

The Effect of Using Written Retelling as a Teaching Strategy on Students Performance on the TOWL-2

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The purpose of this study was to determine if practice in written retellings that focused on the structural framework of narratives, would enhance second grader's writing development as tested by the TOWL-2. This investigation used a Multiple Analysis of Variance procedure to examine the interaction effect of Teaching style (Traditional / Skill Based or Language / Whole Language based) and the use of a written retelling strategy to teach grammar. The questions to be discussed are:

- 1) Do students who are taught reading using the written retelling strategy score better on the Test of Written Language - 2 (TOWL-2) over students that were not taught using this strategy.
- 2) Does the teaching style (Traditional / Skill Based or Language / Writing Process based) have an effect on the test scores on the TOWL-2
- 3) Is there an interaction between these two independent variables. In other words does the written retelling strategy work better in a traditional classroom or a language based classroom?

The study involved a total of 118 children from four writing process and four traditional classrooms. The classes were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups so that there were 2 traditional classrooms and 2 writing process classrooms in each of the control and treatment groups. A written retelling instructional strategy was conducted with the treatment groups over a 12-week period. Prescores and postscores on the Test of Written Language-2 were analyzed by using a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA).

All the subtests except the Thematic Maturity test show a significant interaction effect between teaching style and the written retelling approach to teaching reading and writing. These interactions, along with the individual results for each classroom and independent variable suggest that written retelling cannot be used as a piecemeal ready made activity that teachers can use in their classrooms. Instead the teacher must use this method as part of an overall paradigm shift toward a more writing centered classroom. The MANOVA results show that the traditional classrooms using the written retelling strategy did not show significant gains over the traditional classrooms that was a control group. Therefore the written retelling strategy in this environment was not particularly effective. However, The Literature based / whole language classrooms that used the written retelling strategy did show a significant improvement over the control group. This is the basis for the interaction effect of teaching style and written retelling. Written retelling strategies tend to work best in a literature / whole language based classroom.

Because of the major paradigm shift in the field of literacy, new questions concerning children's writing development have emerged. A recent study by the National

Assessment of Educational Progress (1990) reported one-half of the children in America were not able to write an adequate response to writing assignments that involved a variety of genres. Further evidence indicates that many teachers focus on the mechanics of grammar and correct spelling with little or no time spent on the actual writing process itself.

As educators seek to use more strategies that support children's natural writing

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development, written retellings are suggested. Written retellings are viewed as a practical instructional strategy (Brown & Cambourne, 1987). Although there are only a few studies that investigated retellings as an instructional strategy for writing development, they showed positive results (Gambrell et al., 1985; Gambrell et al., 1991; Morrow, 1985. According to Morrow (1985), there is a need for further research to determine the significance of using written retellings to enhance children's writing development.

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Literature Review

Over the past 20 years, the field of writing has undergone a major paradigm shift. The focus has changed from emphasizing the product to focusing on the process of writing (Calkins, 1986; Heald-Taylor, 1989). Research by Calkins (1983), Graves (1983), Strickland (1989), and Sulzby and Teale (1989) provided support for the paradigm shift. Their research clearly showed that writing is a developmental process that is enhanced when children experience literate rich environments and are active participants in writing. As a result of the paradigm shift, there has been a tremendous increase in the development of appropriate writing practices (Bissex, 1980; Dyson, 1983, 1991; Edelsky & Smith, 1984; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Lucas, 1993; Taylor, 1983). In spite of the emphasis on the writing process, however, a recent study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP, 1990) reported that only 50% of the children in the United States from grades 4, 8, and 12 were able to write an adequate response to a narrative or informative writing assignment. It concluded that classroom teachers were moving slowly in their transition from a skills-based model to a writing-process model.

It seems that many teachers are unaware or ignoring the findings of researchers such as Brown and Cambourne (1987), Calkins (1983, 1986), Goodman (1990), and Graves (1983). Many teachers are still not providing children opportunities to construct their system of written language through writing activities such as writing workshops, journal writing and written retellings.

This investigation focused on written retellings as a practical instructional strat-

egy to determine its effect on children's writing development. During the past few years, researchers have used story retelling as an assessment tool investigating developmental trends in comprehending stories (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979; Thorndyke, 1977). In the limited number of studies conducted using story retelling as a strategy for skill development, positive results were found for increased ability in comprehension, language development, and the inclusion of structural elements in children's retold stories (Gambrell, Koskinen, & Kapinus, 1991; Gambrell, Pfeiffer, & Wilson, 1985; Morrow, 1985). The researchers also concluded that skills gained from retelling stories were transferred to children's dictations or written retellings.

Written retellings of stories appear to have potential for skill development but have not been widely tested (Morrow, 1986). However, there is some evidence that Golden (1984) and Whaley (1981) found that written retellings as an instructional strategy also enhanced the development of various literacy skills. Although there is support for the use of retellings as a strategy to enhance children's literacy development, Morrow (1985) stated that the use of oral and written retellings was not widely practiced in schools since teachers viewed retellings as time consuming and difficult (Morrow, 1985).

In summary, oral retellings make a significant difference in children's skill development. At the same time, written retellings of stories appear to have potential for skill development but have not been widely tested. According to Morrow (1986), additional research is needed to determine the significance of written retellings as an instructional strategy.

Method

The purpose of this study was to determine if practice in written retellings that focused on the structural framework of nar-

ratives would enhance second graders' writing development and sense of story structure. This investigation compared children's written retellings in four traditional and four writing process classrooms over a 12-week period. This was accomplished by comparing the pretest and posttest scores on the Test of Written Language-2 (TOWL-2). The study investigated second graders' written retellings over a 12-week period. MANOVA was used to analyze the pretest and posttest scores from the TOWL-2. Eta Squared (with a criterion of .2) was computed to check for meaningful differences.

Hypothesis

There will be significant interaction between the independent variables of type of classroom environment (type) and on the experimental condition of written retelling treatment (group) on the five subtests of the Test of Written Language-2 (TOWL-2): (a) thematic maturity, (b) contextual vocabulary, (c) syntactic maturity, (d) contextual spelling, and (e) contextual style

Definition of Terms

The following operational definitions were used for the purpose of this study:

Written retelling is a strategy that reflects a holistic concept in which children are actively involved as they reconstruct a written retelling of the story read (Brown & Cambourne, 1987).

Traditional classroom is one in which experiences are teacher controlled and skill oriented. Daily opportunities for writing are usually limited to teacher directed activities. Evaluation focuses on errors in the areas of grammar, spelling, and usage (Heald-Taylor, 1989).

Writing-process classroom is one in which writing opportunities are provided daily on self-selected topics for sharing with the teacher and one another. Emphasis focuses upon process (Graves, 1985; Heald-Taylor, 1989).

Narrative is a story that consists of a series of temporally occurring events that have some causal or thematic ties.

Story structure refers to elements of a narrative that include setting, characters, problems, actions, and resolution.

The eight intact classrooms participating in the study were grouped into four homogeneous groups. Treatment and control groups were randomly selected. Homogeneity was tested by an analysis of scores on the pretest of the Test of Written Language-2. Analysis of the pretest scores indicated that the classes were statistically homogeneous on the five subtests: Thematic Maturity, Syntactic Maturity, and Contextual Spelling.

The following null hypothesis was tested in the study: (a) There will be no significant interaction between experimental and control groups containing writing process and traditional teachers on the five subtests of the TOWL-2: thematic maturity, contextual vocabulary,

this subtest measures "the ability to write when measured by analyzing a spontaneously composed essay" (p. 6).

Literature Selection

Twelve different titles of narratives appropriate for second graders were selected. The selection process included the examination of books selected for teachers' choice awards, and children's choice awards. In addition, suggested literature for second graders by Routman (1988, 1991), Trumpet Book Club (catalog 1993), Scholastic Book Clubs (catalog 1993), and informal interviews with second- and third-grade children were investigated. A panel of reading experts that included two university professors who teach children's literature and an experienced second-grade teacher reviewed a list of titles and selected 12 folk and fairy tales.

Twelve sets of narratives were purchased with 25 copies of each title. This number made it possible for each child who participated in the study to have an individual copy of each story.

Description of Instruments

The Test of Written Language (TOWL-2) was administered to assess the children progress. The Test of Written Language-2 is a revision of Test of Written Language, also by Hammill and Larsen (1988). TOWL-2 consists of two forms, A and B. Form A was used as the pretest and Form B was used as the posttest at the end of the treatment period. The TOWL-2 was standardized on a 19-state sample of more than 2,000 private and public school children from 2nd to 12th-grade. TOWL-2 provides 10 subtests. The first five subtests are comprised of a contrived format that includes spelling, vocabulary, style, logical sentences, and sentence combining. The contrived subtest is defined by Hammill and Larsen (1988) as "the ability to write when measured by tests having contrived formats" (p. 6). The second of the five subtests evaluates writing through spontaneous formats. According to Hammill and Larsen,

Selection of Narratives

One criterion for the selection of narratives used in the study was adapted from Morrow (1986). Morrow suggested that the narratives selected should have a well developed story structure that included definite settings, clearly defined characters, clear themes represented in characters faced with problems or goals, and plot episodes that lead to the characters' goals or resolutions.

The genre selected for this study included folk and fairy tales. Brown and Cambourne (1987) recommended folk and fairy tales for young children's written retellings because the children were already familiar with the elements of story structure used in the tales.

Teacher Training Session

A teacher training session was conducted 2 weeks prior to the treatment period.

The purpose of the training session was to familiarize the teachers in the treatment groups with the procedures used for the written retelling strategy. The teachers watched a video of a second-grade teacher as she implemented each step of the retelling procedure with her class. They also reviewed each book that would be used during the treatment period and discussed in detail the outline of the retelling procedure during the training session. A copy of the Written Retelling Outline is in Appendix B.

The classroom teachers conducted the written retelling procedure 2 days each week for a total of 2.5 hours. The retelling session for the first day was approximately 1 h while the written retelling session on the second day was 1.5 h. The retelling sessions were scheduled on Monday and Wednesday of each week.

Data Collection

Pretests of the Test of Written Language-2 (TOWL-2) by Hammill and Larsen (1988) were administered to establish initial homogeneity among the four control and four experimental groups. The posttest of the TOWL-2 was given at the end of the 12-week treatment period and comparisons were made between scores of the pretest to assess the development of second graders' written retellings.

Data Analysis

In this study, written retellings of narratives of second graders in traditional and writing process classrooms were compared by pretests and posttests from the TOWL-2. The classrooms were referred to as traditional control, traditional experimental, writing process control, and writing process experimental. Experimental groups completed 12 written retellings of narratives that were read over a 12-week period. The control groups had access to the same books as the experimental group but were not given the opportunity to complete the written retellings.

Results

When the pretest data for each of the five variables were examined between the experimental and control groups, no significant differences were observed therefore a covariant method was not employed. Differences in the five subtests (thematic maturity, contextual vocabulary, syntactic maturity, contextual spelling, and contextual style) were examined using a MANOVA technique. The variables of group (experimental and control) and type (writing process and traditional) were used as independent variables in the analysis. Assumptions for use of a MANOVA analysis were examined and were found to be reasonably met. Results for each of the five subtests are reported separately.

A summary of the descriptive statistics for each subtest is presented in Table 1. The MANOVA summary tables for each of the five subtests are provided in Tables 2 through 6.

Findings for the Thematic Maturity Subtest

There was no significant interaction between group and type; therefore, the main effects were examined. When these main effects were examined for group, type, and change over time (comparison of the pre and post tests), statistically significant differences were found for both group with an F ratio of 7.49 ($df = 113, p < .01$) and type with an F ratio of 3.75. ($df = 113, p < .05$). A statistically significant difference was found between the pretest and posttests ($F = 11.81, df = 1, p > .05$) (Table 2).

Findings for the Contextual Vocabulary Subtest

A statistically significant interaction for group and type over time was observed on the Contextual Vocabulary Subtest with an F ratio of 7.06 ($df = 113, p < .01$). This indicates that the writing process classrooms that participated in the treatment program made the largest gains (Table 3).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Subtests of the Test of Written Language-2

	<i>Pretest</i>			<i>Posttest</i>	
	Mean	N	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Thematic maturity</i>					
Experimental					
Writing process	7.966	31	3.179	9.172	2.45
Traditional	7.419	31	2.349	8.226	2.553
Control					
Writing process	7.393	28	1.969	7.643	2.909
Traditional	6.172	29	2.122	7.414	2.771
<i>Contextual vocabulary</i>					
Experimental					
Writing process	2.4	31	1.653	4.6	3.307
Traditional	3.032	31	2.302	3.129	2.377
Control					
Writing process	2.75	28	2.012	3.036	2.987
Traditional	2.414	29	1.402	3.31	2.83
<i>Syntactic maturity</i>					
Experimental					
Writing process	53.903	31	33.409	97.355	16.665
Traditional	55.935	31	26.401	69.516	30.516
Control					
Writing process	46.107	28	32.514	45.107	23.408
Traditional	35.034	29	18.844	67.448	27.118
<i>Contextual spelling</i>					
Experimental					
Writing process	59	31	69.801	78.71	52.152
Traditional	48.548	31	26.233	66.065	32.887
Control					
Writing process	39.893	28	31.518	41.143	23.223
Traditional	29.207	29	16.621	62.034	51.642
<i>Contextual style</i>					
Experimental					
Writing process	4.643	31	3.176	6.786	2.91
Traditional	5.129	31	2.884	6.968	4.175
Control					
Writing process	5.571	28	2.645	5.571	3.176
Traditional	4.69	29	2.779	6.069	2.999

Table 2
ANOVA Summary Table for Thematic Maturity

	SS	DF	MS	F
Between Subject				
Within cells	953.27	113	8.44	
Group	63.22	1	63.22	7.49
Type	31.61	1	31.61	3.75
Group x type	.01	1	.01	0
Within Subjects				
Within cells	429.08	113	3.8	
Time	44.85	1	44.85	11.81
Group x time	.99	1	.99	.26
Type x time	1.28	1	1.28	.34
G x T x time	7.07	1	7.07	1.86

Table 3
ANOVA Summary Table for Contextual Vocabulary

	SS	DF	MS	F
Between Subject				
Within cells	926.35	114	8.13	
Group	10.04	1	10.04	1.24
Type	2.98	1	2.98	0.37
Group x type	2.22	1	2.22	0.27
Within Subjects				
Within cells	437.96	114	3.84	
Time	44.57	1	44.57	11.6
Group x time	4.57	1	4.57	1.19
Type x time	8.2	1	8.2	2.13
G x T x time	27.12	1	27.12	7.06

Table 4
ANOVA Summary Table for Syntactic Maturity

	SS	DF	MS	F
Between Subject				
Within cells	343637.78	115	2988.15	
Group	25576.92	1	25576.92	8.56
Type	784.45	1	784.45	0.26
Group x type	5101.77	1	5101.77	1.71
Within Subjects				
Within cells	291471.13	115	2534.53	
Time	29034.67	1	29034.67	11.46
Group x time	2435.94	1	2435.94	.96
Type x time	46.59	1	46.59	.02
G x T x time	14864.77	1	14864.77	5.86

Table 5
ANOVA Summary Table for Contextual Spelling

	SS	DF	MS	F
Between Subject				
Within cells	334890.01	115	2912.09	
Group	23781.19	1	23781.19	8.17
Type	616.79	1	616.79	0.21
Group x type	4116.35	1	4116.35	1.41
Within Subjects				
Within cells	69749.76	115	606.52	
Time	18870.37	1	18870.37	31.11
Group x time	36.79	1	36.79	.06
Type x time	8.2	1	8.2	2.13
G x T x time	3204.67	1	3204.67	5.28

Findings for the Syntactic Maturity Subtest

Inspection of the scores for the Syntactic Maturity Subtest indicated that there was a statistically significant interaction between group by type over time with an F ratio of 5.86 ($df = 1, 115$ $p < .01$). This demonstrated that the children in the writing process classrooms who participated in the treatment made the largest gains between the pretest and posttest (53.903 - 97.335) (Table 4).

Findings for the Contextual Spelling Subtest

Analysis of the Contextual Spelling Subtest indicated that a statistically significant interaction was observed for the variables of group by type over time (F ratio = 6.98, $df = 1, 113$ $p < .05$). Interpretation of these findings indicates that the children in the traditional classrooms who did not receive the treatment made the greatest gains between the pretest and posttests (Table 5).

Findings for the Contextual Style Subtest

Analysis of the data for Contextual Style Subtest indicated a statistically significant difference for groups between the pretest and posttests with an F ratio of 4.56 ($df = 1, 115$ $p < .05$). This indicates that children in both writing process and traditional classrooms who participated in the treatment made larger gains than the children in the writing process and traditional classrooms who did not.

The null hypothesis that there will be no significant interaction between experimental and control groups containing writing process and traditional teachers of the five subtests of the Test of Written Language-2 will be addressed. The null hypothesis failed to be rejected for the Thematic Maturity Subtest due to no statistically significant interaction. However, there were statistically significant changes over time for all subjects and a statistically significant difference between the treatment and control

groups. However, when Eta Squared was computed (with a criterion of .02), these differences were not found to be meaningful.

Summary, Conclusions and Implications

The results of the 5 subtests shows some interesting findings. All the subtests except the Thematic Maturity test show a significant interaction effect between teaching style and the written retelling approach to teaching reading and writing. These interactions, along with the individual results for each classroom and independent variable suggest that written retelling cannot be used as a piecemeal ready made activity that teachers can use in their classrooms. Instead the teacher must use this method as part of an overall paradigm shift toward a more writing centered classroom. The MANOVA results show that the traditional classrooms using the written retelling strategy did not show significant gains over the traditional classrooms that was a control group. Therefore the written retelling strategy in this environment was not particularly effective. However, The Literature based / writing process classrooms that used the written retelling strategy did show a significant improvement over the control group. This is the basis for the interaction effect of teaching style and written retelling. Written retelling strategies tend to work best in a literature / writing process based classroom.

The results show that using this approach in a classroom that was considered a traditional skills based environment had little effect on the children scores on the TOWL-2 subtests. Reasons for this could be that the teacher was not fully utilizing the strategies beneficial aspects of promoting a love of reading, focusing on meaning, and respecting children literacy development. These factors are not usually present in a traditional skills based classroom. Therefore traditional teachers utilizing the written retelling did not produce the benefits that are possible with a writing based classroom.

However the findings also show that the written retelling strategy used in a literature based / writing process classroom can prove successful in increasing children understanding of grammar, spelling, and other semantic and syntactical tasks. Written retelling, when used as part of an overall philosophy of writing rich and literature based instruction is a valuable tool for teaching children.

The philosophy of the teachers, whether traditional or writing process, also influenced the richness of the retellings. The traditional teachers were more concerned with giving the right answers and test scores than children's writing development. On the other hand, the writing process teachers valued children's responses and gained insights into the children's writing development through the written retelling procedures. Thus, it can be concluded that beliefs and practices of teachers influence children's written retellings.

Educators must develop their goals in terms of children's deep sense of self in relation to others that includes the depth and breadth of their beliefs and understandings. They must understand children's literacy development and provide literacy instruction that reflects their in-depth understanding. Like the writing process teachers in this study, they will effectively use appropriate practices, such as written retellings.

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