

THE EFFECTS OF IMPLEMENTING  
SENTENCE COMBINING INSTRUCTION ON  
EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS' WRITING

RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Purpose of the Study	
Statement of the Problem	
Hypotheses	
Significance of the Study	
Definition of Terms	
Research Procedures	
Assumptions	
Limitations	
Summary	
II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE .....	8
Environment for Successful Writing Instruction	
Grammar Issues Surrounding Writing Instruction	
Characteristics of Sentence Combining	
"Claims to Fame" of Sent. Combining Instruction	
Some Cautions to Sent. Combining Instruction	
Summary	
III. RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY .....	20
Participants	
Instrumentation	
Procedures	
Analysis of Data	
IV. FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY .....	28
V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	42
Restatement of the Problem	
Conclusions	
Recommendations	
REFERENCES .....	45

## LIST OF TABLES

1.	Contrived Writing: Experimental Group .....	29
2.	Contrived Writing: Control Group .....	29
3.	Spontaneous Writing: Experimental Group .....	30
4.	Spontaneous Writing: Control Group .....	30
5.	Overall Writing: Experimental Group .....	31
6.	Overall Writing: Control Group .....	32
7.	Composite Quotients for TOWL-2 .....	32
8.	Composite Scores: Experimental and Control Group .....	33
9.	Differences between the Experimental and Control Groups .....	34
10.	Subtest Standard Scores for the TOWL-2 .....	35
11.	Mean Scores in the Ten Skill Areas: Pretest .....	35
12.	Mean Scores in the Ten Skill Areas: Posttest .....	37
13.	Mean Scores for the Ten Skill Areas: Experimental Group .....	38
14.	Mean Scores for the Ten Skill Areas: Control Group .....	39

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose of the Study

The ability to effectively communicate with each other is a joy; frustration comes with the lack of this ability. Oftentimes, the sent message is open to several interpretations. When the message is oral, the body language and the pitch of the voice help to limit the number of interpretations of the deep meaning. When the message is written, transcription and composition can help or hinder the delivery and reception of the message. For beginning writers, student writers, it is too much to ask of them to spell correctly and punctuate accurately, which is transcription, and compose effectively all at once. How can a writing teacher focus on the growth of transcription and composition without frustrating or overburdening the student? Sentence combining can help.

Sentence combining exercises can provide the correct spelling of words that are being used, while at the same time, can also positively impact vocabulary growth. The deep structure, deep meaning, is also provided. Using the kernel sentences the teacher provides, students are manipulating language in a concrete fashion, much as students in a mathematics class or a science class manipulates "things" to reach a greater understanding of a concept. These exercises afford students opportunities to

explore various ways of saying the same thing with different words, to investigate the beauty of language, to search for voice in their writing. The format of sentence combining which allows for a variety of ways to say something, not just one way, provides a non-threatening environment. Students share their varied combined sentences and receive assurance that their sentences are "on target" or gentle instruction as to why their sentences "missed." The students discover for themselves which combined sentences are more appropriate and why. Students are able to separate their rightness as a person from the rightness of their writing.

Sentence combining can help each student to reach that student's ability to understand and then apply what is understood. One planned lesson can meet the needs of a heterogeneous class. These exercises integrate all language skills in the classroom; research has shown not only a positive influence on writing but also in reading comprehension.

The traditional practice of how to develop better writers by drilling students in knowing the eight parts of speech, underlining the simple subject once and the simple predicate twice, and using various textbook exercises has long been held. Hillocks' 1987 study of different research involving the various techniques of writing instruction pointed out the error of this traditional

practice. Sentence combining exercises provided one of the greatest growth factors for students as writers; whereas, traditional grammar instruction demonstrated a negative effect upon writing.

Obvious questions arise. What is sentence combining? Why does sentence combining work? How does a teacher incorporate sentence combining in daily teaching? How does sentence combining relate to whole language instruction? It is hoped that this study will lead to at least partial answers for as many of these questions as possible.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of sentence combining on eighth grade students' writings.

#### Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study include the following:

1. There will be no significant gains between the pretest and posttest scores of experimental and control groups on the TOWL-2 (Test of Written Language) contrived subtests following sentence combining instruction.
2. There will be no significant gains between the pretest and posttest scores of experimental and control groups on the TOWL-2 spontaneous writing subtest following sentence combining instruction.



### Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the results of the study will contribute to the teacher a means of improving students' writing that integrate many language art skills in a format that will make use of the limited resource of time.

### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions of terms will apply:

Contextual spelling. Contextual spelling refers to the number of correctly spelled words in a written story.

Contextual style. Contextual style refers to the number of instances in which different punctuation and capitalization rules are used.

Contextual vocabulary. Contextual vocabulary refers to vocabulary ability by counting long and unduplicated words.

Contrived writing. Contrived writing is the ability to write using contrived formats such as multiple choice or fill in the blank.

Decombining. Decombining is the process in which a sentence that is composed of multiple ideas that are either embedded in phrases or stated in a compound/complex sentence is broken down into kernel sentences.

Kernel sentences. A kernel sentence is a simple sentence made of a single thought.

Logical sentences. Logical sentences refer to the student's ability to rewrite illogical sentences so they make sense.

Sentence combining. Sentence combining is an activity in which students are presented kernel sentences from a decombined sentence and are asked to recombine the kernel sentences into one grammatically correct sentence without altering the meaning.

Spelling. Spelling refers to the ability to apply spelling generalizations in dictated sentences.

Spontaneous writing. Spontaneous writing is the ability to write a composed essay that is a response to a prompt.

Style. Style refers to the ability of the student to apply capitalization and punctuation rules.

Syntactic maturity. Syntactic maturity refers to the number of words written in a story that is used in a grammatically correct sentence.

Thematic maturity. Thematic maturity refers to mentioning predetermined elements in a story in response from the picture prompt.

Vocabulary. Vocabulary refers to the student's ability to write a sentence using the stimulus word that demonstrates knowledge of the word without writing a definition or resorting to writing about obvious features of

the word such as how many letters the word has or what part of speech that the word might be.

### Research Procedures

This study was implemented from mid-March through Mid-May 1995 using eighth grade classes from a middle school that uses methods normally identified with whole language instruction. The school was located in a central Ohio middle class neighborhood. A total of ten students formed the experimental group with five males and five females having the same teacher and sentence combining instruction. The control group consisted of five males and five females but experienced a different teacher and no sentence combining instruction. Instruction in both groups involved the same types of instruction and materials with the exception of sentence combining exercises for the experimental group.

### Assumptions

The major assumption of this study is that the only contributing factor of difference between the control group and the experimental group was the experimental group receiving instruction in sentence combining.

### Limitations

Possible limitations of this study exist. There might not have been enough students involved in order to make valid conclusion. Doing the study from mid-March to mid-May

might not have been enough time for students to alter their academic behavior.

### Summary

Chapter II will review the literature on sentence combining and summarize the support for this study. The review will examine Mellon's, O'Hare's and Strong's work in the specifics of sentence combining. It will also investigate current thought as to how people write, how ideas are generated, and how teachers can help in the writing process.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

#### Environment for Successful Writing Instruction

A person baking bread knows that there is more than having all the ingredients in their proper proportions and the oven at the right temperature and bread pans of the finest material. It takes strength, practice, and perseverance. To create an environment for successful writing instruction also takes more than some handbooks, paper, pencils, students, and teachers. Atmosphere must be a deliberate creation, and it is created by the teacher.

A conducive environment for writing has several important elements. One obvious element is the teacher's knowledge of how writing can be encouraged. Harste, Short, and Burke (1988) in Creating Classrooms for Authors stated that the authoring cycle using the writing process encourages expression. The authoring cycle is a process that develops students' awareness of what takes place during writing. Student writers engage in prewriting activities such as brainstorming, webbing, reading, researching, free writing, etc. This expenditure of time to develop ideas that prewriting takes is one that has the most profound effect upon written expression (Taylor &

Romich, 1992). Some teachers feel that so much curriculum has to be covered that time to talk about an idea or explore an idea is a waste of time. This expenditure of time helps the students to grow comfortable with an idea and feel empowered to write about an idea. That is an admirable empowerment to give students. Also connected with the authoring cycle is peer editing. Peer editing allows students to interact with each other in a controlled situation where they can share ideas on how to improve each other's writing, congratulate each other on what was done well, and have fun while completing an assignment.

Another element in an environment for successful writing instruction is the open mind a teacher must keep when working with students' writing. There is no one way to write anything, but many (Elbow, 1985; Murray, 1990). This may seem chaotic to an outsider or a fellow professional entrenched in another teaching technique. Students are not static beings. Students seeking assistance from each other as well as the teacher, learning to trust their decisions on how to communicate effectively, and taking ownership of their work are essential elements in promoting literacy. Promoting and providing an environment conducive to writing is vital (Atwell, 1987; Graves 1990; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988).

This open minded attitude helps students and teachers learn from each other (Atwell, 1987; Caulkins, 1986; Graves, 1990; Murray, 1990; Rief, 1992). Mutual trust is built when a student knows the teacher respects an offered work or offered opinion. The ability to learn from each other increases the quality of the writing, for each student learns the techniques of writing faster. Learning faster then leads to trust of each partner's opinion and work. A cycle is then built that further enhances the environment for successful writing instruction.

A teacher is also responsible to keep current with writing research. A study of research helps the individual teacher to know what to do in writing instruction, and it also helps the students and fellow teachers around them (Strong, 1986). A knowledgeable person is oftentimes a confident person who is ready to listen to another's ideas and is ready to share expertise with others. This kind of person knows how students write and knows how to create an environment favorable to writing.

#### Grammar Issues Surrounding Writing Instruction

Traditional writing instruction as implemented in public schools has been and still is included in courses labeled "English." Such traditional means of teaching grammar, i.e. textbook usage or diagramming sentences, is

not supported by research based evidence (Hillocks, 1987; Mellon, 1969; O'Hare, 1973). The learning of rules in isolation does not help written expression. Learning in isolation refers to how students are exposed to writing instruction. Traditional methods would have students learn a set of rules, such as punctuation rules, then approach the writing assignment. On the other hand, current writing instruction techniques would see the meaning of the sentence as the determiner of punctuation (Smith, 1982). The student writer understands the message and uses punctuation to help the transfer of the message to the reader.

Many researchers of writing see grammar as consisting of two strands: the surface grammar and the semantic grammar. Semantic grammar is the ordering of the subject, verb, and complement. Semantic grammar is part of transformational grammar. Transformational grammar is a theory that describes the manner in which thought and language is related (Smith, 1982). This transformational grammar is productive. It generates sentence structure from meaning. This view of grammar does not support the study or acquisition of skills in isolation. A student will not learn to write by doing textbook exercises but by writing to develop meaning of an expressed idea.

How then does a student learn to develop meaning in writing without worrying about surface grammar? Yet an



understanding of surface grammar will allow clearer meaning of the written message. One grammar should not replace the other. Both have their place. Sentence combining exercises allows the student to see the relationship and importance of both. Sentence combining also fosters practice in the elements of the writing process (Strong, 1994).

#### Characteristics of Sentence Combining

Sentence combining does not require special equipment or training for the teacher to be implemented. It is an instructional means of manipulating the meaning of a sentence in a more concrete fashion than traditional methods of teaching sentence writing. To clarify the previous statement, a more detailed example follows using one of the sentences John Kennedy spoke at his Presidential Inaugural Address on Jan. 20, 1961, "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." A traditional approach could have the student identify what type of sentence it is. Then the student could further examine the subject and the predicate, label the complements, isolate the phrases, or even diagram it. In contrast, when the instructional technique of sentence combining is used, the teacher would break down the sentence into kernel sentences: 1. There are poor people in a free society; 2. There are rich

people in a free society; 3. The poor people outnumber the rich people in a free society; 4. A free society is to help people; and 5. If a free society can't help the many, it can't save the few.

Without seeing the original sentence yet, each student would be asked to recombine the kernel sentences into one sentence without changing the meaning of the kernel sentences. After each student has had the time to recombine the sentence, students then would work in groups listening to each other's version. The teacher would move from one group to another listening and analyzing common problems that may have occurred as well as what is being done well. Then as a whole class activity, the teacher would ask for some students to share their recombined sentences. This would allow for instruction of punctuation, capitalization, and subject and verb agreement as a natural extension of clarifying meaning as well as forming an elaborated sentence reflecting a mature or sophisticated style that allows clearer communication between writer and reader (Mellon, 1969; O'Hare, 1973; Strong, 1994). This type of instruction becomes more than the placement of free modifiers since a study of sentence structure would also have students analyze the mood or tone the writer wants to convey (Broadhead, 1985). In written language there are three parties to every transaction - writer, reader, and the text. The text is

pivotal (Smith, 1982). Sentence combining activities allow for these three parties to interact more than do traditional techniques of writing instruction.

The preceding description illustrates the basic mechanics of sentence combining. However, as the meaning of the sentence is more important than the "labelable" parts of a sentence so too is sentence combining more than recombining of kernel sentences. A teacher who incorporates sentence combining in the classroom must understand the nuances of language construction in order to develop meaningful instruction. Sentence combining is not an activity for students in K-3, but by grade 4 students have "full competence repertoires" (Mellon, 1969). Students at this age have had enough language experience in their listening, speaking, and reading lives that they are ready to "play" with language. They are ready to experiment with a written message that uses different sentences to convey the same meaning. When teachers construct acceptable routines, two conditions must be met: 1) the teacher knows the desired outcome, and 2) the format taught will facilitate student's success in reaching the outcome (Mellon, 1969).

Writing should be connected with the literature a student is reading (Murray, 1990). No one is likely to ask a student to compose a poem about nature without first reading other poet's poems about nature. Sentence

combining then should use literature that is being read by the student (Strong, 1994). Taking a paragraph from the literature being read allows the student to hear a professional writer's tone (Strong, 1994). While the meaning of what is in the text is more important than the teaching of skills in isolation, this does not mean sentence combining is to replace normal activities in reading and writing (Mellon, 1969).

Sentence combining can also be part of the instruction in the revision step within the writing process. It is an activity that complements what is being taught without taking away great amounts of class time. It can especially work well when the teacher uses a problem sentence from the student's writing, decombines the sentence into kernel sentences, and then has the student recombine it. This gives the student a chance to hear the sentence recombined in several ways and to choose the preferred one (Elbow, 1985).

#### "Claims to Fame" of Sentence Combining Instruction

Many positive outcomes have been linked with sentence combining instruction. Overall gains have been reported from a sentence combining study that also found that students scoring in the lower half of a pretest made the greatest gains (Evans, Venetozzi, Bundrick, & McWilliams, 1988). Growth in sentence maturity is normal, but normal does not mean optimal growth (Mellon, 1969; O'Hare, 1973).

Sentence combining gets the student closer to optimal growth.

Some outcomes are more qualitative: empathy for a new or inexperienced writer could be a result of sentence combining instruction. With all the choices a writer has to convey the meaning of an idea, "bewilderment is the natural state of the writer" (Broadhead, 1985). This thought refers back to developing a conducive environment for writing instruction. A teacher needs to understand what the student writer feels and how the writer struggles to get the message across.

Sentence combining positively affects sentence maturity, and there is a positive correlation between sentence maturity and reading comprehension. When sentence maturity shows growth so does reading comprehension (Evans, Venetozzi, Bundrick, & McWilliams, 1988). Therefore, sentence combining therefore positively impacts reading comprehension. Sentence combining instruction helps liberate the "passive syntactic abilities" into tools of writing (Nutter & Safran, 1984). Terms students have learned such as participle phrases, appositives, subject-verb agreement, etc. are applied in actual writing experiences in such a fashion that the student can see the direct benefits of being able to manipulate these "things."

Another area in which sentence combining instruction is beneficial is resource expenditures of time and money. Sentence combining instruction integrates all language skills in the classroom (Nutter & Safran, 1984; Strong, 1994). Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are used, to provide an activity that uses class time in an efficient and effective way. Sentence combining instruction requires no special materials (Nutter & Safran, 1984). There is not a special textbook or expensive program to use. It does not require school board adoption nor is it likely to offend any conservative groups, assuming that controversial literature is not used.

Sentence combining would be particularly useful for the needs of middle school and high school students. Students at this age are reading and writing a variety of genre that has a variety of syntactic styles. The students could explore similar meanings expressed in different ways (Broadhead, 1985; Evans, Venetozzi, Bundrick, & McWilliams, 1988). Though these benefits are linked with sentence combining instruction, it is not a panacea for writing problems many students exhibit.

#### Some Cautions to Sentence Combining Instruction

As mentioned before, sentence combining is a revising activity for the most part; therefore, it should not be

the total focus of writing instruction (Elbow, 1985). It is only one tool in writing instruction.

The type of sentences students write affect the voice of the writing. The monotonous use of simple sentence followed by a simple sentence followed by another simple sentence and so forth is to be avoided. So too a long complex sentence followed by a long complex sentence followed by another is also to be avoided. A complex sentence is not better than a simple one, nor is a longer sentence better than a shorter one (Broadhead, 1985). Complex sentences with embedded phrases can cloud the meaning of the sentence. To teach these structures in isolation or out of context just so students can use them can hurt student's writing (Horning, 1985).

Another area to be avoided while using sentence combining instruction is error-oriented teaching. When guiding the student in the correct placement of phrases and subordination of ideas, the teacher needs to understand that the growth of sentence structure may be retarded or otherwise constrained by error-oriented teaching (Mellon, 1969). Errors are best dealt with in private conversations between student and teacher and by direct explanation and brief oral drills that do not involve grammatical rules or terminology (Atwell, 1987; Mellon, 1969; Murray, 1990; Rief, 1992).

### Summary

The teacher's knowledge is important, but also the ability to apply that knowledge to create an environment that is favorable to writing instruction is vital. The teacher needs to be a responsible professional who keeps current on research and implements techniques of writing instruction that help students to obtain desired outcomes as set by the curriculum. For a teacher to accept and implement traditional writing instruction techniques is not founded on fact-based research. Good, sound instruction comes from an understanding of what potential sentence combining instruction can offer as well as understanding the weaknesses or pitfalls that exist in sentence combining instruction.



## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of sentence combining on eighth grade students' writings. Information was gathered from eighth graders attending a middle school in northwest central Ohio. The middle school was the only middle school facility in the school district. By September 1994, more than 3,000 students were enrolled in the total school system with 727 students attending the middle school with 257 of them being eighth grade students.

The community has seen a rapid change of moving from a rural community to a small city. By December 1994 ten new housing projects were in different planning stages. Information collected by the state of Ohio listed the community as one of the fastest growing community in Ohio.

#### Participants

The subjects of this study involved a total of twenty students divided evenly between the experimental and control groups with each group consisting of five females and five males. The age range of the two groups was thirteen to fifteen years.

The teachers of both groups had been working together for five years, and they shared similar teaching styles and similar teaching philosophies. Both had attended workshops, seminars, and graduate level courses together,

as well as conducting seminars together. The control group's teacher had taught ten years, while the teacher of the experimental group had taught nineteen years.

### Instrumentation

The Test of Written Language-2, hereafter referred to as TOWL-2, was given to the control and experimental groups. The TOWL-2 is a writing test that was designed for research in the field of writing (Hammill & Larsen, 1988). It has two sections, spontaneous and contrived, and two forms that could be used as a pretest and a posttest.

The Spontaneous Writing section is a pictorial prompt to which students write for fifteen minutes after the examiner has read the directions to the students. This section consists of five subtests that measure thematic maturity, contextual vocabulary, syntactic maturity, contextual spelling, and contextual style. The syntactic maturity subtest measures the student's application of sentence combining instruction.

The second part of the TOWL-2 is the Contrived Writing section which measures writing skills in an objective format. The second section consists of five subtests that measure vocabulary, spelling, style, logical sentences, and sentence combining. It allows the examiner to measure the strengths and weaknesses in students'

writing. The authors of the TOWL-2 recommend that all the scores be used to make major decisions rather than just one subtest.

The scores are reported as standard scores which allows the TOWL-2 scores to be compared with other standardized test scores. The TOWL-2 was designed so that three scores could be obtained: Spontaneous Writing, Contrived Writing, and a Composite score of both sections.

#### Normative Procedures of the TOWL-2

The TOWL-2 test was given to 2,216 students living in nineteen states, Ohio being one, between March and December 1987. Examination of the various demographic data shows that the sample population used to norm the TOWL-2 is also representative of the participants in this study. The authors of the test used an equal number of males and females which matches the make-up of the control and experimental groups. The TOWL-2 was normed using 66% city residents and 34% rural residents. The small city involved in this study with a decreasing rural population parallels this changing situation. The authors of the test also identified race as a normative factor with 83% being white, 13% being black, and 3% described as other. With the community's school population being over 95% white, this factor seems appropriate. The normed population age ranged from seven to seventeen years of

age, and the students of the control and experimental groups fell within this range.

#### Reliability of the TOWL-2

Hammill and Larsen (1988), authors of TOWL-2, examined three sources of test error reliability: interscorer, content sampling, and time sampling. They found the measurement of error for each of these types and then they averaged the three scores for an overall average. In all subtests' instances, the averaged coefficients exceeded .80, the minimum for acceptable reliability. The average score for the Contrived Writing section was .96; the Spontaneous Writing section's average score was .94; and the Composite average was .95.

#### Test Validity of TOWL-2

According to Hammill and Larsen three types of validity are pertinent to the TOWL-2 (1988): content validity, criterion-related validity, and construct validity. They viewed validity as an on-going process and examined the TOWL-2 through many lenses before claiming the TOWL-2 to be valid. TOWL-2 scores appear to reflect both high and low student ability as well as strengths and weaknesses in students' writing.

#### Procedures

The independent variable in this study was sentence combining instruction. The study was conducted to

determine if this form of instruction would impact eighth grade students' writing ability. The experimental group was given this instruction while a control group received the same content and used the same literature, but they did not receive sentence combining instruction.

Sentence combining instruction took the following format. From the literature which the students were reading, a paragraph was chosen by the teacher. This paragraph was enough in advance of the students' reading that the students could not rely on memory as to how this paragraph was structured. The teacher decombed the paragraph into kernel sentences. This decombed paragraph contained multiple sentences that required more than one day's work. The teacher asked the students to recombine one or two sentence daily, depending on the complexity of the sentences and the students' understanding of the text or their abilities to deal with embedded phrases. After the students had had a chance to recombine the kernel sentences into one sentence, students then worked in small groups of three or four and shared their recombined sentences. While the students worked in small groups, the teacher circulated in the classroom to listen for common problems and to spot possible examples of student work that demonstrated understanding of writing.

The teacher brought the attention of the whole class together to share examples of other students' work by placing the sentences on an overhead. This allowed the teacher to discuss how to choose appropriate wording, how to avoid misplaced modifiers, how to combine sentences without creating a run-on, and how to use punctuation and capitalization rules. These daily exercises allowed brief but re-occurring discussions of writing concerns. The students manipulated embedded phrases, introductory phrases or clauses or created compound subjects, verbs, and/or complements allowing the students to practice with ideas of construction they had not considered before. This brought to a conscious level sentence variety and syntactic maturity.

One example follows to illustrate how instruction was implemented. This example comes from Brian Jacques' 1986 novel Redwall.

Cluny sneered and turned on his heel. Followed by Redtooth, he stamped out. On the stairs between Cavern Hole and Great Hall he stopped and turned, his cold voice echoing between both chambers, "Then die, all of you: every male, female, and young one. You have refused my terms. Now you will suffer the punishment of Cluny. You will beg on your knees for death to come swiftly, but I shall make your torment loud and long before you die!"

Sentences number 5 and 6 within the passage remained as the author wrote them since these two sentences did not

lend themselves to simpler kernel sentences. At no time were the students taught that simple sentences were inferior and that longer sentences were superior. What students could see through this instruction is that a variety of sentence lengths and types could lead to writing with an interesting voice. The following sentences were presented to students for recombining:

- 1.1 Cluny sneered.
- 1.2 Cluny turned on his heel.
  
- 2.1 Cluny stamped out.
- 2.2 Redtooth followed him.
  
- 3.1 Cluny was on the stairs between Cavern Hall and Great Hall.
- 3.2 He stopped.
- 3.3 He turned.
- 3.4 His cold voice echoed between both chambers.
  
- 4.1 "All of you die."
- 4.2 "All the men will die."
- 4.3 "All the women will die."
- 4.4 "All the young ones will die."
  
5. "You have refused my terms."
6. "Now you will suffer the punishment of Cluny."
  
- 7.1 "You will beg for death to come swiftly."
- 7.2 "You will be on your knees."
- 7.3 "I shall make your torment loud before you die!"
- 7.4 "I shall make your torment long before you die!"

After the students finished recombining the sentences they read how Jacques wrote his paragraph. A class discussion followed as to why the author chose the method he used compared to other methods that could have been used.

### Analysis of Data

A grid was made listing students separately from the control and experimental groups with the further separation of male and female results. Vertical columns were headed with the names of the subtests from the two sections of the TOWL-2. The pretest scores were listed in the first column with the posttest scores appearing in the second column. From this information, a group mean was calculated for each testing situation: Contrived score, Spontaneous score, and a Composite score. Pretest and posttest scores were compared to ascertain if a significant difference existed between control and experimental groups. Those results are presented in Chapter IV.



## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

The problem of this study was to determine possible effects of sentence combining instruction on eighth grade students' writing. Both the control group and the experimental group each consisted of ten subjects. Tested areas included vocabulary development, punctuation usage, spelling growth, capitalization usage, sentence structure, and sentence logic or meaning. The testing situation included a contrived or objective testing that corresponded with students' ability to recall and demonstrate their body of knowledge. The testing also included a spontaneous evaluative element that demonstrated students' ability to apply knowledge of composition skills in a situation that had students writing to a picture prompt. This chapter reports the findings in these areas.

The TOWL-2 (Test of Written Language-2) was used to obtain standard scores for comparison purposes. Form A of the TOWL-2 was used for pretesting purposes and Form B of the TOWL-2 was used for posttesting.

Table 1 shows the Contrived Writing mean standard scores of the pretests and posttests of the experimental group as well as a more detailed view of gender performance. The experimental group consisted of ten subjects: five females and five males.

Table 6

Overall Writing: Control Group

Grouping	Pretest mean	Posttest mean	t-score
Both	98.2	92.0	1.34
Female	103.2	96.4	1.01
Male	93.2	87.6	0.88

Results of this analysis showed no significant difference in Overall Writing for the control group or gender comparisons.

This Overall Writing score allows the standard scores to be translated into a quotient score that affords a "normed" comparison to others who have taken the test. Table 7 shows how the experimental and the control groups compare to others who have taken the TOWL-2 (Hammill & Larsen, 1988).

Table 7

Composite Quotients for TOWL-2

Quotient	Description
131 - 165	Very superior
121 - 130	Superior
111 - 120	Above average
90 - 110	Average
80 - 89	Below average

Quotient	Description
70 - 79	Poor
35 - 69	Very Poor

Table 8 shows the composite quotients of the experimental and control groups by using Table 7 to help in the analyzing of the quotients.

Table 8

Composite Scores: Experimental and Control Groups

Grouping	Quotient		Description	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Experimental: Both	110	119	Ave.	Above Ave.
			Ave.	Superior
			Above Ave.	Above Ave.
Control:	99	94	Ave.	Ave.
			Ave.	Ave.
			Ave.	Ave.

The results of this form of evaluation allow a comparison that appears to be easy to understand as to how well the subjects did compared to another population.

Table 9 shows any difference between the experimental and control groups' mean standard scores at pretest and posttest evaluations on the Contrived and Spontaneous subtests and then compares the Overall mean scores.

Table 9

Differences between the Experimental and Control Groups

Test	Experimental	Control	t-score
Contrived			
Pretest	56.9	52.7	1.33
Posttest	64.9	54.1	2.01
Spontaneous			
Pretest	57.6	45.5	3.60
Posttest	62.8	37.9	4.80
Overall			
Pretest	114.5	98.2	2.86
Posttest	127.0	92.0	6.32

The results of this breakdown show there was a significant differences at pretest evaluations between the experimental and control groups: Spontaneous Writing (  $t= 3.6$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ) and Overall Writing (  $t= 2.86$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ) with no significant difference in Contrived Writing. At posttest evaluations significant differences increased in Spontaneous Writing (  $t= 4.80$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ) and Overall Writing (  $t= 6.32$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ). A significant difference was noted at posttest-time in Contrived Writing (  $t= 2.01$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ).

Table 10 shows guidelines for interpreting the subscores of the skill areas in Contrived Writing and

Spontaneous Writing subtests on the TOWL-2 (Hammill & Larsen, 1988). A score of 10 is the mean score with the standard deviation set at 3. Standard scores can be compared from one subtest to another. This provides the best tool for evaluating specific strengths or weaknesses across the ten skill areas.

Table 10

Subtest Standard Scores on the TOWL-2

Standard score	Description
17 - 20	Very superior
15 - 16	Superior
13 - 14	Above average
8 - 12	Average
6 - 7	Below average
4 - 5	Poor
1 - 3	Very poor

Table 11 shows the mean scores for each of the ten skill areas measured by the TOWL-2 pretest for the experimental and control groups. This provides a clearer picture of beginning differences between the groups.

Table 11

Mean Scores in the Ten Skill Areas: Pretest

Skill Area	Experimental	Control	t-score
Vocabulary	10.8	8.6	2.65

Skill Area	Experimental	Control	t-score
Spelling	11.1	10.7	0.39
Style	12.1	10.4	1.94
Logical sentences	12.1	11.8	0.25
Sentence combining	11.0	11.2	0.18
Thematic maturity	13.0	12.4	0.44
Contextual vocabulary	10.5	8.8	1.55
Syntactic maturity	10.2	9.1	1.06
Contextual spelling	9.8	8.0	2.02
Contextual style	12.8	8.2	3.14

Results show significant differences in vocabulary (  $t= 2.65$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ), style (  $t= 1.94$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ), contextual spelling (  $t= 2.02$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ), and contextual style (  $t= 3.14$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ). Differences in the skill areas of spelling, logical sentences, sentence combining, thematic maturity, contextual vocabulary, and syntactic maturity were not found to be significant.

Table 12 shows the mean scores for each of the ten skill areas measured by the TOWL-2 posttest for the experimental and control groups. This provides information to evaluate the differences between the two groups at the end of the study.

Table 12

Mean Scores of the Ten Skill Areas: Posttest

Skill Area	Experimental	Control	t-score
Vocabulary	11.8	9.7	2.67
Spelling	11.3	11.0	0.66
Style	11.7	10.1	1.53
Logical sentences	14.9	11.1	5.33
Sentence combining	15.0	12.2	5.06
Thematic maturity	13.5	8.4	2.03
Contextual vocabulary	11.7	8.0	4.30
Syntactic maturity	12.4	6.8	4.31
Contextual spelling	11.8	5.8	4.57
Contextual style	13.4	8.9	3.67

Results show a significant differences in vocabulary ( $t= 2.67$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p < .05$  ), logical sentences ( $t= 5.33$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p <.05$  ), sentence combining ( $t= 5.06$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p <.05$ ), thematic maturity ( $t= 2.03$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p <.05$ ), contextual vocabulary ( $t= 4.30$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p <.05$ ), syntactic maturity ( $t= 4.31$ ,  $df =18$ ,  $p <.05$ ), contextual spelling ( $t= 4.57$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p <.05$ ), and contextual style ( $t= 3.67$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p <.05$ ). Differences in the skill areas of spelling and style were not found to be significant.

Table 13 shows the pretest and posttest mean scores of the experimental group in the ten skill areas. This allows

for the evaluation for any significant changes in the students' academic behavior.

Table 13

Mean Scores for the Ten Skill Areas: Experimental Group

Skill Area	Pretest	Posttest	t-score
Vocabulary	10.8	11.8	-1.21
Spelling	11.1	11.3	-0.25
Style	12.1	11.7	0.41
Logical sentences	12.1	14.9	-3.01
Sentence combining	11.0	15.0	-4.98
Thematic maturity	13.0	13.5	0.40
Contextual vocabulary	10.5	11.7	-1.16
Syntactic maturity	10.2	12.4	-1.66
Contextual spelling	9.8	11.8	1.58
Contextual style	12.8	13.4	0.40

Outcomes show a significant difference in the skill areas of logical sentences ( $t = -3.01$ ,  $df = 18$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and in sentence combining ( $t = -4.98$ ,  $df = 18$ ,  $p < .05$ ). No significant differences were noted in the skill areas of vocabulary, spelling, style, thematic maturity, contextual vocabulary, syntactic maturity, contextual spelling, and contextual style.

Table 14 shows the pretest and posttest mean scores of the control group in the ten skill areas. This allows for



the evaluation for any significant changes in students' academic behavior.

Table 14

Mean Scores for the Ten Skill Areas: Control Group

Skill Area	Pretest	Posttest	t-score
Vocabulary	8.6	9.7	-1.39
Spelling	10.7	11.0	-0.37
Style	10.4	10.1	0.32
Logical sentences	11.8	11.1	0.66
Sentence combining	11.2	12.2	-1.05
Thematic maturity	12.4	8.4	2.63
Contextual vocabulary	8.8	8.0	0.86
Syntactic maturity	9.1	6.8	2.29
Contextual spelling	8.0	5.8	2.31
Contextual style	8.2	8.9	-0.61

Results show a significant difference in thematic maturity ( $t= 2.63$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p <.05$  ), syntactic maturity ( $t= 2.29$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p <.05$  ), and contextual spelling ( $t= 2.31$ ,  $df= 18$ ,  $p <.05$  ). Differences in the skill areas of vocabulary, spelling, style, logical sentences, sentence combining, contextual vocabulary, and contextual style were not found to be significant.

### Summary

In examining the results in Table 1 the experimental group made significant gains on the Contrived Writing subtest of the TOWL-2. A t-score of  $t \geq 1.734$  or  $\leq -1.734$  was the criteria for determining significant gains when  $df=18$  and  $p < .05$ . A t-score of  $-2.51$  met that criteria. Table 3 shows no significant gain in the experimental group on the Spontaneous Writing subtest of the TOWL-2 using the same criteria as stated for the Contrived Writing, while table 5 shows a significant gain for the experimental group in their Overall Writing with a t-score of  $-1.93$ .

Using  $t \geq 1.734$  or  $\leq -1.734$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $p < .05$ , the control shows a significant change on the Spontaneous Writing of the TOWL-2. Table 4 shows the control group's posttest mean score changed downward 7.6 points resulting in a t-score of  $1.96$ . The Contrived Writing and the Overall Writing scores did not change significantly.

If words were to be used to describe the changes in the experimental group's Overall Writing, Table 8 shows the subjects move from "average" on the pretest to "above average" on the posttest. In contrast, the control group stayed the same at the level of "average."

The TOWL-2 has ten skill areas that are tested and then strengths and weaknesses can be assessed. Table 11 shows the significant differences between the experimental and control groups. The experimental group was stronger in four

areas: vocabulary, style, contextual spelling, and contextual style. Table 12 shows the significant differences between the two groups' mean scores at posttest time. The experimental group shows significant differences from the control group in eight skill areas: vocabulary, logical sentences, sentence combining, thematic maturity, contextual vocabulary, syntactic maturity, contextual spelling, and contextual style. Table 13 shows the significant growth for the experimental group in logical sentences and sentence combining. Table 14 shows the control group has significant decreases in three areas: thematic maturity, syntactic maturity, and contextual spelling.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Restatement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine if sentence combining instruction could affect eighth grade students' writing. The underlying hope was to find a time efficient, inexpensive way of positively impacting students' composition skills.

#### Conclusions

Students' writing is positively influenced by sentence combining instruction. After two months of sentence combining instruction, students in the experimental group grew significantly in overall writing as measured by the TOWL-2 as well as the skill area of logical sentences and sentence combining. Of equal importance of the growth for the experimental group is the fact the experimental group did not significantly recede in any skill area. The control group lost significantly in three skill areas and in the Spontaneous Writing subtest.

The implementing of the sentence combining instruction costs monetarily the teacher, the students, or the school system nothing. This instruction technique makes use of pre-existing resources. It uses the literature the school system has already adopted, requiring no additional purchases of expensive programs. It dovetails nicely with the whole language approach to reading and writing. This

technique though requires time expenditure for class preparation. The teacher must examine the literature for suitable passages that will decombine and readily recombine for meaningful instruction. The best learning or discussions came from passages that lent themselves to several ways of recombining. Finding the right passage for instruction takes time as well as preparing the kernel sentences. It would be easier to use a prepared program such as a textbook. Though it would be easier to use a textbook or a prepared program, sentence combining instruction implemented as part of the writing process or writing workshop works.

#### Recommendations

Sentence combining instruction should be part of the "bag-of-tricks" a writing teacher uses. The results of this two month study were positive enough that a whole year approach should be examined.

Several teachers working together could ease the preparation time "hassle." Sharing preparation time responsibilities could insure that sentence combining instruction would be used. Otherwise, time would not allow the teacher to prepare for the sentence combining activities and grade other writings.

A formal survey study should be conducted with students who receive sentence combining instruction. On an informal

basis during this study, students were noted to be enjoying themselves and were relaxed and more confident in their writing. During peer conferencing students were overheard incorporating appositives, discussing parallel construction, and offering ideas for different sentence structures to make the writing "more interesting." A formal survey could show how students perceive their growth as writers. In the final analysis, students' perception of themselves as writers is as important as the teacher's perception of their growth and maybe more important than a normed, standardized test results. Test results give only numbers; whereas, students' perceptions about themselves as writers cause them to be writers. The ability to communicate effectively is the ultimate goal.

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