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Writing Strategies for Struggling Writers

Christine Keeler
St. John Fisher College

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Writing Strategies
for Struggling Writers

By

Christine Keeler

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Supervised by

Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Arts and Sciences
St. John Fisher College

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Abstract

Writing is a vital component of literacy acquisition. The writing process contains various steps that children must understand and execute in order to be successful writers. This study asked: how can writing strategies taught in a small group foster the development of literacy among struggling writers? Research was done in Port, New York (pseudonym) with two students identified as struggling writers. Through a writing attitude survey, informal interviews, and instruction of various writing strategies during opinion writing, there was evidence that factors can change writing attitudes: modeling supports understanding of strategies: and self-monitoring strategies can support writing. These findings call for teachers to understand how children’s writing develops in order to provide the best instruction for each individual student.

Introduction

Writing is a complex and challenging task, and its development occurs based on a child’s knowledge, motivation, and understanding of the writing process. Writing involves many aspects including the opportunity to express thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Writing can also allow children to demonstrate knowledge on a specific topic. No matter how writing is being used, effective writers must develop a variety of skills including the ability to organize ideas, use conventions, write legibly, identify a structure, and engage an audience (Baker and Chard, 2009).

In order for children to develop writing skills and knowledge, writing instruction must target specific areas to meet intended goals of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Effective instructional procedures exist for young, beginning writers, but effective teachers must implement such procedures in order to create effective writers.
Providing effective instruction and identifying children who experience difficulties learning to write at an early age is vital in education. By providing effective writing instruction, it maximizes children’s writing development and generally minimizes the number of students who develop writing problems. Identifying children who experience difficulties learning to write allows instructors to provide early intervention rather than waiting to try and fix those problems in later grades (Saddler, Moran, Graham, and Harris, 2004).

After exploring these ideas, it is important that the writing instruction for elementary grades be further investigated. Providing instruction on how to plan and write a paper are two aspects that can improve students’ writing. Through teaching self-regulating strategies such as goal setting and self-monitoring, students can plan out their writing while meeting targeted goals and monitoring their own development. Goal setting can be introduced by the teacher in a group setting, but students can also take that and execute goal setting independently to improve their writing. Monitoring writing is an aspect of writing that can often go forgotten by teachers and students. Introducing strategies to monitor or check writing helps students improve their writing. Writing can involve different types including fiction, nonfiction, opinion, and persuasive writing. In all of these types of writing, students must include many aspects. Understanding and implementing self-monitoring strategies can help students make sure that they include all the needed parts. By providing explicit instruction and teacher modeling in these areas, teachers can examine how and if this type of instruction helps students develop in the area of writing. Explicit instruction is needed in the instruction of writing strategies. Teachers directly teach and model how and when to use a specific strategy. In doing so,
it leaves for little misunderstanding of how and when to use each strategy. In addition, repetitive modeling of strategies helps students practice often before carrying them out independently.

Under these ideas, the following research was performed to further analyze writing instruction and students’ outcomes. This research study asks what types of writing strategies foster the development of writing for struggling writers? After researching the literature, recurring themes consisted of the effects of self-regulated strategy development, writing instruction that promotes student learning, and different technology uses that enhances writing development. Research was done in Port, New York (a pseudonym) with two, second grade students identified as struggling writers. Through the implementation of modified self-regulated strategy development instruction, student interviews, teacher interviews, and data collection, it was found that such instruction does have an effect on students’ writing development in varying ways. With the findings come specific implications. Because students have strong opinions about what they write, teachers must take into consideration student perceptions about writing and writing topics in order to design instruction that meets each student’s needs. In addition, teachers must model and explicitly teach specific writing strategies in order to help students make progress in writing development. These findings and implications call for teachers to understand best practice as well as what types of best practice fits the needs of individual students.

**Theoretical Framework**

Literacy is a developmental and multidimensional process where each part plays an important role in what it means to be literate in any culture. Understanding what
promotes and negatively impacts literacy acquisition helps teachers create literate classrooms. However, it can be difficult to define exactly what it means to be literate. Speaking, reading, and writing are key to being literate, but they must be done with full understanding and comprehension. Freebody and Luke (1990) define literacy as “a multifaceted set of social practices with a material technology, entailing code breaking, participation with the knowledge of the text, social uses of text, and analysis/critique of the text,” (p. 15). In order for children to be successful readers, Freebody and Luke (1990) believe that they must use the four roles: code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst. These roles can be learned within the context of the other. Children are able to learn and use these roles when they are taught systematically, explicitly, and developmentally (Freebody and Luke, 1990). Literacy is a complex process where individuals must be knowledgeable of content as well as how and when to use information given. In order to have students acquire literacy and continue to utilize literacy skills, they must first develop each skill.

In addition to this definition, Gee (1989) defines literacy as “control of secondary uses of language (i.e. uses of language in secondary discourses)” (p. 23). By discourse, Gee (1989) means “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network”” (p. 18). Two types of discourses were recognized by Gee (1989): primary and secondary discourses. Primary discourse is used informally, meaning it is used in the home for social interaction among family members and friends of the same community. Secondary discourse is used within more professional settings such as school, work, and church (Gee, 1989). People are born into their primary
discourse and learn to acquire literacy through their immersion of their primary discourse.

Children acquire literacy in a combination of different ways. Oral and written language are two major factors that play an important role in the acquisition of literacy, and both are needed for children to be effective communicators (Freebody and Luke, 1990, Otto 2004, and Kucer, 2009). The linguistic system includes language use at the phonetic, syntactic, semantic and morphemic levels and involves spoken or oral language. Freebody and Luke (1990) argued that if there is one identifiable source of early reading failure, “then it is the failure of the individual to acquire proficiency with the structured nature of spoken language,” (p. 8). In order for children to use and comprehend text, or successfully engage in oral language, they need phonics, letter, knowledge and spelling patterns.

Oral language is as important as written language in the development of literacy as it provides the basis for written language. Together, they work hand in hand. Otto (2004) notes that “oral language is acquired prior to written language knowledge; however, as written language knowledge is acquired, oral language continues to develop further; it is refined and elaborated with experiences that involve written language,” (p. 19). Oral language impacts literacy acquisition because it is repeated over and over again; it is a recursive process. With such practice and repetition, a child gains the necessary skills needed to acquire literacy. Furthermore, oral language can promote school success. Otto (2004) found that “children who have oral language competencies will be more successful in communicating with both teachers and peers. Their success in carrying on conversations and in responding in learning activities will contribute to
further success at school,” (p. 21). Being able to communicate successfully by using language for different functions and purposes in the classroom with peers and teachers is a major impact in acquiring literacy.

Without oral language, students would struggle with written language. Kucer (2009) stated, “written language builds on and extends spoken language,” (p. 71). Therefore, a child needs both written language and oral language to be a successful reader and writer. When a student holds morphemic knowledge, they understand the structure of words. Otto (2004) explains, “knowledge of morphology allows children to comprehend others’ speech better, such as understanding plural nouns and verb tense,” (p. 10). Readers who understand and use their morphemic knowledge are increasing their literacy acquisition. When readers learn the structure of words, they begin to make patterns and hypothesize. Even though overgeneralizations and miscues may occur, children are still learning and practicing morphology, which impacts literacy acquisition (Otto, 2004).

Individuals acquire literacy in a variety of ways often in a social process that is influenced by interaction and communication with others. This definition of literacy comes from a sociocultural perspective. Larson and Marsh (2005) explain, “the sociocultural-historical learning theory defines the child as an active member of a constantly changing community of learners in which knowledge constructs and is constructed by larger cultural systems,” (p. 100). This theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction and culture in acquiring literacy. Children learn from mediated instruction in their cultural context. The sociocultural-historical theory focuses on the significance of seeing how children live culturally. This theory helps teachers gain a
meaningful understanding of how students learn in and out of school. The sociocultural perspective is pertinent in defining literacy because it focuses on what people from different communities do, not what they do when compared to a dominant group (Larson and Marsh, 2005).

The sociocultural-historical theory, as defined by Larson and Marsh (2005), guides my research of writing strategies used at the elementary level. Because literacy acquisition is a social process, students often learn how to read and write through communication and social interaction. Learning is co-constructed by both the teacher and the student under the sociocultural-historical theory, and learning occurs through the participation of both parties and their interaction with one another. Students are able to understand the meaning of written language when the text is culturally relevant both in and out of school (Larson and Marsh, 2005). Throughout this study, students were able to co-construct with the teacher opinions towards specific picture books in order to become more independent at opinion writing. This study was completed in a small group context where students were able to interact with each other. In addition, children’s discourse, oral and written language can adhere to the development of literacy, specifically their understanding of writing. Furthermore, texts were provided that the instructor felt relevant and engaging to students based on their input in the beginning of the study. In this study, students not only displayed their written language, but they also used their oral language to give perceptions and ideas of writing. Combining each of these aspects in instruction is important in developing a literate environment where students can find success in writing.
Research Question

Given that literacy is a social practice and learning occurs through social interaction, this action research project asks, how can specific writing strategies taught in a small group foster the development of literacy among children who are struggling writers?

Literature Review

In order to construct an informative and meaningful action research study, it is important to first fully understand the prior research that has helped form the groundwork for this specific study. In the following literature review, three individual themes will be discussed in depth. The first theme explores the effects of a writing strategy called Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD). The purpose of SRSD as related to writing is to teach students strategies to help them master writing processes. Within SRSD, common topics presented themselves including goal-setting, planning, generalization, and peer support. Each of these topics contributes to the importance of SRSD as an effective writing approach that improves the quality of self-regulating writers.

Next, the second theme revolves around writing instruction that promotes student learning and writing development. Providing a variety of prewriting and before writing activities is important in creating a planned and organized writer. Interactive writing is a key tenet of writing instruction that further develops students’ writing. Additionally, providing explicit and differentiated instruction advances the writing development of independent students and their individual needs. Using a wide-range of writing strategies in the elementary classroom impacts children’s independent writing development.
Lastly, a variety of technology goes unnoticed or forgotten during the writing process in the elementary grades. Without proper training and knowledge, teachers cannot utilize the new technologies that are available for classrooms today. Technology such as music, word processing, and blogs foster the development of writing in various ways.

**Effects of Self-Regulated Strategy Development**

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) is a highly effective tool that improves the writing skills of elementary students at various instructional levels (Graham, Kiuhara, McKeown, & Harris, 2012; Baker & Chard, 2009). The SRSD model is widely used across grade levels and for varying levels of learners. In a meta-analysis of writing instruction for students in elementary grades, Graham et al. (2012) found that strategy instruction enhanced the quality of students’ writing. Out of a total of 20 studies that tested strategy instruction, 14 specifically involved the SRSD model. Graham et al. stated, “with this model, students are taught general and task-specific writing strategies, the background knowledge needed to use the strategies, and procedures (goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instructions, and self-reinforcement) for regulating the strategies, the writing process and writing behaviors” (p. 886). With this type of strategy instruction, teachers individualize their teaching to meet students’ needs. In addition, Baker and Chard (2009)’s study that evaluated the quality of multiple SRSD research studies found that SRSD is a high-quality strategy where, if conducted accurately, teachers can expect to see significant improvements in student writing especially from struggling writers. However, young, average writers are not excluded from the group. Both Graham et al. (2012) and Baker and Chard (2009)’s research found that the majority
of SRSD research has been done with struggling writers, students with learning disabilities, or students at risk for learning disabilities. If SRSD is effective in enhancing the writing of these types of writers, then the SRSD approach would exhibit similar writing gains of other groups of students.

The SRSD approach includes multiple instructional practices throughout its implementation in order for students to improve their writing. Goal-setting and self-monitoring is one feature of SRSD that has been found to improve the quality of writing by creating self-regulating writers (Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2005a; Tracy, Reid, & Graham, 2009). Self-regulating writers prove to have the ability to use such features independently and effectively. In a study by Graham et al. (2005a) that aimed to improve the writing performance, knowledge, and self-efficacy of struggling young writers using the SRSD model, as well as Tracy et al.’s (2009) study that tested the impact of SRSD on third grade students, the idea of goal-setting was introduced by each instructor in various ways. Both instructors used goal-setting in different ways to enhance the quality of instruction for students. An important aspect of goal-setting is that it can be done individually or as a group. Santangelo and Olinghouse (2009) described goal-setting as having the ability to:

be used during the initial conception of the paper, during the drafting process, or while revising a draft. Specific product goals should address the purpose of the assignment (e.g., to write a letter to the editor that sways public opinion) and the characteristics of the final composition (e.g., a topic sentence that conveys the writer’s opinion, reasons for this opinion, and a concluding sentence). (p. 10)
By setting goals in their writing, students work towards becoming self-regulating writers. Setting purposeful goals throughout the entire writing process help students work toward and produce quality writing.

Goal setting is a popular component of writing instruction because it can be incorporated at multiple points throughout the writing process. In Graham et al. (2005a), the instructor explained to students that their goal in the planning phase was to make sure all seven key elements, using a mnemonic device as an aid, including details, sequence, and excitement. The instructor explicitly told students the goal, and there was no confusion in what was expected. In another instance, after being taught the knowledge and skills to plan and write, students were asked to set a goal to use the planning and writing skills outside of class before the next lesson (Tracy et al., 2009). Teachers can model and use goal-setting in instruction in order for students to gain a better understanding of why it is important to begin their writing with an idea of the end product in mind. Goal-setting can also be used to help students achieve certain tasks. Graham et al. (2012)’s meta-analysis validated that teaching how to apply a self-regulating strategy like goal-setting helps students manage their writing and improve outcomes. By setting goals throughout the writing process, students not only have a purpose for writing, but they have an end goal that they strive to meet.

In a study by Lienemann and Reid (2008), where SRSD was used to improve expository writing with students with ADHD, results showed that the self-monitoring aspect provided feedback on performance. Students were able to self-monitor their writing by checking the amount of essay parts they included. Students with ADHD often have trouble creating and persisting toward meeting goals, and SRSD provided students
with ADHD the necessary explicit instruction to establish a goal and work towards meeting that goal (Lienemann & Reid, 2008). Self-monitoring worked alongside goal-setting because students had to self-monitor in order to assure that their original goals were being reached. Research by Graham et al. (2005a) and Tracy et al. (2009) places a strong emphasis on the SRSD approach because both studies produced positive effects of student writing. Furthermore, the inclusion of goal setting and self-monitoring are two important components to teach to students who struggle with writing. Graham et al. (2012) stated, “the teaching of goal setting, self-assessment, and other self-regulation procedures as part of strategy instruction is one way in which SRSD differs from other strategy instructional approaches” (p. 889). Other approaches, such as a traditional basic-skills approach to instruction, exclude the instruction of goal setting. A traditional basic-skills approach emphasizes spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization with less attention paid to specific writing processes (Tracy et al., 2009). Without goal-setting, students lack the skills and knowledge needed to effectively produce complete writing.

Another feature of SRSD that has been found to improve the quality of writing by creating self-regulating writers is planning (Lienemann & Reid, 2008; Little, Lane, Harris, Graham, Story, & Sandmel, 2010; Saddler, Moran, Graham, & Harris, 2004; Saddler, 2006; Graham et al., 2005a; Saddler & Asaro, 2007). The SRSD approach always requires the teaching of the mnemonic “POW,” which stands for pick a topic, organize notes, and write and say more, regardless of the genre. This mnemonic stands as a general planning strategy. However, depending on the specific genre, another mnemonic is introduced to assist planning. Lienemann and Reid (2008) and Little et al. (2010) implemented the SRSD approach with students writing persuasive essays and
opinion essays, respectively. Because of the nature of the genre, SRSD requires the instructor to teach the “TREE” mnemonic, in addition to the POW strategy, as another planning strategy, which stands for topic sentence, reason, explanation, and ending. Conversely, Saddler et al. (2004) and Saddler (2006) used the mnemonic “WWW What=2 How=2” as a planning strategy to teach story writing in addition to the POW mnemonic. This mnemonic provides a basis for the key elements that should be included in a story, which stands for: Who are the main characters? When does the story take place? Where does the story take place? What do the main characters want to do? What happens when the main characters try to do it? How does the story end? How do the main characters feel? Little et al.’s (2010) study compared students’ pretest writing with posttest writing and found that some students consistently used the TREE mnemonic to plan their posttest writing. This result proved that planning was an important factor in the students’ writing. In addition, results from both Saddler et al. (2004) and Saddler’s (2006) study showed that students used planning strategies, to some degree, during posttest. Instructors observed, in both studies, that students planned for posttest by writing mnemonics on their paper and verbalizing planning statements. Saddler and Asaro (2007) found that students at posttest spent more time planning than at pretest. Results have shown that, in some way, the mnemonic devices presented during SRSD play a major role in the planning and composition of student writing. Without instruction of strategies such as POW, TREE, and WWW What=2 How=2, students lack the knowledge of what to include in their writing. The SRSD approach provides a step-by-step instruction of how to effectively teach students a specific way to plan, draft, and revise.
In addition, generalization is another feature of SRSD that has been found to improve the quality of writing by creating self-regulating writers (Tracy et al., 2009; Saddler et al., 2004; Little et al., 2010). Generalization is an important element of SRSD because it tests students’ understanding. If students understand the strategies being taught, then they will often generalize them, or use them, in a similar but slightly different writing situation. In both Tracy et al. (2009) and Saddler et al.’s (2004) study, students were instructed using the SRSD approach to write stories whereas Little et al.’s (2010) study consisted of students learning to write persuasive essays using the SRSD approach. However, each study provided evidence of student ability to generalize self-regulating strategies in an uninstructed genre or independently in the same genre. During instruction of Tracy et al.’s (2009) study, the instructor overtly informed students that the strategies learned for story writing could be transferred to other genres such as personal narratives. Students understood that generalization meant they could apply the strategies they were learning to other types of writing. After story writing instruction in Tracy et al. (2009) and Saddler et al.’s (2004) study, results proved that students could generalize self-regulating strategies in a post-assessment of personal narratives. In each instance, the majority of students included more key elements and wrote more for personal narratives than did students in a control group who were not taught the SRSD strategy. Similar results from Little et al.’s (2010) study show that students who learned strategies to write a persuasive essay, given a topic, were also able to write a persuasive essay independently choosing their own topic. In this case, students wrote persuasive essays on topics of their choice outside of classroom instruction. Lienemann and Reid (2008) found contrasting results in their study of using SRSD to improve expository writing with
students with ADHD stating, “the lack of generalization we found might be due to the lack of common elements across stories and essays,” (p. 482). Noting contrasting results is important in understanding the best effective methods in improving student writing. The SRSD strategy places a major emphasis on generalization because the strategy aims to impact student writing of different types of genres. Students who show the ability and knowledge to generalize compose more complete and meaningful writing.

Peer support is an added component to SRSD that has been found to improve the quality of writing by creating self-regulating writers. Graham et al. (2012) recommended that teachers who provide arrangements for students to work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their papers would improve the quality of his/her writing. Peer support is an important element as students learn from each other, make connections, and confide in one another about their writing. Graham et al.’s study contained two treatment groups and one control group. The first treatment group was instructed in SRSD whereas the second treatment group was instructed in SRSD plus peer support. The purpose of the SRSD plus peer support treatment was to test if peers promoted strategy use together. Graham et al. stated, “the two students met to identify other places or instances where they could use all or part of the strategies they were learning and how they might need to modify a strategy or strategies for an identified situation,” (p. 210). Requiring students to have peer discussions about the strategy increase their practice and help them become more aware of how the strategy can be generalized. After instruction, results showed that there were not too many differences in the effects of the SRSD and SRSD peer support groups. However, students in the SRSD peer support group did spend more time composing their writing in the uninstructed genre, which proved that students learned
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how to generalize. A peer component was also evident in both Tracy et al. (2009) and Saddler (2004)’s study during the instructional process where the teacher modeled goal-setting and planning. In this stage of instruction, students in both studies collaborated with the teacher to form a goal and help plan for the writing of the end product. SRSD typically involves one instructor and multiple students (Tracy et al., 2009). Therefore, the instruction is not one-on-one, which means that students are working in small groups feeding off of each other’s energy and knowledge. Though research does not show that SRSD plus peer support provides significantly different data than pure SRSD, peer support is an added benefit for students practicing the use of self-regulating strategies. Students can work together setting goals and help each other self-monitor their writing process.

Writing Instruction to Promote Student Learning

In addition to the SRSD approach, other components can be included in writing instruction to produce high quality writers. It is important to understand that “a primary goal of early writing instruction is to arm students with the tools they need to become independent, fluent, and confident writers” (Williams & Lundstrom, 2007, p. 209). It is these tools that students must hold in order to be achieving writers. Various research supports that planning prior to writing, including prewriting activities, improves the quality of writing (Lorenz, Green, & Brown, 2009; Zipprich, 1995). Prewriting is an important aspect of the writing process as it is the first step where writers choose a topic and then plans the details in order to support the main idea. Prewriting activities are seen as an important and necessary classroom practice to help students generate ideas for their writing. A meta-analysis by Rogers and Graham (2008) found an assortment of
instructional practices that improve students’ writing including engaging students in prewriting activities for gathering and organizing ideas in advance of writing. A graphic organizer, web, or other type of procedure engages students in the writing process.

Lorenz et al. (2009) conducted a study to “determine whether the use of a tool that provided second-grade students with the ability to organize their thoughts and ideas using various media would increase their written output and logical organization in the prewriting process” (p. 116). The study involved students engaged in a prewriting graphic organizer online, which supported students by utilizing pictures, text, and spoken words to complete the organizer. Graphic organizers help students organize information on one topic, and they also help students keep their writing in a specific order. Bogard and McMackin (2012) provided students with three possible graphic organizers to get them thinking about the beginning, middle, and end of their story. Allowing students to plan helps them turn their writing into thought-out and organized.

In a similar study, Zipprich (1995) used webs to help students plan in a prewriting activity for writing narratives. A web is similar to a graphic organizer as both serve planning and organization purposes. Both studies by Lorenz et al. (2009) and Zipprich (1995) found that using graphic organizers and webs as a prewriting activity foster the development of writing. The use of graphic organizers and webs can be used throughout the writing process in a variety of ways. Interestingly, Lorenz et al. (2009)’s study showed that creating graphic organizers online, versus creating a graphic organizer using pen and paper, lead to more ideas in writing and words overall. Technology, therefore, is a factor that can improve writing and essentially foster the development of writing.
In addition to graphic organizers and webs, other prewriting activities promote student learning and improvement in quality of writing (Lee, 2011; Mason, Snyder, Sukhram, & Kedem, 2006). Self-expressive writing and expository writing are two different genres, yet students’ writing pieces in regards to both of these genres require similar prewriting activities. Lee (2011) engaged students in various prewriting activities before instructing students in writing self-expressive essays. One prewriting activity required students to respond to what, in fact, is good writing by comparing two writing pieces. This type of prewriting activity lays the foundation for what is expected of any student when they embark on writing a new piece. Furthermore, Lee had students unravel thoughts about a variety of topics, which allowed students to develop prior knowledge and make notes about that specific topic. These types of prewriting strategies get students thinking prior to putting pencil to the paper. Mason et al. (2006) conducted a study that examined the expository comprehension and informative writing performance of fourth grade students. Informative writing processes often involve different approaches to writing compared to self-expressive writing or personal narrative writing. One approach that helps students break writing tasks into smaller parts is a mnemonic called PLANS, which stands for “Pick goals, List ways to meet goals, And, Make notes and Sequence notes,” (Mason et al., p. 71). Instructors taught PLANS explicitly and individualized to each student in the study based on their needs. Students instructed in PLANS began the writing process by “selecting goals from a potential list of writing goals or by developing their own personal goals for improving their writing,” (Mason et al., p. 71). After instruction, results showed that PLANS affected students’ written retells positively because they were longer and more organized. Though prewriting activities
seen in Mason et al. (2006) and Lee (2011) were varied, both groups of students learn ways to plan and organize, and students also gained perspectives regarding what good writing contains. Struggling writers often have difficulty with various aspects of the writing process, but gaining an understanding of what good writing is composed of is an important step of developing writing skills.

Interactive writing is another popular aspect of writing instruction that promotes effective writing in the elementary classroom. Through interactive writing, students learn writing processes such as planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing by way of teacher demonstration and eventually student participation. The teacher provides an explicit, shared experience for students to engage in using their oral language. Sharing the pen is the key component of writing instruction where the main goal is to “focus students’ attention on specific aspects of the writing process that they are still coming to understand or need to learn to develop as writers,” (Williams, Sherry, Robinson, & Hungler, 2012, p. 332). Rereading text is another key component in interactive writing because it models good tenets of writing and helps students make sure the writing makes sense. Teachers often incorporate journal writing with interactive writing because it gives students the opportunity to practice the rules of writing they learned in the interactive writing lessons. Interactive writing incorporates word study, as well, as seen in a study by Craig (2003) where “during interactive writing and word building activities, teachers not only demonstrated phonemic segmentation but also supported children’s use of segmentation to complete internal analysis of the words they spelled,” (p. 439).

Incorporating such activities into interactive writing explicitly helped students carry that information to independent writing.
Linking word study to interactive writing promotes student learning and fosters writing development. In a study by Williams and Lundstrom (2007), a first grade teacher was observed during word study and interactive writing with struggling readers. Combining word study and interactive writing, or teaching them hand in hand, is very common as writing instruction during interactive writing often includes specific words learned during word study. Word study promotes active exploration and learning about words rather than the memorization of spellings of words (Williams & Hufnagel, 2005). The teacher also explicitly taught word study strategies, and she provided authentic writing experiences for students to practice strategies they learned during word study. Through the explicit teaching of required spelling words, students learned strategies such as referring to words as a guide to read and spell other words. Another strategy taught was to listen for sounds within a word and it could help figure out another word. These word study strategies linked to interactive writing because the teacher provided meaningful opportunities for students to use these strategies through prompting. The study also reported that students’ journals contained correctly spelled spelling words learned from the prior lessons.

Gibson (2008) also taught strategies explicitly during guided writing. When students wrote independently after guided writing instruction, the teacher prompted, encouraged, and praised students for using writing behaviors that were previously taught. Williams et al. (2012) encouraged similar strategies by setting aside journal writing time where students would free-write and use the strategies they learned during the lesson. Encouragement and reminders is a key principle so students use their knowledge and skills from the interactive writing lesson. Interactive writing provides guided practice for
students to learn and use word-solving strategies, and journal writing extends interactive writing by teacher encouragement of using strategies (Williams & Lundstrom, 2007). Journal writing is a part of many teachers’ instruction. In a national survey conducted by Cutler and Graham (2008), 86.5% of teachers responded yes when asked if students engage in journal writing during the academic year. Journal writing allows students to practice the strategies they learned during interactive writing and word study.

Williams and Hufnagel (2005) researched similar word study instruction and its effect on Kindergarten students’ journal writing. The study focused on a classroom teacher and her word study instruction along with the transfer of the knowledge that was learned in the compositions written in students’ journals. Word study instruction often includes concepts about print, spelling and reading strategies, and word walls. A goal of word study instruction is for students to be able to use spelling strategies, word walls, and other resources independently in their own writing. One way teachers can engage students in writing is through journal writing. Fahsl and McAndrews (2011) introduced a thoughtful approach to incorporating journal writing in the classroom:

To use journaling effectively in a classroom, careful planning and instruction are required. This process can be broken down into five main interrelated phases within a diagnostic teaching cycle: (a) establishing learning outcomes, (b) planning assessment, (c) planning instruction, (d) implementing instruction, and (e) analyzing student learning. (p. 235)

Journal writing can be incorporated in a variety of ways, but planning, instructing, and setting goals are very important in the process of journal writing. The basis of Williams and Hufnagel’s (2005) study focused on the hope that students would use
spelling strategies, word walls, and other resources as they wrote in their journals. In fact, results showed that all students in the study did use some resource, provided during word study instruction, as they wrote in their journals. Furthermore, this study broke students into groups of three levels: high, average, and low. Results showed that journal writing impacted students in the average group the most because the instruction was not advanced enough for the high group and the instruction was too advanced for the low group (Williams & Hufnagel). Journal writing proves to link to word study, and journal writing is an effective way for teachers to provide students the opportunity to engage in writing. Gammill (2006) also supports the use of journal writing in the elementary grades because it is a tangible item that students can often refer to. In addition to practicing strategies learned in word study instruction, journal writing allows students to track their ongoing writing development and make goals for their future writing. Gammill stated, “writing creates a permanent record of a student’s thoughts and attitudes, a record one can return to as one learns and grows,” (p. 756). Writing is a process that occurs every day in the elementary classroom, and providing different options for students to practice their writing is a major aspect of the writing process.

Writing instruction involves many valuable features, but providing explicit and differentiated instruction presents themselves as key components in impacting students’ writing development. Differentiation is an approach to instruction that focuses on meeting the needs of individual students using a variety of strategies. A differentiated approach to writing instruction, as stated by Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor, and Walker-Dalhouse (2012), focuses “on the process by which students learn, the products or demonstrations of their learning, the environment in which they learn, or
the content they are learning,” (p. 304). All students have different needs, and providing instruction based on their individual needs is important in literacy development and especially in the writing process. Fahsl and McAndrews (2011) identified specific guidelines when planning writing instruction including the need to provide explicit and individualized instruction. Guidelines are beneficial to follow “when planning differentiated writing instruction that meets the needs of students with learning disabilities as well as other students who may have difficulties in writing,” (Fahsl & McAndrew, p. 235). Without guidelines, teachers lack organization and do not instruct with an end goal in mind.

Geisler, Hessler, Gardner, and Lovelace (2009) conducted a study where writing differentiated writing interventions took place for high achieving first grade students. In this study, researchers identified first grade students who were performing one whole grade level or higher above first grade in reading and comprehension. The study tested the effects of the use of a synonym list and self-counting on the number of words written. The purpose of the synonym list and self-counting were to help students self-monitor their writing by increasing their word choice as well as overall number of words written. This differentiated instruction resulted in increased amount of writing as well as more of a variety of different words. Differentiation is possible in many aspects of the literacy process. Williams and Hufnagel’s (2005) study identified that only the average group benefited from word study instruction whereas the high group did not make any gains because the instruction was not advanced enough. A differentiated approach could have benefited students in this study because the participants’ knowledge and strategies were diverse. Results from Geisler et al. (2009) made clear that “students respond differently
to specific instructional strategies, requiring the need for differentiation of the curriculum by the teacher. High-achieving students especially need a challenging curriculum that extends beyond what is appropriate for their typically achieving peers,” (p. 242). Every child learns differently because every child is different, and differentiated instruction should benefit not only struggling students but high achieving students as well.

An important aspect of writing to remember is that “a student must produce enough writing to allow the teacher to see which skills to target and then in turn produce enough writing to generate opportunities to practice newly learned skills,” (Geisler et al., 2009, p. 238). Having enough writing to analyze is vital for teachers planning to differentiate their instruction. Students’ strengths and weaknesses present themselves in their writing, which guides a teacher’s instruction of specific writing strategies and processes. Gibson (2008) identified guided writing as “an important context for teachers’ “in the moment” assessment and guidance of student writing; to observe students during specific writing events and provide immediate instructional scaffolding for writing processes targeted to the needs of a specific group of students,” (p. 114). Guided writing is a sample of how teachers can differentiate their writing instruction because students are grouped based on level.

Above all, research provides information regarding the fact that writing strategy instruction should be explicitly taught. Explicit means to simply state clearly and with detail rather than having students infer, assume or learn through discovery. Explicit teaching of strategies has been found to be beneficial “when strategies target generic writing processes such as planning, drafting, revising, or editing, and when strategies are targeted to specific writing tasks such as writing a story, a persuasive essay, or a
summary of reading material,” (Santangelo & Olinghouse, 2009, p. 11). Elementary students write a variety of genres in a variety of ways using the writing process. Explicitly teaching strategies in every step of the writing process is beneficial to students’ writing development. Planning, as discussed previously, is an important step of the writing process. Troia and Graham (2002) found explicit teaching pertinent during the planning stage because “planning strategies has resulted in improved writing performance for students with LD,” (p. 290). Providing explicit teaching in specific strategy instruction is also beneficial. Williams and Lundstrom’s (2007) study found that after the teacher taught spelling strategies explicitly, students then used those strategies independently without teacher prompting. Explicit instruction benefits struggling writers, especially, because directions and information are clearly stated. Troia and Graham (2008), in a study that focused on an explicitly taught strategy, described that “the procedures used to teach these strategies were explicit and relied heavily on teacher direction. Instructors modeled how to use the strategies and provided students with scaffolding as they learned to apply them,” (p. 298). Along with clear directions and information, explicit teaching involves modeling and scaffolding so student learning begins as teacher-directed and ends with student independence.

**Technology to Enhance Writing Development**

Certain aspects of technology go forgotten in education. Perhaps teachers disregard certain technologies because they are not aware of the positive role they may play in the writing process. As noted previously, Lorenz et al.’s (2009) study showed that students using an online graphic organizer yielded more ideas and words in their overall writing. Of course computers are often used in the writing process, but extending
a computer’s use to multiple components can play a positive role. Rogers and Graham’s (2008) meta-analysis found that overall, word processing had a positive impact on increasing productivity of struggling writers in the elementary grades. They suggested that incorporating word processing as a primary tool for writing is an instructional practice that improves students’ writing. Word processing can be seen as a necessary component of the writing process in order for students to improve their writing.

Santangelo and Olinghouse (2009) found word processing beneficial because it can increase length and quality of writing, and it also provides students with spell-check. Students often find word processing as beneficial because it guides them through the writing process.

Word processing indeed serves as a positive piece of technology in the writing development of students (Van Leeuwen & Gabriel, 2007; Beck & Fetherston, 2003). At the elementary level, schools often integrate information and communication technologies (ICT) to assist students in the writing process. Van Leeuwen and Gabriel (2007) focused on the writing behaviors of first grade students who used word processors to support their writing. After being given time to work on computers for writing, students’ attitudes were positive, and students were focused while writing. Beck and Fetherston (2003) found similar results where students who used a word processor to assist them in their writing held positive views toward their writing. Handwriting and neatness is often a worry of elementary students, but word processors eliminate that feature. Students in Beck and Fetherston’s (2003) study stressed the fact that they were very concerned with their handwriting and neatness. Furthermore, with word processors, students felt more comfortable taking risks with writing ideas and details knowing that if
it was not right they could just delete what they had written. In comparison, students were less likely to take risks while writing with a pen and pencil because it takes more time to go back and erase.

Additionally, word processors allow students the opportunity for peer interaction (Van Leeuwen & Gabriel, 2007; Chen, Liu, Shih, Wu, and Yuan, 2011). Peer feedback and peer interaction aid student writing performance, which has been found to be an important component in the writing process. Van Leeuwen and Gabriel (2007) noticed that students often referred to one another for guidance in specific word processing tasks. Students learned and taught one another different strategies using a word processor. In addition, students voluntarily read classmate’s writing and sometimes offered comments toward their classmate’s writing. Chen et al. (2011) found related information regarding peer interaction. In their study, peers provided feedback on each other’s writing through a web blog. Results found that peer feedback aided students in improving their writing. Jerles (2012) added to the idea of peer interaction through the use of a blog in that students often comment on each other’s writing promoting dialogue and learning. Peer feedback and interaction can clearly aid the performance of student writing, and perhaps teachers can be more tolerant of student talk in this specific setting.

One important aspect to note is that students sometimes fail to plan or brainstorm when beginning to write with a word processor (Van Leeuwen & Gabriel, 2007). In this case, writing using a pen and paper can be more beneficial because students have the tools to plan. However, students do often read and reread their writing using a word processor, which can make up for lack of planning. Beck and Fetherston (2003) supports that finding with students in their study who often proof-read their writing using
the word processor. Similarly, students willingly engage in proof-reading their peers' work when a word processor is involved.

Applebee and Langer (2009) performed a study that took a look at writing instruction. Amid various findings concerning instruction of writing was the importance of technology use as a support for writing. Teachers can learn that “from instant messages to Web pages to blogs to embedded graphics and videos, these changes are certainly having an impact on students’ writing experiences,” (Applebee & Langer, p. 26). Technology has the ability to be included in writing instruction. However, instructors must understand and acknowledge the various uses of various technologies. Music is one technology that, although not mentioned specifically in Applebee and Langer (2009), can impact students’ writing experiences. Music is often looked over as a type of technology that can be beneficial in the classroom. However, even though incorporating background music in the classroom is a different component of technology, it can still be included in the classroom environment during writing (Legutko & Trissler, 2012). The idea that background music can play a role in the writing development allows for the ideas of other types of technology that may often be looked over. In a study by Legutko and Trissler (2012), background music played a role in learning disabled students’ writing performance when compared to writing in silence. Students began the study completing writing assignments without any music involved, but during the middle of the study the background music “alternated each week between two Mozart compositions, *Il re pastore* (opera K. 208) and *Symphony No. 16 in C Major* (opera K. 128),” (p. 3). With the intervention of background music, five out of the nine students in the study performed better when background music was used. However, some students...
did not perform any differently when background music was or was not used. Using background music can be a beneficial component in the writing process, but teachers must be aware of the types of music they provide and the affect it has on their students.

An important element for instructors to consider is that “as the integrated use of computers becomes more commonplace in primary-grade curricula, developing a greater understanding of the computer’s impact on instruction is increasingly important,” (Van Leeuwen & Gabriel, 2007, p. 425). Clearly, word processors and background music can serve as a support and aid students in the development of the writing process. However, blogging is another component of technology that can produce quality improvements in elementary students’ writing. Online writing activities engage students in writing through reflection, dialogue, and collaboration. Davis and McGrail (2009) define blogging as “a venue for writing in which an author or group of authors post their work to Web pages that display their posts in reverse chronological sequence,” (p. 74). Blogs can be read by anyone with an Internet connection, but passwords can be set so only the specific group can gain access. Boling, Castek, Zawilinski, Barton & Nierlich (2008) explained that technology “capitalizes on the strengths of authentic writing, the power of the writing process, and the engagement of collaborative writing,” (p. 504). Blogging provides a means for classroom dialogue, reflection, communication, interaction, and academic practice.

A variety of research recommends the use of blogging in the classroom. A study by McGrail and Davis (2011) tested the influence of classroom blogging on elementary student writing, specifically in fifth grade. Attention to audience was one specific factor that blogging impacted. McGrail and Davis (2011) found that “student awareness and
understanding of the audience changed dramatically in this research, however, because they developed a dynamic relationship, and, in many cases, friendships with their readers, through the blogging experience,” (p. 432). Prior to writing, students often experience difficulty connecting to an audience or even identifying that their writing has an audience. With blogging, students have to consider the needs of the reader of the blog especially during responses to different comments (Jerles, 2012). Because students were able to comment using the blog, they realized that an audience existed other than the teacher. Since difficulty arises in identifying an audience when writing abstractly or theoretically, blogging is effective in helping students understand audience because it involves real people and real dialogue (McGrail & Davis, 2011).

The comment feature also encouraged reflection and motivation. McGrail and Davis’s (2011) study involved retired teachers and other teachers in the school by having them post comments on students’ blogs. Certain comments resulted in personal responses and reflection. For example, one student blogged about her love of monkeys, and the commenter shared the same interest. In the student’s response, she shared her passion and included more personal information (McGrail and Davis, 2011). When probing questions are asked, students are able to respond reflectively. Davis and McGrail (2009) found similar results, but their instructor incorporated dialogue in the classroom, prior to blogging, to practice learning “to be clear, convincing, and precise,” (p. 76). The most important piece of blogging is that students reflect on comments and begin a dialogue that leads to learning. Because students engage in dialogue, voice can also be measured. Students are able to identify an audience that helps them reflect on a topic while incorporating their own voice and personal story. In order for students to
understand the importance of voice in writing, Kesler (2012) suggested providing mentor
texts to students. With mentor texts, students have a sample of types of writing that
incorporate excellent voice.

Similar suggestions came from a study by Lacina and Block (2012), which
surveyed literacy directors of the seventeen most populous school districts in the United
States according to the 2009 census data. Increasing the use of mentor texts as models
for effective writing is critically important in writing instruction. Providing students with
opportunities to read, examine, and investigate models of good writing improves
awareness and helps make students make connections between their writing and good
writing. Santangelo and Olinghouse (2009) added that providing models of good writing
is a component of highly effective teachers because teachers model specific features or
elements contained in writing. Struggling readers benefit from specific modeling of
writing skills and sentence construction.

In addition to voice and the use of mentor texts, students become more involved
and motivated in the writing process when using a blog. Being aware of audience,
reflecting on comments, and incorporating voice in their writing with the guidance of
mentor texts motivated students to actively participate in the blogs. Lacina and Block
(2012) found that “incorporating today’s technologies into classroom writing instruction
can engage students and motivate them to participate more fully in the writing process,”
(p. 15). Connecting at home literacies with school literacies is key. When students are
able to use technologies in the classroom that they already use at home or out of school,
they will be motivated and engaged. Although blogging is often a new concept in
differing classrooms, exploring something new can lead to new learning (Davis and McGrail, 2009).

Even with new technologies arising, sometimes teachers are unaware of such technology uses in the classroom. Boling (2008) conducted a study that examined preservice and practicing teachers’ views and ideas toward new technologies incorporated in the classroom. A very interesting yet eye-opening finding was that many teachers saw blogging as recreational rather than educational. Teachers often lack tools, knowledge, and information regarding new technologies. Clearly, instruction and possibly even professional development of new technologies must be offered for teachers with mindsets such as those from Boling’s (2008) study.

Similar results were found in a national survey taken by Cutler and Graham (2008) where teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire that provided information about themselves and their classrooms as well as a survey that specified certain aspects of their writing instruction. The survey included questions about teacher attitudes toward writing, writing processes, instructional time, and approach among other topics. Interesting data from the study showed that 42% of teachers answered never when asked how frequently they use computers to support students’ writing. The limited use of computers in many classrooms reinforces the idea that technology should play a more important aspect in writing instruction, especially in the elementary grades.

Different technologies exist that can promote student learning in the classroom during the writing process. An important idea to note is “millennial children have an increased use and familiarity with media and digital technologies, and as teachers of these tech-savvy children, it is essential we integrate the technology of today into our
classrooms,” (Lacina & Griffith, 2012, p. 316). Experimenting and taking risks in the classroom can lead to learning through new and different resources. Teachers can take advantage of new technologies and incorporate them into classroom instruction with the correct prior knowledge of implementation for each technology.

**Conclusion**

Overall, several aspects must be considered before instructing writing in the elementary grades. A range of strategies exist that can be implemented in writing instruction. Much research supports the use of SRSD, which incorporates multiple features that prove to enhance the writing of elementary students. Explicitly teaching students and using a differentiated approach helps meet the needs of all students regardless of their writing level. Technology is a valuable aspect that can be integrated in the elementary classroom in a variety of ways as long as the teacher is willing to expand his/her instruction and knowledge skills. While writing is a process that is continually developing, the previous research holds great value in the eyes of teachers hoping to help students make positive gains in their writing.

**Method**

**Context**

Research for this study took place at a school district in Western New York in Monroe County. The New York State District Report Card for the 2010-2011 school year indicates that a total of 6,526 students were enrolled within the district, from Kindergarten through 12th grade. The school district is fairly large and contains four elementary schools, two middle schools, one 9th grade academy, and one high school.
Two of the elementary schools house Kindergarten through 2nd grade, and the two other elementary schools house grades 3rd through 5th. For this study, research was conducted in one of the elementary schools that house Kindergarten through 2nd grade. The student enrollment in the 2010-2011 school year contained 645 students. The student population was made up of 89% Caucasian, 5% African American, 4% Asian or Native Hawaiian, and 3% Hispanic or Latino. Of this population, 20% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Research for this study focused on 2nd grade students in one specific classroom. During the 2010-2011 school year, the entire 2nd grade population for this elementary school contained 237 students. The general education classroom in which this study took place contains one male teacher and a total of 19 students including 11 females and eight males. Of those students, 13 are Caucasian, four are African American, one is Hispanic or Latino, and one is Asian.

**Participants**

The participants for this study included two out of the 19 students which comprise the before mentioned 2nd grade classroom. Their teacher identified both participants as struggling writers. The teacher considered various aspects while identifying students as struggling writers. Different aspects included students’ handwriting, spelling, content, sentence structure, details, and grammar.

Billy (a pseudonym) is an eight-year old Caucasian male in the second grade. He enjoys football and playing with his friends on the weekends. Overall, his motivation and attitude toward writing is fairly positive. During class time, he is capable of working independently to accomplish tasks. Billy also receives extra services for writing.
Marie (a pseudonym) is an eight-year old African American female in the second grade. She enjoys hanging out with her family including her aunt, uncle, and cousins. Together, they like to play video games. Overall, her motivation and attitude toward writing is fairly positive. During class time, she tends to require specific directions and frequent redirection to stay on task. Marie also receives extra services for math and reading.

Mr. Smith (a pseudonym) is Billy and Marie’s second grade teacher. He has taught in the school district for twelve years.

Researcher Stance

I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College working towards a Masters degree in Literacy Education, Birth – 12th grade. I presently hold a Bachelors degree in Childhood Education with Special Education, and I am also certified in Early Childhood Education and Special Education. As a researcher in this study, I acted as an active participant observer. Mills (2011) identified that when active participant observers are “actively engaged in teaching, teachers observe the outcomes of their teaching,” (p. 75). Therefore, I was able to engage actively in my teaching while observing the outcomes of the study at the same time (Mills). Because I was able to observe the outcomes of my own teaching, I was able to report my findings to the classroom teacher who could adjust his teaching methods according to students’ needs.

Method

During this study, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data to determine the effects of a self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) in elementary students’
writing. SRSD, paired with genre-specific planning strategies, contains specifically outlined steps to help students develop the knowledge and understanding needed to write clear and detailed writing through a teacher-directed approach that ends with student-centered writing. For the purpose of collecting data, I implemented SRSD with two students, and each student received the same instruction. In addition, I modified different steps to accommodate my own objectives and the needs of the students I worked with. The study took place over the course of one week with each session lasting about 45 minutes to one hour. Two of the sessions, one at the beginning and one at the end of the study, were dedicated to collecting specific forms of data. Pre assessment data was collected at the beginning of the study (Appendix D). Post assessment data was collected at the end of the study (Appendix E). The classroom teacher and students were informally interviewed to gain more information about writing (Appendix B). In addition, a writing attitude survey was administered at the beginning of the study (Appendix A).

Throughout the course of this study, the SRSD model was taught explicitly with a general planning strategy and a genre-specific strategy. The SRSD model targets specific self-regulation procedures such as goal setting and self-monitoring, which help students accomplish specific writing tasks independently. In order to measure any academic gains made by students throughout the study, students’ writing abilities were assessed in the beginning. Students were given two black and white picture prompts with the requirement to choose one and write about which one is their favorite explaining why (Appendix C). Students compared their future writing pieces to the pre-assessment writing piece throughout the study.
During the following sessions, students participated in SRSD writing instruction that lasted about forty-five minutes to an hour each. The second session is where I began the first step of the SRSD model – “Develop Background Knowledge”. In this step, I introduced the general planning strategy mnemonic, “POW”, which stands for P – pick my ideas, O – organize my notes, and W – write and say more. Here, I discussed with students what this strategy stands for and the importance of using it during writing.

Students will be provided with a POW visual for use throughout the study (Appendix F). After the discussion, I gave students time to individually explain their understanding of POW. Then, we discussed the characteristics of writing an opinion piece. Students shared their input, and I wrote down their ideas focusing on the fact that writing makes sense and includes many parts. After this aspect, I introduced another important mnemonic, “TREE”, for writing opinion pieces. Students learned that T stands for topic sentence where you tell what you believe, R stands for reasons where you support your opinion, E stands for examples that show how you believe what you believe, and the last E stands for ending, which wraps up the writing. In addition, students learned that opinion writing needs to include each of these elements, and they were also provided with a visual for use throughout the study (Appendix G). When students have learned the two planning strategies, I read a pre-written story out loud (Appendix I), and students identified the elements by holding up corresponding element cards as I read (Appendix H). To end, we once again reviewed POW and TREE.

In the third session, I taught the next step called “Discuss It.” In this step, I reviewed POW and TREE by asking students what they remember from the previous session. Again, I read another short piece where students were able to identify elements
using the element cards. This session was similar to the previous session, but students were provided with graphic organizers (Appendix K). The graphic organizers allowed students to write notes of the elements in addition to using the cards. As students held up their cards, I filled in a chart to show a visual of the elements that the writing contains (Appendix J). Students received their own charts to fill in alongside mine. Then, I handed back students’ pre-assessment writing pieces. They were able to read their writing and use the graph to identify how many elements they included in their pre-assessment. The graph allowed students to identify how many of each element was included, if they were clear and if they made sense. If the students identified that element in their pre-assessment writing piece, they added a smiley face, sad face, or neutral face. I discussed with each student what parts they included and what parts they failed to include. Together, we discussed how each planning strategy could help them write and compare their progress by referring back to their original graph. Then, I introduced goal-setting. I asked students what it means to have a goal and why it is important. Students learned that a good goal to set is to include all the elements and to make sure the writing makes sense. After we learned about goal setting, I began to read a picture book aloud. Throughout the book, I stopped at various points and asked students to think about what might happen next. For each stop, the goal we wanted to achieve was to include a topic sentence and a reason that made sense. This goal was provided as a visual throughout the reading. At the first two stops, we discussed what might happen next using the information we already had. I wrote down our ideas, and introduced a “sentence starters” visual (Appendix L). At the third and fourth stop, I provided students with a
checklist/goal sheet to fill out (Appendix M). With these specific students, our goal was to include a topic sentence and a reason using complete sentences that made sense.

The fourth session, “Guided Practice,” included another review of POW and TREE. I called this session guided practice because students were using the skills they were learning with much guidance and teacher modeling. I repeated similar steps from the previous session but aimed toward a more student centered session rather than teacher led. After reviewing POW and TREE, I read another picture book. We began with setting a goal to include a topic sentence and a reason for each stop. At each stop, students were asked to give their opinion of what might happen next. In addition, they were given a goal checklist and a TREE elements chart to fill in. Since students’ goal was to include a topic sentence and a reason, I crossed out the example and ending portion of the TREE elements chart. For this session, students were encouraged to write on their own. However, I provided guidance to those students who needed it.

During the final session, I read one more picture book. I called this session “Independent Practice” because students were using the skills they learned independently. This served as the post assessment. Students were not given any visuals including the POW visual, TREE visual, and sentence starter visual. They were also not given the goal prior to reading the story. Students were given the TREE elements chart and the goal/checklist sheet. Students were told they could use these sheets, but they were not required to. I read the story and again stopped four times throughout the story for students to respond to the question, “what is your opinion of what might happen next?” At the third and fourth stop, I had students type their responses on a laptop rather than hand write them. A modified version of an opinion rubric was used to assess the
writing (Appendix N). To gain more qualitative data, each student was informally interviewed at the end of the study to assess their knowledge, understanding, and thoughts about SRSD and the technology incorporation.

**Quality and Credibility of Research**

Evaluating and guaranteeing the study’s quality and credibility is essential in completing any action research. Various components of a qualitative research study’s trustworthiness have been identified in Mills (2011) through Guba (1981) including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Therefore, the previous four components have been carefully analyzed and incorporated within the current research to guarantee its trustworthiness.

Credibility, as defined by Mills (2011), is the “researcher’s 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). To help ensure credibility, I collected artifacts including participants’ pre-assessment writing, graphic organizers with notes, and post-assessment writing. Sessions containing interviews with participants were also audio recorded. In addition, I practiced triangulation, which is defined as using a “variety of data sources and different methods with one another in order to cross check data,” (Mills, p. 104). I triangulated this study through the collection and use of experiential, enquiry, and examination data. Actively observing students in their participation with SRSD, collecting descriptive field notes, collecting pre and post assessment data and attitude scales, and audio recording informal student interviews are all different components of data collection that were incorporated in this study.
Additionally, I ensured transferability in my research. Mills (2011) defined transferability as the “researchers’ beliefs that everything they study 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,” (p. 104). To ensure transferability in this study, I collected detailed descriptive data of student work and perceptions. By providing detailed descriptions of the context of this study, the consumer of the research can judge if it is fitting to other contexts (Mills).

Another component of ensuring a valid and trustworthy study is dependability, which is defined as “the stability of the data,” (Mills, 2011, p. 104). To ensure dependability in this study, I overlapped my methods through triangulation. Using various methods of data collection, including observing students, collecting student data, and interviewing students, support that “the weakness of one is compensated by the strength of another,” (Mills, p.104).

The last component of ensuring quality of research is confirmability, which Mills (2011) defines as “the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected,” (p. 105). Triangulation helped ensure confirmability through the use of various data collection methods. Because I used multiple sources, they can be compared and cross-referenced with each other (Mills). Reflexivity also played a role in ensuring confirmability because I reflected on my teaching and student learning throughout the study. Mills defines reflexivity as the intention to “reveal underlying assumptions or biases that cause the research to formulate a set of questions in a particular way and to present findings in a particular way,” (p. 105). By meeting the previous criteria for
ensuring quality research, I feel as though this study offers a valid approach for the use of SRSD in writing instruction.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

Prior to beginning research, I was required to ask for permission from the parents of all students who were going to be involved in the study in addition to the students themselves. Each parent was provided with a permission form that contained the purpose of the study, which also asked for his or her permission and signature to perform research. In addition, I was required to receive written assent from each student following the receipt of parental permission. I explained to each student the purpose of the study as well as what I would be asking them to do. Both parents and students were also notified that the names of participants would be changed to pseudonyms. Furthermore, both parents and students had the understanding that any identifying marks would be removed from artifacts to protect identities and ensure anonymity. In addition, I received informed consent from the students’ teacher who provided me with information via informal interviews and discussions regarding the students in this study.

**Data Collection**

As previously mentioned, I collected various forms of data to fulfill the process of triangulation. Throughout each session, I kept detailed notes in a journal based on the student interactions with each other and with myself. After each session, I added my own reflections and detailed notes based on student achievements and learning.

I collected pre and post assessment data from each student that participated in the study in order to measure any academic gains made throughout the research. First,
students were informally interviewed and given a writing attitude scale to determine their thoughts about writing. During the first session, students were given two black and white picture prompts with the requirement to choose one and create a written story, which served as the pre-assessment. This data served as baseline information that participants could refer back to throughout the study to gauge their own progress. During the final session, students were individually assessed on their ability to write a topic sentence and a reason four times throughout the reading of a picture book, which served as the post-assessment. A modified version of an opinion rubric was used to assess the writing. This data was examined to determine the participants’ academic gains and ability to use self-regulating strategies during writing. In addition, to the writing task, students typed their stories on a laptop to determine the student perceptions of technology incorporation. They were also informally interviewed once again to determine their thoughts about SRSD, writing, and technology use. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. Throughout the study, students continued to use a chart and checklist in their writing, which also served as a means to measure any growth in the study.

**Data Analysis**

After collecting the data, I began to analyze to look for commonalities across the sources. The first data that I analyzed was the Garfield Writing Attitude Survey. The data from this survey helped me to understand each participant’s attitudes toward writing when asked various questions regarding writing. I then analyzed the informal interviews conducted at both the beginning and at the end of the study. The interview at the beginning of the study yielded information regarding attitudes about writing as well as participant’s thoughts about writing as a whole. The interview at the end of the study
yielded more perceptions about writing and what students’ thoughts were toward the study. I also analyzed my anecdotal notes in order to pull any more information that supported findings in the survey and informal interviews.

In addition to the survey, informal interviews, and anecdotal notes, I also analyzed various student work samples. Students produced multiple work samples throughout the study. During the study, my goal was to teach students how to write an opinion by including a topic sentence followed by a reason with the help of explicitly teaching and modeling self-regulating strategies including goal setting and self-monitoring. In order carry out the study, I incorporated multiple picture books and prompted students by asking, “what is your opinion of what might happen next?” at multiple points throughout the story. Students wrote their responses, which provided me with multiple work samples to analyze for each student.

After analyzing the several forms of data, I began to look for commonalities and themes. One theme that presented itself was the factors that affect attitudes about writing. Another theme that presented itself among the data was teacher modeling of strategies. The resistance of self-monitoring during writing was also another theme that arose from the data.

**Findings and Discussion**

**Factors that Affect Attitudes about Writing**

The initial research done with the students was collecting information regarding their perceptions and attitudes toward writing through an informal interview and a writing attitude survey. I first surveyed each student separately using the Garfield Writing Attitude Survey. I explained to each student that I would read each question, and they
had to choose which Garfield feeling most accurately resembled their feeling toward the question. The survey contained four different Garfield faces. One face was super happy, kind of happy, kind of sad, and angry. I then sat down with both students and asked various questions in a small group discussion. Both students shared their input willingly to give me a better idea of their views toward writing.

Throughout the incorporation of this study, I noticed that students’ attitudes about writing guided my instruction and provided important insight toward their writing. During the informal interview, I asked students what comes to mind when they think about writing. Billy responded, “imagination,” and I asked him what he meant by that, and he said, “if you are interested in something you might want to write about it,” (Student Interview, Pre-Assessment, 2013). Billy’s response showed me that he has an understanding that writing is more than just words on paper and it requires creative thinking. Marie added to his comment by saying, “you might want to write about a book, or actually write a book,” (Student Interview, Pre-Assessment, 2013). Marie’s response showed me that she understands that writing consists of more than just one type or form. I continued to ask students what they like to write about to learn more about how I could make writing interesting, and Billy explained that he liked to write about cats. Billy said, “I already wrote a book called Cat Wars. It’s basically like Star Wars but it starred Cats. It was really funny,” (Student Interview, Pre-Assessment, 2013). Billy’s response allowed me to understand a topic that he finds interesting along with the fact that he enjoys writing books. Marie explained what she likes to write about saying, “Ponies. Well not ponies. Well yes sort of ponies and dragons,” (Student Interview, Pre-Assessment, 2013). This information was helpful; I was able to make the connection that
both students found an interest in animals. In addition, this information led me to choosing the pre-assessment picture prompts, which both contained a silly animal scene. According to Recckio (2003), providing children with topics that they can relate to and find exciting helps motivate them to write. By knowing and understanding what engages students, I was able to choose appropriate texts with the hopes that students would be more interested in writing. In the informal interview, I asked students what their feelings are when they have to write. However, I did not specify a setting when asking what their feelings are when they have to write. Billy responded by saying, “I actually feel happy when I have to write because I like to write,” and Marie responded by saying, “I like to write so I feel happy too,” (Student Interview, Pre-Assessment, 2013). This information provided me with the understanding that, in general, they like to write and have positive feelings toward writing when what they are writing is familiar. I continued to ask when they might feel unhappy when asked to write. Billy responded by saying, “sometimes when I have to write about something I don’t like,” and Marie responded by saying, “yeah I don’t like to write about things I don’t like,” (Student Interview, Pre-Assessment, 2013). This evidence gave me even more insight as to the fact that students would be less interested or engaged when asked to write about something they do not like. In addition, this information is often similar when it comes to reading where students usually are less interested or engaged when asked to read something they do not like.

The Garfield Writing Attitude Survey yielded similar results when compared to the pre-assessment informal interview. Generally, students’ perceptions were positive toward writing. Both Billy and Marie chose the happy Garfield when asked how they would feel telling in writing why something happened (Writing Attitude Survey, 2013).
Billy and Marie may like this type of writing because they feel comfortable explaining something that happened to or involved them. If they are asked to explain an event that happened to them, they may find it easier to remember the steps as opposed to explaining an event that did not happen to them. Furthermore, students often enjoy creativity and the freedom of choice in writing. Billy and Marie may also find explanation writing positive if they can free write and make up their own stories. They both also chose the super happy Garfield when asked how they would feel writing a letter to the author of a book they read. Billy and Marie may have found this type of writing positive because they may like asking questions about what they read. Being able to question the author about the book they read may be very appealing to students. One question asked how they would feel writing a letter stating their opinion about a topic. I thought this question was interesting as this study focused on opinion writing. Billy chose the super happy Garfield, and Marie chose the sad Garfield (Writing Attitude Survey, 2013). This evidence differed from my observations throughout the study where Billy’s overall attitude was less engaged and interested than Marie’s overall attitude who was always happy and interested. Billy was generally less engaged because he was disappointed that he was being pulled out of class to work in a small group with Marie and myself. Marie was more engaged because she enjoyed the fact that she was being pulled out to work in a small group. Perhaps Billy would have been more engaged in the small group if one of his friends were also in the group.

Overall, noting the differences in data highlight the fact that the setting of writing may affect an individual’s attitude toward writing. According to the Garfield survey, Billy’s attitude was positive toward opinion writing. However, I found that his attitude
when being pulled in a small group was more negative. Marie chose the sad Garfield, but I found that her attitude when being pulled in a small group was more positive. The post-assessment informal interview yielded more evidence regarding the fact that setting may affect students’ attitudes toward writing. I asked students what they thought about working in a small group. Billy responded by saying, “it was a little bit frustrating and fun,” and Marie said “it was good, I loved working with you,” (Student Interview, Post-Assessment, 2013). I asked Billy why he was frustrated, and he explained, “because I missed some of my class and working with my friends,” (Student Interview, Post-Assessment, 2013). This information allowed me to understand that my observation of his negative attitude had to do with the fact that he was missing group-work with his friends and not toward opinion writing. Therefore, Billy’s attitude toward writing turns negative when he worked with me in a small group. Once again, the setting affected Billy’s attitude toward writing. In addition, as previously discussed, Recckio (2003) suggests that using topics that children find familiar and exciting helps them become more engaged in the writing process. With the information found from my research, I can still conclude that writing about a topic that is interesting to the student allows more engagement and the will to write.

Billy’s writing throughout the study helps to draw the conclusion that writing about a topic that is interesting to the student allows more engagement and will to write. As previously stated, Billy was interested in cats and animals. Therefore, I incorporated three picture books on three different days throughout my study. The first book I incorporated was called *Mrs. Crump’s Cat* by Linda Smith. Immediately, Billy said, “oh I just love kitty cats,” (Anecdotal Notes, 2013). This statement showed me that Billy was
going to be engaged in the story. While I read the story, I stopped at four points to ask the students what their opinion was of what might happen next. At the first two stops, we discussed their opinions. At the third and fourth stop, I had students write their opinions. Billy’s opinion was accurate, made sense with the prior knowledge he already had from the story, and it clearly contained a topic sentence with a reason. In addition to this information, Billy drew a picture of the main character and the cat (Student Work Sample 1, 2013).

**Figure 1. Student Work Sample 1, 2013**

![Image of Billy's drawing and writing with text: my opinion is Mrs. Grump is no letting the cat stay. I believe this because the cat is tracking flies. meow.
Figure X. Billy’s written response to the prompt during instruction, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” at the third stop during the reading of Mrs. Crump’s Cat by Linda Smith. Billy’s written response is translated as, “My opinion is Mrs. Crump is not letting the cat stay. I believe this because the cat is tracking fleas.”

At this point in the study, I could tell Billy was engaged and interested because he was responding to a topic, cats, that he definitely liked. Though my original research question did not ask about student motivation and engagement, I found that it was still an important aspect in beginning my study.

In addition to attitudes toward writing, I focused on students’ attitudes toward technology incorporation. The technology incorporation provided me with yet another setting in which writing takes place, and I was able to determine each student’s attitude during writing. During the post-assessment, I read another story stopping four times allowing students to write their opinion of what might happen next. They completed this task independently for each stop. However, for the third and fourth stop, students were given a laptop. They typed their opinion of what might happen next on a word document. While watching the two students type on the laptop, they were excited to be able to use the technology for writing. However, they took longer to write responses because they were focused on changing the font, size, and color. During the post-assessment interview, I questioned students about the use of laptops. First I questioned Billy and Marie’s attitudes toward using the laptops, and Marie responded first saying, “they were better like they were good with writing,” (Student Interview, Post-Assessment, 2013). Right away, this response showed me that she was engaged and liked using the laptops. I found that Marie’s attitude toward writing is positive in a setting where technology is involved. Billy responded saying, “they were good because I could write in cursive,”
This response showed me that Billy was interested in the fact that typing in a word document allows the user to change font, size, and color. I found that Billy’s attitude toward writing is positive in a setting where technology is involved versus writing in a small group. As previously discussed, Beck & Fetherston (2003) and Van Leeuwen & Gabriel (2007) found that word processors reveal positive student attitudes toward writing as compared to handwriting. I continued to ask students what they prefer, typing or handwriting, and which one allows them to write more, and Billy said “type” and “I think I like typing better because it is faster,” and Marie said “I like both,” (Student Interview, Post-Assessment, 2013). Billy’s response showed me that he enjoys typing because it is faster than handwriting. My research did not focus on how many words students wrote, but when Billy led me to believe that typing yields more words, I compared his typing responses with his handwritten responses. This information was interesting because he actually wrote more words while handwriting than he did typing. Furthermore, his responses were clearer and made more sense when he handwrote them (Student Work Sample, 2013). Overall, students’ perceptions toward typing on the laptop were positive and full of engagement. This data was beneficial to gather and analyze because it guided me to the understanding that the setting in which writing takes place does, in fact, affect a writer’s attitudes.

Teacher Modeling of Writing Strategies

Teacher modeling of writing strategies was a major component throughout this study. Each time something was presented to students, I modeled how to carry out each task. As previously discussed, providing explicit instruction alongside teacher modeling helps students’ writing development especially when the teacher follows a planned and...
organized routine (Fahsl and McAndrews, 2011). For my study, I began teaching students the mnemonic TREE, which stood for topic sentence, reason, example, and ending. Students were provided with a visual of TREE throughout instruction.

**Figure 2. TREE Mnemonic Visual**

![TREE Mnemonic Visual](image)

- **T** – Topic sentence  “tells what you believe”
- **R** – Reasons  “supports your opinion”
- **E** – Examples  “why do you believe this?”
- **E** – Ending  “wrap it up right!”

*Figure X.* TREE mnemonic visual taught and provided to students during instruction to help understand order of opinion writing.

I taught students that a topic sentence tells what you believe and a reason supports your opinion. In order to help students understand what TREE meant in context, I provided examples of each by reading multiple short writing pieces to students. Each writing piece included a topic sentence, reason, example, and ending.

**Figure 3. Sample Writing Pieces**

Pizza is the greatest kind of food. Pizza is the best because there are so many different toppings. I really like that there are so many choices because I can always create new kinds of pizza. I really want to eat some pizza now.
The best kind of pet is a dog. Dogs make great pets because they are friendly. Dogs are friendly because they wag their tail when people are around. I love dogs and would really like one someday.

The most interesting book is *The Sisters Grimm*. One reason this book is interesting is because of the way Mr. Beck reads it. He uses fun voices for each character. I can’t wait for him to read to us again.

*Figure X.* Sample writing pieces read out loud to students to help practice identifying specific elements of opinion writing as well as to provide a model of what good writing contains.

Students were able to identify where each element were in the writing piece. Through modeling my own writing for students, they were able to gain a better understanding of the elements. As I continued my study, I focused on only the elements of topic sentence and reason because I felt that all four elements at one time were too overwhelming.

Learning only topic sentence and reason narrowed opinion writing down and helped me focus on improving their writing one part at a time. Santangelo and Olinghouse (2009) previously mentioned the importance of providing models of writing so students know exactly what good writing contains. During each session, I reviewed with students what TREE stood for, and they were able to recite what they stood for without the visual because I explicitly taught and modeled it for them.

During instruction, I read various picture books to prompt opinion writing. The first book I read was called *Mrs. Crump’s Cat* by Linda Smith, which was about a woman who found a stray cat on her porch step and was trying to decide throughout the story if she should keep the cat or not. I began to read the story, and instead of prompting students at the first stop, I modeled what my opinion was of what might happen next. I always began my topic sentence with, “My opinion is” and my reason with “I believe this because.” I provided yet another model of topic sentence and reason for the second stop
as well. After discussing my topic sentence and reason, I provided students with a sentence starter visual, which contained a variety of sentence starters for writing their reason.

**Figure 4. Sentence Starter Visual**

**Sentence Starters**

- I believe this because
- I feel this because
- I think this because
- I know this because

*Figure X.* Sentence starters provided to students during instruction to give students a variety of words to use to explain their reason as well as to provide a model of what good writing looks like.

Students could have used, “I believe this because,” “I know this because,” “I feel this because” to help write their reason following their topic sentence. The sentence starter visual was provided each time students wrote their own topic sentences and reasons during instruction. I provided students with only one specific way to write a topic sentence a reason so they could easily monitor if they included each element. By explicitly teaching and modeling how to write a topic sentence and reason, students were able to write their own when they were prompted to write their opinion of what might happen next. In addition, I followed an organized and planned routine, as suggested by Fahls and McAndrews (2011), which allowed students to practice writing multiple topic sentences and reasons.

As I read *Mrs. Crump’s Cat* by Linda Smith, I prompted students at two more stops with, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” They were able to write
their own responses with the aid of the TREE mnemonic visual and sentence starter visual as well as my support. One of Billy’s responses included a topic sentence and a reason (Student Work Sample 2, 2013).

**Figure 5. Student Work Sample 2, 2013**

![Student Work Sample 2, 2013](image)

*Figure X. Billy’s written response to the prompt during instruction, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” at the fourth stop during the reading of Mrs. Crump’s Cat by Linda Smith. Billy’s written response is translated as, “My opinion is that Mrs. Crump is keeping the cat. I believe this because she put up a sign saying stuff people would not like the cat to do.”*

After I modeled and explicitly taught students how to write a topic sentence and reason, Billy responded to the prompt and stated his opinion through a topic sentence followed
by one reason. In addition, Marie showed the ability to write a topic sentence followed by a reason using the same sentence starters I had previously modeled (Student Work Sample 3, 2013).

**Figure 6. Student Work Sample 3, 2013**

![Image of a drawing and text]

*Figure X.* Marie’s written response to the prompt during instruction, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” at the third stop during the reading of *Mrs. Crump’s Cat* by Linda Smith. Marie’s written response is translated as, “My opinion is she is going to let the cat stay. I think this because Mrs. Crump might wash the cat and then she is going to let the cat go outside.”
Marie also included an opinion through writing a topic sentence followed by a reason for why she felt that way. Providing students with a very specific model and repeating the same process helped students remember the aspects that they needed to include to write an opinion response to the prompt, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?”

The second day of instruction I incorporated another picture book called *The Wolf’s Chicken Stew* by Keiko Kasza, which was about a wolf who wanted to catch and cook a chicken to make stew. Before beginning to read, I modeled for students how to write a topic sentence and a reason by reviewing the TREE mnemonic and sentence starter visual. I continued to prompt students with, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” Students wrote their responses for four stops throughout the story. Billy’s responses revealed that he continued to show the ability to include a topic sentence and reason for writing opinions (Student Work Sample 4, 2013).

**Figure 7. Student Work Sample 4, 2013**
**Figure X.** Billy’s written response to the prompt during instruction, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” at the first stop during the reading of *The Wolf’s Chicken Stew* by Keiko Kasza. Billy’s written response is translated as, “My opinion is that the wolf is going to catch the chicken. I feel this because the wolf spotted the chicken.”

Once again, Billy included a topic sentence followed by a reason after being prompted with, “what is your opinion of what might happen next?” Marie also continued to write an opinion by including a topic sentence and a reason (Student Work Sample 5, 2013).

**Figure 8. Student Work Sample 5, 2013**

**Figure X.** Marie’s written response to the prompt during instruction, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” at the first stop during the reading of *The Wolf’s Chicken Stew* by Keiko Kasza. Marie’s written response is translated as, “My opinion is the wolf is going to pretend to be friends with the hen. I think this because the wolf wants some food to eat. He is so so so hungry.”
Marie’s response shows her ability to write a topic sentence and reason. However, I provided guidance during her writing because she began to write her reason before she was finished with her topic sentence. Her writing also shows that she attempted to include an additional sentence to help explain her reason for her opinion. The repeated, planned, and explicitly taught strategy, as suggested by Fahls and McAndrews (2011) and Santangelo and Olinghouse (2009), to write opinions including a topic sentence and reason, helped students construct a short, but organized writing piece.

Data from the pre-assessment, instructional time, and post assessment provided interesting findings. The pre-assessment allowed students to look at two different picture prompts, and they were required to write about which was their favorite and why (Picture A and Picture B).

**Figure 9. Picture A**

![Figure 9. Picture A](image)

**Figure 10. Picture B**

![Figure 10. Picture B](image)
Figure X. Preassessment picture prompts provided to students before instruction along with the prompt, “Which picture is your favorite and why?” Billy chose to write about Picture B. His writing sample showed his ability to choose one picture prompt and explain why he liked it (Student Work Sample 6, 2013).

Figure 11. Student Work Sample 6, 2013

Figure X. Billy’s written response to the pre-assessment picture prompt. Billy’s written response is translated as, “I like Picture B because it’s a panda bear with a camera taking a picture of a child and the bear is standing on a stool.”

Even though Billy was able to choose a picture prompt, he was unable to give a specific reason why he liked it. His reason for why he liked the picture was simply because of what it was. Billy did not give any reason or information of his own. After comparing his pre-assessment response with responses during instruction, I found that when prompting Billy to give his opinion of what might happen next, he uses information
based on what he already knows and what he predicts to write his response. He constructed his opinion using his own ideas, ideas from the book, and also pictures from the book.

Marie chose to write about Picture A. Her writing sample showed her ability to choose one picture prompt and explain why she liked it (Student Work Sample 7, 2013).

**Figure 12. Student Work Sample 7, 2013**

![Image of Marie's written response]

*Figure X.* Marie’s written response to the pre-assessment picture prompt. Marie’s written response is translated as, “I like the picture because it is funny, silly, and so so so fun. It is a dog biting a stick with birds on it.”

Marie, on the other hand, did give a reason why she liked the picture. She explained that she thought it was funny and silly. However, she also did explain exactly
what the picture is, which is not new information. After comparing Marie’s pre-assessment with responses during instruction, I found that she attempts to use outside knowledge and knowledge from what she learned in the story to construct her responses. However, her responses may not always make sense or fit the context of the story (Student Work Sample 8, 2013).

**Figure 13. Student Work Sample 8, 2013**

*Figure X.* Marie’s written response to the prompt during instruction, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” at the third stop during the reading of *The Wolf’s Chicken Stew* by Keiko Kasza. Marie’s written response is translated as, “My opinion is the chicken had eggs. I feel this because when the wolf peeking the house.”
This response is an inaccurate response that did not make sense from Marie. When I prompted her with, “What is your opinion of what might happen next,” the wolf in the story was peeking in the chicken’s door. He was delivering desserts anonymously to fatten up the chicken so he could later cook and eat her. Though her responses did not make sense, she did remember to use the modeled sentence starters for topic sentence and reason.

After comparing students’ preassessment opinion writing to the opinion writing during instruction, I was able to draw the conclusion that teacher modeling and providing explicit instruction positively affected students’ opinion writing. Neither student included the modeled sentence starters in the pre-assessment picture prompt. However, after being instructed in how to write a topic sentence and reason, both students included them in their writing during instructional time when I was available for support and guidance. Teacher modeling is a very important aspect in the writing process as students need explicit instruction and understanding of what good writing entails. Without a model, students lack the knowledge and understanding of what opinion writing should include. Billy and Marie showed their understanding that opinion writing must include a topic sentence and a reason.

**Resistance of Self-Monitoring During Writing**

Self-monitoring during writing was another aspect that I focused on throughout my research. In order to incorporate a self-monitoring aspect during writing, I taught students how to use a goal checklist and a chart. The goal checklist included a part for
students to write their goal and a checklist containing a spot for topic sentence and reason (Goal Checklist).

**Figure 14. Goal Checklist**

*My goal is to......*

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

**Checklist**

_____ Topic Sentence

_____ Reason

*Figure X. Goal checklist provided to students during instruction as well as during the post assessment to be used as a support to monitor their writing.*

The chart allowed students to monitor their writing by checking how many topic sentences and reasons they included in their writing. The chart also allowed students to monitor if their writing is clear and if it made sense by drawing a smiley face, neutral face, or sad face (How Is My Writing Chart).

**Figure 15. How Is My Writing Chart**

**How is my writing?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>How many did I include?</th>
<th>Are they clear?</th>
<th>Do they make sense?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T-topic sentence</td>
<td></td>
<td>🌟🌟🌟</td>
<td>🌟🌟🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-reason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>🌟🌟🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-example</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>🌟🌟🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-ending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>🌟🌟🌟</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure X. Chart provided to students during instruction as well as during the post assessment to be used as a support to monitor their writing.*
Previous research indicates that goal setting and providing self-monitoring strategies aid in students’ writing development (Graham et al., 2005a and Tracy et al., 2009). Data from my research pointed out various findings.

I first incorporated the chart after students wrote their pre-assessment piece. I wanted students to analyze their own writing using the chart to monitor whether or not they included the targeted pieces – topic sentence and reason. I continued to include this chart when students began writing their opinions during Mrs. Crump’s Cat by Linda Smith. Students enjoyed this piece of self-monitoring because they were able to draw smiley faces (Student Work Sample 9, 2013).

**Figure 16. Student Work Sample 9, 2013**

![Image of how is my writing chart]

*Figure X. Marie’s “how is my writing?” chart used during instruction to help monitor her opinion writing at the fourth stop during the reading of Mrs. Crump’s Cat by Linda Smith.*
Since we were only focusing on writing topic sentence and reason, students disregarded the example and ending sections. I continued to have students fill in this chart each time they completed a writing piece. I noticed that students only filled in the chart when I prompted them to. The goal setting aspect guided students throughout the instruction period. Before writing, I provided students with a visual that stated what the goal was of writing (Goal Visual).

**Figure 17. Goal Visual**

*Figure X.* Goal visual provided to students during instruction to help students understand that good writers set writing goals and then work to meet them.

Each time students wrote, their goal was to include a topic sentence and a reason. When I introduced the goal checklist, they, too, wrote down the goal for writing. Having the students write down the goal, even though it was provided as a visual, reinforced the importance and need to first set a goal and then meet that goal. Marie filled out her goal checklist when I read *Mrs. Crump’s Cat* (Student Work Sample 10, 2013).
Figure X. Marie’s goal checklist used during the reading and writing prompt of Mrs. Crump’s Cat by Linda Smith to help monitor her writing.

Marie wrote her goal prior to writing her opinion, and after she wrote her opinion she self-monitored with the use of the checklist. Throughout the instruction period, I provided students with goal checklists and the chart and encouraged the use of them each time students were prompted to write.

For the post assessment, I provided students with lined paper, the goal checklist, and the chart to monitor their writing. Students were not given visuals from instruction nor did I provide guidance during the post assessment. I told students it was up to them if they wanted to use the checklist and chart. I did this because I wanted to see if students would use the self-monitoring strategies on their own without my prompting and guidance. I read another picture book, *Arthur’s Pet Business* by Marc Brown, so the
assessment was very similar to the instruction. Throughout the post assessment, students wrote their opinion of what might happen next independently at the first two points of the story and then typed their opinion of what might happen next independently at the last two points of the story. I assessed students’ post assessment writing with the following opinion rubric.

**Figure 19. Opinion Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion Rubric</th>
<th>Not meeting objective</th>
<th>Working towards objective</th>
<th>Meeting objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas (topic)</strong></td>
<td>Searches to establish a topic or text and lacks a clear opinion.</td>
<td>Begins to introduce a topic or text and states an opinion.</td>
<td>Introduces a topic or text and states an opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas (details)</strong></td>
<td>Omits reasons to support the opinion.</td>
<td>Begins to provide reasons that may support the opinion.</td>
<td>Provides reasons that support the opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word Choice</strong></td>
<td>Lacks linking words that connect opinion and reasons.</td>
<td>Begins to use linking words to connect opinion and reasons.</td>
<td>Uses linking words to connect opinion and reasons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure X.* Opinion rubric used to assess students’ writing during instruction as well as during the post assessment.

Billy’s handwritten responses showed his ability to include opinions that contained both a topic sentence and a reason (Student Work Sample 11, 2013).
Figure 20. Student Work Sample 11, 2013

Figure X. Billy’s written response to the post-assessment prompt, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” at the first and second stop during the reading of Arthur’s Pet Business by Marc Brown. Billy’s first written response is translated as, “My opinion is that he’s going to get a bad dog. I know this because on the cover there’s an angry looking dog.” Billy’s second written response is translated as, “My opinion is that Arthur is not going to like to watch the pets. I feel this because he needs to watch frogs, 1 dog, a snake, and a bird.”

Even though Billy did not use the goal checklist or the chart to monitor his writing, he did include a topic sentence and a reason for both responses that he wrote. In addition, his responses made sense in the context of the story, which showed me that he
was using information he gained from the story to construct a response. Though his responses show room for improvement, the rubric helped me identify that he is working towards the objective, which is to write a well-constructed opinion piece. Marie also failed to use the goal checklist or the chart to monitor her writing. Her responses differed from Billy’s responses (Student Work Sample 12, 2013).

**Figure 21. Student Work Sample 12, 2013**

![Image of Marie's written response]

*Figure X.* Marie’s written response to the post-assessment prompt, “What is your opinion of what might happen next?” at the first and second stop during the reading of *Arthur’s Pet Business* by Marc Brown. Marie’s first written response is translated as, “My opinion is Arthur is going to get a yellow dog. I believe this because I watch this at home.” Marie’s second written response is translated as, “My opinion is Arthur is going to like the dog. I believe this because Arthur is exhausted.”
Even though Marie included the sentence starters for topic sentence and reason from the instruction, her responses were not complete. Marie’s reason for why she thinks Arthur is going to get a yellow dog was because she watches the television show at home. Even if this information is true, she did not give information that she learned from the story. In addition, Marie also explained that she thought Arthur will like the dog he has to babysit because he is exhausted. This response does not make sense because the topic sentence and reason do not connect. Perhaps if she used the self-monitoring strategies, she may have developed clearer reasons that made more sense and related to her topic sentence. The rubric helped me identify that Marie uses linking words to connect her opinion and reason. However, she is still working towards meeting the objective when it comes to introducing a topic and providing a clear reason.

Neither student used the goal checklist and chart to monitor their writing during the post assessment. This finding surprised me because students showed the independent ability to use both the goal checklist and chart throughout instruction. This affected their writing because the post assessment opinions were not as well written as during the instruction period. Students used the laptops to construct an opinion response during the last two stops of the post assessment reading. Research previously mentioned by Van Leeuwen and Gabriel (2007) and Beck and Fetherston (2003) suggests that word processors help students write in a manner where handwriting and neatness does not interfere. Billy’s opinion of what might happen next at the third stop of the post assessment read, “my opinion is that they found perkey I know this because it shows it on the page!!!!!!!,” (Student Work Sample, 2013). In the story, the main character could not find the puppy, Perky, he was dog-sitting. Billy’s typed response is significant because it
shows that he remembers to use the sentence starters he learned. However, his response fails to include a clear and relevant reason that supports the opinion. According to my observations, Billy was more focused on changing the font, color, and size while he was using the laptop as a word processor. Perhaps the use of the laptop as a word processor distracted Billy from constructing a response that contained a clear connection between the topic sentence and reason.

Marie’s responses were different from Billy’s responses, yet they contained interesting data. At the third stop, Marie’s response to the prompt was, “My opinion is they are going to fined parcy I because Ather is looking for her,” (Student Work Sample, 2013), which is translated as “My opinion is they are going to find Perky. I because Arthur is looking for her.” At the fourth stop, Marie’s response to the prompt was, “Perky was in the basmint I blive this because dad said everybody come heaer,” (Student Work Sample, 2013), which is translated as “Perky was in the basement. I believe this because dad said everybody come here.” Marie’s first response contained a sentence starter for the topic sentence but not for the reason. Marie’s second response contained a sentence starter for the reason but not for the topic sentence. Her opinions during the post assessment phase when required to type on the laptops were very inconsistent with her opinions during instruction. Marie did not use the goal checklist or the chart to monitor her writing. Even though research suggested that word processors can support writing due to the fact that students do not have to focus on neatness, I think the lap top may have caused confusion to Marie.

Overall, research has showed that the use of self-monitoring strategies help writing development by creating self-regulating writers (Graham et al., 2005a and Tracy
et al., 2009). Students were able to use the goal checklist and chart to monitor their writing during instructional time where I was available for support and guidance. However, the students in this study did not carry out the self-monitoring strategies in the post assessment portion. The use of a laptop as a word processor could have caused students to forget about the self-monitoring strategies that were offered during the post assessment.

Implications and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to see what specific writing strategies foster the development of literacy among children who are struggling writers. In summary, students were taught how to self-monitor and set goals in their writing in order to produce an opinion that was clear and made sense in the context. The sociocultural historical theory served as the theoretical framework that guided my research because it places an emphasis on the co-construction of learning with the teacher, the student, and culture. This theory highlights that learning is a social process that is affected by the constantly changing culture surrounding the community of learners.

Before conducting the study, I researched various literature finding common themes of effective uses of self-regulated strategy development, writing instruction that promotes student learning, and technology that enhances writing development. After researching the literature, I conducted my study and found that the data revolved around three common themes including student attitudes toward writing, teacher modeling of writing strategies, and self-monitoring during writing.

Overall, students are generally more engaged and positive about writing when the topic is of relevance. In addition, students benefit from explicit instruction of strategies
along with teacher modeling. Students also benefit from the use of self-monitoring strategies such as goal setting. However, this study showed the lack of such strategies during independent writing.

As with any research study, implications present themselves from the research completed. Because students’ perceptions toward writing are a vital piece of information when it comes to writing instruction, it is imperative for teachers to gain such information prior to designing instruction. Teachers should ask questions such as what topics do students find interesting? What topics do students find difficult to write about? This information can yield important information that can guide teachers’ instruction.

In addition, if teachers hope for students to use specific writing strategies, modeling and providing explicit instruction are essential skills to use. Showing students exactly how to carry out a specific strategy allows them to understand the specific steps and processes. Writing strategies can be used at various points throughout the writing process, which is why they are such an important skill to model and teach. Writing strategies, such as goal setting and self-monitoring, can be modeled and explicitly taught to enhance writing. Goal setting and self-monitoring are two strategies that can help guide students’ writing. By providing explicit instruction and modeling how to set a goal and monitor one’s own writing, students can better their writing by meeting specific criteria.

There were also various limitations in the research done. Due to the fact that I do not currently have a classroom of my own, I chose to work with a teacher whom I have previously substituted for. Therefore, I did not have a thorough understanding of each student’s academic knowledge and work habits. In addition, I worked with students over
the course of one week for about a half hour to an hour each time. Due to the short time, it was difficult to teach all of what I had in mind, and I also could not test to see if what was learned was maintained afterwards. Given the chance to complete the study again, I would administer maintenance sessions after instruction.

After completing the research, there were some aspects of writing development that lead me to further questioning. One area in particular is the perceptions toward writing. I have found that students generally are more engaged in writing when the topic is of interest. I think it would be not only interesting but also beneficial for teachers to have students write on a topic that is of interest and also something unfamiliar or uninteresting to see what aspects of writing differ when the topic is changed. Students often have to write on topics that they do not care for or do not know a lot about. Therefore, it would be beneficial for teachers to analyze different writing pieces to learn what aspects of writing should be further instructed in order to help students make their writing better.

In conclusion, children’s writing development is very important for teachers to understand in order to provide the best instruction for individual students. The writing process consists of so many different aspects that contribute to the overall writing that students produce. Without a solid understanding of how students develop literacy, especially the writing aspect of literacy, teachers cannot effectively teach students how to write. Literacy development is just as much about writing as it is reading, and providing effective instruction that promotes student learning is important in creating successful readers and writers.
References


Legutko, R. S. & Trissler, T. T. (2012). The effects of background music on learning


Merrill.

Recckio, V. (2003, October). A Recipe for Motivating Creative Writers. Retrieved from PBS Teachers website:

http://www.pbs.org/teachers/earlychildhood/articles/recipe.html


Appendix

Appendix A

Garfield Writing Attitude Survey
5. How would you feel writing to someone to change their opinion?

6. How would you feel keeping a diary?

7. How would you feel writing poetry for fun?

8. How would you feel writing a letter stating your opinion about a topic?

9. How would you feel if you were an author who writes books?
10. How would you feel if you had a job as a writer for a newspaper or magazine?

11. How would you feel about becoming an even better writer than you already are?

12. How would you feel about writing a story instead of doing homework?

13. How would you feel about writing a story instead of watching TV?

14. How would you feel writing about something you did in science?

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15. How would you feel writing about something you did in social studies?

16. How would you feel if you could write more in school?

17. How would you feel about writing down the important things your teacher says about a new topic?

18. How would you feel writing a long story or report at school?

19. How would you feel writing answers to questions in science or social studies?

Measuring attitude toward writing
20. How would you feel if your teacher asked you to go back and change some of your writing?

21. How would you feel if your classmates talked to you about making your writing better?

22. How would you feel writing an advertisement for something people can buy?

23. How would you feel keeping a journal for class?

24. How would you feel writing about things that have happened in your life?
25. How would you feel writing about something from another person’s point of view?

26. How would you feel about checking your writing to make sure the words you have written are spelled correctly?

27. How would you feel if your classmates read something you wrote?

28. How would you feel if you didn’t write as much in school?
Appendix B

Teacher and Student Interviews

Teacher Interview Transcription:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capstone Student</th>
<th>What does writing look like in your classroom? How do you hope to improve students’ writing? How do you assess students’ writing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Writing is a combination of activities. We have a handwriting book that works on conventions of writing, we have book club that allows students the freedom to write independently on various topics but with guidelines, response to literature is done whole class and independently. This allows students to improve topic/book specific writing skills implementing knowledge of fiction/non-fiction text story elements, vocabulary, and genre. We focus on writing skills for three major assessment categories: small moments, opinion, and non-fiction report (animal). We also write pen-pal letters all year to high school students and to school #7 students. This provides students the opportunity to exchange thoughts and information, as well as asking/answering questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you elaborate on when you said opinion writing is rarely something kids “get”? Also, what is your writing rubric like?</td>
<td>Yes we have a writing rubric for the three major writing pieces that we assess- small moments, opinion, non-fiction report. As far as the kids who get that connection of opinion I feel its developmental. Much like many skills in the primary grades they develop at different times or different children. While this development is similar for many students there are those who are more advanced and likewise struggling to catch up. This year Lanie, Nicole, Tori, Chang You have consistently showed a deeper understanding of giving an opinion and articulating that. They are able to verbalize an opinion and give reasons based on what they know, have read, or what we’ve discussed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Interview Transcription Pre Assessment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>What comes to mind when you think about writing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>What do you mean when you say imagination?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>If you are interested in something you might want to write about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>You might want to write about a book. Or actually write a book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>So what else? What do you like to write about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>I already wrote a book called Cat Wars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Oh what was that about?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Billy  It's basically like Star Wars but it starred Cats. It was really funny.
Instructor  What do you like to write about Marie?
Instructor  Anything else that you like to write about?
Billy  I don’t know because I like to write about a lot of stuff.
Marie  I like to write about a lot of stuff.
Instructor  What are your favorite things to write?
Billy  Books.
Marie  And about books.
Instructor  OK. When do you write?
Marie  At home.
Billy  And at school.
Marie  Yeah and at school.
Instructor  When do you write at school? Does your teacher have a special time for writing?
Marie  During Daily 5 mostly.
Instructor  When do you write Billy?
Billy  Yeah during Daily 5 too.
Instructor  What about at home? When do you write at home?
Marie  After school and on the weekends. Because I have to do my homework and do other stuff like church.
Instructor  What are your feelings toward writing or when you write?
Billy  I actually feel happy when I have to write because I like to write.
Instructor  What about you Marie? How do you feel?
Marie  I like to write so I feel happy too. And surprised.
Instructor  Do you ever feel not happy when you have to write?
Billy  Sometimes.
Marie  Yeah.
Billy  Sometimes when I have to write about something I don’t like.
Marie  Yeah I don’t like to write about things I don’t like.
Instructor  Is there anything else you would like to add about writing?
Marie  I like to write about my family.
Billy  Me too.

Student Interview Transcription Post Assessment:

Instructor  Let’s talk about how we worked in the small group. What did you think?
Billy  It was a little bit frustrating and fun.
Marie  It was good. I loved working with you.
Instructor  Billy, why was it frustrating?
Billy  Because I missed some of my class and working with my friends.
Instructor  OK. Think about what we did. Did you like learning about TREE?
Marie  And POW.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Did you think it was helpful for writing?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>What about today? What did you think about using the laptops?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>They were better like they were good with writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>They were good because I could write in cursive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>OK. Do you think that you liked to type? When you have to write would you rather type or handwrite?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>Type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>I like both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>When you write, do you think you write more when you type or when you handwrite?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>When you handwrite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>I think I like typing better because it is faster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Not all of the time though.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>Yeah for me because don’t have to write the whole word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>What do you mean you don’t have to write the whole word?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>Like if you’re handwriting, you have to draw the actual letter like an a. If you are typing you just hit the key and it pops up so it’s faster.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Oh OK. What about spelling when it comes to typing and handwriting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>I like spelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>I don’t like that either.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>What do you like better? Typing or handwriting? Because when you were typing your responses, you were worried about how to spell the dog’s name, Perky, because the laptop gave you a red squiggle mark underneath the word. But if you were handwriting, you wouldn’t know if you spelled it wrong because you wouldn’t get a squiggle line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>It doesn’t really matter. It only bothers me a little bit. When I handwrite I can just go back and erase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>I don’t really care about that squiggle line or spelling when I type.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>OK.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Pre Assessment Writing Prompt:

What picture do you like better? Why? Write as much as you can!

Picture A:

Picture B:
Appendix D

Pre Assessment Data

Billy:

I like picture

B. Because it's a panda bear with a camera taking a picture of a child, and the bear is standing on a stool.
Marie:

I like the picture because it is funny and silly. It is a dog barking a stick with darts on it.
Appendix E

Post Assessment Data

Billy:

Stop 3 - My opinion is that Perky is in another bedroom. I feel this because Perky slept in another bed.
Stop 4 - my opinion is that they found Perkey. I know this because it shows it on the page!

Marie:

Stop 3 – My opinion is they are going to fined parcy I because Ather is looking for her

Stop 4 – Perky was in the basmint I blive this because dad said everybody come heaer
Appendix F

POW Mnemonic Visual

P – Pick my ideas……………..decide what you want to write about
O – Organize my notes…………develop an advanced writing plan
W – Write and say more………..expand the plan while writing
Appendix G

TREE Mnemonic Visual

T – Topic sentence “tells what you believe”
R – Reasons “supports your opinion”
E – Examples “why do you believe this?”
E – Ending “wrap it up right!”
Appendix H

TREE Element Cards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Sentence</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Ending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I

Sample Writing Pieces

Pizza is the greatest kind of food. Pizza is the best because there are so many different toppings. I really like that there are so many choices because I can always create new kinds of pizza. I really want to eat some pizza now.

The best kind of pet is a dog. Dogs make great pets because they are friendly. Dogs are friendly because they wag their tail when people are around. I love dogs and would really like one someday.

The most interesting book is *The Sisters Grimm*. One reason this book is interesting is because of the way Mr. Beck reads it. He uses fun voices for each character. I can’t wait for him to read to us again.
Appendix J

TREE Elements Chart

How is my writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>How many did I include?</th>
<th>Are they clear?</th>
<th>Do they make sense?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T-topic sentence</td>
<td></td>
<td>☻ ☻ ☻</td>
<td>☻ ☻ ☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-reason</td>
<td></td>
<td>☻ ☻ ☻</td>
<td>☻ ☻ ☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-example</td>
<td></td>
<td>☻ ☻ ☻</td>
<td>☻ ☻ ☻</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-ending</td>
<td></td>
<td>☻ ☻ ☻</td>
<td>☻ ☻ ☻</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K

TREE Elements Graphic Organizer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Sentence</th>
<th>Was there a topic sentence?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give a description:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Was there a topic sentence?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give a description:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Was there a topic sentence?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give a description:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ending</th>
<th>Was there a topic sentence?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give a description:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L

Sentence Starters Visual

Sentence Starters

I believe this because........................

I feel this because...........................

I think this because........................

I know this because........................
Appendix M

Checklist/Goal Sheet

*My goal is to*......

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

__________________________.

**Checklist**

_______ Topic Sentence

_______ Reason
Appendix N

Opinion Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion Rubric</th>
<th>Not meeting objective</th>
<th>Working towards objective</th>
<th>Meeting objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas (topic)</strong></td>
<td>Searches to establish a topic or text and lacks a clear opinion.</td>
<td>Begins to introduce a topic or text and states an opinion.</td>
<td>Introduces a topic or text and states an opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas (details)</strong></td>
<td>Omits reasons to support the opinion.</td>
<td>Begins to provide reasons that may support the opinion.</td>
<td>Provides reasons that support the opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word Choice</strong></td>
<td>Lacks linking words that connect opinion and reasons.</td>
<td>Begins to use linking words to connect opinion and reasons.</td>
<td>Uses linking words to connect opinion and reasons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>