

## COOPERATIVE GROUP WORK AS A STIMULUS TO ENHANCE NARRATIVE ESSAY WRITING

PRAIM KUMAR A/L P. KRISHNASAMY

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Ijazah Sarjana Pendidikan

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Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris  
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## PENGAKUAN

Saya mengakui disertasi ini adalah hasil kerja saya sendiri kecuali nukilan dan ringkasan yang setiap satunya saya jelaskan sumbernya



23 Oktober, 2009.

.....  
( K.Praim Kumar )  
M20051000021



## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this dissertation my own except for quotations and summaries which has been duly acknowledged

23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2009

.....  
( K.Praim Kumar )  
M20051000021

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my  
beloved wife R. Kalai Selvi and my children  
P.Yutharshini and P. Davin Kumar



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to my wife R.Kalai Selvi who was a source of inspiration, a pillar of support to me throughout this work. My heartfelt thanks also goes to my supervisor Cik. Mariyatunnitha Shari for her valuable advise and guidance in taking me through this task.





## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dibuat bagi mencari kaedah alternatif bagi pengajaran penulisan karangan, walaupun kaedah tradisional masih menjadi pegangan. Kajian ini telah dijalankan disebuah sekolah menengah dikawasan Ipoh. 60 orang pelajar telah dipilih dan dibahagikan kepada 2 kumpulan. Satu kumpulan terkawal dan satu lagi kumpulan kajian. Segala data telah diperolehi melalui 3 cara iaitu soal selidik, penulisan karangan serta temubual. Hasil dapatan kajian menunjukkan keberkesanan kaedah kumpulan dalam penulisan karangan. Para pendidik haruslah mengambil iktibar dari sini serta mengamalkan kaedah kumpulan dalam penulisan.





## ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to find an alternative method to teach writing besides the ones which are already in practice. This study was conducted in a selected secondary school in Ipoh. 60 students were selected and split into 2 groups of 30 each. One was the control group and the other was the experimental group. Various methods were used to gather data. Questionnaires, written essays and interviews were used. The findings revealed that the group which underwent treatment improved significantly suggesting that the cooperative group work is indeed an effective way to teach writing. Educators have to place more emphasis on group work in teaching writing.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### 1.0 Introduction



English is taught in all Malaysian primary and secondary schools. The objective of teaching English in Secondary schools in Malaysia involves four language skills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. All the four skills are equally important and should be the focus of teaching the language. However writing is one aspect of the language that has always posed a problem not only to the learners who are learning it but also the teachers who are teaching it.

English teachers are often confronted with the dilemma of choosing suitable teaching techniques to overcome writing apprehension in their students. The problem is even more crucial in an ESL context in Malaysia , where students have to cope not only with the difficulties of writing but also the additional problem of language acquisition.

Should teachers provide techniques for the students to adhere to, present modals of writing for them to imitate, or give students topics and let them express freely?





Developing writing skills poses problems due to the conflict between two most prominent methodologies which are product-oriented and process-oriented approaches. Teachers may employ the traditional writing approach in the classroom. The focus of traditional approach is on the written product and not how the learner should approach the process of writing. Furthermore, many teachers may feel that they have to concentrate on accuracy or rather the grammatical knowledge due to the examination-oriented education system. Hence, the emphasis is placed on the product. This makes writing very individualistic and competitive.

On the contrary, the process-oriented approach emphasizes the fluency of the students' composition rather than accuracy per se. Fluency is more concerned with the writing process, such as, outlining, drafting, revising where a student produce a composition before an assessment is made (Raimes, 1983:12). The writer also states that, process approach recognizes writing as a means of communication that students can express themselves in whatever way possible in the written language without having to worry about their grammar. During this process, it will be even better if students can work in small groups, 'cooperating' among them in an effort to produce good writing.

Social psychological research on cooperation dates back to the 1920s, but research on specific applications of cooperative learning to the classroom did not begin until the early 1970s. At that time, four independent groups of researchers began to develop and research cooperative learning methods in classroom settings. At present,





researchers all over the world are studying practical applications of cooperative learning principles and many cooperative learning methods are available.

Cooperative group work in writing' is investigated based on the work by Vygotsky (1978, 1934, 1986) and post-Vygotskian theorists, researchers and language education practitioners. These works may make sense to any practicing English language teachers.

## 1.1 Statement of the problem

Writing is essentially regarded as a difficult skill. Firstly this is often attributed to its inherently complex characteristics which according to Wall (1981) range from mechanical control to creativity, with good grammar, knowledge of subject matter awareness of stylistic conventions. White and Arndt (1997) argue that writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols : it is a thinking process in its own right. It demands conscious intellectual effort, which usually has to be sustained over a considerable period of time.

Secondly, Peacock (1986) mentions that writing is a continuing and sustained act of communication. So spoken devices such as hesitation, digression and repetition are not acceptable although few graphological devices like punctuation, organization etc. may sometimes fulfill their functions. A writer is expected to maintain an extended, possibly uninterrupted flow of language.

Thirdly, the permanence of writing accounts for the need for accuracy. As recorded piece of communication, linguistic errors, for example spelling mistakes,







deviant sentence structures, wrong choice of lexis and the like may not go undetected. Apart from that, a writer also needs to be aware of the kind of presentation acceptable in terms of language. Content, style, punctuation etc.

Finally, writing is a one sided communication which all the burden of interaction relying mostly on linguistic elements that writing is indeed a deliberate and demanding activity. It requires conscious work on the part of the writer who, besides having to accommodate his own thought, has to be competent in all the written aspects of language; from mechanics to discourse.

Writing is one of the least popular activities amongst students because most students cannot see it as purposeful and interesting. Majority of the students cannot write a reasonably good composition. Byrne (1988:20) comes out with three types of problem that makes writing difficult. They are psychological, linguistics and cognitive.

Psychologically, students may find it difficult to write because the actual writing involves the student alone. Linguistically, writing is difficult because it requires the students to construct grammatically correct sentences. In the cognitive aspect, writing is difficult because the students has to use intelligence to make the written product meaningful.

Students face a lot of difficulty in expressing their ideas. Many students see writing only as a class room exercise, something done to satisfy the English teacher. For most students writing becomes an isolated act, for the audience of one, for the sole





purpose of being graded returned and then forgotten. Students may not have ideas to write and also unable to convey the intended meaning accurately. Students also have problems providing appropriate responses pertaining to the essay. They are rather quiet when it comes to class discussion. They lack of interest to write essay. Their poor performance could be because they lack of motivation.

To address these problems, the researcher attempts to use cooperative group work to enhance narrative essay writing among learners . In conducting this research, the researcher pays special attention to Vygotsky's "Social Cultural Theory of Learning" (1978) particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the use of "scaffolding" in the process of writing. First, the researcher discusses some of the findings and claims made by other researchers on how cooperative learning enhances learning. Then, he moves a little deeper to see what happens in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) The researcher then looks at his own findings and discusses how cooperative group work can enhance the writing of narrative essay.

The use of cooperative group work can enhance writing amongst students. Peers in the group can help to develop the students' interest and motivate them to write better. Peers can also help students to express their ideas well and activate their vocabulary within contexts to write essays. The peers can also help to arouse students' imagination.(Callahan et al, 1998;32) Thus, the main aim of this study is to find out if cooperative group work can enhance students' essay writing.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. Does cooperative group work enhance the performance of students in writing



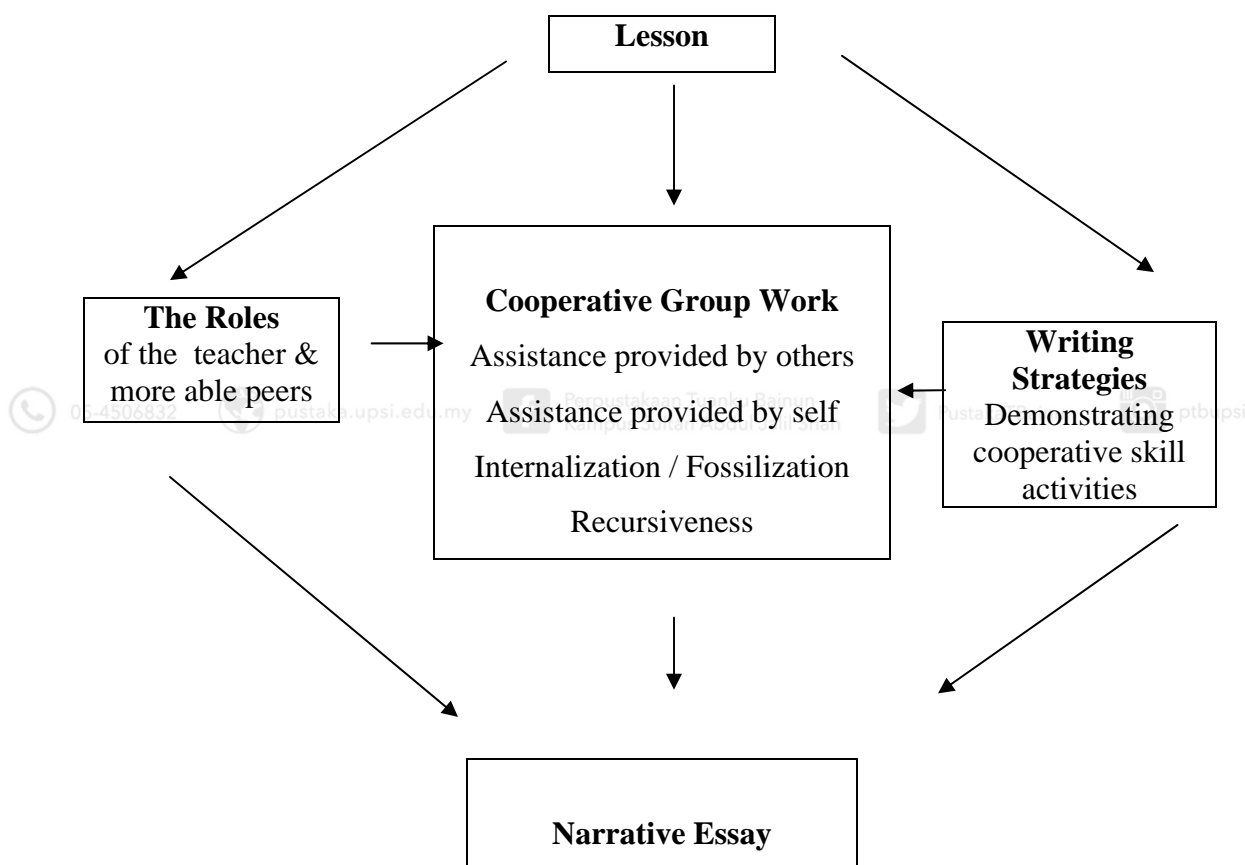
narrative essay?

2. How does cooperative group work enhance the performance of students in writing narrative essays?

### 1.2.1 Conceptual Framework

**Figure 1.1 : Conceptual Framework : Factors that Contribute to Narrative Essay**

#### Writing in Cooperative Learning



This conceptual framework is built on various factors that contribute to good essay writing. The lesson should consists of three different aspects, which are writing strategies, group work and the role of the teacher. The combination of all three factors leads to a good piece of narrative writing.



### 1.3 The Purpose of the Study

As a greater emphasis is placed on writing, the researcher chose this area to investigate and possibly find more effective ways to teach writing. With this the researcher expects the students to write better essays without fear or pressure.

Students who are weak in the writing skill tend to give up on essay writing or make little attempt to answer the question. This could also be due to the 'fear' towards writing. Since the essay comprises the most marks, it is important for students to produce a good essay to score a better grade.

Constructive steps must be taken to overcome the writing apprehension in students. Therefore, in order to help the students to better prepare for examinations, more attention should be given to the teaching of the writing skills.

### 1.4 Research Objective

The research objective was to determine if cooperative group work could enhance narrative essay writing among students. It would also determine if cooperative group work promotes inter group acceptance, broader peer liking patterns and cooperativeness among the students.

#### 1.4.1 Research Hypotheses

There would be a significant improvement in the writing of narrative essays of students who were treated with some sessions of cooperative group activities compared to students who wrote essays using the traditional method of individual writing.





## 1.5 Significance of the Study

This study sought ways to help English teachers to find an interesting and challenging method on how to teach writing narrative essays more effectively using cooperative group work. This study also hoped to help students to improve their writing skills in order to score better grades in their examinations and at the same time to reflect on the students needs. In addition to that, this study also provides guidelines for conducting cooperative group work in the classrooms especially in the teaching and learning of writing. This is also an alternative approach to the teaching of writing.

## 1.6 Limitation of the study

The scope of this study was limited in terms of sample size as only two classes of 30 students each were chosen for this purpose. The researcher felt that given the thousands of students in Malaysian secondary schools, the small number of respondents was unlikely to be totally representative.

There was also constraints of time. The time limitation for the collection of data might not reflect a true progress on the students' part. This was because the development of any progress does not occur in a very short time. In other words, a longitudinal study was needed to get data over a stretch of time and even a short term investigation might take several weeks. Due to this constraints, the researcher was compelled to concentrate on the implications of using cooperative group work in essay writing compared to a traditional class setting.

## 1.7 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research certain terms are defined :





### 1.7.1 Cooperative Group Work

Cooperative group work is a group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others. (Kessler :1992:8) However Slavin,(1983) defines cooperative learning as the motivation to help and encourage each other to learn, rooting for each other to succeed and not to fail (cited in Slavin,1995:4) On the other hand according to Arends, (1994), in order for small - group learning to be truly called Cooperative Learning Group, three basic elements such as positive interdependence, social skills and individual accountability must be present.



### 1.7.2 Enhance

The word 'enhance' means to improve in the value or quality or make better. For this research, the term improve is qualified by the following criteria:

1. The arrangement of ideas
2. Varied and wide range of vocabulary used
3. Stimulate interest
4. Arouse imagination

### 1.7.3 Narrative essay.

Narrative essay tells a story or the details of an experience. It includes all the conventions of storytelling: beginning, middle, end, plot, characters, setting and climax. It is usually filled with details that are carefully selected to explain, support or embellish the story.





## 1.8 Summary

Many students see writing only as a class room exercise, something done to satisfy the English teacher and tossed aside. For most students writing becomes an isolated act, for the audience of one, for the sole purpose of being graded returned and then forgotten.

Many writers often experience a stumbling block in their attempts to produce a piece of writing product. The stumbling block has a lot of emotional turmoil budging in their heads, accompanied by an occasional long silence. It is an agonizing experience not only for speakers as well, whereby *‘a number of them never achieve a high level of expressiveness in writing their first language.’* (Hedge 1988:5).

On the other hand, Rosen (1981) views:



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*“the writer is already a lonely figure cut off from the stimulus and corrective of listeners. He must be a predictor of reactions and act on his predictions whereby he writes with one hand tied behind his back, being robbed of gesture....”*

kaTBainun



ptbupsi

(cited in Hedge 1988:5).

The fact that writing requires a conscious mental effort is also an underlying factor which contributes to cognitive problems faced by writers who need to go through some stages of the writing process before they finally produce the final drafts which are organized, coherent and most important understood by the readers.

Writers also lack a situational contents whereby they have to create one in order to become competent writers. Therefore, the demanding situation is subjected to create anxiety and pressure on the students. Moreover, the fact that many teachers still





recognize the product approach as the only methodology in language learning makes the situation even worse.

In recognizing the pains faced by writers, Peacock (1986 :13) sees writing as 'painfully slow' because writers need to go through many stages of writing process before they finally produce the final drafts which are organized, coherent and most importantly understood by the readers that the students go through simultaneously.

The aim of this research was to look at the techniques of teaching writing narrative essay in a Form 2 class. The focus was on how effective and successful cooperative group work is, in enhancing writing narrative essays. This particular topic was chosen to help students to develop the necessary writing skills for the examination and future communicative undertakings.



## CHAPTER TWO

