INFORMATION TO USERS

This reproduction was made from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this document, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark, it is an indication of either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, duplicate copy, or copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed. For blurred pages, a good image of the page can be found in the adjacent frame. If copyrighted materials were deleted, a target note will appear listing the pages in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed, a definite method of "sectioning" the material has been followed. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. For illustrations that cannot be satisfactorily reproduced by xerographic means, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and inserted into your xerographic copy. These prints are available upon request from the Dissertations Customer Services Department.

5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.

University
Microfilms
International
300 N. Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/5129

8314779

Merrell, Cathy Jean Stangle

PREFERENCES FOR FORMS OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION AS REPORTED BY SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS IN SELECTED OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS

The University of Oklahoma PH.D. 1983

University
Microfilms
International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Copyright 1983

by

Merrell, Cathy Jean Stangle

All Rights Reserved

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

PREFERENCES FOR FORMS OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION AS REPORTED BY SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS IN SELECTED OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

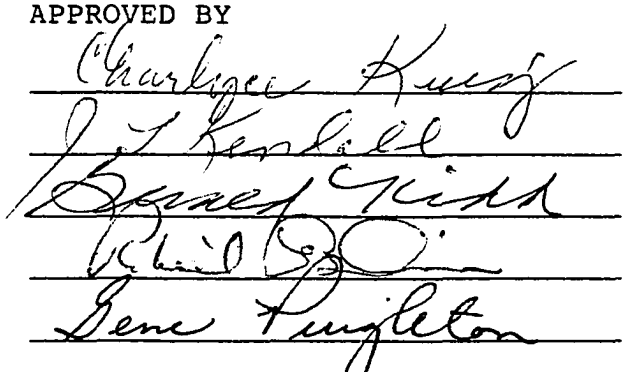
CATHY JEAN STANGLE MERRELL

Norman, Oklahoma

1983

PREFERENCES FOR FORMS OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION AS REPORTED BY SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS IN SELECTED OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS

APPROVED BY



DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

© 1983

CATHY JEAN STANGLE MERRELL

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to express her sincere appreciation to the members of her doctoral committee: Dr. Jack Kendall who graciously agreed to be the member from the English Department; Dr. Robert Bibens who taught me a great deal about what middle schools should be; Dr. Gerald Kidd who taught me the importance of patience in dealing with the adolescent student; Dr. Gene Pingleton who helped me believe that teachers were also professionals; and most of all to Dr. Charlyce King who not only directed my study but understands what its like to be a wife, mother, student, and teacher all at the same time.

Another special thanks goes to my husband, Gary, who started me on this venture because he wanted football tickets, and to my daughter, Valerie, who put up with many hours of having to stay out of my way. Also to my parents who gave me a "Class of '83" button for Christmas thereby forcing me to feel an obligation to finish this degree this semester.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
Chapter I	1
Introduction	1
Need for the Study	3
Theoretical Basis	5
Statement of the Problem	10
Operational Definitions	11
Chapter II	15
Review of the Literature	15
Chapter III	29
Design of the Study	29
Methodology	29
Delimitations	29
Sources of Data	30
Development of the Instrument	30
Reliability	31
Validity	32
Data Collection Procedures	32
Treatment of the Data	33
Chapter IV	34
Presentation and Analysis of Findings	34
Chapter V	50
Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations	50
Recommendations	57
Recommendations for Further Research	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY	60
APPENDIX	65

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table I

Number Responding to Survey 36

Table II

Reported Preferences of Seventh Grade Girls and Boys 37

Table III

Reported Preferences of Eighth Grade Girls and Boys 40

Table IV (A - D)

Reported Preferences by Grade Level and Sex (4.0 - 3.0) 43
(2.99 - 2.0) 44
(1.99 - 1.0) 45
(Below .9) 46

Table V

Essay on Part II Matching Reported Preferences on Part I 48

Table VI

Most Often Reported Preference Among All Responding 49

PREFERENCES FOR FORMS OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION AS REPORTED BY SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS IN SELECTED OKLAHOMA SCHOOLS

CHAPTER I

Introduction

In December of 1975, an article entitled "Why Johnny Can't Write"[1] appeared in Newsweek magazine. Since that time, noted authorities in the field of teaching composition and classroom teachers have been making unprecedented efforts toward the revitalization of the teaching of written composition.

A year previous to the article, teachers in San Francisco made a decision to do something about the teaching of composition and started the Bay Area Writing Project. One purpose of the Writing Project was to reduce the number of high school students who have difficulty writing. Although much of the emphasis is still on high school and college composition courses, the Writing Projects do involve all grade levels.

A major premise of the Writing Projects is that of teachers teaching other teachers about methods of instruction

---

[1]A copy of the opening paragraph to the Newsweek article, "Why Johnny Can't Write," can be found in Appendix A.

in composition. Intensive summer workshops are held with selected teachers who have applied for the Project. During this time they develop curriculum materials for their students as well as polish their own writing skills. These teacher/consultants are then sent into the field during the regular school terms to instruct other teachers who in turn apply the materials and ideas in actual classroom situations. Currently there are Writing Projects in 83 cities and in 38 states.

As a member of the first Oklahoma Writing Project Summer Institute, this writer developed an interest in the value of the projects and the efforts of the teacher/consultants. Therefore, this research surveyed students as to their preferences for the various forms of composition presented by teacher/consultants. The question of student interest appears to be especially acute at the middle school level where much of the teacher's time and effort is directed toward motivating the students to want to write anything at all.

An article by Thomas P. Hogan on the writing activity interests of students in grades one through eight led to the research contained in this paper.[2] Hogan reported that attitudes toward any type of school activities become less favorable with the increase in grade level.[3] He also

---

[2]Thomas P. Hogan, "Students' Interests in Writing Activities," Research in the Teaching of English, vol. 14, no. 2 (May, 1980): 119-126.

[3]Ibid., p. 125.

indicated the most severe decline to be in grades six through eight. However, even though a decline in interest was shown, he did find in the research that students showed an unusual interest in letter writing.

This study extends the information concerning students' interest in writing activities to the practitioners in the field of teaching written composition to the middle school student. The study indicates preferences for various writing forms which could then be used by the practitioner in motivating students to write more both quantitatively and qualitatively. If teachers begin with the area in which the student has expressed an interest, perhaps those teachers can motivate the student to develop further, more complex written materials. Recommendations for practical classroom implementation are found in the conclusion of the study.

Need for the Study

In one of the few articles on the English curriculum in the middle schools, Robert Johnson makes the statement that the teaching of composition may be "the single most challenging task for the middle school/junior high school English teacher ...".[4] A statement such as this by Johnson

---

[4]Robert Spencer Johnson, "The English Curriculum in Middle Schools, Junior Highs -- The Components," NASSP Bulletin, vol. 65, no. 444 (April, 1981): p. 45.

and a review of other authors led this writer to see a definite need for field research in the area of teaching composition to the middle school students.

Daniel Dyer has written an article which effectively points out the need for more research. According to Dyer, there has never been a "thorough descriptive study of the American secondary school English curriculum -- middle school, junior high school, or high school."[5] He states that even though a large number of books and articles have been written about what a middle school is or should do, there is little material on what its English curriculum should be. Concerning those that do cover the English curriculum he writes that "...the theoretical and practical value of these books for middle school English teachers are similarly questionable -- and severely limited."[6]

A great deal of recent interest in writing may possibly be attributed to the point that "...teachers are beginning to get more help with their own writing processes."[7] Because of involvement in projects such as the Bay Area Writing Project and the Oklahoma Writing Project, more teachers now view what children do within the framework of

---

[5]Daniel Dyer, "English in the Middle: The K-Mart Syndrome," English Journal, vol. 69, no. 1 (January, 1980): p. 60.

[6]Ibid., p. 62.

[7]Donald Graves, "A New Look at Research on Writing," in Perspectives on Writing in Grades 1-8, ed. Shirley Haley-James (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1981), p. 95.

what they (the teachers) do themselves. Teachers must become involved in the actual processes in order to understand how the students feel when attempting the assignment. And, the consensus of authors reviewed was that teachers and students find assignments much easier to do if one holds an interest in what he/she is doing.

Graves also reported in his article on writing research that much of what has been done has not been readable by teachers for an actual classroom and is usually done with older students.[8]

Considering the comments of the authors reviewed, this study will not only show the preferences for forms of composition, but will also have as a major goal that its research findings be suitable for use by the classroom teacher.

Theoretical Basis

In a book on curriculum for the emerging adolescent, Curtis and Bidwell stress the importance of the language arts area as a whole.[9] They believe language arts should receive a great deal of attention since learning how to be a continuing learner is dependent on language skills. In regard to writing skills the authors believe the teacher must

---

[8]Ibid., p. 94.

[9]Thomas Curtis and Wilma Bidwell, Curriculum and Instruction for Emerging Adolescents (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, 1977), p. 135.

decide the "...degree of formal writing skill" necessary for the students and work from that point.[10] Even though a certain degree of skills is necessary for all to master, the student must also become involved in the process of learning content areas. Upon student involvement the motivation increases.

Hogan speculated that the reason interests in writing drop off in the junior high may be due to the nature of the curriculum or personal developmental changes.[11] He stated that for this reason the "...teachers in grades 6-8 need to be specially alert to the issue of student interest in writing."[12] This study holds with Hogan's theory that curriculum may be the major source of the problem in motivating students to write. The middle school curriculum has not adapted to the developmental changes of its students. One of those changes being the need to become personally involved in ones course work.

One of the foremost authorities on teaching composition, James Britton, wrote the following about involvement and motivation: "When involved, the writer made the task his own and began to write to satisfy himself as well as his

---

[10]Ibid., p. 215.

[11]Hogan, p. 125.

[12]Ibid., p. 125.

teachers; in perfunctory writing he seemed to satisfy only the minimum demands of the task."[13]

This point is also emphasized by Benjamin Bloom. In discussing the affective outcomes of school learning he says that a subject related affect is defined by whether the student will voluntarily engage in other learning tasks of the same kind.[14] So, if the student is inwardly motivated to write what he/she sees as valuable he/she may in turn write in those forms the teacher also sees valuable.

Bloom also uses the word perseverance in describing the learner. He defines perseverance as "...the time the learner is willing to spend in learning."[15] He adds that the goal of perseverance may be reached if students are provided with appropriate instructional materials.

It may be that perseverance could be obtained through instructional materials that are based first on what the students are familiar with and are interested in doing. With the guidance of the teacher, the students could select those types of writing they wish to do. As one author points out,

---

[13]James Britton, et al., The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18) (London Schools Councils Publication: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975), p. 7.

[14]Benjamin Bloom, Human Characteristics and School Learning (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976), p. 146.

[15]Ibid., p. 164.

the students do have ideas of their own and are often very specific as to the types of writing they would like to do.[16]

Another point by Jeffrey that might be well taken is that it seems "...that teachers set the writing tasks, students 'do' them and very little interaction occurs regarding what is being done and what students would like to be doing."[17] He cites the lack of communication between teachers and students which leads to a lack of motivation on the part of the student. Teachers generally show no tendency, he says, to give students the types of assignments they want to do.[18] If this communication existed, there could be an increase in motivation. One way of achieving communication could be through such instruments as interest surveys, but only if the teacher recognized and used the information.

As pointed out by Mellon, we cannot overstress the importance of motivation in teaching writing.[19] In his report on English from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Mellon points out that "...classroom teachers merely 'give out' composition assignments with no more thought

---

[16]Christopher Jeffrey, "Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of the Writing Process," Research in the Teaching of English, vol. 15, no. 3 (October, 1981): p. 228.

[17]Ibid., p. 227.

[18]Ibid., p. 227.

[19]John C. Mellon, National Assessment and the Teaching of English (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1975), p.34.

to their motivational levels than that they will write simply because they have to."[20] Too often there is little pre-instruction, the assignment is just given.

In addition to the way in which assignments are handled, students are given large blocks of time in which to write on externally imposed topics which, as Mellon points out, "...carry only the promise of teacher approbation and academic marks."[21] This further emphasizes the importance of the structure of the curriculum in relation to motivation. There must be some purpose in the writing task and students should know for whom the writing is being done. As one author points out, students should not have to ask, "Why am I writing this paper?"[22]

In summing up the theoretical basis the following quotations seem appropriate: "Content no matter what its importance to society will not be assimilated unless it is perceived by the learners as relevant to their needs and desires and subsumed under structures they have formulated themselves." and; "Relevance to the needs, purposes, desires,

---

[20]Ibid., p. 34.

[21]Ibid., p. 34.

[22]Edward B. Jenkinson and Donald Seybold, Writing as a Process of Discovery: Some Structured Theme Assignments for Grades Five through Twelve (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 12.

and perceptions of pupils involved in the learning process is of utmost importance in the formulation of a curriculum pattern for the middle school."[23]

Another important point was not made by a known authority but by a perceptive classroom teacher:

> In setting up writing objectives, a teacher has to ask, more than any other question: what kind of writing best serves the development of the person concerned; how can the student search out himself, and how can he relate to the rest of the world? The student has to write what he cares about in the context of life about him. To find relevance in the act, the writer must associate with his own time, with his own environment, and with concerns with which he can identify.[24]

Concerns such as the ones mentioned led to the basic questions pursued in this research.

Statement of the Problem

The problem in this study was to report the preferences for forms of written composition by middle school age students in selected Oklahoma schools during the spring semester of 1981. Questions were asked in order to report findings and find out what information was available in the field. The study answers the following questions in regard

---

[23]Curtis, p. 158.

[24]Epigraph by Sister Cristina Welch, SSJ, St. Agnes High School, Rochester, New York in They Really Taught Us How to Write, ed. Patricia Geuder (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1974), p. 2.

to thirteen various forms of composition and reports the findings in each area according to the student's sex, grade level, and overall grade point average for the 1980-81 school year.

1. By actual count and percentages, what is the first reported preference of seventh grade girls?

2. By actual count and percentages, what is the first reported preference of seventh grade boys?

3. By actual count and percentages, what is the first reported preference of eighth grade girls?

4. By actual count and percentages, what is the first reported preference of eighth grade boys?

5. According to each grade level and sex breakdown, what is the first reported preference by actual count and by percentages when the grade point averages are divided at one point difference levels? (4.0-3.0, 2.9-2.0, 1.9-1.0, and below .9).

6. On part two of the instrument to be used, what percentage of the students wrote in the form they reported as being their first or second preference?

7. By actual count and percentages, what is the most often reported preference among all participants responding?

Operational Definitions

Thirteen forms of composition were selected for the students to rank in order. These thirteen forms were

selected based on the instructional material in a widely used text for grades seven and eight in Oklahoma,[25] and a popular resource book compiled on actual teaching units for grades seven, eight and nine.[26]

Written composition forms are defined as any of the following types of writing commonly assigned to middle school students:

1. Letters to Friends - A letter written for enjoyment of the writer and the reader to inform the reader of recent events.

2. Letters to Businesses - A letter written only in formal letter writing style to any business requesting specific information or ordering specific materials.

3. Fictional Short Stories - Any story which contains fictional elements either in part or whole.

4. Non-fiction Short Stories - Any story that is entirely true and based on either the student's personal experiences or those of an acquaintance.

5. Rhymed Poetry - Poetry of any length which contains some form of rhyming words.

6. Unrhymed Poetry - Poetry of any length and

---

[25]John E. Warriner and Sheila Laws, English Grammar and Composition: First Course and Second Course (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1977.

[26]Ruth Reeves, Chairperson, Ideas for Teaching English: Successful Practices in the Junior High School, Grades 7-8-9 (Champaign, Illinois: NCTE, 1966).

written in any of the free forms or the student's choice of form.

7. Essays with Topic Assigned - An organized piece of expository writing containing clear, concise sentences and two or more paragraphs written on a topic assigned by the teacher.

8. Essays with Free Choice of Topic - An organized piece of expository writing containing clear, concise sentences and two or more paragraphs written on any topic the student might select.

9. Plays - A form of writing in dialogue or monologue with one or more characters speaking before an intended audience.

10. Diaries/Journals - Daily or weekly logs covering the student's thoughts at the time of writing on either his/her own choice of topic or on a brief topic assigned by the teacher.

11. Paragraphs - A group of clear, concise sentences on one specific topic either assigned by the teacher or selected by the student.

12. Newspaper Articles - Any piece of writing which covers recent events and could be included in the sports, news, editorial, or special column sections of a newspaper.

13. Research Reports - A report of a length usually determined by the teacher which requires some form of

library research so that references may be included in the paper. Topic may be assigned by the teacher or selected by the student.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In conducting the review of the literature for this study, two problems were noted which seem to account for the amount of material available. First, there appears to be little accumulated research about how people learn to write, if there are natural stages of development, or what is the best way to teach writing in school.[1] According to Whiteman's study, writing research is approximately 50 years behind that of reading research. The result seems to be that writing research has only scratched the surface in terms of what needs to be done. To quote Whiteman, "Much more research needs to be done if we are to have enough information to inform effectively the teaching of writing."[2]

The second problem encountered is that grades seven and eight are sometimes considered elementary grades and sometimes secondary grades. Books on the elementary level seemed to concentrate on the writing skills of grades four through six while secondary level books emphasized grades nine through twelve. Books and articles that are solely

---

[1]Marcia Farr Whiteman, "What We Can Learn from Writing Research," Theory Into Practice, vol. XIX, no. 3, p. 151.

[2]Ibid., p. 155.

devoted to the middle school concentrate on what the middle school is, its function and how to build a middle school program. Some material was located on the middle school language arts curriculum and will be discussed later. However, curriculum sections were generally found to be severely inadequate.

In an article entitled, "English in the Middle: the K-Mart Syndrome," Daniel Dyer cites what may be the reason for the lack of material on middle schools. He states that for several years middle schools were regarded as a "wasteland."[3] There are few colleges with programs designed specifically for middle school educators and there are still questions existing on the function of the middle school.[4] To alleviate this problem Dyer has recommended that such organizations as the NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English) and the National Middle School Association set up a commission of teachers to "...conduct a national survey of randomly selected intermediate schools to find out what-the-hell is really going on out there in Stanley, North Dakota; Round Lake, Illinois; and Aurora, Ohio...".[5]

---

[3]Dyer, p. 62.

[4]Ibid., p. 62.

[5]Ibid., p. 63.

The problem discovered by Dyer is also evidenced by another author, Donald Graves. Graves, who is one of those considering grades seven and eight as elementary, found that "...only 156 studies of writing in the elementary grades, or an average of six annually, have been done in the United States in the last twenty-five years."[6] (His information was based on studies in ERIC, (Research in the Teaching of English, Elementary English, Language Arts, and dissertation abstracts.) Another interesting finding by Graves was that only one complete book has been written on teaching English to grades seven and eight, that being the NCTE publication of Ideas for Teaching English: Grades 7-8-9.[7] Even this publication is not current, copyright 1966.

The general lack of writing research, and the more specific lack of middle school writing research led this writer to look for further material connected to the established theoretical base. This was done by referring to materials on developing motivation through instructional materials that are relevant and meaningful to the students.

With the exception of the article by Hogan based on the information from the NAEP, the article on which the idea for this study was based, the only item uncovered was in a recent book by Stephen and Susan Judy. Even this item,

---

[6]Graves, p. 93

[7]Ibid., p. 102.

though it was referred to as an interest inventory, focused on the content ideas not on the forms of composition.[8] Even though content is an equally valid area for study, this particular article was not found to be relevant to this study.

Redirecting the research from interest inventories in particular to generally developing interest and motivation led to additional findings. In addition to Hogan's comments on the decline of interest in writing by middle school age students, two other authors, Fadiman and Howard, wrote, "If their development as writers does not actually regress, students in junior and senior high school seem to lose their way in learning."[9] These authors do not attempt to offer any explanation for the lack of interest factor. In fact, they go on to comment that students do not need to be guaranteed that what they are writing will be of interest to them at the time.[10]

Fadiman and Howard were the only authors found to be of the opinion that interest was not entirely necessary.

---

[8]Stephen Judy and Susan Judy, An Introduction to the Teaching of Writing (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1981), pp. 51-53.

[9]Clifton Fadiman and James Howard, Empty Pages: A Search for Writing Competence in School and Society (Belmont, California: Fearon Pittman Publishers, 1979), p. 98.

[10]Ibid., p. 100.

Among those expressing concern for interest there followed the ever present need for students to write for a "real" audience, not just for the teacher. In a book edited by Haley-James, on teaching writing in grades one through eight, there are three observations on writing and its instruction.

> -Writing frequently on self-selected topics is important to developing skill in writing.
> -When children feel a need or a desire to write for some purpose or audience, they write more effectively.
> -Real and varied audiences for their work are important to the development of children as writers and to their incentive to write.[11]

Noteworthy in these observations are the self-selected topics," the writing for "some purpose or audience," and the "incentive to write."

John Holt writes that teachers cannot teach students to write by merely having them write exercises or essays that the teachers think are "good for them." "They can only learn to write well by trying to write, for themselves, or other people they want to reach, what they feel is important."[12]

The previously cited points are again brought out in an article concerned with writing for a purpose. Joanne

---

[11]Shirley Haley-James, "Twentieth Century Perspectives on Writing in Grades One through Eight," in Perspectives on Writing in Grades 1-8, ed. Shirley Haley-James (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1981), p. 17.

[12]John Holt, What Do I Do Monday? (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1970), p. 212.

Golden states that in developing a writing program it is important that children write for a variety of purposes, for an audience, and have plenty of opportunities to write.[13]

Kirby and Liner[14] stress the importance of students writing for themselves as an audience then sharing the writing with their friends. They go on to say the next step is expanding to wider audiences.

Joseph Mersand emphasizes the importance of enlisting the interest and pleasure of the student, making proficiency worthwhile, and using composition activities that grow out of the experiences of the pupil.[15] Simmons also points out the need for a writer to have "some meaningful commitment to his composition."[16] He continues to say that in order for students to become writers "...they must become actively involved in the choice of topics."[17] Simmons believes that topics and forms often come from the teacher's

---

[13]Joanne Golden, "The Writer's Side: Writing for a Purpose and an Audience," Language Arts, vol. 57, no. 7 (October, 1980), pp. 761-762.

[14]Dan Kirby and Tom Liner, Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing (Montclair, New Jersey: Boynton Cook Publishers, 1981), p. 134.

[15]Joseph Mersand, The English Teacher: Basic Traditions and Successful Innovations (Port Washington, New York: National University Publications, Kennikat Press, 1977), p. 116.

[16]John Simmons, Robert Shafer and Gail West, Decisions About the Teaching of English (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1976), p. 183.

[17]Ibid., pp. 183-184.

"interests, background, current crusades, and what have you."[18]

The concensus of the authors cited seems to be that the manner in which assignments are handed out and the lack of student motivation may be a prime reason for low interest and lack of motivation leading to poor quality and smaller quantities of writing. As Graves states, there is often a tendency to overlook the experiences and knowledge base that the child knows best.[19] Although the more intuitive teachers are able to draw upon student knowledge bases to develop interests, there are many who lack the skills to do so. The point by Curtis seems important that teachers should use some time to study material which the student sees as relevant.[20]

Middle School Programs

In reviewing material on current middle school programs that have been designated by their authors to be successful and motivating few resources were located on what might be called a full, viable, operating curriculum. The language arts curricula appears, in many instances, to fall into what Dyer calls the "K-Mart Syndrome." The

---

[18] Ibid., p. 183.

[19] Graves, p. 111.

[20] Curtis, p. 159.

"K-Mart Syndrome" is defined as a comparison to businessmen who rely on impulse buying while customers are waiting in line so company profits will increase. Dyer states that public education has worked on "impulse curricula" for language arts in grades kindergarten through twelve.[21]

A few curriculum guides were located. In one of these, Johnson states that an effective middle school program must provide for "...frequent writing in many forms and for many purposes, and for a variety of audiences."[22] As far as specifics, Johnson states only that writing should include expository essays, descriptive, persuasive reports, poetry, and letters. He continues saying, "Whenever possible, the activities should be related to students' interests and contemporary concerns."[23] Johnson does not, however, deal with how to develop or discover those interests.

Concerning curriculum, another author contends that if a teacher is confused about where to start in the teaching of composition "...one should simply begin at the beginning and work up to the end."[24] Her plan simply calls for

---

[21]Dyer, p. 59.

[22]Johnson, p. 45.

[23]Ibid., p. 45.

[24]Cheryl Micucci, "Streamlining Adolescent Writing: A Diet for Obese Prose," English Journal, vol. 69, no. 9 (December, 1980): pp. 60-61.

beginning with teaching how to write a sentence. This she says should be related to current events or possibly even controversial issues. Micucci then says the teacher should move on to teaching paragraphs and when spring arrives the students will be ready for full length essays. Sometime during the year she states it is acceptable to teach a little poetry and short story writing. This particular author has no specific plans for motivation and sees the teacher as the center of the learning situation.

Piedmont Middle School in San Jose, California, has developed a plan that they feel improved the students' writing.[25] In September, all students write a 20 minute essay which is then scored holistically. Each month after that the teachers concentrate on one of six major objectives: (1) descriptive writing, (2) reports, (3) narratives, (4) poetry, (5) reports, and (6) essays. The packets for these objectives were prepared by the reading resource teacher. Packets included lesson plans, teaching strategies, and learning materials. An important aspect of this program seemed to be the involvement of the principal who supported the program and regularly recognized students who did well.

Even though praise and recognition can be a valuable force toward motivation it can also be a deterrent in a world

---

[25]Arthur Land, "One School's Plan that Improved Student Writing," Thrust, vol. 11, no. 5 (May-June, 1982): pp. 18-19.

of peer pressure where it is not "cool" to succeed. This point is mentioned in a book by Beatrice and Ronald Gross. "By the time the unsure learner has reached grade seven, he sees school as a series of dangers either to be laughed off, fought off, or quickly suffered. Praise is among them."[26] Inner motivation through interests discovered and actually used by the teacher may prove more valuable as a method for developing better writers.

A book entitled The Exemplary Middle School devotes less than half a page to writing skills. The authors believe too little time is given to systematic excercises in developing writing. They give a checklist of writing skills used in Marion County, Florida, for grades six through ten. (See Appendix B)[27] Using this plan, any true student involvement would be used only by an innovative teacher.

Another example of the objectives of a middle school program is in Stephen Judy's book. He states that the school is concerned with success in mastering the stages of the writing process in personal, expressive, and formal writing.[28] While the program seems viable there is no

---

[26]Beatrice and Ronald Gross, Will It Grow in a Classroom? (New York: Delacorte Press, 1974), p. 142.

[27]William Alexander and Paul George, The Exemplary Middle School (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) p. 72.

[28]Judy, pp. 176-177.

mention of developing or discovering student interests. This matter may have been covered in the "how to" portion of the school's curriculum and not listed in Judy's book.

In Glatthorn's recent book on writing and school leadership, he lists a number of composition teaching structures. Among these structures are the following:

-- The discourse centered which is based on Moffett's plan and develops hierarchically from concrete to abstract, personal to impersonal, past to future, and drama to fiction.[29]

-- The skill focused structure identifies skills then arranges them in a sequence of increasing complexity.[30]

-- The individualized structure is a diagnostic prescriptive model based on a list of skills.[31]

-- The developmental sequence is based on a "careful analysis of what pupils can and do write."[32]

-- The generic structure is developed around types of genres of writing.[33]

---

[29]Allan A. Glatthorn, Writing in the Schools, Improvement Through Effective Leadership (Reston, Virginia: NASSP, 1981), p. 34.

[30]Ibid., p. 35.

[31]Ibid., p. 35.

[32]Ibid., pp. 35 and 38.

[33]Ibid., p. 38.

-- The cognitive based structure is the only one Glatthorn relates directly to a middle school program. This structure uses a hierarchy of operations depending on the student's maturity, ability and goals.[34] (A copy of the cognitive based sequence process and a middle school composition program based on this structure can be found in Appendix C and D.)

Glatthorn states that no research has shown one structure to have any superiority over another.

Several areas have been cited which relate to the proposition behind this study that student interest in forms of composition relates directly to the motivation to write. Included in the review have been the necessity of developing interest, the need for a real audience, the evidence of teachers who make assignments at random with little thought as to purpose or student involvement, and examples of programs which are currently operating in middle schools. Although a relationship exists, there was no direct example uncovered in regard to an interest inventory or polling the students on what their interests may be. However, there were two authors who did see a need for some type of survey or of teachers going beyond the book. Their comments follow:

---

[34]Ibid., pp. 33-34.

> Texts can at best provide only vicarious experiences for students, and a danger exists that these experiences will be largely unrelated to the real needs and interests of young adolescents.[35]

> Through beginning-of-the-year questionnaires, attention to material read, and discussions, teachers can find out what their students are interested in and perhaps good at.[36]

Even though she states that students' interests are important, Watson places more emphasis on content than on form when writing. However, adolescent middle school students are usually concerned with form first since that is often where the pass or fail grade originates. Students like to know precisely how to put the information on paper before the concern is shifted to ideas. Teachers make assignments based on a particular form (such as the essay or short story) and expect certain standards of form in the resulting piece.

Recent moves by such groups as the Oklahoma Writing Project direct teachers to look first for fluency, then

---

[35]Richard E. Hodges, "The English Program, Grades Six through Nine: A Heritage Model," Chapter 8 in Three Language Arts Curriculum Models: Pre-Kindergarten through College, ed. Barrett J. Mandel (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1980), pp. 84-85.

[36]Dorothy Watson, "Processes Paradigm: Grades Six through Nine" in Chapter 9 of Mandel (see note 35), p. 99.

form, and then correctness. Little evidence was found in the literature to show that this is actually happening. Using the idea that form is still of primary importance in writing and the proposition of expanding writing quality and quantity this study was developed on the basis of an interest inventory for forms of composition.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Methodology

The method used in this study is descriptive survey. The research tool was a survey questionnaire developed by the writer. As previously mentioned, the thirteen forms of composition listed on the survey were taken from a textbook, a resource book, and the writer's experience in middle school teaching.

Delimitations

Middle schools often range in grade levels from sixth through ninth, however this study included only the two grade levels that are most commonly found in middle schools, seventh and eighth grades.[1] The survey was administered during the spring semester of 1981 to those students in Oklahoma schools who have at least one representative of the Oklahoma Writing Project working within that system. These schools were selected because of their availability and an unwritten agreement among the teacher/consultants of the Project for cooperation with each other for exchanges of

---

[1] John H. Lounsbury and Gordon E. Vars, A Curriculum for the Middle Years (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 14-31.

ideas and information. (See Appendix E for a list of schools used in the study.)

Sources of Data

The population for the study consisted of seventh and eighth grade students in Oklahoma secondary schools which have a representative of the Oklahoma Writing Project within that school system. At the time the survey was conducted there were thirty secondary schools represented in the Oklahoma Writing Project. Of these thirty schools, ten were randomly selected. A stratified random sample of four groups of students was drawn from these ten schools.[2] The four groups included seventh grade girls, seventh grade boys, eighth grade girls, and eighth grade boys.

Development of the Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a survey questionnaire developed by the writer on which the only vital information asked of the students responding was grade level, grade point average for first semester, age, and sex. The remainder of the survey consisted of two major parts. Part one asked the student to number his/her preferences for the thirteen various writing forms in rank order from most to least preferred. Part two asked the

---

[2]The table for determining the stratified random sample sizes was taken from R. V. Krijcie and D. W. Morgan, "Determining Sample Size for Research Activities," Educational and Psychological Measurement, 30:1970: pp. 607-610.

student to use twenty minutes to write in any of the thirteen forms on any topic he/she chose, or the student could individually ask the teacher to assign a topic. If the topic was assigned, the student could indicate this by checking a box on the survey. The thirteen forms of composition were as follows: letters to friends, letter to businesses, fictional short stories, non-fiction short stories, rhymed poetry, unrhymed poetry, plays, essays with topic assigned, essays with free choice of topic, diaries/journals, paragraphs, newspaper articles, and research reports.[3]

Reliability

To check the reliability of the instrument and its appropriateness for seventh and eighth grade students, the survey was administered to fifty randomly selected students within a selected school in December of 1980. The survey was given to the same fifty students again in February of 1981, to determine the reliability by the number of related responses. The school in which the survey was administered was Brink Middle School in the Moore Public School System, Moore, Oklahoma.

---

[3]Since it would be impossible for a student to write an entire research report or play in twenty minutes he/she was asked only to outline what they would like to write if given the opportunity. This option applied to any form the student felt he/she could not adequately cover along with a summary option.

Appropriate and necessary changes were made during the pilot study. Of these changes the only major one, with the exception of placement of items on the page, was the addition of a line at the bottom of the page on which the student was asked to write the name of the form in which he/she chose to write on the reverse side. This was done because of the difficulty in determining the fine lines between what a student may call a short story and an essay, or a paragraph and a story, etc. (A copy of the survey questionnaire may be found in Appendix F.)

Validity

The validity of the instrument was determined by checking the responses in part one with the form actually written in part two. In the pilot study a majority of the students wrote in the same form that was indicated to be their first or second choice.

Language arts teachers at Brink Middle School, Moore, Oklahoma, were questioned as to their opinion of the questions used on the survey. It was their belief that the survey accurately polled the students' preferences for forms of composition and sought true preferences when asking them to write in their choice.

Data Collection Procedures

In March of 1981, letters were sent to the teacher/consultants of the ten randomly selected schools. The

purpose of this letter was to inform the teachers of the intent of the upcoming study and to inquire as to the number of survey forms they would need. (For a copy of the correspondence see Appendix G.) Any teacher who did not wish to participate in the study could indicate as such on the enclosed form and return it to the writer in the stamped, self-addressed envelope included.

In April of 1981, the survey forms were sent to each teacher/consultant along with instructions for administering the survey and a list of operational definitions. Return postage was included in order to insure prompt return of the forms.

Treatment of the Data

Percentages along with actual counts are displayed in table form. The tables deal with the preferences as reported by each grade level and sex along with the breakdowns by grade point averages. Also recorded is the information regarding the percentages of those who actually wrote in the form which they ranked as their first or second preference. The actual writing on the reverse side of the survey was not assessed since the purpose was to find out what the students were writing, not the quality of their writing.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

As evidenced by the data, the most preferred forms of composition are letters to friends and fictional short stories. In the form of letters to friends it was both seventh and eighth grade girls most often reporting the preference as a first choice. For seventh and eighth grade boys the first most often chosen preference was fictional short stories. The second highest reporting for both seventh and eighth grade girls proved to be the form that was the boys' first choice -- fictional short stories. And the second highest reporting for seventh and eighth grade boys was the form that was the girls' first choice -- letters to friends. Placed together, the choice of letters to friends and fictional short stories combined for a total of 55 percent of all students responding.

These findings are consistent with those Hogan reported from the NAEP for grades four through eight, letters to friends being the most popular and stories close behind.[1] It should be noted that the results reported by Hogan were not rank order preferences. In his data students were asked

---

[1]Hogan, p. 124.

to respond to various forms by checking one of three attitudes: like, dislike, or don't know/don't care.[2] Also, only five of his ten categories were actual forms. (See Appendix H.) This study did not include categories for don't know/don't care or dislike because of the often apparent apathy among seventh and eighth graders who do not believe it is "in" to write anything at all. A forced choice of rank order seemed more appropriate for the writer's chosen grade levels.

Observation of the data by grade point averages shows much the same in preferences. The findings in this study would tend to indicate that grade point average has no apparent bearing on choices at this grade level.

Students were again consistent on the point of writing in the same form on the reverse side of the survey that was indicated to be their first or second preference. A total of 70.67 percent did write in the form reported as their first or second preference. The data in this study would then tend to indicate that most students would write in a form of their choice if given the opportunity to do so.

---

[2]Ibid., p. 122.

TABLE I

NUMBER RESPONDING TO SURVEY

	Number Responding	Stratified Random Sample
Seventh grade girls	190	128
Seventh grade boys	168	119
Eighth grade girls	226	144
Eighth grade boys	217	141
Total Surveys Calculated		532

Each question is restated then the tables containing that data follow.

Question 1: By actual count and percentages, what is the first reported preference of seventh grade girls?

Question 2: By actual count and percentages, what is the first reported preference of seventh grade boys?

Clearly the highest reported preference for seventh grade girls was the choice of letters to friends. For seventh grade boys the first preference was fictional short stories.

The second preference for boys was letters to friends with plays showing a close third. For girls the second preference was fictional short stories and plays again a close third.

TABLE II

REPORTED PREFERENCES OF SEVENTH GRADE GIRLS AND BOYS

Total Selecting: (1st Choice)	7th Grade Girls	7th Grade Boys
Newspaper Articles	1	2
Unrhymed Poetry	4	3
Rhymed Poetry	6	8
Paragraphs	3	1
Plays	16	16
Fictional Short Stories	18	37
Non-fiction Short Stories	2	11
Diaries/Journals	11	9
Research Reports	3	0
Letters to Friends	60	19
Letters to Businesses	0	2
Essays with Topic Assigned	0	0
Essays with Free-Choice Topic	4	11
	128	119

TABLE II Continued

Percent Selecting: (1st Choice)	7th Grade Girls	7th Grade Boys
Newspaper Articles	0.78%	1.68%
Unrhymed Poetry	3.13	2.52
Rhymed Poetry	4.69	6.72
Paragraphs	2.34	0.84
Plays	12.50	13.45
Fictional Short Stories	14.06	31.09
Non-Fiction Short Stories	1.56	9.24
Diaries/Journals	8.59	7.56
Research Reports	2.34	0.00
Letters to Friends	46.88	15.97
Letters to Businesses	0.00	1.68
Essays With Topic Assigned	0.00	0.00
Essays With Free-Choice Topic	3.13	9.24

Question 3: By actual count and percentages, what is the first reported preference of eighth grade girls?

Question 4: By actual count and percentages, wht is the first reported preference of eighth grade boys?

The first preference for eighth grade girls was the letters to friends choice, while for eighth grade boys it was fictional short stories.

As with seventh graders the second choice for girls was fictional short stories and for boys it was letters to friends. For both boys and girls plays came in as the third choice but did not show as strongly as indicated by seventh graders.

TABLE III

REPORTED PREFERENCES OF EIGHTH GRADE GIRLS AND BOYS

Total Selecting: (1st Choice)	8th Grade Girls	8th Grade Boys
Newspaper Articles	3	3
Unrhymed Poetry	4	5
Rhymed Poetry	13	15
Paragraphs	4	3
Plays	19	15
Fictional Short Stories	25	53
Non-Fiction Short Stories	3	9
Diaries/Journals	12	1
Research Reports	1	4
Letters to Friends	55	27
Letters to Businesses	1	2
Essays With Topic Assigned	0	0
Essays with Free Choice Topic	4	4
	144	141

TABLE III Continued

Percent Selecting: (1st choice)	8th Grade Girls	8th Grade Boys
Newspaper Articles	2.08%	2.13%
Unrhymed Poetry	2.78	3.55
Rhymed Poetry	9.03	10.64
Paragraphs	2.78	2.13
Plays	13.19	10.64
Fictional Short Stories	17.36	37.59
Non-Fiction Short Stories	2.08	6.38
Diaries/Journals	8.33	.71
Research Reports	.69	2.84
Letters to Friends	38.19	19.15
Letters to Businesses	.69	1.42
Essays With Topic Assigned	0.00	0.00
Essays With Free-Choice Topic	2.78	2.84

Question 5: According to each grade level and sex breakdown what is the first reported preference by actual count and by percentages when the grade point averages are divided at one point difference levels? (4.0-3.0, 2.9-2.0, 1.9-1.0, and below .9).

At the grade point level of 4.00-3.00 the findings were again consistent in that the largest numbers reporting were in the category of letters to friends for both seventh and eighth grade girls and fictional short stories for both seventh and eighth grade boys.

Findings at the 2.9-2.0 GPA level again showed letters to friends as first for both seventh and eighth grade girls and fictional short stories for seventh and eighth grade boys. The same consistency was found at the 1.99-1.0 GPA level.

Below the .9 GPA level only one seventh grade girl reported showing her choice to be essay with free choice of topic. One eighth grade girl reported a paragraph as first choice. Seven eighth grade boys reported again showing fictional short stories as the strongest preference, rhymed poetry as second, and letters to friends and plays tied for third. No seventh grade boys reported at this level.

TABLE IVA

REPORTED PREFERENCES BY SEX AND GRADE
LEVEL WITH GPA OF 4.0-3.0

GPA = 4.00 to 3.00 Total and Percent Selecting (1st choice)	7th Grade Girls	7th Grade Boys	8th Grade Girls	8th Grade Boys
Newspaper Articles	1 1.30%	2 3.64%	3 2.91%	1 1.59%
Unrhymed Poetry	3 3.90	1 1.82	2 1.94	3 4.76
Rhymed Poetry	5 6.49	4 7.27	10 9.71	6 9.52
Paragraphs	0 0.00	0 0.00	2 1.94	1 1.59
Plays	5 6.49	3 5.45	15 14.56	5 7.94
Fictional Short Stories	12 15.58	22 40.00	24 23.30	32 50.79
Non-Fiction Short Stories	0 0.00	7 12.73	2 1.94	4 6.35
Diaries/Journals	4 5.19	3 5.45	6 5.83	0 0.00
Research Reports	2 2.60	0 0.00	1 0.97	2 3.17
Letters to Friends	44 57.14	9 16.36	34 33.01	6 9.52
Letters to Businesses	0 0.00	1 1.82	0 0.00	1 1.59
Essays with Topic Assigned	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00
Essays with Free Choice Topic	1 1.30	3 5.45	4 3.88	2 3.17
	77	55	103	63

TABLE IVB

REPORTED PREFERENCES BY SEX AND GRADE LEVEL WITH GPA OF 2.9 - 2.0

GPA = 2.99 - 2.00 Total and Percent Selecting: (1st choice)	7th Grade Girls	7th Grade Boys	8th Grade Girls	8th Grade Boys
Newspaper Articles	0	0	0	2
	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.35%
Unrhymed Poetry	1	1	2	2
	2.22	1.92	5.71	4.35
Rhymed Poetry	1	3	3	4
	2.22	5.77	8.57	8.70
Paragraphs	3	1	1	1
	6.67	1.92	2.86	2.17
Plays	10	10	4	7
	22.22	19.23	11.43	15.22
Fictional Short Stories	5	13	0	9
	11.11	25.00	0.00	19.57
Non-Fiction Short Stories	2	4	1	3
	4.44	7.69	2.86	6.52
Diaries/Journals	7	4	6	1
	15.56	7.69	17.14	2.17
Research Reports	1	0	0	2
	2.22	0.00	0.00	4.35
Letters to Friends	14	9	17	12
	31.11	17.31	48.57	26.09
Letters to Businesses	0	1	1	1
	0.00	1.92	2.86	2.17
Essays with Topic Assigned	0	0	0	0
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Essays with Free-Choice Topic	1	6	0	2
	2.22	11.54	0.00	4.35
	45	52	35	46

TABLE IVC

REPORTED PREFERENCES BY SEX AND GRADE
LEVEL WITH GPA OF 1.99 - 1.0

GPA = 1.99 - 1.0 Total and Percent Selecting: (1st choice)	7th Grade Girls	7th Grade Boys	8th Grade Girls	8th Grade Boys
Newspaper Articles	0	0	0	0
	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Unrhymed Poetry	0	1	0	0
	0.00	8.33	0.00	0.00
Rhymed Poetry	0	1	0	3
	0.00	8.33	0.00	12.00
Paragraphs	0	0	0	1
	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.00
Plays	1	3	0	2
	20.00	25.00	0.00	7.00
Fictional Short Stories	1	2	1	9
	20.00	16.67	20.00	36.00
Non-Fiction Short Stories	0	0	0	2
	0.00	0.00	0.00	7.00
Diaries/Journals	0	2	0	0
	0.00	16.67	0.00	0.00
Research Reports	0	0	0	0
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Letters to Friends	2	1	4	8
	40.00	8.33	80.00	31.00
Letters to Businesses	0	0	0	0
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Essays with Topic Assigned	0	0	0	0
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Essays with Free-Choice Topic	1	2	0	0
	20.00	16.67	0.00	0.00
	5	12	5	25

TABLE IVD

REPORTED PREFERENCES BY SEX AND GRADE LEVEL WITH GPA OF BELOW .9

GPA = Below .9 Total and Percent Selecting: (1st choice)	7th Grade Girls	7th Grade Boys	8th Grade Girls	8th Grade Boys
Newspaper Articles	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%
Unrhymed Poetry	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00
Rhymed Poetry	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	2 28.57
Paragraphs	0 0.00	0 0.00	1 100.00	0 0.00
Plays	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	2 14.29
Fictional Short Stories	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	3 42.86
Non-Fiction Short Stories	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00
Diaries/Journals	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00
Research Papers	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00
Letters to Friends	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	1 14.29
Letters to Businesses	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00
Essays with Topic Assigned	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00
Essays with Free-Choice Topic	1 100.00	0 0.00	0 0.00	0 0.00
	1	0	1	7

Question 6: On part two of the instrument to be used what percentage of the students wrote in the form they reported as being their preference?

All grade levels and sexes showed over 50 percent as matching the first choice of form when given a choice of a form to actually write.

TABLE V

ESSAY ON PART II MATCHING REPORTED PREFERENCES ON PART I

Essay on Reverse Matching Preference Total and Percent	7th Grade Girls	7th Grade Boys	8th Grade Girls	8th Grade Boys
Matching 1st Choice	74	79	87	81
	57.81%	66.39%	60.42%	57.45%
Matching 2nd Choice	17	7	17	14
	13.28	5.88	11.81	9.93
Matching 3rd Choice	9	8	12	6
	7.03	6.72	8.33	4.26
Matching 4th Choice	9	7	13	9
	7.03	5.88	9.03	6.38
Matching 5th Choice	4	5	5	1
	3.13	4.20	3.47	0.71
Matching 6th Choice	0	1	2	8
	0.00	0.84	1.39	5.67
Matching 7th Choice	6	5	2	3
	4.69	4.20	1.39	2.13
Matching 8th Choice	4	3	0	4
	3.13	2.52	0.00	2.84
Matching 9th Choice	2	2	4	1
	1.56	1.68	2.78	0.71
Matching 10th Choice	0	2	1	2
	0.00	1.68	0.69	1.42
Matching 11th Choice	2	0	1	4
	1.56	0.00	0.69	2.84
Matching 12th Choice	0	0	0	5
	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.55
Matching 13th Choice	1	0	0	3
	0.78	0.00	0.00	2.13
	128	119	144	141

Question 7: By actual count and percentages, what is the most often reported preference among all participants responding?

TABLE VI

MOST OFTEN REPORTED PREFERENCE
AMONG ALL RESPONDING

First Reported Preference	7th Grade Girls	7th Grade Boys	8th Grade Girls	8th Grade Boys		
Letters to Friends	60	19	55	27	=	161
Fictional Short Stories	18	37	25	53	=	133

Letters to Friends represent 30.26% of Total.

Fictional Short Stories represent 25% of Total.

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The data in this study which indicated the popular choices of letters to friends and fictional short stories tends to indicate the need for the emerging adolescent to communicate with his/her peers and establish his/her place in the system. The popularity of letter writing might also be known as "exchanging notes" between classes or before and after school. Kagan writes, "Friends and enemies are a large part of school, perhaps the largest. One comes to school to see friends, one fears school because enemies are there also."[1] Perhaps this need for friends and the need for someone to talk to about enemies are what promote middle school students to write letters to each other.

Letters might also fall into the category which Holt describes as "private papers."[2] In the private papers a student can write what is really on his/her mind. It is writing students do entirely for themselves and not for someone else. Holt may have had something more along the

---

[1]Jerome Kagan and Robert Coles, Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1972), p. 190.

[2]Holt, p. 212.

lines of a journal or diary in mind when speaking of private papers. However, the letter may also be considered a form of private work because it is usually intended for only one other person, often a close friend.

There are also a few authors who see letter writing as a valuable and worthwhile activity. One article reports a project by two teachers in separate schools who set up a pen pal letter exchange at the beginning of the year.[3] On a certain day of each week a letter was sent by each student to another student in the other classroom. What began as a basic writing activity developed into an extended year long writing project. Only minor corrections were made in the letters by teachers and then only if the student asked for help. Over a period of time there was more concern on the part of the student about the correctness and form of his/her letters.

Although the form would be letters to businesses, Janice Hall does suggest that students improve their letter writing skills by writing for free material or writing letters to the editor.[4] This is a practice successfully

---

[3]Carole Berlin and Nancy Miller, "Help, I'm a Prisoner in a Letter Factory," in On Righting Writing: Classroom Practices in Teaching English 1975-1976, ed. Ouida Clapp, chairperson of Thirteenth Report of the Committee on Classroom Practices, (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1975), p. 49.

[4]Janice K. Hall, Evaluating and Improving Written Expression: A Practical Guide for Teachers (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1981), pp. 85 and 90.

used by Margaret Brown of Waukomis Middle School, Waukomis, Oklahoma. Also a member of the first Oklahoma Writing Project, Mrs. Brown consistently urges students to send for free materials. The prospect of an actual response encourages them to do so and the receipt of the materials prompts them to write to other companies. According to Brown, all of this writing improves the students' other written composition as well.

Another author cites a classroom where students write notes to the teacher and others all of whom respond to the note with another note or letter.[5] This writer has tried this technique and found it to be useful in that the students saw a value in a mode of written composition and they saw the teacher writing.

A book on middle school teaching methods urges letter exchanges as "...an interesting combination of writing practice and learning the subject matter of the writer."[6] And Holt writes, "We would be wise to let students use school time -- class, study hall, whatever -- to write letters if they wanted."[7]

---

[5]Glenda L. Bissex, "Growing Writers in the Classroom," Language Arts, vol. 58, no. 7 (October, 1981): p. 787.

[6]Leonard H. Clark and Irving S. Starr, Secondary and Middle School Teaching Methods, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1981), p. 262.

[7]Holt, p. 225.

Even with these several authors writing about the values of letter writing to friends as well as formal business letters, little other evidence was found of the actual practice of allowing students to write letters. This point was evidenced in the review of the literature of this study.

Very little evidence was found to support the value of writing fictional short stories. Another article in the Clapp book suggests students study short stories then write scripts from those stories.[8] However, no direct suggestions are given for encouraging students to write fictional short stories.

As for the reasons for the strong preferences for fictional short stories, especially among boys, it may be that the students use the stories as a means of transporting themselves into a world where they would like to be -- a sort of escape from reality. Fictional short stories may, in fact, serve as the same kind of personal writing as letters without the student having to actually admit that the story involves his/her own feelings. For boys, the fictional short story may be a more convenient form of composition -- it doesn't deface the "macho" image that many male adolescents are trying to build for others and themselves.

---

[8]Debra Tinker, "Writing Skills of Junior High," in Clapp, p. 39.

Overall observations would lead to the conclusion that students can and will write if given the opportunity to do so and a choice of what to write. Personal writing whether direct or indirect, writing to communicate to a particular audience, seems to be the key to composition for middle school students. One survey which reflects the need for more direct writing experience is outlined in the NCTE book on ideas for teaching in the middle grades.[9] Although the preferences do not specify forms they do give indications of the students' need for a real or legitimate audience which can be provided through such forms as letters or even short stories if students are allowed to exchange and discuss the stories. (See Appendix I for the NCTE survey.)

The purpose of this study was to explore what middle school students (grades seven and eight) were interested in writing in regard to forms of composition. The study led to the information that seventh and eighth graders showed a strong interest in letters to friends and fictional short stories. Though these forms may not be considered as something to be taught because they are not formal expository composition, they are a starting place for motivating students to write something.

---

[9]Reeves, pp. 102-103.

The studies previously quoted state that "...schools overemphasize formal writing to the exclusion of the more natural and enjoyable forms of expressive writing."[10] Too often the middle school curriculum asks the student to become a writer of formal expository composition, stating his/her beliefs on a worldly subject, when the student is having his/her own problems just trying to survive the peer pressure and get through a routine school day. Very often the mere act of trying to open ones locker and get books in five minutes is enough to send the emerging adolescent into tears, let alone giving him/her the assignment to comment on the nuclear missile situation.

Klingele writes that "Teacher-oriented and teacher dominated instructional stategies are no longer viable as the dominate methods of teaching youngsters in today's middle schools."[11] It may take a little more time on the part of teacher to find out exactly what it is the student is interested in doing and would do if given the opportunity but the final outcome would undoubtedly prove the time to be very well spent. Teachers must seriously ask themselves what their objectives in regard to composition really are.

---

[10]Kirby, p. 227.

[11]William E. Klingele, Teaching in Middle Schools (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1979), p. 31.

If the answer is better quality they might well try going to the student first since he/she is ultimately the final stop.

James Britton has created a continuum guide for potential student audiences.[12] His continuum begins with audiences of ones peers, much in line with what students indicate as their preferences. Since much serious writing does not begin until grades six or seven it may be well worth some of the teacher's time to examine Britton's continuum and possibly structure some lesson plans around it. (See Appendix J for a copy of the continuum.)

The need for an audience was also pointed out by Birnbaum who studied the writing behaviors of selected fourth and seventh graders.[13] She states that we learn written language because "it enlarges our capacity to shape our experiences into meaning to ourselves and others and to represent ourselves to others in our environment."[14]

Personal writing may be defined as any writing which involves the true feelings and ideas of the student. This point is also listed in the writing objectives of the NAEP.

---

[12]Kirby, pp. 134-135.

[13]June Cannell Birnbaum, "Why Should I Write? Environmental Influences on Children's Views of Writing," Theory into Practice, vol. XIX, no. 3, pp. 202-209.

[14]Ibid., p. 202.

(See Appendix K.)[15] Perhaps some of the student's papers will not even be for a "grade" as such, but the writing will give the student the opportunity for self-expression.

Recommendations

Based on findings indicated in this study this writer would recommend the following:

1. Be aware of the students' needs for an audience.
2. Realize the middle school students' needs for personal writing.
3. Ask the students what kinds of writing they like to do.

The information gained from this study could be effective as a starting point for teaching composition. Teachers may wish to begin with such forms as the letters to friends and fictional short stories or plays which were found to be popular forms. However, each class is different. Listening to the desires and needs of the students may prove valuable in more areas than just composition. Teachers must keep in mind that intrinsic motivation is a much better learning environment than a teacher simply saying, "Do this assignment."

Recommendations for Further Research

This writer agrees with Lundsteen on the need for "Better information about instructional substances and

---

[15]Mellon, p. 102.

practice in actual classrooms,"[16] She states that this needs to be a basic research that is "analytical and relevant" and gives answers to the practical questions about teaching composition, assessing writing, and how writing skills develop.[17] It is true that much research of this kind has been done in recent years but not on the middle school level. If middle schools are to be successful some serious thought must be given to the curriculum content as well as design.

A final comment might best be described in the words of Shakespeare in a quote from Henry IV, Part 2.

> When we mean to build
> We first survey the plot, then draw
> the model;
> And when we see the figure of the house,
> Then must we rate the cost of the
> erection;
> Which if we find outweights ability,
> What do we do then but draw anew the model
> In fewer offices, or at last desist
> To build at all?[19]

Perhaps teachers of composition in middle schools should sit back and contemplate the meaning of this passage.

---

[16]Sara W. Lundsteen, ed. Help for the Teacher of Written Composition; New Directions in Research (Urbana, Illinois: National Conference on Research in English, Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1976), p. 62.

[17]Ibid., p. 62.

[18]William Shakespeare, Henry IV, Part 2, Act I: Scene III, Lines 41-48, in The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. Hardin Craig (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1961), p. 710.

If teachers are to develop good writers they must begin at the beginning, at a place which does not "outweigh the ability" of the student, an area the student knows best. Let the student first select the forms of composition. Work with the student to find a common starting place for interest and motivation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Alexander, William M. and Paul S. George. The Exemplary Middle School. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1981.

Bloom, Benjamin S. Human Characteristics and School Learning. New York: McGraw Hill, 1976.

Britton, James; Tony Burgess; Mancy Martin; Alex McLeod; and Harold Rosen. The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18). London Schools Council Publications: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1975.

Clapp, Ouida H. chairperson. On Righting Writing: Classroom Practices in Teaching English 1975-1976. Thirteenth Report of the Committee on Classroom Practices. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1975.

Clark, Leonard H. and Irving S. Starr. Secondary and Middle School Teaching Methods. 4th ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1981.

Curtis, Thomas E. and Wilman W. Bidwell. Curriculum and Instruction for Emerging Adolescents. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1977.

Fadiman, Clifton and James Howard. Empty Pages: A Search for Writing Competence in School and Society. Belmont, California: Fearon Pittman Publishers, 1979.

Geuder, Patricia; Linda Harvey; Dennis Loyd: and Jack D. Wages, eds. They Really Taught Us How to Write. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1974.

Glatthorn, Allan A. Writing in the Schools: Improvement Through Effective Leadership. Reston, Virginia: NASSP, 1981.

Gross, Beatrice and Ronald. Will It Grow in a Classroom? New York: Delacorte Press, 1974.

Haley-James, Shirley, ed. Perspectives on Writing in Grades 1-8. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1981.

Hall, Janice K. Evaluating and Improving Written Expression: A Practical Guide for Teachers. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1981.

Holt, John. What Do I Do Monday? New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1970.

Jenkinson, Edward B. and Donald A. Seybold. Writing as a Process of Discovery: Some Structured Theme Assignments for Grades Five through Twelve. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970.

Judy, Stephen and Susan. An Introduction to the Teaching of Writing. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1981.

Kagan, Jerome and Robert Coles. Twelve to Sixteen: Early Adolescence. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1972.

Kirby, Dan and Tom Liner. Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing. Montclair New Jersey: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1981.

Klingele, William E. Teaching in Middle Schols. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1979.

Lounsbury, John H. and Gordon E. Vars. A Curriculum for the Middle School Years. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.

Lundsteen, Sara W. ed. Help for the Teacher of Written Composition: New Directions in Research. Urbana, Illinois: National Conference on Research in English, Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1976.

Mandel, Barrett J. ed. Three Language Arts Curriculum Models: Pre-Kindergarten through College. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1980.

Mellon, John C. National Assessment and the Teaching of English. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1975.

Mersand, Joseph. The English Teacher: Basic Traditions and Successful Innovations. Port Washington, New York: National University Publications, Kennikat Press, 1977.

Moffett, James. A Student Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968.

Reeves, Ruth E. chairperson. Ideas for Teaching English, Grades 7-8-9-: Successful Practices in the Junior High. Champaign, Illinois: NCTE, 1966.

Simmons, John; Robert Shafer; and Gail West. Decisions about the Teaching of English. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1976.

Warriner, John E. and Shelia Laws. English Grammar and Composition: First Course and Second Course. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1977.

Journals

Birnbaum, June Cannell. "Why Should I write? Environmental Influences on Children's Views of Writing." Theory Into Practice, vol. XIV, no. 3: 202-209.

Bissex, Glenda L. "Growing Writers in the Classroom." Language Arts, vol. 58, no. 7 (October, 1981): 785-791.

Dyer, Daniel. "English in the Middle: the K-Mart Syndrome." English Journal, vol. 69, no. 1 (January, 1980): 59-63.

Golden, Joanne M. "The Writers' Side: Writing for a Purpose and an Audience." Language Arts, vol. 57, no. 7 (October, 1981): 756-760.

Hogan, Thomas P. "Students' Interests in Writing Activities." Research in the teaching of English, vol. 14, no. 2 (May, 1980): 119-126.

Jeffrey, Christopher. "Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of the Writing Process." Research in the Teaching of English, vol. 15, no. 3 (October, 1981): 215-228.

Johnson, Robert Spencer. "The English Curriculum in Middle Schools, Junior High -- The Components." NASSP Bulletin, vol. 65, no. 444 (April, 1981): 41-46.

Land, Arthur. "One School's Plan that Improved Student Writing." Thrust, vol. 11, no. 5 (May-June, 1982): 18-19.

Micucci, Cheryl Madeline. "Streamlining Adolescent Writing: A Diet for Obese Prose." English Journal, vol. 69, no. 9 (December, 1980): 60-61.

Sheils, Merrill. "Why Johnny Can't Write." Newsweek (December 8, 1975): 58-65.

Whiteman, Marcia Farr. "What We Can Learn from Writing Research." Theory Into Practice, vol. XIX, no. 3: 150-155.

Other Resources Not Directly Cited in Text:

Allen, David. English Teaching Since 1965: How Much Growth? London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980.

Applebee, Arthur N.; Anne Auten; and Fran Lehr. Writing in the Secondary School: English and the Content Areas. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1981.

Bloom, Benjamin S. All Our Children Learning: A Primer for Parents, Teachers and other Educators. New York: McGraw Hill, 1981.

Christensen, Francis and Bonniejean. Notes Toward a New Rhetoric. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.

Elbow, Peter. Writing Without Teachers. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1973; reprint ed., 1981.

Kasden, Lawrence N. and Daniel R. Hoeber, eds. Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers, and Administrators. Montclair, New Jersey: Boynton/ Cook Publishers, Inc., 1981.

Laird, Charlton. And Gladly Teche: Notes on Instructing the Natives in the Native Tongue. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970.

Laque, Carol Feiser and Phyllis A. Sherwood. A Laboratory Approach to Writing. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1977.

Macrorie, Ken. Writing to be Read. New York: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1968.

Marland, Michael, ed. Language Across the Curriculum: The Implementation of the Bullock Report in the Secondary School. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1977.

Moffett, James. Teaching the Universe of Discourse. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968.

Neman, Beth. Teaching Students to Write. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1980.

Saughnessy, Mina P. Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Tate, Gary and Edward P. J. Corbett, eds. The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

APPENDIX

		Page
A.	Newsweek quote from "Why Johnny Can't Write"	67
B.	Checklist of Writing Skills for Marion County, Florida, Grades 6-10	69
C.	A Curriculum Sequence Based upon Cognitive Processes	71
D.	Tonawanda Middle School's Composition Program	73
E.	List of Schools Used for this Survey	75
F.	Copy of Survey Questionnaire	77
G.	Correspondence	79
H.	Student Responses for Grades 4-8 Combined - Item Topics from Hogan	82
I.	Student Preferences in Theme Writing from NCTE Survey	84
J.	James Britton's Continuum Guide for Potential Audiences	87
K.	Writing Objectives of National Assessment of Educational Progress	89

APPENDIX A

NEWSWEEK QUOTE*

If your children are attending college, the chances are that when they graduate they will be unable to write ordinary, expository English with any real degree of structure and lucidity. If they are in high school and planning to attend college, the chances are less than even that they will be able to write English at the minimal college level when they get there. If they are not planning to attend college, their skills in writing English may not even qualify them for secretarial or clerical work. And if they are attending elementary school, they are certainly not being given the kind of required reading material, much less writing instruction, that might make it possible for them eventually to write comprehensible English. Willy-nilly, the U. S. educational system is spawning a generation of semiliterates.

---

*Merrill Sheils, "Why Johnny Can't Write," Newsweek December 8, 1975, p. 58.

APPENDIX B

CHECKLIST OF WRITING SKILLS FOR
MARION COUNTY, FLORIDA
GRADES 6-10*

-- Compose grammatically correct sentences.

-- Organize objects and information into logical groupings and orders.

-- Write a paragraph expressing ideas clearly.

-- Write for the purpose of supplying necessary information.

-- Fill out common forms.

-- Spell correctly.

-- Punctuate correctly.

-- Capitalize correctly.

-- Write legibly.

*William M. Alexander and Paul S. George. The Exemplary Middle School. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981): p. 72.

APPENDIX C

A CURRICULUM SEQUENCE BASED UPON COGNITIVE PROCESSES*

Grade Seven

1. Segmentation and focus: specification and detailing.
2. Comparison and contrast: distinctions, incongruities, likenesses.

Grade Eight

3. Classification: similarities, labeling.
4. Changes: growth, development, metamorphosis.

Grade Nine

5. Physical context: nature, effect on feelings.
6. Sequence: chronological and logical sequences.

Grade Ten

7. Structure analysis--parts, wholes, and their connections.
8. Operation analysis--states, operations, phases.

---

*Allan A. Glatthorn, Writing in the Schools: Improvement through Effective Leadership. (Reston, Virginia: NASSP, 1981): p. 34.

APPENDIX D

TONAWANDA MIDDLE SCHOOL'S COMPOSITION PROGRAM*

I. Common writing activities each semester

- A. Poetry
- B. Journal or other free writing
- C. Creating language activities leading to writing

II. Writing emphasis each semester

- A. Dramatic -- Grade 7, Semester 1
  1. Dialogs
  2. Interior monologs
  3. Dramatic monologs
  4. Short scenes
  5. Radio plays, to be audio-recorded
  6. One-act plays, to be rehearsed and enacted
- B. Narrative -- Grade 7, Semester 2
  1. Personal experience
  2. Autobiography
  3. Chronicle
  4. Biography
  5. Memoir
- C. Fictional -- Grade 8, Semester 3
  1. Recycle of Semesters 1 and 2
  2. Short fiction
- D. Observational-Explanatory -- Grade 8, Semester 4
  1. Interviews
  2. Idea writing
  3. Writing about fiction

---

*Glatthorn, p. 33.

APPENDIX E

LIST OF SCHOOLS USED FOR SURVEY

1. Lexington Public School
2. Dibble Public School
3. Wynnewood Middle School
4. Duncan Junior High School
5. Oologah Middle School
6. Waukomis Middle School
7. Barnsdall Public School
8. Purcell Middle School
9. Minco Junior High School
10. Washington Middle School

APPENDIX F

COPY OF SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE DISTRIBUTED TO STUDENTS

GRADE IN SCHOOL:_____
AGE:_____
SEX: (circle one) Male Female
OVERALL GRADE POINT AVERAGE FOR FIRST SEMESTER:_____

Rank the following types of writing exercises in the order of the ones you most like to do through those you lease like to do. Use the number 1 through 13 with 1 being the highest and 13 being the lowest. If you need a definition for any of the items your teacher has the definitions and will read them to you.

_____Newspaper Articles
_____Unrhymed Poetry
_____Rhymed Poetry
_____Paragraphs
_____Plays
_____Fictional Short Stories
_____Nonfiction Short Stories
_____Diaries/Journals
_____Research Reports
_____Letters to Friends
_____Letters to Businesses
_____Essays with Topic Assigned
_____Essays with Free Choice Topic

On the back of this paper you are to write for 20 minutes using any of the above forms of composition. Your teacher will tell you when to start and stop for the 20 minutes. (Since you can not write a whole research report in 20 minutes you are asked to outline a report you might like to do if given the opportunity. The same applies to any form you may not have time to complete.)

If you have asked the teacher to assign a topic please check this box. ☐ Do not check it if you selected your own topic.

On this line write the name of the form in which you choose to write on the reverse side.

_____

APPENDIX G

CORRESPONDENCE

Cathy Merrell
24 Southwest 102
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
73139

Dear OWP Consultant,

For those of you who don't already know me, I was a member of the first summer institute of the Oklahoma Writing Project. Currently I am teaching acting and gifted and talented English at Brink Middle School in Moore. I am also working on my Ph.D. in secondary curriculum at the University of Oklahoma.

As a middle school teacher and OWP member I have become interested in the writing interests of middle school age students. So, as part of the research for my dissertation I am conducting a survey of the writing preferences of seventh and eighth grade students in Oklahoma. It is for this that I need your help.

Ten schools which have a representative of the OWP within their system have been randomly selected for this survey. If you would be willing to have the 7th and 8th grade students in your school participate I would truly appreciate your cooperation. Even if you do not teach the 7th or 8th graders yourself, you can give the forms to those who do. Please fill out and return the enclosed form telling me if you can help.

A sample of the form to be completed by the students is also enclosed. This form takes no more than 30 minutes to complete. The correct number would be sent to your school along with postage for the return. The results will be available to all upon completion if you wish to obtain them.

Thank you,

Cathy Merrell

enclosures

CORRESPONDENCE continued

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THIS FORM. THANK YOU.

Name of school in which survey will be conducted_____

_____

OWP Consultant_____ _____

Address to which forms should be mailed_____

_____

YES NO (circle one) I am or am not willing to help with the survey.

if YES please complete the following:

Number of 7th graders_____
girls _____
boys _____

Number of 8th graders_____
girls _____
boys _____

APPENDIX H

STUDENT RESPONSES FOR GRADES 4-8 COMBINED

Item Topic	Percent of Students Marking: Like	Don't Know/Care	Dislike
Writing letters to friends	67	22	10
Learning to spell	57	28	14
Choosing a good word for a sentence	50	35	15
Making new words	49	35	16
Spelling tricky words	48	28	24
Making up a title for a story	44	32	24
Writing stories	46	26	28
Making words that sound alike	35	42	22
Writing about things I have done	36	35	28
Writing reports for school	30	28	42

*Thomas P. Hogan, "Students' Interest in Writing Activities," Research in the Teaching of English, vol. 14, no. 2 (May, 1980): p. 122.

APPENDIX I

STUDENTS' PREFERENCES IN THEME WRITING*

Students Like:

1. To be allowed to do more writing
2. To have definite directions, and not have the teacher say, "Write a theme."
3. To have mistakes marked by someone before rewriting.
4. To have a choice in selecting topics (prefer to choose own topic)
5. To have a definite understanding as to how the teacher is going to determine the grade, "How much on content? How much on mechanics?"
6. To have other themes, a short story, an essay, etc., to use as a guide
7. To have more short compositions and fewer long ones
8. To be shown "what is wrong with themes" by using the opaque projector, by working in groups, by using mimeographed samples, or by having illustrations on the chalkboard
9. To write the theme in class with students' and teachers' help
10. To be allowed to write humorous, sad, or ridiculous themes without the wrath of the teacher descending upon the student
11. To be helped in writing poetry, not just "write a poem tomorrow"
12. To have a chance to exchange and read good stories written by fellow students

Students Do Not Like:

1. To have a teacher assign the class one topic
2. To have a teacher grade the theme, not make one mark and not explain "why I gave this grade"

STUDENTS' PREFERENCES IN THEME WRITING* continued

3. To have a teacher accept themes not written by the student, and grade the same theme again and again without recognizing the fact

4. To have a teacher give good grades only to serious themes

5. To write a theme without any explanation or discussion beforehand by the teacher

6. To feel "I have to please the teacher; I can't really write what I want to"

7. To have no discussion about "What makes a good theme? What is important? What is expected? Should I have conversation, etc?"

8. To have no explanation concerning the errors made; "How can I correct the errors? How can I improve my themes?"

---

*Ruth Reeves, chairperson, Ideas for Teaching English: Grades 7-8-9, Successful Practices in the Junior High School (Champaign, Illinois: NCTE, 1966): pp. 102-103.

APPENDIX J

JAMES BRITTON'S CONTINUUM GUIDE FOR POTENTIAL AUDIENCES*

Peers:

- in class - notes and messages, persuasive papers, explanatory papers
- in other classes - letters, journal entries, inquiries
- in other schools - letters, class magazines, surveys, opinion polls
- pen pals
- famous peers - fan letters, question letters
- generalized peers - children of the world
- in school newspaper - editorials, opinion letters

Teachers:

- to encourage a teacher
- to request from a teacher
- to share personal information

Wider known Audiences:

- parents
- parents' friends
- principal

Unknown Audiences:

- newspaper editor
- heroes
- authors
- athletes
- T. V. and movie producers
- corporations
- unknown offenders (the person who threw all the trash on the highway)
- citizen groups
- governmental bodies
- information sources

Imaginary Characters:

- in books
- on T. V.

---

*Dan Kirby and Tom Liner, Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing (Montclair, New Jersey: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc. 1981): pp. 134-135.

APPENDIX K

WRITING OBJECTIVES OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS*

1. Demonstrate ability in writing to reveal personal feelings and ideas:

   a. through free expression;
   b. through the use of conventional modes of discourse

2. Demonstrate ability to write in response to a wide range of societal demands and obligations (ability is defined to include correctness in usage, punctuation, spelling, and forms of convention as appropriate to particular writing tasks, e. g., manuscripts, letters):

   a. social:
      1. personal,
      2. organizational
      3. community;
   b. business/vocational
   c. scholastic

3. Indicate the importance attached to writing skills:

   a. recognize the necessity of writing for a variety of needs (as in 1 and 2);
   b. write to fulfill those needs;
   c. get satisfaction, even enjoyment, from having written something well.

---

*John C. Mellon, National Assessment and the Teaching of English (Urbina, Illinois: NCTE, 1975): p. 102.