

# The Development of English Writing Skills in French Immersion School Programs

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Cette série d'études a été entreprise dans le but d'évaluer le développement des aptitudes en rédaction anglaise parmi des groupes d'élèves anglophones inscrits au programme d'immersion française, du niveau élémentaire et secondaire, et aussi de comparer leur rendement à celui des élèves inscrits au programme anglais régulier. Les deux groupes, formés d'élèves de 4<sup>ème</sup>, 7<sup>ème</sup>, et 11<sup>ème</sup> année étaient homogènes selon les variables du quotient intellectuel et du milieu socio-économique.

Au cours d'une période de 45 minutes, on a demandé à tous les élèves de rédiger une composition. Chaque composition, non identifiée, a été ensuite corrigée par deux enseignants du niveau approprié; ces corrections étaient basées sur 9 différents aspects (vocabulaire, orthographe, etc.). L'évaluation de chacun des différents aspects a été ensuite soumise à une analyse de variance.

On a découvert que les élèves de tous les niveaux du programme d'immersion ont obtenu d'aussi bons et dans certains cas de meilleurs résultats que les élèves du programme non-immersion.

Ces résultats confirment ceux des études précédentes qui avaient évaluées de la même façon les aptitudes en rédaction.

There is a growing fear, and evidence, amongst educators and parents alike, that children are graduating from the public school system in a state of functional illiteracy. Not only is there concern that students' reading and writing skills are substandard, but some argue that their oral and aural language skills are similarly deficient. Similar concerns have been expressed in several English-speaking countries: Britain, the United States, and Canada. Blame for the widespread decline in language skills, especially in reading and writing, has been attributed to excessive exposure to television, lack of emphasis on grammar and language usage in the schools, and general disregard for correct language forms in society at large.

In an attempt to redress the problem, educators are beginning to re-examine and redesign the English curriculum in the public school system, and some universities are even beginning to offer remedial English courses to first-year university students.

As in other North American school systems, parents and teachers in the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (PSBGM) have also become concerned about the reading and writing levels of the students in their schools. There is concern particularly for those students taking bilingual school programs where French along with English, the students' native

language in most cases, is used as a medium of instruction (see Lambert & Tucker, 1972, and Genesee, Allister, & Morin, Note 3, for descriptions of these programs). Because students in the bilingual programs receive much of their course instruction in French, a second language, it was felt that their native, English language skills, especially their writing, might be suffering even more than those of their peers in the regular English programs (these different language programs will be described in more detail later).

Since 1965 when a program of home/school language switch was introduced in an elementary school in the Montreal suburb of St. Lambert (see Lambert & Tucker, 1972, for a description of the program), a growing number of French immersion or bilingual school programs have been introduced by other school boards across Canada (see Swain, 1974, for a review). Some programs have been accompanied by extensive and systematic evaluations of the participating children's English and French language skills (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Edwards & Casserly, Note 2; Polich, Note 6; Barik, Swain, & McTavish, Note 1). Evaluation of their English language skills has included the following types of tests: vocabulary, listening comprehension, spelling, visual discrimination, reading, speaking, and language usage (capitalization and punctuation). The English writing skills of children pursuing this type of program have seldom been evaluated.

Three exceptions are an informal study carried out in 1974 by the two English consultants for the PSBGM (Thomas and Lamet), a study carried out by the Language Research Group, Department of Psychology, McGill University (Lambert, Tucker, & d'Anglejan, 1973), and a recent study by Swain (Note 7).

In the former study, teachers from four immersion and four non-immersion classes set compositions as they normally would. The immersion and nonimmersion schools were paired so as to be equivalent in terms of socio-economic background. Each composition was marked acceptable or unacceptable on seven criteria — for example, spelling, vocabulary, punctuation. Two of the nonimmersion schools scored better than the corresponding immersion classes; the scores of the other two nonimmersion groups were not significantly different from the scores of their corresponding immersion groups. These findings must be accepted with caution for a number of methodological reasons. First of all, the scorers knew which group the compositions came from. Secondly, there was considerable teacher variation in setting the compositions. And thirdly, the classes were not matched in terms of size.

In the McGill study, groups of children in grades 4 and 5 of the St. Lambert bilingual school project were compared with control groups of children in the English program. The compositions of the children in grade 4 of the bilingual program were rated significantly below those of

the control children. By grade 5, however, the compositions of the bilingual group were rated significantly above those of the control children.

Swain (Note 7) evaluated the writing skills of 40 grade 3 French immersion students from Ottawa in terms of (1) vocabulary skills, (2) technical skills (spelling, punctuation), (3) grammatical skills (sentence types, syntax), and (4) creativity. She reports that her "results suggest that there is little need for alarm concerning the English writing skills of the French immersion pupils."

The present report presents results of a number of evaluations of English writing skills carried out at different grade levels in schools of the PSBGM in the academic year 1973/74. The major focus of the studies was a comparison of those students in the bilingual programs and those in the regular English program.

## THE CURRICULUM

### French

There are two different programs of French immersion in the PSBGM for English-speaking children. One is called the *primary immersion* program because it commences in kindergarten. During the first three years of the program, K to 2, all course instruction is given in the French language by native French-speaking teachers. In grade 3 (but sometimes in grade 2) an English language arts course is introduced for one hour a day. In the higher grades, the curriculum gradually becomes more and more English until 60% is given in English at the grade 5 level.

The second type of program is called the *grade 7 French immersion* and follow-up program. This program, as its name suggests, starts in grade 7 and is available to students who have taken the regular French-as-a-second-language (FSL) courses in grades K to 6. In grade 7, approximately 85% of course instruction is given in French by native French-speaking teachers. The remaining 15% of the curriculum is devoted to an English language arts program. In grades 8 to 11, inclusive, students who have taken the grade 7 French immersion program may take a maximum of 40% of their curriculum in French, e.g. geography, history, mathematics. Most students take some of these extra French courses at least up until grade 10. Fewer take them in grade 11, the final year of secondary school in Quebec, because many of the immersion students are able to write off their Secondary School Leaving Exam in French in grade 10, instead of in grade 11, as is customary. Starting in the academic year 1975/76, all grade 11 students must take at least one French course.

### English

As in any large school system, a great deal of variation in the English curriculum exists from school to school and from teacher to teacher,

reflecting the varied needs and interests of the different student groups, as well as the particular predilections of individual teachers. Consequently, it is difficult to document in any detail the nature of the English curriculum in the different language programs. Notwithstanding this variability, some general characterizations are possible.

In the elementary school grades, the English language arts program for the immersion stream is different from that of the nonimmersion stream, because, as mentioned earlier, English is not usually introduced to the immersion students until grade 3. From the outset the emphasis is on reading and writing skills.

The nonimmersion students on the other hand are exposed to basic reading and writing skills as early as grade 1. Because the immersion stream spends less time on English language arts throughout the elementary grades in total, more emphasis is placed on the direct teaching of language skills than in the nonimmersion stream where the extra time allows the teaching of language skills through the use of good literature and content material. As a result of the expanded timetable in the nonimmersion English language arts curriculum, more time can be, and is, spent on creative language use than in the immersion stream. Within each program, there is variation according to the needs of the students, some needing more instruction in language skills than others who may receive more practice in creative language use. This kind of variation, however, is not particular to either the immersion or nonimmersion streams. There are other differences between the two programs owing to the fact that the students from each program are kept in separate classes throughout the elementary grades and, consequently, are exposed to different teachers, textbooks, etc. These differences are not easily documented.

In grade 7, the first year of secondary school in Quebec, the English program concentrates on reading skills. The writing program is tailored to the needs of the students with the more academically successful students receiving more "creative" or content writing, since their mastery of the structures of English are already generally satisfactory, and the less successful students receiving more instruction in formal language structures. There seems to be a general tendency for the English programs of the immersion stream to be more oriented toward teaching language structure than is the nonimmersion English program. This is due primarily to the fact that the immersion English program is shorter (45 minutes a day on a six-day cycle) than the nonimmersion English program (45 minutes for three days; 60 minutes for three days), leaving the English teachers in the immersion stream less time to spend on "creative" writing than the teachers in the nonimmersion stream.

In the remainder of the secondary school grades, 8 to 11, there is no differentiation between the immersion and nonimmersion students when English courses are considered, so that the English programs are identical:

same teachers, same texts, same content. Again, however, curricular variations do exist, but reflect intellectual levels, not language programs. English is compulsory until grade 11 and is offered for 45 minutes a day at all levels above grade 7.

### THE SAMPLE

Students from four grade levels participated in the evaluations — grades 4, 6, 7, and 11.

The students in the grade 6 French immersion sample comprised the first primary French immersion group; that is, they are a sample of the students who enrolled in French immersion at the kindergarten level in 1968, the first year that such a program was offered. Similarly, the grade 11 French immersion sample represented the first students to take the grade 7 and follow-up French immersion program that was inaugurated in 1969. The grade 4 French immersion group was part-way through the primary immersion program. They had completed three years of total French immersion, K to 2, and two years of partial immersion in grades 3 and 4. The grade 7 French immersion group had completed six months of that program. Thus, the four groups represent a continuum of French immersion education: two groups, the grade 6 and grade 11 samples, were completing the primary and secondary school French immersion programs, respectively; and two groups, the grade 4 and grade 7 samples, had completed only part of the primary and secondary school French immersion programs, respectively.

Students from grades 4 and 7 were selected so that they fell into three IQ groupings — below average, average, and above average. Standardized IQ tests (the Canadian Lorge Thorndike Test of Intelligence) are administered in all schools of the PSBGM, upon request, in grades 4, 6, and 9. The students' performance on their most recently written test formed the basis of the IQ classification. The classification was as follows: a score of 95 or below — *below average*; a score of 96–115 inclusive — *average*; and a score of 116 and above — *above average*.

Because of the limited number of students in grade 11 who had enrolled in the first French immersion program in grade 7, and because of the generally high intellectual ability of the participating students, only two IQ groups could be created — *average* and *above average*.

Similarly, it was not possible to select a group of youngsters from grade 6 who could easily be categorized into different IQ groups. Thus, there was only one grade 6 French immersion group with an average verbal IQ of 105 and an average nonverbal IQ of 108.

The sample sizes of each French immersion sample are presented in Table 1.

There are two experimental French Immersion groups in grade 7 and in grade 11 — Experimental 1 (E1) and Experimental 2 (E2). The E1 group

Table 1/Sample Size of French Immersion Groups by IQ Level, Sex, and Grade of Student

		Above-average IQ	Average IQ	Below-average IQ	Total
Grade 4		24	19	11	54
Grade 7, E1	Male	10	9	9	58
	Female	10	10	10	
Grade 7, E2	Male	10	10	9	59
	Female	10	11	9	
Grade 11, E1	Male	9	10		40
	Female	9	12		
Grade 11, E2	Male	12	11		46
	Female	11	12		
Grade 6	Male		14		26
	Female		12		

Note: E1 and E2 designate two experimental French immersion groups within one grade.

in grade 7 included students attending French immersion centers — schools which offer nothing but grade 7 French immersion. The E2 group in grade 7 included students attending French immersion programs in “wing-schools” — schools which offer a regular English program at all grade levels in addition to grade 7 French immersion. The E1 group in grade 11 included students who were taking some of the special courses given in French for grade 11 immersion students. The E2 group in grade 11 included students who were no longer taking the special courses in French that were available to French immersion students in grade 11. Students from the French immersion samples at each grade level were compared to students at the same grade level who were following the regular English program, which includes an FSL program of approximately 30 minutes a day starting in kindergarten. The immersion and control students were equated in terms of IQ and socio-economic status as much as possible. If immersion and nonimmersion students could not be drawn from the same school, and consequently the same neighborhood, they were drawn from schools serving neighborhoods with comparable socio-economic characteristics. The sample size of each control sample is presented in Table 2.

An attempt was made to include an equal number of boys and girls in each grade and IQ subsample. The results were analyzed statistically for sex differences at all grade levels except grade 4.

Table 2/Sample Size of Control Groups by IQ Level, Sex, and Grade of Student

		Above-average IQ	Average IQ	Below-average IQ	Total
Grade 4		23	24	23	70
Grade 7	Male	10	8	11	58
	Female	10	9	10	
Grade 11	Male	8	12		39
	Female	8	11		
Grade 6	Male		11		24
	Female		13		

Testing of the grade 7 group was carried out in late February 1974, while testing of all other grades was done between late May and mid-June 1974.

### PROCEDURE

Except for minor variations the following procedures for administering and scoring the tests were observed at all grade levels. All testing was done during class time in groups not exceeding 30 in number. Each student was asked to write a composition based on a topic provided by the examiner. The topics were designed to be appropriate for each grade level, and all were of the narrative type. In grades 4, 6, and 11 each student was allowed to choose the topic of his composition by selecting one of three topic sentences presented to him. In grade 7, the student was not given a choice; he was given only one topic sentence, which he had to complete. A list of the topic sentences is presented in the Appendix.

The students were told to take as much time as they needed to write a *complete* and *well-written* story. They were encouraged to reread their completed story and to correct or change anything they wanted. The students took between 40 and 50 minutes to complete their compositions.

Each composition was scored on nine different dimensions: spelling, sentence accuracy, sentence complexity and variety, organization, originality, length, punctuation, vocabulary, and overall. A rating from 1 to 5 was assigned to each composition on the dimensions of spelling, sentence accuracy, sentence complexity and variety, organization, originality, and overall. A rating of 5 indicated excellence, and a rating of 1 indicated unsatisfactory performance. Criteria were established for each point on the scale of each dimension. The criteria were changed, where necessary, to be appropriate for each grade level. The rating for *overall* was to be

assigned as the teachers would assign a grade normally, so that 5 was equivalent to an A grade, 4 to a B grade, and so on. A rating of *appropriate* or *inappropriate* was made for the dimensions of length and punctuation, and a rating of *superior*, *average*, or *below average* was made for vocabulary.

The scripts were graded by teachers from the appropriate grade level. Thus, grade 7 teachers scored the grade 7 scripts, and so on. For the grade 4, 6, and 7 groups each composition was scored independently by two teachers. To ensure inter-rater reliability, the two teachers practiced together with the scoring scheme before they began to score the scripts independently. Because the grade 11 scripts were so long, it was not possible to have each scored by two raters. Instead, a subsample of 20 scripts was scored by both teachers and the remaining scripts were divided into two halves with one teacher scoring one half and the other teacher scoring the other half. The scripts that had been scored by both teachers were analyzed statistically to determine inter-rater reliability.

All scripts were scored "blind" so that the raters did not know which school group (immersion or nonimmersion) or IQ group the scripts belonged to. The raters did know the sex of the student, however, since the students' names were left on the compositions. The immersion and nonimmersion scripts were mixed together.

## RESULTS

Six separate analyses of variance were performed on the ratings of spelling, sentence accuracy, sentence complexity and variety, organization, originality, and overall at each grade level. For the grade 4 data, the main factors were school group (immersion, nonimmersion), IQ level (average, above average, below average), and rater (1, 2). For the grade 6 data, the main factors were school group (as above), sex (male, female), and rater (as above). For the grade 7 data, the main factors were school group (Experimental 1, Experimental 2, nonimmersion), IQ level (as above), rater (as above), and sex. In the grade 11 data, the main factors were school group (Experimental 1, Experimental 2, nonimmersion), IQ level (average, above average), and sex.

Because there was a limited number of response categories for the dimensions of length, punctuation, and vocabulary, analysis of variance was not appropriate. Instead, frequency counts were made of the ratings; for example, appropriate or inappropriate. Frequencies were then converted to percentages. IQ, sex, and rater distinctions were ignored in these calculations.

### Grade 4

Summaries of the average ratings, percentage frequency counts, and analyses of variance are presented in Table 3 according to school group and in Table 5 according to IQ group.

Table 3/Summary of the Grade 4 and Grade 6 Results by School Group

	Grade 4		Grade 6		F ratio	F ratio
	Immersion	Non-imm	Immersion	Non-imm.		
	Rating	Rating	Rating	Rating		
Spelling	3.00	3.46	3.54	3.51	7.80*	.01
Sentence Accuracy	2.61	2.42	2.95	3.32	2.35	1.91
Sentence Complexity	2.53	2.36	2.93	3.23	2.05	1.61
Organization	2.66	2.43	2.79	3.15	2.17	1.00
Originality	2.20	2.01	2.25	2.47	4.77*	.62
Overall	2.57	2.37	2.91	3.28	2.96	1.26
Category percentages						
Punctuation	83%	61%	73%	83%		
Appropriate	17%	39%	27%	17%		
Inappropriate						
Length	70%	49%	46%	67%		
Appropriate	30%	51%	54%	33%		
Inappropriate						
Vocabulary	11%	7%	13%	6%		
Superior	84%	80%	79%	67%		
Average	5%	13%	8%	27%		
Below Average						

\*  $p < .05$

First of all, it should be mentioned that there was no significant difference on the rater factor nor was there a statistically significant interaction between rater and school group on any of the six dimensions that were analyzed by analysis of variance.

There were significant differences among the IQ groups on all six of the statistically-analyzed dimensions. As expected, in all cases the above-average group was rated highest, followed in descending order by the average and below-average groups.

There were no significant differences among the school groups on sentence accuracy, sentence complexity and variety, organization, or overall. The immersion and the nonimmersion students were rated equivalent on these dimensions.

On spelling, however, the nonimmersion students (mean = 3.46) were rated higher than the immersion students (mean = 3.00). On originality, the immersion students (mean = 2.20) were rated higher than the non-immersion students (mean = 2.01).

The immersion students tended to be rated higher than the non-immersion students on the remaining three dimensions of punctuation, length, and vocabulary — they received a higher percentage of “appropriate” ratings on punctuation and length, and a higher percentage of “superior” ratings on vocabulary than did the nonimmersion students.

In summary, there was no evidence that the writing skills of the grade 4 immersion students were poorer than those of the nonimmersion students in terms of the following aspects of writing: sentence accuracy, sentence complexity and variety, organization, and overall. The immersion students lagged behind the nonimmersion students, however, on spelling. On the other hand, the immersion students were rated higher than the non-immersion students on originality of thought, on punctuation, and on length of story. These results are very positive in view of the fact that by the end of grade 4 the immersion students had had less experience writing in English than the nonimmersion students.

## Grade 6

A summary of the average ratings, percentage frequency counts, and analyses of variance is presented in Table 3. Again, there was good reliability between the raters.

There were no significant differences between the immersion and nonimmersion group on any of the six dimensions that were analyzed statistically. Nor were there any significant differences between the male and female students on any of these six dimensions.

On the other hand, the nonimmersion students tended to be rated higher than the immersion students on length and punctuation; whereas the immersion students tended to be rated higher than the nonimmersion students on vocabulary. Thus, the nonimmersion students had a higher

percentage of “appropriate” ratings for length (67%) and for punctuation (83%) than did the immersion students (length = 46%; punctuation = 73%). In vocabulary, more immersion students (13%) received a “superior” rating than did nonimmersion students (6%).

The spelling problem that was reported for the grade 4 group was not evident in the grade 6 group. On the other hand, the grade 6 immersion group, unlike the grade 4 immersion group, was rated poorer on length and punctuation than the nonimmersion students. Whether this is a longlasting difference or one that will disappear in time remains to be seen.

### Grade 7

Summaries of the average ratings, percentage frequency counts, and analyses of variance are presented in Table 4 according to school group, and in Table 5 according to IQ group.

There were no significant differences between the male and female students on any of the six dimensions that were analyzed by analyses of variance.

There were significant differences among the IQ groups on all six dimensions. In every case, the rank order from highest to lowest average rating was: above-average group, average group, and below-average group. This finding was not unexpected since IQ correlates highly with performance on verbal tests.

There were no significant differences among the school groups on spelling, sentence accuracy, organization, originality, or overall. Although not statistically significant, the *overall* rating of the Experimental 1 group, those in French immersion centers (mean = 3.86), tended to be better than that of both the Experimental 2 group, those in wing schools (mean = 2.92), and the nonimmersion group (mean = 2.63). In addition, the Experimental 1 and 2 students were rated significantly higher than the nonimmersion students on organization and on sentence complexity and variety.

On punctuation, length, and vocabulary, the two immersion groups were rated as high as, or in some instances higher than, the nonimmersion group. On punctuation, a larger percentage of the Experimental 2 students (75.5%) were rated “appropriate” than were the Experimental 1 (63.5%) and nonimmersion students (62.5%) with the latter two groups receiving an approximately equal percentage of “appropriate” ratings. On length, the Experimental 1 and 2 students received an equal percentage of “appropriate” ratings (65.5%); both received a higher percentage of “appropriate” ratings than did the nonimmersion students (43%). On vocabulary, the Experimental 1 students received the largest percentage of “superior” ratings (12%) followed in descending order by the Experimental 2 students (9.5%) and the nonimmersion students (7.5%).

In summary, there was no evidence that the grade 7 French immersion

Table 4/Summary of Grade 7 and Grade 11 Results by School Group

	Grade 7				Grade 11			
	Exp. 1	Exp. 2	Non-imm.	F ratio	Exp. 1	Exp. 2	Non-imm.	F ratio
<b>Rating</b>								
Spelling	3.26	3.49	3.17	1.70	3.97	3.99	3.76	1.35
Sentence Accuracy	3.10	3.05	2.87	1.30	2.83	3.05	2.73	1.76
Sentence Complexity	3.03	2.98	2.68	4.90*	2.75	2.86	2.62	1.12
Organization	2.92	2.74	2.57	23.84**	2.59	2.90	2.46	4.51**
Originality	2.17	2.03	1.89	2.94	1.91	2.04	1.79	1.48
Overall	3.86	2.92	2.63	3.10	2.59	2.79	2.46	1.54***
<b>Category percentages</b>								
<b>Punctuation</b>								
Appropriate	63.5%	75.5%	62.5%		94%	85%	86%	
Inappropriate	36.5%	24.5%	37.5%		6%	15%	14%	
<b>Length</b>								
Appropriate	65.5%	65.5%	43%		54%	72%	56%	
Inappropriate	34.5%	34.5%	57%		46%	28%	44%	
<b>Vocabulary</b>								
Superior	12%	9.5%	7.5%		37%	19%	24%	
Average	77.5%	80.5%	71.5%		60%	70%	76%	
Below Average	10.5%	10%	21%		3%	11%	0%	

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p = .06$

Table 5/Summary of the Grade 4, Grade 7, and Grade 11 Results by IQ Group

	Grade 4 Ratings			
	Above average	Average	Below average	F ratio
Spelling	3.59	3.18	2.92	5.57**
Sentence Accuracy	3.03	2.37	2.15	9.92**
Sentence Complexity	2.95	2.36	2.01	12.18**
Organization	3.01	2.43	2.20	8.50**
Originality	2.36	2.02	1.95	1.95**
Overall	2.99	2.37	2.00	10.51**

  

	Grade 7 Ratings			
	Above average	Average	Below average	F ratio
Spelling	3.67	3.35	2.91	10.53**
Sentence Accuracy	3.48	2.94	2.59	18.73**
Sentence Complexity	3.28	2.83	2.59	9.80**
Organization	3.15	2.69	2.39	23.84**
Originality	2.28	1.98	1.84	12.80**
Overall	3.24	2.86	2.40	22.69**

  

	Grade 11 Ratings			F Ratio
	Above average	Average		
Spelling	3.94	3.88		.19
Sentence Accuracy	2.97	2.77		1.87
Sentence Complexity	2.83	2.66		1.62
Organization	2.75	2.55		2.74
Originality	1.97	1.85		1.06
Overall	2.78	2.44		4.69*

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

program had resulted in any negative effects on the English writing skills of the participating students. On the contrary, where differences were found between the immersion and nonimmersion students, they were in favor of the French immersion students. Thus, the compositions of the immersion students tended to be rated more highly overall than those of the nonimmersion students; the immersion students were rated significantly higher than the nonimmersion students on sentence complexity and variety. The compositions of the immersion students were of a more appropriate length, were better punctuated, and contained more advanced vocabulary than those of the nonimmersion students.

### Grade 11

A preliminary analysis of variance was performed on the ratings from the set of 20 compositions that were marked by both teachers. There were no significant differences between the two raters on any of the dimensions. Summaries of the average ratings, percentage frequency counts, and analyses of variance are presented in Table 4 according to school group, and in Table 5 according to IQ group.

The results from the analyses of variance indicated that there were no significant differences between the male and female students on any of the six dimensions of spelling, sentence accuracy, sentence variety and complexity, organization, originality, and overall.

There was a significant difference between the two IQ groups only on the *overall* dimension, the above-average group (mean = 2.78) being rated higher than the average group (mean = 2.44). The lack of differences between IQ groups on any of the other dimensions may be due to a "ceiling effect" in the sense that both the average and above-average groups scored above average in IQ (mean = 100) and, therefore, the chances of between-group differences were minimal. The fact that average overall ratings for both groups were low reflects the generally poor quality of the compositions that were submitted for evaluation.

There were no significant differences among the school groups on spelling, sentence accuracy, sentence complexity and variety, originality, and overall. On *organization*, however, the Experimental 2 students, those no longer taking special French courses, were rated higher than both the Experimental 1 students, those still taking special French courses, and the nonimmersion students.

The two immersion groups performed at par with or better than the nonimmersion group on punctuation, length, and vocabulary. On punctuation, approximately an equal number of students from the Experimental 2 group (85%) and from the nonimmersion group (86%) received a rating of "appropriate"; the Experimental 1 group received a higher percentage of appropriate ratings (94%) than either of these two groups. On length, the Experimental 2 group received a greater percentage of "appropriate" ratings (72%) than either the Experimental 1 (54%) or the nonimmersion group (56%), the latter two receiving an approximately equal percentage. On vocabulary, the Experimental 1 group received the highest percentage of "superior" ratings (37%) followed in descending order by the nonimmersion group (24%) and the Experimental 2 group (19%).

In summary, there was no indication that the pilot French immersion group who participated in the first grade 7 and follow-up French immersion program had suffered any harmful effects to their English writing skills. On the contrary, where differences did exist between the immersion groups and the nonimmersion group, they were in favor of the former.

Thus, the immersion students' compositions were better organized, of a more appropriate length, better punctuated, and contained more advanced vocabulary than those of the nonimmersion students.

## DISCUSSION

The scorers felt that in general the compositions were of low calibre and that this was indicative of writing levels in the schools. At the same time, the scorers felt that the low quality could have been exacerbated by the fact that the students were required to finish the compositions in one sitting. A general procedure, although not universal, among these teachers was to allow students a rewrite session during which changes and finishing touches would be made to the composition. However, this procedure was not feasible in the context of this research.

A number of statistically significant differences between the immersion and nonimmersion students emerged from these evaluations. In four instances, the differences favored the nonimmersion students: in grade 4, spelling; in grade 6, length, and punctuation; and in grade 7, sentence complexity and variety. In 13 instances, they favored the immersion students. Thus, there was a general tendency for the immersion students to score better than the nonimmersion students. In particular, the immersion students in grades 4, 7, and 11 performed better than the nonimmersion students in terms of punctuation, length, and vocabulary. The remaining differences in favor of the immersion groups included other dimensions and occurred at particular grade levels. That some of these differences were particular and did not recur across grades suggests that they reflect characteristics of certain groups of students or their teachers, or both, rather than any basic effect that is due specifically to French immersion instructional programs.

These findings suggest that the immersion students had no difficulty expressing themselves in written form. In no case did an immersion group score lower than a nonimmersion group on organization, originality, or overall; on the contrary, the immersion students in particular grades scored higher than the nonimmersion students on each of these dimensions. It appears, at least intuitively, that organization, originality, and overall expression are basic prerequisites for effective expression. Besides these basic skills, effective expression ultimately requires proficiency in linguistic skills related to sentence structure, vocabulary, and punctuation. Again, the immersion students performed as well as the nonimmersion students in these areas. Therefore, the immersion students seemed to be at least as well equipped as the nonimmersion students to express themselves in written English.

It should be pointed out at this time that participation in a French immersion program is voluntary so that there may be some preselection occurring. Insofar as this preselection was based on factors related to

proficiency in the English language, the samples represented in the immersion and nonimmersion samples of the present research are not strictly equivalent. There is, however, no way of controlling the preselection variable. Students in immersion and nonimmersion programs generally score at the same level on standardized group tests of English-language achievement, such as the California or Metropolitan Achievement Tests (see, for example, Genesee, Morin, & Allister, Note 4, Note 5; Genesee, Allister, & Morin, Note 3). This suggests that whatever preselection did occur was not directly or consistently related to English-language proficiency. In any event, by controlling for IQ and socio-economic factors the investigators in this project were attempting to equate samples on language skills.

In conclusion, these results corroborate those of previous researchers (Lambert & Tucker, 1973; Swain, Note 7) who also found that no harmful effects had resulted to the English writing skills of students participating in early French immersion programs. The current results extend these findings to a French immersion program at the secondary school level.

## APPENDIX

Topic sentences for grade 4:

1. Tomorrow my father and I are going to the pet store on the corner of our street. We are going to buy a pet. It will be my very first!
2. On Saturday my friends and I were exploring the woods at the end of the street. There was an old, empty house among the trees. When we went near it to explore it more closely we found. . .
3. Today, my friends and I are going to do something really exciting!

Topic sentences for grade 6:

1. Last summer our family went camping for our vacation. One evening as we were sitting in front of a blazing fire, I sensed someone or something watching me. . .
2. Yesterday I received a letter from my pen pal. I was surprised to learn that. . .
3. Today my friends and I are going to do something really exciting. . .

Topic sentences for grade 7:

1. This is captain's log star date 1-30, year 2074. We have just landed on a strange new planet in galaxy 2-X. Something mysterious has gone wrong with the ship's power source and all our systems are not working properly. It looks as if we are stranded.
2. It was cold and sunny as my friend and I walked home from school . . . a perfect day for snowballs! I bent down quickly to make one and saw the strangest thing I had ever seen.

Topic sentences for grade 11:

1. This is captain's log star date 1-30, year 2074. We have just landed on a strange new planet in galaxy 2-X. Something mysterious has gone wrong with the ship's power source and all our systems are not working properly. It looks as if we are stranded.
2. For four days we have been hiking through the forest of a remote part of the Canadian Rockies. One night, while sitting around the campfire, we suddenly felt uncomfortable and uneasy as if we were being watched. . .

3. Yesterday I received a letter from an old friend I had not heard from in two years. I was very surprised to learn that. . .

## NOTES

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