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How Can Prewriting Strategies Benefit Students?

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How Can Prewriting Strategies Benefit Students?

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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Supervised by

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Abstract

This study examined the benefits of using strategy instruction during the prewriting stage of the writing process. Research was conducted in the home of 10 year old twin brothers as they were introduced to three types of prewriting strategies: brainstorming, graphical representations, and plan, organize, write. Data was collected through student questionnaires, student writing samples, and researcher observations. The findings showed that strategy instruction in the prewriting stage improves student writing in terms of content, organization, and voice, and also improves student’s motivation and creativity towards writing. In order to be beneficial to student writing, educators need to implement instruction in a variety of strategies so students have the opportunity to find a prewriting strategy that works best for their abilities.
How Can Prewriting Strategies Benefit Students?

Literacy is one of the most important knowledge bases a child acquires. It is important for students to use their understanding of language to communicate and socialize in their homes, schools, and communities. Being literate helps a child to communicate, both orally and written, in order to be an active member of society. Although how people use language to communicate differs among communities, every person uses literacy on a daily basis. Based on New Literacy Studies (Larson & Marsh, 2009), literacy is used for a specific purpose. People write for a reason, to a specific group of people, in order to relay a message. This message is what helps individuals relate to others, and be involved in their surroundings. Writing is a difficult, yet crucial literacy component that allows students to publish their ideas in a way that makes them participants of their classrooms and communities. In order for this to happen, teacher instruction in writing needs to be engaging and authentic, since students often have trouble with, and do not care for, written language.

According to Cohen & Cowen (2010), “One reason some students do not like to write is because they see it as a chore, as dreaded work, and as something to ‘get done’; they do not perceive themselves as writers” (p. 322). If students are unaware how writing relates to their own lives, and how they are able to benefit from knowledge of written language, they might be less likely to learn. Teachers need to model a love for writing and embrace writing as a fun activity. (Cohen & Cowen, 2010). By giving students the opportunity to see the teacher engaged in their own thoughts and opinions while writing, the process might become more real to them. In many instances, students are not given opportunities to see the value in writing. A lack of opportunities is why a majority of students are turned off to writing. They feel it is busywork to be completed for a grade, due to some schools putting writing in second, behind reading instruction.
Integrating reading and writing benefits the development of literacy. Research has shown that reading development does not take place in isolation; children develop simultaneously as readers, listeners, speakers, and writers (Cohen & Cowen, 2010). Writing should never take a back seat to reading; otherwise students will not see the importance of it. In order for writing to be beneficial to students learning, instruction should be relevant to the diverse learners within a classroom.

Although each child comes to learn literacy differently, it is important that instruction is meaningful in written language. Taking into consideration every student’s different backgrounds and literacy beliefs, teachers need to form writing instruction in a way that will meet the needs of the entire class. One way that teachers address writing instruction is through the writing process. Traditionally, writing has been conceived as a linear, step-by-step process. (Sommers, 1994). According to Cohen and Cowen (2010), the process of writing involves many stages, each of which is as valuable as the next, each focusing on the overall design and purpose of the final product (p. 324). The first step in the writing process is the prewriting stage. The prewriting stage is perhaps the most important stage in writing. During this stage, the student explores and focuses on the purpose, audience, topic, and form that the writing task could take. This is the “getting ready to write” stage (Cohen & Cowen, 2010 p.324). This first stage in the writing process is important to the final outcome because it causes the student to think about how they will plan out the rest of their writing. This stage is the most helpful in terms of organization and design.

This study researched the benefits of strategy instruction during the first stage of the writing process. The participants of this study were two ten year old boys, entering the sixth grade in the fall. The participants were instructed in three different prewriting strategies,
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brainstorming, graphical representations, and Plan, Organize, and Write. The data collected throughout the study consisted of student questionnaires, student writing samples, and researcher observations. This data was analyzed to interpret the effects and benefits of strategy instruction in the prewriting stage of the writing process. My research suggests that instruction in prewriting strategies benefits students writing on multiple levels. Prewriting strategies improve students writing in terms of content and ideas, organization, and voice; and also helps increase self-motivation and creativity towards writing.

**Theoretical Framework**

Children come to acquire literacy in two different ways. According to Gee (2001), literacy is the control of secondary uses of language (i.e. uses of language in secondary discourses). In other words, Gee believes that a child is literate when they can control, or use, language in appropriate ways while in secondary discourses (such as school). One way students come to understand literacy is through formal teaching and learning. Gee (2001) describes learning as “a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching” (p.20). Learning usually occurs within a classroom setting where students are taught the necessary skills that are essential to their literacy development. Elements of literacy that are “learned” are more easy for students to discuss, but more difficult to perform. The second way a child comes to understand literacy is through acquisition. Gee believes that without acquisition, a child will never fully master their use of literacy in life. Gee (2001) defines acquisition as “a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models and a process of trial and error without formal teaching” (p. 20). Elements of literacy that are “acquired” are easily performed, but more difficult to discuss. Therefore, a child will never fully master their use and understanding of literacy if only taught in formal schooling, although this is an important aspect
of how children come to learn the necessary skills to being literate. Children also acquire these skills while being exposed to different models in natural settings, which help them to develop their own opinions and beliefs about literacy. Gee’s studies are consistent with that of Goodman (2001) who writes that initial literacy is not taught in the classroom; rather, children come to find and discover their own literacy and language by living and participating in an environment where literacy and language is present. Children come to acquire literacy by being given opportunities to use language in various situations for different functions. These opportunities give the students a chance to see the importance in writing instruction, and are learned even before the child enters formal schooling.

Literacy can occur even before school years, as children explore their own uses of language. Teachers should take into consideration that not all students come from mainstream backgrounds and bring the same early literacy skills to school. Meier (2003) writes that “despite their diverse backgrounds, all children bring to school rich linguistic abilities acquired through social interaction in their homes and communities” (p. 242). Most children come into school with early writing skills learned by watching their parents and by being active members of society. A part of this knowledge is gained through bedtime stories (Meier, 2003). Bedtime stories are a time when children are able to listen to their parents read, and begin to understand the fundamentals of both oral and written language. This type of social interaction begins to allow students the knowledge of what authors do, and how they write with letters in order to communicate. The understanding of literacy being a “social practice” that occurs in social settings is described in the Sociocultural Learning Theory. According to the Sociocultural Learning Theory, children learn to write during social interactions (Larson & Marsh, 2005).
According to Larson & Marsh (2005), the Sociocultural 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). What Larson and Marsh describe is that a child develops their own thoughts and perceives literacy depending upon their culture and community they live in. Sociocultural Theory states that learning occurs during these social interactions, such as the bedtime stories (Gee, 2001; Heath, 1982; Meier, 2003). Based on the idea that children learn while in social situations, each child will have different ideas as to what writing is and why it is used. A child living in a mainstream community will have different beliefs and use writing in different ways than a child from a nonmainstream community. How these communities use literacy is ever changing, therefore, the way a child uses written language in social situations is also ever changing. What remains the same, however, is that written language is a crucial part of being an active member of society.

Based on the Sociocultural Learning Theory and the understanding that children come to acquire literacy through social interactions, it is important that students receive authentic and beneficial instruction in writing, but also opportunities to engage in social learning in order to be successful readers and writers. When students are not given these opportunities, they do not see the benefit of writing to their individual lives. Students need to be able to place the benefits of written language into their lives outside of the classroom. Atwell (1998) suggests that students, not the teacher, should decide what they write about. When the student can choose what topic they want to write about, they will be more engaged with the writing activity because it is something they are interested in. By being able to write about a subject of their choice, students will be able to make sense of ideas and situations occurring in their own lives. The authenticity of writing about a personally meaningful topic will show students that writing is important to be
an active member of their communities and society. When planning instruction, it is necessary for teachers to create lessons that will benefit the students. In order to be active members of society, students need to be given opportunities to see how being a good writer will allow them to see their world through different lenses. Students should be given authentic activities to show them how written language is used in the real world. Authentic writing activities help students make discoveries about their own lives. These discoveries made by students during written language instruction are consistent with the Critical Literacy Theory.

According to Larson & Marsh (2005), critical pedagogy locates schooling in political context and constantly challenges teachers and researchers to uncover implicit oppressions. By allowing students the opportunity to write about a topic that interests them, we are giving them the chance to find out about themselves and their community. The Critical Literacy Theory is based upon Freire’s (1987) belief that literacy education should be concerned with raising the critical consciousness of learners. When students have the opportunity to brainstorm and write about subjects that are relevant to them, their work will be more meaningful because it pertains to their life. The Critical Literacy Theory (Larson & Marsh, 2005) expects students to discover aspects of their identity through literacy. Giving students the chance to write about an issue that is meaningful to them is the first step to discovering themselves. Freebody & Luke (1990) believe that one way to raise critical consciousness and be successful in a literate society is to take on four roles while reading and writing. These roles include code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst (p.7). All four of these roles ask the student to consider what the text has to do with them as an individual. It calls for the students to relate to material, and consider what they can do about it. These roles give the student a sense of identity and have them take a
stance in their writing. While writing, students should also consider the bigger picture, and think about how they fit within their communities.

To raise the critical consciousness (Freire, 1987) of learners, students should also be encouraged to think about their lives out of the classroom. The Critical Literacy Theory (Larson & Marsh, 2005) encourages students to uncover inequalities within their homes and communities. Written language is one way for students to identify and express their concerns for such situations. Being able to express their thoughts, even in a journal, helps students identify the issues occurring in their lives, and their stance on these issues. Allowing students choices for their learning shows the students that their prior knowledge is recognized, and does not allow for “banking” models of education (Freire, 1987) or when “the teacher fills the supposedly empty head of learners with his or her own words” (p. 41). Being able to express themselves will give students the opportunity to see what is meaningful in their lives. Students need written language if they want to participate in school and their communities.

Knowledge of written language is necessary for all students, beginning in the primary grades. In order to participate in their communities outside of school, students need to be active writers. In other words, if schools want to produce effective society members, they will need to instruct students in a way that will introduce writing in an enjoyable, beneficial way.

**Research Question**

Based on the fact that literacy is a social practice, and that language and literacy acquisition is acquired in social situations, this action research project asks, how can prewriting activities benefit students?

**Literature Review**
To decide how prewriting strategies can benefit students, various research articles on the subject were looked at. The findings from the research done on this topic showed that there are numerous prewriting strategies used within elementary classrooms. This literature review will discuss the benefits of the writing process (more specifically the first stage of prewriting), how teachers should guide instruction in prewriting strategies for students, and the benefits and limitations of prewriting strategies on students writing. For the purpose of this literature review, the three prewriting strategies researched were brainstorming, graphical representations, and Plan, Organize, Write (POW).

Given Gee’s (2001) definition of literacy as being the ability to control secondary uses of language, students need to have a complete understanding of both written and oral language. As previously discussed, students have a more difficult time mastering writing skills over reading skills. This variation between reading and writing abilities becomes a problem for students beginning in the primary grades. According to Eitelgeorge and Barrett (2004), even preschool children grapple with this interrelated process (writing) as they create illustrations and scribbles with letter-like forms to convey their thoughts. If students who struggle with writing are not identified and do not receive the intervention they need, they will be at risk for struggling in literacy throughout the rest of their school years. The main goal of writing instruction is to create independent writers (Williams, 2011) who use the knowledge and strategies taught to them on their own in and out of the classroom. One way for teachers to create independent writers is by using the writing process within their classrooms.

The Writing Process

Recent research in the field of writing has shown that the process approach to writing is one that is beneficial to both student-writers and teachers. According to Smith (2000), the
emphasis has shifted from creating a product to the current view of writing as a process. Before teachers had an understanding of how to best teach writing to their students, a product approach was implemented. A product approach to writing places almost all concern with the qualities of the finished product, with little or no attention at all granted to the writer, the writing process, or the evaluation of the work in progress (Zamel, 1983; Raimes, 1985; Arndt, 1987). Using the product approach, students’ writing was not taught; it was assigned and corrected (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). Most classrooms today have strayed away from this approach and have implemented the writing process (or a writing workshop) method that stresses the importance in the steps writers take to create a piece of writing, which are rehearsal, drafting/revising, editing, and publishing (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983). When students are able to revise and edit numerous drafts, they will see how they are able to make their writing better. Peer conferencing and teacher conferences will help students to see their writing from a point of view they might not have seen before. Much research has been done to show the positive effects of the writing process on student work.

In their studies, both Baroudy (2008) and Towell and Matanzo (2010) found evidence of the importance of the writing process. Baroudy (2008) found that most student writers exhibit writing behaviors that are part of the writing process. To find this, he created a questionnaire to be completed by successful student writers in numerous classrooms. Baroudy’s (2008) results showed that:

Whether consciously or subconsciously, students are in favor of freely writing using self-selected topics. They write learning from multiple-drafts. They brainstorm to provoke dormant knowledge in their pre-writing stages. They concurrently write and revise. They write in a meaningful context with potential or practical audiences in mind. (p. 60)
This study shows that, given the opportunity, students would rather complete their writing in a process. Although Towell and Matzano (2010) came to their conclusions in a different manner, they also believe in the effectiveness of the writing process and student work. For their study, Towell and Matzano (2010) considered how the writing process created student-authors. They used a group of students varying from second to eighth graders enrolled in public schools. The students were taught the steps in the writing process over a period of days. They also read different fairytale spin-offs of those same ones. For example, the students read *The Three Little Pigs* by James Marshall and also *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka, which tells the story from the wolf’s point of view. Students were then challenged to create their own version of a fairytale. Towell and Matzano (2010) found that the writing process created a “critical landscape” (Baroudy, 2008 p. 384) out of the classroom, and caused students to take risks that they normally would not do. Both of these studies show that the writing process is beneficial to student-writers, who use the process to create pieces that are meaningful to them, and also to teachers as they try to develop a classroom of successful writers. While all the steps in the writing process are crucial for developing a meaningful piece of writing, it is the first stage or prewriting/planning, in which students spend the majority of their time discovering how they will write their piece (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007; Rao, 2007; Gibson, 2008).

Prewriting strategies are important for students writing because it is the stage of the writing process in which they are able to get beginning ideas onto paper. During this time, students are able to process new information with existing schema (Lorenz, Green, & Brown, 2009). For many students, the prewriting stage makes writing easier for them. They are able to get their ideas out of their heads and into an organized manner before they begin. Planning time allows students the chance to think about a topic of their choice. The prewriting stage can look
different between classrooms and even between assignments. Three types of prewriting strategies are brainstorming, POW, and graphical representations.

For most students, one of the toughest parts about writing is thinking about what to write. According to Rao (2007), many students complain that they lack ideas and cannot think of anything interesting or significant to write about. Having students brainstorm (by themselves or with peers) either to themselves or aloud, helps to get their imagination running. Within his study, Rao (2007) looked to find if the brainstorming strategy lead to more gains in writing, and how students felt about brainstorming. By giving students four different brainstorming tasks—thinking individually, verbalizing ideas in pairs, brainstorming ideas in note form, and classifying ideas into appropriate categories, the author was able to see gain from pre to posttest scores. Along with proof of gains in writing score, students also completed a questionnaire that states the majority of them (86%) benefitted from brainstorming because it helped to stimulate their thinking (Rao, 2007). Rao’s (2007) study is consistent with Jacobs (2004), Read (2005), and Williams (2011). Although these studies were conducted in very different manners, all of the mentioned authors came to the conclusion that having students brainstorm before beginning to write showed positive effects on their writing. Most of the gain occurred in organizational structure of the writing, length, and details added (Rao, 2007; Jacobs, 2004; Read, 2005; Williams, 2001). These individual studies were done in differing environments, and all researchers chose brainstorming to be done either in whole group, or pairs. Williams (2011), Read (2005), and Jacobs (2004) conducted interactive writing sessions, in which the teachers modeled how to brainstorm. As the teachers demonstrated how to “think aloud,” students were able to share their ideas and listen to the ideas of others. These studies are consistent with the Sociocultural Learning Theory (Larson & Marsh, 2005) stating that learning is a social practice.
occurring in social situations. Students learn best when engaged in meaningful conversations in which they are able to share their own opinions and ideas and are equally able to understand the ideas of their peers. Rao (2007) states,

   Essentially, writing is a way of expressing thinking and good writing comes from good thinking. Before students start to write something it is reasonable to offer them opportunities to think so as to have a sober reflection about the topic in question. This is an absolutely necessary stage which students activate prior knowledge and skills to apply to the writing task. (p.104).

Without this crucial step in the writing process, students are not as likely to produce to their best potential. As with brainstorming, graphical representations also help students to plan out their thoughts.


   Graphic organizers are visual representations of ideas in keyword format. They can be categorized according to function (compare and contrast, problem and solution) or form (tree diagram or Venn diagram). Drawing graphic organizers help students to plan their writing in the prewriting stage so that they will have a clear sense of direction when they write. (p. 131-132).

Graphic organizers are another strategy to scaffold students writing in the planning stage. Graphic organizers calls for students to activate prior knowledge and new schema just as brainstorming; however, graphic organizers have students write down their ideas on paper. Coleman (2010) researched how teachers’ used graphical representations helped students learning. Based on her survey of elementary teachers’ use of graphical representations, Venn diagrams were the most common graphic organizer used by teachers in the elementary grades.
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Although Coleman’s (2010) research showed which types of graphic organizers were most used by elementary teachers, she did not show how this was beneficial to students learning. Results of Lee, et al (2007); Lorenz, et al (2009), and Li (2007) show that using graphic organizers during the prewriting stage of the writing process is beneficial to the outcome of students writing. Li (2007) studied fourth and fifth graders with learning disabilities and how story maps helped them create their own stories. According to the findings, the visual representation of story mapping helped these students think about story organization, content, development, and outcome. Before the students were instructed in the story mapping strategy, their writing was below average. Li (2007) believes that, “The story mapping strategy can be used effectively to help all learners write more effectively” (p. 91). Similarly, Lee et al (2007) and Lorenz et al (2009) looked at the ways different types of graphic organizers can be more beneficial than others depending on the students. Lorenz et al researched whether graphic organizer software on the computer was more beneficial than paper and pencil ones. Their study proved that one was not considerably more helpful than the other. Students who completed graphic organizers on the computer, however, did write more than the students who completed paper and pencil ones. Lee et al (2007) studied how different types of organizers effected different students. Similar to Lorenz et al, their study provided information that depending on the individual student, some types of organizers may be better than others. For example, the research found that students with high prior knowledge do not benefit from instruction using multiple representations, or more than one different type of organizer. Although each study was carried out in various ways, they all come to the conclusion that using graphic organizers are likely to improve students writing, making it easier for them to plan their work. It is also crucial that teachers understand the different types of learners within her classroom, since not every type of graphical representation will work for every student.
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Similar to graphic organizers, the Plan, Organize, Write strategy helps students to organize their writing using some type of outline.

Plan (pick a topic), Organize (using a graphic organizer), Write (and say more) or POW is a strategy to help students throughout the entire writing process. According to Tracy, Reid, & Graham (2009), students who do not learn to write well are at a considerable disadvantage and their grades are likely to suffer. By using strategies with mnemonic devices, students will be more engaged with their writing and find it more enjoyable (Saddler, Moran, Graham, & Harris, 2004). In their study, Saddler et al (2004) researched how instruction in the POW strategy benefits student writing during the planning stage of the writing process. Their findings showed that before instruction in the POW strategy, students produced relatively short and incomplete stories of poor quality. None of the participants created planning notes before beginning to write, and averaged less than 20 seconds of planning time. After instruction in the prewriting strategy, all of the students wrote more complete stories. Planning time increased to about 4 minutes and 21 seconds of planning time post treatment. Similar to Saddler et al (2004), Mason, Kubina, Valasa, & Cramer (2010) researched how the POW prewriting strategy caused improvements in student writing samples. Their participants consisted of students with learning disabilities, who were performing 1-2 years below grade level. The researchers used an SRSD instruction which is designed to promote writing independence by teaching students cognitive and self-regulation strategies for regulating the writing process (Mason et al, 2010). The authors found that during the baseline writing samples, the students work was inconsistent. The participant’s performance was below grade level due to difficulties in organization, work completion, and rushing through a task without effort (p. 153). After the SRSD instruction was implemented, there were significant gains in the participants writing samples, including the number of response parts, type
of responses, and the number of words written. The research of this study found that direct instruction in prewriting strategies is beneficial to student writing. Alternatively, Tracy et al (2009) found that although their study on the POW strategy did show improvement in student writing, their evidence mostly applies to students in grades 4 and higher (p.329). This contrasts previous studies that state writing should begin in the primary grades (Williams, 2011), therefore this strategy might not be best suitable for younger children.

**Instruction in Prewriting Strategies**

Of all the research (Smith, 2000; Zamel, 1983; Raimes, 1985; Arndt, 1987; Jasmine & Weiner, 2007; Graves, 1983; Baroudy. 2008; Towell & Matanzo, 2010; Lorenz, Green, & Brown, 2009; Rao, 2007; Jacobs, 2004; Read, 2005; Williams, 2011; Larson & Marsh, 2005; Coleman, 2010; Li, 2007; Lee et al, 2007; Lorenz et al, 2009) that has been done on prewriting strategies and its effect on student writing, some of the most important is how teachers can implement the strategies into their classrooms. Since students do not come to school with knowledge of the writing process, it is crucial that teachers have a solid background so they can instruct students on the different strategies to make them successful writers. According to Williams (2011), “Teaching young children to write is complex, and effective writing instruction in the earliest years of schooling can play a crucial role in children’s learning to write” (p. 23). If teachers want to create independent writers (Williams, 2011), writing instruction needs to begin at an early age. Unfortunately, sometimes students do not begin writing until after the primary grades. Some teachers are put off and even scared of introducing the writing process into their classes because they do not know how to begin instruction. Phattey-Chavez et al (2004) and Ates et al (2010) believe that one of the reasons writing programs have not worked is that teachers do not have the knowledge and skills needed to make a significant improvement in the quality of the
learning environments they create for students. Ates et al (2010) conducted a study with 100 classroom teachers showing their understandings of the writing process. Their results showed that most teachers are scared, upset, and worried when they encounter students who struggle with reading. In contrast to Ates et al’s (2010) study, Martin et al (2005) interviewed three first-grade teachers on what they learned through teaching writing. These were advanced teachers who knew a great deal about the writing process. One of the findings of their study was that learning to write is a messy process for teachers and students. Learning the writing process in any grade is not easy, and in order to learn, they had to be willing to take risks. The teachers and students found that learning is a process, and at times, you will struggle. Guskey (2000) pointed out that teachers need to be able to observe the successes of a new innovation through the progress of their students. In order for teachers to be able to view these successes, students need to be shown modeling of the writing process in the form of mini-lessons, and also an adequate amount of time to write during the school day.

Before we can expect students to know how to go through the writing process, teachers need to provide constant modeling. The prewriting strategies mentioned previously have shown to be beneficial to student work, however, that is only because students were taught their purpose and how to use them effectively. Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, van den Bergh, and van Hout-Wolters (2004) state, “When models think aloud while writing, they implicitly offer students orchestration examples in real time. These examples can trigger ‘slumbering’ powers in the students to perform such orchestration as well” (p. 3). When students are viewing the activity of their models, they are likely to inhibit the same behaviors that they are watching. Writing is a difficult task for many students. Being a writer calls for children to shift continually between planning the main ideas, content translating, and text revising (Braaksma et al, 2004). If we
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expect students to excel at every stage of the writing process, they will need to receive instruction and practice in all stages. The best way to instruct students on how to complete a task is to show them. Students who learn by observation “step back” from the writing task and can focus on the learning task, creating a learning opportunity to enlarge their knowledge about writing (Braaksma, van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & Couzijn, 2001; Couzijn, 1999). By allowing students opportunities to observe teachers as models, we give them the chance to reflect on what they already know about writing, and how they can relate new information to their prior knowledge. This learning process is what helps students to grow as writers. The studies of Li (2007) and Braaksma et al (2004) are consistent with the idea that modeling writing strategies improves student writing sample, but also calls for student growth. In the study of Braaksma et al, the authors hypothesized that observational learning results in a process pattern with more metacognitive activities such as goal orientation, planning, and analysis in the beginning of the writing process, as opposed to learning by performing. To do this, the authors used eighth grade students of mixed abilities. The students were instructed in either of the two instructional methods- observation learning or learning by performance. Braaksma et al (2004) discovered that instructional method resulted in different ways writers orchestrate their writing processes. Students in an observational learning environment may develop a richer knowledge base that influences the orchestration of writing processes. This study provides insight to teachers about how their instruction impacts student learning. To give students an effective knowledge base on writing, they will need to consider which way they will guide instruction. Li (2007) conducted their study on a specific prewriting strategy, story mapping, but still found the importance of modeling in writing instruction. To look at the effects of story mapping on student’s story writing, the researcher modeled the use of the story map during phase one of the intervention.
The students and the researcher collaborated while brainstorming possible ideas for their story. What Li’s (2007) study found was the modeling of the use of story mapping had a positive effect on student’s story writing abilities. Before the intervention, the student’s writings were short and poorly developed. However, after the intervention, their writing samples were longer and richer in content. Although these two studies researched different aspects of the prewriting process, they both present the important of modeling for student in this stage. While instructing in prewriting strategies, teachers also need to keep in mind the importance of time.

An essential part of writing instruction that teachers need to keep in mind is time allocated for the writing process. As mentioned previously, it is not uncommon for writing instruction to be given less instructional time as reading instruction. Reading and writing skills go hand in hand when developing literacy skills, so it is crucial that students are able to spend a significant amount of time learning and practicing both. Towell and Matanzo (2010) cite Graves (1983) and Calkins (1994) and other writing experts, who believe that a significant block of time on a regular basis is necessary for the writing process. Writing must be an equal part with reading in a daily language arts routine. Although schedules in the elementary school are hectic, teachers will have to find time for adequate writing instruction if they want their teaching to benefit students. Eitelgeorge and Barrett (2004), Towell and Matanzo (2010), and Gibson (2008) discussed the importance of implementing an extended amount of time for writing instruction. Eitelgeorge and Barrett (2004) and Towell and Matanzo (2010) researched the effects of the writing process and student writing. In their findings, the authors discussed the importance of time allowed for writing instruction. Writing is a process, and processes take time. For writing to be meaningful and to the best of the students ability, they should be given time to do their best work. Eitelgeorge and Barrett (2004) found that the writing process calls for a lengthy block of time.
The researchers believe that the students would have not made the gains that they were able to document with less time. Gibson (2008) conducted her research in during guided writing sessions. Although her data was collected through different measures, she found that the time needed for instruction in the guided writing sessions was absolutely necessary. She states that “Close work over an extended period of time with one group of students is also an important context for development of teacher expertise” (p. 130). Instructional time not only benefits students by giving them time to practice and work on their writing, it also provides the teachers with opportunities for teaching writing skills to students.

**Benefits/Limitations**

Based on the findings of numerous research, it can be said that prewriting strategies have a positive effect on student writing (Towell and Matanzo, 2010; Moats et al, 2006; Lorenz et al, 2009; Eitelgeorge and Barrett, 2004; Bui et al, 2006; Saddler et al, 2004; Kieft et al, 2007; and Monroe and Troia, 2006). This first stage in the writing process is very necessary for student writing because it is the time when they can get their thoughts onto paper. Before beginning their drafts, students are given this time to consider a topic of interest, and decide what important parts they want to include in their piece. The prewriting stage also helps writers to organize their piece in a way that will make sense to the reader. In essence, the prewriting stage saves the writer from writing more drafts than necessary by allowing them a chance to take notes about how their writing will look before they begin the task.

As teachers, one of the main goals is to create self regulated learners. Instruction in prewriting strategies is the first step to creating independent writers. While planning instruction, teachers need to take into consideration what type of scaffolding they need to provide students so that they will eventually be able to complete the skills taught on their own. Williams (2011)
discusses the importance for teachers to talk with the students about the ways they can use independently what was demonstrated to them. If students are not able to practice skills taught outside of the classroom, then they have not truly mastered the material. Prewriting strategies should help students with their writing throughout their schooling, but also after they leave. One of the greatest impacts that prewriting strategies has on the writing process is its overall positive effect of student writing. When students are able to plan out their writing before they begin the writing process, improvements are shown in length, organization, and content (Kieft et al, 2007; Saddler et al, 2004; Lorenz et al, 2009). Moats et al (2006) researched third and fourth grade students from two different types of classrooms. The first group of student came from classes deemed high quality writing instruction. The second group of students were from classes deemed low quality for writing instruction. The researchers found that the writing samples given from the students in the low quality classes were basic in length and content. In order to implement an effective writing system into classrooms, teachers should be knowledgeable about how to instruct students. The writing process has proved to be a successful way to introduce writing into the classroom.

There are also limitations to be considered about prewriting strategies. To begin, a few of the research studies presented in this literature review have a small number of participants (Li, 2007; Jacobs, 2004; Read, 2005; Martin et al, 2005; Gibson, 2008; Williams, 2001; Towell and Matanzo, 2010; Saddler et al, 2004; Lorenz et al, 2009; Eitelgeorge and Barrett, 2004). Since the studies discussed in the literature review were qualitative, and do not have a large number of participants, the findings of each study proves true for only the participants. Another limitation of the research that has to be considered is that every child is a different type of learner. Introducing one type of prewriting strategy will not be effective for every student in a given
class. It is important that teachers introduce different types of prewriting strategies and activities and model their use, so students have options in choosing one that suits their learning style. In their study on the effectiveness of representations in writing, Lee, et al. (2007) state that “Inappropriate selection of representations may impede students’ mental model construction. Thus, it is important to enable students to understand, select, and construct organizers appropriate for the task” (p. 135). When students are using strategies and activities that will most suite them, they will be able to use it to help them plan out their writing piece. One factor that might discourage teachers outlook on the writing workshop is the amount of time needed to effectively implement the workshop within a classroom. Lengthy blocks of time are needed to properly instruct students on the writing workshop if improvements are to be seen (Eitelgeorge & Barrett, 2004; Saddler et al, 2004). Finding long blocks of time in already hectic school days could be a problem for some teachers.

Given that the benefits outweigh the limitations, the writing process is an effective way teachers can implement writing instruction into their classrooms. Although writing is a difficult process for some, high quality instruction will help students to become independent writers. The more teachers know about writing, the better suited they will be to teach their students. When planning instruction, time allocated to instruction and modeling should be taken into consideration so students are more likely to succeed with writing activities, especially in the prewriting stages.

Methods

Context

Research for this action research project will take place in a small group setting in the home of the participants, Herman and Mark (pseudonyms). The participant’s home is located in a
HOW CAN PREWRITING STRATEGIES BENEFIT STUDENTS?

A suburban town in the Western part of New York State with a population of about ninety-six thousand. The majority of the community is of middle to upper-middle class status. Herman and Mark, twin brothers, live with both their mother and father in a housing development located about fifteen minutes from the participants’ school. The housing development consists mostly of older children, not many of which are in Herman and Mark’s age range. The participant’s spend time both before and after school at the babysitter’s house (located within the same town), due to both parents working full time jobs. The socioeconomic status of this family is middle class.

Participants

Herman is a 10 year and eleven month old Caucasian male. He is currently at the end of the fifth grade, and will be entering the sixth grade at the middle school located down the road from his home. Herman is an easy-going 10 year old who likes to bike ride, swim, watch television, text message on his cell phone, and spend time with his family. Herman was born eight weeks prematurely, which caused delays in his development. At the age of three, Herman was diagnosed with PPD (Pervasive Developmental Disorder). This disorder has made it difficult for him to focus while at home and school, and is currently on medication for his hyperactivity and to help him focus. Herman currently has an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) which allows him AIS services in ELA and Math. Herman’s classroom is an 8:1:1 setting. While in the fifth grade, Herman enjoyed reading and mathematics.

Mark is a 10 year, eleven month old Caucasian male. He is twin brothers with Herman, and is two minutes younger. Mark is also at the end of his fifth grade year, and will be entering middle school in the fall. Mark is a feisty boy who enjoys watching television, talking on his cell phone, going to the YMCA, and riding his bike. Mark is the more vocal of the twin brothers, and is very honest in his relationship with others. Like his brother, Mark was also diagnosed with
PPD at the age of three. He has an Individualized Education Program which provides Mark with additional AIS services. At school, Mark is in the same 8:1:1 classroom as his brother. According to Mark, while in the fifth grade his favorite classes were science and physical education.

**Researcher Stance**

During this research study, I worked in a small group setting with the participants. I am a graduate student at St. John Fisher College, working towards achieving a Master’s Degree in Literacy Education (B-6th). I currently hold a bachelor’s degree in Childhood Education and English. While working towards obtaining certification in Literacy, I also have certification through New York State in Childhood Education, Special Education, and English. During this research study, I acted as a participant observer and observed and engaged in the activities throughout the study (Mills, 2007). While the participants were engaged in the writing portion of the study, I observed and recorded their behaviors during each strategy. The observations served as a way for me to analyze the effectiveness of each given strategy. I was also engaged with the students throughout the study during a shared writing activity. By writing with the participants, they saw how each prewriting strategy is used and allowed me to see the benefits of each strategy on the participants writing.

**Method**

To carry out this research, I studied the effectiveness of prewriting strategies on student writing. To do this, I introduced a variety of prewriting strategies to the participants during mini-lessons. The three strategies used for this study were brainstorming, graphical representations, and Plan, Organize, and Write (POW). After introducing and modeling the specific strategies, the participants completed the prewriting strategies on their own, for use within their self-
selected writing topic. I observed the students’ behaviors while engaged in the prewriting and writing stages and noted any difficulties or successes they encountered. A different strategy was introduced during each session.

For the brainstorming strategy, I worked with the students to identify the importance of brainstorming before writing. Brainstorming allows the students a chance to think of topics that interest them, and also lets them decide details they would like to include within their writing. I first modeled how I come up with ideas to write about, from things that interest me and situations that are happening in my life, and how I narrow down my choices into one topic I will write about, or the topic for which I have the most to say. As a group, we brainstormed more topics that we could write about together. The students decided on a story about a thief in a library, and wrote down notes in a brainstorming web to help keep track of details that would be added. This story was written in a group, on large paper, with the participants choosing the main details of the story. After our shared writing session ended, the participants were handed a blank brainstorming web to complete for their own writing piece. The participants decided on their own topic to write a story about, using information from the mini-lesson to help them along. While writing, I observed their actions and questions to get more information on their thoughts about this strategy. I also asked them for their insight about this strategy when they completed their writing samples. Both participants had been familiar with this strategy, since it was one they commonly used in school.

During the second session, the graphical representation strategy was introduced. Like the brainstorming strategy, I introduced the use and purpose of graphic organizers in the prewriting stage by modeling for the participants. For the purpose of this study, the graphical representation used is story mapping. By modeling for the students how I use a story map to identify the
characters, setting, and main events of my story, they witnessed how I use the organizer to help focus my writing while in the drafting phase. Together, we completed a shared writing activity, writing a story together. The participants were then able to show me what they learned from the mini lesson by completing their own story map, and using it while drafting a version of their own story. During this time I observed the participants and noted their behaviors. I asked them for their thoughts and opinions about this strategy after they completed a writing piece on their own.

The third session was in similar format to the previous two. During the third session, the POW or plan-organize-write, strategy was introduced. Like the previous sessions, the POW strategy began with a mini-lesson showing the students how this strategy is used, since this is most likely the most unfamiliar strategy of the three mentioned. I modeled how to use the POW strategy while writing, and how to use the information from the organization step to put into their draft. As a group, we used the POW strategy to create a piece of writing together. After the participants saw how the POW strategy is used in the prewriting stage, they created their own writing pieces using this strategy. I observed the participant’s actions while writing independently. I also asked them for their thoughts about this strategy after they have completed a writing piece on their own.

Quality and Credibility of Research

To ensure quality and credibility during this action research study, certain strategies were taken into account. Credibility of a study refers to the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study (Mills, 2007). To make this study credible, one strategy I used is peer debriefing. According to Mills (2007) peer debriefing is having somebody who is willing and able to help us reflect on our own situations by listening, prompting, and recording our insights throughout the process. I relied on my critical colleague to look over all
methods and materials throughout this study to ensure that the strategies I was implementing would help me find what I was looking for. I will also use persistent observations throughout this study to identify any pervasive qualities or atypical characteristics (Mills). The observations of students during engaged writing time provided insight into the effectiveness of the study. Triangulation was also used in this study. Triangulation allows the researcher to compare a variety of data sources and different methods with one another in order to cross check data (Mills, 2007). As previously mentioned, I collected multiple forms of data to be analyzed. These forms included questionnaires, observations, and participant work samples. Having numerous forms of data allowed me to compare strategies and methods with one another.

This study also covers issues of dependability. According to Mills (2007), dependability refers to the stability of the data. To ensure dependability, overlap methods were used. Three methods of data were collected in a way that the weakness of one is compensated by the strength of the other (Mills, 2007). Having numerous methods of data allows the researcher to identify any commonalities or differences. An audit trail was used to ensure dependability as well. My critical colleague made it possible to have an external auditor (Mills) to examine data. The critical colleague’s feedback provided me with information and the ability to reflect on the research.

This research study ensured confirmability as well. The confirmability of a study refers to the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected (Mills, 2007). One way that confirmability was ensured is through triangulation (collecting multiple sets of data). As previously mentioned, having numerous sets of data allowed me to compare data across multiple sources. Reflexivity was also practiced in this study. Reflexivity is to intentionally reveal underlying assumptions or biases that cause the researcher to formulate a set of questions in a
particular way (Mills, 2007). By having my critical colleague read the questionnaire I gave to the participants, they gave me insight into the way I am formed my questions and methods for the study.

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

Before beginning this study, I collected informed consent from both the parents and informed assent from the children who were used in the research process. The parents of the participants signed a form giving consent for their children to take part in this study. The parents were also informed about the purpose of this qualitative study, and that there were no risks to their children. The participants were also informed of the purpose of this study, and that they were able to walk away at any time or not complete any part of the study if they did not wish to do so. For the confidentiality of the participants, all names have been changed throughout this study and on all work samples.

**Data Collection**

To complete this study, multiple forms of data were collected. Before beginning any prewriting strategies with the participants, I provided a questionnaire for them to complete. This questionnaire allowed the participants to explain their understanding of the planning stage of the writing process. The questionnaire also asked the participants general questions about their relationship with writing. This questionnaire showed me the types of experiences the participants have previously had with writing, and types of prewriting strategies familiar to them. I collected writing samples from the participants during each session, after each strategy is introduced. Before beginning the strategy instruction, I collected one writing sample from each participant. This sample showed me the level of the participants writing before any instruction was implemented. This sample, along with the others collected, was rated using a 5th grade writing
rubric and judged on organization, content, grammar, and voice. Being able to compare the before instruction sample with the after instruction sample allowed me to see which aspects of Herman and Mark’s writing was influenced by the prewriting strategy instruction. Throughout the sessions I also observed the participants while engaged in the strategies. Observing their behaviors offered beneficial information such as if they are struggle with any aspect of the strategy, or if the strategy was helpful to their writing.

**Data Analysis**

Multiple forms of data were collected and analyzed to show any patterns that arose during the research study. The writing questionnaires and researcher observations were cross examined to find any similarities and differences between the participant’s knowledge of the prewriting strategies used in this study, and their ability to use the strategies during independent writing time. Student work samples were examined to distinguish the effectiveness of the strategies by comparing before and after examples. Categories were created based on the similarities found during the cross examination of the data.

**Findings and Discussion**

To begin researching how instruction in prewriting strategies benefits student writing, three methods were used to collect data. Student work samples, questionnaires, and researcher observations were analyzed to find how the study impacted the participants writing. During analysis and cross examination of the data collected through this study a few themes appeared. The themes strengthening of student writing, self-motivation, and the increase of creativity were frequent and show the benefits of using prewriting strategies.

**Strengthening of Student Writing**
Based on the student writing samples and the researcher observations, all three of the prewriting strategies introduced to the participants during this research study benefitted the students by directly improving their writing. The participants’ writing was improved in the categories of story elements, organization, and number of words written. This data is consistent with the research done by Jasmine & Weiner (2007), Tracy, Reid & Graham (2009), Williams (2011), Li (2007) and Braaksma et al (2004) who found that prewriting strategies was beneficial to student writing because the strategies used (brainstorming, graphic organizers, POW) improved student writing samples in length and organization.

While analyzing the student work samples (Appendices A), the researcher compared the writing samples from the three different strategies taught during this study (Student Work Samples #1-6, July 6, 2011); which included brainstorming, graphic organizers, and POW to the baseline writing samples (Student Baseline Sample #1 &#2, June 18, 2011) taken from the students before any instruction was given. The study began by having the participants each create a writing sample based on a topic of their choice. There were graphic organizers present for use, but it was not required. Neither participant chose to use the graphic organizer, or to plan out their writing before they began. Since both Herman and Mark chose not to use the graphic organizer available, they might not feel comfortable enough in their knowledge of graphic organizers to see the value of how it will help them. Based on the student questionnaire (Appendices), both participants use prewriting strategies in the classroom. Having the option to choose the prewriting stage, and opting out of doing so, shows the participants did not see any value of a prewriting strategy at that particular time. The rubric used to evaluate all participants work in this study rated their writing on six traits: ideas and content (does the writing include a central idea with supporting facts?), organization (does the writing have a thoroughly developed
sequence of events?), voice (is the voice of the writing appropriate to the purpose and audience?), sentence fluency (do the sentence have a natural flow and rhythm?), word choice (does the writer use descriptive language?), and conventions (do errors effect the readers understanding of the text?). A sample of the writing rubric used to rate the student samples are below.

Herman’s baseline sample (Student Baseline Sample #1, June 18, 2011), was the first to be analyzed. He received 2.6 out of a possible 4 points on a fifth-grade writing rubric. He wrote a
story describing the relationship between him and his brother. The organization of Herman’s
writing had no clear structure or sequence, and weak sentences made it hard to understand the
main idea of his story. In his baseline sample Herman’s written voice was present, but not
enough to clearly describe his story to the audience. He added few details to his story, making it
difficult and uninteresting for the reader to follow. For example, Herman ended his story with
“so that is how my story ends” (Student Baseline Sample #1, June 18, 2011). Using a statement
like Herman used to end his story makes it difficult for the reader to understand what the
message and purpose for his writing was. Based on the student questionnaire (Appendix A),
when asked why people write, Herman responded with “to work on your printing and for
practice.” This implies that Herman is not yet aware that we write for a purpose, and to send a
message. He views writing as a “chore” or “work” as mentioned in Cohen & Cowen (2010).
Herman’s baseline sample is shown below.
Similar to Herman, Mark’s baseline writing sample (Student Baseline Sample #2, June 18, 2011) was also limited in terms of organization and detail. Mark received 2.7 out of a possible 4 points on the fifth-grade writing rubric. His writing showed little organization, with no logical sequence, and was inconsistent which made it difficult for the reader to follow and understand the main idea of the writing. Mark’s sample began with “Once upon a time” and ended with “so they lived happily ever after,” which shows that he understands stories only as fairytales. Mark’s baseline sample is shown below.
After the research study was implemented, the participant’s writing samples showed improvement in organization, ideas, and voice. The tables below show the data collected from all student writing samples, including before and after strategy instruction was implemented.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits of Rubric (each out of 4 total points)</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Brainstorming</th>
<th>Graphical Representation</th>
<th>Plan Organize Write</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas &amp; Content</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>1.5/4</td>
<td>2.5/4</td>
<td>2.5/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>¼</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>1/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Rubric Score</td>
<td>2.6/4</td>
<td>3.6/4</td>
<td>3.6/4</td>
<td>3.2/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits of Rubric (each out of 4 total points)</th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Brainstorming</th>
<th>Graphical Representation</th>
<th>Plan Organize Write</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas &amp; Content</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2.5/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>1/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Rubric Score</td>
<td>2.7/4</td>
<td>3.8/4</td>
<td>3.5/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the data analyzed from both the writing samples and the researcher observations, the strategy that had the greatest impact on the participants was the brainstorming strategy. Brainstorming is a strategy that was familiar to both of the participants, as they use brainstorming in school. The individual scores for the brainstorming strategy are listed below.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits of Rubric (each out of 4 total points)</th>
<th>Brainstorming-Herman</th>
<th>Brainstorming-Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas &amp; Content</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>2.5/4</td>
<td>2.5/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Rubric Score</td>
<td>3.6/4</td>
<td>3.8/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the modeled mini-lesson on brainstorming, the participant’s organization and ideas greatly improved. Both Herman and Mark went from receiving 2 to 3 points on the writing rubric for ideas and content. The participants each included a title for the brainstorming samples, Mark’s being “Young Man Christian Association,” (Student Sample #2, June 18, 2011) and Herman’s “The Broken Arm” (Student Sample #1, June 18, 2011). This simple addition helped describe their main idea to the reader, which was difficult to understand in each of the baseline samples. Both participants seemed to add more details in their writing, which helped to support the main idea of the writing piece. An extra detail in both writing samples was the addition of new characters. Instead of only writing about themselves, the participants expanded their imagination and included other characters, some who were made up. Each story had a defined beginning,
middle, and end, which included a conflict that came to a resolution by the end of the story. Herman’s story included a conflict when the school playground was torn down because a student broke his arm. By the end, the student had gone to the doctor to get a cast, and the school rebuilt a safer playground for the children. Mark’s story described a YMCA worker who had to jump into the pool to save a person that was drowning. Both writing samples had an obvious change of voice from the baseline sample to the brainstorming sample. In his sample, Mark’s writing became more engaging, and showed that he was aware of an audience. Mark did this by adding dialogue to the characters in his story. In his writing, a character yells “help, my friend is drowning” to get the workers attention (Student Sample #2, June 18, 2011). This dialogue makes Mark’s writing more interesting to read, but allow tells the audience that his characters were facing a problem. The researcher observations showed that while Herman seemed eager and excited to write after the brainstorming activity, Mark became stuck shortly after he began and needed step by step assurance of what he was doing while asking things such as “is this right?” (Researcher observations, June 18, 2011). This observation shows a lack of confidence in how Mark sees himself as a writer. Constantly looking for reinforcement shows that he was not comfortable with this strategy. This could be because he was introduced to brainstorming in a different way at school. These findings are supported by the research of Monroe & Troia (2006) who found that brainstorming activities helped the students generate better writing samples in terms of length, organization, and content. Similar to brainstorming, the graphical representation strategy provided results that proved to be beneficial to student writing.

The graphical representation strategy was also familiar to both of the participants in this study. After the strategy was introduced, both participants’ ratings on the writing rubric were increased. Herman increased his score from his baseline sample by 1 point. Mark increased his
score from the baseline sample by 0.8 of a point. The scores from the graphical representation strategy are listed to below.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits of Rubric (each out of 4 total points)</th>
<th>Graphical Representation- Herman</th>
<th>Graphical Representation- Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas &amp; Content</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>2.5/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Choice</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventions</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Rubric Score</td>
<td>3.6/4</td>
<td>3.5/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most noticeably, during this writing sample, Herman made obvious strides in including story elements within his story about mean friends (Student Sample #3, July 6, 2011). This writing sample had a clear beginning, middle, and end, and also included character development. The setting of the story was in a park, where the main characters, Jimmy, Jacob, and Jayden were playing. The conflict of his story included the involvement of a weapon, where the boys were faced with the challenge of how to avoid danger. The story concluded by one of the mothers taking the boys to safety. Herman’s writing voice is present in this sample, and he was able to tell his story in an engaging way. Based on the researcher observations, Herman was fully engaged in this prewriting strategy. He used the graphic organizer to plan out his story in a way that would help him when he came to the drafting process. He used the organizer to create the beginning, middle, and end of his story, and reread his writing after he was finished. Benefits of graphic organizers as a prewriting tool is support by the research of Coleman (2010) who found
that graphic organizers are the most used prewriting strategy in elementary classrooms. Mark’s writing sample after the introduction of the graphical representation increased slightly (0.8 points) from his baseline sample, but showed to be less effective than the brainstorming strategy. Mark included no character development or sequence to this sample, and includes very little detail. His story begins with it being “A very hot day” and the characters realizing the power went out. In his story, he writes, “The time the power went out was at 7:00 a.m. Then the power came back on at 10:00 p.m.” (Student Sample #4, July 6, 2011). He added no details of what the characters did during the time they had no power, or even why the power went out. This made it difficult to understand the purpose of his writing.

Plan, Organize, Write is a prewriting strategy that was unfamiliar to the participants. Based on the researcher observations and student work samples, this strategy had a small effect on Herman’s (Student Sample #5, July 6, 2011), and Mark’s (Student Sample #6, July 6, 2011) writing samples. The table below shows that both participants scored less on the rubric after the P.O.W. strategy was introduced than the other two strategies.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits of Rubric (each out of 4 total points)</th>
<th>P.O.W- Herman</th>
<th>P.O.W- Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideas &amp; Content</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
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<td>Sentence Fluency</td>
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<td>Word Choice</td>
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<td>Conventions</td>
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<td>Total Rubric Score</td>
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The researcher’s observations showed that both Herman and Mark were confused by this strategy when they showed frustration with getting started independently after the mini-lesson. The participants struggled through the prewriting strategy by asking questions such as “What do I do now?” (Researcher Observations, July 6, 2011). The confusion displayed by the students implies that they struggled with the unfamiliarity of this strategy, as opposed to the other two in which they use in the classroom. Mark seemed to struggle the most with this strategy, and based on researcher observations was disengaged and uninterested through the entire session. His writing was very basic and minimal, and showed no coherent organization. Mark’s P.O.W. sample (Student Sample #6, June 6, 2011) is shown below.

The plot of his story is confusing to the reader, as there is no understandable beginning, middle, and end to his story. Although his characters come into conflict, when the cell phone drops into the water, this conflict is never resolved in the end. Mark again ends his story with an abrupt
“The End!” which was a quick way to end a writing piece he was not engaged in. Unlike Mark, Herman’s writing sample (Student Sample #5, July 6, 2011) showed organization and limited character development. His writing piece also included details that supported the main idea of the story. For example, in the story the characters (a cat and a dog) are fighting over the same toy. He uses descriptive language to describe part of the story “Spencer and Milo were arguing over a toy in the kitchen when my dad got scratched. Blood was dripping down his leg.” This added detail engages the reader and provides a visual of the story as they read. The student writing samples and researcher observations proved the prewriting strategies were more engaging to one of the participants than the other. This observation could be due to the interest level of the students for writing. If a student does not enjoy writing, they are more likely to be disengaged during the writing process. For the participant who was more engaged after the strategy instruction, his observation is supported by Jasmine & Weiner (2007) who found that students became more motivated to write when engaged in the writing workshop.

**Self-Motivation**

During this research study, a major theme that arose was the difference in motivation between the two participants. By asking the participants about attitudes and habits towards writing, the student questionnaire (Appendix A) implied that although they do a lot of writing in school, the participants did not enjoy writing as much as reading. This negative attitude towards writing is supported by Cowen & Cohen (2010), who believe that students do not enjoy writing as much as reading because they see it as a chore. While the participants were writing their baseline samples, my observations showed that both participants struggled to come up with a topic to write about. Herman and Mark both seemed engaged in writing for a few minutes and then stopping to stare around the room. During this session, the participants had to be redirected
numerous times, and would occasionally make faces at each other (Researcher Observations, June 18, 2011). After the researcher instructed the participants in the strategies used in this study, the motivational levels of the two participants differed, as Herman became more motivated than Mark.

Herman’s self-motivational levels showed the most obvious change throughout the study sessions. In the beginning, he seemed unsure of himself and his writing abilities. Based on the researcher observations, he struggled to come up with ideas to write about, and continuously asked the researcher if “this was okay” (Appendix C). This portrayed his lack of confidence in his writing. Being unsure of himself showed that he was not comfortable with his own writing abilities, and possible was confused about what was being asked of him. Following the introduction of the strategies used in this study, Herman’s self-motivation tremendously increased. Throughout all three strategy-used writing samples taken from him, he immediately began working following the researcher instructed mini-lesson. He no longer needed help to think of a topic, and rarely asked questions while engaged in writing. Herman’s self motivated is supported by Tracy et al (2009) who found that strategy instruction created self-regulated learners. As we progressed into the research study, Herman also remembered what was taught and discussed during the previous sessions. He knew what was to be expected of him, and needed little guidance while writing independently. Mark’s motivation levels somewhat differed.

Based on the student questionnaire (Appendices A) Mark enjoys writing because he likes to write neat. Even when given the opportunity to write about a topic that interested him, Mark still seemed disengaged from the activity. He spent most of his time asking what he should write about and being worried about making mistakes (Researcher Observations, July 6, 2011) which shows his lack of self confidence while writing. The second session consisted of writing samples
given graphic organizers and the POW strategy. This session was challenging to get any ideas out of Mark, and he seemed uninterested in doing any writing. He was very consistent from the first session to the last; his body language showed that he would rather be doing something else. Although Mark did produce good writing pieces, he needed to be motivated by someone else, either me or his brother, before he was able to sit down and plan any writing. This lack of motivation implies that he does not view writing as an enjoyable task, because if he did, he would not need a peer or adult to motivate him. This impression could be a factor of the way writing was taught in his elementary classrooms. The research of Tracy et al (2009), and Mason et al (2010) found that when strategy instruction is taught correctly during the writing process, self-regulated, independent writers are created.

Increase of Creativity

Another major theme seen across the data collected was the increased of creativity evident in the participants writing samples after the strategies were introduced. The use of prewriting strategies helped the participants map out their ideas, which made it easier for them to take the ideas from their head and put them onto paper. This creativity made their writing much more interesting to the reader. The increase in creativity is supported by Mason et al (2010) who found that strategy instruction created improvement in the quality of student writing samples including number of words and details. To make stories interesting, supporting details are needed to keep the reader engaged in the text. Writers use details in their work to make the text more interesting for the audience, which will allow the audience to understand the message of the writing. In the participant’s baseline writing samples (Student Baseline Sample #1 & #2, June 18, 2011), the number of words was limited, and so was the number of details added. The lack of details makes it difficult for the reader to understand the main idea of the story. The baseline
stories created by the participants (Student Baseline Samples #1 & #2, June 18, 2011) were almost the exact same stories and Mark and Herman were the main characters in both. They did not step out of their comfort zone, or expand on any detail given. The inability to step out of their comfort zone was a difficulty that both participants mentioned (Researcher Observations, June 6, 2011). During the mini-lessons given by the researcher, creativity was encouraged by modeling how to expand on ideas and notes written down during the prewriting strategy. The graphic organizers helped the participants to take ideas from inside their heads, and made it easier to write down onto the paper by providing them with a visual to refer back to while in the drafting stage. Having the visual of being able to see what would be included in their writing gave the participants more freedom while writing. For example, in Herman’s sample after completing the graphical representation strategy (Student Sample #3, June 18, 2011) he included numerous characters instead of just having one main character. These characters face a struggle, and have to solve a problem in the end. He developed the characters which made his writing interesting to read. The addition of character development implies that Herman now understands that we write for a purpose, and since it is more difficult to explain what we mean in written language than in oral language, writers need to create a well developed writing piece in order to get the message to the reader. This observation is supported by the research of Tracy et al (2009), Li (2007), Rao (2007), and Saddler et al (2004) who found that after strategy instruction was implemented, student writing samples improved in length, quality, organization, and ideas.

Mark also showed his creativity throughout the writing samples. His writing samples were very brief, but after the brainstorming strategy was introduced (Student Sample #2, June 18, 2011) he showed his understanding of adding details to make his writing more engaging. Although his writing did not include as many characters as Herman’s, he was able to include
details that made his story important. Every topic he wrote about was something that was of interest to him. These topics allowed his voice as a writer to shine through. Having the ability to write about a topic of choice allows students to have fun with their writing and to use their existing schema writing voice to be creative. Cohen & Cowen (2010) state that it should be the choice of the student, not the teacher, to decide on a writing topic if students are to enjoy writing.

Both participants showed varying abilities between the baseline samples taken, and the samples taken after the strategies were introduced. Although their strengths in writing vary, it can be said that both participants benefitted from the strategies used in this study.

**Implications**

Prior to this study, I understood the difficulties teachers faced trying to implement writing instruction in the classroom, and also the struggles students went through while trying to produce writing pieces. This understanding led me to question how strategy instruction, specifically in the prewriting stage of the writing workshop, can benefit students writing. The study conducted shows that using strategy instruction during the prewriting stage of the writing process effects student writing in many ways. The study proved that when students are taught strategies for planning their writing, their writing samples rate higher on given rubrics in terms of organization, length, and detail. The participants’ attitudes also changed from before to after the study. These findings relate to the research previously discussed, and also provide implications for classroom teachers.

Incorporating prewriting strategies in the elementary classroom is important for teachers because it allow students to plan out their writing before they begin drafting, allowing them a clear picture of what their writing will include. Strategy instruction in the prewriting stage is beneficial to students and educators because it has shown to improve student work in length,
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organization, and details (Li, 2007; Rao, 2007; Saddler et al, 2004; Dunn & Finley, 2010; Tracy et al, 2009, Jasmine & Weiner, 2007). If educators provide students with the knowledge necessary to use strategies while writing, students will be more likely to produce better writing pieces.

Educators should consider that strategy instruction can impact motivational and creativity issues within the classroom. Both of the participants in this study showed an improvement in their creativity based on their writing samples. Having the prewriting stage allowed them to plan their story from beginning to end, and add in details they might not be able to think about when engaged in writing. Educators should teach the writing process with emphasis on the prewriting stage, in hopes of changing student’s attitudes about writing from a “chore” (Cohen & Cowen, 2010) to a task they enjoy. Allowing students the opportunity to plan or practice their writing before they begin makes the writing process not as scary, and helps to motivate the students before they begin writing. Jasmine & Weiner (2007) found that this motivation gained by students increased their independence and enjoyment of writing. When students are motivated, they are more likely to become self-regulated learners. Tracy et al (2009) found that teaching strategy instruction for the planning stages helped to create self-regulated learners who are motivated to learn. These students will need less guidance to complete assignments.

Educators can also use strategy instruction in elementary classrooms to differentiate instruction for students. The participants used in this study had Individualized Education Programs implemented for them in their schools. Since both of the participants struggled with writing, and learn better visually, the graphic organizers used in the study allowed them to visually see what their writing would look like. The strategies used in this study can be varied depending on the student it is designed for. Based on this study, and the research discussed (Li,
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2007; Rao, 2007; Saddler et al, 2004; Dunn & Finley, 2010; Tracy et al, 2009, Jasmine & Weiner, 2007) strategy instruction benefits general education students, and students with disabilities. Williams (2011) found that the writing process helped students with hearing loss understand what it takes to be a writer. As in every classroom, not one type of strategy will work for every student, so it is up to the educators to find strategies that benefit the diverse learners in a classroom.

In my future classroom, I will incorporate strategy instruction during the prewriting stage of the writing process. It is my hope that with scaffolding and guidance, I will be able to create self-regulated learners. I would like to do more research on this topic while using it as an instructional technique in my classroom. There are a few limitations set forth by this research study. One limitation with this study was the time constraint. The sessions completed with the participants during this study were short, due to scheduling conflicts between the participants and myself. If there had been more time allowed, other strategies could have been instructed, and more writing samples could have been collected. Four samples were collected from each of the participants, and they seemed to vary depending on day. More time would have made it less demanding on the students, who wanted to enjoy their summer vacation. Another limitation of this study is the actual writing levels of the students as told by their teachers. Being unaware of the students writing abilities and levels in school made it difficult to have any data to compare my results too. Also, the writing questionnaire given to them expressed their opinions about writing, but I would have liked to see what their teachers had to say about their writing habits. One final limitation of this study was that although differences in diverse learners were discussed, no evidence was shown of the effects of gifted and talented students. This issue raises questions for further research of how strategy instruction in the prewriting stage affects the
writing of gifted and talented students. My research also leads me to question what types of strategies can be implemented throughout the remaining stages of the writing process, and how strategy instruction in these stages would benefit student work.

**Conclusion**

This research study observed the effects that strategy instruction has during the prewriting strategy. The participants who wrote basic stories before the strategies were implement, wrote more organized, exciting samples after. The prewriting stage of the writing process is influential to the entire writing process because it is this first stage where the ideas come together, and students begin to plan out what they wish to include within their writing. The strategies used in this study (brainstorming, graphic organizers, and Plan, Organize, Write) provided the students an outline, checklist, and visual map of how their writing would turn out. Based on the data analyzed, and the research studied, strategy instruction during the prewriting stage is beneficial to student writing.
References


Appendix A

WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1. What does the word ‘writing’ mean to you?

I think it means it time to write a story.

Q2. Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?

I like to write because it helps me understand my ideas.

Q3. We need to write for lots of reasons. Name 2 reasons.

We use it for our printing.
We can also use it for practice.

Q4. Do you do any writing at home? Yes

Q5. If you do, what do you write?

I write for homework and letters.

Q6. Tick or cross the following statements:

I like writing stories.
I like writing letters.
I like writing poetry.
I like writing about my experiences.
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WRITING QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1. What does the word ‘writing’ mean to you?

Q2. Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?

Q3. We need to write for lots of reasons. Name 2 reasons.

Q4. Do you do any writing at home? Yes...

Q5. If you do, what do you write?

Q6. Tick or cross the following statements:
   1. I like writing stories ...
   2. I like writing letters ...
   3. I like writing poetry ...
   4. I like writing about my experiences ...

Q7. Before you begin writing, do you do any planning?

Q8. What helps you think of ideas for a story?

Q9. What type of planning do you do?

Q10. How does planning help you while writing?
Appendix B

One day at school we went on the playground. So one of the kids went down the new slide they just put in that day. So when he went down the slide he broke his arm. The boy had to go home because his arm broke and injured. So then he went to the hospital and his mom pick him up and took him to the doctor and said he should stay home for like for three days. So when he went back to school that day the playground was all gone and also the swings too. So then when he was doing his work they were playing in a brand new playground and by that time he felt better for the other kids too. So after that three days he went on the playground and he went on the slide and he broke his arm again. So his mom was happy for him too. So when he went to see the doctor he was happy for him too so he
One day at the YMCA there was a savior who was acting like he was so cool. But till he heard some one yelled help saying my friend was drowning. The savior jumped in but he forgot to hit the buser to tell everyone to get out so he can jump in his self. But the savior still jumped in but he almost drowned himself but he still saved the one kid. Then the savior came ponnament at his job. Then the savior said all of you can go back in the pool. Then they lived happy ever after.
That two mean boys.

One evening after dinner we decided to go to the park. I had my best friends over named Jayden, Jimmy, and Jacob. So then when we get to the park I saw these mean boys who had a gun and I was right next to them so I ran over to my mom and said these people have a gun and I ran over to my mom and said they have a gun. So my dad cell phone died and then I ran to my friente and said they have a gun so my dad cell phone died and then I ran to my friends and said they have a gun. So my dad cell phone died so thank god that my mom had hers but so only have one bar so my mom called the cops and they took these to bad boy names Ted and Michael. So then the rest of the evening we had fun. It was a fast.

The end.
One day on a very very hot day before Shannon and James got up the house was very hot so they decided to turn on fans and air conditioners. But other houses had them on. Therefore a lot other houses had them on. Then the power went out. The time the power went out was at 7:00 AM. Then the power came back on at 10:00 PM. Then they calmed down.

The END.
the aigrin toy

One day we where at my cousin Shannon house. We had dinner we had bakezedy. So Milo and Spenser where argueing over a toy in the kitchen and my dad got scratch by it. And blud was dripping down his leg. But Milo and Spenser love to play with yaclar. So then Shannon mom put Milo away. So finaly that Shannon went to the stor to by another one just like this one but it cost a lot of mony so that is what happen.

the

End
Appendix C

Observational notes  6/18/11  3:00

Jacob - Herman
James - Mark
1st story with no planning

- Jacob began the writing task immediately
  after I said to begin. James said he
did not know what to write about.
- I gave them a time limit and Jacob
  complained it might not be enough time,
  thereby strengthening his eagerness to write. James
  said he was stuck shortly after beginning
  the task.
- Both seemed to be mildly thrown off
  by the elements of a story discussion. I told
  them not to worry, just write their story
  because the elements will fall into place.
- Even though they could identify plot, setting,
  characters in examples, I found they
  struggled to see how it fit into their own
  writing.
- Made sure their stories had a beginning,
  middle, and end.
- Jacob finished first, and reread his
  story several times.
- I wrote along with them so they did not feel
  rushed.
- James showed frustration with his
  writing. Brainstorming
- Had to explain to be creative - hard for
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them to be creative.

Once I gave them examples and they
creatively started forming, there were
no more issues.

2nd sample with brainstorming instruction

Jacob began writing immediately, with
little instruction.
James needed step by step instruction,
and it was decided new character
would be needed to add more details
to his writing.

Graphic Organizer

Jacob seemed to jump right into the
assignment with enthusiasm.
Remembered some parts of a story,
recalled what we did in brainstorming.
Many ideas.
Did not need much guidance.

Paw

Jacob seemed continued.
While brainstorming, he had great ideas
Hard to talk discussion and pull in
down onto the paper during the organize part.
Did not ask many questions.

Graphic Organizer

Jimmy asks questions
Great ideas!
Wanted about making mistakes
Paw

Jimmy was totally uninterested.