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Abstract

This research project began by asking the question: Does the use of prewriting strategies improve the overall quality of student writing? Research was conducted within a tutoring program for struggling writers and a local school. Data was collected by teacher questionnaires, student work samples, student interviews, and field notes. It was found that students who use prewriting strategies such as graphic organizers are capable of better quality writing. The data collected implied that if taught the appropriate strategies and resources by their teachers, and given enough time, students writing quality can improve.

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Prewriting Strategies and their Effect on Student Writing

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Abstract

This research project began by asking the question: Does the use of prewriting strategies improve the overall quality of student writing? Research was conducted within a tutoring program for struggling writers and a local school. Data was collected by teacher questionnaires, student work samples, student interviews, and field notes. It was found that students who use prewriting strategies such as graphic organizers are capable of better quality writing. The data collected implied that if taught the appropriate strategies and resources by their teachers, and given enough time, students writing quality can improve.

Prewriting Strategies and their Effect on Student Writing

The topic of this research paper is the importance of prewriting strategies to the organization and portrayed ideas in student writing. The focus strategy for this study is the use of graphic organizers in improving student writing. Prewriting strategies are essential for students to learn and use throughout their school career and well into college. These strategies can take on the role of not only organizing student writing, but also helping students form ideas, define their voice, and develop higher level word choice. The experience of prewriting allows students the time and space to form their ideas. During this process they have the time to edit these ideas and further develop what avenues their writing piece is going to take. Exploring the use of voice prior to writing also gives students a chance to develop the opinion in which their paper is going to take on. By thinking about which direction their writing will take during the prewriting stage, students may develop a deeper understanding of how their voice impacts their writing as a whole (Breetvelt et. al., 1994).

According to Kucer (2009), the planning process of writing is extremely important and greatly influences the impact on which language is and can be produced. This planning, or pre-writing, gives the writer more of an opportunity to consider and reconsider not only the meaning of the message written but also the language used to convey that message. Kucer further acknowledges that writers obtain goals by beginning with a plan. These plans direct the writer from where they currently are in the writing process, to where the writer desires to be when the piece is completed. The plans, in turn, assist student writers in developing a concrete message that is then able to be shared through their writing.

It is important that students of all ages are exposed to different kinds of strategies to use during the writing process so they produce higher quality work and have a better probability of

performing the task well. Students who are exposed to many different prewriting strategies have the potential to have superior writing ability over those students who are not. Those students who have the knowledge of prewriting strategies and use them to plan their writing will have higher academic success over those who neither know nor use such strategies. Students who are not taught to use prewriting strategies struggle in different areas of writing, especially the areas of organization, creation of ideas, and word choice (Sinatra et. al. 1984). It is possible that these students will academically suffer in the long run. Kucer (2009) recognizes that struggling writers also show minimal concern toward the prewriting process. In contrast, writers with a higher ability recurrently develop a plan before beginning to write and are therefore more successful.

All students have the potential to benefit greatly from the use of prewriting strategies. When using graphic organizers as a prewriting strategy, users have a place where all of their information and ideas are stored in an organized fashion. When the information is organized in a consistent way, the user can revisit the work numerous times. Due to this organized, structured method, it is possible that writers, including those who struggle, would benefit from the use of prewriting strategies.

All ability levels can use prewriting strategies successfully (Horton et. al., 2001). In fact, distinguished authors use strategies such as these when planning to write best selling novels. It is a tool that can be used to support any type of writer; young or old, person's with disabilities, struggling students, or anyone who needs organization to be able to write well. Simple teacher modeling can even be used as a prewriting strategy. In Greece, New York, Maryrita Maier, a noted elementary school teacher, never sent students to write without modeling it first. She did this to scaffold student learning in her classroom. Because she modeled and was sure her students understood the concept prior to sending them to write independently, her students were

more successful in their own writing processes (Larson and Marsh, 2005). Another valuable

component of utilizing prewriting strategies is their ability to keep writers on task. In the case of

graphic organizers, the template in front of users can serve as a reminder of what they are

supposed to be thinking about, where they are in the writing process, and what they are

responsible for next.

       In order to investigate this issue, prewriting strategies usefulness and utilization was

researched through academic research based journal articles, questionnaires answered by

teachers of students in kindergarten through eighth grade, as well as actual implementation of

graphic organizers as a prewriting process to students in primary grades. While working with

students in a tutoring program, their writing abilities were assessed prior to using a graphic

organizer in the prewriting stage. After their writing piece was scored using the 6+1 writing traits

rubric, they were then introduced to a number of graphic organizers to use during the remaining

tutoring sessions. These graphic organizers included the hamburger strategy, webs, and

beginning, middle and end charts. The students writing will then be reassessed using the 6+1

writing traits rubric. The information gathered was then analyzed in order to find if in fact the

use of these strategies assist students in the writing processes.

       The main question of this study was does the use of prewriting strategies improve the

overall quality of student writing? To help me research this question, a questionnaire was

distributed to teachers at a local school, interviews of students were conducted, and student work

samples were assessed pre and post implementation of prewriting strategy instruction. It was

proven through the research of literature and the data collected in this study that the use of

prewriting strategies does in fact improve the overall quality of student writing by supporting

students through the writing process. What was also found was that writing is a social practice

and is highly connected to the make-up of the sociocultural theory which recognizes that acquisition of literacy is based not only on formal teaching, but relies heavily on the social aspect as well (Gee, 1989). Ironically the subject of writing, though it is so widely used in society, was found to be the subject that teachers feel the most unprepared to teach. This ill-preparation is linked within the research to the education that teachers are receiving in college and teacher certification programs and it was found that many changes must be made to remedy this lack of confidence.

Theoretical Framework

The topic of literacy can not be loosely defined as it is an ever changing process of acquiring and using language. According to Gee (1989), literacy is defined as the control of secondary uses of language, whereas Freebody and Luke (1990), define literacy as "a multifaceted set of social practices with a material technology, entailing code breaking, participating with the knowledge of text, social uses of text, and analysis/critique of text" (p. 15). Based on these definitions it is clear that literacy cannot be defined simply. Literacy depends on the sociocultural theory which states that higher-order functions, such as learning how to write, grow out of social interaction (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Essentially, literacy is a social practice that has the ability to change depending on the situation. Literacy is moldable and influenced by society which continually changes. Neither is ever static.

The sociocultural theory recognizes literacy as a socially learned concept by defining the child as an active participant in a community of learners where knowledge is created and built upon (Larson & Marsh, 2005). All literary knowledge that children begin school with is created in the social environment from which they came. In this sense, it is necessary for teachers to recognize children as culturally relevant individuals. With the sociocultural theory, children are

recognized as holding pertinent literary knowledge and skills that were created from the society they were an active member of (Larson & Marsh, 2005).

Writing is a complex form of literacy. It's made up of small units in a symbolical system, yet the symbols used are in no way connected to their meaning when combined. There is no way beyond modeling and use of formal strategies to help students understand the meaning behind writing. The sociocultural theory recognizes that acquisition of literacy is based not only on formal teaching, but relies heavily on the exposure to models and the process of trial and error, which usually occur in natural settings (Gee, 1989).

For example, prewriting strategies or strategies that aid in the writing process are primarily taught using modeling. The teacher must set up instruction so that the students can visually see and experience how the strategy works before independently tackling the task. In relation to Edelsky's example of learning to ride a bike, the students must learn from another who is proficient (Larson & Marsh, 2005). In his example, Edelsky explains that we do not learn to ride a bike first by peddling, steering and balancing, but by the help from someone who already knows how. In relation to writing, "people learn to write by writing with the assistance of an expert or more proficient other" (p. 104). To continue this explanation, Rogoff discusses the sociocultural theory in relation to writing in that writing is a social act. Writing as a social act is especially true when there is prewriting involved because the participants or students writing in the classroom setting are community writers/learners (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Within the classroom setting, the teacher corresponds to the apprenticeship role which "arranges the activities for learning and regulates the task's difficulty" (p. 108). The learners are then led through guided practice where the teacher models expert performance of the task at hand. Lastly, the learners enter guided participation where they coordinate the modeled example with their

background knowledge and with what they are working on individually. In writing centers,

learners can also model for each other, promoting a learner centered writing community. The

sociocultural theory recognizes that all of the influences a child has had prior to writing and the

influences they bring to writing in the classroom are all vital resources.

The reasoning behind the sociocultural theory is that developing writers base their writing

off of what they learn or see in society. The linguistic principle, which according to Goodman

(1984) is "the understandings that children have about how written language is organized and

displayed," supports that children who are not formally taught can still write conventionally;

meaning they can still understand that writing is written left to right and top to bottom without

any formal lesson instruction (p.320). However, children not only use imitation as a learning tool

for writing, they also have the ability to hypothesize about the form of language itself due to the

observations they make of those writing around them.

As far as imitation of the writing process is concerned, it has been studied and proven

that having an adult as a demonstrator encourages children in the literacy acquisition process

(Larson & Marsh, 2005). The way language is used around children will determine what skills

they will obtain through observation. For example, if parents in a home demonstrate writing in

different ways such as lists, journals, phone messages, and recipes, the child will understand and

desire to write simply through the exposure.

The use of prewriting strategies ties into the sociocultural framework in that it is a

process for modeling what good writing looks like from those who are proficient in the process.

If students are exposed to prewriting strategies by their parents, teachers and other writers, the

students will see the benefit that is associated with their use. Within this study, students will be

exposed to tools to help them become successful writers. With the encouragement, teaching, and

tools provided for support, the hope is that these struggling writers will rely on not only the tools

provided, but also on writing to lead them to be successful.

Research Question

Given that literacy is a social practice and learning occurs during social interaction, this

action research project asks, how does the use of graphic organizers as a prewriting strategy

improve the writing organization and idea generation of the student writer?

Literature Review

What is required of a well informed research study is the investigation of previously

researched information related to the topic. In the following literature review an examination of

four distinct themes are presented after careful preparation. The first theme investigates teacher

preparation to teach writing. Nationwide, it has been unveiled that schools are not targeting

writing in the curriculums of both elementary and secondary schools as well as colleges and

universities. The later is leaving teachers unprepared to properly and confidently teach writing,

therefore perpetuating the cycle. The second theme explores a possible partial remedy to the lack

of writing preparation in schools. Introducing prewriting strategies to students of all ages,

learning styles, and abilities has been proven to enhance writing quality overall. The third theme

further explores the usefulness of strategies such as graphic organizers to aid struggling writers

and students with learning disabilities. The theme explains the process in which these minority

learners attend to as well as the possible strategies that can parallel these said processes and aid

these students in viewing themselves as, along with becoming, successful writers. Lastly this

research explains the classroom as compared to the ever changing society in which it is housed.

The discussion follows the problems with keeping up with the race of technology and

implementing new literacies while still teaching time-honored strategies that are still beneficial

to students.

Within this review of literature, strategies and suggestions are presented to generally aid

in the preparation to bring writing back into the classroom as an important and valuable part of

the curriculum. While not all strategies and suggestions are useful in every situation, it has been

disproved that any harm can be done by implementing their use within classroom walls.

Teacher Preparation and Experience to Teach Writing

With the onset of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, there is now such a greater push

for reading in schools that writing has been overlooked as an important piece of the school

curriculum in both elementary and secondary schools, as well as colleges and universities

(Grisham & Wolsey, 2011; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Cutler, 2008). Writing, though it is

currently being overlooked, is a subject that is important across all areas. Because of this greater

push for reading in schools, teacher candidates may become prepared for teaching different

reading skills and be exposed to useful and vital strategies for reading success, but they may see

little or no writing instruction during their field placements (Fry & Griffin, 2010). The

combination of little writing instruction inside the college classroom and the lack of

opportunities to observe veteran teachers of writing, leads to teacher candidates not getting the

proper education on how to teach the process of writing to their future students.

Unfortunately it has been proven through use of nationwide surveys that when compared

to the other subjects they are required to teach, teachers feel the least prepared to teach writing

(Cutler, 2008). The fact is there is little concrete preparation teachers are required to have in

writing to become certified, and because of this, teachers are left uninformed of effective

instructional strategies for their own students who are working through the writing process

(Grisham & Wolsey, 2011). This concrete preparation is what makes the difference between

teachers feeling ready to teach the writing process and feeling ill-equipped. Startling as it may

be, few states actually require their teacher candidates to enroll in writing courses in order to

become certified teachers (Fry & Griffin, 2010). As for the few teacher candidates who are

actually required to pass writing courses to become certified, the timeframe in which they take

these courses is not beneficial to them long term. In one instance, teacher candidates were

enrolled in a writing course during their sophomore year, therefore much time had elapsed

between learning the material and having the opportunity to teach it, especially for those who

choose to continue their education in something other than writing prior to beginning their

teaching career (Fry & Griffin, 2010). With so much time between learning the material and

teaching it, it is unreasonable to expect teachers to know what to do when the time comes to

teach their students the writing process. Sadly, the expectation for teachers to know how to teach

writing successfully is unrealistic. In order for teacher candidates to feel prepared to teach the

writing process, there must be changes to the collegial programs and certification requirements

improving the education received by our nation's teachers.

One factor that encourages teachers to feel confident in their teaching is the quality of

teacher self-efficacy (Al-Bataineh et. al., 2010). Self-efficacy is what is responsible for a person

to feel confident in what they are doing. Data has shown that teacher preparation programs, if

properly administered, have the power to change the dispositions of teacher candidates about to

enter the teaching profession by raising their self-efficacy (Grisham and Wosley, 2011). A

positive disposition can be the key to feeling self-assured. Self-efficacy can be defined as the

belief in one's own abilities to organize and execute courses of action required in order to

produce desired outcomes (Al-Bataineh et. al., 2010). Self-efficacy cannot replace good quality preparation. Teachers require it because it affects self motivation, effort, choice of activities, and perseverance in the face of difficulty which is what all teachers face on a daily basis within the classroom (Al-Bataineh et. al., 2010). With both proper preparation and self-efficacy practice, teachers can lead their students into becoming the little train that could. With this attitude and proper education administered by their teacher, students can become successful writers.

Promotion of self-efficacy for teacher candidates, current teachers, and elementary students alike, is only possible by being exposed to positive personal writing experiences, model teachers, and exposure to positive attitudes concerning the writing process. Positive experiences such as these can assist learners to gain the persistence that gets them to the other side of the mountain, whereas negative experiences can lead learners to defeat and surrender (Al-Bataineh et al., 2010). Though self-efficacy encourages positive production in the classroom, those with seemingly high self-efficacy can still find areas in need of improvement, it is not a one fix solution.

An important feature of meaningful writing instruction is teachers' self-efficacy in relation to this topic, however; this confidence and drive stems from teacher education and training. Due to the greater push for reading education, there is a lack of education for teachers to teach writing which is a possible determinant for why students nationwide are falling behind in writing (Cutler, 2008). Because of this determinant, students are now entering classrooms lacking grade level proficiency in writing. With 2/3 of students testing below grade-level proficiency, changes need to be made to the curriculum in order to prepare students for college and occupational success (Cutler, 2008; Gilbert & Graham, 2010). The problem lies within the curriculum of both grade schools as well as high education programs. Fry and Griffin (2010)

further agree that the curriculum changes need not only change for elementary schools, but also

for colleges and universities so that teachers are better prepared. The preparation that teachers

feel they have translates to their students. Until changes are made, student writing will continue

to decline. Grisham and Wosley (2011) and Gilbert and Graham (2010) also argue that writing

should be a target for instruction in elementary schools; however, effective teaching has not been

reached. In order to remedy this, they suggest that elements of writing that are missing be

investigated by survey of teacher candidates currently enrolled. This questions what elements are

lacking and what effect college courses do and don't have on the learning process of teaching.

They concur that more data needs to be collected about what is actually going on behind school

walls as the only thing known for sure is that more time is necessary to properly teach writing.

Time is needed within the classroom to teach a variety of writing types as well as to provide

differentiated instruction for struggling writers (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). As of right now,

according to a national survey conducted by Gilbert and Graham, the only difference between

target student instruction and struggling student instruction is that struggling students are given

more time to complete their work, yet even that has little effect on their educational outcome

because instruction provided is still inadequate. Time also affects teacher candidates. It allows

more practice with skills they will be required to teach. Teacher candidates should be given more

time and opportunities to observe veteran teachers and try new skills with students (Fry &

Griffin, 2010). The opportunity here is to allow teachers' access to seasoned teachers and their

practice. The extra time can be used to observe and try newly learned skills with students which

will then contribute to the creation of more confident teachers (Al-Bataineh et. al., 2010).

   To change the current curriculum it is recommended that the process of writing be broken

down into components (Cutler, 2008; Dunn, 2011; Gilbert & Graham, 2010). Breaking down the

writing process into components is both beneficial to the teacher and the learner. An effective

strategy for doing this is by introducing the 6+1 writing traits to the curriculum. These traits

break writing down into smaller, easily teachable parts such as ideas, organization, voice, and

word choice. These parts can later be combined by both teacher and student. The language used

pertaining to the 6+1 traits is made up of vocabulary that is also easily exchangeable between

teacher and student (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). With the 6+1 rubric's simplistic and teachable

components, it gives any teacher the self-efficacy to teach it confidently. When teachers'

confidence increases with use of this strategy, in turn, students then build self-efficacy in using

it. Using strategies such as this help the teacher stray from assigning the same monotonous

coursework of worksheets and reading responses, which reflect a time when writing was not seen

of value. Rather, writing was assigned and corrected without feedback, which is what the

curriculum has been leaning on since even before the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Gilbert

& Graham, 2010; Jasmine & Weiner, 2007).

Improvements in Learning with the Use of Prewriting Strategies

Writing is a demanding subject because within the process there are many steps to

completion. These include finding resources, formulating goals, planning writing, generating

content, translating ideas into language and then finally revising the work (Lee & Tan, 2010).

Not only do students have to know the process of writing and understand each required step, they

must also complete the process in a logical order. As cited in Kolade (2012), Oluikpe (1979)

explains that writing is a "skill which demands that students plan and organize their imagination

clearly in sequential order", which is a daunting task for many writers, even for those who are

skilled (p.20) Skilled writers must follow the rule of writing and it is a difficult task. Those who

have less skill, especially early or struggling writers, may need support in this area to be successful.

Prewriting strategies are widely used to help tame this task. These strategies have been taught in schools for generations. Some prewriting strategies not only help with the writing task itself, but also with comprehension in content areas (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002). Some prewriting strategies are used for specific types of writing, while others are generic. Examples of these strategies include, but are not limited to, brainstorming, role playing, graphic organizers, observation, clustering, modeling, webbing, think aloud, tables, and outlines (Martin et. al., 2005; Nesbit & Adesope, 2006; Lee & Tan, 2010; Voon, 2010). At lower levels of education, think aloud, role playing and brainstorming are more widely used; however, these strategies can be used with any aged student. According to Voon (2010), role playing and brainstorming are both prewriting activities that assist participants in "generation of ideas for the content of their writing, which enables them to write more developed" pieces (p. 540). Creating more developed writing pieces takes a lot of practice and time, especially for younger students. Using simple strategies the student may already be familiar with, like brainstorming and role playing, help students solidify their thinking and ideas about the writing task, therefore improving their writing overall. Voon defines brainstorming as a means of getting a large number of ideas in a short amount of time. With brainstorming, it is important that the participants realize that it is the quantity that matters, not the quality. The goal is to get students to generate multiple ideas, which is the first step in the writing process for any writer, no matter their skill level (Alber-Morgan et. al., 2007; Voon, 2010). They then have the opportunity to build on those ideas later on in the writing process.

Role playing is another prewriting activity meant to engage students in the process of writing. It is intended to encourage students to experiment with roles and situations otherwise not readily accessible in real life (Voon, 2010). By role playing, students are getting a chance to act out what they will eventually put on paper. When acting, they are practicing with the functions of the language they are using. They are also able to visualize what the reader of their writing piece will see if they choose to add it to their composition. This visualization helps students to confidently make the decisions about what will and won't be added to their piece (Voon).

The next step in writing after ideas are formed, either by brainstorming and role playing or other methods of idea generation, is outlining. Kellogg (1987) explains that by using a text outline, students increase their overall quality of writing. This is where the planning stage of writing is addressed. Skilled writers plan and revise their plans prior to beginning to write (Breetvelt et. al., 1984). Prewriting can take on many different forms. It can be in the form of an outline, a web, an idea map, etc. Prewriting can also be done with the teacher leading a group brainstorming, it can allow students to pre-write with partners or within groups, or students can pre-write alone (Alber-Morgan, 2007).

There are many ways to plan writing. One example is by use of graphic organizers. Graphic organizers were originally designed for activating prior knowledge and relating old and new information (Nesbit & Adesope, 2006). They were called structured overviews, as they are spatial arrangements of information including words, statements, and/or pictures intended to represent relationships between content (Nesbit & Adesope, 2006; Lee & Tan, 2010; Horton, Lovitt, & Bergerud, 2001). Graphic organizers have many uses. They can serve as lecture aids, study materials, and support in collaborative learning (Nesbit & Adesope, 2006). They are also used as visuals that help students map out their thoughts prior to writing. According to Alber-

Morgan et. al. (2007) graphic organizers help students organize their work so that later when

they are writing they don't lose track of what the goal is. They state that "if students know what

they are shooting for they may be better able to produce the desired product" (p. 115). Using

graphic organizers not only helps organize initial thoughts and ideas, they also help writers track

their progress over time. During this time, writers may choose to change or mold their writing

piece along the way. Novice writers in particular do better with the use of visuals and goals

because they fulfill their cognitive needs by being able to view the relationships between their

ideas and concepts (Lee & Tan, 2010). With writing being such a demanding process, many

writers find it useful to map out their thought process prior to writing anything down. During the

planning process it is beneficial to share ideas and confer with others (Kolade, 2012). Within the

classroom, students can share their plan with peers and teachers for feedback. This process is

made easier when the students' plans are in graphic organizer form. The reason for this is that

both parties can visually see the relationships the writer has created and because of this, higher

quality discussion between peers takes place (Lee & Tan, 2010). In Lee and Tan's (2010) study,

they found that students enjoy this part of the writing process because they can gain or alter their

ideas, and ultimately change their papers for the better because of the conferencing that takes

place. In addition, novice writers feel comfortable sharing their work because of the safe

environment (Lee and Tan, 2010). At this point they are not yet expected to be conventionally

and grammatically correct, leaving appropriate room for error. As well as being comfortable with

sharing their ideas, the writers themselves can look back and easily examine the relationships

between their ideas, assess audience expectations and explore revising their work (Breetvelt et.

al., 1994). Using peers for feedback during this stage of the writing process can help build the

writers confidence as well as their creativity. They may choose to alter their writing or feel

confident leaving is unaltered all based on the reaction of their peers. The process approach, as it is called when writers present multiple pieces prior to final writing, is beneficial because it is learner centered and exposes the learners to pools of ideas while teachers can act as facilitators (Kolade, 2012).

Another purpose for graphic organizers is to show a reader the relationships between ideas represented in text (Darch et. al., 1986). Showing a reader these relationships is especially useful when studying information for content area classes such as social studies. In a study performed by Darch et. al., it was proven that students in social studies classes who used graphic organizers scored significantly higher than those in the class who did not have access to the organizers. Graphic organizers are helpful in these content classes because they have the ability to highlight the pertinent information within a text so that the student can visualize the relationships within the content (Darch et. al.). This ability to visualize relationships within the content further solidifies the information for the learner. When the student is asked to write about what they have read, the graphic organizer acts as a bridge between reading and writing (Dexter & Hughes, 2011). This repetition, where the learner goes back and forth between reading and writing, gives the learner time to process and understand the content while linking the information. The difference here is that the student is not creating the relationships for their writing; they are viewing the relationships to obtain the most important information within a text (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002).

To promote independent use of texts with graphic organizers, teachers again act as a facilitator by creating the graphic organizers to parallel the content they are presenting, and upon first presentation of the graphic organizer the teacher is responsible for explaining how to use it effectively (Dexter & Hughes, 2011). The teacher then models how to search for pertinent

information within the text and then guides students with filling in the information. Once these steps are modeled, students can independently use graphic organizers to aid their organization of textual content (Dexter & Hughes, 2011). Knowing how to effectively use graphic organizers is pertinent to student's success in comprehending the content. Nesbit and Adesope (2006) claim that the use of this type of mapping makes concepts easier to comprehend than text itself and that "using text to create the map demands more cognitive engagement" which could explain why the information can be retained for a much longer time (p. 419). Meaning, students who use graphic organizers as they are reading textual information have an easier time processing the content than if the content was only presented to them in standard text form. The reason it is easier to process is because the important information is organized in a way where it stands out to the learner, and because they are going back and forth between the information in the text and the graphic organizer, they come into contact with the information more times as well, helping solidify the retention of the information.

Using the graphic organizers as a closing activity has also been proven effective by Dexter and Hughes (2011) in their study of graphic organizers and their relationship to content learning within the elementary classroom. Their claim is that the use of graphic organizers not only improves factual recall (basic thinking) of information but also inferencing, or higher order thinking skills. This concept is further explained by DiCecco and Gleason (2002) who believe that the human mind contains skeletal frameworks with slots for specific information, also known as schema theory, which reflect the structure of graphic organizers. According to Sinatra et. al. (1984), schema theory explains "the essence of comprehension by proposing that what is understood during reading or listening is linked in some conceptual way with what existed in the mind of the learner beforehand" (p. 23). Schema is essentially a person's background knowledge.

When a person is exposed to something it becomes part of their background knowledge that can

be recalled at a later time when they are exposed to something new. These theorists believe that

because our minds are made of maps, like graphic organizers, we better understand content when

using graphic organizers because the information is presented in the same form as our mind is

structured. Because of this we link back to how Piaget (1952) described schemata as "mental

images or patterns of actions representing experiences (p. 23). These images or patterns represent

our background knowledge and become evident in our minds when they are triggered by a new

piece of information. Because of this parallel, students who use completed graphic organizers to

then write essays on what they have learned, have significantly more relational knowledge

statements within their writing than those who do not use a graphic organizer (Dexter & Hughes,

2011; DiCecco & Gleason, 2002). A reason why students are able to make these relational

knowledge statements is because they are using the graphic organizer to relate their background

knowledge to the new information they are learning. In agreement with the relationship between

knowledge gains and the use of graphic organizers, Nesbitt and Adesope (2006) created a

comparable theory as to why humans relate so well to graphic organizers. This theory is termed

duel coding. Duel coding enhances learning when the learner accompanies text or speech with

visuals. With the enhancement of learning, both student and teacher feel more competent

learning and teaching the material giving them higher self-efficacy (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002).

Students with Learning Disabilities and Their Writing Success

As explained by Garcia and Fidalgo (2008), students with seemingly the highest self-

efficacy are students with learning disabilities. These students are less aware of the learning

process which sometimes leads them into the falsity that they have the ability to produce higher

quality work than they actually have the cognitive ability to do. With writing being such a multifaceted subject, "it demands resources such as attention control, self-regulation, and working memory capacity" (p. 78). These requirements of successful writing hinder students with disabilities because these are areas in which these students have more trouble than typical students and without these requirements, writing ends up being unorganized or illogical.

Students with learning disabilities do not go through the same process that typical learners go through (Sturm & Rankin-Erikson, 2002). Students with learning disabilities have trouble with the seemingly simple or second nature tasks for typical students. The features of writing that are difficult for them include motor control tasks like handwriting, and cognitive tasks such as conventions, setting goals, content generation, organization, sentence structure and revision, which are also the features that typical learners face on a lesser degree of difficulty (Sturm & Rankin-Erikson, 2002). These tasks can become overwhelming and put a detriment on student work. In a study conducted by Garcia and Fidalgo (2008), it was found that students with learning disabilities produce writing pieces that are generally shorter than those of their typical peers and that their pieces are also incomplete, poorly organized, have structural mistakes, are incoherent, and are overall poorer in quality. Their study suggests a reason for this is that students with learning disabilities take very little time to carry out the writing process and rush through; however at the conclusion of their study it was found that these students used significantly more time than typical students to complete their compositions. What this difference also proved is that students with learning disabilities are carrying out more unrelated processes during their composition writing than typical students and have a harder time paying attention to the quality of their composition. In short, students with learning disabilities need to

spend more of that time on the planning process so that there is little room for distraction from the task at hand once they begin writing.

For this problem to be addressed, Dexter and Hughes (2011) suggest graphic organizers be used as an instructional device to assist students with learning disabilities in the writing process. As discussed prior, the main problem in writing for students is learning how to organize their ideas into logical order and cohesive statements that make sense to the reader. Prewriting strategies have the ability to help any writer with the organization of their ideas (Voon, 2010). It is reasonable to say that these strategies also service those with learning disabilities. Sturm and Rankin-Erikson (2002) have studied the use of graphic organizers with students with learning disabilities. Their goal in teaching this prewriting strategy was to assist students with learning disabilities with the self-regulation in order for them to develop independent skills for planning and monitoring their own writing. The thought behind the use of this strategy is that the mapping style of the graphic organizer "helps to decrease the cognitive load for students with learning disabilities" (p. 134). By decreasing the cognitive load, or amount of extra thought involved in the writing process, students have more cognitive ability to focus on the most important aspects of writing. The overall outcome of their study was that students with learning disabilities who used graphic organizers as prewriting strategies to assist them in the writing process, produced longer writing pieces that were more organized and had better structure, however the complexity of the writing did not change. What this means is that the writing process was enhanced by use of the graphic organizer but the writing produced was of diminished complexity due to cognitive ability of the student producing the writing. It is possible however, that with the right combination of strategies, students with learning disabilities can come full circle and produce high quality writing.

Graphic organizers have also been recommended as an instructional device used to assist students with learning disabilities in understanding unfamiliar content. According to Dexter and Hughes (2011), types of graphic organizers such as cognitive and semantic maps support organization in student reading and writing. They believe that these strategies help students to recognize main ideas and supporting details within lecture and text and also locating key concepts. Horton, Lovitt, & Bergerud (2001) agree that less skilled learners require these adaptive techniques in order to manage the information produced in lecture and text in order to be successful learners. The study conducted by Horton, Lovitt, & Bergerud, as well as a study conducted by DiCecco and Gleason (2002), proved that students with learning disabilities who used some sort of graphic organizer when listening to a lecture or reading a text retained more relational knowledge than they did without the assistance of the organizer. The result of using graphic organizers when learning content material is simple. Information is organized and structured in way that will be more accessible for the learner. Extraneous information that would otherwise distract students with learning disabilities from the more important content has been eliminated resulting in students coming out of the lesson with more retention of the knowledge that is most pertinent to the lesson (DiCecco & Gleason, 2002; Horton et al, 2001).

In a study directed by Horton, Lovitt, & Bergerud (2001), graphic organizers were studied to determine the best time of the lesson to implement them. It was found that by implementing the graphic organizer at any time during the lesson was beneficial to the learner because the organizers aid in comprehension but it was found most beneficial when implemented at the end of the lesson. In another study performed by Darch et. al. (1986), it was also found that graphic organizers were best utilized nearing the end of a lesson because they assisted in the wrap up of a mass amount of information presented. These post-organizers, as they are termed

by Horton, Lovitt, & Bergerud (2001), were used in a life science class in a secondary classroom

to see if material presented in text and lecture format could be recalled by use of the graphic

organizer provided. Since the organizer was based specifically on what had just been taught, the

students with learning disabilities as well as typical students performed better at recalling the

information and creating relational knowledge. Dexter and Hughes (2001) suggest that using

graphic organizers in content areas has a lasting effect on the students who use them. They also

believe that the content area of science is most greatly affected because of its foreign nature.

Science has many terms and relationships that are unfamiliar. Dexter and Hughes believe that it

is that unfamiliarity that makes the graphic organizer even more worth while.

　　　　While graphic organizers seem to lead students into the direction of higher order thinking

and retention of information, it must be remembered that the use of the graphic organizer can

only be effective if the teacher explicitly teaches the students how to use the graphic organizer

correctly (Horton et. al., 1993). Without the modeling of how to effectively use graphic

organizers or other prewriting strategies, learners may end up confused, causing more stress on

their cognitive load. Granted, it has been proven that no student harm is possible by the use of

graphic organizers their value is solely based on the method in which it is used (Dexter and

Hughes, 2001; Sturm & Rankin-Erikson, 2002; Lorenz et. al., 2009). Also, the teachers

effectiveness is based on their success in modeling the procedure needed to use the graphic

organizer and providing corrective feedback to its users. These roles that the teacher fills are

what will positively impact the strategy's effectiveness.

Combining New Literacies with Time-Honored Literacy Customs

The New London Group is credited with coining the term *multiliteracies* which set out to "broaden our understanding of what it means to be literate by attending to multiple modes of representation and the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity" (Bogard and McMackin, 2012, p. 313). What this means for future classrooms is that there will be changes made to time-honored literacy customs. These cherished customs will soon be altered or displaced altogether in order to keep classrooms up with the progression of literacy. Today's classroom setting is one of change. Teachers are struggling to keep up with the ever changing technological society in which we live. Where education is concerned however, the change must make sense and must be implemented at a slower pace to be sure of its effectiveness.

Unfortunately it has been proven through many studies that the desire to write diminishes as children get older, so something must be done now (Clippard & Nicaise, 1998). This diminishing desire among aging students is especially true for struggling writers and students with learning disabilities. The problem is that in most classrooms writing instruction is devoted to composing stories, prose or poems, and is usually driven by basal texts in tightly sequenced lessons where skill and drill practice as well as worksheets dominate the lesson plan. Tightly sequenced and skill and drill lessons are especially evident in special education classrooms (Clippard & Nicaise, 1998). These types of lessons are not authentic for students. Teachers struggle to find effective ways to engage students in the writing process and help them be successful (Lorenz et. al., 2009). Writer's workshop has been a proven method to curing both of these issues.

Writer's workshop has been proven to increase students' willingness to write, independence, attitude, and selection of topics or genres (Clippard & Nicaise, 1998). It's an authentic approach because it embraces natural activities and practices displayed by expert

writers such as peer conferencing and sharing of final products. Writer's workshop is generally

the same in every classroom observed using it (Clippard & Nicaise, 1998; Martin et. al., 2005).

Each student in the classroom is a working author. The teacher acts as the writing professional

who guides the 'authors' as they explore writing (Roth and Guinee, 2011). Instead of spending

the majority of the class time on worksheets for spelling and grammar, handwriting and other

skills, writer's workshop focuses on the act of writing itself. After a few lessons on what is

expected to be done during writer's workshop, students manage their own development in a self-

directed way. The lessons that appear in writer's workshop are short and isolated and focus on

real world issues so that each piece of writing is authentic (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). The

workshop portion of the class is just as important as the writing portion. Students share their

work with the class, attend peer conferences and editing, and collect their work in portfolios. The

aspect of peer conferencing within writer's workshop helps students to edit and improve their

quality of written expression which further authenticates the process (Alber-Morgan et. al, 2007).

Authenticating the writing process helps students view the process as exciting and worth while.

They are not only writing for themselves and the teacher, they are writing for an audience. The

workshop encourages students to take writing seriously, to think of themselves as writers and to

learn to interact with their own writing (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007).

Writer's workshop is a newer literacy that has been implemented in the classroom in

recent years but even it has now been surpassed as the newest of literacies. In studies performed

by various researchers, some of the older literacies, the graphic organizer and writer's workshop,

were blended with the use of computer technology (Bogard & McMackin, 2012; Lorenz et. al.,

2009; Lan et. al., 2011). Blending newer and older practices is important because it combines

time honored writing practices that have been proven effective with newer practices that may

prove to be effective in their own right. This type of study has been done before by Sturm and Rankin-Erikson (2002) where students created graphic organizers in one of two ways, pencil and paper, or computer software. In all studies, participants created graphic organizers in one of the two ways. Proof from the studies performed showed that hand drawn maps and computer generated maps both improved the overall quality of writing by generation of a greater number of ideas and the organization of the information written, but that the complexity of writing was the same regardless of the mode in which the graphic organizer was created, both showing equal improvement (Lorenz et. al., 2009; Lan et. al., 2011). While not all areas of writing were exemplary, improvement in any area is desired. This equal improvement was not the expectation of Lan et. al. (2011) who thought that the use of pictures and other technology produced material within the graphic organizer would enhance student writing over students who did not use the technology available.

In the study first performed by Sturm and Rankin-Erikson (2002), a base line group who produced no graphic organizer prior to writing was assessed. A baseline group is extremely important because it shows the researcher the writing abilities of the participants on their own without the support of any type of prewriting strategy. The same group then used graphic organizers created by one of the two previously discussed methods. Immediately following the prewriting strategy, participants moved into the drafting stage. After assessment, it was proven that the mapping group, including students with learning disabilities, had significant increases above their baseline writing samples, proving that prewriting strategies support the process of writing for any type of learner (Lorenz et. al., 2009; Sturm & Rankin-Erikson, 2002). Through these studies, prewriting strategies and the use of graphic organizers supported the improvement in student writing.

Another study, performed by Lan et. al. (2011), compares to Sturm and Rankin-Erikson (2002) in that it shows how student writing can be improved with even the simplest prewriting strategy. Students don't need the newest technology in order to gain support in their writing. Though the students who used computer generated graphic organizers had neater, more organized information, they performed at an equal level to those who created their map by hand (Sturm & Rankin-Erikson, 2002). Though technology is an appropriate feature to introduce students to in the classroom, in reality it is not accessible to everyone outside of the classroom, so students must learn to use other, older, strategies that are accessible to them. Lan et. al. has proven that multimedia improves critical thinking, but their study also proves that simple planning prior to writing also helps students concentrate more on what to write before actually writing it, supporting them in the process as well. According to Kellogg (1988), using the proper writing strategies depending on the situation, is crucial to enhancing writing performance and reducing attention overload. Using simple tools, such as a blank piece of paper folded to create four sections, are tools that can support students' planning process. Alber-Morgan et. al. (2007) explain that the folded paper strategy is accessible to every student in school or at home and is effective because it gives students a kinesthetic graphic organizer on which to plan their thoughts prior to writing.

Further supporting the impact of technology on writing is Bogard and McMakin (2012) who included modern literacy into their study. Instead of moving directly into the drafting stage following the prewriting creation of a graphic organizer, either by use of computer software or by hand, participants used their graphic organizers as reference and used computer audio technology to record their stories verbally. The recording was used during peer conferences where students had the opportunity to listen and obtain constructive feedback. Doing this assisted

the student in revising their work before ever writing it down. Using the voice recorders is a modified version of peer conferencing prior to writing, as well as a strategy students can use on their own when peer conferencing is unavailable. The combination of the older strategy, the written graphic organizer, and the newer strategy, the voice recorder, gave students new tangible support in their prewriting. In congruence with this voice record method, Moore and Filling (2012) studied the use of video recording to get feedback about student writing. Their study explained that because modern society is increasingly using technology, such as laptops, social networking, PDAs and other software, writing teachers should implement technology in "innovative ways to engage students, such as through electronic/computer-based comments, audio feedback, and online conferences" (p. 4). Through these multiple avenues, teachers can engage students in the writing process. This study proved that the use of technology increased the amount of feedback students received which allowed the students more time and information to use to reflect on how to improve their writing. The participants in Moore and Filling's study as well as the participants in Bogard and McMackin's study could also critically think about their writing and its effect on their audience. This critical thinking created an authentic writing environment for all participants because in the end they were writing for a purpose that was important to them, Moore and Filling's participants writing for college courses and Bogard and McMackin's participants writing to share at a school event for family members. Both studies examined blending time honored literacy customs with new literacies in the hope that the result would be students' creating overall better quality writing.

The previous studies prove that both newer and older literacies are beneficial to students' overall writing quality, but using newer literacy strategies such as using audio and video technology, assisted in the overall enthusiasm of the participants. For students with learning

disabilities, listening to their story was even more beneficial because the student could hear if their ideas made sense before struggling with translating them into structured written sentences for their draft and they could replay it to assist them in the writing process (Bogard and McMakin, 2012). Allowing students the opportunity to create their writing in a stress-free environment encourages higher-quality writing. While all studies showed that the graphic organizers were beneficial, the students reduced their own cognitive load associated with translating their ideas into written text by use of the audio technology therefore making the process less stressful especially for struggling writers (Bogard and McMakin, 2012). Video conferencing regarding writing also assisted students in their revisions and their thought process about their writing. The video conference helped students to critically think about their writing and to also consider their audience more frequently (Moore & Filling, 2012).

While the process of writing can be met with enthusiasm, it must also be authentic. Writer's workshop, as mentioned above, is just that. According to Clippard and Nicaise (1998), writer's workshop is authentic because it helps students express ideas, ask questions, and share their writing. Allowing students these opportunities improves students' views about themselves and their peers as writers. Writer's workshop also enhances the writer's sense of belonging to a writing community and therefore enhances their self-efficacy (Clippard & Nicaise). Students' views about their teachers as writers, also elevates their feelings about the classroom writing community. With all of these opportunities and sources of information, students are able to get the most from the lesson overall. The mini lessons associated with writer's workshop performed by the teacher at the beginning or end of a workshop session are based on observation of student needs, which further enhances student learning at this time (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Students are also gaining a lot from conferencing with teachers during this time. As stated prior, the 6+1

writing traits are easily teachable components of writing that share a vocabulary easily exchangeable between teacher and student. This makes conferencing between student and teacher very effective because both understand what is expected of both parties (Alber-Morgan et. al., 2007). As a result of a study performed by Jasmine and Weiner (2007), it was found that writer's workshop increases the enjoyment of writing as well as the process of writing. Students enjoy working and learning from their peers and also having individual time with the teacher to discuss their writing. Choosing what they wish to write also has a positive effect on students because they rarely get to have choice within the school day.

        In a study by Martin et. al. (2005), it was understood that writer's workshop may not be taught at certain grade levels because the schools curriculum doesn't think the students are old enough to use it effectively. Martin et. al. disagreed. Their study of three first grade classrooms proved that the students in primary grades are ready to write and could be successful at writer's workshop. They quote Vygotsky (1962) who stated "what the child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow" (p. 247). What Vygotsky meant was that if teachers effectively teach the process that is writer's workshop, the students will be able to mimic the process on their own. In their study, Martin et. al. agreed that taking a constructivist approach to learning in primary classrooms, where the learner takes an active role in their own learning, is the best model to follow in first grade writing workshop classrooms. If students take responsibility for their own learning at a young age, that trend will follow them through a successful education. In primary grades much modeling is required for students to understand the process of writing (Alber-Morgan et. al., 2007). Young students are very visual. Repetition of a visual setting may help students realize the task required. When paired with stations for each part of the writing process, it helps students in their writing because they can link their location in the room to what they are

supposed to be doing in their writing (Roth & Guinee, 2011). These stations create a visual

environment which students can link to the task. Martin et. al., (2005) states moving around to

different stations and working with different peers on common goals parallels the "sociocultural

perspective because both students and teachers are working in an environment based on

mediated learning" (p.239). When students are able to differentiate their own learning based on

their environment, they are in control of their own learning. The students are not only learning

the steps in the writing process as they move to each labeled station, they are also learning to

work collaboratively with others as well as how to mediate their own learning.

So many time-honored literacy traditions have been abandoned over the years and have

been replaced with new literacies such as new strategies or technology when time-honored

literacies are still effective. If adjustments are necessary to keep up with societal changes

teachers should make them, but not abandon what is still effective.

Conclusion

All of the themes and information provided are essential components of what makes

writing instruction successful within the walls of the classroom. The preparation of all involved

parties is imperative to the success of today's students, whether they be in elementary school

classrooms or attending a university. The use of strategies, especially in the prewriting stage is

crucial in the aid of the students who use them. Without the support of these strategies, the

enthusiasm to write for many more students would become diminished and students would leave

high school without the proper education to continue their education or enter into successful

employment. The goal for educators is to have all of their students leave their classroom

prepared to enter the real world therefore, differentiated instruction is also crucial for not only

students with learning disabilities but for those typical students who struggle in the area of

writing. This study has proven that extra time for these students is not the solution to improving

their writing ability but that the use of strategies and implementing new ideas into the classroom

is a step in the right direction. Lastly, while we must honor past teachings that are still valuable

for our students currently enrolled, we must attempt to move forward with new literacies. While

keeping up with society's ever changing, rapid pace, teachers must always do what is best for

their students' education and that is the mountain they must overcome.

Method

Context

Research for this study was collected from two different sources. The first was from

teachers at Bayside Academy (a pseudonym). Bayside Academy is a part of a large school

district in Western New York. The New York State Report Card for the 2010-2011 school year

shows that a total of 665 students were enrolled at Bayside Academy and that the average class

size was 22 students. The population of students was made up of four different racial/ethnic

origins. 87% of the student population was Black or African American, 8% were Hispanic or

Latino, 1% was Asian or Native Hawaiian, and 4% were White. Of these students, 81% of them

were eligible for free lunch while another 4% were eligible for reduced priced lunch. The

teachers at Bayside Academy have various educational backgrounds. Of the 60 teachers at

Bayside, 3% are teaching out of certification, 8% have fewer than three years experience, and

18% have a Master's Degree plus 30 hours or a Doctorate.

The second source from which data was collected for this study was a tutoring program

for struggling readers and writers of all grade levels hosted by Sunnydale University (a

pseudonym). Sunnydale is located in Western New York and offers 32 academic majors in

humanities, social sciences, sciences, business, and nursing as well as nine pre-professional

programs. They also offer ten graduate programs and three doctoral programs. The tutoring program that is housed within the walls of this university consists of 60 students ranging from kindergarten to twelfth grade. Of these 60 students, one third of them attend school in a rural district, one third attends school in a suburban district, and the remaining third attends school in an urban district. The goal of the program is to give these students, who are struggling readers and writers, the opportunity to work with certified teachers. The teachers involved in this program are part of the Master's of Literacy Education program. These teachers also have the opportunity to learn through the tutoring program. The program gives the teachers opportunities to try new teaching methods and work one on one and in small groups with students who are struggling. The information they gather while working with the students is shared among the other teachers in the program. The strategies and ideas they learn and collect from each other will be beneficial for them to use in their own classrooms outside of Sunnydale.

Participants

Students

The students who participated in this study were from the Sunnydale tutoring program. The first, Jamie (a pseudonym) is a seven years old. He is an excitable, enormously social, African American male. He attends school in the same district as Bayside Elementary which is a large urban district in Western New York. He enjoys playing with this brother and best friend after school, attending church with his family and learning new things. He is currently in the second grade and his favorite time of the school day is lunch and recess, as well as read aloud. He is a very sociable student who loves listening to and telling stories. Currently he is not receiving any special services at school but according to the tutoring program's Fountas and Pinnell Reading Assessment, Jaime is reading at a level D which is consistent with a beginning

first grade reading level. According to the 6+1 Writing Traits Rubric also given at the tutoring program, Jaime is receiving low scores in the areas of organization, presentation, conventions and word choice. His lower than grade level ability does not stop Jamie from being motivated to do well and he remains positive about his school and learning experiences. Because of his positive attitude and motivation, he is a student who is easily introduced to new strategies as he is willing to try anything new without hesitation.

The second student who participated in this study was Garrison (a pseudonym). Garrison is a seven year old Caucasian male who attends school in a suburban district in Western New York. Garrison enjoys playing sports, especially lacrosse. He is the oldest of three children and lives with his siblings, mother, and father. His favorite part of school is that he gets to be in the same class as his best friend. Garrison is not receiving any special services in school and seems to be on or near grade level in writing, reading and word study according to the assessments provided at Sunnydale. According to the 6+1 Writing Traits Rubric, Garrison struggles with voice, word choice and sentence fluency. He also struggles in the areas of ideas and organization. According to the Fountas and Pinnell Reading Assessment, Garrison is reading at a level K/L or a middle second grade level which is right on target for his age. However, his comprehension at that level is below grade level so he is currently working at a level J in the tutoring program to solidify the use of comprehension strategies.

Teachers

The teachers used in this study all work at Bayside Elementary. The school itself is set in an urban area and the teachers at this school teach students ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade.

There were 10 teachers that participated in this study. First, Ashley (a pseudonym) is a kindergarten teacher who is in her first year of teaching. Ashley received her Bachelor's Degree in Childhood and Special Education and is currently enrolled in a Master of Literacy Education Program at a nearby college. Ashley recalls receiving minimal preparation to teach writing in her undergraduate career but feels that the Master's program in which she is currently enrolled will help her greatly.

Brittany (pseudonym) was the second participant in this study. She has been teaching for nine years and has taught numerous grade levels. She currently teaches eighth grade and has a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and a Master's Degree in ESOL Education (English to Speakers of Other Languages). Brittany feels that her schooling for both her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees did not adequately prepare her to teach writing and that the school she currently teaches at does provide the best professional development seminars based on writing available.

Chris (pseudonym) is currently a kindergarten teacher but in the past he has taught all grades through fourth grade. He has a Master of Science Degree in Education but does not recall the classes he took to receive this degree and if they were related to teaching writing. Chris feels that the school he currently teaches at has a very adequate professional development program that improves his confidence and effectiveness to teach writing to his students.

Diana (a pseudonym) is a long term substitute for a sixth grade class but she has spent much time substituting per diem which has given her opportunities to work in multiple grade-level classrooms. She has also worked as a special education teacher at a school for students with disabilities through the sixth grade. Diana has a Bachelor's Degree in Health Science, a Master's

Degree in Childhood and Special Education and is teacher certified in all these areas. She feels that her schooling provided her with adequate classes to make her feel confident and effective in teaching writing. She also learns a lot from the professional development sessions she attends through the current school she works for.

Elizabeth (a pseudonym) is currently teaching second grade but in the past eight years she has also taught first and third grade. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Health Education (K-12) and a Master's Degree in General and Special Education grades 1-6. She feels that her schooling did not provide her with instruction on how to teach students anything regarding writing, including the writing process.

Frederick (a pseudonym) is a first grade long term substitute teacher. He has previously taught grades two and five as well. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Childhood and Special Education (1-6) and is currently working on his Master's Degree in Literacy Education. He has not been to any professional development sessions offered by his district but feels generally that he received enough education in his undergraduate work to feel confident and be effective in teaching his students the writing process.

Ginny (a pseudonym) is in her ninth year of teaching and has taught first and second grade. Currently a teacher of second grade, Ginny has a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and a Master's Degree in Special Education. She feels that her school provides a good amount of professional development sessions that are useful to apply to teaching writing but that her schooling did not prepare her well enough to feel confident in teaching writing.

Hannah (a pseudonym) is in her first year of teaching and is teaching first grade. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Childhood Education and Special Education and a Master's Degree in

Literacy Education. Ginny feels that her schooling provided some courses to make her feel confident to teach writing in the classroom but that she could have used more. Her district, she feels, is providing relatively good information regarding teaching writing in their professional development sessions. She also feels that her students came into her class with the amount of writing abilities appropriate for their grade level.

Ingrid (a pseudonym) has been teaching for 14 years and currently teaches fourth grade. She has also taught third and sixth grade and has degrees in early childhood education birth – grade 6 and is special education certified in grades kindergarten – grade 12. Ingrid stated that she has had to search for resources about teaching writing as she has not participated in any professional developments through her school that have been on writing. She follows teacher blogs online and makes connections with other educators to keep herself informed.

Lastly, Jackie (a pseudonym) has been teaching multiple grade levels for 16 years and is currently a resource room teacher for grades 4-7. Jackie also does not feel that her education or her schools professional development sessions improve her confidence and effectiveness as a teacher of writing.

Researcher Stance

I presently have a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature and I am certified in Childhood Education Birth through Grade 6 and Special Education Birth through Grade 6. Currently I am attending St. John Fisher College to become certified in Literacy Education Birth through Grade 6. As a researcher in this study, I acted as both an active participant observer and a passive observer. Acting as an active participant observer means that I taught while monitoring the outcomes that emerged through that teaching (Mills, 2011). Mills defines active participant

observers as those who are "actively engaged in teaching [and who] observe the outcomes of

their teaching" (p. 75). By acting as an active participant observer I had the opportunity to teach

the students with specific intent on instruction while also having the opportunity to observe the

outcome of the students' learning. Acting as a passive observer means that I took myself out of

the teacher role and focused solely on data collection (Mills). Mills defines passive observers as

those who "no longer assume the responsibilities of the teacher […], someone who is present

only to collect data" (p. 75). The effect being a passive observer had on my research was that I

was able to step back and solely collect information. This information could only be taken for

what it was worth as I did not have any effect on the information obtained.

Method

During this study I collected both qualitative and quantitative data to examine the effects

of using prewriting strategies with students to observe the effects on their quality of writing.

Qualitative data is data that is collected by many sources. For this study the data collection of

existing sources, observation, and writing journals was used to fulfill the requirement of

qualitative data (Mills, 2011). Quantitative data is defined as data that is collected through the

means of "analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena" (Mills,

p. 4). Quantitative data for this study was collected through questionnaires completed by active

teachers as well as assessments of student writing.

This study took place over a 10 week period with one session scheduled each week with

students. At the beginning of the study, baseline data was collected from the participants at the

Sunnydale tutoring program. The participants were not given any instruction other than to write

two journal entries about school and what they did over the summer. Once the baseline data was

collected, the participants were taught new prewriting strategies each week through week six of

the program. Strategies taught included brainstorming lists of what good writer's do, discussion about what constitutes good writing, introduction and practice of graphic organizers such as a beginning/middle/end graphic organizer, a wheel and spoke graphic organizer, and the hamburger graphic organizer. Teacher modeling of planning writing and the writing process was also evident in every session. After the participants had time to learn and utilize the new prewriting strategies with support, they were then asked to write in their journals again. The prompt this time included the requirement for participants to choose a prewriting strategy to assist them in the writing process. Evaluation of both the baseline data and the data collected after the strategies were implemented was done by use of the 6+1 Writing Traits Rubric which is designed to assess ideas, organization, fluency, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions and presentation of student writing. Baseline analysis was then compared to the analysis of the writing after the implementation of prewriting strategies.

To fulfill the quantitative data for this study, the questionnaire (Appendix A) that was sent out to active teachers at Bayside Academy included questions regarding the teachers' academic background, what writing looks like in their classroom, and information about their current students and their use of prewriting strategies. The teachers were given one week to complete the questionnaire via email and were asked to answer each question in its entirety. They also were asked if they will be willing to answer any follow up questions once the questionnaire had been assessed by me.

Quality and Credibility of Research

It is essential that in any form of research, the study's quality and credibility are preserved. While quantitative research depends on validity and reliability, qualitative data relies on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Validity is a way for the

researcher to know for sure that the data collected was appropriately measured while reliability is the way in which the researcher assures that the study is measuring what it is supposed to (Mills, 2011). Mills defines credibility as the "researchers' ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained" (p. 104). In order to maintain credibility in my research, I practiced triangulation which allowed me to compare a variety of data and methods in order to cross-check said data. The data for this study was triangulated by use of three different methods of data collection: experiencing, enquiring and examination. Using the questionnaires with seasoned teachers, analyzing journal entries from the students in the Sunnydale program, and observing choices made and outcomes presented by these students regarding their writing, are all forms of data collection methods that were performed for this study.

Transferability was also be ensured within my research. Transferability means that the researcher who performed the study "believed that everything they studied is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop truth statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people" (Mills, 2011, p. 104). The objective of transferability is that the recipient of the data can visualize the setting for themselves. In this study, the description was transferable in that as much detail as possible was be explained, so much so that the study could be repeated without question.

Dependability is defined by Mills (2011) as the "stability of the data" (p.104). One goal for any study is to always be dependable. Therefore it is recommended that methods of data collection overlap each other so that "the weakness of one [method] is compensated by the strength of the others" (p.104). Triangulation, as defined before, aids in dependability of research because the researcher has gathered information from three differing sources. The sources that I

obtained my information and data from for this study were student observation, analysis of

student work and answers from teachers based on the questionnaire. The strength of these three

sources is great but in the event that one source failed or ended up being weak, the other two

sources made up for what was lacking.

Lastly, the final characteristic that was ensured throughout my study is confirmability.

Confirmability relates to the objectivity of the data collected. According to Mills (2011), in order

for confirmability to be realized within a study, the study must first practice triangulation, which

has been discussed in relation to this study. Secondly the study must practice reflexivity.

Practicing reflexivity assumes that the researcher will "reveal underlying assumptions or biases"

they currently hold about the research and study itself (p. 105). In my study, field notes were

taken in order to conform to the characteristic of study that is confirmability.

Informed Consent and Protection of the Rights of the Participants

In order to protect the rights of all participants involved within a study, it is required that

each participant gives the researcher informed consent. For my study, the students in the

Sunnydale program were too young to sign a consent form so I obtained a verbal assent from

each of them after explaining my intent. Because of my students' age, I spoke with their

parents/guardians and explained that all identifiable information about their children would be

replaced with pseudonyms. On the permission form, the purpose of the study was outlined, the

risks and benefits to the child were detailed, and the rights of the participants were provided. The

parents then had the option to allow their children to participate in my study or to withhold them.

To the teachers at Bayside Academy a consent form was provided. The teachers were also

informed of their rights as participants, of the purpose of the study, and information to contact

me in the event that questions or concerns were raised. No information obtained by the participants was used unless a consent form was signed by the participant.

Data Collection

In order to fulfill the requirements of triangulation for this study, I collected data from three sources. The first source was researched by the method of experiencing and examination. Baseline information was collected from student work provided by the students in the Sunnydale program. The students were asked to write two journal entries from which to collect baseline data. The first entry was writing about their school day, the second about what they did over their summer vacation. The students were allowed as much time as they needed to write in their journals. During the time they were writing, I observed their method of taking on the task and field notes were also taken. Afterward I collected the journal entries and assessed them using the 6+1 Writing Traits Rubric (Appendix B). By using the 6+1 rubric I was able to assess which areas of writing the students struggled with as well as the areas of writing in which they were proficient.

After the students completed their baseline writing samples, instruction began by exploring ways to become better writers. The first session in which discussion took place included brainstorming from both the students and the instructor on what things good writers do. Then, with support, the students created posters to remind themselves of the things they could monitor in their own writing. Their posters were then placed on our board for easy reference. In the following sessions, the students were taught how to use prewriting strategies to assist them in the writing process. Students learned how to create and use a wheel and spoke graphic organizer, a beginning/middle/end graphic organizer and a hamburger graphic organizer. During these sessions, the purposes of the strategies were explained in detail and each strategy was modeled

extensively. Students then used the graphic organizers with support to write narratives. After the six weeks of instruction was complete, I asked the students choose a graphic organizer to use while writing two more writing samples. This time the students had their graphic organizer as support during their writing. These writing samples were then collected and analyzed using the 6+1 Writing Traits Rubric. The data collected from the first session and most recent session were then compared to see if the prewriting strategy aided the students in the writing process.

Another source from which I collected data was through the methods of experiencing and enquiring. When the students were given the choice of which graphic organizer to use in the most recent session, I observed which graphic organizer they gravitated toward. Observations were made of the students while they were writing and field notes were also taken. Once the students had completed their writing, they were then asked questions in a mini interview pertaining to their choice of prewriting strategy.

Lastly the questionnaire distributed to the teachers at Bayside Academy was used as a source of information for this study. The questionnaire was an enquiring method that is informal as it was distributed through the use of e-mail. The answers to the questions were analyzed and compiled so that the researcher could clearly see the stance of the focus group on the importance and validity of prewriting.

Data Analysis

After collecting all of my quantitative and qualitative data, I analyzed the information obtained in search for recurring themes that spanned throughout the data. If the data was as interview, I first recorded it then scribed the session to be better able to analyze it. Next I looked over the questionnaires and examined the information in search of the recurring themes throughout. I looked over the information a number of times before narrowing down my themes.

First I coded my data by writing words or phrases that came to mind when I first read them. After doing this throughout the data I went back and looked through the notes I took and circled the most frequent comments and or comments that complimented each other. Once I did that, I cross checked all of the data with corroborating words and phrases and deciphered my three themes.

Findings and Discussion

After analyzing the data collected from all of the different sources, three themes presented themselves throughout much of the data. Looking through the lenses these themes create aids in the understanding of how prepared teachers feel to teach writing and the writing instruction that is used in the classroom. The three themes that most often reoccurred throughout the data include: teacher preparation to teach writing, prewriting strategies increase the quality of student writing, and types of writing strategies used within the classroom.

Teacher Preparation to Teach Writing

The first of the three themes that emerged was the preparation teachers receive and feel they have to teach writing, and their confidence to teach the subject confidently and successfully. Feeling well prepared and confident to teach is a necessity because without that confidence a teacher feels ill-equipped and is less apt to try new things in the classroom. When teachers feel ill-equipped and not confident, it's the students who suffer academically.

Within the data collected, a questionnaire was given to ten teachers. One section of the questionnaire asked the participants to rate their feelings of confidence and preparation based on the following experiences: if they felt they graduated with their bachelor's degree with enough education to teach the writing process confidently and effectively; if they felt they graduated with their master's degree with enough education to teach the writing process confidently and

effectively; if they feel that their students who entered their classroom at the beginning of the

2012 school year have been taught the writing process adequately based on their grade level; and

if their school provides professional development and/or other seminars that improve their

confidence and effectiveness to teach the writing process. The participants were asked to rate

each of these experiences on a one to four point scale, one being that they strongly disagree with

the statement, two being that they disagree with the statement, three being that they agree with

the statement and four being that they strongly agree with the statement. Below are tables that

log the responses of each participant.

Table 1

Teacher Response to Preparation to Teach Writing

	Percentage Ratings	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
Statement 1: I feel that I graduated with my BS/BA with enough education to teach the writing process confidently and effectively. (Note: two teachers did not answer this question)		50%	38%	12%	0%

According to Table 1, 50% of the teachers who participated in the questionnaire strongly

disagreed that their bachelor's degree provided them with enough education to teach the writing

process both confidently and effectively while an additional 38% disagreed (Questionnaire,

2012). Furthermore, Elizabeth (a pseudonym) stated on the questionnaire that "schooling did not

teach [her] how to teach children how to write or anything about the writing process"

(Questionnaire, 2012). I interpret these percentages and statements to mean that the teachers in

general do not feel confident in their abilities to teach the writing process to their students

effectively based on their education in an undergraduate or certification program.

Table 2

Teacher Response to Preparation to Teach Writing

	Percentage Ratings	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
Statement 2: I feel that I graduated with my MS/MA with enough education to teach the writing process confidently and effectively.		43%	14%	43%	0%

(Note: Three teachers have not completed their Master's Degree and were unable to complete this question)

According to Table 2, 43% of the teachers who participated in the questionnaire strongly disagreed that their master's degree provided them with enough education to teach the writing process confidently and effectively. Another 43% of the teachers, however, agreed that their master's degree provided them with enough education to teach the writing process confidently and effectively. I interpret these findings to mean that the teachers who have participated in this survey feel that they have some education in regard to teaching the writing process but that there is still room for improvement as none of the teachers strongly agreed that their master's degree provided them the education necessary.

In the questionnaire, the question was raised if teachers are receiving enough education to effectively teach the writing process. According to Cutler (2008), who did a study based on why teachers are unprepared to teach writing, found that the No Child Left Behind Act changed the structure of the curriculum which put more of an emphasis on reading. This change in structure caused a depletion of courses based on writing instruction leaving mostly classes that revolved around reading instruction. According to the literature review, writing instruction needs to be targeted and included in elementary school curriculums to aid in student's future success even though the writing curriculum in colleges is overshadowed by the reading curriculum (Grisham & Wosely, 2011). Due to these many changes, college students who are enrolled in teacher preparation programs are not being taught the proper methods to teach writing. These teachers

are graduating without the necessary education to effectively teach writing in their own classrooms, which leads to students being unprepared to enter college or the work force.

When entering teacher preparation programs, it is assumed that a well rounded curriculum will be taught so that teachers emerge not only certified in education but also confident to teach all subjects necessary. Cutler (2008) recommends that colleges and universities advance the learning and teaching of writing in an effort to better prepare these new teachers. According to the data collected as well as the literature review, teachers are in need of these changes to better prepare the students they are responsible for.

These teachers have indicated that their education has been inadequate. As Gilbert and Grisham (2010) recommend, these teachers who feel ill-prepared would have benefited from education programs that devote more time to writing instruction as well as instruction on a variety of writing types. Unfortunately these teachers may also be among the many that see little to no writing instruction as pre-service teachers and may have taken courses in one of the many states who do not require writing courses for certification (Fry & Griffin, 2010).

While some teachers feel their college education did not prepare them well enough to teacher writing confidently and effectively, they are still required to do so. Many teachers actively seek places to learn how to be confident and effective teachers of writing even after they are seasoned teachers. To support teachers, districts provide professional development sessions to introduce or revisit teaching strategies. The following table shows if the teachers who participated in the questionnaire feel that these professional development sessions give them the proper education they are seeking to confidently and effectively teach writing.

Table 3

Teacher Response to Preparation to Teach Writing

	Percentage Ratings	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
Statement 4: My School provides professional development and/or other seminars that improve my confidence and effectiveness to teach the writing process.		25%	25%	38%	12%

(Note: Some teachers have not participated in professional development and could not answer this question)

As discussed previously, teachers feel that the education they received in college has left

them generally feeling unprepared to teach writing. What Table 3 represents is the education

teachers are provided once they leave the college classroom. As noted by this table, 38% of the

participating teachers agree that their school provides professional developments and other

seminars that improve their confidence and effectiveness to teach the writing process while an

additional 12% strongly agree with this statement. According to Diana (a pseudonym), she has

only received "one half day of professional development based solely on writing, student writing

and the writing rubric the school uses to assess writing" (Questionnaire, 2012). Frederick (a

pseudonym) states on the questionnaire that he has "only been present for one session regarding

writing and it was based on interactive writing, not the writing process" (Questionnaire, 2012). I

interpret these statements to mean that the teachers are not getting nearly enough writing

education. The professional development should provide teachers with the information they are

seeking to better themselves in the classroom, but from the comments, it seems as though

information on teaching the writing process is not a topic that is discussed frequently. Ingrid (a

pseudonym) explains that she feels she must go outside her education and her school district to

learn new things about the writing process. She states "I follow many teacher blogs in order to

learn from other educators" (Questionnaire, 2012). This statement made by Ingrid is powerful

because it shows the lengths that teachers are going through in order to get the information they

are seeking to feel prepared in their own classrooms. It is concerning that teachers feel they must

go to places such as the internet for teaching strategies, not only because of the possible lack of

validity behind what they find online, but also because teachers should not have to go other

sources to fin resources when resources should be available to them within the walls of their own

school.

Both Jackie and Ginny (pseudonyms) agree that their school provides opportunities to

learn about the wiring process and state that their "building has devoted one day a week to

evaluate student writing, the school has focused on balanced literacy, and professional

developments have centered on all eight components of balanced literacy" (Questionnaire,

2012). These comments however, argue that more sessions of professional development

provided could be based solely on writing instruction to make a better impact. I interpret these

statements to suggest that the school district these teachers work at provide an adequate number

of professional development sessions but rarely base that education on the writing process and

effective strategies to teach it.

This theme has provided insight into the fact that though writing is the subject teachers

feel the most unprepared to teach, teacher preparation programs have the capacity to change the

disposition of teachers by simply providing the appropriate information and opportunities. To

start, it has been recommended by Fry and Griffin (2010) that these programs take a step in this

direction by first teaching the use of 6+1 trait language so that all educators have a common

knowledge of writing. Also, giving teachers the opportunities to use that language with other

professionals as well as students, time to observe veteran teachers and also having opportunities

to try newly learned skills with children would be beneficial.

Prewriting Strategies Increase Quality of Student Writing

The second of the three themes that emerged throughout the research was how the use of prewriting strategies increases the overall quality of student writing. Two students, Jaime and Garrison (both pseudonyms) were asked to write a journal entry or story as a baseline writing activity. The baseline samples were then scored using the 6+1 Writing Traits Rubric (Appendix B). The tables below show the boys writing scores based on each of the seven components of the 6+1 Writing Traits Rubric; word choice, organization, conventions, fluency, ideas, and voice.

Table 4

Jaime

Writing Trait	Baseline Score
Word Choice	1
Organization	1.5
Conventions	1
Fluency	1
Ideas	2
Voice	2
Overall Score	1.4

Table 5

Garrison

| Writing Trait	Baseline Score
Word Choice	2
Organization	1
Conventions	1
Fluency	2
Ideas	3
Voice	1
Overall Score	1.6

According to Table 4, Jaime's overall score was 1.4 out of a possible 4.0. Looking at the individual scores based on traits, Jaime needs to improve in all areas. A sample of Jaime's baseline writing sample is below.
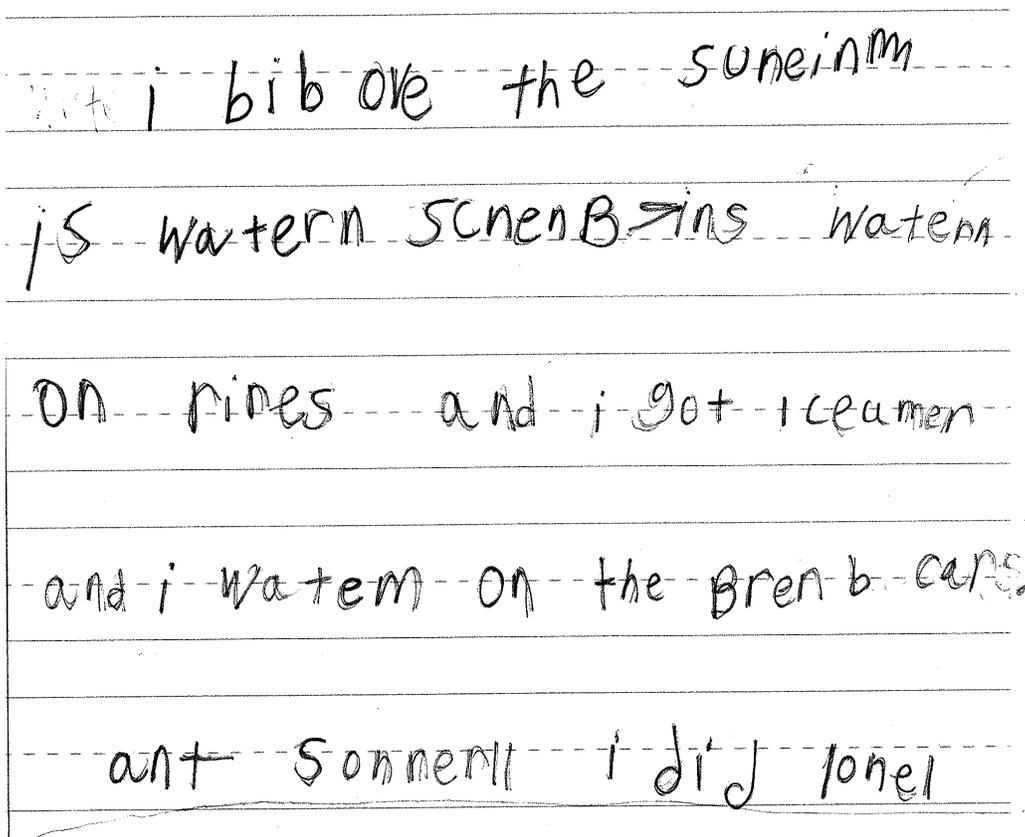
I did over the summer is went to Seabreeze went on rides and I got ice cream and I went on the bumper cars. And summer I did love.

It is evident from the baseline sample that Jaime does not use proper conventions while writing, is not very organized, is not fluent and doesn't have good word choice for his grade level.

According to Table 5, Garrison scored 1.6 out of a possible 4.0. While Garrison's fluency scored well, the rest of his writing piece is below grade level. Below is Garrison's baseline writing sample.
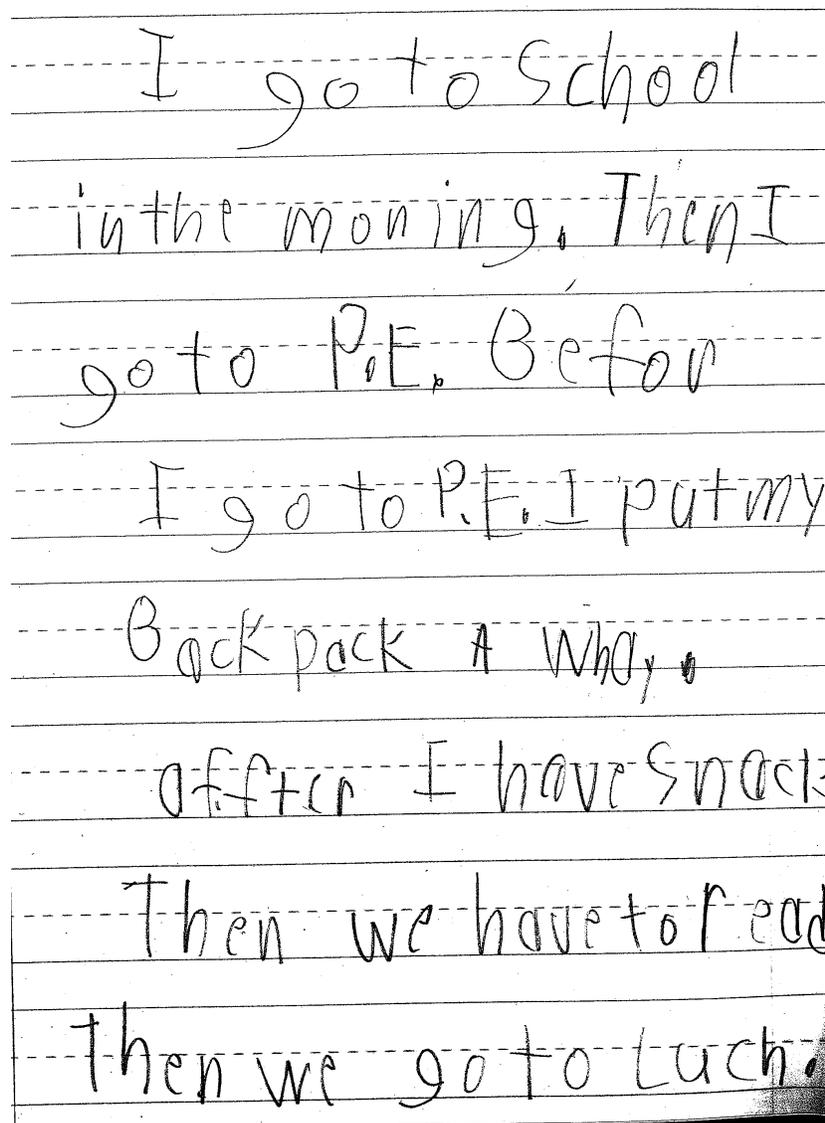
> I go to school in the morning, Then I go to P.E. Befor I go to P.E. I put my Back pack A Way, affter I have snack Then we have to read then we go to Luch.

Though Garrison's spelling is accurate enough for the reader to understand what he is saying, he lacks in multiple areas assessed by the 6+1 Writing Trait Rubric. Garrison lacks organization as shown by lines three, four and five, where he explains his schedule but does not explain it in the order that it happens. He also lacks in word choice as shown by his repetitive use of the word *then*.

The following table represents the scores of both students again, this time after they have been introduced to and have been using graphic organizers for five tutoring sessions. Both

students were given the choice of using one of the following graphic organizers; BME

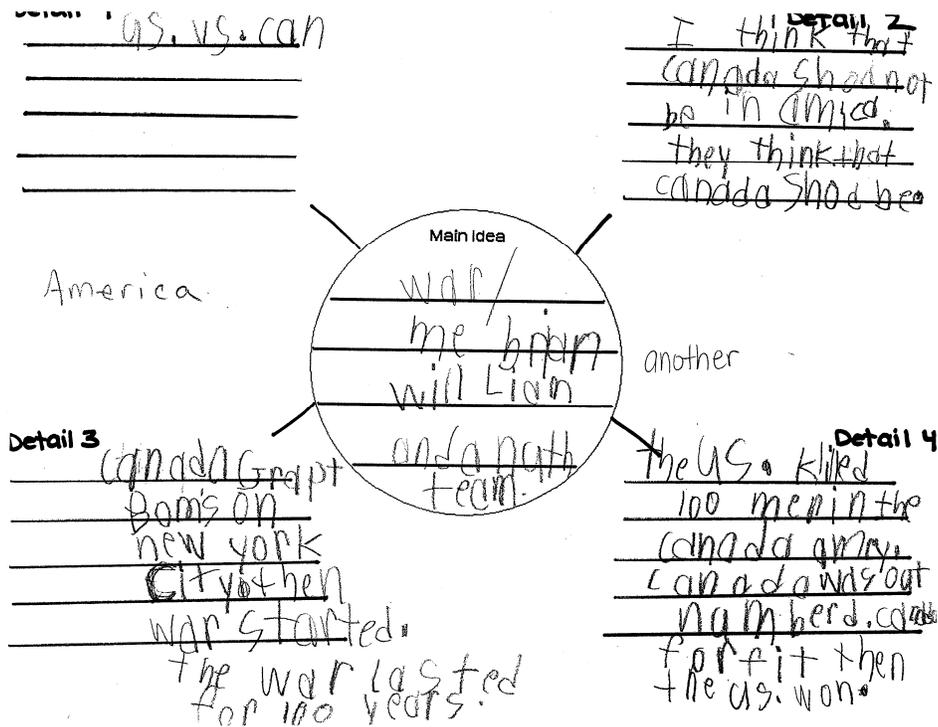(Appendix C), Hamburger (Appendix D) or Semantic Map (Appendix E).

Table 6

Jaime

Writing Trait	Score with use of Strategy
Word Choice	3
Organization	3
Conventions	2.5
Fluency	3
Ideas	3
Voice	3.5
Overall Score	3

Table 7

Garrison

Writing Trait	Score with use of Strategy
Word Choice	2
Organization	4
Conventions	3
Fluency	3
Ideas	4
Voice	3
Overall Score	3.2

According to Table 6 and Table 7, both Jaime and Garrison's overall scores improved

dramatically. They both chose to use different strategies but the purpose was the same for both

students, to give them time and space to plan out their writing. Below is the graphic organizer

used and the corresponding writing piece written by Garrison entitled *The War.*

The war One day me and Brian, Will and Liam, versed another team in war. I think that Canada Shoed not be in America. They think	It shoed, Because Canada dropped bombs on New York city then war started. The war lasted for 100 years. The .u.s killed 100 men	in the Canada army. Canada was out numbered so Canada forfited then the.u.s won and everybody lived happy ever after.
1	2	3

It is clear from Garrison's writing that because of the graphic organizer as a prewriting strategy, his writing quality has improved in all areas. In Garrison's baseline writing sample he scored a 1 out of 4 in organization, however after the implementation of the prewriting strategy his score is 4 out of 4. Garrison's use of conventions also improved greatly as shown by his use of capital and lowercase letters, punctuation, and appropriate spacing throughout his writing piece.

I interpret these dramatic differences in scores to mean that the students were supported in their writing by using the graphic organizers as prewriting strategies and that the support provided students with the time and space to plan their writing. According to the literature review, most students gain success in writing when using prewriting strategies such as graphic organizers. Within the literature review, it is argued that even simple outlines improve the quality of student writing and that certain prewriting strategies, such as brainstorming, can even be used with the youngest of students (Kellogg, 1987; Breetvelt et. al., 1994; and Voon, 2010).

According to the questionnaires, teachers agree that the use of prewriting strategies such as graphic organizers do improve their students writing. Ginny explains that she always "shows

videos or reads books to activate prior knowledge as well as brainstorms with the class and

shows examples of writing pieces the students will create" prior to asking students to write on

their own (Questionnaire, November 2, 2012). She says that the students always perform better

when they have a chance to plan their writing. I interpret Ginny's statements to mean that she

believes that prewriting strategies, even in simplistic form, benefit student writing quality overall

not only because they help students plan the actual writing of the piece but also because it gives

students time to think about experiences they may have had that they can connect to their writing

thus making the process a richer experience. Jackie explains that:

> The writing process is critical for [her] students when writing multi-paragraph
>
> compositions and that prewriting strategies provide the foundation to the
>
> writing assignment. Without the structure early on in the writing process, many
>
> students are not able to effectively organize their thoughts. (Questionnaire,
>
> November 2, 2012).

I interpret Jackie's statement to mean that her students benefit from the use of prewriting

strategies because they support her students in the organization of longer pieces. For Jackie's

students, who are fourth through seventh graders, longer writing pieces are more evident in the

classroom and sometimes longer pieces are added to over a longer period of time. Using graphic

organizers as prewriting strategies can support these students as they return to their writing

pieces time and time again. Diana, Brittany and Hannah (all pseudonyms), all agree that

prewriting strategies benefit all of their students no matter what writing level they are. This

statement is important to mention because all of these teachers teach at different grade levels but

are all using prewriting strategies with their students and they see the benefits no matter what

grade level. These teachers would all agree with Kellogg, (1987), Breetvelt et. al. (1994) and

Voon (2010) because they all argue that students of all grade levels benefit from the use of such strategies as graphic organizers and brainstorming when they are implemented as prewriting strategies.

While teachers who participated in the questionnaire supported the use of prewriting strategies in their classroom, I felt it was also important to research whether or not students using these prewriting strategies felt that they were beneficial to them as the writer and in what ways. When interviewing Garrison, he said that he enjoyed using prewriting strategies such as graphic organizers because "they help [him] to stay organized and make sure [he] has all the stuff [he] needs when [he] writes" such as "capital letters, details, umm.. a beginning, middle and end" (Student Interview, November 6, 2012). He states "they help me remember what I am going to write about so I don't get confused and I make sure I put in everything it needs" (Student Interview, November 6, 2012). I interpret these statements to mean that Garrison understands the effects prewriting has had on him as a writer. Jamie agreed with Garrison by stating "[the graphic organizer] helped me with remembering to do stuff […] stuff like havin' a beginning and a ending like happy ever after or once upon a time […] it helps me with all my things about writing" (Student Interview, November 6, 2012). This statement shows that Jamie knew his weaknesses as a writer, especially his lack of organization. The statement proves that Jamie understands the benefit of using graphic organizers when writing.

According to Olukpe (1979) "writing is a skill which demands that students plan and organize their imagination clearly in a sequential order to fulfill the essence of writing" (p.20). Jamie agreed with this by stating that when using graphic organizers as prewriting strategies, "I could write anything but then I could write it in an order that made sense when I read it" (Student Interview, November 6, 2012). I conclude from these statements that the students feel that using

the strategies helps them through the writing process and the students feel more confident in their writing ability when they use such strategies. The students' interpretations are validated by the data shown that their writing scores dramatically improved after the implementation of prewriting strategies.

The students interviewed are struggling writers in the second grade. The comments made by these students are parallel to those made by Horton et. al. (2001), who argue that less skilled writers require adaptive techniques to manage information and ideas. This statement is validated by the data collected from the student's writing samples. The students struggled during the baseline writing sample as shown by their scores, but once an adaptive technique was introduced, in this case graphic organizers, the student's writing quality improved.

Types of Prewriting Strategies Utilized

The last of the three emerging themes was the different types of prewriting strategies teachers implement into their classrooms and at what grade levels. The teachers who participated in the questionnaire teach grade levels as low as kindergarten and as high as eighth grade. Finding out which strategies were most utilized per grade level was something worth questioning.

Table 8 is presented below. This table shows the different types of prewriting strategies teachers stated they used on the questionnaire. The table shows the grade level the teacher is currently teaching and which strategies they currently use with their students.

Table 8

Strategy	*Grade Level Using Strategy*							
	K	1	2	4	5	6	7	8
Lists	*							
Word Banks	*							
Interactive Writing	*			*	*	*	*	
Modeling	*			*	*	*	*	
Brainstorming		*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Discussion								*
Research/Notes								*
Outlines						*		*
Venn Diagrams				*	*	*	*	*
Plot Diagrams								*
T Chart								*
KWL								*
Previous Work			*	*	*	*	*	
BME		*						
Worksheets		*						
Webs/Maps			*	*	*	*	*	
Post-it System			*					
Sketching		*						
Timeline				*	*	*	*	
Other Graphic Organizers	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

Ashley and Chris teach kindergarten. Prewriting strategies they use include "lists and word banks, as [their] students are not yet able to write on their own" (Questionnaire, November 2, 2012). To supplement, the teachers "also provide modeling for their students and use interactive writing in a whole group setting" (Questionnaire, November 2, 2012). The teachers of grades 1 and 2, Elizabeth, Frederick, Ginny and Hannah begin implementing slightly more advanced prewriting strategies as their students are now able to write at a basic level. The teachers use "brainstorming to introduce topics, but also utilize multiple graphic organizers to plan writing such as webs, tri-fold beginning/middle/end graphic organizers, and post-its" (Questionnaire, November 2, 2012). I interpret the statements made by these teachers to mean

that they teach strategies based on their students writing ability but that many of the strategies taught in younger grades can still be used as students grow and gain more writing knowledge. This is evident as Ashley and Chris who teach kindergarten use brainstorming and so do Elizabeth, Frederick, Ginny and Hannah who teacher older students.

Grades 3-6 are taught by Diana, Ingrid and Jackie, who is also a resource room teacher for these grades. These teachers still use "brainstorming, modeling and interactive writing", but they also utilize "story mapping, webs, timelines, Venn diagrams and other forms of outlining" (Questionnaire, November 2, 2012). Brittany, who teaches grade 8 uses all of the previously mentioned strategies but adds "KWL and T-charts, plot diagrams and much discussion with classmates and parents" (Questionnaire, November 2, 2012). Again, the teachers of the upper grades, Diana, Ingrid and Jackie choose to use a multitude of strategies in order to provide options for students to choose from and also as a way to differentiate instruction. I interpret the statements made by the grades 3-6 and grade 8 teachers to mean that they incorporate strategies taught in the lower grades but they also add more strategies that require higher thinking and writing ability because their students are at higher writing levels.

All of these strategies help students view the relationships between the information provided and helps novice writers fulfill their cognitive needs (Lee & Tan, 2010). Implementing interactive writing and modeling throughout all grade levels agrees with Kolade's process approach, which aids learners with their content choice, organization of ideas, expression and their use of conventions while writing (2012). Using combinations of these strategies encourages students to examine the relationships that improve their overall writing quality.

During the six weeks of tutoring Jamie and Garrison, I implemented multiple forms of prewriting strategies into my instruction in order to give the students the support they needed and

felt comfortable using while writing. Throughout the sessions, brainstorming and modeling were implemented in every session while other strategies, such as interactive writing and graphic organizers like beginning/middle/end, hamburger, and web/semantic mapping were implemented and practiced two weeks at a time. To see which strategies the students felt the most comfortable using I allowed them to choose which graphic organizer they would use when writing a narrative of their choice at the end of the six weeks. The students both chose to brainstorm first for ideas and did so with support from myself and each other (Field Notes, November 6, 2012). When given the choice of which graphic organizer to use, Jamie chose the beginning/middle/end strategy while Garrison chose the hamburger. After writing the title on the hamburger, Garrison flipped his page over and began prewriting his own version of a web/semantic map. I stopped him and asked if he would prefer to use something other than the hamburger. He said "I want to use the circle map because there's more room, can I have a new graphic organizer" (Field Notes, November 6, 2012)? I provided him with a pre-made map and he began to write. During the act of writing their narrative, I observed the students utilize the graphic organizers. I observed them changing vocabulary, adding conventions, and numbering and checking off items as they added them to their piece (Observations, November 6, 2012). I interpret the actions of my students during this time as them monitoring their own writing by use of graphic organizers. Without the graphic organizers, the students would not have produced writing pieces that had satisfactory organization, word choice and other writing traits. Though the students used me as support in prior writing pieces, they had to rely only on the strategy they chose at this time. The strategies helped the students monitor themselves and also provided a checking system to make sure they had all of the parts they needed to create a successful whole writing piece.

To further understand why the students chose to use the graphic organizers they did, I conducted a post writing interview. Jamie chose the beginning/middle/end strategy because of the amount of room to write. He explained that it was the best choice because "sometime [he] write[s] too big for the hamburger" (Student Interview, November 6, 2012). This comment could be interpreted as Jamie learning what type of writer he is. He knew that he would have a difficult time writing in the smaller space provided on the hamburger graphic organizer, so he made a different choice, a choice more suitable to him as a writer. One comment made by Jamie that made me know for sure the he understood the purpose of using a graphic organizer was when he said "I could write anything but then I could write it in a order that made sense when I read it over again and again" (Student Interview, November 6, 2012). I interpret Jamie's comment to mean that again, he is learning more about himself as a writer. He knew from prior writing experiences that he struggles with certain writing traits such as organization but it has also been proven to him that when he utilizes a graphic organizer, he benefits greatly from the support it provides. This comment also helped me understand as his teacher, that Jamie understands the importance of prewriting and how to use the graphic organizer as a tool to refer to while writing.

Garrison also showed his understanding of the importance of prewriting by stating "all graphic organizers […] the hamburger, the circle one, and the beginning/middle/end one help me stay organized and make sure I have all the stuff I need to write […] it helps me remember what I'm going to write" (Student Interview, November 6, 2012). This comment again ties to the argument made by Kellogg, (1987), Breetvelt et. al. (1994) and Voon (2010) in regard to student achievement at any age when prewriting strategies are implemented.

The information I gathered from observations/field notes, teacher questionnaire responses, and interviewing the students helped uncover the real reason for using prewriting

strategies. All of the data collected mirrored the information researched for my literature review agreeing that prewriting strategies such as brainstorming and graphic organizers are positive strategies to use with all types of students as they clearly help students feel confident in writing and improve their overall writing quality.

All three themes that emerged through the research are important aspects of the writing process. It is vital that the professional who is teaching the writing be confident and prepared to teach what is required and more. Understanding the importance of prewriting strategies and their usefulness is necessary for both the teacher and the student involved. Knowing how important it is to use prewriting strategies will help teachers and students rely on them during the writing process. Teaching and using multiple strategies is vital because the overall goal of using prewriting strategies is that if a wide variety of them are known, they can be molded to fit in any classroom, any grade level, any ability level and can be used as a differentiation tool. These themes are all part of a bigger picture that will support students in the writing process and aid them in becoming better, more confident writers.

Implications and Conclusions

Implications

The findings from this study, the data collected and the information researched have important implications for myself as a future educator as well as for all teachers. Writing is a very important aspect of the school day as it and reading are the only subjects that span across all content areas. However, nationwide students are falling behind in writing leaving 50% of students graduating from high school lacking the proper preparation to enter college (Cutler, 2008). Because writing spans across all content areas that are taught within the school day, it is important to examine the implications this study has provided regarding the writing process.

When examining the data I collected, the literature review, and the teacher questionnaire, it was obvious from the information presented that most teachers feel that they have not received enough education on how to teach the writing process confidently and effectively. According to Grisham and Wosley (2011), "teachers may feel somewhat confident as writers themselves, yet they are admittedly anxious about teaching writing" (p. 362). I myself was part of this group who feel that the writing education provided in college was not enough for me to feel confident to teach it effectively. This finding is very serious as students need to be proficient in writing in order to grow into adults who are ready to enter college or the work force.

In order for teachers to feel confident in their ability to teach writing to their students, they are forced to look for opportunities outside of their educational experience to learn more about the teaching process of the subject. It was stated in the teacher questionnaire that one of the teachers follows teacher blogs online to gain information on writing. Though using the internet is a great resource, it is not the best nor the only resource available. Many teachers who are not taking college courses look to their school district to provide education through the use of professional development session. The problem here lies in the fact that professional developments change their topics and are not always geared toward what every teacher feels they need at that time. With writing being such an important topic, teachers should be responsible for suggesting that the professional developments are geared toward writing, if that is in fact the support they need. By speaking up and asking for what we need to be more successful in the classroom, we are not only becoming advocates for ourselves, but for our students. Of course there are other ways of keeping up with writing education aside from professional developments. Becoming members of educational newsletters and journals are also great sources to learn new and effective teaching methods, asking questions, taking the time to research on our own and

having conversations with veteran teachers are all ways to help us become better, more confident teachers of writing. Observing veteran teachers and learning from them is a source where most teachers have direct access, they don't have to leave their school building or go online to use it. Veteran teachers should be used as a valued resource as teacher candidates and teachers less confident to teach writing need better models of what good writing instruction looks like (Grisham & Wosley, 2011).

Another implication that was found through the research was the effective use of prewriting strategies. It was found in all aspects of the research, the literature review, the questionnaire, the student interviews, and the student's 6+1 Writing Traits scores, that using any type of prewriting strategy with students will improve their overall writing quality. As found by Kolade (2012), use of graphic organizers during prewriting improves the overall writing quality of student work. Breetvelt et. al. (1994) agrees as they found that using even a simplistic outline during the prewriting stage increases the quality of the writing produced. These findings are huge implications for teachers. Using prewriting strategies in their classrooms with their students may take a slight bit more time, but the results are worth it. The most valued quality about prewriting strategies is that they are moldable to different ages, grade levels, ability levels, etc. It is exciting to know that a strategy taught in first grade can follow and continue to shape the writing development of a student through high school and possibly through their college careers.

Conclusion

The main question this study asked was how the use of graphic organizers as prewriting strategies improves the writing organization and idea generation of the student writer? It has been proven through the research of literature and the data collected that the use of prewriting strategies does in fact improve the quality of student writing by supporting students through the

writing process. What was also researched was writing as a social practice and how writing is a

form of literacy learned through exposure to models and the process of trial and error (Gee,

1989). The research proved writing as a social practice is tightly connected to the make-up of the

sociocultural theory which recognizes that acquisition of literacy is based not only on formal

teaching, but relies heavily on the social aspect as well (Gee, 1989). The reasoning behind the

theory is that developing writers gain their writing knowledge from what they learn or see in

society. Though writing is bound to all content areas in developing education, it was also

explored that writing ties to the research which indicates that teachers feel the most unprepared

to teach writing as a subject. Why these teachers feel unprepared to teach writing was linked

back to their college education and the experiences they have had with writing within the

classroom setting.

      The research conducted for this study was subject to many limitations. Time was a large

issue as well as access to students and classrooms. If I were to do this research again I would

have sent out questionnaires to teachers at more than one school in different districts. I feel that it

would have been interesting to see how the information they provided was similar or different to

teachers from other schools. Also this extra information would have given me a better-rounded

teacher point of view. Secondly, I would have spent more time in classroom settings where I

would have used more students for both the writing samples and the student interviews that were

conducted. Using students at different grade and ability levels would have provided more

information showing who, or if all students, would have benefited from using the prewriting

strategies. This change in data collection would have given me more of a range of ability levels

as well as more information all together to analyze. Lastly, something I would change would be

adding more of an exploration of the use of technology with writing. After collecting my data, I

found that the teachers who participated in the questionnaire did not discuss any form of technology they may use in the classroom. I now wonder if using technology along side written prewriting strategies is actually feasible within the real classroom.

Findings from this action research project provided me with insight into the writing process within classrooms, how teachers and students feel about teaching and learning about writing, and their confidence doing both. I continue to wonder if conducting this action research during the school day with students at multiple levels would provide me with the same results. If I did conduct my research during the school day, would all types of students respond the same way or would I have to differentiate within the strategies?

The information this action research project provided is beneficial to students and teachers alike. It has been proven that the use of prewriting strategies will improve the overall writing quality of the student writer. It has also been proven that learning to teach these important strategies and the writing process itself is what will drive students and teachers to success in the classroom, whether they are on the teaching spectrum or the learning one.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Does the use of prewriting strategies effect student writing abilities during the writing process?

Part 1: Participant Information
Name:
Current Position (Grade Level/Content Area, # of Years):
All grade levels you've taught:
Degree(s) Received:

Part 2: Background
1. Please answer a, b, c and d based on the rating scale below:
> 1- Strongly Disagree   2- Disagree   3- Agree   4- Strongly Agree
> a. I feel that I graduated with my bachelor's degree with enough education to teach the writing process confidently and effectively.
> b. I feel that I graduated with my master's degree with enough education to teach the writing process confidently and effectively.
> c. I feel that the students who entered my class at the beginning of the 2012 school year have been taught the writing process adequately based on their grade level.
> d. My school provides professional development and/or other seminars that improve my confidence and effectiveness to teach the writing process.

2. What types of classes/seminars/PDs have you participated in, inside or outside of your school, to learn more about teaching the writing process?

Part 3: Writing in your classroom
1. How much time per <u>week</u> is devoted to writing instruction in your classroom?

2. What types of writing assignments are students assigned? (journals, worksheets, narratives, poems, songs, comic strips, etc)

3. What types of prewriting activities/strategies have you used with your students?

4. Have you used graphic organizers with your students? What types and for what content areas?

5. What is your method of evaluating student writing?

6. How do you currently differentiate writing instruction for struggling writers? Explain.

7. Could you use prewriting strategies such as graphic organizers to differentiate your writing instruction? How so?

Part 4: Your Students

1. How many students do you currently have in your class? How many of them receive special education services? (please list services provided)

2. Do your students work better when using prewriting strategies? What types of students benefit the most?
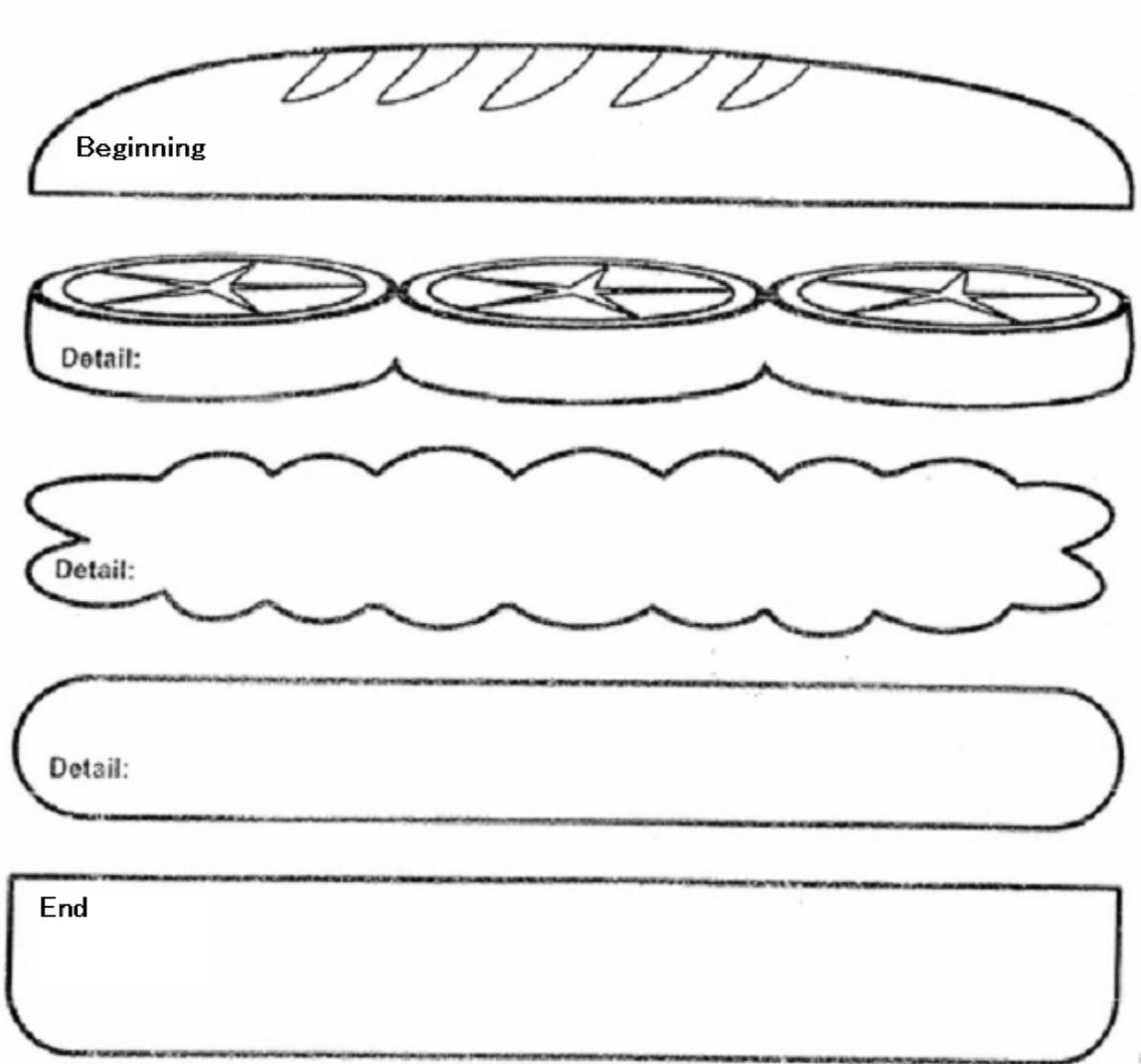
Appendix B

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Word Choice	Writer uses vivid words and phrases that linger or draw pictures in the reader's mind, and the choice and placement of the words seems accurate, natural and not forced.	Writer uses a few vivid words and phrases that linger or draw pictures in the reader's mind, but occasionally the words are used inaccurately or seem overdone.	Writer uses words that communicate clearly, but the writing lacks variety, punch or flair.	Writer uses a limited vocabulary that does not communicate strongly or capture the reader's interest. Jargon or cliches may be present and detract from the meaning.
Organization	The introduction is inviting, states the main topic and previews the structure of the paper. Conclusion is strong. Body paragraphs have clear transitions, and are in a powerful order.	The introduction clearly states the main topic and previews the structure of the paper, but is not particularly inviting to the reader. The conclusion ties things up pretty well. Body paragraphs are relevant but not developed.	The introduction states the main topic, but does not preview the structure of the paper nor is it inviting to the reader. Conclusion exists, but fails in its job. Body paragraphs are randomly placed, and not very detailed.	There is no clear introduction of the main topic or structure of the paper, nor any clear conclusion. Paper begins and ends in limbo, and even the body paragraphs have little structure or detail.
Conventions	Writer makes no errors in spelling, capitalization, grammar, paragraphing or punctuation, so the paper is easy to read, and is ready for publication.	Writer makes 1 or 2 errors in spelling, homonyms, grammar or punctuation, but the paper is still easy to read.	Writer makes a few errors in spelling, paragraphing, grammar, homonyms and/or punctuation that catch the reader's attention and interrupt the flow. The paper needs to be edited and re-written.	Writer makes many errors in spelling, homonyms, grammar, and/or punctuation. The paper is difficult to read and need drastic re-working.
Sentence Structure (Sentence Fluency)	All sentences are well-constructed with varied length, structure and beginnings. No run-ons or fragments.	Most sentences are well-constructed with varied structure and length. 1 or 2 sentences begin the same. 1 or 2 run-ons or fragments.	Most sentences are well-constructed but have a similar structure, length, and/or beginning.	Sentences lack structure and appear incomplete or rambling.
Ideas	Paper is clear and focused. It holds the reader's attention. All examples and anecdotes are relevant and enrich the theme.	Paper is mostly focused and generally clear. Some details are extraneous. Development is weak.	The writer begins to define the topic, but wanders a lot. Details are spotty and/or poorly developed.	The paper wanders all over the map. Details are lacking. There seems to be no purpose or central theme.
Voice	The writer speaks in an individual, compelling, engaging, or unusual style. Paper is fun to read.	The writer addresses the topic, but not the audience. He writes well, but writes for himself, not others.	Sentences are standard, dull, but grammatical. Topic is addressed, but not in an engaging way. The writer is bored with the assignment.	The writer does not care about the topic or the audience, and it shows. Paper is sloppy.

Appendix C

Beginning

Middle

End

Appendix D

Beginning

Detail:

Detail:

Detail:

End

Appendix E

Detail 2:

Detail 4:

Main Idea:

Detail 1:

Detail 3: