



Improving Children's Writing: A Model for Parent Participation

E. Francine Guastello and Claire Lenz

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of parental training on students' writing scores. Six classes of fourth grade students from three schools were randomly assigned to three experimental and three control groups. Parents of the students in the experimental group attended training sessions and received instruction in the stages of the writing process and criteria used in an evaluation rubric. Through the five phases of the study, students in the experimental group received significantly higher writing scores ($p < .05$) than those in the control group as indicated by the criteria for passing on the New York State Standards. In addition, within the experimental group, significant incremental improvement ($p < .05$) was indicated through writing sample 1, 2, and 3.

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The purpose of this paper is to describe a study that looked at the effects of parental training on students' writing scores. Long before children engage in formal instruction in reading and writing, parents begin the process of helping them become literate human beings. As the first teachers, parents have a highly influential role in preparing their children for school through language and literacy-related activities in the home (Moll, 1992). This sentiment was endorsed by a former Secretary of Education, William Bennett, who stated, "The single best way to improve elementary education is to strengthen the parents' role in it." (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1986). There is a considerable body of research to support Bennett's statement that points to the connection between parental involvement and students' achievement (Coleman, 1987; Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Walberg (1984) contended that parental involvement and home factors were more important than student characteristics, instructional strategies, environmental factors, and increased time on academic learning. The home environment is one of the major influences on student learning (Bloom, 1986; Shockley, 1994; Walberg, 1984). There is also a strong positive correlation between parents communicating their expectations to the child and the grades the child attains in school (Duke, 1992; Gyles, 1990).



Parental involvement and encouragement in the literacy life of their children can certainly make a difference. Bloom (1980) insisted that, "If we are convinced that a good education is necessary for all who live in a modern society, then we must search for the alterable variables which can make a difference in the learning of children." One such variable is the influence of parental participation on a child's motivation and achievement in school (DeBaryshe, 1996).

Parental Participation vs. Parental Involvement

Gill Potter (1989) argued that parents should be participants, more than just interested parties, in their children's schooling. Examples of *parental involvement* are: attendance at home-school or parent meetings and parent-teacher conferences and responses to printed materials distributed by the school or individual teachers. *Parent participation*, however, involves parents actively engaged in their child's learning. For example, parents participate in workshops, much like the in-service training for teachers, and use the skills and techniques with their children at home to support their child's learning experiences. Several researchers have documented the positive effect upon language skills when parents perform the role of home instructor (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Bermudez & Padron, 1988; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; McLaughlin & Shield, 1987). Parental participation in school-related learning activities is a key factor in children's motivation and academic achievement (Bloom, 1986; Morrow, 1995; Muller, 1993).

Parents, regardless of economic status or cultural background, care about their children's education and provide substantial support if given specific opportunities and knowledge (Fruchter, Galletta, & White, 1992; Egoff, 1994). Research indicates that parents' participation improves students' learning (Coleman, 1982; Edwards, McMillion, Turner, & Laier, 2001; Epstein, 1991). Without the school's assistance however, parents' knowledge and approaches toward helping their children are heavily dependent on their social class or education (Epstein, 1995). The ability to help their children often comes from knowing what is expected in terms of evaluation.

The introduction and implementation of the English language arts standards in New York and nationwide gave schools the opportunity to invite parents to become part of the process. Questions could be answered and the schools' expectations would be shared at school-sponsored meetings. In fact, the questions posed by parents to school personnel was shared with the researchers and subsequently became the framework for the parent workshops as inspired by Edwards, Pleasants & Franklin (1999).

Parental Inquiry

In 1999, New York State instituted the English Language Arts exams for the fourth and eighth grades students. When the results of the fourth grade tests were made public in June of 2000, they indicated how deficient students were in their writing ability. Sixty-seven percent of the fourth grade students in New York City Public Schools failed to meet the State Standards. These results raised concerns within the entire learning community, particularly among parents.

As the standards continued to be implemented in schools, many parents wanted to become more knowledgeable about the expectations placed upon their children's learning experiences. Parents often ask, "How can we help our children make better progress in school?" But more recently, they were asking, "How can we help our children to enjoy writing, foster their creativity, and enable them to communicate more effectively? How can we support the school's efforts to help our children succeed with state and district standards so our children can achieve the benchmark competencies necessary for promotion and graduation?" (Gratz, 2000; Main, 2000).



Parents were especially interested in assisting their children to improve their writing skills by: (1) understanding the developmental steps in the writing process; (2) developing an awareness of the new standards; and (3) becoming acquainted with the specific writing rubric. The critical need to improve literacy skills was shown in the results of the English Language Arts exams. It was the contention of the researchers that helping parents to understand and set high expectations with their children in writing will improve written expressive language and achievement.

The Goals of the State Standards

At least five of the English language arts standards expect students to communicate effectively through writing, create research and discuss text, and use a variety of sources to gather and share information (National Council of English Teachers and International Reading Association, 1996).

Content and performance standards promoted by the national professional organizations and the various state departments of education grew out of the national forum focusing on improving the academic performance of students in the nation's schools. While most states have developed testing programs to measure student performance with content standards (Editorial Projects in Education, 1999), rubrics or scoring scales have also become very popular local tools. The purpose of the rubric is to make students aware of varying levels of quality, from excellent to poor that will be related to a specific task or assignment, such as an essay, narrative, or report (Andrade, 2000).

Writing is a skill and a process used to communicate meaning, personal feelings and emotions. It requires the thinking skills of analysis, inference, evaluation, problem solving and reading comprehension (Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1999). Writing encourages risk taking, provides opportunities for reflections and promotes the development of language competencies (Routman, 2000). It is an important daily activity where students can pursue their own topics, work by themselves or with their classmates, and where they might continue on a writing piece or begin new topics based on their own interests and experiences (Tompkins, 2000). Hillocks (1987) and Isaacson (1989) regard writing as one of the most complex human activities. Writing is a highly complex process that writers ultimately apply independently (Kameenui & Carnine, 1998).

Rationale for our Research Study

The researchers conducted this study to address two major issues: a). the parents' concerns regarding their children's writing abilities, and b) the lack of significant research focusing on the role of parents and their direct influence on their children's writing. Parents are often unaware of the stages in the writing process and the writing rubric used to evaluate their children's writing assignments. It is the contention of these researchers that when parents gain an understanding of the process and are involved in helping their children meet writing standards, greater achievement in written expression will be possible. Although the positive effects of parental influence upon reading achievement have been documented (Clark, 1988; Rowe, 1991; Rowe & Rowe, 1992; Slaughter, 1987), there is insufficient research on the role of the parent in students' acquisition of writing skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research was to analyze the effects of in-servicing parents as an aid to improving the writing skills of fourth grade students based upon their understanding of the writing process, their interaction with their child and knowledge of a specific writing rubric. The researchers



sought an answer to the question: Does in-servicing parents in the writing process and the use of a writing rubric improve the writing ability of their children? In others words, when the parent is aware of the expectations in writing and shares these expectations with the student, will the child strive to meet the criteria?

Method

Participants: Students, Parents, Raters and Teachers

Fourth grade was selected since these students were in the first group to be assessed by the New York State English Language Arts Standards. The researchers' contention was that the earlier the intervention, the greater the impact. Participants consisted of 167 fourth-grade students in six classes attending various elementary schools. Students were enrolled in one of three schools: (1) two classes from an affluent suburban school on the south shore of Nassau County, NY (2) two classes in a low socioeconomic multi-ethnic school located in Brooklyn, NY and (3) two classes in a middle-class school in Queens, NY. According to the annual school census report, students from the affluent suburban school had a 95% stability rate with 1% eligible for free or reduced lunch. The ethnic composition was 95% Caucasian and 5% other. The middle-class school census revealed a 90% stability rate with 5% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The ethnic composition included 75% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 5% other. In the lower socio-economic school, there was a 75% stability rate with 98% of the students meeting the guidelines for free of reduced lunch. The ethnic composition consisted of 75% Hispanic, 20% African-American, and 5% other. Classes within each school were randomly assigned to either the experimental or control group. The experimental group consisted of 97 students, 50 female and 47 male. The control group contained 70 students, 34 female and 36 male. It is important to note that all student participants in this study had been formally instructed in the steps of the writing process that they used with their previous writing experiences.

The parent participants were defined as biological parents or caregivers who were directly involved in assisting and/or supervising the child's homework and school-related tasks. The parents and caregivers included mothers and fathers, parents from single-parent families and in a few instance, grandparents. At each of the two workshops, attendance was taken. An average of 85% of the parents from the affluent school attended each workshop; 90% from the middle-class school, and 98% from the low socio-economic school.

Three independent raters were involved in the study. Each rater had at least 10 years experience teaching language arts in the elementary school. They were familiar with evaluating writing samples using holistic rubrics. For the purpose of this study, the three raters were trained by the researchers in the use of the English Language Arts (ELA) rubric, using over 100 writing samples prior to the study (See Appendix A). The interrater reliability was .92.

All six teachers had at least three years experience as teachers of Language Arts. In addition, they had received training in the New York State ELA Standards and holistic scoring procedures. However, the teachers in the control group did not give their students direct instruction in the use of the scoring rubric. This task was undertaken by the researchers. None of the teachers served as raters.

Materials

The topics selected for writing for this study were taken from discontinued fifth grade writing competency tests for assurance of content validity. The scoring rubric was developed by the Reading



Department of St. John's University and is consistent with the English Language Arts Standards. The rubric contains six components: topic focus, organization, content, sentence structure, language, and mechanics. Students' writing samples were evaluated in each area using a scale from 1 (low) to 4 (high), based upon descriptions of the type of writing that reflects each component at each level of proficiency. The parents were taught the steps in the writing process as follows: (1) Pre-writing, (2) First draft, (3) Revising, (4) Editing, (5) Second draft and final revision, and (6) Publication. Parents were shown samples of students' writing at each of the stages in the process. Activities for each step will be discussed in the procedure section.

Procedures

The students were given three writing samples that were designated in five phases. These phases were instituted two months apart. The development of each phase is depicted in Figure 1. For each aspect of the writing rubric, a different writing sample was analyzed by students and the teacher during the student and parent training sessions.

Phase One:

All students in the study were given the first topic, *A Time When I Felt Special*, to write over a period of two weeks. This writing piece served as a baseline score for the study. Each day, students developed their composition, engaging in the steps of the writing process. However, none of the students in the experimental or control groups was exposed to the writing rubric, nor were they given any formal instruction as to how to use the rubric to improve their writing. At the end of the two weeks, the writing samples were scored by the two raters using the ELA writing rubric (Appendix A.). A third rater was available in the event that there was a .5 discrepancy between the two raters. The scores were recorded for analysis.

Phase Two:

Two months later, Phase 2 was initiated. Both groups were given the second topic, *My Hero*, to develop. Before the students in the experimental group began to write, they received the treatment of formal instruction on the criteria and the use of the writing rubric by the researchers. Over the course of two weeks, the students were given a separate piece of writing for each component of the rubric. As a class and with the teacher's guidance, the students analyzed and evaluated the writing sample. For the first writing sample, the students were asked to determine whether the author developed the assigned topic in an interesting and imaginative way. After discussing the piece with each other and their teacher, the students scored the writing sample in **topic focus** on a scale of 1 to 4 with 4 as the highest. As each component of the rubric was introduced, it was discussed and analyzed until students came to consensus on the score within a .5 range.

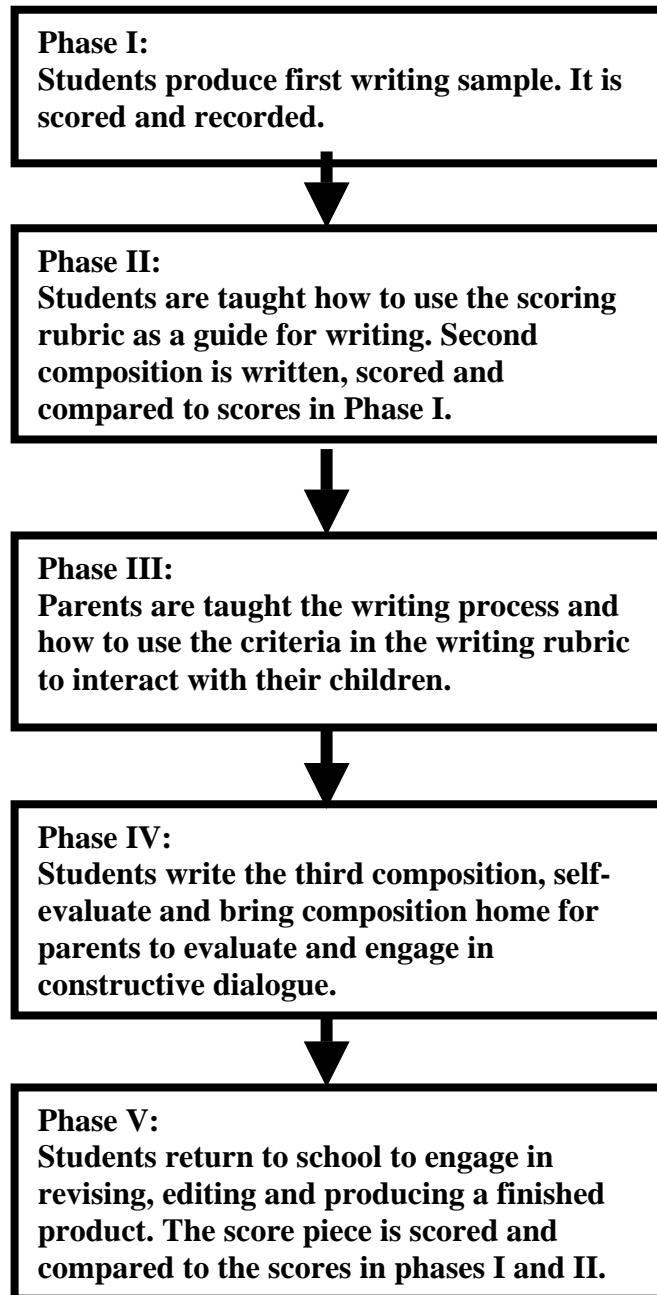
The second writing sample focused on **organization**. Students were asked to determine if the piece had a logical plan of organization and coherence in the development of ideas. Again, the students discussed, analyzed, and scored the writing sample on the same scale.

The third writing piece was subsequently examined for **content**. Did the author use supportive material that was relevant and appropriate for the purpose and audience?



The fourth aspect of the rubric, **sentence structure**, focused on the skillful use of sentence variety. Students specifically noted the length and kinds of sentences that were used in the writing sample. The next writing piece challenged students to determine the evidence of specific and vivid **language**.

Figure 1: Flowchart of the implementation of the writing project



The last writing sample called upon the students' editing skills. Students examined the piece for errors in **mechanics**, which included punctuation and capitalization. Their rating was based on whether these errors interfered with the communication of ideas from the author to the reader. The students added



their ratings of the six components of the rubric and divided the total by six, which yielded a holistic score. As the students progressed through this process, the teachers listened to their rationale for the scores and felt the students grasped the idea of what qualities of writing warranted a score of 4 and what needed to be improved when a paper received a score of 3, 2, or a 1.

After this period of formal instruction, the students were asked to score the writing sample based on all six aspects of the writing rubric. Now having learned the criteria for evaluation, they were ready to use the rubric as a guide for their second writing assignment. They self-evaluated their writing piece based on the rubric. The control group students were also given the second topic, *My Hero*, and proceeded to develop their writing piece following the same procedures as in phase one without knowledge of the criteria for evaluation. The students' writing samples were scored by the same two raters and recorded for analysis.

Phase Three:

Approximately two months after the second writing sample was administered, the parents of the students in the experimental group were invited to attend first two-hour workshop session. First, parents were instructed in the New York State English Language Arts Standards and how these standards were incorporated into the steps of the writing process. The writing process is an approach to teaching writing that allows students to take charge of their own writing and learning (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983, 1991; Hillocks, 1987). It involves five steps (1) pre-writing or selecting the topic; (2) drafting or composing; (3) revising; (4) editing or proofreading; and (5) publishing. This procedure was intended to enable parents to understand that writing is a gradual process that develops in stages from pre-writing to publication.

The second workshop, a week later, involved the same procedures that were used with the children to teach them all six components of the writing rubric and how to arrive at a holistic score. Parents were provided with sample compositions that focused on specific components of the writing rubric. Having read a composition, parents engaged in discussion as they rated a specific aspect of the rubric. For example, when parents were given a writing piece to examine organization, they were asked to rate it based on the criteria 1(lowest) through 4(highest) for logical sequence and coherence of ideas. The purpose of this activity was to provide parents with the opportunity to share their rationale for the score they assigned. This sharing with the researchers and each other helped parents arrive at a consensus for rating each component of the rubric. Finally, they were given a sample and were asked to score it on all six criteria. The researchers were surprised at how quickly parents came to a consensus on the scores that were similar to the raters. Parents were also shown how to use the guide questions (Appendix B) as a means of helping their children reflect on their writing. It was explained to parents that their child would be coming home in the next few days with a composition for them to score

Phase Four:

The students wrote their third composition, *Making Something That I Enjoyed*, and used their scoring rubric to self-evaluate their writing piece. The writing sample was taken home where parent and student discussed the sample based on the criteria of the rubric. After parents scored the writing piece, they discussed with their child the areas of strengths and those needing improvement on the writing sample using the guide questions. No additional writing or corrections were to take place at home.

**Phase Five:**

The child returned to school the next day and began to revise the composition. After the students completed the revisions on their compositions, the two raters scored the third writing piece and recorded the data for analysis.

The control group also received the third writing assignment, however, unlike the experimental group, they did not have instruction in the use of the writing rubric, nor was there any parental involvement. These students had knowledge of the writing process, and revised and edited their work accordingly.

Results

In order to assess rater reliability, a Pearson Product Moment Correlation was computed to assess the degree of correlation between raters in each phase of the study. The Pearson Product Moment Correlations between raters for writing sample one was .85, for writing sample two, it was .88, and for writing sample three, .92. Therefore, it was appropriate to average the two raters' ratings for each sample to form composite scores.

In order to assess whether there were differential increases in performance for each sample for each group, a two-factor repeated measure analysis of variance was performed. The first factor treatment involved between-subject factor with two levels: an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group had 97 students and the control group had 70 students. The within-subjects factor was "Writing Sample" consisting of three samples. The means of the groups within each sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Writing Samples

Group		Writing Sample 1	Writing Sample 2	Writing Sample 3
Experimental (N=97)	Mean (SD)	2.45 (.42)	2.76 (.36)	3.22 (.37)
Control (N=70)	Mean (SD)	2.45 (.28)	2.37 (.21)	2.47 (.30)
Total (N=167)	Mean (SD)	2.45 (.37)	2.60 (.39)	2.91 (.51)

Table 1 shows that the means for both the control group (2.45) and experimental group (2.44) began at the same approximate baseline for Phase One. However, after Sample Two, the experimental group had an increase to 2.76 while the control group actually had a reduction in its mean to 2.37. It was at this point that the students in the experimental group wrote their composition using the writing rubric as a guide. In Phase five, after the parents received their training and they interacted with the students, the results were even more striking with the experimental group realizing a mean of 3.23; however, the control still remained close to its baseline mean with 2.47.

Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that sphericity assumptions could not be retained. Therefore, the tests were adjusted for violation of sphericity through the use of the Huynh-Feldt corrections. Mauchly's Test examines the form of the common covariance matrix. Table 2 presents the results of the analysis of variance. As can be seen in Table 2, there were significant main effects for



sample, a significant main effect for group, and most important, significant main effect for group by sample interaction. The partial Eta squared or correlation ratio was computed, indicating a strong effect (.27). Any correlation over a .25 is considered a strong effect.

Table 2. ANOVA of Test Scores by Experimental Group and Writing Sample

Test of Between-Subject Effects*

Factor	Sum of Squares	Df	MS	F	Sig	Eta squared
Group	17.96	1	17.96	60.24	.000	.267
Error	49.21	165	.30			

Test of Within-Subject Effects*

Writing Sample	13.59	1.89	7.20	181.84	.000	.52
Writing Samples by Group	11.97	1.89	6.34	160.12	.000	.49
Error	12.33	311.46	3.96			

*Huynh-Feldt $p < .05$

In order to further examine the statistical significance of group by sample interaction, simple main effect tests were computed. There were two such sets of tests. The first set of tests compared groups within each sample. As can be seen in Table 3, there were no significant differences between the experimental group and the control group within the baseline writing sample 1. However, there were significant differences between the groups from writing sample 2 to writing sample 3.

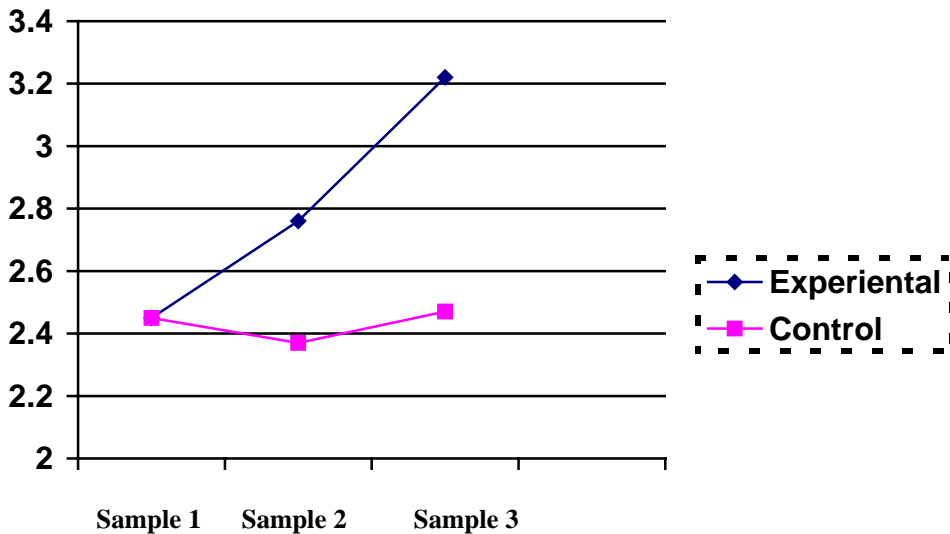
Table 3. Simple Main Effects Tests for Groups within Instructional Phase

Writing Samples	GROUP	GROUP	Mean Difference	Sig.
1	Control	Experimental	6.47	.911
2	Control	Experimental	-.397	.000
3	Control	Experimental	-.760	.000

* $p < .05$

Within the experimental and control groups, there was a significant change from sample to sample. However, it should be noted that in the experimental group, there was continuous improvement. In the control group, there was a slight decrement in the second sample from the baseline score and then a slight improvement from Writing Sample Two to Writing Sample Three.

A graph of the means can be seen in Figure 2. It illustrates that there is no significant difference from Writing Sample One to Writing Sample Three for the control group. This group remained close to the baseline score. However, the experimental group improved with each writing sample.

**Figure 2. Estimated Marginal Means of Measure**

The hypothesis comparing scores by socioeconomic status was tested. Table 4 reports the Means and Standard Deviations for each school (SES). While the results indicate that all three subgroups of the experimental group improved their writing scores, the students in the more suburban affluent school scored higher than their counterparts in the urban schools.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations Each School (SES)

School (SES)		Writing Sample 1	Writing Sample 2	Writing Sample 3
Nassau (N=30)	Mean (SD)	2.41 (.48)	2.67 (.45)	3.18 (.37)
Brooklyn (N=54)	Mean (SD)	2.44 (.39)	2.60 (.39)	2.88 (.53)
Queens (N=81)	Mean (SD)	2.46 (.31)	2.57 (.37)	2.84 (.51)
Total (N=167)	Mean (SD)	2.44 (.37)	2.60 (.39)	2.91 (.51)

A simple main effect test revealed that there were significant differences within the subgroups of the experimental group from writing sample to writing sample as noted in Table 5.



Table 5. ANOVA of Test Scores by Writing Sample and School (SES)

Test of Between-Subject Effects*

Factor	Sum of Squares	Df	MS	F	Sig	Eta squared
School (SES)	1.99	3	.67	1.66	.177	.030
Error	65.18	163	.40			

Test of Within-Subject Effects*

Writing Sample	2.26	1.50	1.51	16.58	.000	.09
Writing Samples by SES	2.08	4.49	.46	5.08	.000	.09
Error	22.22	244.12	9.10			

*Huynh-Feldt $p < .001$

Further analysis compared scores by gender. There was no significant difference between the scores of the males and females in either the experimental and control groups within or between phases.

Discussion

The findings of this study are presented in relation to the three original research questions: (a) Will an incremental improvement for each writing sample occur after each phase for the experimental group? (b) Will there be a significant positive effect upon the writing scores of fourth grade students in the experimental group who have received parental follow-up at home with the writing rubric? (c) Will there be a significant difference in the writing scores based upon socioeconomic status?

Although all the students had been developing the stages of the writing process in their writing since first grade, at the time of the study, they did not have knowledge of a writing rubric that was systematically and directly taught. Nor did they know how to use the rubric as a means of improving the quality of their writing. Prior to this study, some students were exposed to subject-specific rubrics developed by individual teachers.

During Phase Two, the students in the experimental group interacted with the trainers and with each other when evaluating separate writing pieces based on the criteria in the rubric. When scoring a sample, each student had to justify the score thus explaining the significance of the score. Students commented that now that they knew the criteria used in evaluating their writing; they could use the rubric to help them develop each of the six components listed in the rubric. The data indicated that there was indeed an improvement in their scores from writing sample to writing sample. The difference from the first writing sample to the second writing appeared to be based upon their understanding and use of the writing rubric. Coupled with the interaction with their parents, students' scores improved again from Writing Sample Two to Writing Sample Three.

In response to the question, "How can I help my child with writing?" parents became aware of two major aspects of writing: (a) the stages in the writing process and (b) the criteria used to evaluate their



child's writing ability. Questions from parents revealed that many did not have knowledge of writing as a linear and recursive process prior to the in-service sessions. The concepts of brainstorming or providing the child with experiences to incorporate into their writing were aspects of pre-writing where parents admittedly fell short. While most parents focused on mechanics when evaluating their child's work, learning about topic focus, content, organization, and sentence structure enabled parents to obtain a more holistic view of writing.

At the conclusion of the study, the parents were invited to a feedback session about their experiences. Their comments indicated that they had a better understanding of the writing task and the school's expectations for their child's writing. From their responses to scoring their child's writing sample, it seemed that many were able to recognize the elements of quality writing. Parents also indicated by their interaction with the trainers that they felt they now had an effective tool for assisting their child with writing. They expressed their desire to involve their children in more activities to nurture ideas for writing. In the context of this research, parents learned how to provide their children with meaningful feedback; critiquing their children's writing, not their children. This finding confirms the work of Howard and LeMahieu (1995) and Howard (1996) that when parents have an understanding of what is expected of their children and have the means to help them, their children are more likely to succeed in school. In addition, many parents mentioned that their own writing ability improved as they became more involved in their child's writing experiences. Furthermore, they felt that they were better role models for their children in the area of written expression as they developed greater self-confidence in their own ability as writers. This input was consistent throughout all socioeconomic levels.

Students commented that now that their parents were aware of the writing process and the criteria for evaluation, their discussions about the writing were more directed and constructive. Students seemed to enjoy the interaction with their parents. The interaction between the parents and the students motivated most students to take greater responsibility for their writing and to engage in the recursive process of writing to improve upon quality.

Within the experimental group, there were three subgroups. The experimental group consisted of students from affluent, middle, and low-socioeconomic families. The analysis of data revealed that although all students in the experimental group improved their scores as a result of the treatment, the students from the affluent suburban school had a greater increase in their scores. This finding substantiates previous research on SES and student achievement (Walberg, 1984; Coleman, 1988; Comer, 1988). One can speculate on the reasons for these differences. Several factors may be considered: (a) the educational background and professional experiences of the parents; (b) the ability to understand completely the criteria presented in the training sessions; (c) the amount of time and quality of interaction with the child; and (d) language differences or limitations of parents in families where English is not the primary language. Additional training or a different type of training session may need to be developed for parents of bilingual backgrounds. But the fact remains, that despite these factors, the potential for improvement exists.

The results of this study point to the success of a writing process approach with the use of a rubric as the theoretical basis for a school's writing program. The findings clearly reveal the importance of including parents as active participants in the writing program. Schools need to select a writing rubric that can be used and understood by all students and their parents.

Although this study was conducted with elementary school students in urban and suburban schools in the northeast, it is suggested that follow-up studies should be initiated in sites in other parts of the country to determine if the results can be replicated. It is recommended that the training of the parents



should include several follow-up sessions with more comprehensive feedback, and that the procedures of Phase Three be repeated over a prolonged period of time to monitor improvement. This study can be replicated for any grade level and perhaps, the earlier the better.

Writing is a means to enable students to synthesize their learning in all curriculum areas (Atwell, 1998). These results are indicative of the power of connecting the school and home to create more proficient writers.

NOTE: The model for this study is currently being implemented in a (K to 8) program in 10 elementary schools in Brooklyn and Queens funded for three years by “No Child Left Behind.”

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Appendix A

CRITERIA FOR RATING STUDENT RESPONSES

Score	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Topic Focus = ____	Develops the assigned topic in an interesting & imaginative way.	Develops the assigned topic in an acceptable but unimaginative way.	Attempts to develop the assigned topic but includes digressions.	Minimally addresses the assigned topic.
Organization = ____	Demonstrates a logical plan of organization & coherence in the development of ideas.	Has a plan of organization a satisfactory development of ideas.	Demonstrates weakness in organization & the development of ideas.	Shows lack of organization & development of ideas.
Content = ____	Uses support material that is relevant & appropriate for purpose & audience.	Uses adequate support material.	Uses little support material.	Uses no support material or irrelevant material.
Sentence = Structure ____	Shows skillful use of sentence variety.	Uses some sentence variety.	Demonstrates sentence sense but has little sentence sense or variety.	Demonstrates a lack of sentence sense
Language Use = ____	Uses specific, vivid language.	Uses appropriate language.	Uses trite &/or imprecise language	Uses immature &/or inappropriate language.
Mechanics = ____	Makes few or no errors	Makes errors which do not interfere with communication.	Makes errors which interfere with communication.	Errors seriously interfere with communication.

Total Holistic Score _____ **Divided by Six** = _____

Passing (3.0-4.0)

**Appendix B****Questions parents might ask to help their child with writing task.**

- Topic Focus:** Did you write about the topic in an interesting & imaginative way?
What would make someone want to read your composition?
Did you stay on the topic?
Will the reader understand what you have written?
Have you left out information that belongs with your topic?
Did you include information that **does not** belong with your topic?
- Organization:** Do the events in your composition follow in the right or logical order?
Have you arranged your ideas so that they can be followed from one step to another?
Do you have a strong beginning, an interesting middle, and good ending?
Have you used a new paragraph as you wrote the beginning, middle, and end of your story?
- Content:** Have you written your composition with your purpose in mind?
Have you written your composition with your audience in mind?
Did you include enough information in your composition?
Do you have enough details to support your topic or main idea?
- Sentence Structure:** Look at your sentences. Have you tried to use different kinds of sentences? (Interrogative? Imperative. Exclamatory! Declarative.)
Have you used sentences that include dialogue? ("Quotation Marks")
Are your sentences long enough...or are they too long to understand?
- Language Use:** Look at the words you have used.
Have you used the same words too many times?
Did you use interesting words, replacing the ordinary with more colorful and descriptive words?
Did you use words that could paint a picture in the mind of the reader?
Did you use a thesaurus to replace ordinary words?
Were the words you used appropriate for your audience? Will they understand The words?
Did you proofread to determine if your verb tenses were in agreement and consistent?
- Mechanics:** Did you proofread for errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization?
Did you indent your paragraphs?
Did you begin every sentence with a capital letter?
Did you use quotation marks correctly?