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Publication date

2008

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

SIG Writing 2008: program & abstracts

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

van Gelderen, A., & Oostdam, R. (2008). Cognitive and metacognitive components of L2 writing instruction: a classroom experiment. In A. Wegelin, & D. Alamargot (Eds.), *SIG Writing 2008: program & abstracts* (pp. 88). Lund University.
<http://conference.sol.lu.se/fileadmin/conferenceFiles/sigwriting-2008/docs/sigabstracts.pdf>

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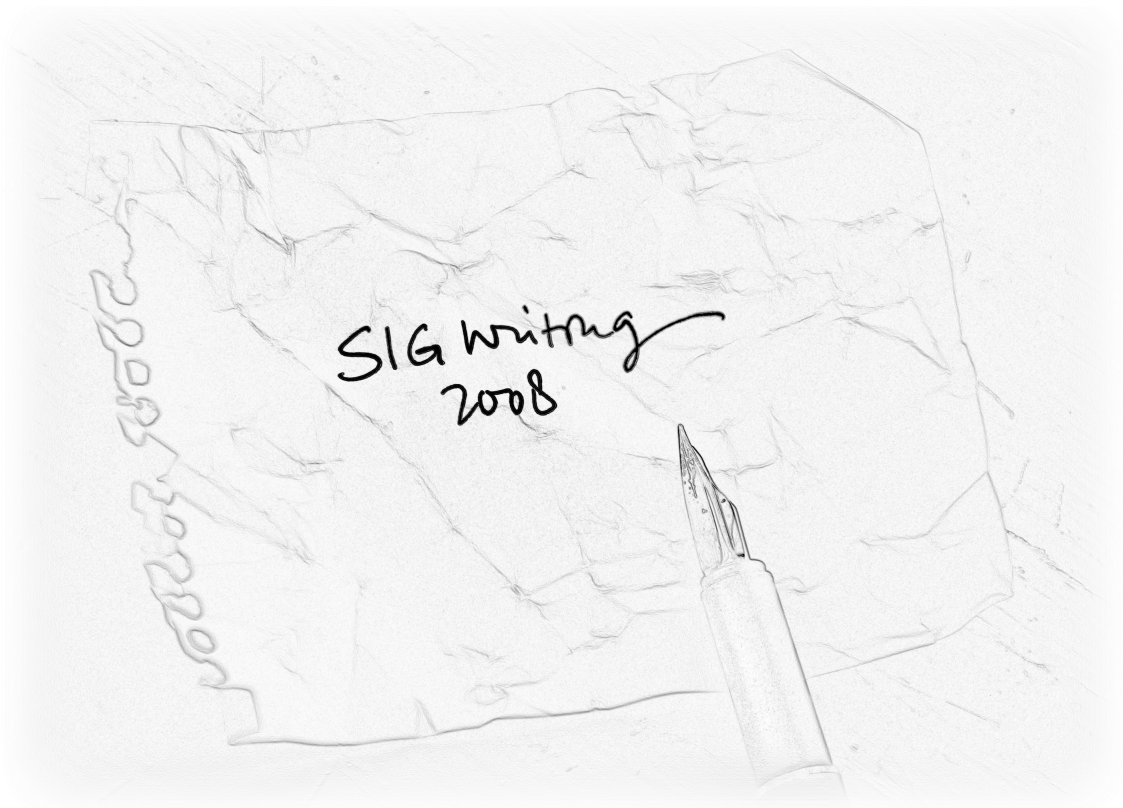
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11:TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE EARLI SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP ON WRITING

SIG Writing 2008 Program & Abstracts



Lund University
June 11–13 2008

Cognitive and metacognitive components of L2 writing instruction: a classroom experiment

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Written text production is characterised in several theories as a problem solving task with many facets (Flower & Hayes, 1980; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). In addition, analysis of writing processes has uncovered both cognitive and metacognitive components. Cognitive components are for example linguistic skills, such as fast retrieval of lexical elements and the ability to combine these elements in sentences. Also genre knowledge, defined as knowledge of the structure of different text genres, is an important cognitive component of writing. Metacognitive components, for example, are orienting on the writing task requirements, planning of the execution of the task, monitoring of the written output, evaluation and revision on the levels of form and meaning of the text. This study is directed to the question which role cognitive and metacognitive components play in foreign language writing instruction. Presumably, efficient management of lexical choice and writing strategies are both means to relieve the burden on working memory resources. In this study, two competitive models are confronted with each other. The first is the additive model in which lexical fluency and self-regulation have an independent contribution to text quality. The second is the conditional model in which lexical fluency is a prerequisite for an extra contribution of self-regulation to text quality. A series of lessons was developed for writing instruction to students in grades 10 and 11 of bilingual (Dutch-English) education. 120 Dutch students were given English writing assignments under different instructional treatment conditions. The lessons focused on three different genres for writing: expository, reflective and argumentative, and explained different goals for writing. In addition, they contained texts dealing with different topics about Europe (government, languages, member states, national habits, globalisation, et cetera). There were three conditions: 1) instruction in self-regulation, 2) lexical training, 3) extra topic knowledge that were compared to each other on their performance on six post-test writing tasks. Although no significant differences were found in global quality of the writing products, further analysis demonstrates that all three conditions lead to learning results in comparison to a control group. This suggests that not only self-regulatory instruction but also lexical training and topic knowledge each contribute to the quality of L2 writing.

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