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Teaching Paragraph Construction to Second Grade Students Using a Structured, Sequential Instructional Program

Sheryl Ann Miller
Western Michigan University

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TEACHING PARAGRAPH CONSTRUCTION TO SECOND GRADE STUDENTS USING A STRUCTURED, SEQUENTIAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

by

Sheryl Ann Miller

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Western Michigan University
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TEACHING PARAGRAPH CONSTRUCTION TO SECOND GRADE STUDENTS USING A STRUCTURED, SEQUENTIAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM

Sheryl Ann Miller, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 1987

The present study proposed that specific methods of teaching writing could be implemented through the application of established principles of behavioral, educational technology. A group of eight second grade students took part in a five week sequential writing program designed to teach them to construct a paragraph incorporating the following components: title, name, introductory sentence, three explanatory sentences, and a conclusion sentence.

Samples of the student's writing were obtained at the beginning and end of the program. Changes in writing style were analyzed for the absence or presence of each component. Every child demonstrated some improvement regarding one or more of the components. Results suggested that application of a structured training program can play an important role in the educational process.
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For making completion of this project possible, I thank my computer genius son, Adam Miller.

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And to my friend, Dana van't Zelfde, who believed in me more than I did myself, I offer my genuine and sincere appreciation.

Sheryl Ann Miller
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Members of the human race rely upon a variety of ways to express feelings, needs, and thoughts. One of these means of expression is accomplished through the written word. Knowledge of written expression is not inherent in man and therefore, must be learned. This learned behavior varies in its individual expression and often is considered to be a personal reflection of the person who produces it.

Persons to whom written expression of their thoughts comes easily may experience positive consequences resulting from interpretation of their writing samples by themselves or others. For other persons for whom written expression is a difficult and unrewarding task, close examination of their written efforts by themselves or others may often be frustrating and unfulfilling.

These perceived reflections sometimes cause people to be caught up in a realistic or unrealistic set of expectations regarding their performance or abilities. Because of these perceptions, such a personal expectancy can negatively or positively affect one's actual performance regardless of one's true ability in a given area. This idea of the critical role which expectations play in human growth and development is crucial to the understanding of
variations in human performance but it is not a new concept.

Scholars throughout the ages have reflected upon that concept and Springer (1972) noted that expectations are important in our lives. He realized that many events which are experienced by each person are foreshadowed by that person's expectation of that which is to come, and it is this preconceived expectation which provides the basis for personal achievement or lack of achievement for a great number of individuals.

Many human reactions are based not only upon the event itself, but also in the way in which the event is initially perceived. This perception is based on one's individual circumstances and may be readily observed as it applies to children in school and their actual and perceived level of achievement. This author believes that the self-fulfilling prophesy of a positive self-image can guide each person through life, but the self-fulfilling prophesy of a negative self-image follows the human victim forever. This begins when the child leaves the home environment to act and react as an individual in the early school environment.

Those who begin school with positive expectations and beliefs about their potential may have already begun to set the stage for personal and scholastic success. Those others, who begin school with a lack of belief in their
abilities and a negative self-concept, may also have roadblocks built into possible scholastic success right from the beginning. The saddest thing about one's personal image of oneself is that each individual has little control over the early formation of his or her own self-concept.

One example of the close tie between one's personal self-concept and his or her actual performance can be seen in the writing samples which each person produces. When a person creates almost any sample of written expression, he or she has produced a document which may reflect his or her own feelings. One's personal self and individual identity are revealed through his or her ability to express him or herself and "it is important to know how to express our feelings not only about yourself but of yourself, for self-identity begins with your feelings" (Brown, 1973, p. 58). One's writing samples may reflect personal feelings about oneself as well as providing examples of his or her actual developmental writing skill level.

Based on this author's beliefs and experiences, presence of or lack of belief in oneself partially develops from the content evaluations, by oneself or others, of the writing samples which each person produces and thus the close tie between the person's self-concept and actual
performance level is hypothesized.

This author also believes that as personal knowledge of oneself grows through increased self-awareness, skill development in areas such as writing can lead to one's enhanced concept of self in a variety of ways such as a higher elevation of personal self-esteem (Battle, 1982), more positive praise and recognition from teachers (Brown, 1973), and even possible transference from increased self-confidence from the school environment into the home and social environment (Campbell, Fairey, & Fehr, 1986).

However, this positive, personal growth does not happen automatically. It must be fostered in a variety of specific ways which are predictable and understandable. Some of these ways will be evaluated in this paper. It is useful to evaluate ways to guide positive growth because, although some of this fostering does take place in ways which help children, the positive fostering techniques need to occur more frequently and consistently in places like the academic environment.

A main concern in the growth and development of students lies in the method with which writing skills are taught. Writing instructions are sometimes unclear and confusing and the resulting writing samples of the students may be examples of the same educational problem. There are many aspects of a person's life in which he or she is judged or evaluated on the basis of writing ability.
Therefore, genuine concern is appropriate regarding the development of writing skills. When inconsistent requirements by teachers regarding writing sample expectations for students lead to frustration on the part of the students, the whole writing process can become a negative and defeating circle of unsuccessful attempts on the part of a student to build writing skills.

Keller (1977) studied the relationship between order and confusion in the classroom and in the subject text. He compared the method with which he taught a class in introductory psychology to a later method with which he taught a different class in introductory psychology. After reviewing the different instructional approaches, he described the first class as "eclectic" and "catholic". He explained that the class was comprised of a variety of lectures, demonstrations, and tests which were arranged with inconsistency and disorder. He laments that

No one asked how memory was related to conditioning, how conditioning was related to concept formation, how concept formation was related to discrimination, or how discrimination was related to association by similarity. (p. 96)

He recalls that the class moved quickly through the material and that it was discovered only later that different elements of the class were working against each other. The class moved quickly from topic to topic and from chapter to chapter. The ultimate feeling was of dissatisfaction, frustration, and unhappiness.
Keller then evaluated the instructional alternatives to this frustration and chose not to quit the course, study only part of the material, or ignore the confusion, but to write his own analysis of the situation instead. After much contemplation and research, he reduced lecture time, added lab and discussion sessions and reevaluated the different teaching methods. The students now demonstrated a clear understanding of a few relevant concepts and could see relationships in that area instead of knowing a little about a lot of areas as had been the case in the first class which had lacked order.

He concluded that scientific methods are now being applied to educational psychology and that the best way to learn is to

master one system thoroughly, your ideas are thus made consistent and your knowledge receives an orderly arrangement; then, as you read further, you can use this system as a touchstone whereby to test new ideas and to arrange new knowledge; and if the new ideas seem preferable to the old, or if the old framework breaks down under the new knowledge, you can alter your system accordingly. If you begin on the contrary, by studying a number of works abreast, you are liable to become confused. (p. 97)

It is that same lack of order and the resulting confusion which can hamper progress in the development of writing skills for many students in the classroom today. This study evaluates this lack of order and will demonstrate how positive differences can result from teaching writing from an orderly and concise perspective to
students in the classroom. Just as Keller found that it is a useful tool to teach material in an orderly arrangement and to master each step thoroughly before proceeding to the next, this study will expand upon that same concept as it applies to the teaching of writing skills.

This focus upon improved and revised methods of teaching writing has been expanded upon by Coop, White, Tapscott, and Lee (1983). They state that

The current movement toward reemphasizing writing competencies at the secondary school and college levels is beginning to shift to elementary and middle schools...(because) one of the many criticisms of public school education over the past several years centers on the inability of students to communicate through writing. (p. 76)

Their program was a structured, sequential writing program designed to strengthen writing skills. Furthermore, their program concentrated on students from the fourth to ninth grade. The program which the current paper describes hypothesizes that it is possible to move this technology to a younger group of children. Second grade students have been chosen on the assumption that they have rudimentary writing skills but have yet to be exposed systematically to more complex writing tasks. A secondary focus of the present study involves exploring the relationship between the development of writing skills and the student's perceived self-esteem. This study acknowledges that traditional school curricula may have
been directed toward some areas of scholastic and personal development, but there is one concern, i.e., self-esteem, which might improve with an altered writing approach.

Attention to the role of self-esteem, as viewed through the understanding of reinforcement, has been examined previously by Geiwitz (1976). He examined ways to improve human performance through implementation of specific techniques and he points out that we may use positive reinforcement to work toward perpetuating desired performance from students.

The concept of reinforcement is central to all social behavior theories. The central idea is fairly simple: Behaviors that lead to positive (pleasant) outcomes are more likely to be learned and performed than behaviors with neutral or negative consequences. These rewards...are often social: They involve praise, attention, and other human rewards, rather than simply food or the like. (p. 345)

The use of reinforcement in teaching writing enhances potential success and achievement for each student because the students are taught in small, achievable units and then rewarded accordingly as they master each unit. The whole program is built upon both actual and perceived success. The students are made to feel successful and the material is presented in such a way that they actually can be.

Others, like Annett (1969) and Bandura (1963) also studied how reinforcement is related to behavior but reinforcement is but one of several relevant variables in
the present research. The potential for success which is built into the program is obtained by incorporating into the teaching program use of several psychological principles. These principles include structured, sequential learning; repetition of desired behaviors; positive, continual, and immediate reinforcement; predictable and known consequences of specified behaviors; and cumulative effects of frequent practice.

The material is not only presented in small, achievable units, it is presented in a certain, logical order which acts in building block fashion. Each unit builds upon the skills learned in each preceding unit. This is important because certain basic expectations, such as development of a relevant topic sentence followed by more sentences which develop the chosen topic, are given components of a unified writing sample. These basic units regarding paragraph development are taught first in the program. This technique of orderly subject presentation has been identified as an effective approach in other areas as well as writing. Haberlandt and Bingham (1984) studied the effects of different approaches to the presentation of learning material. They found

that children whom we studied, regarding verbal learning and verbal behavior, processed statements faster when they were presented in a forward direction which reflects causal dependencies between them than when they were presented in a backward direction which reverses the typical order of actions. (p.165)
Unfortunately, a negative, reverse order can take place in the teaching of writing when an orderly, systematic, and positive program is not designated. A teacher may randomly assign the students to "write a paragraph" before they have mastered and internalized the necessary parts for any paragraph such as a topic sentence, explanatory sentence(s), and a transition or conclusion sentence. This can be confusing to students because they need to know how to create the components of a paragraph before they will be able to compose a well-written paragraph successfully.

On other occasions, students may be told to "write a paragraph." After they have done so, a teacher may write comments on the paper which indicate missing elements of the paragraph. "Use a good topic sentence." "Where is your topic explanation?" "You need a summary." The student may be critiqued on specific areas of performance before the areas of expectation have been clearly identified. The result of this type of evaluation will undoubtedly confuse the student about expectations since he or she did not know what was required.

The approach explored in this paper for teaching writing would present the material in logical order and sequence. The program is designed to teach writing in small, detailed units which mesh together to produce a well-written paragraph. Each sequential, orderly section
is taught in careful detail. The approach is designed to allow the student to achieve success at each step in the writing process and to further develop writing skills.

The realization that humans learn best when the material is presented in logical order and in small, achievable components was also studied by Michael (1974), except that he used animals to demonstrate the same concept. He discovered that it is essential when training animals to

have available a sequence of stimulus materials (or tasks as they would be called in human education) that start with the animal's existing repertoire. Then, the trainer would gradually build in the components of the more complex repertoire that is the goal of the instructional system. (p. 164)

Michael reinforces the importance of logical order and sequence in presentation of new material because it becomes a step toward learning more complex repertoires. This paper modestly attempts to offer further validation for these assertions.

Michael combines the necessity for this program of instruction with the need to differentiate the correct from the incorrect responses on the part of the subject and to be able to differentiate degrees of behavior as being more or less correct than others. The study being described in this paper has recognized these basic needs by isolating the specific sequence of lesson plans and providing ongoing differentiation of responses from the
perspective of the teacher as well as the student.

The concepts implemented in this program have been chosen because of their recognized relevance to the learning process. The knowledge of the concepts themselves is not new or previously unknown. The value of these learning approaches has been evaluated before by scientists who studied possible reasons why some students learn better than others (Bisanz, 1984; Hunter, 1982; Maslow, 1970).

Bisanz found that it is important to do more than simply present the material that is to be learned. It is essential to present it in relevant segments which logically follow each other and relate to that which has been previously learned. The material needs to be presented not only in logical order but in complete units which are relevant to past units.

This relevance to previous units is another important component of the current research. The goal is to ensure that each and every student has the opportunity to benefit as much as possible from exposure to this method of teaching writing. Bisanz's work indicated that "selection or construction of task relevant solution strategies from incomplete instructions may partially account for different performance on tests of reasoning" (p. 167). To eliminate student error resulting from incomplete instructions, each unit in the program described in this paper has been
carefully designed to be relevant and in sequence with past and future units.

The positive reinforcement which is incorporated into this unit plan takes the general form of ongoing praise and encouragement by the teacher to the students. As often as possible, the teacher will respond to a student's comments regarding the writing lesson or other class contributions regarding writing with appreciation for that aspect of the answer that can be defined as correct in some way. At the same time, the teacher will identify and correct elements of the answer which still seem unclear to the student. Class participation and questions will be recognized and encouraged.

This program is presented in such a way that after a few lessons, the student has learned a basic sequence of criteria necessary to write any basic paragraph. This is considered to be the desired behavior to be learned in this program because, after learning basic, logical, sequential steps to use when creating a paragraph, the student will be prepared to further refine his or her writing techniques in a variety of other ways which can be chosen by the teacher.

Once the desired behavior is learned, there must be ongoing performance evaluation. Students in this program first create and critique their own writing samples based on their own background and intuition. Then, the teacher
adds further comments. Shaping of behavior takes place at this time. The teacher needs to pick one major area in which the student is directed to refine writing changes. It is also critical for the teacher to identify and acknowledge one or more positive areas in which the student has been successful. This identification of positive areas of the writing sample helps establish an air of acceptance between the student and teacher. Even though the student will learn from continual monitoring and evaluation of the writing sample, the overall air of "judgement" from the teacher needs to remain accepting and on a positive level. There will be a balance of the students learning to critique their own writing samples combined with specific observations from the teacher which the student can implement to help refine existing writing skills and related knowledge. Tucker (1979) maintains, as a result of his own research, that "to establish and maintain performance, one often must augment natural feedback with a monitored feedback particularly when high performance standards are involved" (p.148). The ultimate goal is for each student to understand and to be able to implement writing skills in a sophisticated manner without outside intervention. Internalization of writing concepts is an achievable goal and one critical step toward this implementation of these concepts is for each student to have a variety of opportunities to actually practice his
or her skills.

The students need more than the opportunity to just talk about HOW to write. The students are given frequent opportunities to PRACTICE their craft. This correlates with findings of Haberlandt and Bingham (1984) who conducted research to find results of differences from simply providing instructions to combining them with opportunities for additional practice with the strategy during instruction. They found that

with grade school children, the supplements generally increased transfer of the keyword strategy, but transfer was most successful when training included comprehensive information about the strategy. (p. 171)

The students in the study currently being described learn writing skills through a combination of practice and positive reinforcement of new and existing, relevant skills. The class is deliberately structured so that each student can feel successful regarding writing sample attempts yet continually develop and refine existing skills through instructor evaluation and input. The students are also able to develop competence in a workable, relevant writing structure and can then be at a level of writing where they can begin to refine and experiment with their own personal writing style. Gage (1975) explains that

we went to the idea of how structure can help not only the teacher but also the student. When you learn a structure, you can handle the things
that fit together as a single whole, and thus are able to comprehend relationships much more efficiently than when dealing with separate unstructured parts. (p. 67)

Careful word choice is a related part of paragraph development. Included in the present program are ongoing observations and comments from the teacher regarding appropriate word choice. Elimination of flaws and imprecise word choice from one's writing samples can help increase the communication skills and to make the written creations more sophisticated. This becomes an ongoing benefit since "anything that affects a communication transaction is a potential communication barrier" (Wilmot, 1974, p. 99).

Eliminating communication barriers helps us to express ourselves more clearly to others. Writing is a means of expressing ourselves in the form of interpersonal communication between a person and one or more others. This "interpersonal communication is significant because ... you have an equal opportunity for sharing information with one another" (Springer, 1972, p. 16). Written style needs to be developed both to utilize our language correctly and, perhaps more importantly, to understand and express ourselves better as human beings.

This author's personal experience has given credence to the belief that as improved techniques enable students to expand their writing skills and style, application of
psychological principles to academic procedures for teaching writing skills can benefit the student in a positive combination of ways. Initially, implementation of this technique can provide students with specific tools, skills, and methods with which to build a paragraph. After the student can build one effective paragraph, it is highly probable that the student will be able to build a variety of additional paragraphs. Initially, however, this method stresses writing quality and not quantity.

It is also hypothesized that the direct and measurable changes in a student's writing skill level may be accompanied by an enhancement of personal self-esteem as measured by instruments such as the subset of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. An indirect benefit of implementation of this writing technique can occur because the positive nature of this method of teaching may show a correlational rise in a student's feelings of self-esteem. This also may influence a student's scholastic performance.

Educators have recognized the importance of self-esteem in the process of achievement for many years and believe strongly that a negative self-concept is a significant factor contributing to low academic achievement. (Battle, 1982, p. 61)

Conversely, researchers like Campbell, Fehr and Fairey (1986) concluded from their research that high self-esteem subjects were more satisfied with their task
performance than low self-esteem subjects.

Ultimately, and perhaps most importantly, acquisition of this structured, sequential writing pattern can produce positive benefits which can transfer from the classroom situation to the student's personal life. This can happen when the student receives the praise and high probability of success which are built into this writing approach. The youngest, least skilled writing student, can be taught this method; utilization of the skill can lead to better grades and then help to develop a more positive teacher-student relationship.
CHAPTER II

METHOD

Subjects

Fourteen members in a second grade class from a local, public elementary school took part in this study. The entire class participated in the program with the exception of a few students who were daily excused from the classroom at the designated time to take part in other programs. The class was not academically special by any official definition but was recognized by the principal of the school to be lower than average, as a whole, regarding writing skills.

There were eight girls and six boys. Measurements were taken of their academic progress as well as their levels of self-esteem. The group met for a half an hour, twice a week, for five weeks.

Of the fourteen students who took part in the study, final analysis procedures were implemented for eight students for whom there were complete sets of data. Incomplete data for the other students were due to illness or absence from the class for reasons beyond the control of the experimenter.
Materials

The students needed only a pencil and paper each day and the instructor used chalk and a chalkboard. It was possible to evaluate specified criteria related to the goals of this writing program and to measure what changes had taken place in each student's writing style by evaluating the daily paragraphs which the students were assigned to write and turn in.

Procedure

This program lasted for a five week period. The class met twice a week 45 minutes each Tuesday and Thursday. The instructor was always available to answer questions and guide the students in areas in which they needed help.

Measurement of progression of writing skills was evaluated through writing samples taken at the beginning of the program and again at the end. The instructions for each of the writing samples were the same. The students were asked to write one paragraph about the topic "Week-end." The paragraph was evaluated in terms of the presence or absence of the specific criteria which the writing program is designed to teach. These criteria are specified below.

During the program, the class was systematically
presented with a series of writing exercises designed to be presented individually as simple units but sequenced to build upon each other to help structure an increasingly complex writing repertoire for the student.

The self-esteem of the students also was measured at the beginning of the program and again at the end. Any differences in responses were measured and evaluated. The instrument of evaluation was the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (1969). This test was standardized on elementary school children and encompasses a variety of questions which can be broken down into predetermined categories including feelings about intellectual and school status. The students took the same test at the beginning and again at the end of the program. Each student needed only a test form and a pencil. Each question was read to the group by myself because of the age and early reading level of second graders.

The program was designed in sequential units and presented as follows:

Day One: Each student took the Piers-Harris Inventory.

Day Two: Each student wrote a sample paragraph about the topic "Week-end."

Day Three: Each student wrote down a main idea about the topic "week-end" with instructions to be sure to:
Write his or her name at the top of the paper.

Write the title "Week-end" at the top of the paper.

Choose a main idea about the topic "Week-end and include that word or idea in their papers.

Day Four: Write a main idea about the topic "Week-end" using the above criteria, PLUS write three things which describe or explain the main idea selected.

Day Five: Write a main idea about the topic "Week-end" using all of the above criteria PLUS write a word which shows how the students FEEL about the experience which they are describing.

Day Six: Using all of the above criteria, make sentences about each word, in order, and develop the words and sentences into a story.

Day Seven: Using the method taught up to this point, write a story about the topic "Week-end".

Day Eight: Let a student teach the class the
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CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present research hypothesized that very young children can be taught specific writing skills through a structured, sequential method of teaching writing.

The data are presented in terms of group measurement and not the individual performance pattern of any particular student. The data are measured in terms of the number of children showing change over time between the pre-test and the post-test samples of their writing skills.

The results of this study suggest a significant gain regarding development of writing skills on the part of the students as well as a gain in their self-concepts. The dependent variables for the study were each student's writing samples and their selected responses on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale as measured at the beginning and end of the study.

Measurement of progression of writing skills was evaluated through writing samples taken at the beginning of the study and again at the end. The instructions for each of the writing samples were the same. The students were asked to write one paragraph about the topic
"Weekend". The paragraph was evaluated in terms of the presence or absence of specific criteria which included the student's name on the paper, title, introductory sentence, three explanatory sentences, and a conclusion sentence.

The overall results of the study indicate that as tasks became more complex, there was a greater amount of random error, although the skills of the group, based on the criteria which were being measured, continued to show an overall gain. (Figure 1)

The graphed variables regarding writing skill levels represent differences in student performance as measured at the beginning of the study and again at the end. Comparisons were made from the sample paragraphs which each student wrote.

The measured variables were designed to be increasingly complex in nature as well as to lead the student from one skill level to the next in relevant order. Figure 1 shows the changes made by the students regarding this predetermined set of seven variables.

The instructions given to the class were the same for each of the samples. The only difference was that in the interim between the beginning and final samples, the students were taught a specific way to construct a paragraph.
Figure 1 Tasks are Grouped Which Measure the Degree of Change Between pre-test and post-test writing samples. The Numbers indicated above each bar represent the number of students completing each task.

1 Name

2 Title

3 Introductory sentence including a topic word

4 Explanatory sentence including one descriptive word relating to topic

5 Explanatory sentence including one descriptive word relating to topic

6 Explanatory sentence including one descriptive word relating to topic

7 Conclusion sentence including word describing student's personal feeling about the topic

Key: The dotted bar is the pre-test data. The solid bar is the post-test data.
All students were able to follow instructions and write their names on their papers during the first assignment which was to write a paragraph. This result did not change during the subsequent writing tasks. All students wrote their name on their papers for the final writing sample. This measurement was taken to see to what degree these second grade students could follow instructions which were not based on acquisition of any new skills.

The second goal for the students was to choose a title for their papers. None of the students performed this instruction during the initial writing sample but all of the students had learned to include a title on their papers by the final writing sample. This was another segment of following instructions coupled with a limited degree of practice. All of the students mastered this task by the end of the class.

The third goal for the students was to write an introductory sentence including a topic word which related to the title which they had chosen. The evaluation of whether or not they had successfully fulfilled this instruction was to accept any noun which seemed to relate to the main idea which they were describing. There was some flexibility required at this point because some of these students still were not used to even
writing a complete sentence at the beginning of the program. In some cases, an incomplete sentence was accepted as being sufficient to fulfill the requirement if a word which seemed to be an appropriate topic word was included. Six of the eight students for whom complete sets of data were gathered did this for the first writing sample but all eight of the students completed this instruction for the final sample.

The fourth goal required the sentence which followed the topic sentence to include at least one word which described the topic. This explanatory sentence was included by four of the students for the initial writing sample but six of the students performed this task for the final writing sample.

The fifth goal was to write another explanatory sentence which again contained at least one word relating to or describing the topic. Three students completed this requirement for the initial writing sample but six of them completed the expectation for the final writing sample.

The sixth goal was to write a third sentence which contained at least one word relating to or describing the topic. Two students completed this for the initial writing sample but six students completed it for the final sample.
The seventh goal was for each student to write a conclusion sentence about their paragraph which included a "feeling" word describing how they felt about what they had written. None of the students did this for the initial measure but six of the students completed the instruction for the final measure which was evaluated and compared to the first measure to determine if and what writing skills had changed during the program.

The tasks were presented to the students in logical order, in increasing complexity, and because they are basic elements of any writing sample expected in school. The name and title are basic for identification purposes and the introductory sentence is a necessary but too often neglected beginning for a paragraph. The next three tasks were required to encourage the student to stick to the chosen topic and to further expand the original idea. The conclusion sentence was complex for second grade level so one possible variation of it was expected from the students. This was a description of how they felt about what they had written about. This takes into consideration the fact that there are a great many ways to effectively construct a conclusion sentence, but in order not to confuse these young children, they were directed to compose one particular type of conclusion sentence.
The results indicate that even second graders are capable of progressively developing a meaningful paragraph if the instructions are presented in simple, achievable units and presented in logical order.

A secondary hypothesis of this program was that the direct and measurable changes in a student's writing skill level may be accompanied by an enhancement of personal self-esteem. The results of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Figure 2) were particularly significant because they seem to reflect changes in student's self-esteem which may have resulted from learning this writing technique. Because of the variety of self-esteem variables which this Piers-Harris instrument measures, a subtest was selected from this established instrument for measuring changes in self-concept. The subtest selected, called "Intellectual And School Status", deals with the relationship between intelligence and self-esteem. The researcher was aware that factors external to the program of instruction could potentially influence self-esteem but the present research rested on the assumption that there is a potential correlation between success in writing and the related measure of self-esteem as indicated by the sub-test. The whole teaching program was designed to implement the concept of positive reinforcement. The expectations for the writing
Bars above 0 represent degrees of positive (+) change
Bars below 0 represent degrees of negative (-) change

Figure 2: The self-esteem questions which showed change during the program are indicated by bars on the graph.

21 I am good in my schoolwork.
5 I am smart.
53 I am dumb about most things.
70 I am a good reader.
66 I forget what I learn.
26 I am slow in finishing my schoolwork.
30 I can give a good report in front of the class.
42 I often volunteer in school.
11 I am unpopular.
49 My classmates in school think I have good ideas.
16 I have good ideas.
7 I get nervous when the teacher calls on me.
27 I am an important member of the class.
33 My friends like my ideas.
17 I am an important member of the family.
9 When I grow up I will be an important person.
12 I am well behaved in school.
57 I am popular with boys.
samples were presented in small, achievable units which allowed students to be continually successful.

Measurement of self-esteem levels was determined by comparing each student's scores from the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (1969) pre-test to the same post-test scores. The reliability for the test was determined by its authors through use of the Kuder-Richardson Formula 21, which assumes equal difficulty of items. Resulting coefficients ranged from .78 to .93.

Stability was obtained as a result of a retest after four months on one half the standardization sample. Resulting coefficients were .72, .71, and .72. Content validity was built into the test during its development by asking children which qualities they liked or disliked about themselves in each of the content areas.

The test is divided into specific factors and this experimenter chose to evaluate one specific, predetermined subset of questions for this program. These questions, labeled Factor II in the test subdivisions, relate to and are entitled Intellectual and School Status.

Reliability, stability, and validity data from previous researchers are based on whole test analysis. It is therefore necessary, since one subset of questions has been evaluated for this program, to note that the
overall reliability for the data resulting from the current program, may be somewhat lower than previously noted results. Data interpretation must be qualified within the framework of the subset of questions asked. It was announced at the first lesson that each student who successfully completed the set of written expectations for the day would earn a sticker; most students got stickers most of the time. The students were praised during class for volunteering to answer questions and for good behavior. The class was a novelty and break from their day and they were trying to please a new and different teacher during the time spent in the program.

In the final tabulation of data, any change from the initial assessment was evaluated. This occurred in five cases and the change was in the positive range for each of the questions.

The questions which showed change were:

- #66 I forget what I learn.
- #26 I am slow in finishing my schoolwork.
- #30 I can give a good report in front of the class.
- #11 I am unpopular.
- #33 My friends like my ideas.

Figure 2 indicates that the results of each of these questions were positive in direction. The upper half of the graph indicates positive change and the bottom half
of the graph indicates negative change. Change is demonstrated by more than one student replying differently to a question on the last test than on the first test. Depending on the wording of the question, results were interpreted as positive or negative depending on the positive or negative wording of the question.

Question #66, I forget what I learn, was answered positively by three more students at the end of the class than at the beginning.

(Positive=No)

Question #26, I am slow at finishing my schoolwork, was answered positively by two more students at the end of the class than at the beginning.

(Positive =No)

Question #30, I can give a good report in front of the class was answered positively by two more students at the end of the class than at the beginning.

(Positive=Yes)

Question #11, I am unpopular, was answered positively by five more students at the end of the class than at the beginning.

(Positive=No)

Question #33, My friends like my ideas, was answered positively by two more students at the end of the class than at the beginning.
The observed change in the measures of self-esteem, as measured by the sub-scale, point to a plausible connection between the structured, sequential program of writing and feelings of personal success on the part of the students. However these data must be viewed with qualifications since control for factors external to the instructional program was not established. Nonetheless, contemplation of these results, which may have developed from teaching writing in small achievable units combined with positive reinforcement and praise, seem to indicate that when students are programmed to achieve, they can do just that. These students not only felt better about themselves (#11), and their own popularity (#11), they felt more acceptance from their friends (#33), and more assurance of their own abilities to succeed in the classroom situation (#66, #26, and #30). While not all questions in the sub-scale showed change, from pre- to post-measure, those that did so reflected enhancement of self-esteem as defined by the test scale. It is necessary to note, once again, that their self-esteem may have been influenced by factors outside the training program.

The study does argue favorably for the premise that students who are involved in a positive climate of learning may benefit not only in intellectual endeavors
but also in terms of their own self-perceptions. Effective teaching strategies can be useful when they complement and enhance a student's natural abilities.
Appendix A

Letter Sent to School Principal
Dear Miss van't Zelfde,

With your permission, I would like to work with a group of your students, for about six weeks. The purpose will be to further the development of their creative writing skills. The method which I will employ is compatible with the expectations presented in the ILA manual. These expectations will be combined with a particular method of presentation which I have developed myself.

I will introduce consecutive writing skills in a building block fashion with each new skill complementing each previous skill. Grading will be focused in a positive, self-esteem building direction.

The main goal of the class will be to raise the self-esteem of each individual student by improving his or her writing skills. This can happen as a result of positive teacher approval, higher writing grades, and social and peer approval related to these positive reinforcement experiences.

With your compliance, I look forward to implementing this program at Chime School.

Sincerely,

Sheryl Miller
Appendix B

Letter Sent to Children's Parents
September 23, 1985

Dear Parents,

Beginning next week, your child will have an opportunity to participate in a program designed to strengthen his or her creative writing abilities.

I designed this program in response to my awareness, as a parent and an English teacher, to the ever-present need for individuals to be able to express themselves through the media of written communication.

The program is being offered in connection with my Master's Degree thesis through the Psychology Department of Western Michigan University.

In order to help to evaluate the effectiveness of this program, each student will be given the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Inventory at the beginning and end of the program.

Information gained from these surveys will be evaluated on a group basis and used to help in continually improving this program. The data will not be identified with individual children because each child will be assigned a number to use on written papers rather than his or her own name. Test scores will not be divulged and written data from the class will be destroyed at the end of the program. The data and scores will not be used or viewed outside the program.

We will meet for a half-hour, twice a week, for six weeks. Upon returning the signed permission slip below, your child will be allowed to participate in this program.

Sincerely,

Sheryl Miller

My child, ____________________________, has my permission to take part in the program designed to develop children's creative writing skills being offered at Chime School. I understand that he/she will take the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Inventory at the beginning and the end of the program, and will be instructed to write a series of paragraphs which will be evaluated and graded during the program.

Parent's Signature ____________________________ Date ____________________________
Appendix C

Participant Agreement Statement
I, ______________________________________, understand that I will take part in Mrs. Miller's group, in which we will learn writing skills.

I also understand that I will take a test at the beginning and at the end of the class.

Participant’s Signature ___________________ Date ________________
Appendix D

Piers-Harris Test Forms
PLEASE NOTE:

Copyrighted materials in this document have not been filmed at the request of the author. They are available for consultation, however, in the author's university library.

These consist of pages:

Appendix D Piers-Harris Test Forms Pages 45-49.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


