussion. These same values guided the responses of the researcher in this study. The researcher attempted to write honest responses where she shared a similar experience. At other times she provided explanations of a different perspective and, third, she encouraged students to elaborate by asking genuine questions. The researcher's entries were generally of the same length as the students'.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents and interprets the findings in an attempt to answer the questions posed in Chapter I and to test the hypotheses presented in Chapter III. First, descriptive statistics were generated to provide information about the variables under investigation. These descriptive statistics cannot verify or reject the hypotheses but they do supply pertinent information about the variables.

Second, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out on the background and intervening variables to determine whether any significant differences were present between the experimental and control groups at the beginning of the study.

Third, the analysis of co-variance (ANCOVA) was conducted on the data to determine if differences existed between the control and experimental groups while simultaneously taking the covariates into account.

Descriptive Statistics

Table I presents the means and standard deviations of the major variables for the two treatment groups as well as those of the total population. Seventy-eight grade eight students participated in this study. There was a slight difference in the number of cases for the variable READ1 with only 74 of the 78 participants completing the reading pretest and (76 as compared to 78) for the variable READ2 (reading performance at post-testing) due to student absenteeism for these standardized tests. As well, two cases for PARED were missing because the parents of two students were not willing to provide the researcher

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of the Major Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	
GENDER	(1)	1.569	0.500
	(2)	1.593	0.501
	(3)	1.577	0.497
AGE	(1)	167.35	4.137
	(2)	167.04	6.149
	(3)	167.24	4.889
PARED	(1)	8.082	2.99
	(2)	8.296	3.22
	(3)	8.158	3.05
WRITE1	(1)	16.961	3.504
	(2)	16.333	3.162
	(3)	16.744	3.382
ATT1	(1)	18.78	4.797
	(2)	19.296	5.217
	(3)	18.962	4.919
PERC1	(1)	21.078	3.57
	(2)	22.30	3.429
	(3)	21.50	3.552
READ1	(1)	32.708	9.739
	(2)	34.885	11.155
	(3)	33.473	10.236
WRITE2	(1)	16.539	2.942
	(2)	18.704	3.036
	(3)	17.282	2.973
ATT2	(1)	19.29	5.811
	(2)	17.89	5.515
	(3)	18.81	5.71
PERC2	(1)	20.39	3.33
	(2)	20.92	3.245
	(3)	20.58	3.293
READ2	(1)	36.816	10.523
	(2)	41.111	11.656
	(3)	38.342	11.057

Key: GENDER = Male (coded 1), Female (coded 2), AGE = Age in months, PARED = Father's educational level plus mother's educational level, WRITE1 = Writing competency score at pretest period, ATT1 = Attitude toward writing at pretest period, PERC1 = Perception of writing at pretest period, READ1 = Reading comprehension raw score at pretest period, WRITE2 = Writing competency score at posttest period, ATT2 = Attitude toward writing at posttest period, PERC2 = Perception of writing at posttest period, READ2 = Reading comprehension raw score at posttest period, (1) = Control group, (2) = Treatment group, (3) = Total population.

with their educational status.

As indicated in Table 1, GENDER indicates that there were slightly more females than males in the total population, and this ratio of females to males remained approximately the same in the two groups. Thirty-three or 42.3% of these participants were male, while forty-five or 57% were female.

The average age (AGE) was 167.24 months or 13 years, 11 months. The ages ranged from the youngest at 13 years, one month (157 months) to the oldest at 15 years, one month (181 months). Table one indicates that there was little age difference between students in the control and treatment groups.

As is evident by PARED, in Table 1, the parents of students belonging to the control group had a slightly lower educational level than parents of the students participating in the dialogue journal exchange. While the mean for the control group's PARED was 8.082, the mean for the experimental group's PARED was 8.296.

Evaluation of the writing samples at the beginning of the year (WRITE1), as shown in Table 1, indicated that the control group (n=51), with a total mean score of 16.961, was slightly better at writing than the experimental group (n=27) who had a mean score of 16.333. Using the same writing criteria scale to evaluate the students' compositions at the end of the year, total mean scores in writing (WRITE2) indicated that the experimental group's performance (18.704) proved more proficient than the control group's performance (mean= 16.529). In fact the control group improved very little despite a full year in a grade eight language class.

The control students, as shown in Table 1, had a lower mean score (18.78) than

the experimental group (19.296) in their attitude toward writing at the beginning of grade eight (ATT1). Since the positive statements provided a low score if the students agreed with them and the negative statements revealed a high score if there was agreement, the mean scores in Table 1 demonstrate that the control group students, on the average, held more positive attitudes toward writing than the experimental group. However, at the end of the year (ATT2) the student's participating in the dialogic interaction had a lower mean score (17.89) or a more positive attitude toward writing than the control students (19.29).

Table 1 reveals that the total mean score for the control group (21.078) was lower than the experimental group (22.30) on the perceptions of writing items administered at the beginning of grade eight (PERC1). This indicated that the students in the control group held more accurate perceptions of writing than the experimental group at the beginning of the study. At the end of the project, the control groups mean score (20.39) on the perception variable (PERC2) was slightly lower than the experimental group's mean (20.92) which meant that the control group continued to hold slightly more accurate perceptions at posttest time. While both groups of students developed more accurate perceptions as the year progressed, as is evidenced by the decrease in both group mean scores at posttesting, the gap between the groups was not as large at the end of the year as it was in the beginning of the year.

Reading comprehension ability was represented by the raw scores obtained on the reading comprehension subtests of the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). Measurements at the beginning of the year (READ1) indicated that the experimental group (mean=34.885, n=26) was stronger in reading than the control group (mean=32.708, n=48).

This finding is consistent at the end of the year (READR2) when the control group (n=49) yielded a total mean score of 36.816 and the experimental group (n=27) had a mean score of 41.111.

Bivariate Statistics

Correlations

Zero-order correlations between all of the variables in the model are presented in Table 2. An examination of these correlations revealed significant relationships between many of the variables under investigation.

Treatment Relationships

The correlations between the type of treatment (TREAT) received and the other variables are not statistically significant with the exception of one variable. The writing competency scores at the posttest period (WRITE2) significantly correlates with TREAT. A correlation coefficient of .322 between TREAT and WRITE2 proved significant at the .003 level. This relationship looks promising for treatment effects on one of the major variables but further analysis is required to more confidently judge the influence of the treatment on the postwriting achievement outcome. With no significant correlations between TREAT and the other outcome variables, the treatment effects on ATT2, PERC2, AND READ2 will probably be negligible.

Table 2
Zero-Order Correlations, Significance Levels, Means and Standard Deviations for the Variables in the Study

Variables	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12
X1 TREAT	1.000											
X2 GENDER	0.023	1.000										
X3 AGE	-0.031	-0.219	1.000									
X4 PARED	0.034	-0.148	0.037	1.000								
X5 WRITE1	-0.089	0.213	-0.012	0.344*	1.000							
X6 ATT1	0.050	-0.171	0.054	-0.099	-0.298*	1.000						
X7 PERC1	0.164	-0.062	-0.162	0.009	-0.050	0.478**	1.000					
X8 READ1	0.102	0.096	0.001	0.456**	0.475**	-0.464**	-0.170	1.000				
X9 WRITE2	0.332*	0.244	0.002	0.448**	0.562**	-0.251	-0.002	0.416**	1.000			
X10 ATT2	-0.118	-0.349*	0.060	-0.154	-0.405**	0.519**	0.135	0.326*	-0.484**	1.000		
X11 PERC2	0.078	-0.103	-0.035	0.070	-0.121	0.311*	0.266	-0.173	-0.285	0.461**	1.000	
X12 READ2	0.187	0.208	0.035	0.356*	0.478**	-0.306*	-0.047	0.787**	0.416**	-0.323*	-0.293	1.000
Mean	1.316	1.877	167.2	8.318	16.74	18.86	21.8	32.47	17.38	18.81	30.58	38.34
SD	0.479	0.497	4.48	3.03	3.38	4.92	3.55	10.24	3.13	5.71	3.29	11.06
Cases	78	78	76	76	78	78	78	74	78	78	78	74

Key: Treat = Treatment group, GENDER = Male (coded 1), Female (coded 2), AGE = Age in months, PARED = parents' educational level plus mother's educational level, WRITE1 = writing composition score at pretest period, ATT1 = Attitude toward writing at pretest period, PERC1 = Perception of writing at pretest period, READ1 = Reading comprehension raw score at pretest period, WRITE2 = writing competency score at posttest period, ATT2 = Attitude toward writing at posttest period, PERC2 = Perception of writing at posttest period, READ2 = Reading comprehension raw score at posttest period.

* $F < .01$

** $F < .001$

Background Variable Relationships

The correlations between the background variables (GENDER, AGE and PARED) and the other variables in the model were explored. Of these three background variables, the student's age appeared to have little relationship to any of the other variables.

Although it was expected, according to the theory, that gender would correlate with many of the variables under investigation, it was discovered that the sex of the student correlated significantly with only one measure, namely, students' attitudes toward writing at the posttest period. Since male was scored one and female was scored two, the negative correlation coefficient of $-.349$, significant at the $.01$ level, indicated that females had more positive attitudes about writing than males.

Literature regarding the effects of socio-economic background maintains that parental educational level has a major influence on children's language acquisition. This investigation supports this theory with significant correlations existing between the PARED variable and all reading comprehension and writing competency measures. Those which correlated with PARED, at the $.001$ level of significance, were reading at pretest time (READ1) and writing at posttest time (WRITE2) with respective coefficients of $.456$ and $.448$. WRITE1 and READ2 had significant relationships with PARED, at the $.01$ level, with respective correlation coefficients of $.344$ and $.356$.

Intervening Variable Relationships

An examination of the relationships between the intervening variables, writing competency at the beginning of the year (WRITE1), attitudes toward writing at the beginning

of the year (ATT1), perceptions of writing at the beginning of the year (PERC1), and reading comprehension at the beginning of the year (READ1), and all other variables showed that PERC1 was the only factor not correlated with any other variable in the study. This lack of correlation of students' perceptions of writing and the other variables in this study is not consistent with the position of Dweck & Leggett (1988), who felt that perception of a task was a significant predictor of behaviour.

Relationships, at the .001 significance level, between students' written language competencies at the beginning of the year and three posttest variables (ATT2, READ2, and WRITE2), are shown in Table 2. Coefficients to depict the respective correlations between WRITE1 and the variables ATT2, READ2, and WRITE2 were -.404, .478 and .563. These findings indicate that pretest writing ability was strongly related to attitudes toward writing, reading comprehension and written language competencies at the posttest period. Although it appears that there was a negative relationship between pretest writing ability and attitudes toward writing at posttesting with a coefficient of -.404, the fact that the attitude measurement produced a low score if there were positive attitudes and a high score for negative attitudes explains why the negative sign exists.

Students' attitudes toward writing at the pretest period, on the other hand, significantly correlated with six variables (WRITE1, PERC1, READ1, ATT2, PERC2 and READ2). The three variables exhibiting significant relationships with ATT1 at the .001 level were PERC1, READ1, and ATT2 with respective coefficients of .478, -.404 and .519. The relationships between ATT1 and the variables WRITE1, PERC2, and READ2 were significant at the .01 level, with coefficients of -.299, .321 and -.306 respectively. Again,

although it appears that negative relationships existed, the negative sign exists because the attitude and perception measurements generated low scores if there were positive responses and high scores for negative responses. The findings indicated that attitudes toward writing at pre-testing were positively related to WRITE1, PERC1, READ1, ATT2, PERC2 and READ2. Because the review of the literature emphasized the important influence of a person's attitude on learning outcomes, these relationships were expected.

The student's reading comprehension at the pretest period was found to be significantly correlated with four other variables, namely, WRITE1, ATT2, READ2, and WRITE2. The correlation between READ1 and ATT2, with a coefficient of $-.326$, was significant at the $.01$ level. This negative coefficient means that those students who scored well in the reading assessment during pretesting held more positive attitudes toward writing at the posttest period.

The relationships between READ1 and the variables WRITE1, READ2 and WRITE2 were all significant at the $.001$ level with coefficients of $.479$, $.787$ and $.444$ respectively. The fact that reading comprehension correlated with the forementioned variables is promising; however, this measure, according to the reading theory, was also expected to correlate with other variables in this study. It was expected that reading comprehension ability would also be related to socio-economic background, attitudes toward writing and perceptions of writing.

Analysis of Variance

Background and Intervening Variables

One way analysis of variance was carried out on the background variables and the intervening variables to assess whether there were differences between the two groups on gender, age, parental education, writing competency, writing attitudes, writing perceptions and reading comprehension at pretest period. From the insignificant eta coefficients of .023 for GENDER, .031 for AGE, .034 for PARED, .089 for WRITE1, .050 for ATTI, .164 for PERC1, .102 for READ1, displayed in Table 3, there were no significant differences existing between the groups at the beginning of the school year. Although this finding does not address the hypotheses generated in Chapter three, it does confirm that variables other than the treatment students received were not statistically different. This means that the experimental and control groups were not statistically different, with regard to GENDER, AGE, PARED, WRITE1, ATTI, PERC1, and READ1, at the start of this study.

Criterion Variables

Analysis of variance was also carried out to determine whether the treatment had an effect on the four criterion or outcome variables; writing competency, writing attitudes, writing perceptions and reading comprehension at posttest period. Table 4 presents the ANOVA results for the effects of the treatment on WRITE2, ATT2, PERC2, and READ2. These ANOVA results addressed the four major hypotheses of this thesis.

Hypothesis 1: Students who have been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity for one year in addition to the prescribed curriculum will attain a higher level

Table 3
One-way Analysis of Variance Results: Treatment Effects on Background and Inter-vening Variables*

Variable	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Eta	Eta Squared	Sig. Level
GENDER	—	1	—	.0402	.023	.0005	.8416
Between groups							
AGE	1.7618	1	1.7618	.0728	.031	.0010	.7880
Between groups							
PARSED	.9022	1	.8022	.0849	.034	.0011	.7716
Between groups							
WRITE1	6.9502	1	6.9502	.6044	.089	.0079	.4393
Between groups							
ATR1	4.6275	1	4.6275	.1893	.050	.0025	.6648
Between groups							
PERC1	26.1841	1	26.1841	2.1051	.164	.0270	.1509
Between groups							
READ1	79.8754	1	79.8754	.7599	.102	.0104	.3863
Between groups							

*See Table 1 for a key to the mnemonics.

Note: The ANOVA result for the GENDER variable designed to show that the sample was unbiased in so far as GENDER is concerned was, erroneously, omitted from the analysis. The results presented for this variable have been extrapolated from other sources, but the Sum of Squares and Mean Square have had to be omitted.

Table 4
 One-way Analysis of Variance Results: Treatment Effects on Criterion Variables*

Variable	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F-Ratio	Eta	Eta Squared	Sig. Level
WRITE							
Between groups	83.4584	1	83.4584	9.4341	.3323	.1106	.0030
Within groups	672.3355	76	8.8465				
ATT2							
Between groups	34.8605	1	34.8605	1.0686	.1178	.0139	.3045
Within groups	2479.2549	76	32.6218				
PERC2							
Between groups	5.0297	1	5.0297	.4606	.0776	.0060	.1994
Within groups	830.0087	76	10.9212				
READ2							
Between groups	321.0917	1	321.0917	2.6854	.1871	.0079	.1055
Within groups	8848.0136	74	119.5678				

*See Table 1 for a key to the mnemonics.

of writing competency than those students following the prescribed curriculum but not participating in a dialogue journal exchange for one year.

The ANOVA examining the effect of the experimental treatment, dialogue journal writing, on posttest measures of writing competency showed that significant differences existed between the experimental group and the control group at the end of the year. The eta coefficient of .332 for the relationship between TREAT and WRITE2 was significant at the .003 level. The positive coefficient indicated that the differences were in favour of the experimental group, therefore, hypothesis one was accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Students who have been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity for one year in addition to the prescribed curriculum will develop more positive attitudes toward writing than those students following the prescribed curriculum but not participating in a dialogue journal exchange for one year.

The relationship between TREAT and ATT2 proved to be insignificant, therefore, there were no statistical differences between groups with regard to their attitudes toward writing at the posttest period. With an eta coefficient of .118 and a significance level greater than .05, hypothesis two was rejected.

Hypothesis 3: Students who have been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity for one year in addition to the prescribed curriculum will develop more accurate perceptions of writing than those students following the prescribed curriculum but not participating in a dialogue journal exchange for one year.

The ANOVA examining the effect of the treatment, dialogue journal writing, on posttest measures of students' perceptions of writing showed that no significant differences

existed between the groups at the end of the year. The eta coefficient of .078 for the relationship between TREAT and PERC2 was not significant at the .05 significance level. Therefore, hypothesis three was rejected.

Hypothesis 4: Students who have been exposed to the dialogue journal activity for one year in addition to the prescribed curriculum will attain a higher level of reading comprehension ability than those students following the prescribed curriculum but not participating in the dialogue journal exchange for one year.

The relationship between TREAT and READ2 proved to be stronger than the relationships between TREAT and ATT2 and TREAT and PERC2 but the relationship was not significant. With an eta coefficient of .187 and a significance level of .106, hypothesis four was rejected.

Analysis of Variance and Correlational Findings

An earlier examination of the correlational findings noted that TREAT was significantly correlated with the posttest measure for writing competency only. ANOVA results also indicated a strong relationship between the treatment and student's writing competencies at the end of the year. The significance level of the ANOVA testing was at .003 while the correlational study revealed a significant relationship at the .001 level. Both of these relationships provide support for the use of dialogue journals to help enhance students' written language competencies.

Although many statistically significant correlations were detected in the bivariate statistics, it was found that TREAT did not correlate with any variable other than WRIT2.

Again in the ANOVA, the experimental and the control groups were shown to have significant differences between them in the posttest writing scores, in favour of the experimental group.

Although the correlational findings and the ANOVA's both made the relationship between dialogue journal writing and writing improvement look promising, other significant correlations may have influenced writing developments. Because these variables were not adequately controlled in this study, the results of the correlational analysis and the ANOVA's were only tentative.

To determine the effects of the treatment, over and above the effects of the background and intervening variables, a more stringent analysis was required. The analysis of covariance within the regression model allows for the examination of a variable after placing statistical controls on all other factors. This permits the researcher to estimate the experimental treatment effect with greater confidence.

Analysis of Covariance Within the Regression Model

Analysis of covariance is a subset of the general linear model. Thus, an analysis of covariance model can be estimated using a standard ANCOVA package such as SSPSX or the same analysis can be conducted using dummy variable regression within the general linear model (Neter & Wasserman, 1974). In the present instance, the regression approach was used.

Background Factors and Achievement Variables at Pretest Time

The four intervening variables, namely, WRITE1, ATT1, PERC1, and READ1, were regressed on the three background variables GENDER, AGE, and PARED to determine the direct effect of the students' background on the four achievement variables at the beginning of this study. Tables 5 through 8 represent the regression results for the relationships between the background and achievement variables at pretest time.

The findings, presented in Table 5, show that GENDER significantly influenced writing scores at the pretest period, with a beta coefficient of .247 and t-value of 2.281 ($p < .05$ level). The positive coefficient indicates that this relationship was in favour of the females. WRITE1 was not significantly influenced by AGE having a beta coefficient of .029 and t-value of .269 which was significant at .789. The education level of the students' parents, however, seemed to be a strong predictor of their writing competency having a beta coefficient of .361, and a t-value of 3.404, significant at the .001 level.

The data presented in Table 6 indicates that ATT1 was not influenced significantly by the students' gender, age, or their parent's education level. With respective beta coefficients of -.176, .020 and -.114, t-values of -1.505, .172, and -.997, and significance levels of .137, .864, and .322, it was realized that the relationships between ATT1 and the background variables GENDER, AGE, and PARED could not be supported. As well, PERC1 was not significantly influenced by the students' gender, age, or their parent's education level as indicated by the data in Table 7. With respective beta coefficients of -.102, -.185 and 8.014, t-values of -.872, -1.578, and .070, and significance levels of .386, .119, and .944, the relationships between PERC1 and the background variables GENDER,

Table 5

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, Standardized Regression Coefficients, T-values and Significance Levels for the Relationship between Dependent Variable, WRITE1, and the Independent Variables in Stage One of the Model.

Independent Variables	B	SE(B)	Dependent Variable WRITE1		
			Beta	t-value	P
GENDER	1.683	0.737	0.247	2.281	0.025
AGE	0.020	0.075	0.029	0.269	0.789
PARED	0.404	0.119	0.361	3.404	0.001
Mult R.	0.4191				
R-Square	0.1756				
Residual	0.908				

Key: GENDER = Male (1) Female (2), AGE = AGE in months, PARED = Father's educational level plus mother's educational level, WRITE1 = Writing competency score at pretest period, B = Regression Coefficients, SE(B) = Standard Errors, Beta = Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-value = T-values, P = Significance levels.

Table 6

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, Standardized Regression Coefficients, T-values and Significance Levels for the Relationship between Dependent Variable, ATT1, and the Independent Variables in Stage One of the Model

Independent Variables	B	SE(B)	Dependent Variable ATT1		
			Beta	t-value	P
GENDER	-1.74	1.156	-0.176	-1.595	0.137
AGE	0.020	0.117	0.020	0.172	0.864
PARED	-0.186	0.186	-0.114	-0.997	0.322
Mult R.	0.2062				
R-Square	0.0425				
Residual	0.979				

Key: GENDER = Male (1) Female (2), AGE = AGE in months, PARED = Father's educational level plus mother's educational level, ATT1 = Attitudes toward writing score at pretest period, B = Regression Coefficients, SE(B) = Standard Errors, Beta = Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-value = T-values, P = Significance levels.

Table 7

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, Standardized Regression Coefficients, T-values and Significance Levels for the Relationship between Dependent Variable, PERCI, and the Independent Variables in Stage One of the Model

Independent Variables	B	SE(B)	Dependent Variable PERCI		
			Beta	t-value	P
GENDER	-0.730	0.838	-0.102	-0.872	0.386
AGE	-0.134	0.085	-0.185	-1.582	0.119
PARED	9.440	0.135	8.014	0.070	0.944
Mult R.	0.1907				
R-Square	0.0363				
Residual	0.983				

Key: GENDER = Male (1) Female (2), AGE = AGE in months, PARED = Father's educational level plus mother's educational level, PERCI = Perceptions of writing score at pretest period,
 B = Regression Coefficients, SE(B) = Standard Errors, Beta = Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-value = T-values, P = Significance levels.

AGE, and PARED could not be supported.

The data presented in Table 8 shows that READ1 is not significantly influenced by the students' gender or age, having respective beta coefficients of .132 and .013, t-values of 1.247 and .125, with significant levels of .216 and .901. The education level of the students' parents, however, appeared to be a strong predictor of their reading ability in the regression analysis having a beta weight of .454, with a t-value of 4.37 significant at the .001 level.

Criterion Variables at Posttest Time

The writing model.

Figure 2 depicts the relationship of WRITE2 to the predictor variables in this study. Writing competency at the posttest period was regressed on the three background variables (GENDER, AGE, and PARED), the four pretest variables (WRITE1, ATT1, PERC1, and READ1), and TREAT. This analysis established the factors having the greatest effects on students' developments in writing ability by the end of grade eight. GENDER, AGE, ATT1, PERC1, and READ1 appeared to have insignificant influence on the students' writing competency, at posttesting as indicated in Figure 2. That is, when taking the treatment (dialogue journal writing), parental educational level, and prior writing competency into account, writing improvement was not influenced by gender, age, attitude toward writing, students' prior perceptions of writing, or prior reading ability.

TREAT, PARED, and WRITE1, however, revealed significant effects over and above the effects of all other variables in the model, as indicated in Table 9.

Table 8

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, Standardized Regression Coefficients, T-values and Significance Levels for the Relationship between Dependent Variable, READ1, and the Independent Variables in Stage One of the Model

Independent Variables	B	SE(B)	Dependent Variable READ1		
			Beta	t-value	P
GENDER	2.648	2.123	0.132	1.247	0.215
AGE	0.027	0.215	0.013	0.125	0.901
PARED	1.500	0.342	0.454	4.387	0.000
Mult R.	0.4623				
R-Square	0.2137				
Residual	0.887				

Key: GENDER = Male (1) Female (2), AGE = AGE in months, PARED = Father's educational level plus mother's educational level, READ1 = Reading Comprehension score at pretest period, B = Regression Coefficients, SE(B) = Standard Errors, Beta = Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-value = T-values, P = Significance levels.

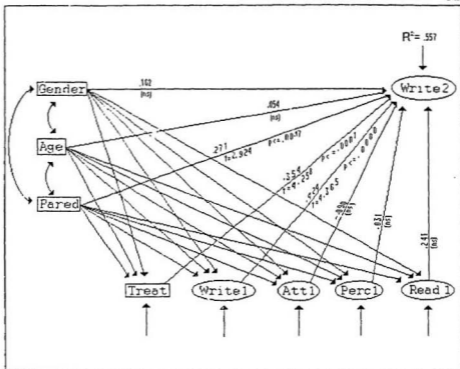


Figure 2. A model of the responsiveness of posttest writing competency to explanatory variables.*

* Note: Standardized partial regression coefficients above the paths, t-values in parenthesis below the paths. T-values greater than or equal to 2.00 are significant at the $p < 0.05$. ns = not statistically significant.

Table 9

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, Standardized Regression Coefficients, T-values and Significance Levels for the Relationship between Dependent Variable, WRITE2, and the Independent Variables in Stage Two of the Model

Independent Variables	B	SE(B)	Dependent Variable WRITE2		
			Beta	t-value	P
TREAT	2.317	0.544	0.354	4.258	0.0001
GENDER	1.019	0.541	0.162	1.803	0.064
AGE	0.054	0.054	0.054	0.636	0.527
PARED	0.281	0.096	0.271	2.924	0.005
WRITE1	0.393	0.090	0.424	4.365	0.000
ATT1	-0.057	0.064	-0.090	-0.896	0.373
PERC1	0.028	0.084	0.031	0.327	0.744
READ1	0.013	0.032	0.041	0.397	0.692
Mult R.		0.746			
R-Square		0.557			
Residual		0.656			

*See Table 1 for a key to the mnemonics for the independent variables.

Note: B = Regression Coefficients, SE(B) = Standard Errors, Beta = Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-value = T-values, P = Significance Levels, WRITE2 = Writing Competency score at posttest period.

Respective beta coefficients were .354, .271, and .424, with t-values of 4.258, 2.924, and 4.365, and significance levels of .0001, .005, and .000. The significant relationships, over and above TREAT, namely, PARED and WRITE1 were expected since, according to the theory, both are considered correlates of literacy development. Parental educational level has proven to be a powerful predictor of children's writing attainment and it is presumed that student's prior performance in writing would significantly impact subsequent achievement in writing. These relationships supported initial findings of the correlational study. Although these relationships do not answer any of the research questions, it is important to determine what factors make major contributions to variance in writing competencies.

The relationship between TREAT and WRITE2 was the most interesting because it specifically addressed one of the hypothesis of the study, that students exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity would attain a higher level of writing competency than those students not participating in this activity. This hypothesis was accepted because the relationship was significant, at the .001 level, over and above the effects of all other variables in the model. In Table 9, these other variables are GENDER, AGE, PARED, ATT1, PERC1, READ1, and WRITE1. This means that the students who were provided with increased opportunities to write developed greater writing proficiency than those who were not provided with such opportunities. These analyses confirmed, as in Bode's (1988) research and the many ethnographic studies discussed in this thesis, that the dialogue journal activity has significant effects on student's writing development. The extra time spent writing to a supportive model, about self generated topics, produced more competent

writers.

Examination of the journals themselves indicated, for the most part, as the exchange activity progressed through the year there was an obvious increase in length of entries. While students at the beginning of the year were writing five or six lines, towards the end of the project it was not uncommon for them to write three or more pages.

A comparison of the pretest and posttest writing samples indicated that students showed greatest improvement in their ability to demonstrate their individual voices in writing. During the writing exercise at the end of the year, students displayed more of themselves and their personal styles which permitted the reader to sense the individual behind the print. Through the ten month experience of dialoguing with another individual, students have numerous opportunities to speak their minds, to explain their feelings and thoughts, and to offer arguments. Unlike most other school writing assignments, this dialogic exchange allowed students to show more of themselves in print which facilitated the development of students' individual voices.

Ideas, for the most part, were more extensively developed and appeared to be better organized in students' posttest passages compared to their pretest writing. Since the conveyance of messages is of utmost importance in the dialogic journal activity, the participants' ability to communicate and organize ideas is expected to improve.

Although the sentence structure of the posttest passages indicated a slight improvement over the sentence structure in the pretest writing samples, the students' vocabulary and mechanical skills did not indicate progression. Sentence structure, vocabulary, and mechanical skills were not specifically stressed in the writing of the journals and not explicitly

corrected in students' writing because the researcher was primarily concerned with responding to the content of the entries. However, correct forms were modelled by the researcher in the responses. It was thought that students' writing would improve in terms of sentence structure, vocabulary, and mechanical skills since the teacher could use responses to model standard English, grammar, conventional spelling and other mechanics of writing. However, the modelling did not appear to help in these areas.

The writing attitude model.

Figure 3 depicts the dependent variable, attitude toward writing at posttest time, regressed on the three background variables (GENDER, AGE, and PARED), the four achievement variables (WRITE1, ATT1, PERC1, and READ1), and TREAT. This analysis established the factors making important contributions to variance in attitudes toward writing at the end of grade eight.

The relationship between ATT2 and the predictor variables was calculated in the regression analysis and presented in Table 10. While AGE, PARED, PERC1, READ1 and TREAT appeared to have little influence on student's attitudes toward writing at posttesting, results showed significant effects for GENDER, ATT1, and WRITE1. The participants' attitudes toward writing at the beginning of the project appeared to have the most significant effect with a beta weight of .467, a t-value of 4.07 and a significance level of .0001. One would expect the attitude variable at the time of pretesting to be a significant predictor of attitude at posttesting. A beta weight of this magnitude stresses the need to establish positive attitudes toward writing during the initial years of schooling.

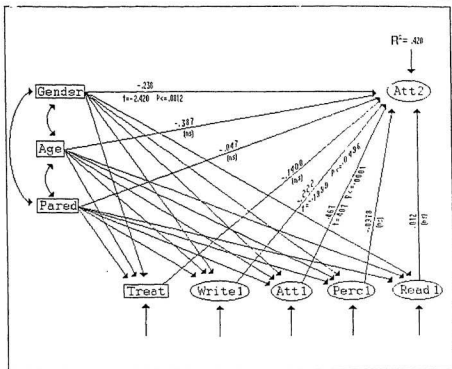


Figure 3. A model of the responsiveness of posttest attitudes competency to explanatory variables.*

* Note: Standardized partial regression coefficients above the paths, t-values in parenthesis below the paths. T-values greater than or equal to 2.00 are significant at the $p < 0.05$. ns = not statistically significant.

Table 10

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, Standardized Regression Coefficients, T-values and Significance Levels for the Relationship between Dependent Variable, ATT2, and the Independent Variables in Stage Two of the Model.

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable ATT2				
	B	SE(B)	Beta	t-value	P
TREAT	-1.671	1.135	-0.140	-1.472	0.146
GENDER	-2.755	1.129	-0.238	-2.420	0.018
AGE	-0.045	0.113	-0.039	-0.402	0.689
PARED	-0.090	0.201	-0.047	-0.447	0.656
WHITE1	-0.375	0.188	-0.222	-1.999	0.050
ATT1	0.543	0.113	0.467	4.070	0.001
PERCI	-0.157	0.176	-0.098	-0.895	0.374
READ1	6.629	0.068	0.012	0.098	0.972
Mult R.	0.648				
R-Square	0.420				
Residual	0.762				

*See Table 1 for a key to the mnemonics for t's independent variables.

Note: B = Regression Coefficients, SE(B) = Standard Errors, Beta = Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-value = T-values, P = Significance levels, ATT2 = Attitudes toward writing score at posttest period.

Beginning writing early in whole language experiences such as dialogue journal writing may well make writing an enjoyable activity from an early age, one which positively influences student's attitudes. Leaving attitudinal development until grade eight is perhaps too late.

GENDER and WRITE1 also appear to be predictors of ATT2 with respective beta weights of $-.238$ and $-.222$ and t -values of -2.420 and -1.999 , significant at the $.05$ level. As discussed earlier, because of the way in which the attitude questionnaires were coded, the more positive attitudes produced low scores. Although it appears that the above results are negatively significant, the fact that low scores yielded positive attitudes indicates that these relationships are really positively significant. In this case one would anticipate negative signs for a positive relationship. As expected, the females displayed more positive attitudes toward writing at posttesting than the males since a review of the literature indicated that differences in the sexes were evident, with boys trailing behind girls in written language development and motivation. It seems logical that pretests in writing (WRITE1) would affect attitudes toward writing at posttesting (ATT2) since the best writers would be expected to have more positive attitudes toward writing than the weaker writers. These results stress the necessity of having children write in their initial years of schooling, not only to develop positive attitudes early but to improve proficiency which in turn produces more positive attitudes.

The relationship of greatest concern in this analysis was that between TREAT and ATT2 because it specifically addressed the second hypothesis of the study, that students exposed to the dialogue journal writing would attain more positive attitudes toward writing

than those students not participating in the dialogue journal exchange. Students can experience success because they can work at their own pace and level in a situation where they are invited to take risks to construct meaning in print. A developing writer is provided with a reader/respondent who is interested in what the child wishes to express rather than the examination of work for evaluation purposes. As indicated in the review of the literature, utilization of the dialogue journal to help students develop more positive attitudes toward writing has been supported in other studies.

As seen in Table 10, TREAT did not have a significant effect on the students' attitudes toward writing with a beta weight of $-.140$, a t -value of -1.472 and significance level of $.146$. The relationships identified in the regression analysis are similar to those established in the correlational findings. Therefore, the earlier, more tentative rejection of this hypothesis in the ANOVA was confirmed with greater confidence in the regression analysis. The effect of the experimental treatment was not significant and it was concluded that writing attitudes were not responsive to the experience of dialogue journal writing, at the grade eight level, over and above the effects of the other variables in the study. Perhaps this ten month study was too short a time to yield significant changes in student's attitudes. Perhaps the effects of the treatment were not apparent at the post test period but might produce a lagged effect at a later date. Perhaps there was no carry over in attitudes from the conversational writing involved in the dialogue journal to what was required in class. Maybe the regular activity of journal writing helped establish a healthy attitude toward writing, one that may not be fully appreciated at this point in their lives but at a later time when such an activity might be replicated with significant others through

the common practice of letter writing. The insignificant effect of the dialogue treatment on student's attitudes at this grade level may well emphasize the importance of attitudinal development earlier in the student's schooling.

The writing perception model.

Figure 4 depicts the dependent variable: perceptions of writing at the posttest period, regressed on the three background variables (GENDER, AGE, and PARIED), the four achievement variables (WRITE1, ATT1, PERC1, and READ1), and TREAT. This analysis established the factors making important contributions to variance in perceptions of writing at the end of grade eight.

The relationship of greatest interest in this analysis was that between TREAT and PERC2 because it specifically addressed the third hypothesis of the study, that students who had been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity would attain a better understanding of writing than those not exposed to this activity.

Students would be actively constructing meaning for a real-life purpose on self-selected topics while dialoguing with a supportive model, one who is concerned with the message more so than the examination of papers. The review of the literature, supports the implementation of these written conversations into the Language Arts curriculum to help students develop a more extensive understanding of writing. The earlier tentative rejection of hypothesis three, regarding the relationship between TREAT and PERC2, was confirmed with greater confidence in the regression analysis. Findings in Table 11, revealing a beta weight of .030, a t-value of .267 and a significance level of .790, showed

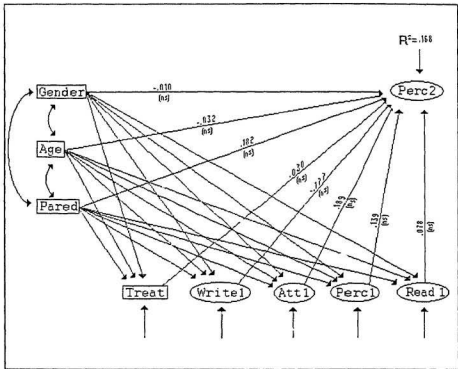


Figure 4. A model of the responsiveness of posttest perceptions competency to explanatory variables.*

* Note: Standardized partial regression coefficients above the paths, t-values in parenthesis below the paths. T-values greater than or equal to 2.00 are significant at the $p < 0.05$. ns = not statistically significant.

Table 11

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, Standardized Regression Coefficients, T-values and Significance Levels for the Relationship between Dependent Variable, PERC2, and the Independent Variables in Stage Two of the Model^a

Independent Variables	B	SE(B)	Dependent Variable PERC2		
			Beta	t-value	P
TREAT	0.210	0.784	0.030	0.267	0.790
GENDER	-0.068	0.780	-0.010	-0.087	0.931
AGE	-0.022	0.078	-0.032	-0.280	0.780
PARED	0.199	0.139	0.182	1.432	0.157
WRITE1	-0.172	0.130	-0.177	-1.330	0.188
ATT1	0.126	0.092	0.189	1.372	0.175
PERC1	0.129	0.121	0.139	1.065	0.291
READ1	-0.026	0.047	-0.078	-0.553	0.582
Mult R.	0.409				
R-Square	0.168				
Residual	0.912				

^aSee Table 1 for a key to the mnemonics for the independent variables.

Note: B = Regression Coefficients, SE(B) = Standard Errors, Beta = Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-value = T-values, P = Significance levels, PERC2 = Perceptions of writing score at posttest period.

that the experience of dialogue journal writing did not significantly influence these students' perceptions of writing. Perhaps this ten month study was too short a time to yield significant changes in perceptions. Maybe the effects of the treatment were not apparent at the posttest period but might produce a lagged effect at a later date. This dialogue activity was completed outside of classtime and was viewed, by many of the students, as a different kind of writing than multi-draft writing with peer editing and different than first draft writing during examinations. Perhaps there was no carry over in perceptions from the conversational writing involved in the dialogue journal to what was required in class.

In the correlational findings, discussed earlier, ATT1 and ATT2 appeared to be significantly related to PERC2. These factors, as shown in the regression analysis, were not significantly influential, over and above the effect of other variables in the study. However, since ATT1 and PERC1 have a correlation of .478 (Table 2) significant at the .001 level, perceptions are directly related to ATT1 and possibly operating on ATT2 through ATT1. As well, the correlation coefficient for ATT2 and PERC2 (Table 2) is .464 which is significant at the .001 level. With such high correlations in stage I and stage II of the study perceptions are possibly operating through attitudes. However, neither ATT1 or PERC1 influence WRITE2 directly (Table 9) but seem to be operating through WRITE1, especially given the correlation coefficient of $-.484$ ($p < .001$) for ATT2 and WRITE2 and the insignificant correlation of $-.255$ between PERC2 and WRITE2. Although, as mentioned earlier, the regression analysis indicated that the relationships were not significant, it seems that ATT1 and PERC1 are highly related and operating through ATT1 on WRITE1 which in turn acts on WRITE2. This provides even stronger support for developing attitudes,

perceptions and writing ability early in children's schooling but especially attitudes and perceptions, since they do not seem to influence writing ability in later years.

The reading comprehension model.

Reading comprehension scores at posttest time were regressed on all eight predictor variables, GENDER, AGE, PARED, WRITE1, ATT1, PERC1, READ1, and TREAT, as shown in Figure 5. This analysis determined the factors in the study having the greatest effect on the students' developments in reading comprehension at the end of grade eight. Findings, as indicated in Table 12, revealed that the variable READ1 was the only predictor of READ2. The relationship existing between these two variables was significant at the .000 level with a beta weight of .657 and a t-value of 6.919. Improvements in reading appeared not to be a function of gender, age, parental educational level, writing competency at time one, prior attitude toward writing, students' prior perceptions of writing, or the experimental treatment, over and above the effect of READ1.

The relationship of greatest concern in this analysis was that between TREAT and READ2 because it specifically addressed the final hypothesis of the study, that students exposed to the dialogue journal writing would attain a higher level of reading comprehension ability than those students not participating in the dialogue journal exchange. As seen in Table 12, with a beta weight of .118, a t-value 1.541 and a significance level of .128, the more tentative rejection of this hypothesis from the ANOVA was supported in the regression analysis.

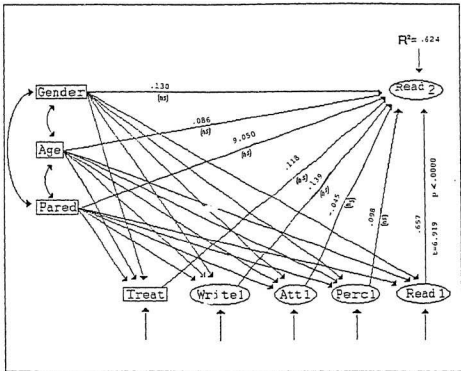


Figure 5. A model of the responsiveness of posttest reading competency to explanatory variables.*

* Note: Standardized partial regression coefficients above the paths, t-values in parenthesis below the paths. T-values greater than or equal to 2.00 are significant at the $p < 0.05$. ns = not statistically significant.

Table 12

Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, Standardized Regression Coefficients, T-values and Significance Levels for the Relationship between Dependent Variable, READ2, and the Independent Variables in Stage Two of the Model^a

Independent Variables	B	SE(B)	Dependent Variable READ2		
			Beta	t-value	p
TREAT	2.692	1.747	0.018	1.541	0.128
GENDER	2.848	1.738	0.130	1.639	0.106
AGE	0.191	0.173	0.086	1.103	0.274
FARED	0.033	0.309	0.050	0.106	0.916
WRITE1	0.457	0.289	0.140	1.559	0.124
ATT1	-0.100	0.205	-0.045	-0.489	0.626
PERC1	0.302	0.271	0.098	1.116	0.268
READ1	0.719	0.104	0.657	6.919	0.0000

Mult R. 0.789
R-Square 0.624
Residual 0.613

^aSee Table 1 for a key to the mnemonics for the independent variables.

Note: B = Regression Coefficients, SE(B) = Standard Errors, Beta = Standardized Regression Coefficients, t-value = T-values, p = Significance levels, READ2 = Reading Comprehension score at posttest period.

Although the relationship between TREAT and reading comprehension at the posttest period was not significant, the relationship proved to be in the direction of that suggested by the research literature. Reading comprehension at the end of the year was more proficient than at the beginning of the year, as indicated by the mean base differences in Table 1. It was confirmed, however, that dialogue journal writing did not promote students' reading comprehension over and above the effects of all other variables in this model. These results were not consistent with the literature presented in Chapter II, which maintained that this exchange provides students with language experiences which have a significant impact on reading comprehension. Equipping students with a means to become involved in using language as they read and reread their entries during writing, and later read and possibly reread the teacher's responses, was thought to help students improve their comprehension processing skills. Perhaps this ten month study was too short a time to yield significant changes in reading comprehension. Maybe the effects of the treatment were not apparent at the posttest period but might produce a lagged effect at a later date. Perhaps, by grade eight, for average students, their reading is at an appropriate level and rereading personal writing and teacher responses was not a complex enough task to increase reading ability at this level. As well, all responses may not have been written at a level that would enhance reading abilities beyond the grade eight level. Since the researcher was mostly concerned with providing responses to the content of students' entries, there probably was not a conscious enough effort on the part of the researcher to write challenging material, material that would develop reading comprehension. It may be wise to take this into greater consideration when responding to journals at higher grade levels.

Summary of the regression analysis.

Figure 6 indicates the significant paths detected in the dialogue journal model. As is evident, TREAT had a significant influence on students' writing proficiencies over and above the other variables in the model but no significant effect was found on the other three outcome variables, namely, attitudes toward writing, perceptions of writing and reading comprehension ability.

Even though these results led to the rejection of hypotheses two, three, and four in this study, a number of other significant relationships between the variables still accentuate the validity of the dialogue journal model. There may not be treatment effects, other than gains in writing competency, but with the exception of hypothesis three, there are factors which make important contributions to variance in attitude toward writing and reading competencies. These factors may have policy significance.

Of the three background variables, GENDER, AGE, and PARID, the dialogue journal model reveals that GENDER had an influence on WRITE1 and ATT2 while PARID, as expected, influenced students' pretest and posttest writing and pretest reading scores.

Three of the four intervening variables, namely, WRITE1, ATT1, and READ1, appeared to significantly effect the posttest variables. WRITE1, as depicted, had an influence on WRITE2 and ATT2. Significant paths were also detected between ATT1 and ATT2 and between READ1 and READ2.

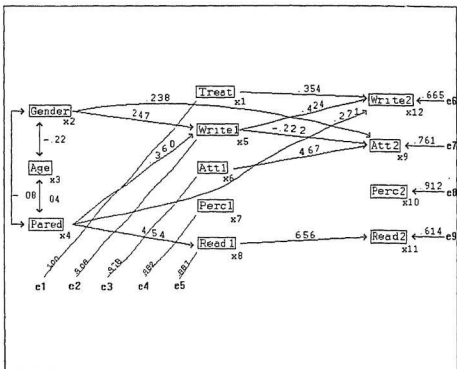


Figure 6. Significant paths detected in the Dialogue Journal Model.*

* Nonsignificant paths not shown.

Chapter V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to present a synopsis of the study and the conclusions reached. The implications from this investigation will then be discussed. Finally, suggestions for further research will be presented.

Synopsis of the Study

The overall purpose of this study was to statistically evaluate the activity of writing dialogue journals as a pedagogical method for encouraging written language development. While many ethnographic studies and articles have emerged in recent years, very little statistical documentation exists to support the use of this learning activity. Bode (1988) established its value with students in first grade and the present study was designed to determine if this activity could demonstrate significance at the grade eight level.

This investigation attempted to ascertain if four variables, namely, students' writing proficiency, students' attitudes toward writing, students' perceptions of writing, and reading comprehension ability, were influenced as a result of participating in dialogue journal writing over a ten month period. The research was conducted in a natural school setting which meant that students were not randomly assigned to treatment groups.

Due to the organizational structure of the school, groups were intact according to class placement. The sample consisted of 78 students attending junior high school in the city of Corner Brook where the researcher taught. The participants were in grade eight during the academic year 1989-1990. An experimental group of twenty-seven students

participated in dialogue journal writing with the researcher outside of class time while a control group of fifty-one students followed the regular Language Arts program. Both groups were tested at the beginning and end of the year. A one way analysis of variance was conducted on the data to determine if significant differences existed between the two groups while an analysis of covariance within the regression model investigated the factors contributing to these differences. The ANOVA showed that the experimental groups and control groups were not statistically different in any of the variables at the outset of the study but the groups differed significantly in writing competency measures at the end of the year. The regression results indicated that the dialogue journal experience had a significant influence on students' writing proficiencies over and above the other variables in the model but no significant effect was found on the other three outcome variables, namely, attitudes toward writing, perceptions of writing, and reading comprehension ability. Based on the evidence provided by these statistical tests, it was concluded that the students who had been exposed to the dialogue journal writing activity attained a higher level of writing competency than those students who were not exposed to this activity. These analyses confirmed the findings of Bode (1988) and many ethnographic studies, that dialogue journals make significant contributions to students' writing abilities.

A perceived drawback of this study was that the researcher taught very few of the students participating in the project. The activity appeared to be superficial or of little relevance, in some respects, since students had never experienced this form of writing before and it was not required as part of the regular program but a volunteer activity to be completed outside of classtime. Considering this, the results are outstanding. If this

procedure were utilized in situations where the teacher was the Language teacher or homeroom teacher and children were granted time to write, results may have been much more profound.

As with any field study, circumstances cannot always be controlled by the researcher. At the start of the project the groups of students were intact by class assignment. One class of students, belonging to the control group, seemed to have more than its share of discipline problems and these discipline problems seemed to filter through the classroom to create, at times, an unsatisfactory atmosphere for learning.

Implications of the Study

From the results of this project, it is evident that the activity of dialogue journal writing positively influenced participants' writing proficiency. Students provided with increased opportunities to write developed greater writing competency than those who were not provided with such opportunities. Bode (1988) established the validity of dialogue journal writing with first graders and ethnographic research supports this activity throughout the elementary grades but this study clearly indicated the feasibility of utilizing dialogue journals with grade eight students. These extended conversations encourage and promote developing writers' expression of written language while offering a useful supplement to the traditional language curriculum. This exchange provides students with a functional avenue for writing, one that does not rely on the process oriented multi-draft writing nor the product oriented first draft produced for examination purposes in the intermediate educational setting.

This student-centered activity grows out of the students' thoughts and experiences as they generate topics, decide on the course of the conversation and become active participants in the learning process. Unlike most other school writing assignments, this dialogic exchange allows students to show more of themselves in print which facilitates the development of their individual voices. The dialogue journal provides developing writers with a forum for asking questions, questions that possibly might never be asked in the shuffle of daily routines, and is a means for examining and exploring issues with another individual. Teachers provide immediate feedback for students' questions, observations and ideas and meet students at a personal level to create realistic conversations. The following are examples of the kinds of questions, feelings, interests, and personal opinions explored during journal writing.

Tanya: I got a letter from a girl from Thailand the other day. And I got about 5 letters from people in Italy, and a letter from Texas and one from Indiappless and one from Nova Scotia. I DO NOT have a clue how they got my name. I got all these in a half of a year. I have to write them all back to. Oh my nerves are rubed right raw!!! HELP!!!!!!

Christa: Hi. How are you, are you going to St. John's for Christmas. What did you ask for christmas. I mean what kind of presents did you ask for. I ask for stuff for skiing and what eles mom whats to buy me. are you going skiing this winter. if you are who do you ski with.

Stephen: Yesterday I skipped off. We went up to Kmart. After that we went to my friend shed and we let off a fire cracker. When we were up to Kmart my friend saw his mother friend and she ratted on us. We were free and my friend got in trouble. Then he ratted on me so now I got detion for two weeks and I'm going to kick the crap out of my ex-friend who told on me.

Justin: A few weeks ago me and my family plus some other friends went into the cabin. We had a hard time going up steady brook sloops so we had to phone some other people we knew to help us up the sloops. We had rope on up so we tied three skidoo together and towed up the sled full with grub and other things. When we got to the top of the hill the other men with the skidoos had to go home because they were having a party at there house. there was so much weight on the skidoos me and my mother had to walk into the cabin. It was stormy that night and I had to keep my mother moving so she would not stop and freeze to death. Every time we heard a skidoo we thought it was dad coming back for us but they were just ahead of us. We walked about 7 miles that night. When we got in the cabin dad and his friend francais told us the the hitch broke off of the skidoo and he told us that they got lost on the skidoo. That was a scary night but we got in all right.

Jackie: Well today I saw someone who has been a friend for a long time although I never really noticed him until today. It sure is funny. When you were in grades 4-6 all of the guys were geeky looking but now in grade 8, wow have they changed. (for the better) But of course looks aren't the only things that count. They do help though. All we (girls) have to look forward to is gaining weight and letting boys out run and jump us. When we were in S.D. Cook the girls were usually faster than the boys and could always jump further than they could but now that is changing. You saw that when we played against the guys in volleyball. When they spiked it was hard. It was a good thing most of them went out or we would of been in trouble. Its sad but thats part of growing up. I still think girls can do anything boys can do. I'm liberated. You know that song which says " in our town a woman can't take work from a man" I think it is cheauvinus even though it is only a song. I'm going to get the job I want even if I have to beat out a man. I'm also not going to stiek around here after highschool: I'll get nowhere. I'm going to Carlton to study political science and Law. There aren't many good jobs for Lawyers around here. I wouldn't be surprised if I got into politics either. Of course I'd be running for the liberals.

The communication, in many cases, develops into an individual tutorial relationship where the teacher is available to help children focus their attention on academic concerns and problems. The following interactions between the researcher and students provides an indication of the type of tutorial conversation entailed in journal writing, even though the researcher did not teach these students the subjects being referred to.

Jason: I am looking forward to getting more worksheets on integers. Because I am having trouble with subtraction of integers. I don't understand why we have to swich positive to negitative and swich addition to subtraction. Today we are learning how to multiply and divide.

My parents were amazed with the mark I got on my math test. They said if I kept those marks up I would get a brand new mountain bike for passing.

Researcher: I like your attitude towards Math and the extra worksheets you've been completing. With the extra work you are doing you should be able to keep your mark up. Hard work does pay off, you will see. You'll have to think of integers on a number line and you shouldn't have too much trouble. Your math teacher would be happy to give you more worksheets I'm sure.

I'm happy your parents were pleased with your last mark. You should also be proud of your efforts.

Rebecca: I usually do pretty good on my exams. I know I'm not going to do good on my social studies test. I just can't get it together this year. I'm finding it really hard. I don't know if it's the teacher or what. I just can't do it. I could study for hours and still fail a test. I dunno. I'll just have to work at it. I can't believe exams are next week!!!

Skiing starts on Friday and I'm looking forward to it. I don't know if I'll be allowed to go skiing though. So close to exams and all. I hope I will. One of my friends said that she was going to tape off all her stuff and take it skiing with her. Study while you ski!! Well nothing much more to say. Bye for now.

Researcher: That is an excellent idea your friend had. Does she tape off all of her notes and then just listen to them while skiing? I had a friend, I studied with last year, who used to tape off all of her notes and then listen to them while driving her car.

I'm looking forward to the skiing too but I won't be going up this weekend. Maybe during next week I will go up. You never know though. I may get it in my head to go up on Sunday.

If you're really having problems grasping the ideas in Social Studies you should talk to your teacher. Does s/he go by the book or is it something entirely different? If that doesn't help, why not ask your parents to work through the chapters with you? A friend studying with you can also do wonders.

Rebecca: Thanks again for the advice! Jennifer said she would help me study for our social studies exam. I hope I do good. I fooled up completely on my Band exam. I know I didn't flunk it, but I messed up. It seemed like when I blew into it nothing came out. I'm so worried about my social studies exam!!

Neil: were writing a story in English. I like writing stories but this story has to be about a gift and the person who is buying the gift has to buy it in a store called the magic shop. In the paragraph sir read to us it said that one gift would come to life, another would chance someones life, and the other has a kerse on it. I wanted to write a good story so, I'm going to have the gift come to life. I needed some action in the story so I'm going to make it a horror. Now I have 3 pages wrote in my story. I'll let you read it when its done.

I'm also doing a science project. I'm going to make a little town and have a generator house. The only thing that is going to be different about this generator house is, it's going to have a new way of making electricity. I might just make the motor with the new way of making electricity. What do you think?

Researcher: Sounds like your story will be interesting. I really don't like watching horror films but don't mind reading horror stories. I hate the music they play in horror movies and the scenes are always in the dark, it seems. I'm one of those that jump out of the chair and walk around the living room, scream out directions or cover my face with a pillow. I will enjoy reading

your story when it is complete.

Your science project sounds pretty complicated to me. I think you know much more about all of that than I do. It sounds like an excellent idea to me though. I'm impressed!

This study indicated that students' vocabulary and mechanical skills did not indicate progression as a result of the dialogue journal experience. It was thought that students' writing would improve in these areas since the teacher could use responses to model standard English, grammar, conventional spelling and other mechanics of writing. Since the modelling did not appear to help develop these skills, it may be necessary to directly teach mini-lessons on the problem areas encountered in journal writing. The journals could even direct the teacher's language instruction to larger groups if it is observed that a number of students indicate a lack of understanding about a particular concept. Based on information offered in the journals, teachers are provided with insights regarding the effectiveness of classroom activities in terms of meeting individual student needs and through the journal the teacher becomes available to advise and teach them what they need in order to develop more effective communication strategies. Subsequent student entries then become an ideal means to watch for demonstrations of progress.

The dialogue journal provides extended samples of functional, stressfree writing. Students can experience success because they can work at their own pace and level in a situation where they are invited to take risks to actively construct meaning for a real-life purpose. The continuing communication, with a supportive model who is concerned with the message more so than the examination of papers, is generally genuine and positive in nature. During the study students expressed satisfaction with the dialogue journal activity,

as is indicated in the following students' entries.

Nicole: Dear Mrs. Cook, I really like this english project. It is much better than the journals we use to keep in grades 3, 4, 5 and 6. I can remember my journal entries would be only two or three lines. I usually only told what the weather was like, if I played team handball or basketball that day, had drama or guides. It wasn't very interesting writing to yourself. When I get my journal back now I can't wait to see what you have written.

Krista: Mrs. Cook, when you asked me to keep a journal you'll really get your reading's worth. I love journals so I don't mind. It's so easy to pour out feelings, frustrations and emotions, paper doesn't talk back. But in my case I get a response to my journal writing, this is alot of fun too.

Although the review of the literature supports the implementation of the dialogue journal into the Language Arts curriculum to help develop within students a more positive attitude toward writing and a greater understanding of written language, the results of this project indicated that the activity of dialogue journal writing did not significantly affect attitudes toward writing or perceptions of writing at the grade eight level. The insignificant effects may well emphasize the importance of developing positive attitudes and perceptions during the initial years of schooling. Beginning writing early in whole language experiences such as dialogue journal writing may well help developing writers perceive writing as an enjoyable and functional activity from an early age, one which positively influences student's attitudes and perceptions. Leaving attitudinal and perceptual development until grade eight is perhaps too late.

Equipping students with a means to become involved in using language as they read and reread their entries during writing, and later read and possibly reread the teacher's

responses, was thought to help students improve their comprehension processing skills. Results of this study, however, indicated that the dialogue journal activity did not significantly affect students' reading comprehension abilities. Perhaps rereading personal writing and teacher responses was not a complex enough task to increase reading comprehension ability at the grade eight level. As well, all responses may not have been written at a level that would enhance reading abilities beyond the grade eight level. Since the researcher was mostly concerned with providing responses to the content of the students' entries, there probably was not a conscious enough effort on the researcher's part to write challenging material, material that would develop reading comprehension. It may be wise to take this into greater consideration when responding to journals at higher grade levels.

The implementation of the dialogue journal requires very little preparation but saving time is not one of the advantages. The amount of time it takes to read and respond to students' entries on a regular basis requires a commitment of the educator's time. However, the teacher does not need to search for stimulating activities for the students to write about and the journals provide valuable information to help the teacher assess students' growth and plan lessons based on students' needs.

If teachers are finding it difficult to find the time to respond to students' entries, Cathro (1987) suggests that they should look at the amount of time spent grading and determine if marking is more important than reading and responding to the ideas and concerns of students. Reed (1986), who began dialoguing as a means of helping students remember what they were learning, recognized how enlightening and rewarding an experience it was for both the students and the teachers. Encouraging other educators to participate

in this interactive exchange she maintains, "If you only knew what the investment in that time would be for you as well as your class you couldn't afford not to take the time" (p. 6).

Suggestions for Further Research

Many areas of dialogue journal research emerge from this inquiry. Dialogue journal writing is a recent phenomenon in educational settings and to establish its significance and to outline the benefits derived from this interaction further research will be required.

1. Similar studies need to be conducted at this and other educational levels. Statistical analyses to examine the effectiveness of dialogue journals are a necessity at all levels of education. Replications of this study might include larger and, if possible, randomized samples.
2. There is a need for longitudinal studies which will look at the effectiveness of the dialogue journal treatment over a period of time. A ten month study may have been too short to yield changes in attitude and perception. A longer duration for this type of study would eliminate the possibilities of a lagged effect.
3. There are many other possible areas of development or outcome variables that this study did not investigate because to do so would have been beyond the scope of thesis research. Future research might examine other student variables such as the development of spelling ability or vocabulary growth in students as a result of writing dialogue journals. A future study might examine teacher variables such as determining the most effective strategies for continuing conversations with students.

4. Investigations into the effect of various correspondents besides the teacher could be conducted to determine if students corresponding with their peers, or parents, have similar effects to those of the teacher and student interactions.

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Appendix A

September 20, 1989

Mr. William Coates
Superintendent
Bay of Islands-St. Georges, Burgeo,
Ramea, Integrated School Board
Corner Brook, Newfoundland

Dear Mr. Coates:

I am currently working towards the completion of a Master's degree in Language Arts. As a final stage, I must conduct a small research project with my supervisor, Dr. Mona Beebe.

This letter is to request your permission to run an eight month writing project at _____ Junior High School. The study will involve three grade eight classes. While all three of these classes will be requested to participate in the pre and post-test exercises, one class will be asked to dialogue bi-weekly in a journal with me. It is hoped that this writing/reading activity will positively influence students' writing proficiency, their attitudes and perceptions of writing as well as their reading performance.

Except for the tests, totalling approximately one half hour, to be administered at the beginning and end of the study, the regular classroom program would not be interrupted in any way.

If you are willing to grant my request, would you please sign the attached form and return it to me at your earliest convenience?

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Cook

I, Mr. William Coates, superintendent of the Bay of Islands-St. Georges, Burgeo, Ramea, Integrated School Board, hereby grant Sharon Cook permission to conduct a dialogue journal writing project at _____ Junior High School. This study, involving three grade eight classes will begin in October, 1989 and end in June, 1990.

Mr. William Coates,
Superintendent

September 20, 1989

Mr. _____
Principal
_____ Junior High School
Corner Brook, Newfoundland
A2H 2E5

Dear Mr. _____:

I am currently working towards the completion of a Master's degree in Language Arts. As a final stage, I must conduct a small research project with my supervisor, Dr. Mona Beebe.

This letter is to request your permission to run an eight month writing project at _____ Junior High School. The study will involve three grade eight classes. While all three of these classes will be requested to participate in the pre and post-test exercises, one class will be asked to dialogue bi-weekly in a journal with me. It is hoped that this writing/reading activity will positively influence students' writing proficiency, attitudes and perceptions of writing as well as their reading performance.

Except for the tests, totalling approximately one half hour, to be administered at the beginning and end of the study, the regular classroom program would not be interrupted in any way.

If you are willing to grant my request, would you please sign the attached form and return it to me at your earliest convenience?

Yours sincerely,

Sharon Cook

I, Mr. Michael Barrett, principal of _____ Junior High School, hereby grant Sharon Cook permission to conduct a dialogue journal writing project at this school. This study, involving three grade eight classes will begin in October, 1989 and end in June, 1990.

Mr. Micheal Barrett,
Principal

Appendix B
Criteria for Writing Evaluation

Quality of Ideas

Score

1. Writes very little or nothing.
2. Message is vague, incoherent, underdeveloped or inaccurate.
3. Ideas, though sound, are not fully developed and lack imagination.
4. Ideas are sound, moderately well developed and show some imagination.
5. Ideas are relevant, well thought out, imaginative, fully developed and clearly presented.

Organization

Score

1. Complete absence of organization. Ideas are presented in random order with little or no connection.
2. Discernible overall structure, even though the beginning, middle and end generally weak. No emphasis placed on major points. Sentences and paragraphs are rarely connected by smooth transitions.
3. Overall structure clear and appropriate with a forward moving introduction, development and conclusion. Emphasis on major and minor points not always well balanced. Sentences and paragraphs are not consistently connected

by effective transitions.

4. Introduction, development and conclusion are well thought out, organized and clearly presented. Major points are treated with greater emphasis than less important ones. Sentences and paragraphs are consistently connected by smooth transitions.

Sentence Structure

Score

1. Awkward sentence construction and error-filled sentences.
2. Run-on sentences and fragments often appear.
Sentences are simple and lack variety.
Conjunctions and transitions are rarely used
and are limited to words like and, and then.
3. Some variety in sentence structure and complexity. The sentence structure is basically correct, but the writing may contain occasional errors. Run-on sentences and sentence fragments are evident but are not predominant.
Transitions are used when necessary.
4. Sentence length and structure varied. Sentences are consistently well-formed, containing no serious errors such as fragments, dangling modifiers or run-on constructions. Smooth flow from sentence to sentence.

Vocabulary**Score**

1. Meagre and/or totally inappropriate word choice.
2. Word selection generally inappropriate, immature, and limited. Figurative language rarely used.
3. Word selection, although suitable and correct, may be general rather than specific. Instances of repetition somewhat common. Figurative language, when used, may be strained or lack imagination.
4. Concise, appropriate and mature word selection. Writer deliberately experiments with words in slightly unusual and interesting ways.

Writer's Voice**Score**

1. There is no evidence of the writer's voice.
2. A small trace of the writer's voice apparent.
3. The writer's voice, although sometimes repetitive, is clearly portrayed.
4. The explicitness of the writer's voice contributes to the quality of the writing.

Mechanics**Score**

1. Writes very little or nothing.
2. Frequent errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling and capitalization.
3. Periodic violations in grammar, punctuation, spelling and capitalization.
4. Very few errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling and capitalization.

Appendix C
Writing Questionnaire

This is not a test. There is no right or wrong answer.
It is simply to see what you really think about writing.
Answers will be kept confidential. Circle one answer for each question.

Key: Strongly agree - 1
Mostly agree - 2
Mostly disagree- 3
Strongly disagree - 4

Learning to write well...

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 1. is difficult for me | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. involves correct spelling,
punctuation and grammar | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. is worth the effort | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. usually means writing more
than one draft | 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. is boring | 1 2 3 4 |
| 6. involves practicing writing
many things | 1 2 3 4 |
| 7. is too time consuming | 1 2 3 4 |
| 8. encourages people to write more | 1 2 3 4 |
| 9. is interesting to me | 1 2 3 4 |
| 10. involves saying what you want to
say the way you want to say it | 1 2 3 4 |
| 11. is as important as learning to read | 1 2 3 4 |
| 12. involves as much thinking as writing | 1 2 3 4 |

- | | |
|--|---------|
| 13. is going to help me later on | 1 2 3 4 |
| 14. involves revising, editing
and proofreading | 1 2 3 4 |
| 15. gives me a sense of satisfaction | 1 2 3 4 |
| 16. comes naturally to some students | 1 2 3 4 |
| 17. is not for me | 1 2 3 4 |
| 18. takes a lot of practice | 1 2 3 4 |
| 19. calls for more time than
is available in school | 1 2 3 4 |
| 20. means not guessing at how
to spell words | 1 2 3 4 |



