

WRITING ATTITUDES: DETERMINING THE
EFFECT OF A COMMUNITY OF
LEARNERS PROJECT ON THE ATTITUDES
OF COMPOSITION STUDENTS

By

JOSH KRAWCZYK

Bachelor of Arts in English

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, OK

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Thesis Approved:

Dr. Richard Batteiger

Thesis Adviser
Dr. Elizabeth Grubgeld

Dr. Ron Brooks

Dr. A Gordan Emslie
Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The daunting task of finding ways to motivate students to learn and to write, much less perhaps enjoy that process, faces every composition instructor at every level. In particular, college composition instructors may struggle more than most because students have definite notions about writing by the time they reach a college classroom, and often these notions preclude a perceived ability or willingness to write.

This thesis aims to explore what makes some students enjoy writing more than others; specifically, this study will measure writing attitudes as a function of topic and group learning dynamics. Because several studies investigate factors influencing writing attitudes, but none investigate the relationship between cross-curriculum instruction and writing attitudes, this study will provide a small but foundational illustration of additional tools at the disposal of the composition instructor struggling to motivate his students.

Introduction

In the past 25 years, significant research has been conducted exploring the relationship between student attitudes toward writing, their self-perception, and their measurable writing ability. A positive correlation has been shown repeatedly to exist between positive attitudes and improved writing skills, though, based on results of this study, causation of one by the other is disputable. Nevertheless, research has shown that good writers have positive attitudes about writing. Factors affecting writing attitudes

have been explored only in a limited fashion, however, and the study presented here is intended to further the understanding of what factors produce positive attitudes towards writing.

As previous studies have shown, students with less apprehension and more positive attitudes about writing are better writers in general, both in terms of mechanics and idea-generating, when compared to students with more negative attitudes. Many potential variables influence attitudes toward writing and/or apprehension about the act of writing; extensive studies have been conducted on several of these variables: teacher attitude; self-perception; writing centers; grade level; understanding of the writing process; teachers' comments and grading of writing assignments; and critical reading. A review of extant literature on writing attitudes and apprehension yields myriad causal factors and influences on writers. The Literature Review section of this study will examine several of these studies and the foundation they comprise for the body of work presented here. The sum total of those studies yields at least one proven truth: that a student with a positive attitude towards writing will tend to be a better writer than a student with a more negative attitude.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to identify factors influencing student attitudes toward writing, measure them, and provide speculation on reproduction of those factors for future studies and, ultimately, provide a new tool for composition instructors. If positive attitudes and lowered apprehension yield writers with improved skill levels, then finding a way to generate those attitudes is a worthy endeavor. The logical benefit of improving attitudes is the relief of some or all writing apprehension and prevention of

further negative attitudes; related research demonstrates the causal relationship between positive attitudes and improved writing skills, although those studies do not directly examine attitudes; they examine apprehension levels. This study tests the idea that a community of learners, enrolled together in a composition course and introductory course pursuant to their major, will have a better attitude towards writing as result of one variable; in addition, the value of the community of learners, a consistent group with which to learn and work together, may also have a positive influence on attitudes toward writing. But primarily, this study attempts to examine a writing class modified for this community of learners to help them improve their writing through research and assignments relative to their major.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the operational terms are defined below. These terms each have varying definitions within the relevant bodies of research, described later in this thesis; but the author has adopted working definitions which represent a fusion of accepted definitions among scholars and definitions as they presented themselves in the course of this study.

Writing Attitude: Writing attitude, for this study, will be comprised simply by the presence of or lack of preference for certain reading and writing habits, i.e., a personal journal, or the desire to publish writing, etc. The attitudinal findings are gauged by a modified survey, detailed in the Methodology section of this study.

Collaborative Learning: Collaborative learning in this study is the extent to which these subjects worked together in groups for both their composition courses and their major

introductory course. Group peer reviewing of essays took place in the composition course, as did brainstorming and other forms of idea generating.

Community of Learners: This working definition is perhaps the least conventional of any used in this study. For the purposes of this study, the “community of learners” includes only students enrolled in both an introductory composition course and an introductory course to their shared majors. These students were participants in a Community of Learners project piloted by the College of Human Environmental Sciences; a group of 25 students enrolled together in an introductory composition class (ENGL 1213, Composition II) as well as an introductory major class (DHM 2003, Creative Problem Solving in Design and Merchandising), with the hope that the project increased retention of students in the college and yielded an academic benefit as well. They are labeled as a learning community due to their concurrent enrollment in the two courses and the cooperation between instructors of those courses to design assignments that cross curriculum areas for each. (For a description of the composition classroom, see Appendix E).

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis to be tested is as follows: there will be no statistically significant difference in subjects’ responses to items on a writing attitude survey between a group of students in a community of learners writing about their major in a composition classroom and a group of students enrolled individually in writing courses with more traditional writing topics.

The expectation for this hypothesis is that the students in the community of learners who write about their major will actually exhibit a more positive writing attitude overall than the other group. Survey results will be examined on an individual item basis; that is, each item where the group responses vary significantly will be examined and reasons for the difference will be postulated.

Qualifications to Presented Research

Readers should note that the selection of subjects for this study was far from random; the College of Human Environmental Sciences (HES) at Oklahoma State chose to pilot a Community of Learners program, concurrently enrolling a set of freshmen students in their first- and second-semester composition courses and major introductory courses. The writing attitudes research presented here was designed (secondarily) to test the success of that program, as manifested in measured writing attitudes. The Methods section of this study will describe in greater detail the population sample and demographic information

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The shape of research on attitudes toward writing is clear: many factors, such as previous writing experiences, self-perceptions of ability, and even the writer's sex affect attitudes toward writing either positively or negatively, and writing attitudes affect many aspects of a student's classroom experience, with writing performance the primary focus. Investigations into each of these factors comprise the body of extant research, and most studies are focused efforts at exploring a single topic relative to writing attitudes.

But writing attitudes research is only one component of the material relevant to the study presented here: collaborative learning is equally important, and is a subject also represented in the review of research. Extant research on collaborative learning seems wholly positive in support of the practice based on its positive effects on writing anxiety, attitude, and practical ability.

The sum of these two areas of research provides a provoking backdrop for this research project. The number of factors influencing (and influenced by) writing attitudes and collaborative learning present myriad considerations for explanations of results. The scope of this study is only writing attitude measurement and examination of the possible influence of the experimental group's involvement in a Community of Learners; however, the review of relevant literature makes clear the fact that no examination attitude can be limited to only one or even two potential factors of influence. The body

of research reveals a complicated network of internal and external influences that belies the notion that any single factor affects attitude, anxiety, or ability, and demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive understanding of students' experience in a writing classroom.

Review of Literature – Writing Apprehension and Attitude

The contributions of John Daly since 1975 heavily influence the research available on writing attitudes. Daly's work deals almost exclusively with writing *apprehension*; however, for the purpose of this study, writing apprehension functions as a component of a writer's attitude towards the act of writing; in Daly's research, the roles of apprehension and attitude are reversed, as Daly's definition of apprehension incorporates attitude as a discreet part, where this research places apprehension as a component of attitude. Thus Daly's work is an important, but secondary, concern. But despite this secondary status, the importance of Daly's body of work should not be underestimated.

The bulk of Daly's research on writing apprehension ranges in publication dates from 1975 to 1985. Three articles in particular, all published within months of each other in 1975, form the foundation for Daly's scholarship.

Two of the articles were published in the same issue of *Research in the Teaching of English* and provide a springboard for all subsequent articles concerning writing apprehension. The first, "The Empirical Development of an Instrument to Measure Writing Apprehension," yielded a writing apprehension survey now widely used to gauge apprehension levels in students of various levels and ability. In describing writing apprehension, Daly states "Individuals with high apprehension of writing would fear

evaluation of their writing...Thus they avoid writing when possible and when forced to write exhibit high levels of anxiety.” In short, according to Daly, “high apprehensives” avoid writing situations where they feel their writing ability and/or written product may be evaluated to some degree; “low apprehensives,” by contrast, embrace situations where writing is expected as they enjoy the act and the product.

This first article defining writing apprehension was one of the first significant studies published that inventoried student writing apprehension levels in a quantitative and analyzable statistical fashion; according to Daly and Miller, earlier studies had employed observational-interview approaches, or physiological measures such as galvanic skin response and heart rate. But the findings of these studies seldom agreed with each other and were impractical and expensive in administration and analysis (Daly and Miller 1975). Thus Daly and Miller developed a simple survey, easily administered and analyzed, utilizing self-reported data to gauge apprehension levels in subjects. The survey was modeled after a communication apprehension survey developed by McCroskey. The study employed a 63-item survey, now known as the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Survey, administered to 164 undergraduates at West Virginia University in the spring of 1974.

In the conclusions section of the study, the actual results of the survey were secondary to suggested treatment of apprehension, based on the data gathered. Daly and Miller suggest that “The procedure commonly used of forcing students to write is very likely the wrong choice of treatments. [This tactic] simply reinforce[s] the punishing nature of the writing act...” As alternatives, Daly and Miller suggest counseling programs designed to allow apprehensive writers to build a positive writing experience;

systematic desensitization, through therapy, is another suggested treatment found to work with communication apprehensives.

This article is perhaps the most significant among those written by Daly and/or other researchers, as it establishes two benchmarks: a reliable survey to gauge apprehension levels in learners at various stages; and validation of the notion that writing apprehension can be quantified and documented in a statistical study, exceeding findings of extant qualitative studies. Subsequent publications by Daly and other researchers focus and further specify the nature of writing apprehension as a function of many factors.

Daly and Miller followed this seminal article with “Further Studies on Writing Apprehension: SAT Scores, Success Expectations, Willingness to Take Advanced Courses and Sex Differences,” an analysis of the correlation between SAT verbal scores, writing apprehension survey scores, and the ability of those correlates to predict writing success expectations, student willingness to voluntarily take additional writing courses, and placement in remedial writing courses. The study tested seven hypotheses, of which three dealt with SAT verbal scores and the suspected non-correlation with perceived likelihood of success in a writing course as compared to the expected correlation between writing apprehension and perceived success; the other four hypotheses dealt more directly with writing apprehension and success:

H₄: Individuals with high apprehension of writing would report significantly lower expectations of success and willingness to take other courses in writing than individuals with low apprehension;

H₅: Individuals voluntarily enrolled in advanced writing courses will have a significantly lower mean score [indicating lower apprehension levels] on writing apprehension than a general population mean;

H₆: High apprehensive individuals would report significantly less success in previous writing courses than low apprehensives.

H₇: Male writers would have significantly higher scores on the writing apprehension measure than female writers.

To test these hypotheses, subjects completed an abbreviated version of the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Survey and a questionnaire regarding their SAT verbal scores. The results of the study supported hypothesis 4, 5, 6, and 7.

These two articles comprise the framework for nearly all subsequent research on writing apprehension and attitude, including later articles by Daly; Daly's later research examines factors affecting and affected by writing apprehension. Factors affected by writing apprehension include: message intensity ("intensity" is defined as "language indicating degree and distance from neutrality [within a persuasive paradigm]"; low apprehensives consistently encode more intense messages than high apprehensives) (Daly and Miller 1975), and academic and professional decisions (low apprehensive more often tend to select majors and careers where writing is perceived as required, whereas high apprehensives select major and careers with little or no perceived writing requirement in order to avoid it) (Daly and Shamo 1978). Factors influencing apprehension levels include self-esteem, personality, and previous writing experiences (writing apprehension and general self-esteem, as well as writing-specific self-esteem, are inversely related) (Daly and Wilson 1983).

Perhaps most important of all Daly's research, a 1978 study by Daly attempted to determine the relationship between actual written performance and writing apprehension levels. The findings of the study, given previous research, are not surprising: "High apprehensives not only write differently and with lower quality than low apprehensives, but, in addition, fail to demonstrate as strong a working knowledge of writing skills as low apprehensives," (Daly 1978).

The net influence of Daly's body of research is to clearly define writing apprehension as "a person's general tendencies to approach or avoid situations perceived to demand writing accompanied by some amount of evaluation." Beyond defining apprehension, Daly explores factors affecting and affected by high levels of writing apprehension, and provides a foundation of research for other, more specific studies later to come.

Donald McAndrew (1986) produced a review of research on writing apprehension. The products of the reviewed research included a profile of the high-apprehensive; a characterization of written products of high apprehensives; a catalogue of potential causes for high apprehension; and suggestions for remedying high apprehension. In doing so, McAndrew calls upon much of Daly's research, as well as that of other scholars. Most of McAndrew's description of the high apprehensive can be found within Daly's scholarship; one new facet of the definition that McAndrew includes, however, is the notion the high apprehensives often rely too much upon rigid rules of language and misapply them in their writing, an idea originally propagated by Mike Rose (1980).

In characterizing the written product of high apprehensives, McAndrew focuses mostly on the recursive nature of the writing process, and the high apprehensive's lack of knowledge of that nature. High apprehensives often begin writing as soon as an idea comes to them, for fear of losing the idea in any prolonged planning or prewriting stages. The damage caused by this avoidance of planning and prewriting is the resulting simplistic and under-developed ideas, poor audience consideration, and generally lower-quality products.

Causes of high apprehension are widespread, according to McAndrew, who again refers to Rose's notion of over-reliance on rules; and McAndrew emphasizes Daly's notion of "comparison deficiency," apprehension raised when the writer's writing fails to match their intended product. Finally, and most importantly to the study presented here, McAndrew emphasizes the value of peer groups in reducing writing apprehension. Students working together to evaluate each others' work cultivates a safer writing environment while also giving students the skills to evaluate their own writing later. Though most of McAndrew's article is a summary of other research, the structure of the article provides its greatest value – it outlines the direction of research among a handful of scholars, and provides a cross-section of the entire body of work. Two important areas that McAndrew explores are the writing processes of high-apprehensives and their written products; five articles that McAndrew cites are worth describing again in detail.

Two articles deal with the written product of high apprehensives; Edgar Richardson studied the quality of writing of high and low apprehensives as a function of audience distance, intimate or distant. According to Richardson's study, four hypotheses were valid: there was a substantial difference in the quality of writing products of high

and low apprehensives; there were substantial differences in the quality of writing products of high and low apprehensives in an essay aimed at an intimate audience; the same difference in quality held true between high and low apprehensives for a distant audience; finally, the quality of an essay written by either high or low apprehensive will be lower if written toward an intimate audience than if written for a distant audience. The relevance of this research applies to the Community of Learners population – the audience they wrote for conceivably was more intimate because their paper topics included industry topics related to their major, and thus their audience would be comprised of peers or superiors in their field. This factor may have influenced their attitude towards writing.

The second article dealing with written product quality was written by Lester Faigley, John Daly, and Stephen Witte. The research supported the hypotheses that high apprehensives produced lower-quality writing than did low apprehensives, but with an important caveat: the low apprehensives performed better on a standardized writing test measuring writing competency, and in written narrative descriptive essays, but no significant difference in quality was observed in argumentative essays. According to the study, high apprehensives appeared to perceive a greater chance for failure in composing objective and verifiable descriptions of a place or event, but were more confident in expressing an argument in which they believed. These findings also apply to the Community of Learners – their writing topics were mostly narrative/descriptive, but about topics in which they perhaps felt more confident in their knowledge, as it pertained specifically to their major rather than a more unfamiliar, external area. This factor may

have influenced the survey results, as it may have improved their attitude towards writing.

Three additional articles dealt with low and high apprehensive's notion of the writing process; Linda Bannister demonstrates with her research that homogenous peer groups of low and high apprehensives spend significantly different amounts of time on pre-writing. Low apprehensives spend much more time planning and generating ideas, or "anti-writing," as Bannister refers to it, indicating the "stepped-up tension and increased awareness that accompany creativity." High apprehensives, on the other hand, feared elongated periods of planning because they feared forgetting their ideas, and thus being evaluated lower. The high apprehensives were thus less embracing to new ideas after the first was generated in their group, resulting in as little group revision as possible; presumably, according to Bannister, this is because any side- or back-tracking may also result in the loss of an idea.

Lynn Bloom pursues these ideas on the planning stages of the writing process; Bloom's research with a group of anxious and non-anxious writers indicates that the anxious (high apprehensive) writers most often only needed help with organization of their writing task into discreet steps, including planning, which resulted in both better writing and decreased anxiety. Importantly, however, this study did not examine a group dynamic; rather, it involved naturalistic observations of teacher interactions with individual students.

Mike Rose makes an in-depth examination of writing apprehension as a function of writer's block, and attributes writer's block to an overabundant dependence on grammatical and other language rules. According to Rose, students with writer's block

often adhere to these “algorithms” to try to solve the problem before them, for example, composing the “catchy” opening sentence. By relying too much on rules they have been taught, high apprehensives may neglect the freedom of ideas and composition that makes for good writing.

Both Rose’s and Bloom’s articles provide further possibilities for a perceived negative attitude toward writing, as a function of heightened apprehension. Though this study does not include an examination of apprehensions levels as they affect attitude, further research should, and therein lay the value of these articles.

Multiple articles investigate other potential variables that affect students’ attitudes toward writing. One such article, published by Stuart Brown in 1985, examined the value of critical reading skills as they affect writing attitude. Using Daly and Miller’s apprehension survey as well as the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Form D), Brown found that students gained confidence in their writing ability when enrolled in a course that emphasized critical reading as much as composing strategies; Brown also found that the students writing improved when they better comprehended the connection between reading and writing, and that simply requiring students to read carefully and critically, without examining the relationship between reading and writing, could be detrimental. In short, emphasizing and improving students’ critical reading skills may improve attitudes toward writing as well as actual writing quality.

Another possible positive influence on students’ writing attitudes and abilities is the Writing Center; Kevin Davis (1987) studied the effect of writing centers and peer tutoring on writing attitude as measured by an attitude survey. The study demonstrated over the course of a semester that students who visited the writing center showed the

greatest gains in positive writing attitude, compared to students who did not make use of the writing center.

Much earlier, in 1976, Rose Mary Dreussi explore the effects of expressive writing on attitude and ability; significantly, expressive writing assignments apparently greatly improved writing attitudes overall, a finding that predicted Faigley's research on the nature of writing assignments presented earlier. Dreussi's research on the nature of writing assignments is significant to the study presented here because the Community of Learners wrote about topics relative to their major, while the control group wrote about topics selected from a reader in most cases.

An influence on writing attitude not to be ignored is that of the instructor; a 1983 study by Pamela Gay demonstrates that students tend to write to please their instructor and earn a grade, rather than for their own education or pleasure. Further, misconceptions about the nature of writing, such as the necessity of recursive revision rather than over-commitment to the initial draft, may contribute to their negative attitudes toward writing.

These studies by Brown, Davis, and Gay are very relevant to the research presented in this study as they address potential variables that may affect writing attitudes. These variables: writing centers, expressive writing, and instructors, must be considered in tandem with the conclusions drawn from the research presented here; although the variables will not be measured or accounted for statistically, they will definitely shape the conclusions and ideas for further research, combining potential influencing factors such as these.

The research conducted by Brown, Davis, and Gay examine external factors, discrete from the inner workings of the students emotions and mind. Factors internal to the students themselves, most notably perception of their own writing ability, may in fact influence their attitude and ability also, and at least correlate with writing performance most of the time, according to Stanley Bank.

In 1982, Bank measured the self-estimates of writing ability of 134 high school students; data analysis indicated a clear correlation between grade level, self perception, and writing performance. As the grade level rose, self-estimates of ability dropped, as did writing quality. These findings beg several questions deserving of further research: did instructors and pedagogies cause a decrease in response quality? As the writing assignments increased in difficulty from grade to grade, did they reach a level of difficulty too great for the students? Though Bank's findings reveal a relationship between self-perception, writing ability, and grade level, the nature of that relationship and causal factors need to be explored.

But self-perception and attitude of student writers is not always so negative. In a 1991 study Michael Marx measured perceptions among a developmental writing group, a middle ability group, and an advanced writing group, and the results were mixed and unexpected. The developmental writers shared the same writing attitudes of the advanced writers, while the middle group expressed attitudes more negative, previously expected of the developmental writers according to the study's hypotheses.

Yet another factor related directly to the student and no outside influence is sex; a 1994 study by JoAnn Holz revealed that overall, female writers have less anxiety about writing than males. But Holz qualifies these results – she indicates that writing anxiety is

more than a “sex” issue. More likely, male writers have had few or no positive writing models influence them, while females tend to have had more models to follow. Holz also examined writing attitude differences between sexes; males and females tended to like writing for the same reason: most cited personal expression through the writing process as the main attractor. But reasons for disliking writing were different. Males focused on themselves: “It’s hard for *me* to follow the rules,” while females focused on others, mostly instructors: “Teachers are so picky.” The differences according to sex that this study detected are less important than Holz’s examination of previous role models as influencing attitude. Prior experiences with writing, both positive and negative, prove to be very influential on writing attitudes.

These two articles serve to complicate the nature of student attitudes even further, and actually broaden the horizon of potential influencing factors; now internal influences must also be considered, such as innate confidence in ability entering the writing classroom, and factors that affect this confidence level, which in turn governs, at least in part, writing attitude.

Review of Literature – Collaborative Learning

Participants in this study were also members of a Community of Learners as assembled by their college; thus, research on collaborative learning is relevant, as the group dynamic these students maintain may affect their attitude toward school in general and toward writing specifically.

Relative to the writing classroom, the early expert on collaborative learning and group dynamics is Kenneth Bruffee, and in “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind,’” Bruffee makes a convincing case in favor of collaborative

learning and the improvement in learning it provides. In the essay, Bruffee first traces the history of collaborative learning: relative to writing, the concept was first examined in large scale at the 1982 Conference on College Composition and Communication; relative to literature classrooms, “interpretive communities” were examined at the 1978 Modern Language Association convention. “Interpretive communities,” according to Bruffee, were early equivalents to group collaboration on textual understanding and analysis. And outside any specific academic area, British school systems employed collaborative learning in the 1960’s as a political answer to “socially destructive authoritarian social forms” that shaped classrooms at the time.

Within the realm of composition classrooms, collaborative learning, according to Bruffee, was employed when students made no use of available forms of assistance: graduate students and other professional tutors. By Bruffee’s reckoning, these forms of assistance too nearly duplicated the writing classroom, and thus replicated the very obstacles the students needed help with. Peer tutors were accordingly used, and some success experienced. Educators found that what the students learned in these peer groups was not changed; rather, how they learned the material, and the social context in which they learned it, changed – students learned better from an interaction with their peers than from perceived authorities on writing. The students and peer tutors were able to converse on a level comfortable for the student, and as Bruffee demonstrates, that quality conversation is critical to quality writing.

Bruffee cites Vygotsky to establish that a writer’s internal thoughts are reflections of public or social conversation which the writer has internalized. Taking this logic a step further, Bruffee demonstrates that writing, then, is an externalized form of individual

thought, which is internalized reflection; thus the relationship between writing and conversation is complicated by the psychological distance between the two. Herein lies the value of collaborative learning, according to Bruffee. Collaborative groups converse in solving problems, or, in this case, composing a thought or paper. Working in groups more naturally accommodates the thought processes of the group members, and facilitates learning and higher quality idea-generating and writing. As students learn to converse better and more effectively in their collaborative groups, they learn to think equally as effectively, and thus write equally effectively.

This notion of collaborative learning complicates the role of the teacher; at once it challenges the teacher's authority, as Bruffee posits that these groups generate their own knowledge base, heretofore the source of the teacher's authority; the notion also requires teachers to shape the collaborative groups so that they converse in a manner close to what the teacher wants to see in the individuals' writing. Accordingly, the teacher must not "[throw] students together with their peers with little or no guidance or preparation. To do that is merely to perpetuate, perhaps even aggravate, the...negative efforts of peer group influence: conformity, anti-intellectualism, intimidation..." Careful and guided planning by the teacher is necessary to make effective use of collaborative learning.

In a 1993 book devoted exclusively to the value of collaborative learning, Bruffee further specifies that collaborative learning is a process of reacculturization. According to Bruffee, to move from one knowledge community into another (in this case, for college freshmen to move into the world of academia), individuals must "organize or join a temporary transition or support group on the way to our goal, as we undergo the trials of changing allegiance from one community to another." That students' attitudes are

affected by their efforts at gaining access to a new knowledge community is very important in understanding the college freshman's experience in a writing classroom. And though this issue presents an entirely new area for further speculation and research, it is definitely relevant to the measurement of attitudes and theorized explanations for the results.

Bruffee's article and book are central to writing classrooms and any related research. They represent the foundation for collaborative learning research within the English classroom, and are pivotal to this study for that reason. Like Daly and writing apprehension, Bruffee and collaborative learning comprise the starting point for most relevant research, and directly or indirectly informs the entire body of scholarship.

Several articles prove the value of collaborative learning statistically; a 1991 article by Robert Hart ("An Investigation of the Effects of Collaborative Learning on the Writing Skills of Composition II Students at Gloucester County College"), gauged the change in writing skills of college freshmen over a semester; one population worked in collaborative groups, while the control population worked in the traditional individualized classroom. Hart's results indicated, by pre-and post-test examinations, that the collaborative instruction method yielded higher mean scores than the traditionally instructed group.

A more specific 1991 article by Charles Cullum, "Collaborative Learning, Phase Two: Experimental Research," indicates that collaborative learning impacts "to be" verbs, passive voice, and sentence length by improving student understanding and use of these facets of writing. Perhaps more importantly, Cullum posits that developmental

writing students are in fact not inferior in any intrinsic way, and that the improvement these students made due to collaborative learning techniques prove this.

The Hart and Cullum articles provide valuable insight into the impact of collaborative learning, which earns their spot in this review. Hart's article proves the positive value of collaborative learning, and Cullum begins the analysis of its impact in very specific way; these articles demonstrate yet another avenue for consideration of items that affect the attitudes of writing students.

Martha Saunders investigates the social aspect of collaborative learning and the inherent inhibition some students possess in collaborative groups: out of fear of hurting their peers' feelings, students will often soften their responses to an idea or piece of writing and neglect important critical flaws or omissions. Accordingly, Saunders encourages taking collaborative learning a step further, to collaborative production of a piece of writing, the process of composing which demonstrates to each individual the commonality they share in their struggles and respective writing processes. By sharing the process, students are less inhibited in responding to each other, according to Saunders. Thus, the Community of Learners examined in the research presented in this thesis fall within this realm of consideration; because of their shared major area and their shared writing tasks, they likely experienced a less-inhibited group dynamic, perhaps affecting their writing attitude.

A 1979 article by Richard Gebhardt cites the need to employ collaborative learning techniques earlier in the writing process, so that the function is greater than just revising and editing. According to Gebhardt, students should find a topic together, generate details on that topic together, and locate the intended audience for a paper

together. Performing these tasks as a group helps reduce a student's sense of isolation in the learning and composing process, gives them moral support, and provides wider or different points of view. This is another early example of the proven positive effects of collaborative learning on the student's experience, and, logically, their writing attitude.

A 1988 article by Joan Rothstein-Vandergriff and Joan Gilson supports Gebhardt's conclusions; collaborative groups should be used for more than just peer-editing, and the two authors provide a four-step sequence for collaborative instruction:

- 1) A class-wide, teacher led discussion on a reading of interest to the students;
- 2) Small group discussion of the reading;
- 3) A collaborative writing assignment, which students complete in small groups;
- 4) Individual writing assignments.

Though this process is heavily prescriptive, it nevertheless demonstrates a collaborative sequence similar to what the Community of Learners experienced in their writing classroom. In that classroom, students discussed their writing in small groups as a draft review process, and most researched their writing topics together. Although the focus of this study does not include a specific pedagogical analysis of each classroom setting of the experimental and control groups, the Community of Learners' experience with a collaborative learning is important insofar as it affects their attitude.

A 1986 article by Gabbert et al. examines the effects of collaborative learning in more general terms; the study examined students' performances on tasks ranging from Level 2 to Level 6 on Bloom's taxonomy of instructional objectives. Students in groups

performed higher on all tasks than individuals. Although this study does not deal specifically with writing, it supports the positive value of collaborative learning as an educational tool in general.

Another study that examines the effects of collaborative learning on performance was conducted by Evelyn Wynn in 1999. Peer authoring and editing, according to Wynn, had a positive effect on writing anxiety and quality, and supported Daly's tenet that high anxiety leads to lower writing quality, and that lower anxiety leads to higher writing quality. Interestingly, Wynn found that collaborative learning had a negligible effect on writing attitude in spite of its effect on actual performance.

These studies by Bloom and Wynn focus more on the practical effects of collaborative learning on ability, rather than attitude or apprehension. This fact makes their research perhaps marginal to the study presented here; but positive effects on ability should logically lead to improvement in attitude, representing an area for further research.

Summary

In examining the results of this study and speculating on influencing factors, the body of existing research will heavily influence the process. Although this study purports to examine the effects collaborative learning on attitudes toward writing, several other factors will have to be considered; ultimately, this study will likely provide an incomplete picture of the causal factors for the measured differences in attitude between the two groups, as the review of literature reveals countless influencing factors not accounted for or measured in the research design.

Conversely, however, the limitations of this study design mirror the limitations of most other existing studies, in that it selects only a single variable for examination and exploration. Only a few works attempt to examine writing attitudes and collaborative learning holistically, and these few works are now decades old. At this point in the research, the parts must be reassembled (some revealed for the first time), before any cumulative conclusions can once again be drawn.

This study, then, comprises one more small but integral facet in understanding writing attitudes, and will hopefully lead to another building block in the scholarship.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

A 55-item survey was administered to 71 undergraduate students enrolled in Design, Housing, and Merchandising (DHM) 2003, “Creative Problem Solving in Design,” an introductory course in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. Of these 71 subjects, 18 were concurrently enrolled in one section of ENGL 1213, Composition II. These 18 subjects were the experimental group, and the 53 remaining subjects were the control group.

Sampling / Demographics

As noted earlier, sampling for this survey was not random. The 18-subject experimental group was part of a pilot program for their respective college; all were Design, Housing, and Merchandise (DHM) department majors. Eight were apparel merchandising majors; five listed DHM as their major; three were fashion merchandising majors; one listed fashion marketing, and one listed only merchandising. All were female students, of whom three were 18 years of age, and 15 were 19 years of age. All were classified as freshmen.

Of the 53-subject control group, three listed their major as apparel design; four listed majors as apparel design/merchandising; two listed majors as apparel merchandising/marketing; 18 listed majors as apparel merchandising; four listed DHM as a major; one listed fashion merchandising; ten listed interior design as a major; five listed

interior merchandising as a major; five listed merchandising only; and one subject listed no major. Of the control group subjects, 49 were female, three were male, and one subject chose not to indicate sex. Two subjects were 18 years of age, twelve were 19 years of age, 27 were 20 years of age, six were 21 years of age; one was 22 years of age; one was 23 years of age; one was 32 years of age; one was 33 years of age; and two chose not to indicate their age.

Survey Instrument

The instrument used in this survey was an adaptation of Richardson's earlier research (see Appendix C for original instrument). The adapted survey included 55 questions, 40 positive statements and 15 negative statements, with subjects selecting a "strongly agree/agree/undecided/disagree/strongly disagree" response on a Likert scale. The original survey was selected because it yielded a Cronbach alpha score of .6931 and a standardized alpha of .7353, demonstrating sufficient internal consistency (Richardson 1992).

In addition to the survey questions, participants were asked to submit demographic information: sex, age, major, and classification. Subjects were also asked to indicate whether or not they were original residents in the state of Oklahoma.

Data Collection

The survey was administered in class to 71 participants during the second week of the spring semester in 2005. The researcher read from a script (see Appendix D) describing the voluntary nature of participation and the general purpose of the survey in measuring attitudes. Subjects were NOT made aware the experimental and control groups until after completion of the survey, so as not to affect responses.

Once all surveys were completed and returned to the researcher, all data was entered into a database. Each survey was given a numeric identifier (names were removed for protection of participants), and the numeric responses to each question by each respondent were entered. Separate tables were created for the control and experimental groups.

Once all response had been entered and checked for errors, response percentages were computed.

Data Analysis

A one-tailed analysis of variance compared the results of the experimental group with the results of the control group. A significance level of .05 was used for this analysis, determining any significant difference in responses.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Of the 55 items on the survey, the groups answered 10 questions at levels of significance of .05 or lower (see Appendix B for table of 10 questions). Data is presented in the tables below. Any percentages not adding up to 100% are due to non- (blank) responses and rounding of percentages to the nearest hundredth decimal point. The experimental group (n=18) is listed on the top row in white; the control group (n=53) is listed on the bottom row in grey:

F Prob = .05	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2. Writers are born, not made (taught).	0%	6%	11%	67%	17%
	2%	17%	19%	43%	19%

Table 1.1

Responses to Statement 2 indicate that the experimental group had an overall more positive attitude, believing that writing is not necessarily an innate trait that cannot be taught, but that anyone can become a writer.

F Prob = .001	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. All writers utilize a specific program which works best for them.	33%	44%	11%	6%	6%
	21%	66%	11%	2%	0%

Table 1.2

Responses to Statement 3 indicate a very similar attitude in both groups; 77% of each group chose “Strongly Agree” or “Agree,” demonstrating a shared attitude by most.

However, the 6% of the experimental group that chose “Strongly Disagree” while none of the control group chose this response, indicating a subtle difference in attitude.

F Prob = .02	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4. No professional writer could teach another person how to write.	0%	11%	11%	44%	28%
	4%	2%	13%	55%	26%

Table 1.3

Responses to Statement 4 demonstrate the overall more positive attitude of the control group; though both groups largely disagreed with the statement (72% of the experimental group and 81% of the control group chose “Disagree or “Strongly Disagree”), 11% of the experimental group chose “Agree” while only 6% of the control group chose “Strongly Agree” or “Agree.”

F Prob = .04	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. Writing helps the writer to think through certain aspects of problems.	17%	78%	6%	0%	0%
	30%	60%	6%	4%	0%

Table 1.4

Responses to Statement 9 demonstrate a more positive attitude by the experimental group; 95% chose “Strongly Agree” or “Agree,” while only 90% of the control group made similar selection. And 4% of the control group selected “Disagree,” while none of the experimental group chose that response.

F Prob = .05	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. Teachers need only make assignments and [students] will write.	0%	11%	44%	44%	0%
	2%	13%	38%	38%	8%

Table 1.5

Responses to Statement 15 fell in two simple distributions. Neither group demonstrated a clearly positive or negative attitude, although the control group had only a 2% “Strongly Agree” response compared to an 8% “Strongly Disagree” response in the same group.

These two outlier response categories make up the significant difference in the two groups’ responses: the control group had a broader curve while the experimental group was largely undecided or disagreed.

F Prob = .04	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
32. I read articles about writing.	0%	0%	17%	61%	22%
	0%	15%	4%	58%	23%

Table 1.6

Responses to Statement 32 demonstrated a more negative attitude in the control group, 15% of whom indicated that they read articles about writing. None of the experimental group felt the need to find written guidance for their writing beyond their classroom experiences.

F Prob = .01	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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44. No two writers write alike.	22%	44%	17%	6%	6%
	28%	57%	9%	6%	0%

Table 1.7

Responses to Statement 44 demonstrate a similar attitude with one exception: 6% of the experimental group chose “Strongly Disagree,” while none of the control group chose this response. Here, the experimental group demonstrates a more positive attitude in thinking that all writers share some innate qualities in their writing, meaning all individuals possess some writing ability, which can be fostered and improved with proper instruction.

F Prob = .05	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
45. The audience for which I am writing is a strong factor in how and what I write.	11%	50%	22%	11%	6%
	21%	58%	15%	6%	0%

Table 1.8

Responses to Statement 45 indicates a more positive attitude of the experimental group; 18% more of the control group indicate audience as a strong influencing factor in their writing, while 11% of the experimental group disagree, indicating a more internal motivation for their writing.

F Prob = .04	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
46. Not every student should be required to write.	0%	6%	17%	67%	11%
	2%	13%	30%	32%	23%

Table 1.9

Responses to Statement 46 indicate a more positive attitude in the experimental group, 78% of whom believe that every student should be required to write. Only 55% of the control group chose similar responses, while 9% more of the control group indicated their belief that not every student should be made to write.

F Prob = .001	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
54. I like to publish what I write.	0%	0%	0%	78%	22%
	0%	4%	19%	36%	42%

Table 1.10

Responses to Statement 54 gave demonstrate a more positive attitude of the control group, 23% of whom indicated a desire to publish their writing. 78% of the control group disagreed with this statement, but 99% of the experimental group also disagreed, an 11% difference in response.

A table with composite responses follows on the next two pages.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	F Prob
2. Writers are born, not made (taught).	0%	6%	11%	67%	17%	0.05
	2%	17%	19%	43%	19%	
3. All writers utilize a specific program which works best for them.	33%	44%	11%	6%	6%	0.001
	21%	66%	11%	2%	0%	
4. No professional writer could teach another person how to write.	0%	11%	11%	44%	28%	0.02
	4%	2%	13%	55%	26%	
9. Writing helps the writer to think through certain aspects of problems.	17%	78%	6%	0%	0%	0.04
	30%	60%	6%	4%	0%	
15. Teacher need only make assignments and [students] will write.	0%	11%	44%	44%	0%	0.05
	2%	13%	38%	38%	8%	
32. I read articles about writing.	0%	0%	17%	61%	22%	0.04
	0%	15%	4%	58%	23%	
44. No two writers write alike.	22%	44%	17%	6%	6%	0.01
	28%	57%	9%	6%	0%	
45. The audience for which I am writing is a strong factor in how and what I write.	11%	50%	22%	11%	6%	0.05
	21%	58%	15%	6%	0%	
46. Not every student should be required to write.	0%	6%	17%	67%	11%	0.04
	2%	13%	30%	32%	23%	

54. I like to publish what I write.	0%	0%	0%	78%	22%	0.001
	0%	4%	19%	36%	42%	

Table 1.11

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Overview

The null hypothesis was rejected; ten items on the survey demonstrated a significant difference in writing attitudes between the two groups. Of the ten statements, only two yielded responses indicating a more positive attitude in the control group than in the experimental group (Statements 4 and 54). One statement yielded ambiguous results (Statement 15), seemingly indicating poor statement design as it allowed for response considerations beyond those influencing writing attitude. The remainder of the statements all indicated a more positive attitude in the experimental group.

Discussion

Each item that yielded a significant difference in responses from the two groups presents its own problems and complications to the study presented here. Accordingly, they will first be addressed individually, then as an amalgamated whole in the “Conclusions” section.

On Statement 2, “Writers are born, not made (taught),” 22% fewer of the control group chose “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” than did the experimental group; this seems to indicate a belief that a good writer is born with the skill to write, and without this skill, one cannot truly become a writer. This may be a reflection of poor self-perception relative to writing ability or past unsuccessful attempts at writing (Marx, 1991; Daly & Wilson, 1983). But whatever the reason for the low confidence level, the

experimental group clearly has a more positive attitude, as they believe anyone, with sufficient instruction, can become a quality writer. This optimism, conversely, may result from positive past writing attempts and high self-perception relative to writing. Accordingly, this response rate indicates a more positive attitude among the experimental group.

On Statement 3, “All writers utilize a specific program which works best for them,” 10% more of the control group agrees to some extent, while 6% more of the experimental group strongly disagree. This also indicates a more positive attitude on the part of the experimental group. Most likely, the control group, who believe that most writers adhere to a specific program in order to experience writing success, rely too heavily on prescriptive rules and guidelines for writing (Rose, 1980), whereas the experimental group may experience for freedom and reasons for writing beyond to earn a grade from their instructor, such as personal pleasure or reflection (Gay, 1983).

Statement 4 presents an opposite to Statement 2: “No professional writer could teach another person to write.” 9% more of the control group disagreed with this statement to some extent, contradicting their belief from Statement 2 that writers are gifted from birth with an innate ability, which others lack. Also, 11% of the experimental group agreed, while only 6% of the control group agreed or strongly agreed. So the response rate to this statement was inconsistent with the similar Statement 2, indicating a more positive writing attitude in the control group.

On Statement 9, “Writing helps the writer to think through certain aspects of problems,” 5% more of the experimental group agreed or strongly agreed, while 4% more of the control group disagreed. Writers with poor attitudes towards writing fear the

recursive nature of writing because revision may cost an idea forgotten during the revising process (McAndrew, 1986). This explains the control group's hesitance to rely on writing as means to solving a problem. The control group respondents, with a negative attitude toward writing, fear any part of the process which may cause them to forget an idea; the experimental group, with the more positive attitude on this statement, is comfortable relying on a written exploration of a problem because they embrace the recursive nature of the writing process, demonstrating their overall more positive attitude.

Responses to Statement 15, "Teachers need only make assignments and students will write," indicated no clear difference in attitudes; 4% more of the control group agreed or strongly agreed than did the experimental group. 6% more of the experimental group answered "Undecided" or "Disagree" than did the control group, and herein may lay the significance. 44% of the experimental group was undecided; this large undecided percentage may indicate that the students had differing opinions of the intent of the question. If the question was one of obedience, work ethic, or effort to please the teacher, then writing attitude per se had little to do with the respondents' choice for this question. A student choosing not to write does not necessarily make any indication of ability or attitude, and respondents in the experimental group may have perceived this ambiguity, thus yielding the resulting bell curve in both groups' responses.

Statement 32, "I read articles about writing," indicated a higher confidence in the experimental group, and thus better attitude. None of the experimental respondents agreed with the statements, seeming to indicate their lack of need for external guidance beyond their writing classroom. 15% of the control group, on the other hand, agreed,

demonstrating their need for overlaying rules and writing strategies to govern their writing (Rose, 1980).

Eighty-five percent of the control group respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Statement 44, “No two writers are alike.” In comparison, only 66% of the experimental group strongly agreed or agreed; extant literature does not seem to address feelings of sameness towards others with regard to writing ability or attitude, so analysis of this response pattern is speculative at best. The control group respondents may have interpreted this question as implying, once again, an innate writing ability present in only a select percentage of the population; they may equate innate ability with uniqueness. The experimental group, meanwhile, believes the opposite; two writers may in fact be similar if taught by the same person or same role model (Holz, 1994). If this logic is accurate, then responses to this question also indicate a more positive attitude on the part of the experimental group.

No ambiguity exists on Statement 45, “The audience for which I am writing is a strong factor in how and what I write.” 18% more of the control group strongly agreed or agreed than did the experimental group respondents; in most cases, writing instructors comprise the audience for student writing, so the control group’s heavy reliance on audience consideration merely confirms Gay’s theory that writers with a more negative writing attitude often write simply to please their instructor and earn a grade, rather than for personal or private pleasure (1983). Thus, the experimental group exhibits a more positive attitude on this statement response than the control group.

Similarly, Statements 46, “Not every student should be made to write,” gives a clear indication that the experimental group has a more positive attitude. Believing that

anyone can produce quality writing with sufficient effective instruction (and indicating their positive attitude), 78% of the experimental group disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, while only 6% of the same group agreed. Conversely, only 55% of the control group disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 15% agreed or strongly agreed. This proves Daly and Shamo's notion that a high-apprehensive writer will avoid, when possible, situations requiring writing, whether those situations are personal, academic, or professional; this avoidance demonstrates the control group's negative attitude (1978).

Finally, Statement 54, "I like to publish what I write," actually demonstrates a more positive attitude on the part of the control group, 4% of whom actually agreed and 19% of whom were undecided. 100% of the experimental group disagreed or disagreed strongly.

Conclusions – Survey Results

Eight of the ten statements with significant differences in response rates indicate that the experimental group, overall, employs a more positive attitude towards writing. Divining causation for this attitude may be impossible, as separating the influence of their writing topics in class (major related) from the value of the group dynamic they experienced in their writing class is also impossible. With this caveat acknowledged, it seems safe to say that the Community of Learners project piloted by the Human Environmental Sciences College is a successful one; as a result of involvement in the program, the students here surveyed demonstrated a more positive attitude towards writing. However, whether or not these positive attitudes translated into higher quality writing remains to be seen, a topic for further study.

The aberrations to findings, two statements on which the control group was more positive than the experimental group, probably have more to do with the very small survey population; on Statement 54, for example, a single aspiring writer with ambitions for publication may have skewed those results. On Statement 4, the majority of the group still disagreed with the statement, fitting the prescribed model of negative attitude assigned to the control group, but the statistical analysis of so small a population indicated that the difference in responses was still significant. Rather than applying the results of this one statement to the group as a whole, readers must keep in mind that a small percentage difference, as was the case on Statement 54, may be comprised of a single respondent.

The predictive value of this study is arguable, based on design flaws presented in the next section. However, the results cannot be ignored totally, either. Students involved in the Community of Learners, writing specifically about their major, often in groups, exhibited a more positive writing attitude overall than did their counterparts in the control group.

Conclusions – Flaws in the Study

Flaws in this study were mostly due to the small survey population. As the Community of Learners presented a ready-made experimental group, it was accepted despite having only 18 members. The number of respondents should have been much larger in order to provide any predictive value; as it stands, this study should be duplicated many times over in other schools before the results can be fully confirmed.

Statements on the survey may have been ambiguous to respondents; in particular, Statement 15 yielded no usable results beyond variations in a bell curve in both groups.

This statement could have been more specific to ensure consideration only of factors influencing, or influenced by, the respondents' writing attitudes.

Finally, this study failed to consider if and when the control group members had actually taken ENGL 1113, the composition course in which the experimental group was enrolled. Having never taken the course, or if they took it years ago, the respondents in the control group may have exhibited a more negative writing attitude that could be attributed to time and distance from the writing classroom. Simply being enrolled in a writing class may affect a student's attitude, and that variable was not accounted for in this study.

This study should likely be redesigned before any duplication to verify its validity. This topic, as is often the case when attempting to evaluate classroom practices, student behaviors, or pedagogical effectiveness, should be examined qualitatively rather than quantitatively. Statistical analysis of survey results may be an effective component of such a study, but instructor/student interviews and classroom observation would create a much clearer picture of why an experimental group may behave differently from a control group.

Such a study would also benefit from longevity; taking an average of behaviors over three to five years would determine both an accurate baseline behavior for the control group, and allow for a larger population in both groups to provide more reliable results. This would also allow for different instructors in each course, further increasing the validity of findings over time.

Additionally, demographic information on each participant may be a necessary factor to consider, as socioeconomic background may have a significant impact on both ability and attitude.

Further Research

Additional research should definitely be performed, separating and accounting for the variables in this study: collaborative learning as it affects writing attitude, and writing topics as they affect writing attitude (specifically writing about a self-selected major), should be examined individually before being considered in tandem.. Future research should also include much greater numbers of survey respondents at multiple sites, to allow for variances in teaching styles and composition programs. And these pedagogies in themselves may be studied at greater length also.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Determining the Effect of a Community of Learners Project on the Attitude of
Composition Students
Josh Krawczyk, Principal Investigator

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted at Oklahoma State University. The purpose of this study is to determine various factors which may or may not affect student attitudes towards writing.

As a participant, you agree to take a single survey. Your responses will be used only anonymously. You would not need to complete any additional work. Once the survey is completed, your participation in this study would be complete.

Copies of your survey would be kept, without any identifying markers, in a locked file drawer in a locked office for not more than 10 years. Any information used from your survey could not be traced directly to you.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no penalties for refusing to participate in this study. You may, by informing the principal investigator in writing, withdraw or modify your consent at any point.

If you have questions, you may contact Josh Krawczyk at (405)744-3940 or 150 Athletic Center, Stillwater, OK, 74078. For information on subjects' rights, contact Dr. Sue Jacobs, IRB Chair, Oklahoma State University, 415 Whitehurst, Stillwater, OK 74078 (405-744-5700).

I, _____, hereby authorize or direct Josh Krawczyk, to use my anonymous survey in a study of writing attitudes. I understand surveys will kept only anonymously and that my responses will be published only as part of a collective whole.

I understand that participation is voluntary and that I will not be penalized if I choose not to participate. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent partially or wholly and end my participation in this project at any time without penalty after I notify the

project director (Josh Krawczyk).I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _____
(a.m./p.m.)

Time:

Name (printed)

Signature

Appendix B

One-tailed Analysis of Variance Comparing Control and Experimental Group Responses
(Significant at .05 level or below)

Table 1	
Question	F Probability
2. Writers are born, not made (taught).	.05
3. All writers utilize a specific program which works best for them.	.001
4. No professional writer could teach another person how to write.	.02
9. Writing helps the writer to think through certain aspects of problems.	.04
15. Teachers need only make assignments and students will write.	.05
32. I read articles about writing.	.04
44. No two writers are alike.	.01
45. The audience for which I am writing is a strong factor in how and what I write.	.05
46. Not every student should be required to write.	.04
54. I like to publish what I write.	.001

Appendix C

Survey Instrument

Participant Demographic Information

Name: _____

(Last)

(First)

(Middle)

Last 4 digits of your Social Security #: _____ Age: _____ Sex: M / F

Classification (Fr/So/Jr/Sr): _____ Major: _____

Resident of Oklahoma: Yes / No

Please use the following scale to respond to each statement below:

1 Strongly Agree 2 Agree 3 Undecided 4 Disagree 5 Strongly Disagree

1. I am a capable writer.
2. Writers are born, not made (taught).
3. All writers utilize a specific program which works best for them.
4. No professional writer could teach another person how to write.
5. Writers should learn a process which best suits their personalities.
6. Creativity is a prerequisite for writing.
7. A writer must like to write.
8. Writing helps the writer discover himself/herself.
9. Writing helps the writer to think through certain aspects of problems.
10. Writing does not require self discipline.
11. Nothing one writes should be discarded.
12. A writing assignment usually requires only one good draft.
13. Proofreading material does not imply change of content.
14. Writing takes talent.
15. Teacher need only make assignments and [students] will write.
16. Writing assignments are difficult to grade.
17. Writing specific genres (poetry, short stories, plays) is more difficult than writing essays.
18. Writing informally requires little planning.
19. I am insecure about my technical skills.
20. I feel comfortable sharing what I write.
21. I believe that I would make a good partner for a peer group response session.
22. I know what makes a good writer.
23. I am confident when asked to critique another person's writing.
24. I believe that writing skills are not necessary to a person's success in most

endeavors.
25. I like to write poetry.
26. I like to write short stories.
27. I like to write essays.
28. I like to write plays.
29. I am a capable reader.
30. I like to journal every day.
31. I keep a daybook of interesting things that I encounter that would enhance my writing ideas.
32. I read articles about writing.
33. Research writing is not my strongest point.
34. I can write about anything I see, feel, or think.
35. I like the finished products of my writing.
36. Writing should be incorporated across the curriculum.
37. There should be stronger emphasis on writing essays answers to examinations.
38. Writing requires thinking.
39. I have little trouble with punctuation and spelling.
40. I can recognize subject/verb and pronoun/antecedent errors in my own writing.
41. Writing is an important skill for both teachers and students.
42. The future will require more writing skills of students.
43. I do not need instruction in writing.
44. No two writers write alike.
45. The audience for which I am writing is a strong factor in how and what I write.
46. Not every student should be required to write.
47. I need to develop professional writing skills.
48. The writers I have read are role models for me.
49. I read often.
50. I hate writing.
51. I have difficulties finding descriptive words.
52. I usually write long sentences.
53. I feel that I have nothing to prove.
54. I like to publish what I write.
55. I think writing should be fun.

Appendix D

Consent Script Read to Participants

Script: (To be read to participants by the PI)

I am researching factors that affect students' writing attitudes and hope you will fill out a simple survey for my research. There are 70 questions with which you may agree strongly, simply agree, remain undecided, disagree, or disagree strongly. Though you will put your name at the top of your survey, you will be assigned a numeric identifier and your responses will remain anonymous.

If you choose to participate, you will not have to complete any additional work or to work differently from the way you would work in this class if you did not participate. There will be no direct benefits to you from participating, nor will there be any consequences if you choose not to participate.

I am distributing to each of you two copies of the official Informed Consent form. Please read it carefully; I would be happy to answer questions about any aspect of this project. After questions have been answered, please decide whether or not you wish to participate; if you decide to participate, please sign one form and return the other to me along with your completed survey. If you do not wish to participate, you may decline to sign the consent form and leave the survey blank. If you decide you do not wish to consent to letting me use your survey, please inform me in a written letter sent to the address at the bottom of the form.

Appendix E

Descriptions of Composition Classroom and Modified Writing Assignments

The composition classroom was a largely research-based course; both the composition and Human Environmental Sciences (HES) instructor collaborated on assignments. The HES instructor provided several potential research topics for the composition instructor, who then adapted her normal writing topics to include the suggestions.

Students were directed to research a manufacturer/wholesale company, or a retail company, and provide a written report as well as a poster and verbal presentation of their findings. The use of visual and spoken presentation, beyond the written report, was a direct result of the mission of the Community of Learners project: the hope of the college was that participants would improve writing, reading, and speaking skills both in general and within the college's disciplines.

Students researched, brainstormed, and even drafted together, and also participated in peer reviews. They ultimately produced individual projects for individual grades, but a majority of the process, from idea-generating to drafting to critiquing, was done in pairs or small groups.

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Friday, February 04, 2005
IRB Application No AS0550
Proposal Title: Writing Attitudes as Function of WAC Involvement

Reviewed and Exempt
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 2/3/2006

Principal
Investigator(s)

Josh Kráwczyk
510 NE 4th St.
Perkins, OK 74059

Richard Batteiger
302C Morrill
Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, emct@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,


Sue C. Jacobs, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Joshua Mark Krawczyk

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: WRITING ATTITUDES: DETERMING THE EFFECT OF A COMMUNITY
OF LEARNERS PROJECT ON THE ATTITUDES OF COMPOSITION
STUDENTS

Major Field: Composition and Rhetoric Studies

Biographical: Born in Tulsa, OK; currently reside in Stillwater, OK;

Education: •B.A., English, Oklahoma State University, 2001
•M.A., Composition and Rhetoric Studies, Oklahoma State
University, 2005

Experience: •ENGL 1113/1213 Teaching Assistant, Oklahoma State
University, 2002-2003
•EDUC 2510 (Life Skills in Transition) instructor, Oklahoma State
University, 2003-current
•UNIV 0133 (Basic Composition), Northern Oklahoma College,
current
•Academic Coordinator, Athletics, Oklahoma State University,
2003-current

Name: Joshua Mark Krawczyk

Date of Degree: December, 2005

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: WRITING ATTITUDES: DETERMING THE EFFECT OF A

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS PROJECT ON THE ATTITUDES OF

COMPOSITION STUDENTS

Pages in Study: 54

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts

Major Field: Composition and Rhetoric Studies

Scope and Method of Study: A 55-item survey was administered to 71 undergraduate students enrolled in Design, Housing, and Merchandising (DHM) 2003, "Creative Problem Solving in Design," an introductory course in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. Of these 71 subjects, 18 were concurrently enrolled in one section of ENGL 1213, Composition II. These 18 subjects were the experimental group, and the 53 remaining subjects were the control group.

Findings and Conclusions: Eight of the ten statements with significant differences in response rates indicated that the experimental group, overall, employed a more positive attitude towards writing. Divining causation for this attitude may be impossible, as separating the influence of their writing topics in class (major related) from the value of the group dynamic they experienced in their writing class is also impossible. With this caveat acknowledged, it seemed safe to say that the Community of Learners project piloted by the Human Environmental Sciences College was a successful one; as a result of involvement in the program, the students here surveyed demonstrated a more positive attitude towards writing. However, whether or not these positive attitudes translated into higher quality writing remains to be seen, a topic for further study.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Richard Batteiger