

EVALUATION OF THE DOUBLE LANGUAGE ARTS PERIOD AT
DELAND JUNIOR HIGH

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This study was undertaken to evaluate the double-period organization of language arts classes at DeLand Junior High School. At the time the evaluation was made, the double periods had been operating two years, having been set up in the fall of 1961. The objective of the innovation was to provide longer blocks of time for language arts instruction in hopes that such provision would result in better pupil achievement in the language arts, primarily reading and writing.

Procedure

It was decided to use scores on the California Reading Achievement Test, Form Y, administered in the spring, as the criterion of reading achievement. Ratings of pupils' themes, written under standardized conditions, and scored by a standardized procedure, were used as the criterion of writing ability.

Experimental subjects were eighth grade students at DeLand Junior High School who had been in the program two full years. Control subjects were students in two other schools of the county who had been enrolled in regular one-period language art classes.

All DeLand eighth grade pupils were asked to write two themes, on different days, on these subjects: The Ideal Job (Theme 1) and Face to Face (Theme 2). Mimeographed instructions were prepared to provide a common background for the themes. Half the group wrote one theme first and the other half wrote the other first. Students in the control group followed the same procedure. However, the entire eighth grade was used in only one control school. In the other school only four classes were used.

Four random samples of 20 students each were drawn from the experimental school, in such a way that each sample was unique - that is, Samples 1 and 3 wrote the Theme 1 first and samples 2 and 4 wrote the Theme 1 second. For Sample 1, Theme 1 was used; for sample 3, Theme 2 was used etc. For all students in the experimental samples, data from tests administered in the fall of the eighth grade were recorded for all but two students who missed the tests because of illness. From the control schools random samples were selected with the same characteristics as the experimental samples as to the theme used and the order of presentation, and test scores

were recorded for all pupils for whom they were available. The test scores used were the Reading Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension, and Mechanics of English scores on the California Achievement Test Battery, Form X. These three scores, expressed as grade placement scores, were added to yield a prediction score, so that an analysis of covariance could be computed if the experimental and control groups were found to differ significantly on the predictor measure. Reading scores from the spring testing were also recorded for all students in the study.

The students' themes were typed, exactly as written, in order to control for such extraneous variables as handwriting and neatness. Judges were teachers of English in senior high schools. The twenty themes from the experimental sample and twenty from the control sample on the same topic and in the same time sequence were combined into one group for rating purposes. Codes identified the students and their school, and the judges rated the themes without knowing the purpose or the identity of the students or their schools. A standardized system of rating was used, with the judges asked to rate all themes independently on these qualities: Ideas, Mechanics, Wording, Form, Flavor (style and interest). Ratings on each quality were forced into a normal distribution by using predetermined percentages to receive each rating. As a final step the ratings on each quality were summed to yield a total score. Each set of themes was rated independently by two judges, and their ratings were averaged to yield a measure of the students' writing ability. The reliability of the averaged ratings was found to be .75.

Some students were included in the theme writing samples for whom no fall test scores were available, due to the random sampling procedure. Data were analyzed only for those students for whom test scores were available in order to correct for any difference in initial performance, if necessary. There were 76 students in the experimental sample and 64 in the control sample.

Findings

1. Reading Achievement

Table 1 presents the data from the reading tests. These data indicate that the control group was a little higher on both pre-test measures than the experimental group, and that the pre-test difference in Reading Comprehension approaches statistical significance. The analysis of covariance is, therefore, the most appropriate method of analyzing the data. When this analysis was done there were no statistically significant differences between the Control and Experimental groups.

Table 1

Comparison of Experimental and Control Groups as to Pre-test and Post-test Scores on California Reading Vocabulary and Comprehension Tests

A. Reading Vocabulary						
	Pre-Test			Post-Test		
	E	C	Diff.	E	C	Diff.
M	8.98	9.25	.27	10.14	10.34	.20
SD	1.64	1.65		1.42	1.19	
SEM _D			.28			.22
N	76	64		76	64	
B. Reading Comprehension						
	Pre-Test			Post-Test		
	E	C	Diff.	E	C	Diff.
M	10.04	10.73	.69	10.94	10.73	.21
SD	2.35	1.89		2.27	1.65	
SEM _D			.36			.34
N	76	64		76	64	

2. Writing Ability

Table 2 presents the data for the predictor score (sum of Reading Vocabulary, Reading Comprehension and Mechanics of English scores, decimals removed) and the averaged theme ratings. The data in Table 2 indicate that the control group had higher predictor scores than the experimental group. Despite this, the difference between the means of the theme ratings for the experimental group and the control group has a probability of only 2%. Actually, the difference in the predictor score makes analysis of covariance a more appropriate statistic. This analysis would yield even lower probabilities; and, thus greater significance.

Table 2

Comparison of Experimental and Control Groups as to Predictor Scores and Theme Ratings

	Predictor Score			Theme Ratings		
	E	C	Diff.	E	C	Diff.
Mean	290.00	297.25	7.25	15.88	14.50	1.38
SD	52.50	44.57		3.90	2.96	
SE _{MD}			8.20			.58
N	76	64		76	64	

Conclusion

In this study it was found that junior high pupils in double language arts classes do better on theme writing than pupils in regular classes. The differences in reading test scores, though somewhat in favor of the double language arts groups, were not statistically significant.

In interpreting these findings, it should be remembered that students in all schools received special reading help, regardless of the length of the period, so that the extra length of the double period really affected primarily the amount of time available for writing. Also, with smaller total student loads, teachers of the double period could assign and read more written work. Therefore, it is not surprising that the greatest effect of the double period is on writing ability of the students.

Appendix A

Instructions to Raters

Enclosed are the 40 essays which you are to rate for the special English project. In order to objectify ratings, essays have been typed and coded, thus eliminating identifying information and handwriting biases.

In order to insure comparability between raters, please follow these directions:

1. Rate each dimension separately. That is, rate all papers on ideas before considering mechanics, etc.

2. Remember that all ratings are comparative, and the rating refers to a position in reference to other papers in this sample. The figures in parentheses indicate how many papers should receive each rating on each dimension.

3. Select extremes first. That is, choose the two best papers (on the dimension being rated) and give them a rating of "5". Then choose the two poorest, and give them a rating of "1". Then select the next 8 high and 8 low and rate them "4" and "2", respectively. All other papers are rated "3". Follow this same procedure for every dimension.

Appendix B

Rating Form for Essays

Paper No. _____
Reader Code _____

1 lowest 5% (2) 2 next 20% (8) 3 middle 50% (2)
 4 next 20% (8) top 5% (2)

IDEAS	1	2	3	4	5
Richness and soundness of ideas					
Development and support of ideas					
Relevance of ideas to the assignment					
Adequate length without padding					
MECHANICS	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar and usage					
Punctuation, capitals, abbreviations, numbers					
Spelling					
WORDING	1	2	3	4	5
Choice and arrangement of words					
General level of vocabulary development					
FORM	1	2	3	4	5
Organization (follows a discernible plan)					
Analysis (topic broken up into reasonable parts)					
FLAVOR	1	2	3	4	5
Style (personal qualities of the writing)					
Interest and sincerity					
COMMENTS:					
					SUM _____