

## **INFORMATION TO USERS**

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

# **UMI**

A Bell & Howell Information Company  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

PREVIEW

THE EFFECTS OF PAIRED DISCUSSION DURING  
PREWRITING STAGE OF COMPOSITION

by

Judith A. Evans

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdepartmental Area of Psychological  
and Cultural Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor  
Wayne C. Piersel

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1995

**UMI Number: 9604410**

---

**UMI Microform 9604410**

**Copyright 1995, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized  
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

---

**UMI**

**300 North Zeeb Road  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103**

DISSERTATION TITLE

THE EFFECTS OF PAIRED DISCUSSION DURING PREWRITING

STAGE OF COMPOSITION

BY

Judith Ann Evans

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

APPROVED

DATE

Wayne C. Piersel  
Signature

8-3-95

Wayne C. Piersel  
Typed Name

Steven L. Wise  
Signature

8/3/95

Steven L. Wise  
Typed Name

Rose M. Allinder  
Signature

8-7-95

Rose Allinder  
Typed Name

Lisa M. Larson  
Signature

8-3-95

Lisa M. Larson  
Typed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Typed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Typed Name



GRADUATE COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

THE EFFECTS OF PAIRED DISCUSSION DURING PREWRITING  
STAGE OF COMPOSITION

Judith Ann Evans, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1995

Advisor: Wayne Piersel, Ph.D.

The effects of children engaged in paired discussion during the prewriting stage of composition was investigated. Eight out of twenty students in a regular fourth grade classroom in a midwestern city served as subjects in the experimental group while the remaining twelve students served as the control group. These eight subjects were divided into four pairs with two pairs identified as being poor writers and two as good writers. Each day all subjects were assigned a writing task related to a daily reading assignment.

A multiple baseline across subjects design combined with descriptors was used. The dependent variables consisted of (1) the number of ideas generated and (2) the number of words written in the daily compositions. The study consisted of a baseline phase and treatment phase. During the baseline phase the subjects had 15 minutes of whole group discussion followed by 15 minutes writing time. The treatment phase

consisted of five minutes of whole group discussion, 10 minutes of paired discussion followed by 15 minutes of writing time.

The results supported one of the three hypotheses across all groups. The first hypothesis, maintaining that paired discussion would result in an increase in ideas generated over baseline condition, was not supported by any group. More ideas were consistently generated during group discussion than during paired discussion. The second hypothesis, maintaining that paired discussion would result in more ideas being written, was supported by seven of the ten groups with the greatest gain in ideas written made by the identified poor writers. The third hypothesis, maintaining that paired discussion would result in an increase of total words written over baseline condition, was supported by all groups. Even though all subjects did increase the total number of words written, the largest gain in total words written was made by the identified poor writers.

The results of this study do support using paired discussion as a prewriting activity. Paired discussion did result in more ideas being generated during composition, particularly with poor writers, and did result in more words being written by good and poor writers.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Following the many years of effort in pursuit of this degree I wish to express my gratitude to the individuals who have provided assistance and support in the completion of this research. Thanks are first expressed to the members of my committee, Dr. Jane Conoley, Dr. Al Kilgore, and Dr. Stan Vasa for their suggestions and contributions toward the completion of this project.

Special thanks are given to Dr. Wayne Piersel, my Graduate Advisor and Chair of my committee. His guidance, patience, encouragement and perseverance on this research and throughout my graduate studies are deeply appreciated.

I am also extremely grateful to Carol Mueller for allowing me to conduct the research in her classroom and for assisting me with the collection of data. Next, I give special thanks to Colette Michael for the many hours spent scoring compositions and transcribing audio recordings.

I would like to thank my son, Barry, for being understanding of the time and effort necessary to complete this research project. I would also like to thank my mother for instilling in me the thirst for knowledge and the drive to accomplish whatever goal I set, no matter the hardships.

Finally, my deepest appreciation and eternal gratitude is given to my husband, Jim. Without his continuous



encouragement, patience, and sacrifice, my completion of this phase of a long graduate career would not have been possible.

PREVIEW

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	01
Historical Background.....	01
Underlying Assumptions in Teaching Practices.....	02
Changes in Teaching Practices.....	06
Characteristics of Good and Poor Writers.....	08
Specific Writing Stages.....	09
Purpose of the Study.....	11
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
Oral and Written Language Interaction.....	12
Prewriting Stage of the Writing Process.....	15
Generation of Ideas During Prewriting.....	19
Collaborative Discussion Among Peers.....	25
Assessing the Writing Product.....	28
Statement of the Problem.....	33
III. METHOD.....	35
Subjects and Setting.....	35
Selection and Criteria.....	36
Generalization Setting.....	36
Experimental Design.....	37
Dependent Variable and Recording Procedures.....	37
Scoring Criteria.....	38
Procedures.....	39
Instruction Prior to First Treatment.....	39
Intervention Phase.....	40
Observation by the Investigator.....	42
Review of Portfolios.....	42
Teacher Interview.....	42
Student Survey.....	42
Generalization Measure.....	43
Data Analyses.....	43

IV. RESULTS.....	44
Quantitative Data.....	44
Pairs 1 and 2.....	44
Pairs 3 and 4.....	50
Pairs 5, 6, and 7.....	57
Pairs 8, 9, and 10.....	62
Qualitative Data.....	66
Classroom Observations.....	66
Week One of Baseline.....	66
Second Week of Experiment.....	69
Observation During Third Week.....	72
Observation During Fourth Week.....	73
Observation During Fifth Week.....	74
Observation During Sixth Week.....	75
Student Portfolios.....	78
Teacher Interview.....	79
Student Questionnaire.....	82
V. DISCUSSION.....	84
Areas Requiring Further Research.....	91
Conclusions.....	93
REFERENCES.....	95
APPENDIX A.....	108
APPENDIX B.....	114
APPENDIX C.....	130
APPENDIX D.....	132

## List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Demographic Information Concerning Chronological Age, Achievement Scores and Aptitude.....	109
2. Weekly Mean Frequencies of Ideas Generated.....	111
3. Weekly Mean Frequencies of Total Words Generated in Composition.....	112
4. Mean Frequencies Comparing Baseline with Treatment.....	113

PREVIEW

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Weekly Mean Frequencies of Ideas Generated During Prewriting and Writing Stages of Composition for Groups One and Two.....	45
2. Daily Mean Frequencies of Ideas Generated during Prewriting and Writing Stages of Composition for Groups 1 and 2.....	47
3. Individual Weekly Mean Frequencies of Ideas Generated During Writing for Groups 1 and 2 .....	49
4. Total Words Generated During Composition for Groups 1 and 2.....	51
5. Weekly Mean Frequencies of Ideas Generated during Prewriting and Writing Stages of composition for Groups 3 and 4.....	52
6. Daily Mean Frequencies of Ideas Generated During Prewriting and Writing Stages of Composition for Groups 3 and 4.....	54
7. Individual Weekly Mean Frequencies of Ideas Generated During Composition for Groups 3 and 4...	56
8. Total Number of Words Generated During Composition for Groups 3 and 4.....	58
9. Weekly Mean Frequencies of Ideas Generated During Prewriting and Writing Stages for Groups 5, 6, and 7.....	60
10. Total Words Generated During Composition for Groups 5, 6, and 7.....	61
11. Weekly Mean Frequencies of Ideas Generated during Prewriting and Writing Stages of Composition for Groups 8, 9, and 10.....	63
12. Total Number of Words Generated During Composition for Groups 8, 9, and 10.....	65

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

The ability to express one's thoughts in written form is considered one of humanity's highest achievements as it requires the integration of both thought and process. The importance of written language cannot be overemphasized. Academic progress is measured by how well a student can convey his knowledge through written form. Writing can be used as a mode of entertainment, a method of conveying information, and a means of sharing feelings and thoughts with others.

Expressing one's ideas in written form is also a critical aspect for success in post-secondary education and training settings. Many occupations require that a person can express feelings and thoughts meaningfully. In order for a writer to express his/her ideas meaningfully, he/she must first generate enough ideas. Specific strategies for helping writers to generate ideas are noted in the literature concerning the teaching of composition.

It is the purpose of this study to investigate one specific strategy recommended in such literature. The specific strategy being investigated is the use of paired-discussion during the prewriting stage of composition.

#### Historical Background of Composition Instruction

Instructional strategies for teaching composition have

changed dramatically over the last two decades (Graham, 1992; Graves, 1986; Hillock, 1987). The focus of instruction has shifted from the writing product to the writing process. During the 1960s and 1970s a major emphasis was placed returning to the basics, reading and math. Due to additional time being spent on the basic instruction of reading and mathematics, the time spent teaching composition diminished (Graham, 1978; Graham, 1982).

In 1975 the National Council of Teachers of English recognized that the traditional models of teaching writing were inadequate (Odell, 1980). Strickland (1963), a prominent language specialist, noted that classroom teachers were not adequately prepared to teach composition. Graham (1982) concluded that American students displayed poor writing skills because they had received poor instruction and had few opportunities to develop such skills. Indeed, students were spending approximately ten minutes a day in active writing tasks (Leinhardt, Zigmond, and Cooley, 1980).

#### Underlying Assumptions in Teaching Practices

Established practices for teaching writing are based on assumptions refuted by recent research (Hillocks, 1987). The first assumption was that students intuitively have the knowledge required by the suggested writing tasks. Many educators assumed that writing was an inherited talent. However, researchers examining the process of writing have indicated that writing

skills are acquired through guided, consistent practice (Hillock, 1985; Hollingsworth & Eastman, 1988; Shaughnessy, 1977; Weaver, 1979).

A second assumption was that students should be able to write perfect sentences and paragraphs prior to writing a story or composition. To gain such perfection, students spent hours studying and practicing sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling rules. This instruction was supposed to provide the students with an understanding of "how the English language works" (Hillock, 1987). Educators anticipated that students would be able to generalize skills learned from the practice exercises and apply these skills when given a writing assignment (Hollingsworth & Eastman, 1988).

However, researchers have demonstrated that constructs of mechanics, grammar, and spelling are best taught in context of writing (Kean, 1983). After an extensive review of studies that examined the practice of teaching grammar through isolated exercises, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963) concluded that such instruction did not affect the quality of writing.

Elley, Barham, Lamb and Wyllie (1975) conducted a four-year study where they compared both traditional and generative grammar treatments to a no-grammar treatment. Two hundred forty eight students were grouped into 31 matched classes. The students were matched on the basis of scores obtained on a general ability



test, a grammar usage exam, and a reading vocabulary test. Three different strands of instruction were used with these students:

(a) transformational grammar, rhetoric and literature strand, (b) a reading and writing strand, and (c) a traditional English grammar strand. The students' essays were evaluated on content, organization, style and mechanics. The students were given a variety of language tests and a questionnaire concerning attitudes toward different instructional components.

Elley et al. (1975) found that at the end of four years of instruction, there was no statistically significant difference among the three groups in their writing quality, in mechanical errors or in their attitudes toward writing. However, when the questionnaire responses were analyzed, the researchers found that students taking the traditional English grammar strand thought the instruction more 'repetitive' and 'useless' than students from the other two strands.

In 1986 Hillock conducted a meta-analysis of 60 well-defined research projects containing 72 experimental treatments. From these studies Hillock identified six separate instructional methods used to teach composition. These research projects examined writing instruction based on teaching: (a) grammar/mechanics; (b) models; (c) sentence combining; (d) scales; (e) inquiry; and (f) free writing. The results of this meta-analysis indicated that writing instruction based on using

models, sentence combining, scales, inquiry and free writing showed a positive correlation with the quality of writing. Writing instruction based on the teaching of grammar and mechanics, however, had a negative (-0.30) correlation with the quality of writing. Hillock proposed that writers do use knowledge of grammar, but it is an intuitive knowledge that the writer uses while composing.

A third assumption noted about writing was that students write in a linear fashion (Hillock, 1986; Hollingsworth et al., 1988). Simply stated, writers get an idea; they write it down; they correct errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling; they make a final copy; and then they turn it in to the instructor. This procedure has been stressed by most composition textbooks (Emig, 1975; Hillock, 1987).

However, researchers have demonstrated that writing is a complex task. Students tend to loop back and forth among parts of the writing process as dictated by their needs as writers and by the required task (Lindemann, 1982). The processes and subprocesses involved in writing are hierarchically related and recursive (Bereiter, 1980; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1982; Flower & Hayes, 1980; Flower et al., 1981; Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1983). Stages in this complex task include some form of planning, drafting, revising or editing (Bos, 1988).

Changes in Teaching Practices

In 1978, the Ford Foundation commissioned Donald Graves to address writing instruction issues. In his report, Balance the Basics: Let Them Write, Graves recommended that teachers focus on the process of writing rather than on the product. This recommendation was based on years of observing elementary students in the act of writing and then examining their written products.

Graves (1983) noted developmental variations within the writing process. Compositions became more complex with age and experience (Graham, 1982). In a report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (1975) students displayed substantial gains in writing quality between the ages of nine and thirteen, but little gain between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. Hunt (1965) noted that students demonstrated optimum growth in the average length of sentences and in the average number of words per clause between grades four and eight.

Graham (1982) summarized development in written language as being characterized by spurts, plateaus, and even regressions. As different skills developed at different rates, students demonstrated substantial variation in acquisition of writing skills.

Bos (1988) described writing as a student-centered instructional approach that emphasizes an interactive model of

composing. This approach relies on descriptive analyses of the composing process in conjunction with the generated product and places value on establishing an "authentic" purpose for writing.

This interactive model of composing involves three distinct phases: (a) prewriting, (b) writing, and (c) revision. This instructional approach deviates from tradition in that instructional time is spent on each phase. The actual writing process is directly taught and modeled. The students are taught that writing is an ongoing process that does not have to be completed in one setting or day.

The premise behind the interactive or process-writing model is that a large, complex problem can be broken down or partitioned into semi-independent subproblems. The students can work on one aspect of writing at a time (Graham, 1982; Flower & Hayes, 1980). By providing daily opportunities for writing, the learner gains confidence. This new found confidence fosters willingness to attempt the different types of writing required for different communication tasks (Newcomer et al., 1988).

There has, however, been resistance in changing traditional composition curriculum. The results of a 1985 survey conducted by the National Assessment of Education Progress suggested that only seven percent of high school students were receiving instruction through an approach that placed the emphasis on the process rather than the product (Daniels & Zemelman, 1985).

Characteristics of Good and Poor Writers

As the result of research conducted over the last several decades, specific characteristics of good and poor writers have been identified. First, good writers can integrate newly acquired writing skills, while poor writers are not (Schaeffer, 1975). Poor writers need to have the skills broken into discrete stages and then need taught specific techniques for each stage or process. The separation of stages provides a procedure for making the perceived arduous task seem more manageable (Graham, 1982; Graham & Harris, 1988).

In addition, good writers have few problems with mechanics as they usually master such skills before the fourth grade. However, poor writers have not developed these skills even through the sixth grade. MacArthur and Graham (1987) found that when mechanical requirements were removed, poor writers composed better stories. If poor writers did not have to worry about mechanical requirements, they were able to deal with higher order processes and were more willing to write.

Hillock (1984) noted that a third advantage good writers have over poor writers is their ability to use established criteria when evaluating other students' writings and then apply such criteria to their own writing. Good writers tend to internalize and use the evaluation criteria as goals for their own writing. Deficient writers, however, are not able to make

such generalizations.

Hayes and Flowers (1986) noted the effective writers were goal-oriented and used three recursive processes to reach their goals. The recursive processes noted were: (a) planning, (b) sentence generation, and (c) revising. During the planning stage, good writers engaged in specific activities such as brainstorming, semantic mapping or outlining to generate and gather ideas. In contrast, poor writers did not engage in such activities without direct instruction (Raphael, Kirschner, & Engler, 1988).

In addition, Bereiter (1980) noted that good writers were not only fluent in generating ideas but possessed fluency in producing written language. Good writers had mastered writing conventions, considered the audience, appreciated literature, and used reflective thought. Good writers also seemed to understand the value of sharing their ideas and perceived themselves as authors responding to a specific audience (Graves & Hansen, 1983). Whereas, poor writers spent little time generating initial ideas, did not consider their audience, did not perceive themselves as authors (Hillock, 1986; Graham, 1982), and were hesitant to share their writings with peers (Graves, 1983).

#### Specific Writing Stages

The general stages of writing process are prewriting or planning, writing, and revising (Flowers, et al., 1981; Graham,

1992; Graves, 1984). Hillock (1986) noted that before any words are written on paper, the composer must engage in numerous complex tasks. The first task is the author's awareness that specific purposes and constraints may change during each stage.

Next, the writer must utilize his/her specific knowledge base. This knowledge base includes: (a) knowledge of the content to be written about; (b) procedural knowledge that enables the manipulation of content; (c) knowledge of discourse structures, including the schemata underlying various types of writing (e.g., story, argument), syntactic forms, and the conventions of punctuation and usage; and (d) the procedural knowledge that enables the production of a particular type of writing.

Hillock also noted that the student engages in numerous activities prior to writing any thoughts on paper. "Semantic units" or general ideas or notions about the topic are developed first. These semantic units are followed by "verbatim units" or sequences of words that can be stated upon request but are still not written down. The final stage involves the "graphemic units" or the actual writing of these ideas or sequence of words.

A student can actually spend more time in the prewriting stage than he/she spends in the writing stage. As noted earlier, good writers spend more time engaged in prewriting activities than poor writers. However, poor writers can be taught specific strategies which enables them to generate ideas and organize

their thoughts. Prewriting strategies recommended by Flowers, et al. (1981) can involve the student working on his own, with the teacher or with peers.

The teaching of writing where the focus is on the process rather than on the product has been widely examined over the last two decades. A literature search conducted by Newcomer, Nodine, and Barenbaum (1988) noted that most researchers examined these strategies using a qualitative approach. Students attitudes toward writing and their behaviors during the writing process were examined. Newcomer, et al. (1988) also noted that most studies examined the writing skills of competent writers. What appears to be lacking is research that examines of the effectiveness of using process writing strategies with deficient writers (Graham & Harris, 1988).

#### Purpose of the study

The purpose of the present study is to examine the effect of a specific learning strategy on students' written products. Specifically, the influence of paired discussion on idea generation during prewriting, on ideas embedded during writing, and on the total number of words written is examined.