

## ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the potential use of topical structure analysis as a refining strategy, to develop coherence and cohesion in the written discourse of Grade 10 Jamaican students. An exploratory-interpretive research design was used and the sample size was five high school students.

A pre-test in the form of an argumentative essay was given in order to assess students' ability to write coherently and cohesively. The texts were rated by two experienced markers using the Caribbean Examination Council's (CXC) marking scheme, along with myself using the Primary Trait scoring. The texts were classified in terms of high-scoring and low-scoring by all markers, and further subjected to topical structure analysis by myself.

Subsequently, the unit of work was developed to address the need for more coherent writing. Although other weak areas were identified in these scripts, the focus was on organization and connectedness. It was felt that if students were helped in these areas, then other weak areas would benefit incidentally.

Topical structure analysis originally developed by Lautamatti (1978) and used as a revision strategy by Connor and Farmer (1990) were found useful in tracing the progression of sentences in a text, and how topics in the sentences progressively build meaning through parallel, sequential and extended parallel progressions. It was also

seen that topical analysis as a refining strategy, is most effective after teacher-student conferencing and the employment of a check-list of questions for students to ask themselves about their essays.

It is to be noted that Lautamatti's taxonomy was adapted to incorporate Halliday and Hasan's (1976) cohesion classification to assess the kinds of cohesive ties present in coherent essays as against incoherent ones. This consequently revealed that the same kinds of ties exist in both coherent and incoherent essays. What is important is how a writer is able to make these ties work for him or her.

At the end of the unit a post-test essay was given. From the evaluation, using topical structure analysis, I concluded that the strategy could be successfully used as a refining one to develop coherence and cohesion in written discourse. It was also found that the idea of publishing a class-newspaper was a good motivator for students to write coherently, because they have a real audience and real purpose for writing.