

Innovative approach results in improved writing skills at primary school

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Primary school writing classes place insufficient emphasis on pupils' writing processes and on the communicative function of texts. Teachers tend to focus mainly on the superficial features of a text, such as the use of a title at the top, correct spelling, and proper punctuation. These are the claims made by Mariëtte Hooegeveen, a PhD candidate at the University of Twente. After conducting an experimental study, she found that the peer response with additional instruction in specific genre knowledge approach leads to improved writing performance. Pupils who are taught using this approach write better texts than those in the control group.

Mariëtte Hooegeveen notes that "In [primary education](#) there is insufficient emphasis on the communicative function of texts. By this I mean that pupils are not given sufficient instruction in how to adapt their texts to the intended purpose and to the [target audience](#) in question. Nor is due consideration given to either the writing process or the text itself." According to Ms Hooegeveen, excessive emphasis is still being placed on superficial characteristics such as "you forgot to use capital letters" or "I enjoyed reading your text". Mariëtte Hooegeveen conducted an experimental study based on an approach that she had developed herself: peer response with additional instruction in specific genre knowledge.

Instruction in genre knowledge

The peer response approach requires pupils to work in pairs or in small

groups during the various stages of the writing process. Ms Hoogeveen investigated peer response using two types of instructions in genre knowledge. The first type involves instruction in specific genre knowledge (SGK). This focuses on the use of indicators of time and place and their function in different genres. The second type involves instruction in genre knowledge of a broader nature, also known as general aspects of communicative writing (GACW). Here pupils are taught about the function of various genres, in addition to 'purposefulness and a target-audience focus in different genres.

Mariëtte Hoogeveen's study shows that pupils taught using the peer response with additional instruction in specific genre knowledge (SGK condition) produce much better texts than either pupils in the [control group](#) or those in the GACW-condition group. They also used more functional indicators of time and place in their texts, and revised their texts on the basis of this focus in the instruction. No differences were found between the control group and pupils in the GACW-condition group.

The pupils' writing skills were assessed by means of four writing tasks, consisting of two stories and two sets of instructions. In addition to an overall score for text quality, the indicators of time and place were assessed, as was their use during text revision. Furthermore, video clips were made of text discussion sessions. These showed that, when discussing texts, pupils in the SGK-condition group tended to focus more on indicators of time and place.

Fragment

The tasks assigned to [pupils](#) included writing a set of instructions on how to make Dutch apple turnovers. The following is a first version produced by a pupil in the SGK-condition group.

Peel the apples, add raisins, sugar, and cinnamon, then stir. Place on the puff pastry, then fold it shut.

During the text discussion session, the pupil received responses concerning the written text. The pupil then modified the text. The second version read:

Peel the apples and place them in a bowl, add raisins, sugar, and cinnamon, then stir the mixture well. Place the mixture on the puff pastry, then fold the pastry from one corner to another to make a triangle.

The text discussion session had resulted in a much clearer, improved [text](#)

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Mariëtte Hoogeveen's doctoral defence will take place on 18 January at the University of Twente. The title of her PhD thesis is: "[Writing](#) with peer response using genre knowledge. A classroom intervention study."

More information: Mariëtte Hoogeveen's doctoral defence will take place on 18 January at the University of Twente. The title of her PhD thesis is: "Writing with peer response using genre knowledge. A classroom intervention study."

Provided by University of Twente

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