

AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY
USING THE READING/WRITING APPROACH IN
A SEVENTH GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

MASTER'S PROJECT

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Purpose for the Study

Language arts teachers face the important responsibility of teaching students to be effective writers. Such teachers face challenges in evoking meaningful writing experiences for students. Teachers must create assignments that promote growth as writers and thinkers.

Many approaches have emerged to help increase writing achievement among students. One such approach is the reading/writing approach which utilizes the processes and skills involved in reading to develop better writers.

At one time, writing was considered unteachable or simply a "natural" talent and was solely product-oriented. In the 1960's, the process approach emerged which focused attention on writing skills, instead of pure literature instruction. Unfortunately, the process-centered approach did little to incorporate the value of the reading process. In recent years, the reading/writing connection has been explored to give teachers another way to rethink teaching composition. By connecting reading and writing, teachers not only increase writing skills, but also thinking skills as well.

The author believes that the reading/writing approach allows students to become empowered in their writing once they are trained to inquire properly about prose. This approach does not simply ask students to copy existing prose written by someone such as Shakespeare in order to improve ability but to reflect on the author's purpose, thus developing the use of discourse strategies (Greene, 1992). The author believes that along with an increase in achievement students will attribute more positive feelings towards writing.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of implementing the inductive reading/writing approach on the achievement and attitude of seventh grade students.

Hypotheses Statements

There will be no significant difference between the mean pre and post test attitude scores of students after they have been exposed to the reading/writing approach.

There will be no significant difference between the mean pre and post test essay scores of students after they have been exposed to the reading/writing approach.

Assumptions

In order to carry out this study, the author made the following assumptions. First, the author assumed that the students would answer honestly on the attitude survey. Also, students would perform to the best of their ability on the essay assesment. Furthermore, the writer assumed that students would participate fully in the reading/writing approach.

Limitations

There were several limitations in completing this project. One limitation was the absence of a control group. Another limitation was the sample size. The sample size was limited to twenty-four urban students, which may not have been representative of the general population. Furthermore, studnets may have been instructed using an inductive and integrated approach towards writing. The remainig limitations deal with factors of the internal and external design. Internal vaildity is threatened because because there is no assurance that the treatment is the only factor in

the posttest difference (Isaac and Michael, 1990). Other factors that could effect validity are history, maturation, and testing effects.

Definition of Terms

Achievement is the level of quality attributed to a student's academic performance as evidenced on an essay assessment.

Attitude is the student's positive or negative feelings towards the reading/writing approach.

Inductive Learning is when student's master concepts by analyzing information and then making generalizations.

Reading/Writing Approach is a type of writing instruction in which students learn writing through carefully analyzing fiction and non-fiction prose selected by the teacher.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

History of Writing Instruction

Historically composition has been a subject given little attention in classrooms. Writing has been viewed as a separate process of language from reading. Composition being a viable and invaluable form of communication, one must look at its history in terms of instruction to realize the neglect.

One of the primary sources that kept writing separate from reading was social forces. Although recognized, the integrated and experienced based approach failed because socially people's writing was criticized as inferior by society's standards. When the public made an outcry against education, the move was generally back to a skills-based approach. With the assumption that education as a whole was cyclical, it was easier to articulate the resistance to change in instruction and curriculum. Two facts were recognized regarding language instruction: writing had always maintained a subordinate role to reading and language skills had always been fragmented, most notably reading and writing (Clifford, 1986).

In the first report on secondary education by the Committee of Ten in 1894, reading and writing received equal importance; yet in the classroom literature instruction was at least twice as frequent as writing (Clifford, 1986). Writing was used to test student's reading comprehension. In the early 1900's there was a response to attempt to rectify this situation from the National Conference on College Entrance Requirements in English who recommended that writing instruction be built upon experiences that students encounter daily (Clifford, 1986). The battle between traditional versus progressive education continued as new writing strategies were

explored because it was still perceived that students could not write effectively. Instructionally, higher levels of English used writing to respond to literature, while lower levels taught functional writing such as business letters and report writing.

Current trends in writing stemmed from the massive influx of students into universities after World War II due to the G.I. Bill. With a larger population of secondary students attending college with varying abilities, college was no longer for the academically elite (Clifford, 1986). It became obvious that intensive writing instruction must occur at the secondary level if the general population in state universities was going to be able to compete with its peers. This movement led to the acknowledgement of the process-centered approach rather than the product approach. The process approach acknowledged that writers engage in certain processes when they compose termed prewriting, drafting, revising, and publishing. Within the process approach, a number of teaching methods emerged.

One such method was the reading/writing approach which called for writers to examine reading material to develop strategies for various modes of writing. It simply would not make sense to ignore that writing influenced reading, and reading influenced writing. One reason this area of study had been ignored was that reading and composition had their own issues and paradigms regarding research which made it difficult to integrate the two fields (Spivey, 1990). Early connections between reading and writing were merely imitation of forms. According to Bazerman, "The beginning student studied rules and practiced set forms derived from the best of previous writing; analysis and imitation of revered texts was the core of more advanced study of writing. The way to good writing was to mold

oneself into the contours of prior greatness" (Bazerman, 1980, p. 656). It was now recognized that instead of simple imitation, students must be able to develop an interplay between the two processes of reading and writing. There were several methods and processes to forming a thought dialogue between the reader and the text.

Advances made in connecting the processes of reading and writing explored the importance of past experiences and developed the inverse relationship between reading and writing. For the reading/writing approach to be an enduring in classroom instruction teachers must be aware of how these principles establish the approach.

Principles of the Reading/Writing Connection

When students read or write they brought past experiences, or schema, to the activity. Prior knowledge had been recognized and its role speculated on for theories that incorporate the role of past learning in comprehension and composition (Ackerman, 1991). The role of literary genres played a role in schema development. As students were exposed to different literary genres in school, they fit that genre into their schema and were able to recall it when applying it to other readings and writing (Smith, 1991). To help explore this relationship, reading and writing can be considered a conversation. Bazerman states, "Conversation requires absorption of what prior speakers have said, consideration of how earlier comments relate to the responder's thoughts, and a response framed to the situation and the responder's purposes" (Bazerman, 1980, p. 657). First students must understand what was being said or written. Teachers prepared students to do so by giving instruction in the conventions of the chosen discipline by teaching techniques of absorbing written text, reshaping ideas, and using reading (Bazerman, 1980).

To discuss these processes as analogous did not describe how readers brought the two together. Students were not only bring the two together, but they were to also reshape the ideas to fit their intentions. A term that described this hybrid act of literacy was discourse sythensis which meant comprehension and composing acted together to lead to the construction of "textual worlds" from many sources of textual information (Ackerman, 1991). When writers read, they used critical thinking skills such as making inferences, elaborations, and examples or counterexamples to argue a particular point (Spivey, 1990). The content that the students generate represented the processes of elaborating and making inferences during reading and during writing it could have been used as prewriting or invention.

The constructivist theory of human learning was often applied when discussing the reading/writing connection. Writers would have the capability to read creatively from two different perspectives (Strong, 1987). The two viewpoints were described as reader-at-work and reader-at-play. Strong wrote, "One reader is our image of someone else, the likely reader for our text; this image provides a convenient fiction for a large array of textual decisions. The second reader is an aspect of ourselves, a kind of best self" (Strong, 1987, p. 25). Essentially, these two readers saw the connections and made judgements based on the composing act (Strong, 1987). Writing constructively was evident among students because the composer created a product, or newly formed text, as writers attempted to meet goals (Spivey, 1990).

Greene used the metaphor of mining to explain how readers can store knowledge and use it to accomplish their writing goals. Mining required a strategic process which in composition could be translated to mean context,

structure, and language. Greene explained, "Such a process requires one to plan, selectively evaluating and organizing information in order to get a sense of the topography, and to reflect upon one's choices and decisions about how to use accumulated knowledge to the best effect. For this excavation, the miner used certain "tools" appropriate to the situation to help uncover what was most desired. For the reader who was also a writer, this meant using strategies to reconstruct context, infer or impose structure, and see choices in language" (Greene, 1992, p. 155).

In a case study on writing narratives by Sager states, "As writers they must acknowledge language as a powerful cultural tool that empowers them to manipulate, direct, shape, and stir a reader's thoughts. As readers in turn, they must expect to be frightened, titilated, amused, outraged, saddened, stimulted, shocked, engrossed, confused" (Sager, 1989 p. 41). In another study done with eighth graders, Duncan attempted to discover if middle school students could transfer knowledge of literary models to their own writing. She realized that students needed training to associate that through reading students can derive a paradigm for written prose (Duncan, 1981). Futhermore, students would not make the associations without proper training. Duncan also found that, "By combining successful strategies from the teaching of reading and the teaching of writing teachers can help students to grasp the view that communication processes are interrelated and exist in reciprocity to one another" (Duncan, 1981, p.8).

The combining of the two processes had been described as an internal collaboration or dialectic. McGinley stated, "The recursive integration of reading and writing acitivities throughout the task of composing from sources paralleled, and perhaps even contributed to the nonlinear,

synergistic relationships among reasoning operations that also occurred during the task" (McGinley, 1992, p. 227).

The advances in writing instruction and the development of strategies that allowed students to see the connections between comprehension and composing promote important critical thinking ability. As educators continued to explore the use of past experiences and constructivism, students would be able to engage in written discourse using strategies that promoted successful compositions. Many of the processes of reading and writing promote social processes which researchers have explored.

Social Processes of the Reading/Writing Connection

Writing and reading both incorporated the social aspect learning. In composition during the stages of prewriting, drafting, and revising, students shared ideas and developed a vocabulary for discussion. In reading, students explored aspects of comprehension and structure to determine the author's purpose. The primary method for sharing ideas was conferencing. Conferencing allowed students to work in small groups or pairs reading and discussing their ideas about their composing processes (Nystrand, 1990). In the workshop model of teaching reading and writing, students used their peers to share ideas and make decisions regarding language and thought (Atwell, 1987). When students conferenced they entered into a discourse community in which they discovered ways to discuss and shape ideas which became more important than what was actually written (Reither, 1985). By students being able to verbalize their ideas through collaborative interaction, they became more confident with their ability to read, reason, and write.

Process-centered workshops and conferencing had the ability to create a dramatic change in students' attitudes. Silvers conducted a study in

which she observed a significant change in students' perceptions about writing. She witnessed students who attributed negative feelings towards writing evolve into competent and reflective readers and writers (Silvers, 1986). Peer conferencing was successful because it makes clear the relationship between readers and writers by making the audience real which further established the duality between readers and writers. Thus, writers became aware of the rhetorical balance between their intentions and the reader's expectations through language (Nystrand, 1990). Several insights had been acknowledged through using the workshop approach. Dillard and Dahl felt, "We needed to do reading and writing together rather than just talk about it. When we studied writing, we learned by being insiders in the process. We also experienced reading in the same way, engaging in the process of reading and sharing our responses. Now we needed to continue that scaffold by engaging in the reading/writing process. Class sessions were to become a workshop that merged the two" (Dillard and Dahl, 1986, p. 695).

For workshops and conferencing to be successful, teachers modeled each aspect. Students need to see their teacher as a writing peer engaging in the same thought process as students. When students saw the teacher willing to take risks and share ideas, they in turn were more willing to do so. Modeling also gave students a look into how a professional undertook the process of writing (Atwell, 1987).

Silvers stated that by using this approach, "The emerging literacy and language facility of the students in reading and writing are proof of the power and validity of process based instruction. These students are innately able to use a variety of strategies which are automatically integrated into their reading and writing to make meaning or communicate. I have

recognized the very important and subtle differences in instruction when language, reading, and writing are viewed as total processes and not isolated subskills" (Silvers, 1986, p. 687).

CHAPTER III PROCEDURE

Subjects

The subjects chosen for this study were twenty-four seventh grade students of mixed abilities. For the attitude survey, eleven girls and thirteen boys participated. On the essay prompt, there were eleven girls and eleven boys. Their ages ranged from twelve to fifteen years old. Students were chosen randomly based on their placement in the author's classroom.

Setting

School. The author's building contained 740 students in grades seven and eight. It is one of seven middle schools in the district. Students were pulled out of regular language arts for remedial and honors language arts classes. Class sizes ranged for eighteen to twenty-five students with students of varied ability. The teacher met with the subjects every school day for eighty-two minutes in a language arts classroom. There was no control group. The school system was urban with a total enrollment of over 25,000 students.

Community. The school system was found in an urban area in the midwest. Residents had varied economic and educational backgrounds. Many of the students came from Appalachian and African-American backgrounds. The district had a magnet school program which gave students their choice of school. Therefore, students came from many different areas of the city. Involvement in school related activities by the parents was weak. Parents had jobs that had been traditionally labeled as blue collar in manufacturing plants and both skilled and unskilled trade fields. Students came from primarily lower and middle socioeconomic

backgrounds. Approximately eighty percent of the students were from families that relied on some form of public assistance.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collecting Instrument. Two instruments were used to test the two hypotheses previously stated by the writer. To measure attitude, the Emig-King Writing Attitude Scale for Students (WASS) which was devised in 1979 was used. The scale contained 40 items that represented three categories: preference for writing, perception of writing, and process of writing. Students were asked to circle one of five points ranging from "almost always" which equaled a five to "almost never" which equaled a one. The points given to each of the questions were added and then divided by forty to attain a mean score. Cronback alpha reliabilities for the subscales of WASS are as follows: perception: .589; process: .726; and preference: .716 (Emig and King, 1979).

To assess the essay scores, the Ohio Ninth-grade Proficiency holistic writing rubric developed by the Ohio State Department of Education was used (Appendix A). The prompt called for students to write a personal narrative which is the seventh grade writing objective for the author's district. Students were rated from one to four on their essays, four being a perfect score.

Administration of the Data Collecting Instrument. All students were administered as pretests the WASS and essay prompt during the week of January 23, 1995 in a whole group setting. Students were not timed in completing the testing. The instruments were administered before the students were exposed to the reading/writing approach. After the completion of the nine week period, students were administered as posttests

the WASS and a narrative essay prompt in the same manner as the pretest during the week of January 23, 1995.

Design

The writer used the one-group pretest-posttest design which allowed for minimal control. The author manipulated one independent variable to test the two hypotheses. The T1 represented the pretesting carried out on attitudes and written essays. The X referred to the independent variable of the reading/writing approach. The T2 represented the posttesting carried out on attitudes and written essays (Isaac and Michael, 1990).

Treatment

The experimental group participated over a nine week period in which assignments and activities engaged the students in examining different aspects of reading, both comprehension and structure. Then students completed an assignment in the same mode of writing, which was primarily narrative. Activities and lessons were designed to allow students to examine the relationship between reading and writing. The program was conducted from late January into late March, 1995.

Several activities occurred with each of the four writing assignments given over the nine week time frame. First, students read several selections of short prose, both fiction and non-fiction. Selections were used from the text book and from various trade books selected by the author. After students completed the reading, they demonstrated comprehension of the material read. Next, students examined the content, organization, and purpose of the text through questioning and discussion to determine a paradigm for the mode of writing. Finally, students looked at aspects of style to learn how to evoke that in their own writing. Once students began

to write, they demonstrated understanding of all aspects of the writing process which they had previously learned.

When the students wrote, they worked independently and in groups, depending on the stage of writing. Two of the writing assignments were personal narratives, and two were fictional narratives. Each assignment was started with the development of a paradigm for the type of writing. Next, students completed prewriting activities such as brainstorming and freewriting. Students conferenced at this stage on their topics deciding if their topic was appropriate and possible strategies for developing the essay. During drafting students worked independantly. There was little emphasis placed on drafting. Students were to simply put their ideas on paper in sentence form for the first time. Revision called for some self-revision, but most of the time students worked with peers and the teachers through conferencing. When students revised they focused on content, organization, and mechanics. During publishing, students worked individually to write their final copy.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presentation of Results

The problem focus of this study was to develop a type of writing instruction which allowed students to use the processes of reading and analytical thinking to develop better writing skills. This study was an attempt to measure the effects of the approach regarding the attitude and achievement of twenty-four students involved in the study.

The author computed the mean as the measure of central tendency and the standard deviation as the measure of variance for pre and posttest scores on the attitude survey and written essay. The results were entered into a table. The t test for dependent samples was used to evaluate scores within a .05 level of significance.

The first hypothesis stated that there would be no significant difference between the mean pre and post test attitude scores of students after they were exposed to the reading/writing approach. The second hypothesis stated that there would be no significant difference between the mean pre and post test essay scores of students after they were exposed to the reading/writing approach.

TABLE 1
ATTITUDE SURVEY

Presentation of Results of Pretest and Posttest of All Students

TEST	N	\bar{X}	S
Pretest	24	2.76	2.83
Posttest	24	2.72	2.78

(t = -.5 df = 23 p > .05)

TABLE 2
ESSAY SCORES

Presentation of Results of Pretest and Posttest of All Students

TEST	N	\bar{X}	S
Pretest	22	2.45	2.5
Posttest	22	2.67	2.71

(t = 3.04 df = 21 p < .05)

Discussion of Results

The author of this study found the results for the semantic differential to be surprising and interesting on the first hypothesis. Twenty-four students took the pretest for attitudes towards the reading/writing approach

with a mean of 2.76. Eleven students scored above the mean and thirteen who scored below. The standard deviation was 2.83. The same twenty-four students took the posttest for attitudes with a mean of 2.72. Twelve students scored above the mean and twelve scored below. The standard deviation was 2.78.

The t test for dependent samples was then calculated. The t score for the attitude survey was -.5. The significant level for a two-tailed test at the .05 level of significance was 2.069, therefore the null hypothesis was accepted. There was no significant change in the attitudes of the students toward the reading/writing approach.

According to the research attitudes should have changed in a positive direction due to the social interaction of the reading/writing approach through conferencing (Sager, 1986; Silvers, 1986). Attitudes could have been affected because the study was conducted during the third quarter late in the school year which may have caused attitudes towards school to become more negative in general. Students may have become fatigued and approached the activities and assignments with less enthusiasm. The author noticed that at first students were uncomfortable with sharing their writing with classmates. After the author modeled and students practiced the activity, students began to enjoy working with their partners and groups discussing and reshaping their ideas. Perhaps if the study would have been conducted over a longer period of time a positive change in attitude towards writing would have been demonstrated on the attitude survey. As well the analytical nature of the reading/writing approach may have possibly negated the social aspects.

For the second hypothesis twenty-two students wrote the essay pretest on a narrative prompt. The pretest mean was 2.45. There were eight

students who scored above the mean and sixteen who scored below. The standard deviation was 2.5. Twenty-two students took the posttest narrative writing prompt. Twelve students scored above the mean and ten scored below. The standard deviation was 2.71.

The t test for dependent was calculated with score of 3.04. The significance level for a two-tailed test at the .05 level is 2.069 which meant the null hypothesis was rejected. There was a significant change in the essay scores of the students after the reading/writing approach.

The author believes the reading/writing approach caused students to increase their writing ability because students were writing with a plan and a purpose. After students read selected stories, they were able to develop a paradigm for their own writing. By students planning carefully in the prewriting stage, no longer was drafting such a challenge, thus increasing the level of confidence students felt towards their writing. Research indicated that students who are exposed to the reading/writing approach will become more successful writers because of their schema development (Ackerman, 1991; Bazerman, 1988; Spivey, 1990). The author noticed that as students accumulated experiences with reading and writing narratives the more independent they became with their writing. Over the nine week period students developed discourse strategies that increased their confidence and ability to write a narrative essay.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of the inductive reading/writing approach on the achievement and attitude of twenty-four seventh grade students.

The first hypothesis stated that there would be no significant difference between the mean pre and post test attitude scores of students after they had been exposed to the reading/writing approach. The second hypothesis stated that there would be no significant difference between the mean pre and post test essay scores of students after they had been exposed to the reading/writing approach.

For this study, twenty-four seventh grade students were chosen based on their placement in the author's classroom. The school contained 740 students and was located in a large urban district. Two instruments were used to test the hypotheses. For the attitudes, the Emig-King Writing Attitude Scale for Students was administered as the pre and post test and for the essay scores, students were asked to write a narrative prompt. The writer used the one-group pretest-posttest design which allowed for minimal control (Issac and Michael, 1990). The experimental group participated over a nine week period in which students wrote four narrative essays. During each assignment the author employed the strategies of the reading/writing approach.

The results of the attitude survey show no significant difference for the first hypothesis in scores between the pre and post test results. Students demonstrated a slight change in the negative direction in their attitudes

towards writing. The results for the second hypothesis show that students made a significant gain in essay scores rejecting the hypothesis.

Conclusions

The experimental group as a whole did demonstrate both positive and negative results. Attitudes among students appeared to drop as the study progressed. Reasons for this may stem from two areas. First, the school year was coming to a close which could have caused a decrease in motivation. Thus, students had more negative feelings towards academic tasks, such as writing. Secondly, the reading/writing called for students to use higher order thinking skills, which may have been difficult for some students. As a result, writing became a more challenging activity causing attitudes to change negatively. An opportunity may exist for an increase in attitudes if activities were restructured to involve a more hands on type approach. Hopefully the more the social component of writing is explored the more students will enjoy writing. Conferencing about writing is a skill that students must learn before they can truly reap the benefits of this activity (Atwell, 1987). The nine week time frame of the study may have been too short for students to fully understand conferencing.

Essay scores among students did show a significant increase. The author feels several factors contributed. Students became aware of the processes of reading and writing which allowed them to engage in a thought process that made writing more manageable. When students were presented with a topic, they were able to determine a mode of writing and a paradigm to match. As well, maturation played a factor. With the amount of time that was devoted to writing, the author feels some positive change would have naturally occurred. Students also became more comfortable with the writing

process which enabled them to be able to compose and revise more competently. The reading/writing approach was a successful way to teach writing in terms of achievement, but has little effect on attitudes.

Recommendations

The author believes that the reading/writing approach is an effective way to produce better writing from students. If used in a middle school environment, students need to be brought into the approach slowly by reading short stories and non-fiction passages followed by discussion on organization and content. After students master that technique, they will be able to more closely examine the writing for tone, purpose, and style. To improve motivation, the author believes the use of oral storytelling and drama performed by students would help to make it more relevant and interesting. As well, it would be in excellent tie in to narrative writing.

When writing, the instructor needs to make sure the process is active and social by allowing students to conference during all stages of the writing process.

Finally, the reading material must be relevant and current trade publications that the students can understand and enjoy.

APPENDIX A

Rubric for Holistic Scoring

- 4 The writing focuses on the topic with ample supporting ideas or examples and has a logical structure. The paper conveys a sense of completeness, or wholeness. The writing demonstrates a mature command of language, including precision in word choice. With rare exceptions, sentences are complete except when fragments are used purposefully. Subject/verb agreement and verb and noun forms are generally correct. With few exceptions, the paper follows the conventions of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
- 3 The writing is generally related to the topic with adequate supporting ideas or examples, although development may be uneven. Logical order is apparent, although some lapses may occur. The paper exhibits some sense of completeness, or wholeness. Word choice is generally adequate and precise. Most sentences are complete. There may be occasional errors in subject/verb agreement and in standard forms of verbs and nouns but not enough to impede communication. The conventions of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are generally followed.
- 2 The writing demonstrates an awareness of the topic but may include extraneous or loosely related material. Some supporting ideas or examples are included but are not developed. An organizational pattern has been attempted. The paper may lack a sense of completeness, or wholeness. Vocabulary is adequate but limited, predictable, and occasionally vague. Readability is limited by errors in sentence structure, subject/verb agreement, and verb and noun forms. Knowledge of the conventions of punctuation and capitalization is demonstrated. With few exceptions, commonly used words are spelled correctly.
- 1 The writing is only slightly related to the topic, offering few supporting ideas or examples. The writing exhibits little or no evidence of an organizational pattern. Development of ideas is erratic, inadequate, or illogical. Limited or inappropriate vocabulary obscures meaning. Gross errors in sentence structure and usage impede communication. Frequent and blatant errors occur in basic punctuation and capitalization, and commonly used words are frequently misspelled.
- 0 Non-scorable. A paper may be considered non-scorable for any of the following reasons: illegible, not enough text, and flagrant disregard of the topic.

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