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The Effect of Music on Journal Writing Productivity

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Submitted to the
Faculty of Urbana University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master in Education
Division of Graduate Study

by

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Urbana, Ohio

2002

Approved:

Advisor: _____

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Chapter I

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Writing is an important skill for students to master. To increase their competence in writing, students must practice writing. The purpose of this study was to determine if the presence of music in the classroom would change the quantity of writing output by eleventh and twelfth grade students during journal writing sessions.

Significance of the Problem

Many eleventh and twelfth grade students at Upper Valley Joint Vocational School do not like to write. Various Upper Valley Joint Vocational School faculty members have indicated that they have difficulty in motivating students to write. Some of the eleventh and twelfth grade students at Upper Valley Joint Vocational School refuse to attempt extended written work, whether the writing consists of journal entries, homework, essays, or essay answers on tests. Those same students will complete fill in the blank or short answer questions as well as multiple choice and matching tests and assignments. Teachers have reported that sometimes getting a student to write more than one complete sentence is a challenge.

Failure of students to write more than one paragraph or refusal to express their thoughts in written form is often due to a lack of confidence and past failures. The successful completion of written work improves confidence and allows the teacher to identify student strengths on which to build and the weaknesses from which to guide improvement.

Question to be Investigated

This study focused on the question to guide the investigation:

1.e What is the effect of the presence of music on journal writing productivity with eleventh and twelfth grade students?

The sub questions which will further guide the investigation:

a.e What effect does classical music have on journal writing productivity?

b.e What effect does folk music have on journal writing productivity?

Definition of Terms

The terms to be used throughout this study will be defined as follows:

Journal Writing Session: a continuous twenty minute block of time set aside for students to reflect and to write in their journal.

Writing Productivity: the number of lines written by a student.

Folk Music: compositions written and performed by John Denver.

Classical Music: compositions written by Gioachino Antonio Rossini and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Research Procedures and Methodology

This study was in the form of an action research. It examined if the presence of folk music and/or classical music influenced the writing productivity during journal writing sessions of eleventh and twelfth grade students.

Assumptions

- 1.e Each student participating in the study wrote at least at the fourth grade level.e
- 2.e Each student participating in the study could hear the varied tone and pitch of the musical selections when played at a moderate volume.e
- 3.e Every student desired to earn a passing grade.e

Limitations

- 1.e The students in the study had all opted to enroll in a vocational school. Up to half of the student school day was spent in training in the selected vocational area, as compared to a regular or comprehensive high school setting where the majority of the student day and focus would be spent working in an academic setting.e
- 2.e The students selected to participate in the study were in the eleventh and twelfth grade, as those are the grade levels that attend Upper Valley Joint Vocational School.e
- 3.e The music was played from the center of the room. Each student would be close enough to hear, but did not hear the music at exactly the same volume.e
- 4.e Student attendance during the journal writing sessions reduced the number of subject entries tabulated in this study.e
- 5.e Student mood and the appeal of the writing prompt may have influenced individual journal writing session productivity.e

Delimitations

- 1.e The students did receive a grade on their journal writinge based upon length and legibility. Grammar and spelling dide not impact the grade unless it affected legibility ande understanding.e
- 2.e Students were provided a writing prompt, but also could opte to write about any open topic appropriate for school.e
- 3.e Students were allowed to take their journals home toe continue the writing assignment to earn the desired grade.e The journals were be marked with respect to the number ofe lines written immediately after the journal writing sessione was completed.e
- 4.e Journal writing sessions took place for four consecutivee weeks starting at the beginning of the second semester ofe classes.e
- 5.e One-hundred students participated in the study, based upone the number of students who were scheduled to regularlye attend the selected English classes.e

Chapter II

Related Research and Literature

Writing is an important form of communication. Conveying of thoughts and ideas in written form is vital to students as they transition from high school to college or to the work place. It would be difficult to argue that effective writing is not an important skill for an individual to succeed in society. The question is how to encourage students to participate and practice in the development of their writing skills. Teachers of writing regularly encounter students, similar to the high apprehensives in this study, who struggle painfully through academic writing situations because their writing is fashioned in response to purely external demands or they believe they cannot write (Wachholz and Ethridge, 1996).

Having students write in journals can be a positive experience and improve writing and thinking ability. Zacharias (1991) noted that knowledge is seen as generated by the students themselves through an interactive, thinking, and doing process with their environment and Reid (1997) indicated that she has seen students' fluency increase and their dread about writing decrease when using journals.

In addition, journal writing can improve communication and rapport between the teacher and the student. Cutforth and Parker (1996) stated it was their experience that journals

foster dialogue between teachers and students which affirms the mutuality of the educational encounter, or the sense that both parties are in this together. A student having confidence in his teacher and believing it is a mutual effort can foster a more positive and productive educational experience for the student.

Journaling is more than a method to increase writing competency. Barlow (1999) suggests it is a way to deepen comprehension. Schools face a difficult job in getting students to take an active part in the learning process (Oxendine, 1988). They have difficulty making connections. It is more than simply knowing a set of facts, but understanding them and applying them. Oxendine (1988) stated that journal writing, by its contribution toward self-understanding and, its role in the thinking process, can help students take an active part. Writing about a non-threatening situation about subject matter they consider relevant, students should find the educational process real and meaningful on a more personal level.

If journal writing is beneficial to student writing competency, and if journal writing can be a positive factor in the educational process, how can one motivate or encourage students to write more in their journals? The presence of music in the classroom is one option studied over the years, although not as in depth or published as frequently as one might believe.

In his study of research, Weinberger (1998) reviewed a large number of pre-1980 dissertations on the topic of the effects of music experience or training on academic performance, mainly in primary school children. He located thirty-one dissertations, twenty-nine of which had not been published as of 1996. He surmises that their findings are virtually unknown today and apparently have had little influence.

Maintaining student on task performance and especially keeping them focused on writing can be difficult. In their study, Kariuki and Honeycutt (1998) indicated complaints by students about writing assignments and constant physical movement. But when students were exposed to music, their resistance to performance decreased and they were able to ignore outside disturbances and focus on their writing. This enabled the students to produce a higher volume of writing output which displayed improved writing skills and positive attitudes. McKnight (1998) found that playing slow tempo classical music can make a difference on children's on-task behavior. She indicated the classical music had a positive effect. In Scott's article (1996), the author noted that music calmed and quieted students while the incorporation of music resulted in some inspired writing. Lensman (1994) indicated the use of 5 senses, including hearing by writing to music, improved student writing exercises.

Results with respect to increased productivity in journal writing while in the presence of music are indicated in several studies (Donohoe and McNeeley, 1999, Karuki and Honeycutt, 1998, Koppleman and Imig, 1995, and McKnight 1998). However, Donohoe and McNeeley (1999) did not identify their findings as significant, and Koppleman and Imig (1995) determined the type of music present during journal writing had an impact, both positive or negative, on journal writing productivity.

Koppleman and Imig (1995) found that when the average number of words per selection, consistency, and tone, are used to analyze children's writings, jazz and classical music have a significant positive effect when played in the background during the students' writing time. Top 40 music was found to have a significant negative effect when played during the student's writing time.

The research appears to indicate that journal writing is a beneficial exercise and educational tool. It can promote not only the improvement of writing and communication skills but also other skills such as comprehension. In addition, journal writing can improve student confidence and participation. The presence of music in general appears to have a positive effect on the quantity and quality of journal writing. However, some studies indicate insignificant increases or even a negative influence depending on the type of music present.

In general, the studies located with respect to the effect of music on journal writing have focused on students below the sixth grade.

Chapter III

The Procedures for this Study

Subjects

The subjects in this study consisted of eleventh and twelfth grade students that attended a Joint Vocational School that is located in west central Ohio. The student ages range from 16 years to 19 years of age. Each student was enrolled in a career technical or tech prep program, and transferred from one of 15 rural, small city school, or suburban districts located in two west central Ohio counties.

One hundred students, forty-nine twelfth graders and fifty-one eleventh graders, participated in the study. Sixty-six students, thirty-two twelfth graders and thirty-four eleventh graders, participated in all four journal writing sessions.

Instrumentation

The students were required to write in journals which consisted of spiral bound notebooks with their names and class period written on the front cover. White college or wide ruled paper was used. The students were assigned to use either blue or black ink pens or pencils with number two lead. The journals were stored in file cabinet drawers assigned by class period, and locked when not in use.

The participation of each student in the four journal writing sessions and the length of each twenty minute entry were recorded on a final tally sheet (See Appendix A). For the collection of data one tally sheet was prepared for each class period and recorded the student name, identification number, and number of lines written during each of the four journal writing sessions.

The classical music consisted of three scores played in the following order during each journal writing session accompanied by classical music: Gioacchino Antonio Rossini's *William Tell*, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*. Each piece was played by the New Philharmonic Orchestra and conducted by Alfred Scholz.

The folk music selections were all performed by John Denver. The songs were played in the following order during each journal writing session accompanied by folk music: *Looking for Space*, *Calypso*, *Cowboy's Delight*, *Spirit*, *Late Night Radio*, and *Fly Away*.

The music selections were played on a Memorex portable CD Player AM/FM Stereo Radio, from compact disks.

Procedures

Prior to each journal writing session, the writing prompt for the journal entry was written on the chalkboard behind the

overhead screen. The students were instructed to obtain their journals, which were spiral bound notebooks, from the file cabinet drawer and prepare any writing utensils. They were instructed to write the date on the top of the page on which they began writing during the journal writing session.

The overhead screen was raised and the writing prompt was read orally to the students. Questions regarding the topic were answered and the students were instructed to begin writing their journal entry. The students were reminded that they could write on an open topic of their choice in place of or to supplement what they have written on the original topic or writing prompt. The time the journal writing session was initiated was noted and the time for the students to stop writing was written prominently on the chalkboard. The classroom clock was visible from every seat in the classroom.

The music was initiated, depending on if it was appropriate for that particular writing session, immediately after the time for stopping was written on the chalkboard.

After twenty minutes for reflection and writing, the students were asked to stop, and to return their journals to the file cabinet drawer. The music, if playing, was stopped. Those students who desired to continue writing in their journal after the twenty minute journal writing session had the instructor

mark in ink where the writing was completed during the session, and the student was required to return the journal the next day.

Each student received a classroom grade based upon the final length and proper content of the journal entry. For the purposes of this study, each student's quantity of writing during the twenty minute journal writing session was assessed and recorded as to the number of lines written. If writing was placed on a line, that line was counted, even if it constituted only one word. If a student wrote large, to emphasize a point for example, and the writing took up two lines in height, then one line was counted for that particular section.

The student groups were organized based upon class period. There were six student groups. The largest student group had twenty-three students. The smallest student group had twelve students. A baseline was established for each student in each group by participating in two silent journal writing sessions. Three of the student groups wrote two sessions in the presence of folk music. Eleventh grade students, age 16 to 18 wrote in the presence of folk music. The remaining three student groups, consisting of twelfth grade students, age 17 to 19, wrote two sessions in the presence of classical music. Each student group will write one journal per week for four consecutive weeks.

Each student was identified by class period, and a number according to the alphabetical listing on the class roster. For

example, if John Smith was in period three and was ranked fourteenth alphabetically, his code designation would be 3-14.

Separate tabulations were recorded for each student for each session in which they participated. Each session was identified by the writing prompt for that class period, and the conditions (silent, folk music, classical music).

The baseline averages of the number of lines written during the silent journal writing sessions were compared to the folk music averages and compared to the classical music averages.

If a student was absent from one of the music sessions (folk or classical) or one of the silent writing sessions, their totals were not entered into the average, or utilized for comparing the silent vs. classical or the silent vs. folk music journal writing sessions.

Chapter IV

The Analysis of the Data

The study began with one hundred students, forty-nine eleventh graders and fifty-one twelfth graders. Thirty-two twelfth graders and thirty-four eleventh graders participated in each of four journal writing sessions.

For the twelfth grade students who listened to folk music for two of the journal writing sessions and participated in all four journal writing sessions, the number of lines written for each session were counted and recorded. The individual student average, for the first two journal writing sessions that were written without background music, was calculated. Then the individual student average for the two journal writing sessions written in the presence of folk music was averaged (Appendix A Table 1).

A paired t test was performed on the average number of lines written in a journal, comparing the journal writing sessions performed in silence to those performed while listening to folk music.

The mean for the journal writing sessions performed in silence, and before being exposed to journal writing session with folk music, was 22.828 lines with a range of 0 to 69 lines and a standard deviation of 15.522 lines. The mean for the journal writing sessions performed while listening to folk music

was 29.109 lines, indicating a mean increase of 6.281 lines when writing in the presence of folk music as compared to writing in silence. The range of lines written while listening to folk music was from 0 to 62.5 lines and had a standard deviation of 16.941 lines. The t value equaled 2.9447, the P value was equal to 0.0061, and the results are considered statistically significant with a 95% level of confidence. This indicates that the presence of folk music during the journal writing sessions had a positive impact with respect to writing productivity.

For the eleventh grade students who listened to classical music for two journal writing sessions, after two journal writing sessions written in silence, and participated in all four journal writing sessions, the number of lines written for each session were counted and recorded. The individual student average for the first two sessions written in silence was calculated and the individual student average for the two sessions written in the presence of classical music was averaged (Appendix A Table 2).

A paired t test was performed on the average number of lines written in a journal, comparing the journal writing sessions performed in silence to those performed while listening to classical music.

The mean for the journal writing sessions performed in silence, and before being exposed to journal writing session

with classical music, was 21.853 lines with a range of 0 to 48 lines and a standard deviation of 12.553 lines. The mean for the journal writing sessions performed while listening to classical music was 23.956 lines, indicating a mean increase of 2.103 lines when listening to classical music as compared to writing in silence. The range of lines written while listening to classical music was 0 to 48.5 lines with a standard deviation of 12.188 lines. The t value equaled 1.2694, the P value was equal to 0.2132, and the results are not considered statistically significant with a 95% level of confidence. This indicates that the presence of classical music during the journal writing sessions did not have an influence with respect to writing productivity.

Chapter V

Summary and Conclusions

Summary of Findings

The study began with one hundred students, forty-nine eleventh graders and fifty-one twelfth graders. Thirty-four, or about one third, did not participate in all four journal writing sessions. Thirty-two twelfth graders and thirty-four eleventh graders participated in each of the four journal writing sessions.

Although the presence of music, both classical music and folk music, showed an increase in writing productivity during journal writing sessions as compared to journal writing sessions conducted in silence, the results were not the same.

A statistically significant increase in writing productivity as indicated by the number of lines written during journal writing sessions was observed with respect to folk music's presence. The playing of folk music had an overall positive impact with respect to writing volume.

A much smaller increase in writing productivity was observed when classical music was played during journal writing sessions as compared to writing in silence. Although the average increase was observed, it was not statistically significant.

Conclusions

The evidence demonstrates that the presence of music while eleventh and twelfth grade students are participating in journal writing can have a positive impact. It also indicates that some types of music are more beneficial than others in increasing the writing productivity of students. As Koppleman and Imig (1995) concluded, jazz and classical music have a significant positive effect when played in the background during the student's writing time. They also indicated top 40 music had a significant negative effect when played in the background during student's writing time.

Koppleman and Imig (1995) believed the reason that top 40 music had a negative effect was that it distracted the students from the writing task. The students would focus on words and familiarity with the music. Instead of writing the students would compete to determine the title of the song or who performed it. The students in Koppleman and Imig's study were in the second grade.

Although somewhat dissimilar, a distraction occurred with the eleventh grade students in this study who listened to classical music. Despite the fact that the majority of the eleventh grade students in this study could not identify the classical music pieces' composers or the title of the selection, they were distracted by the fact that they did not like the

classical music and that it was not music to which they preferred to listen. Several students in this study did verbally identify the classical selections as "cartoon music," and this appeared to decrease the level of verbal dissatisfaction. However, it may have continued to influence some student's attitude and thus lowered writing productivity.

There is a possible influence in writing productivity that should be noted. In the journal writing of several eleventh graders, while listening to classical music, some of the content lines were written in reference to their view that the classical music annoyed them and that they did not like it. Occasionally this contributed a significant number of lines that were subsequently calculated into the figures for writing productivity. The same was also true for the twelfth graders who commented negatively upon the folk music. However, the frequency of the negative comments of the folk music was rare and the complaints were usually limited to a line or two. In addition, the twelfth grade writers commented positively about the presence of the music. They indicated it helped them concentrate and remain focused. Again, the positive comments were brief but noted. In addition, some of the added volume of writing in the presence of either type of music could be cancelled out by similar comments by students during journal writing sessions in silence, where they remarked how noise in

the hallway or a squeaking desk annoyed and distracted them. Comments about background noise were very rarely written when background music was present.

This observation is supported by Donohoe and McNeeley (1999) who indicated that choice in music did play some role in students' motivation to write. They noted that students felt they wrote more while listening to music they liked. Donohoe and McNeely also stated in their study that students who felt that they had to listen to music not of their choosing would not be able to work as well.

Implications

Writing is an important skill for students to master. To increase their competence in writing, students must practice writing. Methods to increase willingness and motivation of students, especially students who do not like to write, are of value. Without practice and without student writing samples for teacher assessment, teachers are limited in their ability to provide guidance, instruction and foster improvement in student written communication skills. Landsman (1994) seems to support this as she indicated that a key for building a writing community within each class, which is essential for opening up students' writing is to have them write. She indicated that

using the 5 senses, including writing to music (hearing) can be an effective strategy.

In addition, apprehensive writers are often reluctant writers. Journal writing can have a positive impact on student willingness to write. As previously indicated, Reid (1997) observed students' fluency increase and their dread about writing decrease when using journals. Of further benefit is the observation of many teachers, and some researchers including Zacharias (1991) that there is a connection between journal writing and the thinking process. The connection, Zacharias indicated, is that journal writing assists the development of the thinking process.

Improvement in journal writing sessions could not only serve to motivate reluctant writers and improve written communication but assist in the thinking process which is key to all areas of education and learning.

Recommendations and Future Research

This study identified the potential positive benefits of the presence of music in the classroom with respect to writing productivity. McKnight (1998) who concluded that limited time implementing the project and the limited writing abilities of her students had a bearing on the results. McKnight believed that more fluent writers would have been easier to assess and

would have found greater increase on the students' on task behavior. A study similar to this one but longer in duration may have provided more substantial results, once the propensity of students to add comments for or against the presence of music had ended.

In addition, a larger number of students, exposed to a more extensive variety of music may identify those which are most beneficial to writing productivity. It could reduce or eliminate some of the limitations such as student mood or motivation.

An additional avenue for examining the effect of the presence of music on journal writing productivity with students would be to lengthen the study to include a repeated baseline alternating research design where journal writing session with no music present would be the considered the baseline and alternating different types of music would be used during subsequent journal writing sessions. The results suggest or indicate the possibility of a positive influence of music on journal writing productivity and could identify which types of music are the most beneficial to student writing productivity.

As indicated by different results to selected types of music such as classical, possibly influenced by age of the student, additional studies to determine the effect of various types of music at different ages, and possibly even students

with different cultural backgrounds and achievement levels could be examined.

Appendix A**Table 1****Journal Writing Final Averages Class Period: 1,3,4B Level: 12**

ID #	Session 1 (No Music) # Lines	Session 2 (No Music) # Lines	Session 3 (Folk Music) # Lines	Session 4 (Folk Music) # Lines	Ave. Session (No Music) 1 & 2	Ave. Session (Folk Music) 3 & 4
1-1	25	51	73	32	38	52.5
1-3	31	36	41	3	32.5	22
1-5	64	74	64	61	69	62.5
1-6	18	44	30	31	31	30.5
1-7	0	0	34	30	0	32
1-8	14	22	0	25	18	12.5
1-10	15	27	30	26	21	28
1-11	47	47	48	47	47	47.5
1-13	32	47	28	28	39.5	28
1-14	44	42	45	68	43	56.5
1-15	31	30	31	34	30.5	32.5
1-16	0	36	42	44	18	41
3-1	25	10	30	28	17.5	29
3-3	0	20	5	7	10	6
3-4	39	0	31	5	19.5	18
3-5	0	0	0	18	0	9
3-6	0	62	60	62	31	61
3-7	15	38	0	29	26.5	14.5
3-8	0	0	0	0	0	0
3-11	48	18	51	54	33	52.5
3-12	0	3	17	10	1.5	13.5
3-13	12	0	4	8	6	6
3-14	18	21	16	22	19.5	19
3-17	0	29	18	23	14.5	20.5
3-19	21	0	35	30	10.5	32.5
3-20	46	26	46	45	36	45.5
4-1	3	13	27	16	8	21.5
4-3	0	40	30	10	20	20
4-4	0	35	35	55	17.5	45
4-7	27	27	36	34	27	35
4-8	0	25	22	2	12.5	12
4-13	22	43	31	20	32.5	25.5

Table 2

Journal Writing Final Averages Class Period: 6, 7, 8 Level: 11

ID #	Session 1 (No Music) # Lines	Session 2 (No Music) # Lines	Session 3 (Classical Music) # Lines	Session 4 (Classical Music) # Lines	Ave. Session (No Music) 1 & 2	Ave. Session (Classical Music) 3 & 4
6-1	22	0	27	38	11	32.5
6-3	31	31	36	32	31	34
6-4	29	4	39	25	16.5	32
6-5	21	30	24	14	25.5	19
6-6	24	25	34	34	24.5	34
6-10	0	0	40	0	0	20
6-12	19	16	19	20	17.5	21.5
7-1	26	15	32	0	20.5	16
7-2	29	33	26	31	31	33.5
7-3	38	27	31	31	32.5	31
7-4	30	21	21	12	25.5	16.5
7-6	40	48	49	3	44	26
7-8	17	23	0	0	20	0
7-10	29	28	43	38	28.5	40.5
7-11	21	0	13	12	10.5	12.5
7-12	30	30	29	0	30	14.5
7-13	21	12	16	21	16.5	18.5
7-14	16	0	22	16	8	19
7-15	36	48	53	23	42	38
7-16	46	50	47	50	48	48.5
7-17	31	33	52	28	32	40
7-18	33	25	21	20	29	20.5
7-20	32	43	44	22	37.5	33
7-21	24	21	27	24	22.5	25.5
7-22	0	0	0	0	0	0
7-23	0	0	0	0	0	0
8-1	46	0	26	21	23	23.5
8-3	6	0	0	6	3	3
8-5	22	2	22	22	12	22
8-6	27	4	21	24	15.5	22.5
8-9	0	19	22	23	9.5	22.5
8-12	37	18	33	31	27.5	32
8-14	25	6	19	23	15.5	21
8-16	46	20	47	36	33	41.5

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