Article Critique #1

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The Effects of Incorporating a Word Processor Into a Year Three Writing Program

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The article entitled “The Effects of Incorporating a Word Processor Into a Year Three Writing Program” was written by Natalie Beck and Tony Fetherston for the Edith Cowan University in Australia. The purpose of their study was to compare the students’ prior hand-written writing attitudes, motivation and qualitative outcomes with those after the introduction of a word processor. This research claims that the use of word processors enhances creativity, motivation, style and completion of writing and that word processors enabled the students to concentrate on their writing content/style rather than on presentation and mechanics.

The researchers conducted a qualitative study using convenience sampling. They used seven year three students and the learners were interviewed using conversational and standardized open-ended techniques. Ongoing observations, anecdotal notes and tape-recordings of conversations were utilized to collect data during their daily forty-five minute writing lesson over a period of six weeks. Their evaluation used standardized marking criteria to assess the quality of the written work.

I believe that there were a number of satisfactory elements in the methodology used. The researchers used a variety of access points to evaluate the development in student attitude and motivation along with the quality of the students’ writing. Writing is multidimensional and therefore, I think that the researchers understood the need to evaluate potential progress using several methods. They evaluated the students using interviews and observations which they combined with a standardized analytical scoring system. The results were also moderated by a qualified teacher which increased the validity and accuracy of their data. Also, prior research at other grades indicated that this research could be fruitful for grade three. Consequently I can see the researchers’ logic for conducting this investigation, especially since they maintain that writing is central to learning.

There were also some pitfalls to the methodology and analysis used by Beck and Fetherston. First of all, they use a variety of non-committal evaluations (this could be linked...some of the students...perhaps...appeared to be...could have led to...made a very positive impact on all of the students...most of the students). These are inferential comments that have no direct correlation to the data. Secondly, why were the hand written and word processing tasks not identical if a direct comparison was to be made? If they had used the same task format they would have added validity to their research. The researchers also used “unstructured interviews throughout the six week period of investigation in an attempt to ‘discover’ the contents of their minds...” (Beck & Fetherston, 2003, p.145) and I question why these were not structured to give more accurate and reliable information. Their case study also used previous writing samples of each student as a benchmark but they do not elaborate on how these were selected which indicated possible bias. I also noticed that there was no control group of non-computer users used and the gender factor was not raised even though research indicates that girls are better writers and boys are have more facility with technology. Lastly, the references cited in their literature review are significantly dated. If they had access to more current research their own research findings may have been emphasized. These elements are essential to an effective and comprehensive analysis of this data.

In conclusion, this research was a fairly valid and accurate case study of the effects of integrating word processors into a grade three classroom; however it only confirms prior research and adds little new to the discussion. There were a variety of angles that were not investigated such as the gender aspect and the loss of handwritten skills in a word processor dominated environment; however, Beck and Fetherston used the methodological tools available to them appropriately and their findings are an accurate representation of this.

**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*.*