

Concept-Based Instruction and Teacher Planning and Student Achievement in Persuasive Writing

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this study is twofold: to analyze the relationship of the concept-based curriculum with what the teacher in persuasive writing will include in their lesson plan, and to come up with a yardstick that would provide a more concrete description on the impact of concepts to the students' performance in persuasive writing. The main method used in this study is exploratory and library research. The readings, however, point to the reality that given the right concept the learners can develop and could excel in writing persuasive essays. This study has found out through that indeed concept-based curriculum affects the performance of the writers. They provide a springboard to what the student has to write. When students are familiar with what they are talking, they can express themselves better and naturally they can be more convincing.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a tedious task. It requires dedication and devotion to motivate the learners to imbibe concepts and to master skills. Teaching persuasive writing requires not only patience and determination but it also requires creativity, imagination, and many concepts and innovative instructional materials that would motivate the learners to come up with something that would attract their readers to read their works or convince their target clients to their themes and to their products.

Persuasive writing is defined as a written work in which a writer presents a case for or against a particular position for the following purpose: (1) to inform; (2) to entertain; (3) to shape a view; or (4) to argue for or against a position, mabry-online.com. 2008. Web Everyone 2007 believes that the primary purpose of persuasive writing is to give an opinion and try to influence the reader's way of thinking with supporting evidence. Whatever persuasive writings are primarily meant for it is still important for the teachers of writing to motivate the writers to write with precision, good value and content. However, a language teacher must realize that unless the learners have concepts or ideas to write about he/she could not write good enough to convince or shape others opinions.

What District 118 2007 says of concepts indicated the value of a lesson plan which is based on ideas or concepts: "A concept is an idea that is timeless, abstract, broad and can be shown through a variety of examples. Conflict, change

and perspective are concepts. Examples of the concept change can be found in social studies (historical events), science (erosion), literature (characters) and mathematics (trading)".

Teaching writing has become a real challenge to the language teachers. Several techniques and strategies have been tried and yet student performance in writing seemed to have deteriorated. The schools then are confronted not only with how they should be able to motivate the learners but they must also decide on how and what to use as instructional materials to be able to teach with effectiveness and efficiency.

Many believe that the Americans have even deteriorated in their speaking and writing English because their attitudes have changed radically. In an interview conducted by Siddiqui (2007) Aurelio states that there are three main reasons for the deterioration: "Deterioration in speaking and writing English has taken place because many people have become lazier with their rampant use of the technological advances of e-mailing, instant messaging, and cell phone text messaging. The three main reasons for this change in American speaking and writing habits are laziness, technological advances, and the widespread opinion that using correct English is simply not that important.

Teachers of English language proficiency then must be prompt to address the deterioration of speaking and writing. Schools must be able to adjust their curriculum to the needs of their students. The teachers must assess the needs of their students and prepare lesson plans that would best fit to the weaknesses of their students. They

must inculcate in the minds of their students the necessity to master the skills which was also the call of the National Commission of Writing in America's Schools and Colleges as written by Magrath (2003): American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in their classroom. Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge. Although many models of effective ways to teach writing exist, both the teaching and practice of writing are increasingly short changed throughout the school and college years. Writing, always time-consuming for student and teacher, is today hard-pressed in the American classroom. Of the three "R's" writing is clearly the most neglected.

If the students have not seen the relevance of writing, teachers should come up with relevant curriculum reflective of the sentiment and the culture of the learners so that they find meaning and value to what they are learning. They must adjust their curriculum and come up with instructional materials that would bring back learning of English in the mainstream. Teachers must be able to integrate concepts and ideas not far from the experiences of the learners. Concepts, due to their broad nature, provide opportunities for curriculum integration. Culture could be used to integrate language arts (fairy tales from different countries) with social studies (geography). Also, because concepts are timeless, they are relevant to students' lives. The study of topics, guided by the focus of culture, allows students to develop an understanding and hopefully acceptance of people of different cultures, District 118, (2007).

If concept-based curriculum and instruction are effective strategies in the teaching of persuasive writing, then teachers will be most glad to implement them in the classroom. As to the skills District 118 also states that as the students write with a definite concept they acquire the skill better:

Skills are embedded in the study of a topic.... As students notice cultural elements in fairy tales, they can locate the countries from which the fairy tales originated. Language arts skills can be taught as students write their own fairy tales and compare and contrast versions of fairy tales from different culture. When teachers base their instruction on concepts, they can expect their students to learn more than just facts.

This paper then would attempt to research and review literature and earlier studies on concept-based curriculum and instructional materials in order to find out if such curriculum makes a real impact to both teachers' planning and student academic performance.

The paper shall also attempt to establish or analyze the relationship of the concept-based curriculum with what the teacher in persuasive writing will include in their lesson plan. It shall also go into correlation and analysis of concept-based curriculum and instruction to the academic performance of the learners particularly their performance in writing essays that are meant to convince or to persuade.

The paper shall also attempt to come up with a yardstick that would provide a more concrete description on the impact of concepts to the students' performance in persuasive writing.

Statement of the Problem

This paper is aimed at evaluating the significance of the concept-based curriculum to the manner the teacher plans his/her lessons and to find out the relationship of the concept-based curriculum and instruction to the performance of the learners in writing persuasive essays. Specifically, this paper seeks to answer the following questions: (1) to what extent does Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction affect American teachers' planning? Does Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction impact American Student Performance in persuasive writing?

Significance of the Study

The need for a meaningful and relevant curriculum that would motivate the learners to persuasive writing and to develop their skills to upgrade their academic performance is an urgent task for the teachers and for the schools. This study is relevant then as it shall be able to provide a more concrete understanding on how concept-based curriculum and instruction affects the performance of students in terms of persuasive writing. It also provides the school and the teachers a framework for their curriculum and lesson planning. The study is also significant to the faculty, as it shall provide them a guide on what to stress in their teaching of persuasive writing. It is also significant to the whole academic

community as it shall give them a detailed explanation on how integration of concepts that are related to the culture of the learners affect the performance of students in writing persuasive essays in English. It is most significant to the students as they will be able to understand why teachers need to base their instructions and curriculum on concepts related to their experiences and culture should it really make a significant effect on their performance in their writing activities.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

Proficiency in writing requires one to master a lot of skills in writing different modes and types of writing. This paper however, shall only deal with persuasive writing as affected by the concept-based curriculum and instruction. The study shall also include an evaluation of the effect of the said instruction and curriculum on the teacher planning of day-to-day lesson in persuasive writing. The study shall seek to answer only two problems: (1) the impact of concept-based curriculum and instruction on teachers' planning, (2) the impact of the concept-based curriculum on the performance of students in persuasive writing. It shall review at several related literature and studies and would go into the analysis of the different readings to come up with logical conclusions and recommendations.

Review of Related Studies and Literature

Twyman (2003a) in a study on the effect of concept-based instruction on English learner states that their "previous research on low-performing students and students with disabilities indicated that significant gains in learning can be attained by intentionally aligning curriculum and instruction with assessment using an instructional approach called concept-based instruction. It was the purpose of their study to "describe the positive impact of concept-based instruction on one English language learner in a rural district. The said study found out that concept-based education aligns curriculum with assessment in three phases: (1) that information is organized into critical knowledge forms that reflect the depth and breadth of a content domain; (2) instruction on declarative and procedural knowledge is delivered using procedural knowledge delivered using graphical presentations of

information enriched with scaffolding activities and interactive discussions; (3) critical thinking measures are administered that encourage students to transfer knowledge to new situation and problem-solving events.

Twyman (2003a) is a descriptive study that made use of two groups of participants; an experimental and control group. The control group were students "who were taught using a more traditional fact-based, model-lead-test approach. The group were taught and provided the same identical content material using the same textbook pages, videos, activities, and assessment measures as the experimental group in concept-based instruction. The students in the experimental group in the other hand were taught the concept-based instruction. It made use of the concept "civilization" in four attributes: "(1) religion-words that focus on people's beliefs, (2) social-words that address how people lived together, (3) support-words relating to how people supported themselves, and (4) writing-words about how people communicated with written language. To measure the outcome, Twyman (2003b) made use of the following activities: (1) map activity, and (2) extended-response essay. Although no statistical differences were apparent in the maps created by students in the experimental versus the control group, statistically significant differences were found between the two groups in their writing. The similarity in the scoring of the maps was deemed inconsequential, as it served primarily as a pre-writing activity for the essay. As the data indicate, the experimental group outperformed the control group on the extended-response essay. Twyman (2003b) then concluded that high-quality curriculum and instruction are necessary in the improvement of the performance of the students in map activity and extended-essay response. The study further states that concept-based curriculum is a tool that can easily align current text and instruction to the state standards without the need for adoption of new curricula or extensive professional development.

Chappell and Killpatrick (2003) replicated a study that involved 305 college-level calculus students and 8 instructors. They involved 303-college level calculus students and 8 instructors and investigated on the effects of concept-based against the procedural based curriculum. They used multiple achievement measures to determine the degree of mastery of the concepts and the

procedures. The learning environment resulted in no significant differences in the students' abilities to employ procedural skills, as measured by the skills examinations. The students enrolled in the concept-based learning environment scored significantly higher than the students enrolled in the procedure-based learning environment on assessments that measured conceptual understanding as well as procedural skills. The results of the replication study are consistent with the results of the original study, increasing the generalizability of the results. These results provide post-secondary level evidence that concept-based instructional programs can effectively foster the development of student understanding without sacrificing skill proficiency.

In a study entitled *Assessment Models and Effects and Concept-Based Instruction*, Twyman (2003b) found out that as regards to the curriculum, textbooks were used as primary instructional resources, which are primarily fact based and laden with so much reading. Their assessment also found out that textbooks do not representatively sample instruction, do not employ production responses, and do not provide enough information to make instructional decisions. They also found in their assessment that textbooks are not used with a range of evaluation standards and that they are not technically adequate to maximize student learning. This study indicated that (1) weak basic skills inhibit communication not understanding of content; (2) multiple opportunities to practice manipulating information in problem-solving and other complex tasks increases achievement.

Straubel (2006) in a desire to come up with a comprehensive research on concept mapping printed and reviewed 380 abstracts of dissertations on the use of concept-mapping in different fields for research, curriculum planning, learning and teaching. Of the 380 abstracts, she selected 211 of the most relevant informal meta-analysis and labelled as assessment of concept mapping's efficacy according to the categories such as: (1) "test" and "supports", (2) "test" and "denied", (3) "inconclusive" and "applies." Straubel (2006) points out in the study that the most content-oriented in her English classes are writing classes which the composition writing in particular as it is in composition writing that students are expected to "learn and practice critical reading and communication, as well as problem solving

and collaborative skills." She said mapping helps her to overcome some of students' natural bias, while getting them started in learning to summarize and critique the writing of others successfully according to a specific set of criteria. In working towards her understanding of good, clear persuasive writing, Straubel (2006) asked three basic questions: (1) what is the writer trying to convince the reader? (2) How is the writer trying to inform or convince? (2) How successful is the attempt to inform or persuade the reader? and (3) How successful is the attempt to inform and/or to persuade the reader? According to Straubel (2006) application of the said questions to the source being critiqued "supplies ready-made conceptual scaffolding into which students can place specific critical observations on any argument. Linking these specific claims in a hierarchical structure, then, becomes the basis for a far more cogent and objective summary and critique of the original writer's ideas than one might otherwise hope for. Without such a structure, students tend to fall back on reacting in an emotional and subjective manner based upon the happenstance of their prior positions *visa vis* these new arguments. Straubel (2006) added in her discussion that without such a conceptual structure, students tend to respond to the written argument by following its paragraph-by-paragraph structure, never creating their own order. She also pointed out that students in the attempt to superimpose critique over established order, could not organize their ideas so that they come up with disorganized and incoherent paragraphs and compositions. In their attempt to superimpose critique over the source argument's established order, they create no organization of their own. Such response essays are a disorganized mess, showing, at best, a loose or associative order moving from one disconnected point to another.

Graham and Perin (2007) in their concern with adolescent competence in writing conducted a study to identify effective instruction practices for teaching writing to them. They ran a meta-analysis of the writing intervention literature, which focused on experimental and quasi-experimental studies. In the said study Graham and Perin (2007) located 123 documents that yielded 154 effect sizes of quality writing" The following are their calculation of the average weighted effect size: "strategy instruction (0.82), summarization (0.82), peer assistance (0.75),

setting product goals (0.70), word processing (0.55), sentence combining (0.50), inquiry (0.32), prewriting activities (0.32), process writing approach (0.32), study of models (0.25), grammar instruction.”

Drake and Burns (2004) on curriculum planning indicated that alignment is a fundamental principle of the backward design process and is central to a successful curriculum. They believed that there are two types of alignment in the curriculum (1) external alignment, and (2) internal alignment. In Drake and Burns (2004) work they defined external alignment to occur when the curriculum aligns with mandated standards and testing objectives. The writers point out that the written and taught curricula reflect the concepts and skills required in the standards and that external alignment means that teachers mindful of testing objectives. Internal alignment on the other hand was described by Drake and Burns (2004) to occur when the instructional strategies and classroom assessment reflect the language and intent of the standards.

In their study they stressed that teachers must know how to unpack the standards or decode the performance requirements embedded in order to achieve internal alignment. Both types of alignments were presented to be important for the curriculum in the classroom and that alignment levels are essential ingredient in curriculum design.

Jones (2006) in a study on teaching rigor and relevance came up with an effective framework and maps. He listed different levels of taxonomy from (1) knowledge (2) comprehension (3) application (4) analysis (5) synthesis and (6) evaluation. For writing performance task which he defines as a description of how a student is expected to demonstrate understanding, knowledge and skills, Jones stresses the task may be a product, performance or extended writing that requires rigorous thinking and relevant application usually written in the third person describing learning to other educators. Among the performance tasks included by Jones: (1) student work, (2) specific learning context, (3) setting, (4) conditions, (5) assessment, (6) specific direction to the student, (7) specific equipment list, and homework or reading assignments.

For lesson planning then Jones provided in his study that following points to stress and follow: (1) the choice of context, theme, or focus of learning – the teacher must have to look on certain standards and grade level expectations; (2)

the rigor and relevance for student performance – the teacher must be able to define the student learning perhaps through big ideas web. (3) assessment – the teachers needs to design different levels of assessments, and (4) learning experiences – the teacher needs to develop a plan for each learning; to select strategies most appropriate for his lesson; design launching activities and lesson enhancement.

Birbili (2007) in a study attempted to organize teaching and learning in early childhood education around concepts and generalization rather than inert facts, stressed that teachers can facilitate concept development by putting concepts and generalizations at the centre of activities that provides the children with a wider range of concrete experiences and in way helping them learn to observe and represent better what they see and hear. In the same study Bribili (2007) stressed that with concept-based instruction, the learners are provided with varied examples of the concepts being taught.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows schematic diagram of the study. It has different variables, the dependent and the independent variables: concept-based curriculum, teachers' lesson planning, and performance and persuasive writing.

Its primary concern is to find out the extent of influence of the concept-based curriculum and instruction to the choice of the teachers subject matter in preparing his lesson and to find out the extent of the influence of the said concept-based curriculum and instruction to the performance of student in writing persuasive essays.

Definition of Terms

The research deems it necessary to give the operational definition of the following terms:

Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction.

This refers to the content of the instructional material that is used as a springboard for discussion or for writing the persuasive essays. It can be as varied as to subject matter. It can be history, literature, folktales, news story, video clips, etc. What is important is that the student must be able to connect themselves with the concept used.

Lesson Planning. This refers to the prepared guide of the teacher which should contain the

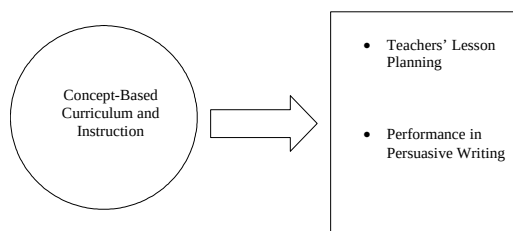


Fig. 1. The schematic diagram of the study

following: (1) objectives of the lesson, (2) content of the Lesson, (3) strategy or the steps to be followed to present the concepts or the lesson; (4) instructional materials to be used; (5) the evaluation or assessment; and (6) assignment and deepening

Persuasive Writing. This refers to the type of writing essays which primary purpose is to convince or to persuade. It is also a type of essay meant to shape or influence an opinion.

METHODOLOGY

The main method used in this study is exploratory and library research.

FINDINGS

The readings, however, point to the reality that given the right concept the learners can develop and could excel in writing persuasive essays. When teachers aim for a more meaningful and relevant learning, this study has found out through that indeed concept-based curriculum affects the performance of the writers. They provide a springboard to what the student has to write. When students are familiar with what they are talking, they can express themselves better and naturally they can be more convincing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that this study must be conducted in different school setting of different levels. It may be conducted to two groups of learners of English Proficiency in writing: (1) native speakers of English, and (2) non-native speakers of English.

It also recommends for a preparation of lesson plan that can be pilot tested in the different schools to be able to evaluate the real extent of the effect of the concept-based curriculum and

instruction in the preparation of lesson plan. And a separate test should be conducted also to find out the effect of such curriculum in the performance of the writers of persuasive essays.

CONCLUSION

As teaching attempts to meet its goals, it is clear that high-quality curriculum and instruction are necessary if students are to improve their performance on these measures. Curriculum Based Instruction is a tool that can easily align current texts and instruction to the state standards without the need for adoption of new curricula or extensive professional development. The Curriculum based instruction necessitates that all schools find affordable and effective means of accommodating all students. For university level students in particular, curriculum based instruction shows great promise as a potential tool to mitigate professional, economic, and legislated challenges.

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