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Lorraine Miniutti Bordonaro
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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THE EFFECTS OF A REVISION TECHNIQUE ON URBAN FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS '
WRITING MECHANICS OF THE WRITING PROCESS

A Dissertation Presented

by

LORRAINE MINIUTTI BORDONARO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 1990

Education

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WRITING MECHANICS OF THE WRITING PROCESS

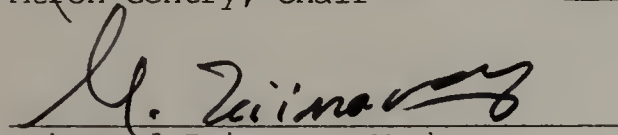
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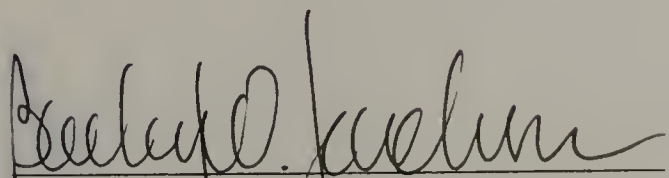
LORRAINE MINIUTTI BORDONARO

Approved as to style and content by:


Atron Gentry, Chair


Muhammed Zaimaran, Member


Eleanor Kutz, Member


Marilyn Haring-Hidore, Dean
School of Education

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this study to my husband, Vincent, for his support and encouragement during these years of commitment. To my son, Steven, for his sense of humor and perspective during this labor. Finally to my colleague in the program, Mary Grassa O'Neill, for her enthusiasm and endurance throughout the course of the study.

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There were others who contributed much but the special help of Dr. Frank Rife, Frances Stuart, Dr. James Buckley, Hind Jarest, and David Maloof merits special thanks.

ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF A REVISION TECHNIQUE ON URBAN FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS' WRITING MECHANICS OF THE WRITING PROCESS

SEPTEMBER 1990

LORRAINE MINIUTTI BORDONARO, B. A., EMMANUEL COLLEGE

M.Ed., STATE COLLEGE AT BOSTON

Ed.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Atron Gentry

After a decade dominated by studies and rhetoric about school reform, a national report card released on January, 1990, indicated that children showed no improvement in writing.

The purpose of this research was to determine if by using the Cumulative Writing Folder Program, a mandated Program, with the additional use of sentence combining as a revision strategy urban fifth graders would improve their writing in the six areas of topic development, organization, supporting details, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics.

This study fit in with the existing knowledge and research in the field. It focused on the writing habits of fifth grade students and examined a program that improved their writing skills.

This study used concrete strategies in a well-defined writing program to improve revision processes for students which added to the current research in this area.

John Collins' Cumulative Writing Folder Program was incorporated in the design of the study. Both the experimental and control groups utilized the Cumulative Writing Folder. The experimental group used sentence combining as a revision strategy. The teacher instructed this group on the techniques of sentence combining and instructed them to use this strategy to revise their writing samples.

In September and June the two groups produced writing samples which were analytically scored by independent scorers. An analysis of the comparison of the pre and post scores of the experimental group with the control group in the six variables was given.

Results showed that the overall writing performance of the experimental group showed improvement at a significant level.

In the variable of topic development, there was a level of significance.

The five variables which showed no level of significance were organization, mechanics, supporting details, sentence structure, and word choice.

The study suggested that a well defined writing program with the revision strategy of sentence combining did provide overall improvement in the quality of writing over the course of the school year.

The study further suggested that more research and subsequent solutions to the problem of the inferior quality of writing at the elementary level needed addressing. It indicated clear directions for further study.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Chapter One will discuss the background of the study at both a national and local level, provide a description of a writing program, the purpose of the study, the hypotheses, and a summary.

Background of Study

In 1963 Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Shoer asked an apparently simple question: "What is involved in the act of writing?" [Braddock, 1963] The question only appears simple, for more than two decades later we are still asking more and more questions about the process of writing. There are some thoroughly researched answers to this question, but there still remain many questions surrounding the skill and process of writing.

After a decade dominated by studies and rhetoric about school reform, a national report card released on January, 1990, has shown that children read only slightly better than they did in 1971 and show no improvement in writing.

Significance at National Level

Education Secretary Lauro Cavazos released the assessment's report cards on reading and writing, which is the only nationally representative and continually monitoring of student performance nationwide in key subjects.

Nearly a decade into the educational reform movement and the writing process movement--each of which has advocated changes in both the kinds of writing instruction provided and in the uses for writing in schools--NAEP data indicate that both students' writing instruction and their writing performance have remained relatively unchanged

said the writing report card.

Results on the two assessment writing tests given in 1974 and 1988 to grades 4, 8, and 11 showed no major changes in writing competence during that fourteen-year span. Research in the area of writing must continue if this problem is to be solved.

In most research, writing is defined as a process which involves planning time, that planning involves a great deal of production time, and that planning takes place at several levels of abstraction. Writing is viewed as an activity or process with an identifiable set of behaviors and cognitions. Therefore, writing should be considered as an activity which can be acquired rather than something one possesses or lacks [Hillocks, 1986].

Researchers also learned that the writing process does not occur step by step, but there are several main processes--planning, transcribing text, and reviewing.

Recent trends in the teaching of writing emphasize process more than product. These studies of process were concerned with the nature of such variables as prewriting behavior, activity during pauses, rate of writing, and what writers do when they stop.

There is evidence that learning to write helps writers think in a fundamentally different way. Learning to write coherently

may help writers learn strategies for keeping many ideas in mind for the purpose of drawing conclusions, extrapolating and evaluating. Do writers have to learn strategies for reconstructing text in order to write more coherently?

Unless specific and structured techniques and strategies are implemented in the revision process of writing there is no significant improvement in the revision process of elementary students.

At the elementary level at least 175 studies have been initiated in this area in the United States during the last 25 years. The literature will focus on the studies of the writing process in the elementary level, specifically on the final revision process in writing. Revision has been a subject of concern in a variety of studies. Some examine the kinds, numbers and quality of revisions made by writers. Others attempt to determine the cognitive process involved in revision.

The purpose of this research is to determine if by using the Cumulative Writing Folder program with the additional use of sentence combining as a revision strategy urban fifth graders will improve their writing in the six areas of topic development, organization, supporting details, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics.

Significance at Local Level

A well-designed elementary writing program would improve the writing skills of students in their elementary and secondary schooling. Clear-cut strategies in the elementary grades could

only improve and provide a basis for knowledge for the secondary level. The revision strategy of sentence combining within the framework of a well-structured writing program will show writing progress in several skill areas.

This study will fit in with the existing knowledge and research in the field. It will focus on the writing habits of fifth grade students and will examine a program that will improve their writing skills.

Calkins [1980] in her study of third graders identified revision strategies which she classified into four developmental groups: random drafting, refining, transition, and interacting. The classifications were made on the basis of the children's behavior in making revisions of their own work as well as their behavior in revising a composition prepared by the researcher. The two children classified as random drafters wrote successive drafts of their own work without examining their earlier drafts. Their changes appeared to be arbitrary or accidental. The eight refiners made cosmetic and lexical changes, sometimes adding sentences but retaining most of their first drafts, so that between 75 and 99 percent of final drafts made over a year were identical to the first drafts. Transition children (four of them) appeared to have developed higher standards for themselves than refiners, so that draft after draft didn't satisfy them. But instead of revising, they began new drafts, retaining relatively little of the first draft. The three interacting revisers are described as allowing what they had written to

prompt new ideas and as using symbols to indicate where additional information should go. Calkins claims that these revisers cycled between "assessing and discovering" [p. 341], that is, between examining critically what they had written and thinking of new ideas and reformulation.

Unfortunately, Calkins does not present the data on specific types or levels of revisions and operations.

Most of the revision at all levels was at the surface or lexical levels. Surface-level revision includes changes in mechanics, such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Word-level changes include the addition, deletion or substitution of single words. There are some revisions at the phrase level.

This study will use concrete strategies in a well-defined writing program to improve revision processes for students which should add to the current research in this area.

Description of Writing Program

Fifth graders in this study are mandated to use the Cumulative Writing Folder founded by John J. Collins [1982] in their writing class. The Cumulative Writing Folder was first created by Collins in 1982. Since that time approximately 20,000 packages of 25 folders each have been sold. According to Collins more than 500,000 students have used it across the United States, Canada and seven foreign countries. It is most popular in the northeastern United States. The program is endorsed by the Pennsylvania State Department of Education and constitutes the

mandated writing program in major urban areas in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.

There have been workshops in every state in the eastern seaboard for many school systems. It was mandated for grades 4-12 as part of the Superintendent's Education Plan as part of the Writing Component. The Cumulative Writing Folder consists of four elements: a writing management system and three teaching strategies: oral reading, focus correcting, and using past papers to teach new skills.

The four elements of the Cumulative Writing Folder are described below [Collins, 1988].

The Classroom Management System

The classroom management system is the actual Cumulative Writing Folder with its standard composition heading and correction symbols, uniform record keeping system, and step-by-step description of how students should develop and revise their composition. All of these elements reinforce the three key teaching strategies of the program.

Oral Reading

The second element of the program is oral reading or oral editing, a critical element of the program for three reasons: it is the single most effective way to help students revise and edit their papers; it causes students to take responsibility for their writing; and it promotes sharing of writing and reader reaction. Oral reading is a two-step process. First, students must read

their drafts out loud, to themselves. Next, a peer reads the paper out loud to the author.

Focus Correction

The third element is focus correction. Focus correction is a selective approach to correcting student writing. In focus correcting, the teacher selects one, two, or three critical problem areas and corrects only those areas. Students are informed of the focus correction areas before they begin their first drafts.

Using Past Papers to Teach New Skills

The fourth and final element of the program is using past papers to teach new skills which means that students practice the new writing skills that have been taught by editing compositions that are already in the Cumulative Writing Folder.

The Cumulative Writing Folder and its teaching strategies of oral reading, focus correction and using past papers to teach new skills is an embodiment of the environmental mode because at its core it takes advantage of all the resources of the classroom.

According to Collins [1990], there are several theoretical perspectives and successful teaching strategies on which the Cumulative Writing Folder is based. The writing process movement contributed to the notions of having the writer read his written work to himself and others, writing for multiple audiences and including the rough draft, feedback, revision editing and final copy as important stages of the writing task.

The Cumulative Writing Folder Program also grows out of the whole language movement. Whole language is defined by Dr. Collins as students discussing ideas, writing their ideas, reading what they've written and then using past writings to practice new skills rather than teaching and drilling skills in isolation. Additionally the Cumulative Writing Folder Program has a diagnostic prescriptive base and borrows from mastery learning particularly in the selection and frequency of repetition in focus correction areas.

George Hillock's [1986] Research on Written Composition describes three modes of instruction and their relative effectiveness. He describes the environmental mode as the most effective [pp. 246-247].

The technique of sentence combining, introduced first by John Mellon in Transformational Sentence Combining [NCTE, 1969], and later developed in Frank O'Hare's NCTE study, Sentence Combining, Research Report #15 and Sentence Craft [Ginn, 1975], in William Strong's Sentence Combining [1983], refers to a practice of deriving from a variety of sentences, usually short, simple, kernel sentences, a pattern for combining them into one or two longer sentences. Through this type of practice the student develops syntactic maturity. The result of this method is effective skill building. This theory is based on Kellogg Hunt's standard measure or T-unit, which is simply a main clause with all of its modifiers, including subordinate clauses [1965].

Sentence combining is a technique which can be taught successfully to fifth grade students. Research has shown that this strategy may improve a person's writing skill. There are six variables of interest in a written composition which may be effected by this particular strategy. They are topic development, organization, supporting details, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics. These six areas will provide information about the effectiveness of the writer's ideas, the skill in communicating them and the clarity of the message.

Hypotheses

1. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revisions use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in topic development in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.
2. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the organization of writing as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

3. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the quantity and/or quality of supporting details as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.
4. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the sentence structure as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.
5. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the variety of word choices as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.
6. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the mechanics as compared to urban fifth graders in the

Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining a revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of adding the strategy of sentence combining to the Cumulative Writing Folder Program as revision strategy used by a predominantly white population of urban elementary grade 5 students. Whether it is an effective solution for all students to use sentence combining with the Cumulative Writing Folder Program is to be determined. Whether its effectiveness or ineffectiveness is related to the complex process of writing is still being researched.

This study will look at a specific method of sentence combining used with the Cumulative Writing Folder Program to see if a student will produce a more coherent writing sample if given concrete methods in a well-defined structured program.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this review of literature is to establish a conceptual base by which to examine the studies of the writing process in the elementary grades. Only 156 studies have been done in this area in the United States in the last twenty five years. The funds for writing research came to less than one percent of all research funds for education. Improved funding is now available, and there is hope and optimism for the 90's.

Scope of the Literature Review

This review of literature will provide a collection of findings and hypotheses about the composing process. Recent trends in the teaching of writing emphasize process more than product. The process of writing--of using language to discover meaning and communicate it--is a significant human act.

The early studies of process were concerned with such variables as prewriting behavior, activity during pauses, rate of writing, and what writers do when they stop. One group of researchers led by Donald Graves [1981] observed young children writing in their classrooms. Under a grant from the National Institute of Education, this group examined the development of young writers along four sequences: time and space, external to internal, egocentric to sociocentric, and explicit to implicit.

The first aspect of development, time and space, was examined as a combination of three factors: the page, the

process, and information. Young writers sequence letters in a variety of ways, but under the tutelage of instructors, they view a "messy" paper in a positive way--as an indication of constructive changes which have been made.

When children begin to write, the process resembles spontaneous play. In beginning writing the information presented is fragmentary, often lacks context, and has tenuous logic. They write what comes to mind, secure that it has meaning for them.

Graves and his colleagues say that when children begin to write their activity is external. They often speak aloud as they write. For most children the shift from external to internal is accompanied by a shift in problem-solving focus from spelling and handwriting to topic and information. The writing process appears to be internalized.

The third shift identified by Graves is that from egocentric to sociocentric. According to Benjamin Bloom [1981] and his colleagues at the University of Chicago a crucial positive play experience in early attempts in a variety of fields is important to developing high-level commitment to the task. The same may be true for writers---positive play experiences in early attempts at writing are important. Young writers in this stage experiment fearlessly given a small amount of encouragement. Eventually children discover that their peers have questions about what they write. In Calkins' words, "Children no longer write solely for themselves. Writing is no longer all-process, all-present, all-

personal. Children are concerned with product and with audience" [1981].

The fourth dimension of change as identified by Graves describes children as moving from a stage in which they make their messages explicit in conversation to one in which the written message conveys the full meaning. First, there is the stage of over-telling. As children choose information more selectively, they move into the implicit stage of writing.

In addition to examining these sequences the Graves team has also begun an analysis of "concepts" related to the writing process. Most of Graves and Calkins studies provide general information about behavior prior to and during writing.

A group of researchers focused on the nature of planning and its appearance in the composing process. Matsushashi [1981] suggests that her writers are able to move "confidently ahead to report an event" because they are "guided by a years-long familiarity with a script for narratives of personal experience." Her evidence suggests continuous movements from high level planning to specific word choices and back to mere abstract levels.

Research on planning by Linda S. Flower and John R. Hayes [1980] has to do primarily with the strategies used by their subjects in what they identify as three major processes of composing: planning, translating, and reviewing. They establish the importance of generating ideas prior to formulating an

outline or even during the translating or editing processes and the importance of criteria during the process.

According to Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia [1982] one way to help students learn to initiate and maintain memory searches is the use of prewriting activities which activate memory nodes relevant to the topic. Students need to learn not only to conduct a memory search but to learn that writing requires it.

Sager and Coleman [1973] used scales to teach children to judge their own and other's writing. When children learn that the requirements of written prose are different from those of conversation, they activate more extensive memory searches. In addition, when children learn criteria, they may seek content which results in higher-quality writing.

A number of studies have attended to the planning strategies of writers. Bereiter and Scardamalia [1982] claim that the thinking-aloud protocols of young children provide little evidence of planning. There is a dominant of the "what next" strategy in younger writers.

Researchers Panko [1978] and Shaughnessy [1977] suggest that some writers become so enmeshed in the mechanics of the textual representation that the quality of their writing is affected. That belief underlies the common advice to get ideas down on paper without worrying about corrections until a later draft. It also underlies the common curricular assumptions that young writers should learn all the mechanics of writing early so

that mechanical skills will become automatic, thus putting as little demand on the memory as possible. The question is what processes interfere with others and when.

Donald Murray [1978] believed that the writing process can be described, understood, and therefore learned. He proposed new terms for consideration, terms which may emphasize the essential process of discovery through writing: prevision, vision, and revision. He said that the stages of the process overlap, but most writers pass through these three distinct stages.

The first stage is called prevision, a term that encompasses everything that precedes the first draft---the underestimated skills of title and lead writing, which help the student identify a subject, limit it, develop a point of view towards it, and begin to find the voice to explore the subject.

The second stage is called vision. In this stage of the writing process the draft or discovery stage is completed. It is the fulcrum of the writing process.

The third stage is the revision stage. This is what the writer does after a draft is completed to understand and communicate what has begun to appear on the page. The writer confirms, alters, or develops it. The revision stage is the most important step in the process.

Arthur Applebee [1981] in his extensive research, showed that when writing is studied as a process, it is quickly apparent that the process has a number of distinct stages. At the simplest level, these include prewriting, writing, and editing.

Prewriting is the time during which information is gathered and an idea played with. The writing stage is when the topic is developed on paper. This stage of the writing process involves a discovery of meaning that is waiting full-blown in the writer's mind.

The third stage of the writing process is editing, polishing what has been written. This is the stage for attention to mechanics.

Applebee [1981] and Murray [1978] are very similar in their descriptions of the three stages in the writing process.

Revision has been a subject of concern in a variety of studies. Calkins [1981] studied the revision strategies of third graders. She classified them into four groups which she views as developmental: random drafting, refining, transition, and interacting. Younger children confine their revision to the cosmetic, lexical, and clause or phrase levels. Addition is a prominent revision strategy used by interacting revisers. Nold [1981] describes revising as a process which involves evaluating. The successful reviser must note deficiencies and "think of a good way to change them."

Hayes and Flower [1980] present a similar model; however, they discriminate between editing and reviewing. Both processes rely on matching text to intentions and producing a change when needed.

Bereiter and Scardamalia [1982] point out that the usual explanation for children's inability to revise is that their

egocentricity does not allow them to stand apart from their texts as critics. If given a routine procedure to use for evaluation, children will evaluate their own writing systematically and appropriately.

Research Conflicts

Research on the composing process has provided many valuable insights, hypotheses, and points of departure for further study. In the case studies, there are tendencies to present data selectively rather than systematically, to interpret data without a consistent analysis, to infer cause-and-effect relationships, and to ignore the range of possible effects which the presence of researchers might have on results.

Emig [1971], for example, concentrates heavily on a single case study, providing only limited information on seven others. Yet her conclusions are based on all eight cases.

While the research of Graves [1981] and his colleagues claims to be exhaustive, no data on the frequency of writing episodes, observed and unobserved, or on the spread of observations across children of various ability levels are presented. Some subjects have received considerable more attention than others. There is no explanation for the selection process in the studies. The question is, "How does it affect our view of the data?"

Calkins [1981] documents one case study of writing out a number of possibilities for leads early in the year. Is the

mental progression in this one case true for all children?

Evidence for the whole sample is not presented.

Another problem in the research on process is a tendency to infer cause-and-effect relationships. For example, when Graves [1981] states that "when children control their subjects, they write more, gain greater practice in writing, and ultimately care much more about the appearance of their letters on the page" the conditions of the research do not provide for direct comparisons with children who do not control their subjects--at least not in the current data.

Research by Bereiter and Scardamalia [1982] and other experiments strongly suggest that factors other than control of the subject are associated with writing more and with higher quality. The assertion that school-sponsored writing results in lack of commitment to writing on the part of students is another example of inferring cause-and-effect relationships without adequate evidence. Pianko [1978] contends that self-sponsored writing, "writing experiences which evolve from within students," results in greater commitment and concern. Pianko has no observations of school-sponsored writing. Her subjects write for the benefit of the researcher in afternoon sessions, voluntarily. There is a significant difference between writing for a researcher and writing for a teacher. The subjects have no stake in the former; but they do in the latter. The studies reported by Flower and Hayes [1980] some of which derive from conventional assignments suggest a fairly high level of commitment. The

researchers provide no clear definitions or measures of levels of commitment or concern. Rather, they infer them from the behavior of the writers.

Assuming the researchers had adequate measures of commitment and concern, they would still have to show the level of concern about school-sponsored writing is the same as that for inquiry-sponsored writing and that these levels of concern or commitment vary systematically with the levels of commitment to self-sponsored writing. Demonstrating that school-sponsored writing results in a lack of commitment to writing requires that evidence be collected over a range of programs with different characteristics.

In conclusion, while it may be true that school-sponsored writing causes lack of commitment and deep concern, these studies have not demonstrated a causal relationship or a strong association between the two. According to Pianko [1978] the alternative to school-sponsored writing, in which the teacher controls topic, time, and place, is self-sponsored writing. Pianko contends that writing should begin with an idea developing out of students' confrontations with life. Pianko states his contention as a conclusion, but in fact it is an hypothesis open to investigation.

Another problem in interpreting the research on process involves determining what effects the presence of researchers has on results. Graves and his colleagues spent two years in the classrooms observing children's behavior during the writing

process. They not only recorded what the children were doing but also conducted interviews with the children while they were writing.

Bereiter and Scardamalia [1982] used countless prompts with their subjects while they researched the writing process. There must be some emotions of approval or disapproval displayed by the researchers. The scope and type of researcher influence may influence the results of the research.

Despite these problems in interpreting findings and claims, particularly of the case study and observational research, the research on process provides a number of significant hypotheses about development and teaching.

Significant Hypotheses

George Hillock's Research on Written Composition [1986] describes three modes of instruction and their relative effectiveness:

In the most common and widespread mode (presentational), the instructor dominates all activity, with students acting as the passive recipients of rules, advice, and examples of good writing. This is the least effective mode examined--only about half as effective as the average experimental treatment.

In the natural process mode, the instructor encourages students to write for other students, to receive comments from them, and to revise their drafts in light of comments from both students and the instructor. But the instructor does not plan activities to help develop specific strategies of composing. This instructional mode is about 25 percent less effective than the average experimental treatment, but about 50 percent more effective than the presentational mode. . . .

I have labeled the most effective mode of instruction environmental, because it brings teacher, student, and materials more nearly into balance and, in effect, takes

advantage of all resources of the classroom. In this mode, the instructor plans and uses activities which result in high levels of student interaction concerning particular problems parallel to those they encounter in certain kinds of writing, e.g., generating criteria and examples to develop extended definitions of concepts or generating arguable assertions from appropriate data and predicting and countering opposing arguments. In contrast to the presentational mode, this mode places priority on high levels of student involvement. In contrast to natural process, the environmental mode places priority on structured problem-solving activities, with clear objectives, planned to enable students to deal with similar problems in composing. On pre-to-post measures, the environmental mode is over four times more effective than the traditional presentational mode and three times more effective than the natural process mode [pp. 246-247].

The use of a structured design which incorporates the most effective mode of instruction, the environmental mode, is found in the Cumulative Writing Folder.

The Cumulative Writing Folder and its teaching strategies of oral reading, focus correction, and, especially, using past papers to teach new skills is an embodiment of the environmental mode because at its core it "takes advantage of all the resources of the classroom." The teacher diagnoses and selects focus correction areas and uses student compositions on the overhead as models. The students read and react to one another's papers.

Hillock's Research on Written Composition [1986] describes six foci of instruction which include types of content or activities which teachers of composition expect to have a salutary effect on writing. These include the study of traditional grammar, work with mechanics, the study of model compositions to identify features of good writing, sentence combining, inquiry and free writing.

The sentence combining treatment is one pioneered by Mellon [1969] and O'Hare [1973] who showed that practice in combining simple sentences into more complex ones results in better writing. A number of researchers support these findings that direct instruction in sentence combining results in greater syntactic complexity and increased writing quality [O'Hare, 1973; Faigley, 1979]. The result of this method is effective skill building; the students' sentences have greater variety, appear more mature and sophisticated, and illustrate how writers in the same class, working with the same kernel sentences, are able to transform them into many different types of effective communication.

An example of sentence combining might be:

1. The guard was a muscular man.
2. The guard was about 6'4".
3. The guard dribbled the ball down the court.

Students are asked to consider sentences such as #1, #2, #3 and then, by following specific instruction combine these three sentences into one sentence. The resulting sentence could be, "The muscular guard, who was about 6'4", dribbled the ball down the court."

It is the focus of instruction, sentence combining, that will be researched in this study of writing. Sentence combining included as a revision strategy with the Cumulative Writing Folder Program will be studied in six specific writing areas.

In conclusion, writing involves a great deal of planning, that planning involves a lot of production time, and that planning takes place at several levels of abstraction. The levels of abstraction involved are shown in research by Emig, the various studies by Hayes and Flower, studies by Bereiter, Scardamalia, Applebee, Murray, and the research of Matsushashi. At the most abstract levels, planning seems to involve rather general intentions about the kind of writing to be produced, directed in part by knowledge of schemata and in part by intended content. General intentions generate more specific, but still rather generalized, content.

Matsushashi [1981] found that writers plan their writing in semantic chunks. It suggests continuous movements from high-level planning to specific word choices and back to more abstract levels.

Finally, the finding by Bereiter and Scardamalia [1982] that children write out nearly the same words they forecast indicates the occurrence of an editorial process between the information held in short term memory and the actual writing. The evidence strongly suggests that writers continually reconstruct goals, plans, and content. Children write briefly, not for lack of knowledge, but for lack of adequate means for tapping the knowledge they do have.

The most dramatic discoveries of the research have yielded the most obvious truths: writing is difficult. It requires a writer to think about and do many different things at once; the

better a writer is at generally managing the complex demands of writing, the better able he is to write. Composing is recursive, with writers moving back to what has been written and forward to what has not. It is fairly certain that the subprocesses of composing interrupt each other. The writer moves from high-level plans to the transcription of words and back to higher-level planning, rereading what has been written, reconstructing plans already made, making new plans, generating new data or performing editing of some kind. This moving back and forward in the writing process has been examined by several of the researchers. Together these recursive and "bobbing actions" present a far different notion of composing than there is to be found in composition texts which traditionally assume that all planning precedes all transcribing and that all editing follows. This finding alone has significant instructional value for teachers.

The research on the composing process written in the last two decades raises many questions as well as providing many answers. The challenge for those who share this concern will be to find ways to give teachers the time and the training to represent writing to students as a complex behavior and a complex intellectual activity.

Summary

This review of related literature sought to answer a series of questions significant to the study. It looked at the research of the various steps in the writing process. It focused specifically at the final or revision step in the process.

Although as in most research there are conflicting points of view, it does indicate clear directions for further study.

If the purpose of any study of school-sponsored writing is to improve the skills of students, there must be a systematic approach of defining instructional techniques which are demonstrably more effective.

This experimental study will examine a Writing Program which uses the Cumulative Writing Folder which is best described as an embodiment of the environmental mode and incorporates the focus of instruction technique of sentence combining as a revision strategy.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN AND PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In the preceding two chapters the background of the study and a review of the related literature were presented. This chapter will define the source of the data, the subject selection, how the data for the study was collected, in terms of the instrumentalities and the procedures that were employed.

The study sought answers to several questions, and while it was hoped that meaningful answers would be found to the questions posed by the study, of equal interest would be the possibility of generating new questions.

The data presented herein will lead others to probe further and seek additional information about methods and strategies for improving writing. The design of the study is such that it can be readily replicated by others knowledgeable in the educative process.

Sample Employed in the Study

The population of the sample groups was urban elementary fifth graders who were randomly selected for the experimental and control groups. It was a pre-post experimental control group design with random assignment. An entire fifth grade class of fifteen students was used for the study. The class was divided randomly--two groups of four seated on the left side of the classroom constituted the experimental group while two groups of four and three seated on the right side of the classroom

constituted the control group. The teacher instructed the two groups independently with little difficulty because of their physical location in the room.

The experimental group consisted of three males, five females between the ages of nine years, ten months to ten years, eight months at the beginning of the study.

The control group consisted of three males, four females between the ages of nine years, ten months to ten years, nine months at the beginning of the study.

The racial composition of the class was 86% white and 14% Asian. It was an urban elementary school in a low socio-economic background. Fifty-three % of the students lived in single parent homes.

The following propositions were assumptions made concerning the subjects of the study, the environment, and the procedures.

Entry Level Skills

1. It was assumed that entry level skills of the subjects were sufficiently equivalent. All subjects have completed the same basic grade 4 curriculum and none have been exposed to the Cumulative Writing Folder system
2. To test this assumption all subjects were given a pre-test as part of the treatment

Competency of Subjects

1. Based on subjects having met the promotion requirements for grade 4 which included prespecified grades in all subjects including reading, language arts, mathematics, science,

social studies, it was assumed all are competent to complete the course of study.

2. Based on the subjects having achieved different grades as marks in their previous courses, and various standardized tests of reading/language arts skills it was assumed that some students would do well and some students would do less well and that something could be done about that.
3. It was further assumed that there was no program that would work for all subjects.

Time of Day

Since the teacher was allowed to select the time of day to teach writing, it was assumed that the time of day in which the students were taught writing would not be a major factor to be considered.

Physical and Mental Conditions of Subjects

The subjects' physical and mental condition was not considered to have an effect on the results of the study. All subjects were involved in the study for the entire school year and had ample opportunity to make-up work if they missed because they were overtired or unwell.

Pacing

1. It was assumed that all subjects because randomly selected were equally motivated and unmotivated about completing all writing assignments since all writing assignments were part of the Language Arts Curriculum.

2. It was assumed that all subjects because randomly selected were equally conscientious and unconscientious about their efforts on the writing assignments since their work represented was part of their Language Arts grade.

Age and Sex of Subjects

1. It was assumed that age, sex, and race of the subjects were not major factors for consideration in the study since 100% of the students were age appropriate in the age range of 9 - 11 years; 53% female; 47% male; 14% Asian, and 86% white.
2. It was assumed that age and sex might limit the generalizability of the study.

Environment

1. The classroom in which the study was conducted was away from traffic patterns and there were limited ingress and egress to minimize noise and distraction.
2. It was assumed that the environment in which the study was conducted, an urban elementary school, might limit the generalizability of the study.

Equipment

1. It was assumed that lack of familiarity with the Cumulative Writing Folder System might affect the study; therefore, the teacher would receive an all day workshop of training in the use of the system.
2. It was assumed that since no audio-visual equipment was necessary for the program that its use was not a factor to be considered.

Experimenter Influence

It was assumed that subjects might be influenced by the presence of an experimenter; therefore, the experimenter was not involved directly with the subjects.

Integrity of Subjects

It was assumed that the integrity of the subjects was not a factor to be considered. The program was part of their regular course of study on which they were graded and would be given every opportunity to achieve as well in this area of the curriculum as in all other areas of the curriculum.

Limitations of the Study

An entire grade 5 class of students was involved in the study. The composition of the fifteen students was 53% Female; 47% Male; 14% Asian and 86% White. All were between the ages of 9 and 11. All students have attended the same urban elementary school where 60% of the students' families were below the poverty level and receive free or reduced lunch. The small sample size of fifteen is a limitation.

Every effort was made to reduce the limitations by having one teacher work with both the controlled and experimental groups.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of sentence-combining as a revision strategy for a predominantly white population of urban elementary grade 5 students. Whether it was an effective solution for all students to have a clearly

defined revision strategy was determined. Whether its effectiveness or ineffectiveness was related to the complex process of writing is still being researched.

This study looked at a specific method of revision strategy in the writing process to see if a student would produce a more coherent writing sample if given concrete methods in a well-defined structured program. The Cumulative Writing Program was explicit and well-defined and utilized the experimental mode of instruction--the best method according to the research.

Research on the composing process indicates that writing is an enormously complex task. It reveals that writing involves stop-review-start-again processes that teachers need to recognize in their assignments.

It is during the start-again process that I focused on specific strategies to improve the quality of the written work. Revision refers to the re-examination of a whole discourse or some fairly extensive part of it in light of purposes, content and form. As previously stated, research as a rule found very little revision at the level of the whole composition. The vast majority of revisions are cosmetic or mechanical. The necessity for continuous reconstruction suggests why writing is so difficult for so many people.

The complexity and difficulty of the composition process indicates the inadequacy of current school practices. Applebee [1981] found that the average preparation for writing amounts to about three minutes, the most writing assignments in schools ask

students to supply short answers of one word to a sentence, and that the most students are likely to write is a paragraph.

The research by Hayes and Flower [1980] is most valuable in suggesting the recursive nature of the writing process, in identifying various subprocesses and types of plans and in demonstrating the tendency for these plans and processes to interact with each other. They firmly establish the importance of generating ideas prior to formulating a thesis or outlining and even during the translating and editing process.

Further studies found that the more skilled writers pay greater attention to matters of context and organization while weaker writers have a tendency to be preoccupied with mechanics, particularly spelling [Pianko 1979].

At least two studies with elementary students confirmed the thesis that students need criteria which are appropriate to writing. Sager [1973b] and Coleman [1982] used scales to teach children to judge their own and others' writing. When children learn that the requirements of written prose are different from those of conversation, they activate more extensive memory searches. In addition when children learn criteria, they may seek content which results in higher quality writing.

Emig's conclusion in her study of revision techniques claimed that "students do not voluntarily revise school-sponsored writing" [1971].

Scales, criteria, and specific questions that students apply to their own or others' writing have a powerful effect on

enhancing writing quality. Through using criteria systematically, students appear to internalize them and bring them to bear in generalizing new material even when they do not have the criteria in front of them.

It is with this evidence that the design of the study was made.

Treatment

As described in Chapter II, John Collins' Cumulative Writing Folder Program was incorporated in the design of the study. Both the experimental and control groups utilized the Cumulative Writing Folder. The experimental group used sentence combining as a revision strategy. The teacher instructed this group on the techniques of sentence combining and instructed them to use this strategy to revise their writing samples.

In September the entire class of fifth graders was asked to produce a writing sample which was analytically scored by independent scorers. It was a comprehensive writing evaluation. The goals of the comprehensive writing evaluation as defined by Advanced Systems in Measurement and Evaluation, Inc., provide information about the effectiveness of three elements--the writer's ideas, his or her skill in communicating them, and the message's clarity or effect on its intended audience--a relatively complete picture of a writer's strengths and weaknesses. Instead of a pass/fail or a single holistic score, there are scores for each student in six categories: topic development, organization, support, sentence structure, word

choice, and mechanics. Each student received a total score and a percentile ranking, comparing that student to all other students tested at the fifth grade.

There are two major ways to assess writing: directly and indirectly. The indirect approach uses multiple choice questions to assess discrete skills involving spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammatical usage (writing conventions). While an indirect assessment can evaluate a student's knowledge about writing, the teacher still has no information about whether the student can actually write. In a direct writing assessment, the student is asked to produce a complete piece of writing, which is then evaluated by one or more scoring methods. Besides evaluating a student's knowledge of grammar and writing conventions, a direct assessment can also determine how well a student can think, plan, and use language to convey meaning.

The students were given two sessions in which to write their sample. The current research on writing indicates that students perform better when they are allowed time to think about what they want to say, write rough drafts, revise and edit their rough drafts, and then produce final copies. Giving the students two sessions in which to write provided them with a writing experience that was similar to their classroom writing situation, thus providing results that were more indicative of their writing abilities.

The writing prompts were developed by Advanced Systems staff members who are experienced in the teaching and testing of

writing. Each prompt was written to appeal to students coming from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, and to elicit the best writing they can produce. The writing prompts were extensively field-tested on students coming from a variety of backgrounds and ability levels, in both urban and rural settings.

Fifth grade students were asked to write a descriptive writing sample. For each of the three levels tested, a different writing prompt is used and a different mode of discourse must be employed to develop the essay. The National Council of Teachers of English currently recognize four different modes of discourse (methods of development or types of writing): Narrative, Descriptive, Expository, and Persuasive. For this assessment, students were asked to respond to a writing prompt that would require the following mode of discourse:

<u>Testing Level</u>	<u>Mode of Discourse</u>
Level One: grades 4-6	Descriptive

The writing prompt that was given in September and in June was as follows:

"Birthdays are special times for everyone. Imagine that on your next birthday you will be able to go wherever you want and do whatever you choose. You may invite up to four people to share your special day."

Two types of data were provided for every student taking the Comprehensive Writing Evaluation: raw scores and percentile ranks. The raw score tells how a student performed at the level tested, based on the standard used to evaluate papers at that level. The raw scores provide valid comparisons among individual students and also show growth across grades within a specific

level. For example, if a student takes the test the first year as a fourth grader, and then takes it again the following year as a fifth grader, that student's raw scores will increase if his or her writing has improved. The prompts will change each year, but the mode of discourse will remain the same within a level.

Because the prompts and modes of discourse are different for each testing level, however, it is not possible to compare raw scores across levels.

Percentile ranks are also provided for every student, allowing comparisons to be made between that student and all the other students at the same grade level who took the test that year.

To provide students with the best possible writing conditions, they were given time and materials to produce a rough draft during the first testing session, and write their final composition during the second testing session. The students were tested in two 35-40 minute sessions. Only the final draft of the student compositions is returned and evaluated.

The writing samples are scored analytically rather than with other scoring methods. There are several different scoring procedures currently in use to provide different types of information, depending on the goals of the testing program. For example, a holistic assessment of writing, which asks the rater to read the paper quickly and form an overall impression, provides some information on how each student scored in relation to the other students in the class, but does not indicate the

strengths and weaknesses of each student or show the improvement of individuals, classes, and programs over time. A primary trait scoring method evaluates a paper on one or two important features, but, again, fails to address other aspects of writing and does not provide much diagnostic information at the individual, class, or school level. An analytic approach, however, provides the detailed information needed by teachers and administrators to evaluate students and programs and shows both individual and group improvement over time.

Measurements

Each writing sample was scored in six different areas on a scale from one (low) to six (high). The six elements in the scale focused on writing as the expression, development, and effective communication of the student's ideas. These elements include:

1. Sentence Structure: examined the piece of writing at the sentence level for completeness, correctness, and variety or sophistication appropriate to the testing level.
2. Word Choice: evaluated the student's choice of words for correct usage, specific vocabulary, freshness and vividness of language.
3. Mechanics: measured the correct and effective use of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing appropriate to the testing level.
4. Topic Development: measured how well the writer communicates with the reader; shows awareness of the

audience and the purpose for writing; reveals the ability to write in the appropriate mode of discourse

5. Organization: measured the writer's ability to choose a focus, develop a logical organizational plan, and maintain coherence throughout the paper.
6. Support: evaluated the use of appropriate reasons, details, and examples to enhance the effect and/or support the generalizations and conclusions of the piece.

Each writing sample was evaluated independently by two readers experienced in analytic scoring. The readers were trained for the specific writing prompt with sets of anchor papers which exemplified the different score points on the scoring guide. For example, if one reader gave a particular paper 4 in organization and the other reader gave that paper 5 in organization, the student's organization score would appear as 4.5. If the two readers' initial ratings in any characteristic differ by more than one point, the sample is read by a scoring supervisor who decides on a final score for that characteristic. All readers are employed by Advanced Systems in Measurement and Evaluation, Inc., have backgrounds in education, and have scored writing samples analytically at grades 4 through 12 over the past three years.

During the school year from September to June the teacher instructed the students in writing using the Cumulative Writing Folder. With the experimental group the teacher instructed the students to revise their writings using sentence combining as a

revision strategy. Explicit instructions and exercises in this method were given to this group. The students had a writing lesson once a week during the school year.

Teacher Responses

To address questions pertaining to the specific writing instruction of the class during the school year the following responses were given by the teacher of this urban fifth grade class.

The teacher instructed the class in writing a minimum of once per week in a thirty-six week school year.

The classroom for most activities was naturally divided into two groups. It was a self-contained fifteen member fifth grade class. Many classroom activities included peer-tutoring within the two groups.

The teacher introduced and taught the sentence-combining technique to the experimental group as part of their Language Arts class. It was not unusual to teach specific theories or lessons to separate groups in this classroom. The experimental group participated in both written and oral exercises in sentence-combining as a writing revision strategy.

It was relatively easy and not unusual to exclude the control group from using this particular revision strategy. The control group was directed to work on another subject and/or exercise. There were occasions when the control group was given a lesson independent of the experimental group. It did not

appear contrived or artificial in the classroom management of this class.

The two groups were randomly selected and were more alike as a group than different. The two groups were heterogeneous and differences between them were not discernible.

The writing lessons always involved the Cumulative Writing Folder. The teacher selected those focus correction areas in which she thought the students were having difficulty in their written assignments or focus correction areas were selected as part of the fifth grade course of study. Specific focus correction areas were repeated during the year as needed. This was the first year that the students were trained in the use of the Cumulative Writing Folder. The teacher felt that it was an excellent program which was relatively easy to use when teaching the skill of writing.

Summary

In June, both the experimental and control group were asked to provide a writing sample as their post test. This sample was evaluated in the same manner as the pre test in September. An analysis of the comparison of the pre and post scores of the experimental group with the control group in the six variables is given in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of adding the revision strategy of sentence combining to the Cumulative Writing Folder Program used by a predominantly white population of urban fifth graders.

In September fifteen fifth graders were given a writing prompt (topic), and they produced a writing sample. This same writing prompt (topic) was given to these fifth graders in June, and they produced a second writing sample. The writing samples represent the pretest (September) and the posttest (June).

Both sets of writing samples were scored analytically by independent scorers. It was a comprehensive writing evaluation which graded in six distinct categories. Each paper was given a score from one to six points in the following six categories: topic development, organization, support, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics. The fifth grade class was randomly assigned into two groups.

This chapter presents the major questions posed by the study, and the hypotheses, and the analysis of the data.

Variables of Interest

The six variables of topic development, organization, supporting details, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics will be discussed and analyzed in this chapter.

Results

Three separate analyses were run to test the hypotheses.

Table 1 reports the raw scores of the six variables and totals these scores for the experimental and control groups of the pre-test writing samples given in September, 1988.

Table 2 reports the raw scores of the six variables and totals these scores of the post-test writing samples given in June, 1989.

A summary analysis and six separate analyses in the six subtopics of topic development, organization, supporting details, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics, will follow.

Analysis of the Data

There are seven different analyses for the overall score and six subscores; one for each of the aforementioned variables. In each variable the table lists the mean and standard deviation for the pre/post scores of the experimental and control groups of students. The second part of each table is the analysis of variance with repeated measures. This study will examine the P value which indicates the probability that any differences between the two exist.

Each hypothesis will be stated and analyzed separately with the analysis data explained.

TABLE 1

Pre-Writing Sample Results

Comprehensive Writing Evaluation
Individual Student Report

Grade 5

Date of Testing: September, 1988

Number Tested: 15

RAW SCORES							TOTAL SCORE
	Topic Devel- opment	Organ- ization	Support	Sentence Structure	Word Choice	Mechanics	Raw Score
Experimental							
1E	3.0	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	15.5
2E	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.5	3.5	4.0	23.0
3E	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.5	3.0	3.0	17.5
4E	3.0	3.0	2.5	3.0	3.0	3.0	17.5
5E	3.0	3.5	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.5	20.0
6E	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.0	3.5	19.0
7E	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	4.0	20.5
8E	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.5	3.5	4.0	22.0
Control							
1C	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.5	19.0
2C	3.0	3.5	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	19.5
3C	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.5	18.5
4C	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	19.0
5C	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.5	3.5	19.0
6C	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.5	2.5	3.0	17.0
7C	2.5	3.0	2.0	2.5	2.5	2.5	15.0

TABLE 2

Post-Writing Sample Results

Comprehensive Writing Evaluation
Individual Student Report

Grade 5

Date of Testing: June, 1989

Number Tested: 15

RAW SCORES

TOTAL
SCORE

	Topic Devel- opment	Organ- ization	Support	Sentence Structure	Word Choice	Mechanics	Raw Score
Experimental							
1E	3.5	3.0	2.5	3.0	3.0	3.5	18.5
2E	4.0	3.5	4.5	4.0	4.0	4.0	24.0
3E	4.0	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	21.0
4E	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.5	23.5
5E	3.0	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	4.5	21.0
6E	4.0	3.5	3.5	4.0	4.0	4.0	23.0
7E	4.0	3.5	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	22.5
8E	4.0	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.0	4.0	21.5
Control							
1C	3.0	3.0	2.5	3.0	3.0	3.5	18.0
2C	4.0	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.5	21.0
3C	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.0	3.0	15.0
4C	3.0	2.5	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	17.5
5C	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	17.0
6C	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	3.0	3.5	17.5
7C	3.0	2.5	3.0	2.5	2.5	3.0	16.5

Hypothesis One

If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revisions use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in topic development in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In topic development the table lists the mean and standard deviation for the pre/post scores of the experimental and control groups of students. The second part of each table is the analysis of variance with repeated measures. This study will examine the P value which indicates the probability that any differences between the two exist.

TABLE 3

Analysis of Topic Development Scores of Pre and Post Differences of Students Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining or Not Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining

		<u>Topic Development</u>					
	Pre		Post				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Experimental	3.0	.3	3.5	.6			
Control	2.9	.2	3.1	.4			
Source			SS	df	ms	F	p
Between Subjects							
Exp/Control			1.64	1	1.64	11.5	.005
Error _b			1.86	13	.14		
Within Subjects							
Pre/Post			1.29	1	1.29	11.8	.004
Pre/Post x Exp/Control			.55	1	.55	5.1	.04
Error _w			1.41	13	.11		

In the Pre/Post analysis across both the control and experimental groups there was significant topic development increases over the course of the school year. The mean in the experimental group increased from 3.0 to 3.5; whereas, in the control group the mean increase was 2.9 to 3.1.

The Pre/Post X Experimental/Control is the interaction term. It answers the question as to whether the experimental group changed in a different way over time compared to the control group. The measure of differences within the subjects is 5.1 (F) and the level of significance (P) is .04 which indicates there was significant topic development improvement over the year.

In traditional social science $P < .05$ is to be considered significant. Therefore, hypothesis one is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Two

If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the organization of writing as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In organization the table lists the mean and standard deviation for the pre/post scores of the experimental and control groups of students. The second part of each table is the analysis of variance with repeated measures. This study will

examine the P value which indicates the probability that any differences between the two exist.

TABLE 4

Analysis of Organization Scores of Pre and Post Differences of Students Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining or Not Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining

	<u>Organization</u>						
	Pre		Post				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Experimental	3.2	.4	3.1	.7			
Control	3.1	.2	2.9	.4			
Source			SS	df	ms	F	p
Between Subjects							
Exp/Control			1.46	1	1.46	8.1	.01
Error _b			2.34	13	.18		
Within Subjects							
Pre/Post			.0	1	.3	0	.9
Pre/Post x Exp/Control			.3	1	.55	3.3	.09
Error _w			1.2	13	.09		

In the Pre/Post analysis across both the control and experimental groups there were no significant organization increases over the course of the school year. The mean in the experimental group decreased from 3.2 to 3.1; and also in the control group the mean decrease was 3.1 to 2.9.

The Pre/Post X Experimental/Control is the interaction term. It answers the question as to whether the experimental group changed in a different way over time compared to the

control group. The measure of differences within the subjects is 3.3 (F) and the level of significance (P) is .09 which indicates no significant organization improvement over the year. It does, however, approach significance.

In traditional social science $P < .05$ is to be considered significant. Hypothesis two failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis Three

If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the quantity and/or quality of supporting details as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In supporting details the table lists the mean and standard deviation for the pre/post scores of the experimental and control groups of students. The second part of each table is the analysis of variance with repeated measures. This study will examine the P value which indicates the probability that any differences between the two exist.

TABLE 5

Analysis of Supporting Details Scores of Pre and Post Differences of Students Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining or Not Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining

	Pre		<u>Support</u>		Post			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Experimental	3.0	.5	3.1	.7				
Control	2.9	.4	2.6	.6				
Source			SS	df	ms	F	p	
Between Subjects								
Exp/Control			2.63	1	2.63	7.6	.02	
Error _b			4.48	13	.34			
Within Subjects								
Pre/Post			.02	1	.25	.07	.8	
Pre/Post x Exp/Control			.52	1	.029	2.11	.2	
Error _w			3.2	13	.52			

In the Pre/Post analysis across both the control and experimental groups there were no significant increases in supporting details over the course of the school year. The mean in the experimental group increased slightly from 3.0 to 3.1; but the mean decreased in the control group from 2.9 to 2.6.

The Pre/Post X Experimental/Control is the interaction term. It answers the question of whether the experimental group changed in a different way over time compared to the control group. The measure of differences within the subjects is 2.11 (F) and the level of significance (P) is .2 which indicates no significant supporting detail improvement over the year.

In traditional social science $P < .05$ is to be considered significant. Hypothesis three failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis Four

If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the sentence structure as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In sentence structure the table lists the mean and standard deviation for the pre/post scores of the experimental and control groups of students. The second part of each table is the analysis of variance with repeated measures. This study will examine the P value which indicates the probability that any differences between the two exist.

TABLE 6

Analysis of Sentence Structure Scores of Pre and Post Differences of Students Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining or Not Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining

		<u>Sentence Structure</u>				
		Pre		Post		
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Experimental		3.0	.4	3.3	.6	
Control		2.9	.2	3.0	.5	
Source				SS	df	ms F p
Between Subjects						
Exp/Control				1.49	1	1.49 6.6 .02
Error _b				2.9	13	.23
Within Subjects						
Pre/Post				.77	1	.77 5.97 .03
Pre/Post x Exp/Control				.24	1	.24 1.84 .2
Error _w				1.68	13	.13

In the Pre/Post analysis across both the control and experimental groups there were no significant increases in sentence structure over the course of the school year. The mean in the experimental group increased from 3.0 to 3.3; and the mean in the control group increased only slightly from 2.9 to 3.0.

The Pre/Post X Experimental/Control is the interaction term. It answers the question as to whether the experimental group changed in a different way over time compared to the control group. The measure of differences within the subjects is 1.84 (F) and the level of significance (P) is .2 which indicates no significant sentence structure improvement over the year.

In traditional social sciences $P < .05$ is to be considered significant. Hypothesis four failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis Five

If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the variety of word choice as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In word choice the table lists the mean and standard deviation for the pre/post scores of the experimental and control groups of students. The second part of each table is the analysis of variance with repeated measures. This study will examine the P value which indicates the probability that any differences between the two exist.

TABLE 7

Analysis of Word Choice Scores of Pre and Post Differences of
Students Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining or Not
Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining

	<u>Word Choice</u>						
	Pre		Post				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Experimental	3.1	.4	3.2	.6			
Control	3.0	.4	2.9	.6			
Source			SS	df	ms	F	p
Between Subjects							
Exp/Control			.91	1	.91	3.1	.1
Error _b			3.79	13	.29		
Within Subjects							
Pre/Post			.06	1	.06	.37	
Pre/Post x Exp/Control			.19	1	.19	1.2	
Error _w			2.11	13	.16		

In the Pre/Post analysis across both the control and experimental groups there were no significant increases in word choice over the course of the school year. The mean in the experimental group increased slightly from 3.1 to 3.2, and the mean decreased slightly in the control group from 3.0 to 2.9.

The Pre/Post X Experimental/Control is the interaction term. It answers the question as to whether the experimental group changed in a different way over time compared to the control group. The measure of differences within the subjects is 1.2 (F) and there is no level of significance (P).

In traditional social sciences $P < .05$ is to be considered significant. Hypothesis five failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis Six

If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the mechanics as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In mechanics the table lists the mean and standard deviation for the pre/post scores of the experimental and control groups of students. The second part of each table is the analysis of variance with repeated measures. This study will examine the P value which indicates the probability that any differences between the two exist.

TABLE 8

Analysis of Mechanics Scores of Pre and Post Differences of Students Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining or Not Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining

		<u>Mechanics</u>					
	Pre		Post				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Experimental	3.4	.5	3.7	.6			
Control	3.4	.5	3.4	.6			
Source			SS	df	ms	F	p
Between Subjects							
Exp/Control			.79	1	.79	2.25	.2
Error _b			4.57	13	.35		
Within Subjects							
Pre/Post			.45	1	.45	2.64	.12
Pre/Post x Exp/Control			.75	1	.755	4.4	.06
Error _w			2.22	13	.7		

In the Pre/Post analysis across both the control and experimental groups there were no significant increases in mechanics over the course of the school year. The mean in the experimental group increased from 3.4 to 3.7 and in the control group the mean remained the same from 3.4 to 3.4.

The Pre/Post X Experimental/Control is the interaction term. It answers the question as to whether the experimental group changed in a different way over time compared to the control group. The measure of differences within the subjects is 4.4 (F) and the level of significance (P) is .06 which indicates that it is approaching significance but does not meet the standard of $P < .05$. Hypothesis six failed to reject the null hypothesis.

There was an overall comparison of the results of the writing samples of both the experimental and control groups.

In the total raw score the table lists the mean and standard deviation for the pre/post scores of the experimental and control groups of students. The second part of each table is the analysis of variance with repeated measures. This study will examine the P value which indicates the probability that any differences between the two exist.

TABLE 9

Analysis of the Total Raw Score of Pre and Post Differences of Students Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining or Not Receiving Revision Strategy of Sentence Combining

	<u>Total</u>		<u>Raw</u>	<u>Score</u>			
	Pre		Post				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Experimental	18.8	2.15	20	3.0			
Control	18.1	1.6	17.9	2.8			
Source			SS	df	ms	F	p
Between Subjects							
Exp/Control			51.45	1	51.45	7.4	.02
Error _b			90.5	13	6.7		
Within Subjects							
Pre/Post			9.15	1	9.15	3.56	.08
Pre/Post x Exp/Control			14.49	1	14.49	5.63	.03
Error _w			33.5	13	2.57		

In the overall comparison of the experimental and control groups over the course of the year there were significant increases. The mean in the experimental group increased from 18.8 to 20 and the mean in the control group decreased from 18.1 to 17.9.

The Pre/Post X Experimental/Control is the interaction term. The measure of differences within the subjects is 5.63 (F) and the level of significance (P) is .03 which indicates that the overall performance of the subjects over the course of a school year was significant. It met the level of significance of $P < .05$.

Summary

Chapter IV has presented the results of the study. The overall performance of the experimental group compared to the

control group showed a level of significance over the course of the school year.

There was significance or approaching significance in three of the six hypotheses.

In Hypothesis 1:

1. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revisions use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the topic development in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In Hypothesis 2:

2. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the organization of writing as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In Hypothesis 6:

6. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be

improvement in the mechanics as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In Hypotheses 1, 2, and 6, there were various levels of significance when the experimental and control groups were compared over the course of the school year.

There were three hypotheses which showed no level of significance over the course of the school year.

Hypothesis 3:

3. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the quantity and/or quality of supporting details as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

Hypothesis 4:

4. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the sentence structure as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision

strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

Hypothesis 5:

5. If urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program in their writing revision use sentence combining as a revision strategy there will be improvement in the variety of word choices as compared to urban fifth graders in the Cumulative Writing Folder Program not using the sentence combining revision strategy as measured by an analytically scored pre and post writing sample.

In the above three hypotheses there was no significant level of significance over the course of the school year.

Chapter V will present the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section presents a summary of the study, including the bases of the research, purpose, discussion of the limits of the study, statement of the problem, design and procedures, and results. The second section presents a discussion of the important conclusions derived from the research activity. The third section offers recommendations concerning the applications of the findings of the study and the need for future research.

Summary of the Study

The "crisis in the area of writing" both on a national and local level cannot be overemphasized. The teaching of writing is a skill that needs to be taught with successful results in our schools. There has been no major improvement in the results of writing assessment tests over the past decade. Both students' writing instruction and their writing performance have remained relatively unchanged. Businesses are very much aware of the crisis as they face growing numbers of students who cannot write simple statements in applications. There must continue to be research in the area of writing. Writing programs at the elementary school level must be developed, implemented and tested to address this critical problem.

Bases for the Study

The bases for the study were the assumptions that writing is a process which can be taught successfully, that a structured program at the elementary level can be developed, and that optimal performance will result if the program is clearly designed and implemented.

The Problem

In the research in elementary schools, clearly defined writing programs do not exist. This lack of programs or unified approach to teaching writing manifests itself most significantly in student and/or teacher avoidance of and frustration with writing. The problem remains that unless writing programs are introduced and implemented in schools, quality writing will continue to be a skill that only a few possess.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to modify a fifth grade writing program with a structured revision strategy. The study looked at a specific method of sentence combining used with the Cumulative Writing Folder Program to see if those students would produce a more coherent writing sample. Sentence combining as a revision strategy was chosen because research has shown that this technique can improve the quality of writing.

Limits of the Study

The limits of the study included the relatively small sample size of fifteen fifth grade students. The environment in which the study was conducted, an urban elementary school, may limit

the generalizability of the study. Every effort was made to reduce the limitations by having one teacher work with both the control and experimental groups.

Design and Procedures of the Study

The population of the sample groups was urban elementary fifth graders who were randomly selected for the experimental and control groups. A pre-post experimental control group design with random assignment was chosen. An entire fifth grade class of fifteen students was used for the study. The class was divided randomly: two groups of four seated on the left side of the room constituted the experimental group while two groups of four and three seated on the right side of the classroom constituted the control group. The teacher instructed the two groups independently. Both the control and experimental groups used the Cumulative Writing Folder. The experimental group used sentence combining as a revision strategy. In September the entire class produced a writing sample and again in June. A comparison of these two writing samples of each of the fifteen students was compared and analyzed. The same topic was given in both samples.

Results of the Study

The overall performance of the experimental group showed significant improvement in the quality of their writing samples over the course of the school year. There was a downward trend in the overall quality of the control group.

The hypotheses that showed levels of significance were in the areas of topic development, organization of writing, and the mechanics of writing.

The hypotheses that were in the areas of supporting details, sentence structure, and variety of word choice showed little or no significant levels of improvement.

Conclusions

Writing is a process that can be taught successfully. A writing program with a unified set of techniques and expectations about student writing can be developed and reinforced over a period of years. Implemented properly, students will have a structure within which to work and an understanding of their teacher's expectations. Students are able to understand the basic requirements of writing. A piece of writing has its own process of development. Thinking about where ideas and facts go in the paper is more closely aligned with revision than with planning. Students need more guidance in the use of planning and specific revision strategies such as sentence combining that require taking a broader view of a paper and evaluating its overall organization and coherence.

When the revision strategy of sentence combining was used within the framework of the Cumulative Writing Folder Program, there was an overall improvement in the post writing samples.

Topic development showed a significant level of improvement over the course of the school year in the experimental group. This indicates that the additional revision strategy of sentence

combining improves the quality of topic development. It shows awareness of the audience and the purpose for writing. There was only slight improvement in the post tests of the control group.

Organization within a writing sample showed a slight level of significance in the experimental group. This variable measured the ability to choose a focus, develop a plan and maintain coherence. There was no improvement but a slight decrease in organization in the control group.

Sentence combining as a revision strategy does not necessarily improve the task of organization in a writing sample.

The third hypothesis in which there was improvement over the course of the school year was in the area of mechanics. This skill measures the correct and effective use of spelling, capitalization, and paragraphing. Using sentence combining as a revision strategy is a mechanical and stylistic skill. Improvement in this area was expected.

The most significant fact was that there was overall improvement in the post writing samples of the experimental group. The structured Cumulative Writing Folder Program and its four elements--a writing management system, oral reading, focus correction, and using past papers to teach new skills, plus most importantly the revision strategy of combining sentences--resulted in overall writing success.

The areas in which there were no significant levels of improvement--supporting details, sentence structure, and variety of word choice--are below.

In the area of supporting details, the revision strategy of sentence combining did not affect the results. Sentence combining is a grammatical technique that combines simple sentences without adding supporting details.

That there was no significant level of improvement in the area of sentence structure was surprising. The addition of sentence combining as a revision strategy is closely linked to the improvement of sentence structure; therefore, overall improvement in this area was expected and assumed. A closer look at the criteria of sentence structure would be recommended. It examined the piece of writing at the sentence level for completeness, correctness, and variety.

No improvement in the area of word choice in the experimental group's post writing samples was expected. Specific vocabulary, freshness and vividness of language are not the expected results of sentence combining.

Recommendations

The results of this study are encouraging but further research and study in the teaching of writing is recommended.

A structured writing program like John Collins' Cumulative Writing Folder Program and defined revision strategies such as sentence combining result in improved writing samples over the course of a school year. A school-wide writing program and a commitment to its implementation and supervision is a recommendation. As a result of this research there is a strong

indication that a well-defined structure in a writing program is necessary for improved results.

There is a need for professional development for teachers to learn how to teach the process of writing and specific revision strategies such as the writing technique of sentence combining. Further research should also be directed at discovering additional writing techniques to be used by students in the revision process.

Is the Cumulative Writing Folder Program an effective writing program for elementary grades? Additional instruction on its use should be given to elementary teachers. Follow-up workshops are necessary for continuity and effectiveness.

In how much writing do elementary children engage? Donald Graves, a professor of English education at the University of New Hampshire, surveyed school systems that supposedly stressed writing. He found that elementary students averaged only three pieces of writing in three months' time [1978].

A recommendation for elementary writing would include weekly instruction in the process of writing. Teachers should teach specific writing skills that are stressed in the focus correction areas in the Cumulative Writing Folder as well as specific revision strategies. Students should be routinely required to write more frequently.

Many questions are raised as well as answered in a research activity. There is a need to discover and design writing

programs for elementary students. Only through research will the solution to this need be answered.

There is a need for school wide acceptance of a particular writing program and a commitment to implement and supervise a writing program.

There is a need for professional development for teachers in the training in the use of a writing program and specific revision strategies. The teacher in this study had only a one-day workshop in the use of the John Collins Cumulative Writing Folder. Her only experience in the use of sentence combining, the strategy technique being studied, was the instruction and subsequent exercises in an elementary grammar book. These conclusions became apparent when the review of the pretest and posttest writing samples were examined. It can be assumed that there is little or no training for elementary teachers in the skill of writing. This is an area of serious concern for future studies which should address the need for professional development in the area of writing.

Further research should also be directed at discovering additional writing techniques to be administered in the teaching of writing. There is a need and only through research will the answer to this need be discovered. This study has raised as many questions as it has answered.

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM: PARENT LETTER

PUBLIC SCHOOLS



LORRAINE M. BORDONARO
Principal

Dear Parent:

Since last year I have been preparing and writing a Dissertation for my Doctorate Degree. As part of my research, I examined writing papers from Ms Stuart's fifth grade class of last year.

While your child was a student in Ms Stuart's class, the John Collin's Writing Folder Program was used. This Writing Program is still being used today in all fifth grade classrooms in the Public Schools as part of the Education Plan.

During their writing classes, two distinct revision strategies were used. Both of these strategies are accepted techniques used in elementary programs. My study compares the results of the writing samples of the two groups.

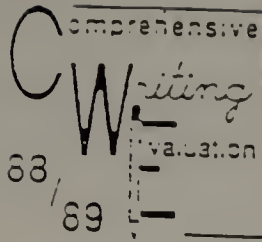
This letter is to inform you that neither your child's name nor the individual results of his/her writings will be used. Their identity will be kept strictly confidential. I will be very happy to share the results of this study with you when it is complete.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call me at school at

Sincerely,

Lorraine M. Bordonaro
Principal

PRE-TEST / POST-TEST



Name _____

LEVEL 1, GRADES 4 - 6

FIRST DRAFT, FIRST WRITING PERIOD

DIRECTIONS

You will have two sessions to work on a paper that tells about your special birthday. Read the instructions in the box below and then think about the prewriting suggestions.

WRITING SITUATION:

Birthdays are special times for everyone. Imagine that on your next birthday you will be able to go wherever you want and do whatever you choose. You may invite up to four people to share your special day.

DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING:

Write about your special day. Be sure to include where you want to go, what you want to do, and who will be with you. Make the people who will read your paper feel as if they will be sharing this occasion with you.

PREWRITING SUGGESTIONS:

1. Think about several favorite or special things you would like to do on your next birthday. Write your ideas on the lines below.

2. Which one is your favorite? Write it below.

3. List some details about the special thing you choose to do. You may use these details in your rough draft to describe your day.

APPENDIX C

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How often did you teach a writing lesson to the class?
2. How was the class seated and/or divided?
3. How did you introduce and teach the sentence-combining technique as a revision strategy to the experimental group?
4. How did you exclude the control group from using this particular revision strategy?
5. How were the two groups alike and/or different from each other?
6. Explain your use of the Cumulative Writing Folder.

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