

## Per email

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## Title

*Analyzing the Writing Processes*

*in the Project Fair Debating and Written Argumentation in Grade Nine. First Results*

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## Abstract

The teaching and research project Fair Debating and Written Argumentation is a controlled, quasi-experimental intervention study in panel design in grade 9 at schools with higher education and non-higher education track with 355 students. In this context the central question is, how (written) language competences of ninth-grade students can be assessed and developed by two series of lessons on the topics of debating and argumentative writing. The study examines the mutual influence between debating competence (treatment D) and writing competence (treatment E). The lesson series were conducted by the team of the chair and include debating (inspired by *Jugend debattiert*) and argumentative writing (in the sense of SRSD, Graham & Harris, 2017). The measurement of writing competence was realised in a mixed methods design by four writing tasks (argumentative writing) from selected intermediate secondary school exams of the past ten years. All anonymised written argumentations (n=1,000) were holistically and analytically rated within a double-blind review process on Likert scale quantitatively (Cohen's Kappa =.828). The presentation focuses on the results of the intervention study about the text length, the text quality (overall impression), and selected data of digitally recorded writing processes. The results show for example, regarding the order of the treatments, that the texts of those students, who debated first and then composed written argumentations, had a greater text length and quality than in the other intervention group and the control group (also in the non-higher education track).

## Keywords

#Design-Based-Reserach #Debating #Two-Panel Design #Text Rating #Written Argumentation #Secondary Schools

## Theoretical Framework

„The term inclusion in the school context stands for learning and working together within a school community. For teaching, this means that the individual learning requirements of all students are recognized in an appreciative manner and are taken

## Debating

Acquiring literacy can be described as a right of every student to get the necessary resources and opportunities to develop sufficient and sustainable literacy skills (Valtin, 2016). One of the key objectives of inclusive didactics of writing is to enable students in lower secondary education to gain access to educational qualifications by teaching literacy skills and thereby achieve educational equity. Due to the uncertainty of present times, this objective is even more relevant. School performance studies show that students face barriers in their educational trajectories, when they lack these literacy skills (OECD, 2021). Therefore, it is important to support all students, especially writers, speakers, and readers with low literacy skills, so that they can participate in professional, cultural, and political contexts. In this context writing is a key competence and a long-life part of learning (OECD, 2021). Oral and written argumentation, by simultaneous linguistic and democratic action, provides rich opportunities to develop writing skills and the aspiration for political and social participation in students (Achour et al. 2020). Despite this, the influence of oral argumentation on the ability to compose written argumentations in German lessons at the end of lower secondary school can be described as a research desideratum.

Debating, i.e. taking a position on a controversial issue and then weighing up the arguments (Kemmann & Wagner, 2019: 2), opens up opportunities to discuss issues together in a factual manner through direct linguistic and democratic action. Debating as an action orally supports the weighing of arguments. In the philosophical-didactic context, argumentation is about proving the truth of a statement (conclusion) through the truth of other statements (premises). Whoever argues thus ultimately claims the truth of his:her conclusion (Tetens, 2010: 198f.). However, a debate is not to be understood merely as a clash of arguments - rather, these arguments relate to each other and the speakers interact with each other in this way. This process is illustrated with pro-contra lists and/or debate cards, which visualise the different relationships between contributions within a debate (Betz, 2016: 172f.).

Today's common form of discussion in class is characterised, among other things, by the ability to formulate the topic, the justification of the answers, the equal rights of all speakers and the (at least) twofold alternation of speech and counter-speech (Kemmann, 2014: 41). This is less about convincing the person on the opposite side, but rather "about sharpening the contrast of positions" (ibid.: 42). At this point, the term should be distinguished from discussing and entertaining. In contrast to discussions, debates have strict rules and always a decision question that only allows two possible answers (pro/contra) (ibid.: 42). Jugend debattiert was recommended in 2009 by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany as a social science competition for pupils (KMK, 2009: 7) and offers participants the opportunity to directly experience the impact of their contributions (Kemmann, 2014: 42).

Debating also enables a practical examination of rhetoric in the classroom. In didactic research, the understanding of rhetoric as a (speech) art has recently shifted to an "ability [...]"

to argue one's own point of view convincingly in a discussion" (Gora, 2010: 21). Jugend debattiert represents a format that has been established in Germany for 20 years with approximately 1,400 schools and combines argumentation and debating with the use of rhetorical skills. Debating is generally understood as "a conversation to clarify decision-making conditions" (Kemmann, 2013: 41), in which the debaters are regarded as equals and are interested in a rational clarification to the same extent. The Anglo-Saxon debating clubs can be regarded as the basis of school debate (Massing, 1999: 403). The American form of debate provides for two teams (with 3-5 participants each) and an observation group to participate in the process. Each member of the contra-group responds to a specific member of the pro-group and then, depending on the concept, a closing speech is given or a free exchange of opinions is initiated (Pschibul, 1980: 355ff.; Rode-Florin, 2000: 50ff.).

The Hertie Foundation and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MBS) annually call for the pupils' competition Jugend debattiert (Youth Debates) in two age groups, one from years 8-10 and one from 11-13. In addition to the Gymnasium, other school types are also involved. In the state of Brandenburg, however, only about 3% of the participating schools are non-grammar schools. Political debate and discussion can be learned and should therefore be practised and trained in the classroom context for all young people at all types of schools, whether with or without special needs, whether with or without a migrant background, whether at grammar schools or secondary schools, comprehensive schools or special schools. In this field, there is still a need for research in order to implement empirically evaluated (in a quasi-experimental research design) language support projects for discussion and debate in schools. Therefore, intervention studies are needed that empirically survey and evaluate these literal and exam-relevant competences for lower secondary schools.

### *Written Argumentation*

The written, dialectical discussion is a relevant examination task for the Mittlerer Schulabschluss at the end of lower secondary school. In the research design presented, the writing competence in writing an argument is examined. Giera (2020) defined writing competence as "a construct that can be evoked in its performance on the one hand via text quality as a latent variable by means of an associated writing task, and on the other hand can be self-assessed [...] and in doing so examines, among other things, text type knowledge, writing attitudes and writing strategy use among the test subjects" (Giera, 2020: 129). The discussion is fundamentally a written argumentation in German lessons (Peters, 2004: 13). In the context of this writing process, students develop both pro and con arguments to a concrete question and support them with examples and evidence. In addition, ninth and tenth grade learners are expected to be able to link and weight partial arguments and formulate thesis, antithesis and synthesis when writing a dialectical argument (Giera, 2020: p.41). According to a pragmatic concept of argumentation, which focuses on convincing others with the help of strategies that can show different points of view, writing an argumentative text such as the discussion is the result of the sub-acts of positioning, modalising and conceding (Feilke, 2013: 122). According to Winkler (2005), the development of factual competence, linguistic competence, moral competence, and social-communicative competence are fundamental to this process (Winkler, 2005: 89ff).

In addition to the search for consensus, the promotion of opinion formation, critical thinking and the argumentative use of language can be formulated as didactic goals (Loibner, 2019: 83). As a result, in the discussion, the writers have to imagine their communication partners to be convinced (Schüler, 2017: 25; Feilke, 2013: 122) and make use of their argumentative ability, which has been defined as the use of specific cognitive ways of dealing with an issue as well as the use of specific linguistic forms (Domenech, 2019: 2).

In the field of subject didactics, however, the discussion is not uncontroversial. It is said to be a highly schematised essay form that is only found in school contexts (Winkler, 2005: 94). Pohl (2014) also distinguishes the text form from written argumentation since it should be understood as a form of argumentation reduced to its creative-generative function. In contrast to argumentative writing, argumentative writing is not only fictitious (with regard to the dialogue-motivated sub-actions), but also entirely fictitious. Thus, argumentative writing would include a counter-position that does not even exist as such (Pohl, 2014:298ff). Regardless of the didactic discourse, material-based writing presents students with great challenges - in reading, oracy, and writing. It requires a particularly long attention span and the use of procedural reading and writing strategies.

### *Writing with Self-Regulated-Strategy Development (SRSD)*

The writing process of persuasive student texts can be positively guided by the "Self-regulated-Strategy-Development approach" (Graham & Harris, 2017; Graham & Harris, 1987; Graham & Harris, 1996; Graham, Harris & Troia, 1998; Graham, Harris & Zito, 2005; Graham, Harris & Mason, 2005; Graham & Perin, 2007), as this writing intervention approach has been successfully tested in over 100 studies, but only in the Anglo-American world. The writing phases in debating should be based on the writing intervention approach "Self-Regulated-Strategy-Development" 1 (Graham & Harris, 2017) with its six phases (Giera, 2020):

In Germany, there are more and more studies on the SRSD approach also in primary education (e.g. Glaser 2005; Keßler 2006, 2010; the research group Restless at the University of Regensburg), but only one study in secondary education I/II (Giera, 2020). Yet the memorisation and practice of writing strategies anchored in the SRSD approach is essential for weak writers, especially in a heterogeneous and inclusive classroom. The peer-to-peer feedback included in the SRSD approach in the fifth phase also has a positive qualitative impact on the writing product. The use of appropriate strategies in the SRSD approach can promote literacy in weak readers, which would need to be tested empirically. Writing on the PC makes it easier for students to revise their texts, in the project the discussions (Hayes, 2012). Writing on the PC motivates students to write longer texts. Research in this area is scarce in Germany but is repeatedly called for by German didactics (Becker-Mrotzek/Grabowski & Steinhoff, 2017).

Due to the Corona epidemic, many writing and reading processes no longer took place in schools, but at home. The extent to which literal competences were practised and built up at home or in independent work by pupils at the beginning of lower secondary school is a gap in research. A school-independent comparative test like VERA-8 could not be conducted in 2020 because there is no online test yet. However, it is certain that the final German examination will take place at the end of grade 10. The largest part of this examination to achieve the Mittlerer Schulabschluss is taken up by reading, including non-fiction texts, and writing a dialectical discussion. It is precisely at this point that the research gap needs to be closed by an examination-relevant project that includes screening in the pre-, post- and follow-up tests one year before the final examination in the ninth grade and, in addition, uses the

oral and written weighing of arguments as a resource within the framework of two series of lessons to promote literary competences and the aspiration to political and social participation among students (Achour et al. 2020, Winkler, 2005). So, with our work we would like to “close the gaps between those who have good literacy skills and those who struggle [...]” (European Union, 2012: 48)

In this context, the central question is, how (written) language competences of ninth-grade students can be assessed and developed through two series of lessons on the topics of debating and argumentative writing. The study examines the mutual influence between debating competence (treatment D) and writing competence (treatment E). In this context, the trained members of the chair team conducted two lesson series about debating and argumentative writing in six schools using a design-based research approach (Philippakos et al., 2021). The global research question is: How does the writing competence of the participating students develop in the course of the school teaching project? The following hypotheses are relevant for the research:

- **H<sub>1</sub>** The writing processes (measured by time in the editor field and in the writing plan and the switches between writing plan and editor field) influence text quality (overall impression) (Giera, 2020, Hayes, 2012).
- **H<sub>2</sub>** The text length (number of words in the text) influences the text quality (Giera, 2020).
- **H<sub>3</sub>** The intervention group, which first debates and then writes in the treatment, shows a higher text quality (overall impression, language systematics, language pragmatics) than the other treatment group and the control group.
- **H<sub>4</sub>** The intervention group, which first debates and then writes in the treatment, writes longer texts (measured in the editor field) than the other treatment group and the control group (Domenech, 2019, Kemman, 2018, Loibner, 2019, Betz, 2016, Gora, 2010, Winkler, 2005).
- **H<sub>5</sub>** The intervention group, which first debates and then writes in the treatment, stays longer in the writing process (time in editor field and writing plan) than the other treatment group and the control group (Feilke, 2013).
- **H<sub>6</sub>** The intervention group, which first debates and then writes in the treatment, switches more often in the writing process between writing plan and editor field than the other treatment group and the control group (Graham & Harris, 2017, Feilke, 2013, Hayes, 2012).

## Design

On this basis, the teaching and research project was designed. It is a controlled, quasi-experimental intervention study in a panel design in grade 9 at grammar schools and non-grammar schools with 355 students. In this context, the central question investigated is how (written) language competences of ninth-grade students can be assessed and developed through two series of lessons on the topics of debating and written argument.

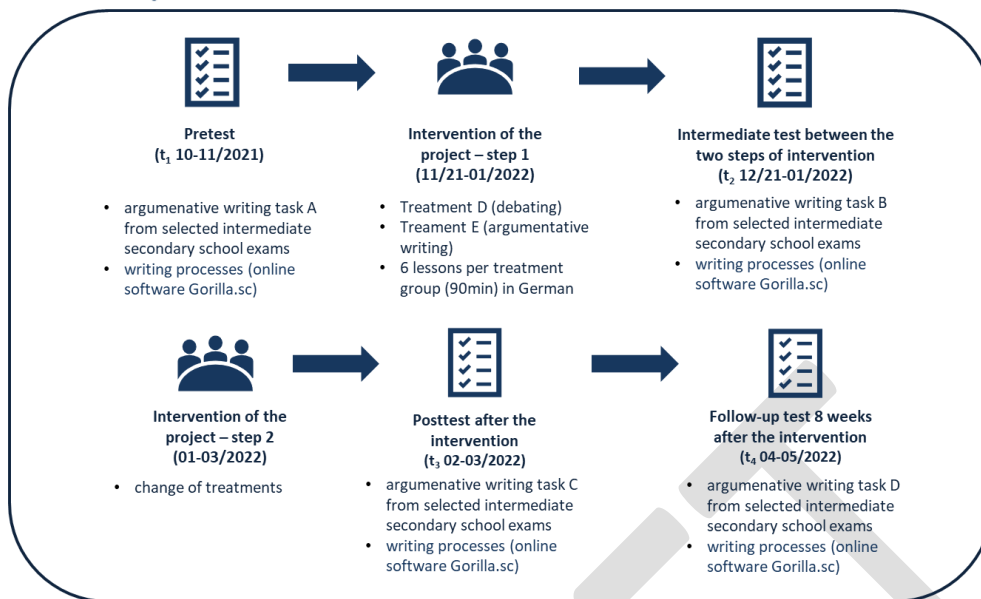


Figure 1. Screening procedure in the research project "Fair Debattieren und Erörtern"

The study examines the mutual influence of debating competence (treatment D) on the one hand and writing competence (treatment E) on the other. In this context, the trained members of the chair team went into the school field in the sense of the design-based research approach (Reimann, 2022; Philippakos et al., 2021) to carry out the intervention in the form of the two lesson series on debating (based on the lesson series of Jugend debattiert) and on written debate (according to the Self-Regulated-Strategy-Development approach, Graham & Harris, 2017).

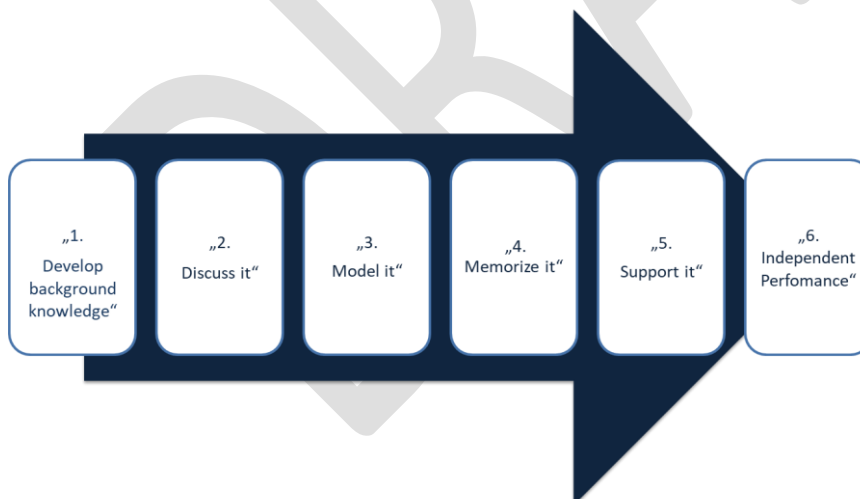


Figure 2. Self-Regulated Strategy Development for writing with students (Graham & Harris, 1996, 2017)

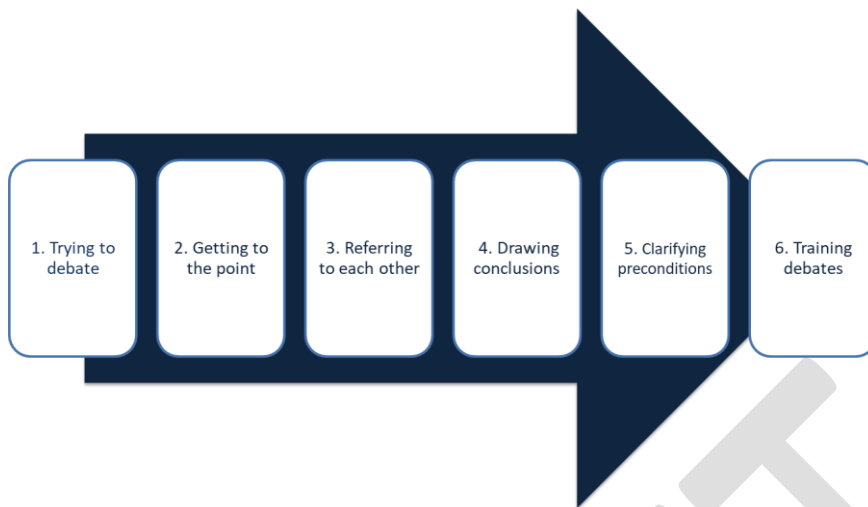


Figure 3 Lessons series inspired by *Jugend debattiert* (Kemman et al., 2019)

Within the framework of the two teaching series, the following competence developments were aimed at: The participating students...

- ... are able to write dialectical discussions/debates on self-selected and given topics (SenBJW & MBSJ, 2015a: 23, 39, 44; SenBJW & MBSJ, 2015b: 6, 17).
- ... are able to plan and revise them in peer feedback discussions with their classmates (SenBJW & MBSJ, 2015a: 18).
- ... can memorise appropriate strategies for discussion (ibid.: 22).
- ... can continuously read factual texts in the form of news reports in selected apps (ibid.: 5, 27f).
- ... can evaluate related graphics and use them in their discussions and debates (ibid.: 25, 27).
- ...are able to actively participate in several debates of the teaching format *Jugend debattiert* (SenBJW & MBSJ, 2015a: 39; SenBJW & MBSJ, 2015b: 6, 17).
- ... can improve their writing skills on their laptops using Word software (SenBJW & MBSJ, 2015a: 21).
- ... can give their classmates relevant feedback using checklists (ibid.: 43).

The project was piloted in the first phase (11/2021-05/2022) and evaluated, reflected and adapted in terms of the DBR approach both within the teaching team and with teaching staff. The innovative character of this intervention study lies, in addition to the inclusive teaching culture, in the scientific survey of writing competence over the course of a longer project period (longitudinal study, 10/2021-05/2022) and the recording of writing processes as a diagnostic process with the help of the digital survey platform Gorilla.sc., which took place at four measurement points (pre-, mid-, post- and follow-up testing) in randomised intervention groups as well as in control groups. The intervention study thus investigates for the first time the reciprocal influence of debating competence and writing competence.

### Data collection

The project was piloted in the first phase (11/2021-05/2022) at six schools and evaluated, reflected, and adapted in terms of the design-based research approach within the team of the chair as well as with teachers.

The schools mentioned were recruited through written contact and the subsequent declared willingness of the school headmasters and German teachers to participate in the project. In the recruitment process, a mixture of grammar and non-grammar schools was aimed for and also achieved, as the total of participating schools is made up of three grammar schools and three non-grammar schools.

The sample of the intervention study consists of pupils in grade 9. The choice of this grade is justified by the fact that at this point the pupils still have one year of preparation time until they take the examination for the MSA German in the tenth grade. Thus, on the one hand, the current state of competence in oral and written argumentation (dialectical discussion) can be determined within the ninth grade and, on the other hand, the basis for successful preparation for the examination at the end of the tenth grade can be laid at an early stage. In order to increase the validity of the longitudinal study and to be able to adequately determine the effect of the intervention in the form of the two series of lessons on debating and written argument on the students' writing competence, the total sample was differentiated into intervention groups and control groups (source). In the control groups, accordingly, no teaching series was carried out by the teaching team, but they cannot be described as "waiting groups". This is due to the fact that although debating was not a subject of learning for the students in these groups during the project period, written debate was certainly dealt with by the teachers in the control groups. The selection of the classes for the project "Fair Debate and Discussion" and the allocation to an intervention or control group was done in consultation with the German departments. This resulted in a total sample of 355 pupils for the project period, of which 239 pupils were in the intervention groups and 116 in the control groups. A further differentiation was made within the intervention groups with regard to the order of treatments D (debating) and E (written discussion) in order to answer the question of which intervention process leads to a higher quality level of discussion (see above). For this purpose, the class list was taken as a basis before the intervention began and the learning group was divided into two halves by counting (1,2,1,2) and thus randomised. As a result, within the intervention groups, the subgroups DE (started with the lesson series on debating) and ED (started with the lesson series on written argument) were formed.

The innovative character of the data collection is based on the recording of the writing processes as a process diagnosis with the help of the digital survey platform Gorilla.sc., which took place at four measurement points (pre, intermediate, post and follow-up screening) in randomised intervention groups as well as in control groups. The measurement of writing competence was realised by four writing tasks (argumentative writing) from selected intermediate secondary school exams of the past ten years. All anonymised written argumentations ( $n=1,000$ ) were holistically and analytically rated within a double-blind review process on Likert scale quantitatively (Cohen's Kappa = .828) using the IMOSS encoding (Neumann & Matthiesen, 2011). Data processing was done by R Studio by multilevel analyses.

### **Results** (*Current Calculating until 1st January 2023*)

The results show that the students, who debated first and then wrote, stayed longer in the writing plan, wrote longer texts, and obtained better text qualities (overall impression and language



pragmatics. Beyond that there is the highest significant correlation between the measurement points and all dependent variables in all groups. The students of both intervention groups were more promoted in building up literacy skills (debating and written argumentation) than the control group. In the non-higher education track we can see significantly writing efforts, if they first debate, and in the second step write their argumentation. The SRSD writing approach promotes the text quality during the treatment E for students in non-higher education track.

Table 1. Writing results (descriptive) of all participants

	t <sub>1</sub>		t <sub>2</sub>		t <sub>3</sub>		t <sub>4</sub>
	Pre-test n = 270 M (SD)		Intermediate-test n = 279 M (SD)		Post-test n = 265 M (SD)		Follow-up-test n = 267
	IG	CG	IG	CG	IG	CG	
Inadequate texts <sup>1</sup>	n = 191 n = 65	n = 79 n = 24	n = 190 n = 17	n = 89 n = 12	n = 177 n = 13	n = 88 n = 12	
Overall Impression <sup>2</sup>	1.59 (0.69)	1.96 (0.85)	2.62 (0.84)	2.44 (0.86)	2.81 (0.83)	2.64 (0.93)	
Language Systematics <sup>3</sup>	2.55 (1.24)	3.00 (1.13)	3.39 (0.78)	3.30 (0.92)	3.39 (0.75)	3.34 (0.87)	
Language Pragmatics <sup>4</sup>	1.88 (0.80)	2.29 (0.90)	2.99 (0.91)	2.79 (0.95)	3.20 (0.82)	2.99 (0.98)	
Words (text)	112 (88)	158 (98)	297 (159)	270 (174)	320 (138)	281 (132)	
Words (plan)	136 (85)	118 (114)	225 (150)	211 (149)	250 (141)	307 (732)	
Time (text; ms)	572,117 (307,322)	933,840 (540,630)	1,261,178 (589,422)	1,078,564 (593,417)	1,211,227 (569,687)	941,529 (633,548)	
Time (text; min)	9.53 (5.12)	15.64 (9.01)	21.01 (9.82)	17.97 (9.89)	20.81 (9.49)	15.69 (10.55)	
Time (plan; ms)	904,482 (448,255)	835,714 (599,804)	1,450,461 (745,776)	1,419,020 (723,266)	1,480,899 (844,911)	1,290,810 (892,016)	
Time (plan; min)	15.07 (7.47)	13.92 (9.99)	24.17 (12.42)	23.65 (12.05)	24.68 (14.08)	21.51 (14.86)	
Switches	8 (7)	9 (9)	19 (12)	17 (12)	19 (10)	18 (13)	

Note.

<sup>1</sup> Failed writing task or less than two sentences

<sup>2</sup> MIN 1/MAX 5 (holistic text encoding) Cohens Kappa .828

<sup>3</sup> MIN 1/MAX 5 (IMOSS text encoding, 4 items) Cohens Kappa .700

<sup>4</sup> MIN 1/MAX 5 (IMOSS text encoding, 5 items) Cohens Kappa .727

### Ad 1st Hypothesis

The Pearson correlation is highly significant (n=622  $r = ,365$   $**p < 0.01$ ) between the time in the editor field and the text quality. It is highly significant (n=622  $r = ,174$   $**p < 0.01$ ) between the time in the writing plan and the text quality. The correlation is highly significant (n=622  $r = ,484$   $**p < 0.01$ ) between the number of switches between the editor field and the writing plan on the one hand and the text quality on the other hand.

### Ad 2nd Hypothesis

The Pearson correlation is highly significant (n= 622  $r = ,805$   $**p < 0.01$ ) between the number of words in the text and the text quality. This correlation is highly significant (n=622  $r = ,315$   $**p < 0.01$ ) between the number of words in the writing plan and the text quality.

### Ad 3rd Hypothesis

The average of overall impression increases higher in the intervention group, which first debates and then writes in the treatment, than in the other treatment and the control group. The average of language systematics increases in all groups. The average of language pragmatics increases higher in the intervention group, which first debates and then writes in the treatment, than in the treatment and the control group.

#### *Ad 4th Hypothesis*

The average of the number of words in the text (editor field) increases higher in the intervention group, which first debates and then writes in the treatment, than in the treatment and the control group.

#### *Ad 5th Hypothesis*

The average of time in the editor field increases in both intervention groups higher than in the control group. The average of time in the writing plan increases higher in the intervention group, which first debates and then writes in the treatment, than in the treatment and the control group.

#### *Ad 6th Hypothesis*

The average of the number of switches between the editor field and the writing plan increases in all groups.

The results illustrate the relevance of longitudinal intervention studies according to the design-based research approach to initiate transfer processes between educational research and teaching practice and to improve writing skills of students at lower secondary school.

### **Conclusion**

The results showed that the students, who debated first and then wrote, stayed longer in the writing plan, wrote longer texts, and obtained better text qualities (overall impression and language pragmatics). Text quality (overall impression) is highly significantly related to the number of words in the editor field, and in the writing plan. Furthermore, text quality is influenced highly significantly by the time in the editor field, the time in the writing plan, and the number of switches between editor field, and writing plan. Beyond that there is an most significant correlation between the measurement points and all dependent variables in all groups. The students of both intervention groups were more promoted in building up literacy skills (debating and written argumentation) than the control group.

The limitations of the study are, that the team of the chair made no observations in control groups (only self-reports of the teachers). This pilot study focused at first only regional schools in the county. More research in national and international context is needed. We did not collect any personal data from the participants. The cooperation between university research and school practice is to be deepened in the long term through this project. Good practice approaches are to result from the project as a transfer to teacher training and further teacher training. Through the empirical analysis, inclusion-didactic teaching models are to be further developed in university research, offering solutions for practice. Thus, further school-based intervention studies in a quasi-experimental design are needed. With the help of the planned support measures within the intervention study, all pupils should be able to participate politically in the sense of inclusion and thus be a valuable part of society.

*„Let us share our knowledge and experience! (Winnie-Karen Giera)“*

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### More Details

<https://www.uni-potsdam.de/en/inklusive-deutschdidaktik/research/research-project-i-fair-debating-and-written-argumentation>

### Institutional Description

The Junior Professorship for German Didactics in an Inclusive Context/Special Educational Needs in Language and Communication (Secondary Level) is located at the University of Potsdam, Department for German Studies at the Philosophy of Arts. Over the next few years, we will be investigating how students' (with and without language support needs) linguistic and communicative skills can be promoted in cultural/political/vocational school projects (<https://www.uni-potsdam.de/en/inklusive-deutschdidaktik/>). One quarter of all students at the university is studying in the teacher education. The University of Potsdam is the only central university, who is responsible for teacher education in the county Brandenburg in Germany. The research project was financial supported by the university.

Bearing in mind the concept of inclusion, all pupils should be able to participate culturally, politically and professionally with the help of empirically evaluated support measures.

### Key Theorists

- Learning: Constructivism, Motivation
- Writing interventions in this field : Steve Graham & Karen Harris (SRSD, 1996, 2017); John Hayes (1980, 1996, 2012); Gert Rijlaarsdam; Becker-Mrotzek; Joachim Grabowski

### Glossary

- SRSD
- Jugend debattiert
- Inclusion

DRAFT