

EXPOSING THE ESSAY: A STUDY OF NINTH GRADERS AND EXPOSITORY
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis uses empirical research in order to understand effective strategies for successfully teaching of the expository essay to ninth grade students. Five focal areas are studied for targeted intervention in order to discover best practices for maximizing student learning of the essay format. The study hypothesizes that in order for ninth grade students to gain mastery of the expository essay they must: tap into prior knowledge, attain metacognitive awareness while writing, have a thorough understanding of essay structure, and display the confidence as well as the language mastery necessary to respond fluidly to expository writing prompts.

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Chapter 1: Ms. Murphy's Classroom

The Problem

It is second period on a Wednesday morning and a ninth grade English class is in session. Everything seems to be going according to Ms. Murphy's plan. The students have entered the classroom and copied down their agenda by the time the bell has rung. They have their notes ready to go and have even offered a few "good mornings" to each other and to their teacher. Ms. Murphy is excited and energetic about the day's lesson plan. She knows that she is well organized and prepared for this particular unit. She greets the class and proclaims, "We are going to begin our expository essay unit today." Ms. Murphy is caught unaware by the disgruntled murmurs that sweep over her class. The classroom environment immediately changes from a pleasant anticipation to unveiled tension complete with sighs, moans, inaudible complaints and defensive body posture. "What has happened?" Ms. Murphy wonders. She poses this question to the class. Her response confirms what she already knows. She has mentioned the word *essay*.

Essay writing is a difficult process that is challenging to a student's academic ability. As an individual writes, he or she must incorporate logical thoughts and ideas along with grammatically correct language constructs to communicate in a clear and concise manner. Because it is difficult to master the process of communicating logically within the boundary of correct grammatical constructs and because writing is a cyclical process without a clear right or wrong answer, the level of frustration that students experience when writing should not be surprising; neither should a pervasive sense of a dislike of the writing process shock or disappoint educators. Unlike Ms. Murphy, we as ninth grade writing teachers should expect a frustrated resistance when we begin an essay writing unit. We should, however, be equipped with certain tools of engagement that allow us to address negative student affect when it comes

to the issue of student writing—*especially* when ninth grade students must write the expository writing essay.

Background of Problem

“Both the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* of 2004 mandate that teachers use research-validated practices to improve students’ performance in all academic areas, including writing” (Santangelo, Harris, & Graham 2008, p.78). The *Reading and Language Arts Framework of California Public Schools* (2007) prescribes that ninth grade students are required to successfully author the expository essay. The framework states that ninth grade “students write coherent and focused essays that convey a well-defined perspective of tightly reasoned argument. The writing demonstrates students’ awareness of audience and purpose. Students progress through the states of the writing process as needed” (Department of Education, 2007, p.224). This academic task, sometimes applauded, more often dreaded, is taught by content area teachers as a sort of rite of passage into higher level education. Whether viewed as a chore or an important mastery skill, the five-paragraph expository essay with its champions and critics is universally acknowledged as a foundation for more complex academic writing tasks. Educators must, therefore, facilitate student acquisition of the skills necessary to write successfully within this format. Additionally, educators are expected to instill a sense of purpose for this academic task so that students can gain the ability to exceed beyond basic assignment completion into becoming life long writers. Kieft et al., comment, “Learning to write well is not only a matter of learning how to carry out and combine the different components of the writing process. It also involves learning what the particular form of discourse is and how to incorporate the genre features into the writing process” (2007).

As language arts content area teachers, we recognize the importance of fostering a sense

of excellence and pride in mastering academic content matter within our students. We recognize, however, that this type of mastery requires that students understand the structural format as well as the specific attributes endemic to a piece of literature. As quoted above, students need to know more than how to write well within a given format, they also need to have foundational understanding regarding the type of writing in which they are engaged so that they can become good authors.

To successfully facilitate student learning, teachers, themselves must know that the methods they are using to impart and share knowledge are effective. Teachers may often find that they are rushing the learning process in an attempt to fit in both academic content and concept acquisition within a limited amount of time. Of course, in ideal classrooms, educators have ample time and resources which they can use to work with individual students. Each student, within such classrooms, would be provided with a specific learning plan that guides his or her needs until content mastery is achieved. This type of individualized learning, however, is the dream for most general educators. Within most California public school classrooms, the teacher-student ratio does not allow for holistic and individualized lesson planning for all students. As a result, content area teachers must use differentiated instruction that is effective in allowing both content mastery and a love for learning to occur. As such, “teachers are more likely to use an instructional procedure if it improves performance across their weaker, average, and better students” (Harris, Alexander & Graham, 2008). Because of limited resources, time constraints, and large class sizes, educators need effective strategies for teaching writing to students.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

This thesis uses empirical research to understand effective strategies for successfully teaching the expository essay to ninth grade students. Five focal areas are studied for targeted intervention to discover best practices for maximizing student learning of the five paragraph essay format. The principal researcher will use a twenty point questionnaire to collect rudimentary data pertaining to the five focal areas of study. Information gathered from the questionnaire will ascertain student practices used during the writing process. An analysis of the results will provide educators with successful strategies for teaching the expository essay to ninth grade students.

Research Question

When teacher writing, issues pertaining to affect, information gathering and communication arise. The teacher is required to deal with all of these complex issues so that students can master this academic learning task. This thesis asks a significant question about academic task of writing and ninth grade students. The researcher asks, “*What are effective strategies in teaching the expository essay to ninth grade students?*”

Hypotheses

This thesis uses empirical research to understand effective strategies for successfully teaching the expository essay to ninth grade students. Five focal areas are studied for targeted intervention to discover best practices for maximizing student learning of the five paragraph essay format. The study hypothesizes for ninth grade students to gain mastery of the expository essay they must: tap into prior knowledge, attain metacognitive awareness while writing, have a

thorough understanding of essay structure, and display the interest as well as the language mastery necessary to respond fluidly to expository writing prompts.

Chapter 2: Five Focal Areas for Strategic Intervention

Metacognition

For ninth grade students to gain mastery of the expository essay, they must attain metacognitive awareness while writing. It is imperative that students have the knowledge that they, the student, undergo key cognitive processes or thinking patterns as they encounter a writing task. Armed with this empowering information, writers gain the ability to recognize the reasons behind each writing task as it is performed. Harris, Alexander and Graham quoting Pressley, Graham and Harris (2006) write, “Across the ensuing decades of research, there has also been solid evidence that more effective learners demonstrate certain cognitive and metacognitive behaviors that facilitate learning and performance...” (p. 87). Our task as educators is to facilitate effective learners; therefore, our goal becomes to provide students with opportunity and skills necessary for gaining ‘thinking awareness’ as they write. Students who display this aptitude, of being aware of their thinking, will have the ability, as mentioned in the quote above, to self-monitor the cognitive behaviors that ‘facilitate learning and performance’.

When learners become more aware of their thinking processes, they move beyond simple assignment completion into acquiring and maintaining a sense of purpose in their work. Naturally, they begin to participate in the process of monitoring or regulating their cognitive progress and comprehension. William Lan states, “defining self-regulation as “students’ self-generated thoughts, feelings, and notions, which are systematically oriented toward attainment of their goals” (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994, p.ix), researchers believe that self-regulated learners orchestrated cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components of learning activity to produce expected outcomes” (109). This sense of purpose, or intrinsic motivation, is what makes effective and successful student writers who have a desire to master writing instruction and

practice. The classroom is a microcosm of life, a training ground for future community leaders and participants. As educators, we want students whose thoughts, feelings, and notions mirror those of real authors. We do not want to breed automatons who merely complete a writing assignment for the sake of a grade. These current classroom authors are future societal leaders and change agents.

Although research has proved that self-regulation or metacognitive awareness is necessary for student achievement, practical application of such behaviors within the classroom context and within a learner is a challenging proposition for educators. The question arises, how can educators monitor the thinking awareness of individual students? Additionally, how can we foster a habit of effective self-monitoring within learners? Lan notes, “It seems that young students need external assistance or scaffolding to execute self-monitoring at first and, as some constructivists in strategy instruction suggest (Pressley, Harris, & Marks, 1992), they gradually internalize the self-monitoring strategies with their learning experiences so that external assistance becomes less and less needed (p.123). William Lan is suggesting that, as educators, we ought to put into place cognitive strategies that allow students to systematically gain awareness of their thinking processes. If we can get students to model and practice these cognitive behaviors, the behaviors will become automatic patterns and habits ultimately leading to metacognitive awareness. Nist and Holschuh (2005) write, “It may be that by informing students about their own beliefs, educators may be able to help students move towards more mature epistemological perspectives” (p.87). Educators can disseminate these beliefs and perspectives with a holistic multi-strategic approach to fostering metacognition among students.

The general understanding of the term strategy is a method or instructional guideline used to share knowledge with students; for the purposes of this study, it is important that we specify

the way in which it will be used. According to Harris et al., (2008), “A strategy is a special form of procedural knowledge that is intentionally, purposefully, and effortfully applied to a given task or situation for which one’s typical thought or automatic pattern of thought or behaviors is perceived as inadequate or nonoptimal” (p.89). Strategies are specific systems that educators teach, model, and practice with students in order to instill a method for continuous mastery of academic concepts. Of course, strategies are not a panacea for instruction of difficult content matter. They are systematic methods for helping or training students to own their individual learning. Quoting Beck et al., Harris et al., state, “A shared concern among strategies researchers and others is that teachers may see the strategies as an end unto themselves rather than part of a strategic, problem-solving process that involves good strategies” (p. 93).

As educators, we want students who are holistically engaged in the learning process especially when it comes to complex academic tasks like writing. We need, therefore, to use strategies that foster metacognitive awareness within students so that they can understand the overarching purpose mastering these difficult skills. We can use a multi-strategic approach that allows students to habitually monitor their own thinking as they complete learning tasks.

Prior Knowledge

Learners do not enter the classroom setting without a plethora of prior experiences that ultimately become the foundation of their worldview. Indeed, it is these experiences and background information or schema, which allow students to relate actively to new academic content matter. “Louis Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, a major influence in language arts teaching and learning since early in the last century...describes the “transaction” that occurs between the reader and the text, arguing that the meaning of any text lies not in the print but in

the reader's interaction with the words on the page. The reader is involved in a give-and-take relationship with the text bringing background information, experiences, attitudes, and understanding to the text that influence the understanding he or she builds on the words" (Martin 2003, pp. 289-90). The transaction that occurs between the student reader and her text is the same type of transaction that occurs between the student author and his content.

According to Louis Rosenblatt's transactional theory quoted above, a successful student author must interact with his manuscript. He has to bring with him his 'background information, experiences, and attitudes' as he attempts to convey a message to his audience. For ninth grade students to gain mastery of the expository essay, they must have access to their prior knowledge or schemata. This accessed knowledge is then used to fluidly express the student author's perspective to the reader. Santagelo, Harris, and Graham (2008) discuss the negative effects in writing that occur when students cannot access their prior knowledge, "...students who struggle with writing frequently produce inordinately short stories that contain little elaboration or detail (Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1991). Most likely, this occurs because students have difficulty retrieving information from memory, utilizing outside sources, and translating their ideas into written form" (Graham, 1990) (p. 79). As educators, we do not want to use strategies that cultivate students who are unable to achieve the academic learning task of writing. Neither do we want to promote a sense of learned helplessness within students who cannot access what they already know and apply it to what they need to learn.

We ought to, then, offer strategies that facilitate students with the ability to access their prior knowledge. However, before these strategies can be applied, it is advisable that we gain an awareness of our student's academic writing capabilities versus their ability to achieve complex learning tasks such as crafting an essay. In Vygotskian terminology, we need careful gauge their

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as it pertains to writing. “The ZPD is the ‘distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86 in Vanderburg, 2006, p. 376).

As we accurately compare our students’ level of competence with their possible academic writing abilities, we will be better able to determine the level at which we can begin scaffolding instruction. The end goal, of course, is to build comprehension and writing construct mastery without overwhelming the student and completely frustrating their ability to master writing the expository essay.

Structure

Ninth grade students cannot gain mastery of the expository essay without a thorough understanding of essay structure. In the field of education, much like other areas of study, there is an ensuing debate of form versus function. Perhaps if we were to conduct an empirical study of the question, ‘which came first, the chicken or the egg’ we could attain a definitive answer for laying a foundation for the argument that the egg, or form, is necessary in order for function to effectively occur. In writing structure is the form or the foundation for each genre. Without structure, students would have a difficult time recognizing as well as understanding the various attributes and nuances of different literary texts. Derek Soles in a paper presented at the 2006 College English Association Conference states, “A sound structure enhances clarity and readability, a random or rambling structure breeds ambiguity, a virtue for a poem, perhaps but not for a college essay” (p.5). Although ninth grade high school students are not yet writing college essays, they are in the formative process of mastering the essay and its specific as well as

subtle nuances. In these early years of academic writing, it is imperative that ninth grade students gain firm understanding of essay structure and format.

Parr et al., write, “We conceptualized writing as serving six major functions or purpose (after Knapp & Watkins, 1994) that encapsulate what the text is doing...the processes are: to perform or entertain through narrating or “storying (imaginative narrative, personal interpretive/expressive); to inform or entertain through recounts; to report and describe by classifying and organizing information; to instruct or layout a procedure; to argue or persuade, and to explain” (p.72). Because the California Standards for English Language require students to “write expository compositions, including analytical essay and research reports” (Frameworks, p. 226), ninth grade students focus on a writing structure that is expository, or explains a particular concept or idea. The mastery of this type of writing structure is not intrinsic. Students are not necessarily born with the logical constructs for writing an essay already in place. Despite the idea that learners may have prior awareness of the function and even the form of an essay, structure is a construct that is explicitly taught in academic settings. Explicitly teaching writing is a scaffolding process that moves from sentence creation, to paragraph construction, and finally to the actual essay format itself. Essay structure or format is a systematic process, including metacognitive awareness, that must be modeled and re-taught to students until they can ‘own’ the effective skills necessary for creating their individual compositions.

Of course, teaching this complex academic task is labor intensive, requiring a multi-faceted approach. “With respect to teaching writing, it would seem that teachers need more knowledge than an adult competent writer...arguably, to teach developing writers, teachers need to know, for example, what strategies more expert writes use as they engage in the complex activity of writing” (Parr, 2007, p.70). Phelps and Schilling (2003) quoted in the same article by

Parr state, “Teachers content knowledge of reading (and writing) has not been a major topic of inquiry, although interest in the professional knowledge associated with teaching reading [and writing] is increasing” (p.70). These researchers argue that educators, themselves, need to own the implicit knowledge about writing structure that they can, in turn, model to students. Teachers should be aware of, and use key strategies that will allow ninth grade students to master the constructs of the expository essay.

Such strategies for teaching writing are key part of student mastery. Nancy W. Fordham (2006) comments, “Lenski, Wham, and Johns (2003) added that ‘the judicious, flexible use of strategies when reading and writing is a prime characteristic of expert readers and writers should be an instructional goal for every teacher’”(p.390). Indeed teachers use these strategies within a wider format generally known as the writing process.

“According to this model [referring to Hayes & Flower], the writing process consists of three components that may continuously interact: planning what to say, translating those plans into written text and reviewing those written texts and plans” (Kieft, Rijlaarsdam, Galbraith, & Van Den Bergh, 2007, pp. 566). In teaching the writing process, teachers are allowing ninth grade students a systematic approach to planning, organizing, drafting, reviewing and sharing their individual thoughts with a reader. Students are able to sequentially develop and communicate their ideas with peers, their teacher, and the world in general. They have a voice that can be logically and concisely expressed within a manageable structure.

While the writing process is a good overarching strategy for teaching the expository essay to ninth grade students, educators should also be aware that “...the cognitive processes involved in writing may be unevenly developed in students of different grades” (Torrance et al., quoted in Kieft et al., 2007, p. 567). In the same page, they continue stating, “learning to write

well is not only a matter of learning how to carry out and combine the different components of the writing process. It also involves learning what the particular form of disclosure is and how to incorporate the genre features into the writing process”. This is to say that teachers must further breakdown the writing process into chunks that allow for ninth grade student mental digestion and understanding of this learning task. Dr. Soles (2006) writes, “I endorse, in a limited way, assigning the infamous five-paragraph them, as a way of alerting students to the importance of structure. With its clear thesis at the end of the first paragraph, its three paragraphs to elucidate the thesis, and its concluding paragraph to summarize the body and reaffirm the thesis, the five-paragraph essay reminds us of the relationship among meaning, clarity, and structure” (p.6).

Teaching the expository essay to ninth grade students is a challenging academic task that builds the foundation for higher level writing. An effective way to accomplish this task is by explicitly exposing students to the writing process and the five paragraph essay as strategies that will foster student mastery of this concept.

Interest

For ninth grade students to gain mastery of the expository essay, they must have interest in the academic content matter. For the purposes of this study, interest can be defined as the intrinsic motivation required to complete a learning task. Joseph Sanacore (2008) writes, “Creating a foundation for academic success involves a number of factors, and in the front is motivation” (p.40). Oftentimes, students are unable to realize a connection between classroom content and the real world. As educators, we are appointed with the responsibility of helping students draw connections between what they are learning within the classroom with life outside of the classroom. As Ann Ketch states, “It is these connections to the text, to the world, to

background information, and to experiences (schema) that make readers feel like the characters, connect to the story, or remember similar experiences” (p.8). Although Ketch is commenting on reading, the same logic can be applied to academic writing tasks. Only when students can make connections with their subject matter and their world will they be able to write effective expository essays. John Gardner, quoted in William Lan (2005), states, “the ultimate goal of the educational system is to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education” (p.169). Therefore, the classroom teacher has the task of encouraging students to develop an intimate connection with their writing so that each writing assignment becomes an extension of the individual student

As educators, we want students who own their education. As language arts teachers, we desire that students own their writing. We want to nurture students who view academic writing as a life long process as opposed to a temporary assignment necessary to earn a grade.

Redefining our students’ view of writing requires that we create within our students the sense that they are ‘real writers’. “Real writers have natural, authentic questions that arise from their work...” (Sandman, 2006 p. 21). These types of meaningful questions are the basis for interest and ownership in the writing process. Sanacore continues, “When students believe they are incapable of completing meaningful assignments, their motivation [interest] to learn diminishes” (p.40).

It is highly improbable that one would find a content area teacher who advocates for student interest in learning to fade. Given that educators actively seek full student engagement in the learning process, there is an implied mandate to seek strategies encouraging intrinsic motivation within our students. Such strategies include assignments that are meaningful to the end goal of developing students into authors.

Strickland and Walker (2004) write, “In her book, In the Middle: Writing, Reading and Learning with Adolescents, Nancy Atwell (1997) proposes that teachers ask themselves, is this what real writers do or is the writing experience only a school exercise?” (p.415). We must ask ourselves to analyze the imbedded messages that are communicated when we assign an academic writing task to students. Are we encouraging students to complete written assignments with the underlying message that writing is a valuable tool for social communication and change, or are we relegating writing tasks to the deplorable list of other meaningless academic drills? If our answer is to be the former, then academic writing tasks must be apparently meaningful and applicable to our students’ life outside of the classroom.

Students have the mental acuity to recognize assignments given merely for the purpose of completing a task. Because they, like adults, conceptualize that the end goal of such tasks is of little consequence, they quickly realize that there is no reason to invest any sort of grand purpose or effort to their assigned tasks. They have no reason to be interested in the learning tasks. “In the classroom, the teacher, like the parent at home, provides a model for the behaviors of her students. If she values literacy by demonstrating its worth and purpose, she will provide time and opportunity for students to engage in a variety of literacy activities that are meaningful, authentic and enjoyable” (Strickland and Walker, 2004, p.403). As with literacy, educators do need to demonstrate and model a variety of writing activities that bring in the student’s world outside of the classroom. Vanderburg (2006) referring to earlier research using Vygotski’s Zone of Proximal Development states, “Sperling’s findings demonstrated that students were more apt to interact with teachers who presented questions and modeled writing tasks as opposed to telling students what is right or wrong” (p.380). Such writing tasks captivate ninth grade students’ emotional interest in the subject matter and builds intrinsic motivation. “We need to remind

ourselves often that students are primarily emotional and secondarily intellectual (Sanacore, 2007) and that we are more apt to improve their interest in learning when we challenge them, give them choices, increase their participation, and encourage their love of learning” (Sanacore 2008, p.44).

Ninth grade student interest in the learning task is a key component if we are requiring students to master any academic content including the expository essay. Abdelmajid Naceur and Ulrich Schiefele (2005) write, “...it was shown by Morton and Saljo (1984) that intrinsically motivated students being asked to learn a given text were better able to establish relations between different parts of the text and between the text and prior knowledge. In addition, students showed better understanding of the intentions and conclusions of the author” (p.156). It is this intrinsic motivation that aide students in moving from mere assignment completion into becoming life long writers.

As educators, we are to draw upon strategies that encourage students to become self reliant and self motivated in performing academic tasks, such as writing the expository essay. Joseph Sanacore (2008) adds, “In summarizing related research, Tomlinson (2006) concluded, “modifying instruction to draw on student interests is likely to result in greater student engagement, higher levels of intrinsic motivation, higher student productivity, greater student autonomy, increased achievement, and increased sense of self-competence”(p.41).

Language Mastery

Ninth grade students must demonstrated the language mastery necessary to carry out higher level writing tasks to successfully complete the expository essay. Language mastery falls into four categories: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Although all are of equal

importance for student learning, this paper focuses on the comprehension and vocabulary skills necessary to effectively write the expository essay. Students must have an ease with speaking and fluidly using language to become adept at writing. Ann Ketch (2005) writes, “conversation is our connection to comprehension” (p.9). Ketch is highlighting the idea that through conversation, speakers are able to utter, extend, clarify and specify ideas. This practice allows the speaker to understand or comprehend their subject.

Conversation is a key element in aiding language comprehension. However, one cannot use conversation to further comprehension without extensive access to vocabulary words. Derek Soles (2006) adds, “They [students with a robust writing style] have vocabularies broad enough to select appropriate, concrete, and specific words for a variety of rhetorical contexts” (p.11). Both Ketch and Soles are alluding to the fact that students need a broad range words in order to express themselves. This statement is true whether the expression is oral or written. In writing tasks, however, students must have extended knowledge of academic language constructs. Specifically, they must have the vocabulary necessary to clearly communicate their ideas within the proper grammatical formats. Quoting Grabe (2006), Noelle Vance writes, “Unlike speaking and listening, reading and writing are not natural processes. The symbols of any written language are entirely based on conventions...Thus, learning to read [and write] does not occur in the same way that learning to speak does. Reading [and writing] must be explicitly taught” (2008). This is to say that academic vocabulary acquisition must become a component of learning if students are to become successful writers. Therefore, teachers who expect students to produce any sort of literature have to spend time equipping and modeling the practice of gaining and using content specific vocabulary. This process allows student to gain the language mastery necessary to write effectively.

Educators can begin the process of fostering language mastery within ninth grade students by exposing them to strategies that build both vocabulary skills and reading comprehension. Soles comments, “writing teachers also need to help students build a strong vocabulary if we are to help students cultivate a good style” (p.13). Lori Helman and Matthew Burns (2008) quoting Johnston (2000) continue, “students who develop an extensive bank of words that they can retrieve effortlessly by sight will find reading new texts easier and more meaningful and are in a position to learn many more new words from grade-level texts” (p.14). An ‘extensive bank of words’ does not only allow students to comprehend literature as readers, it is also the foundation for these same readers to become competent and fully expressive authors. As students move through the cognitively demanding tasks of writing, they should not get bogged down with a lack of vocabulary. This is both frustrating to the students’ progress as a writer and to their self-view as a competent learner. It is, therefore, critical that students have automatic access to vocabulary that is already part of their schema as well as newly acquired.

Helman and Burns (2008) note that “instructional practices tailored to build on what students know and to support their oral and written language skills in English may be more effective than ignoring students’ background experiences” (p.15). These instructional practices especially in the area of vocabulary expansion are the foundation for effective strategies that educators can use to successfully teach language mastery to ninth graders. These practices include activities that foster comprehension and vocabulary practice so that the academic task of writing can become a fluid process and students can master the expository essay.

Chapter 3: Anatomy of the Respondents

Research Design

According to the California Content Standards for Language Arts, ninth graders are required to write expository essays. Often, the task appears arduous and uninspired because of the disconnect between student performance and then teaching of skills necessary to complete this academic learning task. Additionally, the California Standards Testing Examination (CST) results for the particular population surveyed in this study indicate that the area in which ninth grade students most struggle is written conventions and writing strategies.

The goal of this research was to find strategies that allowed the process of teaching the expository essay fluidly so that ninth grade students can gain mastery of this academic learning task. The researcher asked the question, “What are effective strategies in teaching the expository essay to ninth grade students?” Delimitations of the study included students who were in ninth grade college preparatory English classes. Ninth graders in college preparatory English classes had CST scores ranging from basic to advanced.

A review of the literature highlighted five focal areas that enable students to become good writers. The literature concluded that a multi-strategic approach allowing students to incorporate metacognitive practices, access their prior knowledge, gain an understanding of essay structure, find interest in the subject matter, and display language mastery, is necessary when teaching mastery of the expository essay to ninth grade students.

Sampling, Population, and Participants

The researcher used a convenience sample of the ninth grade population at an urban school in Southern California. The site, originally built in 1956, was meant to provide schooling

to less than 2,000 students. Currently, the student population is 3,300 students. Nine hundred twenty-eight of these students are classified as ninth graders in regular general education program. Between freshmen and sophomore years, this number diminishes to 728 students who actually transition from the ninth grade and become classified as tenth graders. The data indicates that approximately 203 (28%) of sophomores do not meet the credits necessary to fully move to the tenth grade and are therefore reclassified as ninth graders.

These findings emphasize the need to study ninth grade curriculum and isolate areas within which students struggle. Collectively, the ninth grade collaborative team of teachers at this particular school identified the expository essay as an area of difficulty for students. As a result, this researcher conducted a study that encompassed three classes of regular education ninth grade students and one honors class of ninth grade students. Approximately 140 survey were handed out to the students in the English classrooms. Seventy three surveys were returned to the researcher.

Data Collection

Of the 160 surveys that were handed out ninth grade students, 73 (46%) were completed and handed in to the researcher. Those who completed the survey were ninth grade students ranging in age between 13 and 17 years. Sixty eight (93%) of the respondents were 14 years old. Of those who participated, forty-four (60%) were female and 28 (38%) were male; 1 (less than 1%) of the respondents declined to state their gender. The participants represent a multi-ethnic group that reflects the population surrounding the school site. Forty-four percent (32) of the 73 respondents to the survey were of Hispanic descent. Those of Pacific Islander or Asian,

European-American, and African- American descent each composed .03% (2 each) of the sampling. The remaining 48% (35) of survey responses did not indicate their ethnic background.

The instrument used in this study was a twenty-point survey entitled: Student Writing Evaluation Questionnaire. Seventeen of the twenty questions employed a Likert scale for the categorical responses that ranged in choices from strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly agree. The researcher tested the face validity of the survey by asking several professional educators to review the questions presented to the student population. The result of the review was an instrument designed with language that was both accessible to students and specific in providing data for review.

Chapter 4: Delving into the Data

Data Analysis

The results from the study were analyzed question by question. Each question is followed by a table containing response information listed on the five categories of the Likert scale. The questions in the instrument were chosen to inform the researcher about student opinion regarding the five focal areas of the study: metacognition, prior knowledge, structure, interest, and language mastery. A short summary of the findings is presented following each table.

Question 1: Student Judgment on Writing

In this first question, students were asked to rate their opinion regarding the difficulty of a writing task.

Question 1: Writing is easy for me.

Table 1. Ease of Writing

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	2	2.78
Disagree	14	19.44
Neither agree nor disagree	32	44.44
Agree	21	29.17
Strongly Agree	3	4.17
Total	72	100.00

Students indicated (33%) with a ten percent margin that writing is easy for them. Forty-four percent were neutral.

Question 2: Student Judgment on English as an academic subject.

In this section, students were asked to rate their attitude toward English as an academic subject.

Question 2: I like English as a subject.

Table 2. Attitude toward English

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	0	0.00
Disagree	14	19.44
Neither agree nor disagree	25	34.72
Agree	26	36.11
Strongly Agree	7	0.10
Total	72	100.00

Regarding their attitude toward English, the highest percentage of students (35%) indicated that they were neutral in their like or dislike of English as an academic subject. Thirty-three percent of respondents agreed that they liked English as a subject.

Question 3: Indication of Access to Prior Knowledge

In question III, students were asked to indicate whether or not they tapped into prior knowledge when given an academic writing assignment.

Question 3: I make a connection between what I already know and the writing topic that I have been assigned.

Table 3. Connection Between Prior Knowledge and Assignment

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	0	0.00
Disagree	2	2.78
Neither agree nor disagree	17	23.61
Agree	40	55.56
Strongly Agree	13	18.06
Total	72	100.00

Ninth grade students overwhelmingly indicated (74%) that they make connections between their prior knowledge and academic learning tasks that they have been given. Twenty

four percent of students were neutral when if they connected their prior knowledge with assigned writing tasks.

Question 4: Indication of Metacognitive Awareness Preceding a Writing Task

In question IV, students were asked to identify whether or not they engaged in the metacognitive process of visualization before engaging in a writing activity.

Question 4: It helps me to visualize my ideas before I start writing.

Table 4. Visualization of Ideas

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	1	1.39
Disagree	6	8.33
Neither agree nor disagree	13	18.06
Agree	37	51.39
Strongly Agree	15	20.83
Total	72	100.00

The greatest percentage of students (72%) agreed that they did create mental pictures of their ideas before they began to write. Eighteen percent of students were neutral on the subject of visualization.

Question 5: Indication of Metacognitive Awareness

In question V, students were asked to indicate whether or not they participated in metacognitive procedures as they completed writing assignments.

Question 5: I am aware of my thinking process as I write.

Table 5. Awareness of Thinking Process

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	1	1.39
Disagree	7	9.72
Neither agree nor disagree	15	20.83
Agree	38	52.78

Strongly Agree	11	15.28
Total	72	100.00

A high percentage of students (68%) acknowledged that they are actively aware of their metacognitive processes as they write. Less than half (21%), of students declined to comment on whether or not they were aware of their thinking processes as they undergo a writing task.

Question 6: Awareness of the Structural Processes for Writing

In question VI, students were asked to acknowledge that the academic task of writing requires procedural practice.

Question 6: I am aware that writing is a process.

Table 6. Awareness of Writing

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	1	1.39
Disagree	4	5.56
Neither agree nor disagree	18	25.00
Agree	32	44.44
Strongly Agree	17	23.61
Total	72	100.00

A majority of respondents (68%) indicated that they are aware of the procedural nature of writing. A quarter of those surveyed (25%) remained neutral.

Question 7: Indication of the Metacognitive Process of Organization

In question VII, students were asked to identify whether or not they undertook the metacognitive process of organizing their thoughts before beginning an academic writing task.

Question 7: I always organize my thoughts before I start to write.

Table 7. Organization of Thoughts

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	5	6.94

Disagree	15	20.83
Neither agree nor disagree	26	36.11
Agree	20	27.78
Strongly Agree	6	8.33
Total	72	100.00

The student response for this question was somewhat evenly distributed. Thirty-six percent of students agreed that they organized their thoughts before beginning an academic writing task. Thirty-six percent of students were neutral in their response and did not indicate either agreement or disagreement with the question regarding their organization thinking procedure. Twenty-eight percent of respondents noted that they did not organize their thoughts before beginning a writing task.

Question 8: Indication of Essay Structure Knowledge

In question VIII, students were asked to indicate their use of essay structure. They were asked to acknowledge a use of structure in planning the outcome their expository essay.

Question 8: When I write an expository essay, I organize the information into a clear introduction, body, and conclusion.

Table 8. Organization of Information

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	4	5.56
Disagree	8	11.11
Neither agree nor disagree	23	31.94
Agree	21	29.17
Strongly Agree	16	22.22
Total	72	100.00

When writing an expository essay, more than half of the respondents (56%) agreed that they organized their information to follow the structural pattern of essay.

Question 9: Indication of Access to Prior Knowledge

In question IX students were asked to comment upon the number of drafts they completed for a particular writing assignment. Students were asked to identify the importance of completing more than one draft a writing assignment.

Question 9: It is important to write more than one draft of my expository essay.

Table 9. Number of Drafts

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	1	1.41
Disagree	9	12.68
Neither agree nor disagree	21	29.58
Agree	30	42.25
Strongly Agree	10	14.08
Total	71	100.00

More than half of the respondents (56%) indicated that it is important to completed more than one draft of their expository essay. Thirty-two percent were neutral.

Question 10: Importance of Peer Review

In question X, students were asked to indicate if they frequently included another individual in the editorial process of their academic writing task before turning it in to a teacher for review.

Question 10: I often get another individual to edit my writing before I hand it in to the teacher.

Table 10. Peer Editing

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	4	5.63
Disagree	20	28.17
Neither agree nor disagree	15	21.13
Agree	17	23.94

Strongly Agree	15	21.13
Total	71	100.00

Forty-five percent of students indicated that they frequently used another individual to help improve their writing before turning the assignment in to their teacher. 34% of students do not frequently utilize the help of another individual prior to handing a writing assignment in.

Question 11: Indication of Ease Prior to Writing

In question XI, students were asked to indicate their awareness of emotional affect at the beginning a writing assignment.

Question 11: When I am given a writing topic, it is easy for me to start writing immediately.

Table 11. Automaticity of Writing

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	5	7.14
Disagree	26	37.14
Neither agree nor disagree	17	24.29
Agree	18	25.71
Strongly Agree	4	5.71
Total	70	100.00

The majority of student respondents (44%) indicated that it was difficult for them to begin a writing assignment. Thirty-one percent of students agreed that they could easily begin writing when given a topic.

Question 12: Indication of Negative Affect Prior to Writing

In question XII, students were asked to analyze the presence of anxiety in relation to the amount of time required to begin a writing assignment. Students were asked to indicate whether or not their levels of anxiety increased with the amount of time it took to begin a writing assignment.

Question 12: I become anxious the longer it takes me to begin working on a writing assignment.

Table 12. Anxiety in Writing

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	4	5.63
Disagree	8	11.27
Neither agree nor disagree	14	19.72
Agree	26	36.62
Strongly Agree	19	26.76
Total	71	100.00

The majority of students agreed (63%) that their level of anxiety increased in direct proportion with the amount of time it took to begin a writing assignment.

Question 13: Indication of Access to Appropriate Vocabulary for Communication

In question XIII, students were asked to analyze their ability to use clear vocabulary for communicating their ideas during an academic writing task.

Question 13: I always have the words to communicating my ideas when I write.

Table 13. Vocabulary for Communication

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	5	7.04
Disagree	17	23.94
Neither agree nor disagree	24	33.80
Agree	18	25.35
Strongly Agree	7	9.86
Total	71	100.00

The responses to this survey question were somewhat evenly distributed. Thirty-five percent of respondents agreed that they had the vocabulary constructs to clearly communicate within a writing assignment. Thirty-four percent of respondents remained neutral regarding their

ability to use appropriate vocabulary while 31% of respondents stated that they did not have the terminology to communicate their ideas as they write.

Question 14: Indication of Access to Interesting Vocabulary

In question XIV, students were asked to indicate the use of varied vocabulary within their written texts.

Question 14: When I write, I often find myself repeating the same words rather than finding more interesting vocabulary.

Table 14. Lack of Vocabulary in Writing

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	4	5.63
Disagree	11	15.49
Neither agree nor disagree	13	18.31
Agree	34	47.89
Strongly Agree	9	12.68
Total	71	100.00

Regarding their use of the same vocabulary terms, over half of the student respondents indicated (61%) that do repeat the same vocabulary terms in their writing. Eighteen percent were neutral in their response and did not indicate whether or not they used a variety of vocabulary in their writing.

Question 15: Indication of Positive Affect in Connection with Writing

In question XV, students were asked to rate their excitement at the ability to express their perspective within a writing assignment.

Question 15: When I encounter a writing assignment, I am excited to express my opinion.

Table 15. Excitement for Expression

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	4	5.63
Disagree	19	26.76
Neither agree nor disagree	21	29.58
Agree	15	21.13
Strongly Agree	12	16.90
Total	71	100.00

The response to this question was somewhat evenly distributed. Thirty-eight percent of students agreed that they were excited to express their opinions when they encounter a writing assignment. Thirty-two percent of students disagreed with question indicating that they were not excited to express their opinion. Thirty percent of respondents remained neutral.

Question 16: Indication of Lack of Self Efficacy in Essay Writing

In question XVI, students were asked to indicate their feelings regarding their ability to successfully meet the requirements of an essay writing assignment.

Question 16: I feel nervous about my ability to respond well to an essay question.

Table 16. Nervousness to Essay Prompts

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	2	2.86
Disagree	15	21.43
Neither agree nor disagree	17	24.29
Agree	21	30.00
Strongly Agree	15	21.43
Total	70	100.00

Regarding their ability to respond well to an essay prompt, 51% of students indicated that they felt nervous about their ability to successfully complete the writing task. An equal number

of respondents (24%) were either neutral or indicated that they were not nervous about their ability to respond well to an essay prompt.

Question 17: Indication of Positive Affect Toward Essay Writing

In question XVII, students were asked to comment on their attitude regarding the writing of an essay.

Question 17: I enjoy writing essays.

Table 17. Enjoyment of Writing Essays

<u>Value Label</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly disagree	19	27.14
Disagree	18	25.71
Neither agree nor disagree	24	34.29
Agree	8	11.43
Strongly Agree	1	1.43
Total	70	100.00

More than half of the students surveyed (53%) indicated that they do not enjoy writing essays while only 13% stated that they enjoyed the academic task. Thirty-four percent of students were neutral in their response.

Chapter 5: Summary of Findings

Metacognition

A review of the literature conjectured that learners need to be aware of the cognitive processes that they practice in order to achieve higher level academic learning tasks like writing. (Nist & Holschuh, 2005, Harris et al., 2008) That is, students should be able to systematically manage their ideas and thoughts in the process getting this information from their heads to the paper. Not only do students need to know what to think, but they also need to know how to monitor their thinking.

Questions four through six of the survey instrument used measured the respondents' awareness of their thinking as they encountered academic writing tasks. Findings from the survey overwhelmingly show that a majority of ninth grade students acknowledge awareness of their thinking process as they write. Students also indicate that they visualize their ideas before and during writing. In conjunction with the literature, the results from the survey demonstrated that strategies that allow students to gain and utilize metacognitive awareness while completing writing tasks are helpful in order for mastery of the expository essay to occur.

Prior Knowledge

Researchers recognize learner access to prior knowledge as a key building block for content matter acquisition and successful academic task performance. Martin (2003) discusses the exchange of ideas which occurs between a student and content matter while Santagelo, Harris, and Graham (2008) acknowledge the detrimental effects that occur when students cannot access prior knowledge. The literature supports the use of strategies allowing students to reach into their academic memory banks and life experiences as a foundation for learning skills.

In this study, the results revealed only one third (33%) of students in agreement with the statement that they make connections between their prior knowledge and assigned writing tasks. Conversely, a mere 19% stated that they do not use prior knowledge to inform their writing. Although the numbers seem to show that some students employ prior knowledge to inform their writing, the findings are inconclusive. Of those surveyed, the largest amount of students, (35%) declined to state agreement or disagreement regarding their access to and use of prior knowledge.

Structure

Each writing genre has a format or structure attributed to it. Essays are no exception. The general structure of an essay includes an introduction, body, and conclusion. Within the body of literature, researchers suggest understanding of structure as foundational for students to successfully produce expository writing texts (Soles 2006, Parr et al., 2007).

Questions six through ten of the research instrument focused on student use and understanding of the writing process and essay structure. More than half of the ninth grade students surveyed agree that they are aware of writing as a process (68%) and quite a few (33%) generally organize information according to the prescribed genre format when assigned an expository essay. However, 36% of student respondents declined to state whether or not they organized their thoughts before writing by responding that they neither agreed nor disagreed. While the respondents exhibited awareness of writing procedure, the findings were inconclusive as to student perception of the importance of thought organization prior to writing.

Interest

Tomlinson (2006) and Joseph Sanacore (2008) concluded that educators need to incorporate strategies that encourage students to become intrinsically motivated as they perform challenging learning tasks like writing the expository essay. Academic practices allowing students to own their compositions not only enhance their self-efficacy, which in turn fuel higher academic productivity, academic practices that are intrinsically motivating also allow students to become more invested in their work and therefore, more adept at learning the skills found in good authors.

Questions twelve, and fifteen through seventeen of the survey instrument targeted ninth grade student sentiment regarding interest, or intrinsic motivation. Of the students surveyed, more than half (63%) expressed that they were anxious when it came to writing and 53% revealed that they do not enjoy essay writing. These findings show that a large group of students harbor negative feelings about academic writing in general and essay writing in particular. Given these responses and a body of literature that encourages strategies fostering intrinsic motivation within students, educators find themselves at a tense impasse. Strategies that build student interest should also aim at lowering negative student affect when it comes to writing essays.

Language Mastery

The literature surmises the student need for a good understanding of vocabulary and an extensive word bank upon which to draw. These tools allow students to create essays that are clear, concise, and effective in presenting the main idea (Grabe 2008, Helman & Burns, 2008). Questions eleven, thirteen and fourteen of the research instrument deal with ninth grade student

perception of their language mastery abilities. The research instrument asked respondents to focus on their use of appropriate vocabulary during written assignments. Sixty-one percent of students identified that they lacked the language mastery necessary to use varied words when writing, while only 35% of respondents acknowledged having the words necessary to communicate their ideas. It would appear that the body of literature is correct in highlighting the need for explicitly teaching strategies that increase ninth grade student word banks.

Chapter 6: Weaving the Writing Tapestry

Conclusions

In chapter 1, we were introduced to Ms. Murphy, a well meaning English teacher excited about her lesson. Indeed, she was well prepared and her second period students were eager to learn, at least, until she mentioned the word *essay*. The goal of this thesis was to offer up methodology diffusing the tension and consequent low academic performance arising when ninth grade teachers, like Ms. Murphy, embark upon the journey of teaching the expository essay to students. This study asked the question, “What are effective strategies in teaching the expository essay to ninth grade students?” As pre-cursor to the question, Harris, Alexander & Graham (2008) write, “a basic assumption underlying long-term multiple strategies instruction is that it produces learners who can skillfully and flexibly apply and orchestrate strategies when needed and that such instruction improves performance as well as produces more knowledgeable and motivated students” (p.91).

Additional review of the literature highlighted five focal points for strategic intervention. They are: metacognitive awareness, access to prior knowledge, understanding of expository essay structure, student interest in the content matter, and language mastery. Through the use of twenty point questionnaire, a sampling of ninth grade students were asked to rate their opinions regarding these focal areas using a five point Likert scale moving from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Findings from this student questionnaire indicate that the population has a great deal of variability with these five-research based expository strategies. Thus, prior to teaching the expository essay to ninth graders, educators must intentionally take the time to plan and model the following five learning activities: 1) allow students to monitor their thinking as they are undergoing the writing task; 2) create specific avenues for students to access prior knowledge

that is relevant to the writing task; 3) explicitly help students organize their information into expository essay structure-introduction, body, and conclusion; 4) appeal to students' interest; 5) utilize and increase variety in student academic vocabulary.

Following these five steps, Ms. Murphy can re-organize her unit on writing. Instead of starting the expository essay writing unit by simply announcing the dreaded word *essay*, she can supply her students with a checklist identifying the process of writing and highlighting the procedures that students will follow. This incremental building of the expository essay along with subsequent mini-lesson for each portion of the checklist will allow students to monitor their thinking. Additionally, a rubric targeting the key areas for grading will equip students with a cognitive base for meeting the challenge required as they write the expository essay.

Second, Ms. Murphy can model a way for students to access their prior knowledge in regard to the topic. She can, for example, ask students to recall a particular time when they had to explain something and ask them to graphically organize the steps they followed. The knowledge accessed by students can be used as a pattern for composing their expository essay.

Third, Ms. Murphy needs to explicitly teach the structure of an expository essay. As she breaks down the information in this clear, incremental manner, she will be modeling to students how they can systematically organize their information into the expository essay.

Fourth, Ms. Murphy will want to use a topic that is relevant and of interest to her students' life. A way that she could garner student interest and build intrinsic motivation within the individual students is by asking them to produce topics that they would like to explicate in their writing. In this way, students have automatic ownership of their expository essay.

Finally, Ms. Murphy will have to implement an ongoing pattern for vocabulary practice within her classroom. Whether vocabulary words are used in context with other literature, or

otherwise incorporated in ongoing academic learning tasks, she will be ensuring that students have the vocabulary constructs that they need in order to successfully master the expository essay.

Limitations

Although this study had a high percentage of respondents (45%), it was a convenience study conducted at one school. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the generalizability of the findings to a larger population. Additional limitations included the specific choices presented in the survey instrument. More definitive results could have been gathered if the researcher eliminated the choice for ninth grade students to neither agree nor disagree option on the Likert scale used.

Recommendations for Further Study

Research focusing on the key methodological practices would be helpful in further exposing best multi-strategic approaches for teaching ninth graders the expository essay. These would include targeted instructional practices specifically geared for ninth grade students and the expository essay. Additionally, a broader spectrum of the ninth grade population will need to be surveyed to corroborate the findings of this study. Because an astounding number of students expressed anxiety about the prospect of writing (63%) and a large amount (53%) clearly indicated that they do not enjoy writing essays, research offering ways to tap into and build student motivational interest when it comes to expository writing would assist educators in helping students successfully master the skills necessary to write an expository essay.

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Exposing the Essay: A Study of Ninth Graders and Expository Writing

In Partial Fulfillment of the Masters Degree
Biola University
School of Education
Chair of Committee: Dr. June Hetzel and Dr. Fred Ramirez

Chair Signature

Date

Sarah Charlotte Evensen

September 21, 2008

Informed Consent Form

Participant's name: _____

I authorize Sarah Charlotte Evensen of the School of Education, Biola University, La Mirada, California, to gather information from me on the topic of teaching the expository essay to ninth grade students.

I understand that the general purposes of the research are to find out my opinions regarding effective strategies for teaching expository writing to ninth grade students, that I will be asked to answer a questionnaire, and that the approximate total time of my involvement will be ten minutes.

I am aware that I may choose not to answer any questions that I find embarrassing or offensive.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue anxiety or stress or have questions about the research or my rights as a participant, that may have been provoked by the experience, Sarah Charlotte Evensen will be available for consultation, and will also be available to provide direction regarding medical assistance in the unlikely event of physical injury incurred during participation in the research.

Confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher. My individual results will not be released without my written consent.

The potential benefits of the study are **that ninth grade students will be better equipped with the skills necessary for mastering expository writing.**

Signature

Date

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the researcher with your responses. The other copy you may keep for your records.

Questions and comments may be addressed to Sarah Charlotte Evensen, School of Education, Biola University, 13800 Biola Ave., La Mirada, CA. 90639-0001. Phone: (562) 903-6000.

Consent for Adolescent to Participate

Child's name: _____

Parent's/Guardian's name: _____

I authorize Sarah Charlotte Evensen of the School of Education, Biola University, La Mirada, California, to gather information from my child on the topic of teaching the expository (five paragraph) essay to ninth grade students.

I understand that the general purposes of the research are to find out my child's opinion regarding writing an expository essay, and I understand that my child's participation will involve: answering a questionnaire. The approximate total time of my child's involvement will be ten minutes. My child and I have been assured that my child may refuse to discuss any matters that cause discomfort or that my child might experience as an unwanted invasion of privacy. I am aware that my child may choose not to answer any questions that my child finds embarrassing or offensive.

I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that my child may refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which my child may be otherwise entitled.

This study is unlikely to cause my child distress. However, I understand that if, after participation, my child experiences any undue anxiety or stress or has questions about the research or their rights as a participant that may have been provoked by the experience, Sarah Charlotte Evensen will be available for consultation, and will also be available to provide direction regarding medical assistance in the unlikely event of physical injury incurred during participation in the research.

Confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher. No individual results will be released without the written consent of the parents or guardians of the particular child.

The potential benefit of the study is that ninth grade students will be better equipped with the skills necessary for mastering expository essay writing.

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the researcher with your responses. The other copy you may keep for your records.

Questions and comments may be addressed to Sarah Charlotte Evensen, School of Education, Biola University, 13800 Biola Ave., La Mirada, CA. 90639-0001. Phone: (562) 903-6000.

Risk Level Determination

Title of Research: Exposing the Essay: A Study of Ninth Graders and Expository Writing.

Justification of Risk Determination:

1. Describe participants (number of participants, age range, place of recruitment, etc.):

This study will focus on three college preparatory and one honors classes of ninth grade students at Warren High School in Downey, California. Each of these classes holds approximately 40 students ranging in age from 13 years to 15 years old. According to the California Standardized Test exams, the students in this study have scores ranging from Far Below Basic to Advanced. Students in this study are all mandated to meet the California English Standards requirement of writing an expository essay during their ninth grade year.

2. List assessment tools, if any (questionnaires, measures, etc.). Also append copies to the protocol:

This study will use a twenty point questionnaire in order to elicit participants' opinions and perspectives regarding the writing of an expository essay. The questionnaire asks students to respond to questions regarding their prior knowledge, metacognitive awareness, essay structure, confidence, and language mastery while writing.

3. How will consent be obtained?
 - a. Consent Form (append copy of form)

There are two consent forms necessary for this study as it focus on ninth grade minors. One consent form will sent home to parents/guardians describing the nature of the study and offering parents/guardians the right to allow or disallow their child's participation in the study.

A second consent form will be given to the actual ninth grade student participants in the study. This consent form will summarize the purpose of the study and give the students the right to participate or refuse participation in the study.

- b. Verbal instructions (append verbatim instructions and describe how informed, voluntary consent to participate will be guaranteed to each individual participant):

The researcher will inform the ninth grade student participants that: the purpose of the study is to analyze effective strategies for allowing ninth grade students mastery of the expository writing essay.

The researcher will inform the student participants that in order for the study to be meaningful and successful, student's actual opinion about their writing habits is required.

The researcher will inform student participants that their opinion will be derived from a twenty point questionnaire and that their names are any other identifying markers are not required as part of the survey completion.

The researcher will inform the student participants that they can decline participation in the survey at any point in which they feel uncomfortable, anxious, or under undue stress.

3. How will anonymity/confidentiality be maintained?

Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained in this study because student participants are not required to write their names or any other identifying markers on the survey. As well, the researcher will be the only individual to give out and collect the survey and its results. Additionally, the researcher will transport and store the survey materials in a case specific container and will only use the results to inform the researcher's study pertaining to the subject of English and composition.

Risks due to participant population:

1. Minors — describe how you will obtain each child's assent (agreement to participate), as well as the informed consent from the child's legal guardian.

The researcher will send two parent/guardian consent forms home. The minor participant's parent/guardian will complete and sign both forms. One will be returned to the researcher. The second consent form will be maintained by the parent/guardian for their personal records.

The researcher will give each student participant two copies of an assent form. Each willing participant will complete and sign both forms. Each willing student participant will return one copy to the researcher and will maintain the other copy for their personal records.

2. Participants vulnerable to "undue influence" (See Guideline 1, number 3) — describe how the participant's right to decline participation without negative consequences will be preserved:

This study does not require unwilling participation. There are no identifying markers on the questionnaire. The students who decline to participate or whose parents/guardians decline participation will experience no adverse consequences. The researcher will reiterate the fact that participation is optional does not negatively influence any present or future instruction.

3. Other "vulnerable populations" — describe the vulnerability of the participants and how the risk caused by this vulnerability will be minimized:

This study uses ninth grade students between the ages of 13-15 in order to analyze effective strategies for teaching the expository essay. The participants in this study are vulnerable because they are minors and are being asked to reflect on their academic writing skills. As such, these student participants may feel as if their academic abilities could be negatively criticized by the researcher. This risk caused will be minimized by the researcher explicitly stating that the purpose of the research is to find effective strategies for teachers to successfully teach writing strategies; therefore, the student participants are informing the study rather than being critiqued for their academic deficiencies.

The risk caused by the vulnerability of student participants will also be minimized by the anonymity of the questionnaire. The researcher will only identify the surveys by number and not by individual name or any other identifying markers.

Risks due to assessment instruments:

1. Describe the sensitive nature of the instruments to be used:

The questionnaire used in this study requires that student participants analyze and reflect upon their academic writing abilities. As such, this questionnaire may cause psychological discomfort for student participants who are not confident in their academic writing abilities, or student participants who may assume that the researcher will make negative assessments based on their personal responses.

2. Assess the risks to the participants:

- a. Published, standardized, widely used instruments — how do participants generally respond to the tools utilized in your study?

Participants generally respond to questionnaires by either consenting to participate in the survey or by denying consent for participation in the survey. Participants may also engage in discussion as to the potential benefits or lack thereof of the questionnaire. Additionally, participants may weigh the risk of their responses and base their consent or lack thereof on assessment upon the perceived risk factors.

- b. Researcher-generated instruments — what has been done to minimize the risks to participants caused by the sensitive nature of the instrument?

The researcher has designed the instrument so that it is both anonymous and uses language accessible to the age group analyzed in this study.

The researcher has provided documentation that allows for declination of assent without negative consequence prior to completion of the questionnaire as well as during the questionnaire.

The researcher has provided contact information for participants in the study to contact and discuss the purposes of the study.

Risks due to the procedure

1. Fully describe the procedure including an elaboration of the risks involved.

The researcher will inform all possible participants of the nature and purpose of the study both verbally and in written form. The risk involved with this portion of the procedure is that possible participants may feel some psychological pressure to participate in this study.

The researcher will send consent forms to parents/guardians of the minor participants. The consent forms must be completed, signed, and returned to the researcher prior to any data being collected for this study. The risk involved with this portion of the procedure is that some parents/guardians may feel that the survey is an invasion of their child's privacy and could be used for negative labeling or assessment of their child's academic potential.

The researcher will hand out two copies of assent forms to possible participants in the study and have the willing participants complete and return a copy of the assent forms to the researcher. The risk involved with this portion of the procedure is that willing participants may feel some psychological pressure to participate in the study.

The researcher will verbally explain the directions as well as the ability for student participants to decline completion of the questionnaire at any time during the process. The researcher will hand out the instrument to the willing student participants and monitor their completion of the questionnaire. The risk involved with

this portion of the procedure is that student participants may be feel the pressure to anticipate the correct responses to the survey questionnaire or risk negative assessment of their academic writing abilities.

The researcher will collect the survey results, place them in a case specific box, transport, and analyze them only for the purposes of research. The risk involved with this portion of the procedure is that the information may be lost or displaced.

2. Describe the means to be taken to reduce the risks to the participants.

In order to reduce the risks to participants, the researcher will provide the following:

- Information regarding the nature of the study, its potential benefits and risks.
- A consent form allowing for assent or declination of participation in the study.
- Verbal instructions that explain the nature of the study and its uses as well as reiterating the ability for participants to decline participation at any point of the study.
- Anonymity of identifying markers within the survey instrument and case specific transport for survey results.

3. Describe the information given to the participants in obtaining consent to participate.

The participants will be given an assent form that must be completed and signed for participation in the study. This form will provide information regarding the nature as well potential benefits and risk of the study.

4. Describe the information given to participants regarding available remedial resources in the event of research-related injury.

The name and telephone number of the researcher will be provided to the participants as well as the parents/guardians of the participants in this study. The participant will be told to contact the researcher for referral to appropriate help or in case of questions regarding the research.

Risk Level

This study holds MINIMAL RISK for its participants.

Date: _____

Survey Number: _____

Student Writing Evaluation Questionnaire**Directions:** Please circle the phrase which best describes your opinion regarding the following statements.

1. Writing is easy for me.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
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2. I like English as a subject.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
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3. I make a connection between what I already know and the writing topic that I have been assigned.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
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4. It helps me to visualize my ideas before I start writing.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
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5. I am aware of my thinking process as I write.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	-------------------------------	----------	----------------------

6. I am aware that writing is a process.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	-------------------------------	----------	----------------------

7. I always organize my thoughts before I start to write.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	-------------------------------	----------	----------------------

8. When I write an expository essay, I organize the information into a clear introduction, body, and conclusion.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
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9. It is important to write more than one draft of my expository essay.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	-------------------------------	----------	----------------------

10. I often get another individual to edit my writing before I hand it in to the teacher.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	-------------------------------	----------	----------------------

11. When I am given a writing topic, it is easy for me to start writing immediately.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
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12. I become anxious the longer it takes me to begin working on a writing assignment.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
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13. I always have the words to communicate my ideas when I write.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	-------------------------------	----------	----------------------

14. When I write, I often find myself repeating the same words rather than coming up with more interesting vocabulary.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
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15. When I encounter a writing assignment, I am excited to express my opinion.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	-------------------------------	----------	----------------------

16. I feel nervous about my ability to respond well to an essay question.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
----------------	-------	-------------------------------	----------	----------------------

17. I enjoy writing essays.

Strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
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18. Gender of person filling out survey : _____ Male _____ Female

19. Age of person filling out survey: _____

20. Ethnicity of person filling out survey (optional): _____