

# Using Precision Teaching Techniques To Encourage Creative Writing

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## Introduction

For some students the task of creative writing is laborious and seldom results in a feeling of accomplishment. The reluctant writer has problems, not only organizing his ideas into complete thoughts and paragraphs, but even more basic, developing the ability to draw from past experiences to form the basis for his creative writing.

The controversy over whether to praise or criticize student creative writing samples has long existed among educators. A study by Taylor and Hoedt (1966) indicates that praise is a more effective system to use for increasing ideas and developing favorable attitudes.

Once the decision to measure creative writing is made, the question then is what to measure. Areas of concern include mechanics such as spelling, grammar and punctuation, and content such as vocabulary use, originality, number of ideas and organization. On a daily basis it would be difficult to measure all of these aspects (Hansen, 1978).

A study by Hansen and Lovitt (1973) measured the effect of feedback on mechanics and/or content. The words-per-minute rates of the students remained the same throughout the study. The study indicated that emphasis on mechanics did not have an adverse effect on content. Mechanics feedback was actually more effective than feedback on content in influencing both mechanics and content positively.

The primary objective of the current project was to increase the words-per-minute rate with respect to total number of ideas and words written. Once the quantity of words and ideas was increased through the use of daily practice and free writing, then the quality of these responses could be developed.

## Procedure

The process used involved daily practice on a variety of topics through use of specific timed activities. The reason for timed practice rather than free writing without a time schedule was twofold. First, it focused the student's attention on a specific completion time, giving him a framework within which he could respond successfully. Secondly, it allowed for consistent measurement from day to day.

A topic was selected daily by the teacher, or students selected individual topics for their creative writing activity. Initially, it was easier for the teacher to select a topic within the experience realm of her class. As students became more proficient in organizing their ideas they could elect to choose their own topics.

Once the topic had been selected, students were given one minute to write as many ideas as they could pertaining to that topic. Students were encouraged to write short phrases or one-word ideas, not complete sentences.

At the end of the one-minute time sample, the total number of words written was counted and recorded on the Standard Behavior Chart.

Immediately following the one-minute time sample and charting procedure, students wrote for ten minutes. During this time sample students wrote sentences and paragraphs about the chosen topic. The emphasis was on quantity of complete ideas written, not spelling, mechanics or sentence structure. Students were encouraged to use the ideas generated during the one-minute time sample. At the end of the ten minutes, number of words written was counted and recorded on the Chart.

These short compositions were retained by the students in a folder and were not given to the teacher for feedback. This procedure was continued for a five-day period. The topics varied from day to day, but were always ones upon which students had some past experience from which to draw ideas.

After several days of daily practice, the students selected one of their compositions to edit and rewrite and turn in to be read and graded by the classroom teacher. Direct instruction in editing skills were taught prior to this rewrite activity.

The first copy became the rough draft. Students spent one class period correcting errors, including grammar, spelling, punctuation and sentence structure. The student could also change the order of the sentences, delete sentences and add additional ideas. This revision process occurred during an untimed class activity. Once the corrections were made on the rough draft, a final copy was completed, and both copies were turned in to the teacher. Receiving both copies gave the teacher the opportunity to assess and develop a student's rewrite and editing skills in addition to developing fluency of words written.

There were some variations in the procedure. For students with spelling problems, the teacher checked the compositions daily to develop individual spelling lists. This helped students learn to spell those words that were a part of his speaking vocabulary but may not have been a part of his writing vocabulary.

To increase a student's recognition of syllables, creative writing with the Japanese poetry, Haiku, easily lent itself to this process. From the one-minute time sample, syllables instead of words or phrases were counted and charted. Again, syllables were counted in each completed Haiku from the ten-minute sample.

The same process was used in content areas to develop main ideas and support details concerning specific subject content. In this variation the chosen topic was a major idea or concept being taught.

## Results

Daily data were charted by students, and students' growth or lack of growth was continually monitored. Through the use of specific decision rules directly related to the Chart, instructional interventions were made on an individual basis.

Included are charted data from four 6th grade students, indicating their growth over one week based on daily practice using this technique. The

first set of five data points indicates words-per-minute during the one-minute time sample, and the second set of data indicates words-per-minute during the ten-minute sample.

Chart 1 illustrates the growth of each student. The data indicate similar growth patterns between the one-minute sample when compared to the ten-minute sample. As a student increased the number of words or short phrases in one minute, he also tended to increase the number of words and sentences in the ten-minute time sample. The choice of a daily topic also affected the frequency on any given day.

### Discussion

The data from this study tend to support the use of daily timed practice to increase the quantity of words written. The one-minute warm-up or practice seemed to provide the students with a beginning point and to develop some organization of ideas. For those reluctant writers it was a non-threatening, ungraded activity. It also freed the teacher from making any judgments as to content or mechanics during the part of the activity devoted to increasing the rate of response.

Further research could study the possible relationship between the one-minute and ten-minute activity, or the relevance of the topic selected and its relationship to a student's past experiences.

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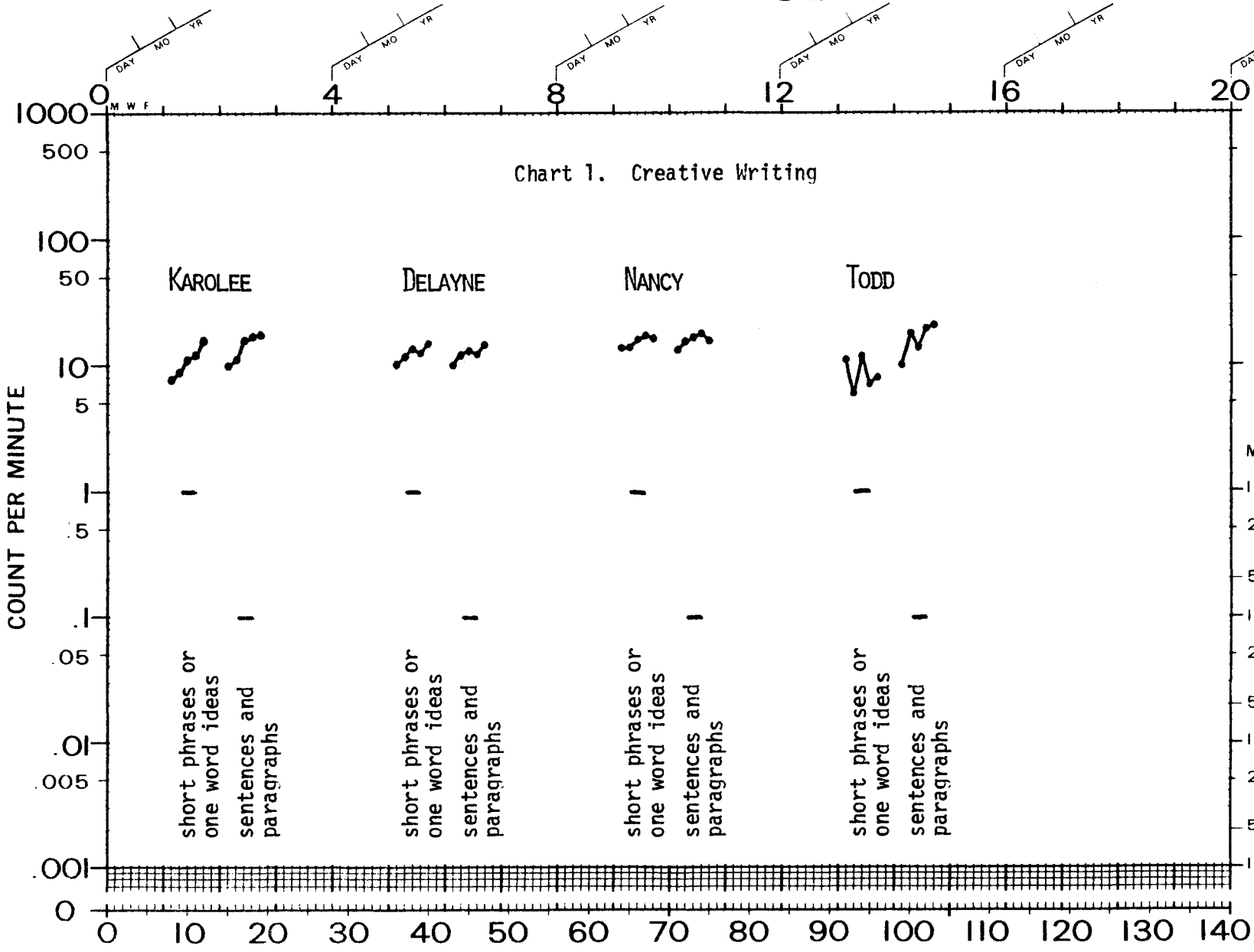
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