

DELIGHTFUL, DISCIPLINED DESCRIPTION

A TEACHING UNIT

by

Renita Kathleen Pohl Ubel

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED	1
The Problem	1
Statement of the problem	1
Importance of the study	1
Definitions of Terms Used	2
Description	2
Teaching unit	2
Intermediate grades	2
Organization of Remainder of Report	2
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	3
Characteristics of the Intermediate Grade Writer	3
Writing Environment	4
Frequency of Writing	7
Sequence of Writing Skills	9
Grammar	10
Teaching Strategies	12
Evaluation	14
Summary	16
III. "DELIGHTFUL, DISCIPLINED DESCRIPTION" A TEACHING UNIT	18
IV. RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND RESULTS	30
Presentation of the Unit	30

CHAPTER	PAGE
The class	30
The teacher	30
The unit	30
Evaluation of Written Samples	31
Preparation of samples for evaluation	31
Ratings by readers	31
Frequency counts	32
Results	33
Readers' ratings	33
Frequency counts	35
Interpretation of Results	36
Evaluative Comments on the Study	37
Unit	37
Lessons	37
Readers	38
Summary	39
FOOTNOTES	40
BIBLIOGRAPHY	45

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
I. Mean of Readers' Ratings for Girls, Boys, and Total Class	33
II. Mean Ratings of Individual Quality Criteria and Percentage Gains	34
III. Mean Number of Words Per Sentence	35
IV. Mean Number of Complete, Incomplete, and Run-on Sentences Per Paragraph	35

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

The following comments resulted from a brief "teachers' lounge encounter session" recently.

"I think writing is important but I don't do enough with it. I don't follow it up. There needs to be some kind of sequential study or method of improving."

"Writing should be emphasized more as a communication skill."

"We need to do MORE writing--EARLIER."

"Writing should be a building process."

These teachers, all teaching in the intermediate grades, were discussing the present state of written composition in the Wamego Elementary School. Each had his own ideas and pet theories but no one had THE answer. Even in the most sophisticated circles there is little agreement as to the best way of improving student writing (1).

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purposes of this study are:
(a) to review selected aspects of written composition; (b) to outline a sequential teaching unit on the descriptive paragraph; (c) to formulate appropriate research procedures for determining some relationships between the quality of written composition and the types of language used.

Importance of the study. Written composition is important to persons at all ages and in all walks of life. Fluent writing is

an asset that will serve a person well and increase in value with use.

During the past few years, businessmen, government officials, college professors, and others who employ or teach the products of the public schools have complained about the inability of young people to express themselves clearly and eloquently (2).

Teachers readily admit they are failing and laboring in vain; they know they aren't getting the results they should (3). We are living in an age in which the written word is of primary importance in the conduct of education, business, and cultural affairs; therefore, it is imperative that teachers know how to write and know how to teach others to write (4).

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Description. The use of concrete words, selecting detail to support a single impression, and accurate use of language (5).

Teaching unit. A series of specified lessons related to a certain topic.

Intermediate grades. The fourth, fifth, and sixth grades.

III. ORGANIZATION OF REMAINDER OF REPORT

Chapter II enumerates much of the current thinking about written composition. Current trends can be studied and applied to the "real world". Chapter III consists of a teaching unit on the descriptive paragraph. The last chapter of this report is devoted to the research procedure, presentation, and discussion of results.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When one constructs a teaching unit on any subject or topic, he must know the subject matter well and have some understanding of the approaches that will best suit his goals and needs. This chapter is a summary of theories and practices which may affect the teaching of written composition.

Characteristics of the Intermediate Grade Writer. Several items are outlined by the English Language Arts Program in Malcolm Price Laboratory School as being characteristic of the intermediate grade writer. These educators feel that by the end of the intermediate years the child adjusts size of writing to purpose; uses commas, apostrophes, quotation marks; devotes primary attention to expression of ideas while mastering such mechanics of writing as punctuation and capitalization; uses complete sentences to express his ideas; understands the purpose of paragraphing and grows in ability to write a well-organized paragraph; recognizes and uses different types of written expression; welcomes opportunity to write creatively; recognizes and appreciates quality in his own writing and that of his classmates; and, employs proofreading, using guidebooks when necessary, to correct his own work independently (6).

Hill and Hill, 1966, conducted a descriptive study of the writings of intermediate level children based on the theory that a sequential growth pattern would be revealed. Of the several

conclusions reached, the following were applicable to this study:

1. Significant patterns of sequential development occurred in the analysis, particularly in regard to grade and age level.
 - a. As grade increased, subjects wrote more and longer sentences.
 - b. Type of sentence did not appear to be an important distinguishing element.
 - c. Sentence complexity increased with grade level; simple sentences decreased from grade four to five.
 - d. The use of phrases increased with grade level.
2. Girls appeared to be using slightly more complex written language than boys. Girls wrote shorter sentences but more of them and used more complex and compound sentences. There was no pattern of superiority by sex in the use of various parts of speech and phrases.
3. The proportion of the use of various parts of speech were affected by both age and grade level. The use of nouns, verbs and pronouns decreased while the use of adjectives and adverbs increased with age and grade level (7).

It is important to remember that in any functioning group there may be a range in skills from those who can scarcely express themselves in writing the simplest ideas to those who write their thoughts fluently and creatively. Teaching, therefore, requires more than group explanations and uniform exercises which may leave some children bored and others still ailing with their own weaknesses (8).

Writing Environment. Many children do not normally expect teachers to have any interest in their doings. Britton outlines three steps that a teacher must follow in showing children that

he is interested in their writings. First, the teacher has to convince them that they have something worthwhile to say. Secondly, he must ease the children's tensions and bring to the surface all the locked-up information about themselves and their lives which they have not thought suitable for work in school. Thirdly, the teacher must prove to them that he himself finds this material significant and important (9). Lohman feels that a child will have more security in his academic work if he has the ability to express himself and feels that what he says will be heard and appreciated by his friends (10). Robertson agrees that fears usually disappear when children feel that the people with whom they work and plan approve of what they write (11).

Tiedt suggests four characteristics of a classroom atmosphere conducive to creative effort. They include: a workshop atmosphere; diversity of contributions; teacher enthusiasm; and, positive attitude (12).

Robertson subscribed to these ideas when he stated, "While many conditions contribute to the creation of a rich and stimulating environment for writing, it is doubtful whether any single factor is as important as warm and friendly relationships (13)."

Biberstine, 1966, investigated the relationships that exist between the written compositions of fourth graders and various teacher influences. The topics explored were these: writing ability of the teacher; pupil's perception of his classroom, his assignments, the classroom discussion, his teacher, and the

written composition of his class; classroom atmosphere; certain characteristics of teachers that seem to correlate closely to the writing ability of his pupils; and, the grading procedure of the teacher. The results of this study would tend to indicate there is a negative relationship between a teacher's ability to write and his ability to help others express themselves in written composition. He found the better writing groups tended to see the following: (a) their classroom as being easy, pleasant, clear, relaxed, and free; (b) the classroom discussions as being free, clear, friendly, calm, and pleasant; (c) the assignments as being small, clear, pleasant, and soft; (d) their teacher as being easy-going, pleasant, kind, clear, friendly, and soft. Biberstine concluded that the free relaxed atmosphere as measured by the concepts and scales of the Semantic Differential does have a significant positive relationship with the group's writing performance. Negative comments or marks made by the teacher on the pupils' papers have a substantial negative relationship with the pupils' writing abilities (14).

The major findings of a study by Sayra, 1966, indicated that the difference between the writing produced by pupils of "more strict" and "less strict" teachers were small and not statistically significant. The small differences did, however, consistently favor the "less strict" group. She concluded that "pupils whose teachers emphasized ideas and originality produced slightly more words, ideas, rare ideas and slightly higher overall quality of

writing, as well as slightly fewer errors in spelling, capitalization and punctuation (15).

Frequency of Writing. In the opening paragraphs of this paper one teacher indicated a need for more writing. She is not alone. Murray, a professional writer, states flatly, "We learn to write by writing, and so the student should write frequently." He feels that the student will learn more and the teacher will be able to teach more by a series of short, but frequent, assignments (16). It has even been argued that a child do original writing every day. Sheppard feels that a child's own thoughts and reactions to the writings of others take precedence over prepared materials such as worksheets and workbooks (17).

While in many classes, writing every week is sacredly pursued, an experiment by Heys, 1958, failed to uphold the "weekly writing." One of two eleventh-grade classes wrote the equivalent of a theme a week, and the other was excused from practically all composition work for an entire year and used the time thus freed for an increased amount of in- and out-of-class reading. At the end of the year both groups had improved in their ability to write; both groups had improved about the same; but if either class could be said to have made the greater improvement, it was the class that had done little or no writing. Because of these "inconclusive but disquieting results", Heys repeated the experiment, 1960, under more controlled and structured conditions and found that:

1. The claim that "the way to learn to write is to write" is not substantiated by this experiment.

2. The claim that ability to write well is related to the amount of writing done is not substantiated by this experiment (18).

In a study by Arnold, 1963, four combinations of frequency and evaluation were studied. In one group students wrote infrequently and teachers evaluated moderately. In a second group, students wrote frequently and teachers evaluated moderately. In a third group, students wrote infrequently, but teachers evaluated intensively. In a fourth group, students wrote frequently and teachers evaluated intensively. Arnold's analysis of data revealed no differences in group performance resulting from either frequent practice or intensive evaluation (19, 20).

Sherwin sums up research dealing with frequency of writing by stating:

One major study by McColly (21) and other lesser efforts by Dressel-Schmid-Kincaid (22), Burton-Arnold (23), and Christiansen (24) reached the conclusion that writing does not teach writing, that is, the act of writing alone--the simple increasing of the number of writing opportunities--does not result in a statistically significant improvement in writing skill. A study by Lokke and Wykoff (25), which reached a contrary conclusion, appears to be too faulty to be counted on either side of the issue. Evidence supplied by McColly suggests that less writing in conjunction with better teaching will obtain measurably superior results.

He concluded by stating, "Motivation, selective criticism, discussion, practical explanation, and revision are the important features of instruction. Intensive evaluation, like the mere multiplying of writing assignments, is costly in effort for everyone and fails to achieve positive results (Burton-Arnold)." (26)

Sequence of Writing Skills. A cry for a sequence comes from both teachers in the field and various publishing educators and writers. Munkres believes that each skill should be on an unbroken continuum ranging from easy to difficult and simple to complex (27).

Learning to write is a gradual growth process and a sequential writing program must be planned. The aspects of writing will have to be broken up into a number of smaller segments, and each segment will have to be arranged in a logical sequence (28). It must be planned with ultimate goals and with knowledge of what the functions of the elementary, junior high, and high school are to be in the fulfillment of these goals. Teachers of English will teach composition better if they follow a sound sequential program, making writing meaningful and interesting and evaluate composition properly than if they followed no such program (29).

In an effort to gain information dealing with established sequence planning in written composition, thirteen textbook companies, a major source of program material for the teacher, were asked to submit the sequential plan of skills in written composition used in their programs. Of the nine companies responding, three were able to supply a scope and sequence chart of written composition. One, McGraw-Hill Book Company, outlines a comprehensive program from grades 7 through 12. A second, Houghton-Mifflin, Inc., initiates instruction on the paragraph in the third grade, while the Harper and Row Publishers begin introducing paragraphs in grade one.

Grammar. Much is said but little is proven concerning the relationship between grammar and written composition. Roberts states, "It is not to be expected that the study of grammar, no matter how good a grammar it is or how carefully it is taught, will effect any enormous improvement in writing (30)." Link and Schuster, 1961, sum up their action research dealing with grammar and writing by saying, "There is, unfortunately, very little evidence that the study of either the new or the traditional grammar improves student writing (31)."

Prestwood disagrees with this generalization. He feels a study of linguistics can help give students a mature style (32) and students will realize that in speaking they employ sentence patterns useful in their writing (33). He concludes his comments with the following statement:

Although lessening hostility toward writing, and particularly toward the study of grammar, may not be classified as a direct contribution to improving student compositions, the linguistic approach does tend to cause students to react positively to writing assignments (34).

In a two year study, Harris, 1962, studied the effect of instruction of formal grammar in enabling students to write better compositions. The formal grammar group used a logically organized traditional textbook, learned parts of speech, and used traditional grammatical terms in correcting compositions. The other group did not use a textbook, considered problems in sentence structure but avoided use of grammatical terms, concentrated on common errors which appeared in composition, and learned inductively by way of

example and imitation. This method is sometimes known as usage study and pattern practice. After two years the results on the composition test pointed to a significant advantage for the students in the usage study and pattern practice program (35).

Montag conducted a study to determine whether an oral-aural approach to remedial composition for college students would be superior to the traditional grammar and rhetoric approach. Sessions of one experimental classroom were divided into two parts: a thought stimulation period, exposing students to such motivational aids as films, slides, prints, cartoons, or recordings; and a writing session, occasionally preceded by a discussion period. Three classrooms were taught by the traditional approach. Results indicated that students taught by the experimental method learned to write as well as those taught by the traditional grammar method (36).

Brett reports of a study by O'Donnell, 1963, comparing ability in composition and knowledge of various aspects of grammar. "Although the findings do not indicate a high degree of relationship between ability in written composition, and various aspects of grammatical knowledge, they can hardly be interpreted as proof that such a relationship does not exist (37)."

Blake, 1967, conducted a study using fourth and fifth graders and found that the groups receiving instruction in structural linguistics in this study did considerably better on matters having to do with vocabulary growth and word choice than the group receiving traditional instruction. The group receiving traditional

instruction made no noticable gains on any of the tested variables (38).

Sherwin reports on several other studies. One by Zidonis, 1965, found a small advantage for generative grammar (39). Johnson, 1960, found structural linguistics and traditional grammar to be about equally effective in improving student's themes (40). Weinfeld, 1959, found only insignificant differences between scores of students who had studied structural linguistics and those who had studied traditional grammar (41). He summarizes the research in the area of grammar with the following statement:

The research is of sufficient quality to warrent the conclusion that instruction in formal grammar is an ineffective and inefficient way to help students achieve proficiency in writing (42).

Teaching Strategies. Tiedt suggests four methods that could be utilized by the teacher to stimulate student involvement in writing: (a) go to the student for writing topics; (b) publicize student writing; (c) develop a feeling of security and empathy with your students; (d) confer with students about their writing (43).

Cecere, 1966, investigated the concept that through self-expression or self-experience in art, children may become more perceptive and responsive to writing. One hundred and twelve third grade subjects, ages eight to eleven, were studied. Cecere used structured and unstructured verbal motivating stimuli for writing on one hand, and structured and unstructured drawing as

stimuli to writing on the other. The writing accompanying the drawing stimuli was rated as superior to the verbal writing treatments (44).

The methods of development may be introduced to the writer through models. Models of writing to be done by the student are an indispensable aid to both teaching and learning if used inductively and if the student is asked to make generalizations about the development of the model (45).

Miles, 1967, conducted a study to examine the use of literary models in teaching written composition to children. After a pilot project, the main study was conducted in four fifth grade classrooms of two schools in Georgia. One-hour periods were used twice weekly for 24 weeks to teach written composition to the experimental group. The lessons were based on the models in specifically selected children's literature. Based on STEP Writing as the measure of written composition, significant difference after treatment was not found; but based on Writing Sample as the measure of written composition, difference at the .001 level of significance was found. Miles feels that these results are inconclusive and more research is needed (46).

Rippey, 1968, examined the use of a model paragraph in the 10th and 11th grades. His conclusions "indicated that the importance of thoughtful imitation, a crucial step in learning the most sophisticated kinds of behavior, has often been underestimated in teaching (47)."

Graser relates the outcomes of a project in the Baltimore City Public Schools.

Although the students grasped the content of stories and articles suited to their reading levels, they were baffled by trying to combine writing with the discussion of implications, inferences, and motives. Teachers therefore decided to relate writing assignments to the students' experiences rather than to literature.

Based on general reactions, rather than proven statistical data, she felt that using the experiences, and particularly using a visual approach, was very helpful (48).

Jackson, 1967, examined the students' preferences in writing topics. She found that 7th grade students preferred certain essay titles, particularly those related to their adolescent subculture. Males preferred titles involving sports, science, and animals. Less intelligent students preferred concrete and personally relevant topics, whereas the intellectually bright students preferred more abstract titles concerning complicated issues (49).

Evaluation. Since success usually motivates the student, the teacher should note that it is the successes rather than the failures that should come first in discussion (50). The way teachers evaluate writing assignments largely determines whether students really learn to write and whether they will want to learn to write (51).

There are several avenues open for evaluation. Britton feels that the general atmosphere of the correction period becomes that of a workshop (52). Several authors believe best results are

achieved when children learn to discover and correct their own mistakes (53, 54, 55). Hach feels that conferences are the best way in which to discuss a theme with a student (56). One caution was offered by Murray concerning the use of small group evaluation procedures. He is convinced that small group instruction can be effective only if the students are prepared to accept responsibility for their own education (57).

Emig has found that it is important for a student to concentrate upon correcting one weakness at a time, or else he grows discouraged at the complexity of the task (58). Decisions must be made as to which problems should be tackled at a given moment; and which should be left for another time. Delicate judgments must be made as to the number and type of corrections pupils can take, and remain productive in their efforts. Some will be challenged by variety and range of suggestions; others will be discouraged with a minimum of difficulties (59).

A distinction must be made between writing to communicate information and writing to communicate personal attitude and emotion. Freyman says the former can be taught and judged while the latter is not only difficult to teach but almost impossible to judge (60). Evans agrees since the danger of antagonizing the student is much less in a paper dealing with observation or other types of information (61).

Armstrong conducted a study designed to find an objective way of evaluating written composition. Fifty classroom teachers

ranked two sets of compositions according to over-all quality. Several frequency counts, representing indices of written language quality, were made for each composition. A correlation analysis was then made to discover any direct relationship between rankings given and the results of the frequency count. Two major weaknesses in the measures were found: (a) they did not account for all of the written language quality; and (b) they used frequency counts which were too time consuming to be used conveniently (62).

To be interested in improving his ability to write, a student must feel that his teacher has respect for his efforts. If a student is to consider content, organization, and mechanics in his writing in that order of priority, the teacher must give students that impression of relative importance by the way he evaluates a paper (63). Rodgers, 1969, conducted a study to discover if teachers are influenced in grading by mechanical errors even if the grade was to be based only on content.

Eleven out of twelve pairs of raters with an average of 7.8 years of high school experience who achieved a high degree of agreement as to the rank order of student themes (as indicated by a rank order correlation of .65 or better) no longer demonstrated any such agreement when one half graded themes with mechanical errors corrected, even though all were supposedly grading on content only (64).

SUMMARY

Writing can provide a child a satisfying means to express his thoughts. The child must learn that language is an instrument of many uses, and all of the uses demand of him attention and control.

If a child is to learn them, the teacher must plan systematically to develop such skills and to present such knowledge (65, 66). The teacher must consider the characteristics of his class, how often writing needs to be done, if grammar is necessary, the type of evaluation best suited for his purposes, the development of a sequence, and the range of methods to teach written composition. Most important of all is the teacher's look at himself. What he sees may determine whether his pupils learn to write and whether they will want to learn to write.

CHAPTER III

"DELIGHTFUL, DISCIPLINED DESCRIPTION"

A TEACHING UNIT

The following goals were prevalent in the construction of this teaching unit:

1. To incorporate theory and research findings into a practical teaching unit on the descriptive paragraph. These findings include: providing structured opportunities for writing; moderate evaluation; multi-media or sensory motivational stimuli; a sequential development of skills; use of models; and, paragraph topics relating to the child and his experience.
2. To provide varied types of experiences for the total class. An emphasis was placed on using various types of media incorporating many different kinds of sensory stimuli.
3. To encourage creative and unique expression within the limits set for a descriptive paragraph.

Ten lessons have been developed following a sequentially logical order. The lessons begin exploring types and uses of words, progress through sentence composition, and conclude with paragraph composition. The lessons are organized with attention to objectives, materials, procedures, and evaluation techniques for the teacher. The time required for each lesson will vary but it is important that sufficient time be given to keep interest high and boredom low.

Lessons 1, 10: (Pre-test and Post-test)

Objective: The student will describe a character study so that, in a display, another student would know which one he had described.

Materials: 12 mounted black and white character studies or sketches (close-up pictures of interesting faces taken from magazines by the teacher)

Procedures: A. Allow pupils to choose a character study. Give only these directions:

Observe this character study. In an interesting paragraph, describe this person so that your classmates could identify him.

B. When all have finished writing, place pictures where all can see. Read paragraphs in random order. Listeners identify the sketch being described. Orally note especially good descriptions.

Evaluation: Used as a pre-test and as post-test. See Chapter IV for evaluation procedures.

Lesson 2:

Objective: The student will learn that the common things can be described in some way that will make them interesting.

Materials: Reflections on a Gift of a Watermelon Pickle
Slides (either made by teacher or class)
Slide projector
Screen

- Procedures:
- A. Read "The Toaster" and "Steam Shovel", page 37 in Reflections..... Discuss this method of describing objects.
 - B. Show slides of transparent articles from nature, such as leaves, butterfly wings, with a musical accompaniment. Discuss words which might be used to describe the scenes depicted and the feelings evoked.
 - C. Read the poem "To Look at Any Thing", page 21 in Reflections.....

Lesson 3:

Objectives: The student will, after listening to taped sounds, write descriptive sentences of the sound, places where it could have happened, and/or the object(s) making the sound.

Materials: Tape of various sounds with short interval between each sound.
Tape recorder

Procedures:

- A. Experiment with one or two sounds. Talk about them and especially concentrate on descriptive words.
- B. Group members contribute sentences describing these sounds to teacher who writes them on the board. Discuss the sentence structure and choice of words.
- C. Play series of sounds allowing time for each student to write at least one descriptive sentence for the sound.
- D. Play series again--this time students will share the sentences they wrote. Positively but critically evaluate each other's sentences--emphasizing descriptive words and interesting sentence structure.
- E. Discuss the thesaurus as a source of descriptive words. Are there any others?
- F. Summarize by emphasizing how words and sentence structure add to vivid description.

Evaluation: Play two more sounds. Each student will write one sentence describing the sound, where it happened, or what was making the sound. Evaluate according to choice of descriptive adjectives, adverbs, verbs and nouns.

Note: The sounds were taped from background sounds used for commercials obtained from a local radio station. The sound included a jet landing, a train starting, crickets, a playground, a tractor, a horse galloping, a race car, birds, a thunder storm, wind in the trees.

Lesson 4:

Objectives: The student will be able to accurately describe several unknown substances after experiencing them through the sense of touch. The student is able to give one reason for using accurate descriptive words.

Materials: Paper sacks with unusual objects in them.
One large sack with one large, commonly found object.

Procedures:

- A. Divide the class into groups, giving each group a sack.
- B. Give them an opportunity to explore their sacks. Encourage exchanging ideas with the others in their group.
- C. Each group decides on several descriptive words for the object they have "experienced". These words may be written on a sheet of paper for reference later.
- D. Each group moves to another sack. Each individual describes this object, writing his descriptive words on a sheet of paper. Let each group then compare its list of words with those of the first group.
- E. Discuss the problems in describing something using only the sense of touch. Discuss the problems of reading about something you have never experienced --what words are best?

Evaluation: Present large sack to entire group. Each individual, in turn, feels the object and adds a descriptive word to the list on the blackboard while others try to guess the object.

Lesson 5:

Objectives: Using the guide questions, the student will write a paragraph which consists of a topic sentence, supporting material, and a conclusion.

Materials: Tape with recorded questions
Tape recorder
Ear phones

Procedures:

- A. Explore through discussion the students' ideas of a paragraph. Find out (a) previous experiences, (b) what they feel a paragraph should be.
- B. Explain purpose, in general, of tape and thoroughly review directions.
- C. Pupils listen to tape and write as the questions are asked. Stress complete sentences and not one word answers.
- D. When finished, discuss with pupils the ease or difficulty with which they wrote. If possible, see if pupils can summarize the "essential" parts of a paragraph.

Evaluation: Informally evaluate paragraph "sense". Did the paragraphs have a topic sentence, supportive materials, and a conclusion?

Directions: To teacher: If several are using tape at one time, use groups of pupils that will work at approximately the same rate.

To pupils: Use ear phones at table.
Play tape for one section. Stop the tape at the end of the statement and write in complete sentences the response to the direction or question.
When completed with one section, play the next section and continue until you are directed to turn off the recorder.

Questions:

1. Where is your favorite place around your home?

Lesson 5 (continued):

2. Name one or two unusual things about this place. Describe these things.
3. Describe the similarities between this place and somewhere else you have been.
4. How do you feel when you are there?

Proofread the paragraph you have written. Do the sentences make sense? Do they sound logical? Turn off the tape recorder.

Lesson 6:

Objective: The student will write a paragraph which has a topic sentence, supporting material and a concluding sentence, guided by the TRI approach*.

Materials: Overhead transparencies
Overhead projector
Transparency marking pen

Procedures: A. Show transparency set and discuss each plate.

Plate number:

1. Newspaper column, handwritten letter, paragraph from social studies book shown. Discuss physical characteristics of a paragraph, indentation.
2. One social studies page is shown. Discuss number of paragraphs on page, indentation, and lead into topic sentence or main idea.
3. Drawing of a vegetable garden with different plants in the same row. Discuss organization of garden--similar things are together. Compare with paragraph.
4. Cartoon drawing of train with engine as topic sentence and other sentences following. Discuss usual sequential order of sentences in a paragraph.
5. Cartoon drawing of train running off of the track. Discuss need for control of sentences, both in subject and in number.
6. T R I -- illustrated in ornate lettering. Relate to the pupils that there is an easy way to remember the important points of a paragraph.
7. Consists of two overlays. Base shows the face of a woman, first overlay shows the woman sitting in a red convertible, the second overlay shows a policeman writing a ticket to the woman. As each overlay is added, relate it to the TRI approach to paragraph writing.
8. A hand with finger pointing straight at viewer with the caption "Now YOU Try It!"

B. Discuss application of the TRI approach to paragraph writing. How is it usable? Why could it help one write better paragraphs?

Lesson 6 (continued):

C. Assignment: Choose one of the following topics or choose your own topic. Keep in mind the TRI approach and experiment in the use of descriptive words.

- Describe your "HERO"
- "The Darkest Night of the Year"
- "My Favorite Game"
- "I NEVER Have Anything to Wear!"
- "My Most Embarrassing Moment"

Evaluation: Rate the paragraphs from 1 to 5. Logical organization and description evident in a paragraph would rate the 5 while a paragraph totally lacking in organization and descriptive words would receive a 1.

* TRI approach was developed by Richard Young. The first sentence of the paragraph is a general statement on the topic. The second sentence restricts the topic. The last sentence illustrates the topic. Further information can be found:

Folta, Bernarr. "Writing as Leading the Reader to Discovery."
Paper presented to the Annual Convention of National Council
of Teachers of English, Washington, D. C., November, 1959.
Reproduced by E. R. I. C. 039 227.

Lesson 7:

Objectives: The student will be able to write a descriptive paragraph from a point-of-view other than his own. The student will be able to identify and match paragraphs with different given points of view.

Materials: Previously completed art lessons.

- Procedures:**
- A. Prior to lesson, conduct the art lesson--"Drawing From an Ant's Eye View". Using this art lesson as a starting point--Discuss how things look different from different points of view.
 - B. Explore ideas about Wamego Elementary School from different points of view. Bring out as many possibilities as the pupils can handle or seem interested in.
 - C. Assignment: Write two paragraphs choosing a different point-of-view for each.
 - 1. The Chamber of Commerce is describing the school to interest people in moving here.
 - 2. Some one is describing WES who is moving away after living here all his life.
 - 3. A new pupil who didn't want to leave his old school is describing the school.
 - 4. A person anxious to meet new people and has just come here is describing WES.

Evaluation: When reading the paragraphs, notice the difference in descriptive words, especially adjectives and adverbs. Can a distinct difference be observed?

Lesson 8:

Objectives: The student in associating with others will compare ideas about descriptive paragraphs and will recall differences in points of view.

Materials: A large, abstract picture of landscape.
Opaque projector.

Procedures: Day I:

- A. Divide class into several writing groups--each having members on same level of writing.
- B. Show class the picture and give instructions:
Write a paragraph describing this scene to someone who has never been here. Accept or reject sentences until you have a well constructed and interesting descriptive paragraph. Remember the parts that a paragraph has and include them in your description. Hand in when finished.
- C. With entire class--discuss problems encountered and solved in the groups. Review parts of the paragraph.

Day II:

- A. Use these paragraphs on opaque projector, typed, to discuss and lead into next lesson.

Evaluation: Teacher casually visits the groups working and notices whether any meaningful discussion of paragraphs is occurring.

Lesson 9:

Objectives: Students will show knowledge of paragraph composition by evaluating, and supporting this evaluation, of several paragraphs.

Materials: Transparencies of descriptive paragraphs found in books*. Paragraphs written in previous lesson.
Opaque projector.
Overhead projector.

- Procedures:**
- A. Show in random order and discuss the paragraphs written in the groups in previous lesson.
 - 1. Is a topic sentence evident?
 - 2. How does the last sentence relate to the others?
 - 3. Do all the sentences discuss the same topic?
 - B. Evaluate at least two professionally written descriptive paragraphs. Ask above questions.
 - C. On same transparency show a well-written paragraph and a poorly written paragraph. Which one is better? Why? Question as in A.
 - D. Summarize which type of description is more interesting.
 - E. Assignment: Write a descriptive paragraph that describes the location of a mystery story.
(Ideas--cave, house, attic, basement, barn, woods)

Evaluation: Rate paragraphs as in Lesson 6.

* Books to be used:

Sail, Calypso!, Adrienne Jones

The Jazz Man, Mary Hays Weik

The Fearsome Inn, Isaac Bashevis Singer

Footlights for Jean, Diana Forbes-Robertson

Cristy at Skippinghill, Mabel Leigh Hunt

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND RESULTS

After the construction of the unit (see Chapter III) the procedure may be divided into four parts: Presentation of the Unit; Evaluation of Written Samples; Results of Evaluation; Interpretation of Results.

I. PRESENTATION OF THE UNIT

The class. The population involved in this study consists of one of two sixth grade classes in Wamego Elementary School during the school year, 1971-72. Pupils were assigned to one of the two classes in a random manner. The population is unique in at least one respect. During the previous school year all the pupils were in three classes averaging 24 students each. In the 1971-72 school year the class size averaged 36 pupils each. The effect of increased class size cannot be known at this time.

The teacher. The teacher of the experimental class has had 2½ years prior teaching experience. This includes one year teaching junior and senior high home economics; one-half year as a remedial teacher in primary grades; and one year as sixth grade instructor. She has completed coursework for the Master's Degree in Elementary Education with emphasis on the language arts.

The unit. The unit consists of ten lessons which include a pre-test and a post-test and requires two to three weeks for completion. The unit was presented in an organized manner avoiding lapses of days to occur between lessons.

II. EVALUATION OF WRITTEN SAMPLES

Preparation of Samples for Evaluation. Lessons 1 and 10 of the teaching unit were the pre-test and the post-test. The pre-test was administered to the pupils as the introduction to the actual unit. The same procedure was followed for administering both tests. Twenty-four black-and-white character sketches were randomly assigned to two groups for use with the pre-test and with the post-test.

After the samples were collected they were typed with spelling and most mechanical errors corrected. Those errors not corrected were those relating directly to the construction or meaning of the paragraph. An example of an error not corrected is the failure to indent the first line of the paragraph.

Ratings by Readers. In order that a reliable rating be obtained for each writing sample, three readers were selected to rate the sample paragraphs according to a determined set of criteria. Reader A was an art consultant with four years of teaching experience with an English minor. Reader B taught sixth grade three years and junior high language arts for one year. Reader C has taught three years in the fourth grade and one year in the fifth grade.

The prepared samples of the pre-test and post-test paragraphs were numbered and divided randomly into three sets. One set was given to each reader and rotated so that one rating from each reader was available for every sample.

Each reader was supplied with a rating sheet for each paragraph. The directions and criteria supplied to the readers were these:

For this evaluation a 5 point scale will be used with a score of 5 being the best possible score.

Rate the paragraph according to the following points:

Paragraph number _____	Circle one:
I. A. Uniqueness of descriptive words	5 4 3 2 1
B. Accuracy of description	5 4 3 2 1
C. Appropriate variety of sentence structure	5 4 3 2 1
II. Organization -- main idea followed by supporting details	5 4 3 2 1
Reader _____	

After the sample ratings were collected from the readers, the rating scores were calculated. All the circled scores were added with the last score being added in twice to give organization more importance in the total score. The mean of the three scores, one from each reader, was calculated for each paragraph.

Frequency counts. To determine quantitative differences in the language used, the following frequency counts were made by the experimenter for each sample:

- A. Total number of sentences in sample
 1. Number of complete sentences
 2. Number of incomplete sentences
 3. Number of run-on sentences

B. Total number of words in sample

1. Calculate average number of words per sentence

Tabulations were not made for the number of different descriptive words, number of different descriptive phrases, and the number of different simple predicates. It has been found to be quite time-consuming and difficult to recognize and differentiate between certain descriptive words, phrases and predicates. Also, a simple word count does not allow for differences in the choice of words. A word count gives the same value to the predicate "walk" as it does to the more descriptive word "saunter".

III. RESULTS

Readers' ratings. To identify the relationship between the quality of written composition as determined by the readers' ratings and the type of language used, a mean rating of each sample was calculated. Scores were tabulated for boys and girls, as well as for the total class.

The mean scores calculated from the readers' ratings are shown in Table I.

TABLE I

MEAN OF READERS' RATINGS FOR GIRLS, BOYS, AND TOTAL CLASS

	Girls	Boys	Total class
Mean Score for Pre-test	11.62	10.64	11.13
Mean Score for Post-test	14.20	13.15	13.63

The difference in the mean ratings for the girls was 2.52 or 22+% gain over the mean pre-test ratings. The gain in the mean score for the boys was 2.51 or 23+% higher than the pre-test ratings. The total mean gain was 22.5% more than the pre-test rating or a difference of 2.50.

To discover any trends in the improvements in writing, tabulations were made on each criteria rated by the readers. The numerical means and percentage of gain are shown in Table II.

TABLE II
MEAN RATINGS OF INDIVIDUAL QUALITY CRITERIA
AND PERCENTAGE GAINS

	Uniqueness of Descriptive Words		Accuracy of Description		Variety of Sentence Structure		Organization	
	Mean	Gain	Mean	Gain	Mean	Gain	Mean	Gain
Girls:								
Pre-test	2.02		2.54		2.19		4.87	
Post-test	2.50	23%	3.18	25%	2.96	35%	5.56	14%
Boys:								
Pre-test	1.83		2.50		1.94		4.41	
Post-test	2.17	18%	2.80	12%	2.37	22%	5.81	32%
Total:								
Pre-test	1.92		2.52		2.06		4.63	
Post-test	2.32	21%	2.98	18%	2.65	29%	5.69	23%

As shown in Table II, the largest percentage gain was made in varying sentence structure. The girls made the largest gain in varying sentence structure while the boys improved greatly in organization.

Frequency counts. The mean number of words per sentence for girls, boys, and the total class is shown in Table III.

TABLE III

MEAN NUMBER OF WORDS PER SENTENCE

	Girls	Boys	Total Class
Pre-test	9.32	9.46	9.39
Post-test	9.53	8.47	8.97

The difference in the mean number of words per sentence for the girls is .21 words or 2.3% more than the pre-test mean. For the boys the difference is .99 words or 10.5% less than the mean for the pre-test. The total difference in mean words per sentence is .42 or 4.5% less than the original.

The mean number of total sentences, complete sentences, incomplete and run-on sentences are shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV

MEAN NUMBER OF COMPLETE, INCOMPLETE, AND RUN-ON SENTENCES PER PARAGRAPH

	Complete	Incomplete	Run-on	Total Number
Girls:				
Pre-test	2.7	.6	.1	3.4
Post-test	3.1	.2	.2	3.4
Boys:				
Pre-test	2.2	.6	.2	2.9
Post-test	3.1	.5	.1	3.7
Total Class:				
Pre-test	2.5	.6	.1	3.2
Post-test	3.1	.4	.1	3.6

IV. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

An increase of 22.5% in readers' ratings is undoubtedly a significant and real increase in quality of writing during an approximately two week period. Twenty-three of thirty-four pupils showed increases ranging from .06 up to 8.7 points in ratings. Fourteen of eighteen boys showed increases while nine of sixteen girls showed an improvement.

One would expect to find longer sentences as the quality increased. In this study this assumption was not supported. The boys actually wrote 10.5% fewer words per sentence while improving 23+% on the readers' ratings. An examination of the pupils' writings provided a partial explanation for this result. A count only of the words per sentence does not take into consideration any variation in sentence structure or length. A reader would probably tend to give a higher rating to a paragraph with three long and two shorter sentences rather than to a paragraph with five sentences of equal length. On Table II, page 35, the readers' ratings of variety of sentence structure showed the largest percentage increase, 29% for the total class. The largest percentage increase of any area, 35%, was shown in the variety of sentence structure.

In comparing the readers' mean rating in organization, Table II, page 35, one can observe that the boys made an increase of 32% while the girls improved only 14%. The total number of sentences

per paragraph, shown in Table IV, page 36, also shows an obvious difference between the boys and girls. The girls made no change in the number of sentences per paragraph while the boys added almost 1 sentence per paragraph. No direct relationship between quality of organization and number of sentences per paragraph can be proven by this comparison but the possibility of such a relationship is an area for further study.

V. EVALUATIVE COMMENTS ON THE STUDY

Unit. One purpose of this study was to outline a sequential teaching unit on the descriptive paragraph. The lessons were developed in the following order: visual awareness of objects and descriptive words and phrases; awareness of other ways of describing objects--use of sense of touch and hearing; developing sentences about images brought forth by selected sounds; paragraph construction with guided questions for answering; presentation and use of a formula for paragraph writing; further development of paragraph from different points of view, working with a group of fellow students on a descriptive paragraph of an abstract picture; studying descriptive models from books, looking for types of descriptive words, phrases and then writing descriptive paragraphs.

Lessons. Some lessons were felt by the writer to be more successful than others. Lesson 3, page 21, stimulated a great deal of pupil interest. The pupils were anxious to guess what the sound was or what was making the sound. The pupils could then be

led to give words and phrases that would tell what each sound was like to one who did not hear it. They found that the overused words such as "loud", "high", would not be enough but that they would have to be more specific.

Lesson 4, page 22, dealt with the sense of touch. After experimenting in groups, a "contest" yielded interesting results and stimulated much discussion on accurate choice of descriptive words. The object in the group's sack was a light bulb. Students had to think in order to choose words which would describe the object using only the sense of touch.

A third valuable lesson was Lesson 8, page 28. After studying the TRI approach, the students had an opportunity to apply it to an abstract picture of landscape. Each member of the pupil groups helped and was helped in clarifying the goals of the TRI method of writing paragraphs.

The writer feels that the pre-test and post-tests were interesting to the students. All but one of 35 pupils turned in a paragraph for both tests.

Readers. The use of readers was an interesting experiment. A teacher tends to evaluate writing on the basis of the child while the readers could judge only the writing. Most scores given by the readers were fairly similar. The readers did express dismay occasionally because it was hard for them to remember their individual standards from one set of paragraphs to the next.

VI. SUMMARY

After conducting a review of literature, the writer feels that the teacher and the method of organizing and teaching the class will have a greater effect upon the student's ability to write descriptive paragraphs than the frequency of writing or the teaching of grammar. A planned sequential method of teaching can be outlined and taught with results in learning. The writer feels the student is aided if he is exposed to many different types of stimuli before sitting down to write.

The data collected and the conclusions drawn from this study are not intended to be interpreted as precise, objective results. Many subjective decisions were made which may have influenced the nature of the experiment. It is hoped that others will continue developing and testing teaching units in written composition so there will no longer be "little agreement as to the best way of improving student writing."

FOOTNOTES

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(2)Jewett, op. cit., p. 4.

(3)Eugene Smith, Teacher Preparation in Composition, National Council of Teachers of English Educational Resources Information Center, (Champaign, Ill.: Clearinghouse on the Teaching of English, 1969), p. 26.

(4)Mary Elizabeth Fowler, Teaching Language, Composition, and Literature, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), p. 130

(5)Fowler, op. cit., p. 139.

(6)The English Language Arts Program: Kindergarten-Grade 12, Malcolm Price Laboratory School, (Cedar Falls: State College of Iowa, 1966), p. 23.

(7)Edwin C. Hill and Margaret Keyser Hill, "Written Language Development of Intermediate Grade Children," U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Cooperative Research Project of the Office of Education, Research Project No. 1571, April, 1966, pp. 38-39.

(8)Alberta Munkres, "The What and How of Skills," Readings in the Language Arts in the Elementary School, James C. MacCampbell, editor, (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1964), p. 163.

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(13)Robertson, op. cit., p. 253.

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(19)Lois V. Arnold, "Effects of Frequency of Writing and Intensity of Teacher Evaluation upon Performance in Written Composition of Tenth Grade Students," Dissertation Abstracts, XXIV, No. 2, p. 1022.

(20)Lois Arnold, "Writer's Cramp and Eyestrain--Are They Paying Off?" English Journal, LIII (January, 1964), p. 14.

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(24)Sherwin, op. cit., citing Mark Christiansen, "Tripling Writing and Omitting Readings in Freshman English: An Experiment," College Composition and Communication, XVI (May, 1965), pp. 122-124.

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- (33) Jewett, op. cit., p. 53.
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DELIGHTFUL, DISCIPLINED DESCRIPTION
A TEACHING UNIT

by

Renita Kathleen Pohl Ubel
B.S., Kansas State University, 1967

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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MASTER OF SCIENCE

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AN ABSTRACT

DELIGHTFUL, DISCIPLINED DESCRIPTION: A TEACHING UNIT

In addition to reviewing the literature of selected aspects of written composition, the writer outlined a sequential eight-lesson teaching unit on the descriptive paragraph, taught it to a group of sixth-grade pupils, and evaluated the impact of this instruction upon selected components of the pupils' written composition.

A pre-test of written composition was administered to the pupils and was rated according to selected criteria and processes by three "readers." Eight lessons in writing the descriptive paragraph were taught and then a post-test was administered in much the same ways as was the pre-test.

Analysis of reader ratings and of the pre- and post-tests indicated that not only did the overall quality of pupils' compositions greatly improve but that improvement occurred in each of the components: uniqueness of descriptive words; accuracy of description; variety of sentence structure; organization; and, complete sentences. Additional analyses compared pre- and post-test achievement of boys versus girls.

In addition, the writer subjectively evaluated each lesson of the teaching unit and noted both its strengths and weaknesses.