
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FEATURES
FOUND IN ESSAYS WRITTEN BY SELECTED
BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS FOR THE
NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL
PROGRESS (NAEP) AND THE NEW JERSEY HIGH
SCHOOL PROFICIENCY TEST

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This session began with a summary of the results of a comparative analysis of writing features found in essays written by selected Black and White eighth grade and/or 13 year-old students for the 1983-84 National Assessment of Educational Progress with features found in essays written by 9th grade Black students for the New Jersey High School Proficiency Test.

In phase one of the investigation, four readers read a random sample of 133 essays in an attempt to identify and compare features in the students' writing. In this initial reading, the readers identified fourteen specific features. They classified these features into fourteen categories: grammar and syntax, organization, task perception, and cultural influence. NAEP used this classification scheme in phase two of the investigation to analyze a larger sample (373) of students' essays.

In widely disseminated reports of students' performances in national and state assessments, Black students have consistently scored lower than White students. While this investigation does not evaluate students' writing abilities, it offers a detailed description of observable features in the students' writing. The investigation emanates from the premise that the strategies students use to write essays for assessment purposes can serve as keys to effective instruction and improved performances.

The session included a review of the classification scheme used in the analysis, examples of the features found in four modes of writing (imaginative, informative, persuasive, and narrative), and numerical comparisons of the number of times the features were found in Black and White students' essays.