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A Study of the Effects of Explicit Story Structure Instruction on Narrative Writing in the Upper Primary School

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MLitEd (Master of Literacy Education)
at Massey University, Albany,
New Zealand

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2016
Abstract

Many New Zealand middle and upper primary students, struggle with writing. This is a challenge, as research shows a continuing downward trend in writing standards as children move across the grades. Therefore, it is helpful to know whether children can write better narratives after appropriate instruction so that writing achievement can be improved. Previous research has found that teaching story structure in a very explicit way improves narrative writing quality and quantity but few studies have been done in New Zealand classrooms. Hence the present study. Participants were initially 50 children from a country school and a city school. The study started with 50 children from two classrooms in schools, one in the country and one in the city. Of these, 41 children completed all the assessments, 18 in the country school and 23 children in the city school. Initial data from the schools about the children in terms of ethnicity, gender, and writing achievement enabled the researcher to assign children randomly either to an experimental group or control group. The experimental group received writing instruction that focused on aspects such as setting, characters, plot, and theme. The control group received writing instruction that focused less on structure and more on main ideas and using literary elements. Both groups received tuition in how to use a story planner as a guide when writing. The lessons ran daily, for an hour at a time, for three days. The classroom teacher taught the experimental group and the researcher taught the control group. Children wrote three stories across five days. The results showed that the story structure intervention did have an effect on children’s writing of stories in the country school but the effect was smaller in the city school. The discussion focuses on possible reasons for this.
Acknowledgements

I wish to express my appreciation to my supervisor, Professor Tom Nicholson for his professional guidance, dedication, enthusiasm and encouragement throughout this learning journey. I would also like to thank Professor Michael Townsend for his interest, input and time over the last two years. My thanks also to the principals, teachers and pupils of the two primary schools who participated in this study without their involvement this study could not have occurred. In particular, thanks to the teachers, Annette Barns and colleague who gave up their time to teach the intervention lessons. Your willingness was much appreciated. To your students who also willingly shared their stories, thank you! To Diane Hebley, New Zealand author, who likewise willingly shared her entertaining story, “It Took a Miracle” which was a fabulous model for writing, thank you. Thanks also to the Ministry of Education for giving permission to reprint the story. Thank you to the markers, Kristen Hammerich and Caro Vinnicombe. I appreciate your professionalism and dedication. Furthermore, Caro, thank you for the wonderful illustrations that stimulated some great student writing. A special thank you goes to Anna Cribb for carefully reading the completed work and offering constructive criticism. To my friends, thank you so much for your understanding and encouragement. And to my dear Mother, Margaret Mooney, love and thanks, you never stopped believing and encouraged my efforts. Thanks also to my family, especially my brother, David Mooney and cousin, Jason King who never stopped listening and gave a sound perspective.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... i

Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................. iii

List of Tables ..................................................................................................................................... x

**CHAPTER 1 Introduction** ............................................................................................................. 1

Statement of the problem ......................................................................................................................... 1

Elements of story structure ..................................................................................................................... 1

The CORE approach .............................................................................................................................. 2

Rationale for the study ........................................................................................................................... 2

Aim of the study and research questions ............................................................................................. 2

Reason for selecting the sample of children ......................................................................................... 3

The participants ................................................................................................................................. 4

Design of the study .............................................................................................................................. 5

The timeline for the study ..................................................................................................................... 6

Assessments ....................................................................................................................................... 7

Lessons ............................................................................................................................................. 7

Control group .................................................................................................................................... 7

Experimental group ............................................................................................................................ 8
Overview of the rest of the thesis................................................................. 9

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review................................................................. 10

Overview ........................................................................................................ 10
Structure of the review ................................................................................... 10
Chronology of studies ................................................................................... 11
Different kinds of instruction used in studies ............................................... 12
Design issues: External validity .................................................................... 15
  Internal validity ............................................................................................ 17
Overall pattern of study findings .................................................................. 20
Students with learning disabilities ............................................................... 21
Summary of chapter ...................................................................................... 23

CHAPTER 3 Method ..................................................................................... 25
Participants .................................................................................................... 25
Setting and timing of the study .................................................................... 29
Assessments ................................................................................................... 29
Research design ............................................................................................. 30
Ethics ............................................................................................................. 30
Procedure ...................................................................................................... 31
Control group lessons ................................................................................... 31
Intervention group lessons ........................................................................... 34
Inter-scorer reliability ................................................................. 38
Scoring of stories ........................................................................ 39
Scoring of story planner .............................................................. 43
Scoring of paragraphs, beginning, middle, and end and words .......... 44
Summary ....................................................................................... 46

CHAPTER 4 Results ........................................................................ 47
Quantitative results ........................................................................ 48
Overview of the results ................................................................. 48
Results for the city school ............................................................. 49
  Part 1 – Story quality analysis .................................................... 49
  Part 2 – Analysis of children’s use of a story planner ....................... 54
  Part 3 – Mechanics of children’s writing during the study ............... 55
Result for the country school ......................................................... 57
  Part 1 – Story quality analysis .................................................... 57
  Part 2 – Analysis of children’s use of a story planner ....................... 60
  Part 3 – Mechanics of children’s writing during the study ............... 61
Summary ....................................................................................... 63

CHAPTER 5 Results – qualitative analysis of children’s writing .......... 65
Example of good writing ............................................................... 65
A not-so-good piece of writing at pretest ........................................ 71
A not-so-good piece of writing at posttest .............................................................. 73

Summary of chapter .............................................................................................. 75

CHAPTER 6 Discussion .......................................................................................... 76

The aim of the study .............................................................................................. 76

The study .............................................................................................................. 77

Lessons learned .................................................................................................... 77

Limitations ........................................................................................................... 77

Student planning of stories .................................................................................. 79

Positive aspects of the study design ...................................................................... 79

The teaching strategies used in the study .............................................................. 80

Concluding statement ......................................................................................... 81

REFERENCES ...................................................................................................... 82

APPENDICES ........................................................................................................ 89

Appendix A: Summary of the 22 Studies in the Literature Review .................... 89

Appendix B: Validity Issues Relating to the 22 Studies ..................................... 96

Appendix C: The Chronological Order of Appearance of the 22 Studies ....... 102

Appendix D: A List of Teaching Techniques Used in the 22 Studies ............ 104

Appendix E: Example of Check-offs ................................................................. 105

Appendix F: Demographics of Participants ....................................................... 106

Appendix G: Pretest Motivational Illustration, Title Page, Story Planner and
Appendix H: Copies of It Took a Miracle: Journal, Big Book and Typed Version

Appendix I: Posttest Motivational Illustration

Appendix J: Ethics Forms – Information and Consent

Appendix K: Lessons 1-3 for Control Group

Appendix L: Mix and Match Activity Testing Literary Elements

Appendix M: Vocabulary Weave for It Took a Miracle

Appendix N: Quiz for It Took a Miracle

Appendix O: Copies of It Took a Miracle Cut into Beginning, Middle and End with Main Ideas Highlighted

Appendix P: Story Planner for It Took a Miracle with Main Ideas Recorded

Appendix Q: Student Planning and Story – Pop the Magnificent Heifer – from Control Group Lesson One

Appendix R: Student Alliterated Titles for Stories

Appendix S: Student Planning and Story – Pop the Magnificent Heifer – from Control Group Lesson Two

Appendix T: Student Edited Stories – The Lost Cow and Riker’s Farm in Texas
Appendix U: Illustration of Cows and Calves with Student Summaries and Alliterated Titles for It Took a Miracle .......................................................... 174
Appendix V: Student Story Extracts Showing Alliteration and Hyperbole Usage..................................................................................................... 176
Appendix W: Student Planning and Story – Pop the Magnificent Heifer from Control Group Lesson Three ........................................................................... 178
Appendix X: Lessons 1-3 for the Experimental Group .............................. 180
Appendix Y: Lesson 1: Supplementary Materials: for Experimental Group ......................................................................................................................... 205
Appendix Z: Story Structure Planner Blank, It Took a Miracle Model Answers and Student Answers................................................................. 213
Appendix AA: Student Summary of It Took a Miracle ............................. 216
Appendix BB: Student Planning and Story – One Day a Girl Called Bella… from Experimental Group Lesson One ................................................................. 217
Appendix CC: A Story Web for the Story – Model Answers and Student Answers................................................................................................................. 219
Appendix DD: Story Highlighted by Students to Show Story Structure ...... 221
Appendix EE: Student Planning and Story – One Day a Girl Called Bella… from Experimental Group Lesson Two ................................................................. 222
Appendix FF: Story Highlighted and Annotated by Students to Show Story Structure ....................................................................................................... 224
Appendix GG: Character Analysis Chart, Blank, Student Answers, Models Answers.............................................................................................................. 226
Appendix HH: Student Planning and Story – One Day a Girl Called Bella…From Experimental Group Lesson Three ........................................234
Appendix II: The 25 Story Marking Criteria.................................................................237
Appendix JJ: Examiner Marking Sheet........................................................................239
Appendix KK: Student Planning and Story – The Storm – About Chicks in a Storm.................................................................................................................................241
Appendix LL: Detailed Discussion of Marking of Story about Chicks in a Storm and Examiner Scoring .................................................................245
Appendix MM: Student Planning and Story – A Dog Named Tyler ...................254
Appendix NN: Examiner Scoring of A Dog Named Tyler.................................256
Appendix OO: Student Story about – The Ducklings That Had a Chicken for a Mother..........................................................................................................................258
Appendix PP: Examiner Scoring of the Ducklings Story ................................262
List of Tables

Table 1: Number of Participants in the Study by School and Age...............................26
Table 2: Number of Participants in the Study by School and Gender............................27
Table 3: Number of Participants in the Study by School and Ethnicity..........................27
Table 4: Number of Participants in the Study by School and Writing Level ..................28
Table 5: Number of Participants in the Study by School and ESOL .............................29
Table 6: An Example of a Marking Sheet and Scoring.................................................40
Table 7: City School: Pretest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Quality – MANOVA........51
Table 8: City School: Midtest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Quality – ANCOVA ....52
Table 9: City School Posttest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Quality – ANCOVA ..53
Table 10: City School Posttest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Planner – MANOVA 54
Table 11: City School: Pretest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Mechanics – and MANOVA results ........................................................................................................55
Table 12: City School: Midtest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Mechanics – and ANCOVA results ........................................................................................................56
Table 13: City School: Posttest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Mechanics – and ANCOVA results ........................................................................................................57
Table 14: Country School: Pretest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Quality – MANOVA .......................................................................................................................58
Table 15: Country School: Midtest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Quality – ANCOVA .......................................................................................................................59
Table 16: Country School: Posttest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Quality – ANCOVA .......................................................................................................................60
Table 17: Country School: Posttest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Planner – MANOVA.................................................................61

Table 18: Country School: Pretest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Mechanics and – MANOVA results.................................................................62

Table 19: Country School: Midtest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Mechanics and – ANCOVA results.................................................................63

Table 20: Country School: Posttest Mean Scores and SDs for Story Mechanics and – ANCOVA results .................................................................63