Assignment# 1

"The Effects of Incorporating a Word Processor into a Year Three Writing Program"

By

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In this article, Beck & Fetherston describe their ethnographic study to explore the effects of implementing a word processor in the writing program for year three students. Their qualitative study aims to investigate the student's attitude towards writing and overall effect on writing development when using word processors instead of traditional methods.

Based on convenience sampling, the study was focussed on seven students from year three/ four split class in urban Perth, Australia. Students were required to complete two handwritten and two word processed stories using Storybook Weaver Deluxe software over a six week period and seven individual case studies were developed from the data gathered via interviews and observations. Keeping into consideration the multidimensional aspect of writing, they chose Tompkins' analytic scoring system based on four categories – ideas, organization, style and mechanics classified over a 3 point scale of strong, average or weak for evaluation.

The study reveals positive effects of using a word processor for story writing as the students constructed better stories, showed increased motivation and increased risk taking behaviour as compared to those using traditional pencil and paper.

To the extent that this research is exploratory in nature, results of this study provide valuable insights into the importance of recognizing cultural differences for teaching and learning and its associated impact on student psychology and behaviour. The authors provide extensive research evidence generally supporting their argument, however, several limitations must be considered while analyzing its application to the focus group. A critical analysis reveals that the study lacks a clear problem definition, fails to underscore the intuitive multimedia features of the word processing software, and has significant flaws in approach and evaluation.

Beck and Fetherston cite various references supporting the importance of writing and advantages of using word processors, however, the evidence seems to go on a tangent rather than focus on the main issue which seems to be around faculty development and teaching practices that make young students disinterested in creative writing. The study compares student behaviour towards writing a story on a plain paper versus using a multimedia rich, highly engaging gaming software. Given that a picture is worth thousand words and enormously helps in organization of thoughts and ideas, their methodology is worth questioning. Further, the small sample size is not representative enough to generalize the findings as there could be vast differences in teaching modalities in other settings.

The assessment criterion does not seem appropriate for the focus group as well. In grade three, students start developing their writing skills and it doesn't seem fair to compare them to professional software's inbuilt thesaurus, grammar and spell checker. Arguably, the dependence on word processing tools at such a tender age could potentially limit the language skills of the students who may not be able to think beyond the software vocabulary.

The results elucidate that the student's positive outlook towards word processors comes from their overarching concern to focus on neatness rather than the writing quality in order to get better grades. This valuable finding elicits a pitfall in our education system and perhaps presents our academic leadership with some food for thought. In summary, it has to be admitted that the current study is far from being conclusive and further research is required to validate the argument.

References

Beck, N., & Fetherston, T. (2003). The effects of incorporating a word processor into a year three writing program. *Information Technology in Childhood Education Annual*, 139-161.