

THE EFFECT OF USING THE WRITING PROCESS

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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by

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William Paterson University

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of employing direct-based instructional methods to enhance the writing process within a self-contained special education classroom. This study examines the impact of structured and systematic teaching approaches on improving writing proficiency. The research evaluates the implementation of direct-based instruction, encompassing explicit strategies and sequential steps tailored to accommodate individual learning styles and special education requirements.. By employing qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, including observations, rubrics, and pre- and post-assessment analyses, this study aimed to explain the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach. Findings from this research contribute valuable insights into optimizing the teaching of the writing process in special education settings, offering practical recommendations to empower educators in fostering enhanced writing skills among students with diverse learning needs. This study concluded that students were able to write more and became more independent with their writing. Additionally, student engagement and excitement about writing increased.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To my mom- This was such a cool experience! I am so thankful we got to get our master's together. Love you so much!

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## CHAPTER I

### Statement of the Problem

#### Introduction

According to Harris and Graham (2011), a majority of students in U.S. schools have remarkable difficulty when writing a narrative, an expository or descriptive piece, as well as a persuasive essay. Yet, this doesn't even touch base on students with learning disabilities. Harris and Graham (2011) also explain how these students have greater problems than their "normally achieving peers" and often have a negative connotation towards writing. Though general education students may also dislike writing, the issue for special education students is that they lack the strategies and abilities of general education students (Harris & Graham, 2011).

Many Northern New Jersey public school districts utilize the readers and writers workshop model, which has been published by authors such as Lucy Calkins and companies such as SchoolWide. The workshop model has three parts- a mini-lesson/read-aloud, independent work time (where teachers work in small groups or conference with students), and group sharing. Although writer's workshops have shown effectiveness in promoting writing skills among typically developing students, there are several challenges and limitations associated with its implementation for students with special needs. These challenges may affect students' ability to benefit from the writer's workshop approach, resulting in the need for teachers to better meet their learning needs.

In my district, we utilize the SchoolWide materials for reading and writing workshop. Teachers in my district are constantly creating differentiated materials for all types of students, due to SchoolWide only offering one type of material for each lesson. For example, if a teacher

does not like the graphic organizer that SchoolWide has made for story structure, they have to find something else that appeals to their learners.

My self-contained classroom has third and fourth-grade students who struggle with creating and writing fluent sentences. Therefore, I am already differentiating and finding resources that work for these students. The whole group-based format where students engage in similar writing activities needs to address the individual student needs and abilities in my classroom, especially having two grade levels. The pacing of a workshop model classroom can be challenging for these students as they may need more time to practice a skill than others. Lastly, some of the lessons in the SchoolWide curriculum require students to think in an abstract manner, whereas my students need concrete examples and direct instruction strategies in order to understand a skill.

While the Writer's Workshop model has demonstrated its value in general education classrooms, adapting it to accommodate the diverse needs of special education students demands thoughtful consideration and strategies to ensure that every child has the opportunity to develop their writing skills and achieve their potential.

The use of the writing process approach represents a shift in the way we approach teaching writing, offering an alternative to the traditional writer's workshop model. While writer's workshops often focus on peer feedback and critique as a means of improvement, the writing process approach places greater emphasis on the individual writer's journey from initial idea to polished piece. This process approach recognizes that writing is dynamic and has stages including prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The writing process can give students extensive, explicit, and supported instruction that they need to master their writing abilities (Harris & Graham, 2011).

## Research Questions

This section presents the primary research question. This question evolved out of the educational problem identified above, regarding the workshop model with special education students. The primary research question is: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?*

In addition to the primary research question identified above, this study also examines related questions/observations, such as:

In what ways do students in special education respond to/engage with the process writing model?

## Definition of Terms

This section presents the definitions of terms that will be used throughout this study. This study is designed to answer the research question: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* For the purpose of this study, these terms are defined as follows.

*Writers workshop model:* in this study refers to a framework for teaching writing (mini-lesson, independent work time, share time).

*SchoolWide Curriculum:* in this study refers to the program utilized to teach writers workshop in my district.

*Process writing model:* in this study refers to teaching students to write using these steps- planning, drafting, sharing, evaluating, revising, editing, and publishing.

*Self-contained special education class/setting:* The class referred to in this study includes seven classified students who have a language learning disability and receive small group instruction in English Language Arts.

*Whole group instruction:* in this study refers to teaching a lesson to the whole class

*One-on-one instruction:* in this study refers to teaching with a teacher and one student

*Direct-based instruction:* in this study refers to explicit instruction where a teacher introduces a topic or skill, then models it for students to see, then the teacher and students practice together (guided practice), then the students complete and practice the skill independently

### **Theoretical Framework**

This section presents the theoretical framework selected based upon the research question. The research question is *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* This question was used to identify the theoretical framework. This framework includes the following theories and ideologies: *Universal Design for Learning (UDL)* and Flower and Hayes' *A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing* (1981).

According to Thibodeau (2021), the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework was originally started by Dr. David Rose and Dr. Ann Meyer who incorporated CAST Inc. (The Center for Applied Specialized Technology) to create technology that would assist students with special needs and their learning. Though often confused with differentiation, UDL is more about students understanding what they need, based on what the teacher offers them in terms of choices. For teachers, it is important that they create "...flexible pathways for all learners to learn and share what they need to know." (Thibodeau, 2021)

UDL has three sections within guidelines with the framework- multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. When applied to the writing process, UDL can support students at various levels. With multiple means of engagement, UDL encourages student choice, scaffolds for visualizing outcomes, and feedback. With multiple means of representation, UDL encourages customizing displayed information to best fit the learner's needs, as well as clarifying vocabulary and giving prompts for each step in a process. Lastly, when looking at multiple means of action and expression, UDL encourages access to different tools for construction and composition and using assistive technologies. (2018)

Incorporating the principles of Universal Design for Learning into the writing process ensures that writing instruction is inclusive and supportive of all learners, including those with special needs. The prevalent approach to teaching writing in composition classrooms, known as the 'process' model, aligns with the scaffolded learning experiences advocated by UDL-based pedagogy. (Laist, 2021)

According to Flower and Hayes (1981), the writing process is viewed from a cognitive perspective. Their theory outlines a view of how writing occurs, emphasizing that it is not a linear or mechanical task but a dynamic and recursive process. Their writing process is broken into several components: planning, translating, reviewing, revising, and evaluating.

Flower and Hayes' theory emphasizes the dynamic and repetitive nature of the writing process. Writers may move back and forth between these stages, revising and rethinking their work as they go. They stress that this process is influenced by various factors, including the writer's knowledge, the complexity of the task, and the strategies they use.

## **Educational Significance**

The purpose of this study is to examine the research question: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* This question is extremely significant because we must learn more ways to ensure that special education students have access to the same curriculum as their peers, with the necessary modifications and accommodations. Additionally, process writing can help these students learn to organize their thoughts and ideas while also teaching them a skill they can utilize in future endeavors.

Teachers, supervisors, and administration will be able to learn from this study. Teachers can gain insight into the accommodations and modifications they can use to better support students through the writing process. Furthermore, teachers can use the process to create whole group lessons or mini-lessons in order to best support any type of learner. Lastly, the process can also create more independent writers, which will allow teachers to allocate their time to be productive elsewhere during instructional time.

Supervisors and administration can use this study to create professional development for teachers who are interested in utilizing the process in their classroom. They can also work with the curriculum to ensure it is incorporated and specifies students with special needs who may prefer it. This knowledge can lead to more inclusive and effective writing instruction for students with special needs.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Literature

#### Overview

This chapter reviews the literature that is relevant to the primary question identified in this study. This research question is: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* This review of the literature examines research studies that looked at modeling and direct instruction, differentiated writing instruction, and teaching strategies in writing.

#### Modeling and Direct Instruction

In these investigations, it was discovered that both modeling and direct guidance proved to be successful approaches for instructing students in writing. Such instructional methods not only inspire students but also drive them to produce more written work than they initially thought possible. López (2017) created a study that had a goal to compare the effects of explicit teaching and modeling a writing strategy. The study involved one hundred thirty-three students in fifth and sixth grades, aged ten to twelve, in a school in Spain who received similar writing instruction. Students were from medium to high-income households. Students were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions and a control condition.

One instructor did the instruction in the study through whole group instruction. There were three groups- direct instruction (planning and drafting strategies supported by mnemonics/graphic organizers), modeling (observed an expert model), and control (taught about the features of argumentative text, but no mention of strategies). Sessions lasted for fifty-five minutes. The first thirty-five to forty minutes involved the instructional content delivery and during the second part, students practiced the skill in pairs, doing a short writing task. There



were roles for each part of the pair. The “writer” role performed the writing task and verbally explained their actions and thoughts while completing the writing task. The “helper” sat by the writer and monitored the writer’s processes and output.

The study results found that modeling and direct instruction are equally effective in improving writing skills. The researchers believe that both interventions could have resulted in an increase in the motivation of the students.

In the next study conducted by Pennington and Koehler (2017), the authors investigated the impact of an intervention package on the inclusion of video models, story templates, self-graphing, and the number of story elements in the written narratives of three middle school students with Moderate Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (MSD). This study took place over a number of weeks (not specified in the study). The three students in this study (Ryan, Jay, Duncan) were recommended by their teacher because of their deficiencies in writing narratives. The boys had basic spelling skills and could produce simple written sentences.

Sessions were held in a one-on-one instructional arrangement, with the teacher sitting across from the student at a, while other students received instruction from paraprofessionals in different areas of the classroom. Each session lasted fifteen to twenty minutes. During intervention sessions that were conducted three to four days a week, students watched YouTube videos that were chosen based on specific criteria, including the presence of all targeted story elements and a potentially engaging ending. Students were also presented with story templates to model story writing and they also had a checklist of the five story elements. Once students were done with their narratives, the teacher would prompt them to identify the element throughout their narrative and together would graph the number of occurrences.

The findings of this research were that the three students used a significantly more amount than the beginning. For example, during week one, Jay had used zero story elements. By session twenty, he used five. The authors concluded that this study was successful but reminded readers that this is only data for three students and cautioned them about this when interpreting their research.

In another research study done by Curcic and Platt (2019), the researchers' purpose was to enhance the writing skills of a small group of African-American students with a learning disability in reading in a Title I public elementary school located in a rural area in the southeast. The three participants were third-grade males who exhibited low writing skills and primarily spoke in a southern U.S. dialect known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE). The study was conducted from the end of January to the beginning of May during the school year.

To address their writing difficulties, teachers selected a set of short informational and fictional texts for the students to summarize in writing. They used a free app called Dragon Dictation, which provided speech-to-text capabilities to record their thoughts using this app.

The instructional process involved several steps. First, the instructor demonstrated the process of summarization by reading the text aloud and modeling their thinking out loud. Next, the students used an adapted POWER think sheet that included steps such as planning, recording thoughts on Dragon Dictation, organizing, writing, and editing/revising. Then, the instructor modeled how to plan for summarization. After, the students recorded their thoughts on the Dragon Dictation app on an iPad. They then read their recorded thoughts, planned the organization of their text (with teacher modeling with a think-aloud), and started writing their second drafts on a computer. The final step involved editing and revising the text, with the teacher examining the overall organization and identifying areas for revision.

The results showed the effectiveness of using dictation in writing instruction for the three third graders with learning disabilities. Through explicit instruction, modeling, and feedback, the students progressed from writing only one incomplete sentence at the beginning to composing one or two short paragraphs at the post-intervention stage.

A study done by Slater and Groff (2017) investigated the impact of using the stases as a reading and writing problem-solving strategy, particularly in the context of identifying and constructing claims and supports within the Toulmin model, among a group of eight 10th-grade minority students in a suburban Maryland high school. These students, all African American, volunteered for the study due to their struggles with prewriting.

The researchers employed three instructional models for tutoring: direct explanation, questioning the author, and reciprocal teaching, all grounded in a gradual-release-of-responsibility instructional approach. During the study, the researchers engaged with the students to introduce and apply the Toulmin model terms, providing support as the students worked on their persuasive papers using this model. A one-class period information search session was scheduled in collaboration with the school's resource center, which was done over a four-week period.

The eight participants recognized the benefits they gained from using the stases in reading informational and persuasive texts and in constructing theses, claims, and supports for their assigned papers.

### **Differentiated Writing Instruction**

Tailoring writing instruction is crucial since students exhibit varying levels of writing abilities and skills. Through differentiated writing instruction, educators can effectively assist students in reaching their unique writing objectives. Clark et al. (2021) created a research study

to assess whether struggling primary-grade writers, who participated in a university-based summer learning program, would demonstrate improved writing achievement when engaged in a writing unit that had been customized to offer additional support.

The participants in the study were a convenience sample comprising 41 children who had recently completed the first (five students), second (twenty-five students), and third (eleven students) grades. The instructional approach followed the TCRWP (Teachers College Reading and Writing Project) workshop model. In addition to following the workshop model, teachers held daily conferences with students to assess their individual needs. They provided explicit instruction and scaffolded support tailored to each child's writing development.

The results of this study suggest that students can make significant progress when they receive instruction that aligns with their specific needs. The study also highlights the necessity for schools to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to writing instruction. Students need individualized support to help them succeed with their written expression.

Grünke et al. (2018) created a research study to assess the effectiveness of a motivational support system in improving the writing performance of students with learning disabilities or those at risk for them in a typical classroom setting. The study took place in an upper-middle socioeconomic suburb of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. The study involved eleven fourth-grade students aged ten to eleven attending an inclusive school. To evaluate the impact of the intervention, an ABAB plan was implemented, with five daily sessions in each phase. The classroom teacher was responsible for delivering the intervention.

During the A phase, students randomly selected a writing prompt each day and were instructed to produce a story using one colored pen and paper. There were no time constraints during this phase, and students received no feedback or encouragement. The researchers

measured the writing performance using the total number of words written (TWW) by the children.

In the B phase, students were given cards with the TWW from their phase A assignment and were encouraged by the teacher to create longer and better stories than they previously had. Students had ten minutes to complete their writing task. After ten minutes, students were asked to count their words line by line, calculate the total, and record it on the top of their paper with a different colored pen than before. If a student exceeded their personal best, the teacher made a new index card displaying the new high score before the next B phase session.

The results indicated that this motivational support system had significant potential to engage a class of low-achieving elementary school students in writing enthusiastically. This approach improved the writing performance of the students, demonstrating the positive impact of explicit timing, immediate self-scoring feedback, and positive reinforcement through verbal praise and displaying high scores on their writing abilities.

Kreutzer (2023) researched the impact of targeted instruction through strategy groups on student writing. The study involved eleven third-grade students and spanned a period of six weeks. The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach, which included weekly observations of small group sessions focused on narrative writing. To assess student progress, pre- and post-assessment writing samples were collected, and a constant comparison method was instilled, using drafts and anecdotal notes throughout the study to identify patterns and adjust the targeted instruction.

The findings of the research revealed that over half of the participating students demonstrated improvement in the specific writing skills they were struggling with. Out of the eleven students, seven showed growth during the six weeks, while four experienced a decline in

their scores. However, these groups did not lead to significant short-term growth in students' overall writing abilities. Despite this, students displayed increased confidence in their writing skills and were receptive to the instructional activities conducted during the small group sessions.

### **Teaching Strategies in Writing**

Through the teaching of writing strategies, students can enhance their writing prowess and retain the ability to employ these skills in subsequent writing assignments. Moreover, students become more conscious of their actions and the underlying purpose behind them. Sundeen (2012) investigated the impact of explicitly teaching an organizational strategy, the mind-mapping strategy, on the writing quality of high school students with learning disabilities. The research took place over a seventeen-week period at a public high school and involved eleventh-grade students with learning disabilities who attended general education classes for most of the school day and received specialized strategy instruction in a learning strategies resource room for one period daily. It consisted of four fifty-minute classroom sessions.

All students in the learning strategies classes were required to write responses to daily prompts given by their teacher at the beginning of each class period, with a time limit of fifteen minutes per day. This resulted in writing samples consisting of approximately three to five paragraphs. The mind-mapping intervention was introduced to the participants after establishing stability in the group that had previously received mind-mapping instruction.

Results indicated limited success in improving students' written products. However, pre- and post-test data suggested that writing quality had improved. Additionally, interviews conducted with both students and the teacher revealed themes indicating that students felt that using the mind-mapping strategy and receiving explicit instruction helped enhance their writing. The teacher also believed that the strategy significantly impacted students' planning abilities

before writing. It is believed that explicitly teaching planning strategies may be beneficial for students with learning disabilities.

A study done by Shen and Troia (2018) investigated the effectiveness of planning and revising strategy instruction using the SRSD instructional framework for compare-contrast text composition in fourth to sixth graders with Language Learning Disabilities (LLD). The study involved three students from the Great Lakes region who had IEPs, normal nonverbal cognitive abilities, and oral language impairments.

The participants were provided with a strategy reminder card and a planning graphic organizer. The mnemonic "TREE BRANCH," developed by Troia (2013), was used to help students plan and write compare-contrast papers while also promoting self-regulation of cognitive processes. The planning strategy instruction was delivered in six lessons. This lasted four weeks.

In Lesson 1, students were introduced to compare-contrast expository writing and the TREE BRANCH planning strategy. The teacher emphasized the importance of learning the planning strategy and demonstrated how to track the key elements using a progress-tracking chart. Lessons 2 and 3 involved modeling and collaborative practice with TREE BRANCH, including the use of transition words. In Lesson 4, students memorized TREE BRANCH and filled it out on a blank organizer. In Lesson 5, students practiced independently planning and composing a compare-contrast essay with TREE BRANCH and a planning sheet. Finally, Lesson 6 had students practice independently without visual aids. The revising strategy instruction followed a similar lesson structure to the planning instruction.

After receiving the planning instruction, all three students showed significant improvements in their writing performance across various measures of the writing process and

product. Students also began to allot more time to planning before composing, and their written plans improved substantially, scoring above 4 on average, indicating well-structured plans that included the graphic organizer, three traits, and supporting details. This research suggests that the SRSD instructional framework, along with the TREE BRANCH mnemonic, can be effective in strengthening students' writing skills.

Gillespie et al. (2013) examined what students knew about the process of writing. It explored students' understanding of the characteristics of different types of texts, including stories, persuasive arguments, and informational reports. It also determined whether students' knowledge of the writing process could predict their knowledge of these different text types. The study involved fifth-grade students from six classrooms in two northeastern United States schools that followed the same writing curriculum. These students were chosen as the focus because they had prior exposure to the three genres (stories, persuasive arguments, and informational reports) assessed in grades K-4.

To assess students' knowledge, the researchers used the Test of Written Language (TOWL-3) Spontaneous Writing subtest and conducted individual knowledge interviews. These interviews were adapted from a previous study by Graham et al. (1993) and included additional questions to evaluate students' knowledge of persuasive and informational genres. The interview covered topics such as identifying behaviors of good writers, understanding writing difficulties, and planning and writing a paper.

The findings of the study revealed that the students possessed a subtle but somewhat unsophisticated understanding of the writing process. The research also demonstrated that students could differentiate between various types of texts. However, students had a more in-depth understanding of story writing compared to persuasive and informational writing. Lastly,



the study found that students with a more profound comprehension of effective writing exhibited a higher level of knowledge concerning different types of texts.

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

This section summarizes the literature used based on the research question. The research question is *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?*

Across the research studies, there are several similarities such as the instructional methods and the development of students' writing skills. López (2017) found that explicit teaching and modeling, as well as Pennington and Koehler's (2017) use of video models and templates, both had positive effects on students' writing skills. Curcic and Platt (2019) demonstrated the effectiveness of using speech-to-text technology for students with learning disabilities. Slater and Groff (2017) explored the benefits of using the stases in reading and writing problem-solving. Clark et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of individualized support and differentiated instruction in writing. Similarly, in terms of individualized support, Kreutzer (2023) highlighted the potential of targeted instruction in small groups. Grünke et al. (2018) showed the value of a motivational support system. Sundeen (2012) indicated that explicit instruction in planning strategies can be beneficial. Finally, Shen and Troia (2018) underscored the effectiveness of planning and revising strategy instruction. Gillespie et al. (2013) contributed to the understanding of students' knowledge of the writing process and different text types. While there are common ideas of effective writing instruction, the studies also highlight the importance of the unique characteristics and abilities of different student groups. The studies support the further growth of student writing skills using tools, specifically in Pennington and Koehler

(2017) utilizing video models, as well as Curcic and Platt (2019) utilizing speech-to-text technology.

The main differences between the research studies are the participants and the way it was conducted. For example, López (2017) and Pennington & Koehler (2017) targeted students in general education settings, while Curcic and Platt (2019) focused on African-American students with learning disabilities in a rural area. Slater and Groff (2017) explored the use of stases in high school students, emphasizing pre-writing struggles. Clark et al. (2021) concentrated on primary-grade writers in a summer learning program. Grünke et al. (2018) examined the motivational support system for students with learning disabilities in a typical classroom setting. Kreutzer (2023) investigated targeted instruction through strategy groups with third-grade students, and Sundeen (2012) explored the mind-mapping strategy for high school students with learning disabilities. Shen and Troia (2018) looked at planning and revising strategy instruction for fourth to sixth graders with language learning disabilities. Gillespie et al. (2013) focused on fifth-grade students' understanding of the writing process and different text types. One main difference was in Gillespie et al. (2013) in terms of their results not proving their research study idea. They noted that the results were subtle, whereas the rest of the research studies previously mentioned showed success in their data and findings.

## CHAPTER III

### Research Design

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the design of this research study. The research question is: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* The chapter will go over the research setting, participants, data sources, how data will be analyzed, the validity and reliability, as well as the limitations of the study.

As the teacher-researcher and participant observer in this study, I facilitated a mixed-method research approach. Mixed methods research “...proposes to cross boundaries between worldviews and blend qualitative and quantitative research methods and techniques into a single study” (Efron and Ravid, 2019). The goal of this research is to use the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research to explore different ideas of a question. Each student is unique in how they are/react to things and that is something important to my thesis. Additionally, each student, especially in special education, has different ways they learn and do things and this is something to consider.

Ultimately, choosing the right research method and approach will ensure the thesis achieves its goals and contributes to existing knowledge. Writing involves cognitive processes, creativity, and individual differences among writers. By combining qualitative methods quantitative methods, researchers can gain a more integrated understanding of the writing process. This approach enables me, as the researcher, as well as my students to explore the "what," "why," and "how" behind various writing behaviors.

## Research Setting

This section presents the setting for this research study. This study is designed to answer the research question *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* This research study is set in a school district located in Northern New Jersey. The town has a population of 8,019 residents. The population is made up of 69.4% White Non-Hispanic people, 15.5% White (Hispanic) people, 5.05% Other (Hispanic) people, 4.84% Asian people, 2% Multiracial people, and 1.55% American Indian and Alaska Native people. The median household income of this town is \$103,018. Lastly, 6.92% of the population lives below the poverty line.

The school district has an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. The elementary school has students from grades preschool to fourth. The middle school hosts students from fifth to eighth grade, while the high school has students from ninth to twelfth grade. The district has 1,156 students and an 11:1 student-teacher ratio. The district is smaller than most however, everyone is tight-knit and the administration, including the superintendent, knows every teacher. Some important programs in this district include AP classes, gifted and talented programs, and STEAM program.

The school discussed in this study is the elementary school that hosts preschool through fourth-grade students. The elementary school has 379 students, 38 teachers, and 10 paraprofessionals. Each grade level has four sections or classes. The school offers special education services as well as speech, physical therapy, and occupational therapy services. The school has an ELL (English Language Learner) program and a Gifted and Talented Program. There are multiple after-school activities that students can take part in as well. Students have a

World Language class once a week, where they learn Spanish. Administration and therapists have their own rooms to perform their daily tasks and jobs.

Research is taking place in a self-contained special education classroom. The classroom has a desk for each student, three small tables for small groups, and a teacher's desk. There is also a reading corner with a carpet and shelves with books. The room has a chalkboard with a Smartboard projector in the front and one whiteboard in the back near a small group table. Around the room are different anchor charts as well as posters and visual tools for students such as skip counting posters. There is a word wall that has high-frequency words and a word wall for math with important terms and keywords to remind students as needed.

### **Research Participants**

This section presents information on the research participants in this study. This study is designed to answer the research question: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* The researcher is in her third year of teaching, but her first year of teaching in a self-contained classroom for grades three and four. The researcher received her undergraduate degree from William Paterson University in Elementary and Special Education. Currently, the researcher is taking classes to receive their Master's degree from William Paterson University.

In this study, there will be seven participants- four students in third grade (two girls and two boys) and three students in fourth grade (one girl and two boys). These students are in the self-contained classroom for English Language Arts based on their IEPs. The researcher has read and developed an understanding of each student's IEP and uses it to assist in creating lessons and instructional materials.

Student 1 is a fourth-grade female with a classification of Specific Learning Disability. From the researcher's observations of her and previous assessment data, Student 1 does well with direct-based instruction and requires some to little assistance. She is good at advocating if she needs help and does well with praise. Student 2 is a fourth-grade male with a classification of Specific Learning Disability. Student 2 comes from a Spanish-speaking household and exited the ESL (English as a Second Language) program in 2019, but the researcher has noticed that he sometimes struggles to write fluent sentences and to use the correct English words when speaking. Student 2 requires check-in support and occasional one-on-one support. Student 3 is a third-grade female with a classification of Other Health Impairment. Student 3 is doing well in the self-contained classroom and responds well to direct-based instruction and teacher modeling. She is meeting all of her goals and objectives and is going to continue to push-in more to the general education classroom after the holiday season.

Student 4 is a fourth-grade male with a classification of Autism (functional communication). He requires re-direction, prompting, and one-on-one assistance with his work. Most of the time, he can pick up on a skill after doing examples with the researcher. Other times, he requires practice/repetition (more in mathematics). Student 4 responds well with clear, direct instruction. Student 5 is a third-grade male with a classification of Other Health Impairment (ADHD). Student 5 struggles with reading/spelling words. His reading level is at the kindergarten level and struggles to spell words at the first grade level. His work ability and moods are inconsistent, therefore it can be difficult to analyze and understand his academic ability. Student 5 has no little to no support at home, never completing reading logs and rarely completing math homework, making it difficult to supplement instruction at home. Student 5 receives speech services three times a week, that focus on communication and speech production

skills. Student 5 can talk and communicate well enough in the classroom, but his mood and motivation will inhibit him from working to his full potential. Student 5 will frequently not ask for help on his own (even when just asked to raise his hand) and struggles to do work independently.

Student 6 is a third-grade female with a classification of Specific Learning Disability. Student 6 is one of the higher students in the class, who enjoys participating and praise from the teacher. She does well with direct instruction and seeing an example before completing on her own. She can get easily distracted, but when she is in the work mode, she does well and requires little to no modifications. Student 7 is a third-grade male with a classification of Specific Learning Disability. Though he is classified, he is still apart of the ESL (English as a Second Language) program and is seen several times a week. He communicates in English well and is thorough with his work. His reading level is at a first grade level, however he works hard and does well with teacher modeling when it comes to instruction. He is newer to the class as he was switched into the self contained classroom after he was having a difficult time in the general education classroom.

### **Procedures**

The research study took place over the span of 15 instructional/school days. On Wednesdays, instructional time is lost due to a world language class the students must take part in, so instruction normally occurs four days a week. During Week 2, students took place in Halloween activities, therefore no instruction/data collection took place. During Week 3, students were off for two days for the New Jersey Education Associates Convention in addition to World Language class, therefore instruction/data collection only took place two days that week.

The Language Arts session runs from 12:10 to 1:40. During the first half of this period, fourth-grade students attend their science class from 12:10 to 12:40. Consequently, the researcher dedicates this time to engaging with third-grade students in phonics/word work (spelling). From 12:40 to 1:10, whole group instruction takes place simultaneously for both grade levels, covering the lessons detailed in Table 1 below. Finally, between 1:10 and 1:40, the researcher focuses on working with fourth-grade students in phonics/word work (spelling), while the remaining students either return to their general education classroom or work independently.

The pre-assessment was given to students the week before starting the lessons in this research study. Each lesson has a duration of approximately thirty minutes, during which the researcher demonstrates the skill to the students through modeling. Depending on the specific lesson, students are then tasked with completing an assignment that showcases their proficiency in the skill or applying it to their writing. Table 1 breaks down each day's lesson objective, the lesson plan/activity, and what was used to assess the students. If students were not assessed using the data collection materials, the researcher wrote "N/A" under "Assessment Method."



**Table 1***Informational Writing Process Lesson Plans*

Day	Lesson Objective	Lesson Plan/Activity	Assessment Method
Week 1			
1	I can state each step of the writing process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduce writing process anchor chart</li> <li>● Explain each step</li> <li>● Independent- putting steps in order (cut and paste activity)</li> </ul>	N/A
2	I can state the parts of an informative writing piece.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parts of an informative writing piece anchor chart</li> <li>● Modeling- identifying parts of an informative paragraph</li> <li>● Guided practice- identify parts of a paragraph cut and paste page</li> </ul>	N/A
3	I can choose an animal to research and write about.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Inform students they are starting the “planning” step of the writing process</li> <li>● Modeling- using Kiddle and National Geographic Kids to research an animal</li> <li>● Independent- students looked up animals and chose an animal to write about</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet
4	I can research facts about my animal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “planning” their writing</li> <li>● Modeling- using graphic organizer to write research</li> <li>● Independent- students completed graphic organizer</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet

Week 2			
5	I can research facts about my animal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “planning” their writing</li> <li>● Modeling- reminded students how to complete graphic organizer</li> <li>● Independent- students finished organizer</li> </ul>	<p>Teacher observation note sheet</p> <p>Completed graphic organizer</p>
6	I can identify and create a topic sentence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “drafting” their writing</li> <li>● Topic sentence definition</li> <li>● Model- using sentence starters</li> <li>● Guided practice- using sentence starters as whole group, then with partners</li> <li>● Independent- writing topic sentences for different animals</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet
7	I can write a topic sentence for my animal research project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “drafting” their writing</li> <li>● Review sentence starters from yesterday</li> <li>● Model- writing topic sentence on draft paper</li> <li>● Independent- writing topic sentence for animal</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet
Week 3			
8	I can write sentences based on my animal research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “drafting” their writing</li> <li>● Introduce sentence starters for each part of graphic organizers</li> <li>● Model- using sentence starters to write sentences about animals</li> <li>● Independent- start writing rough draft</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet
9	I can write sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are</li> </ul>	Teacher

	based on my animal research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “drafting” their writing</li> <li>● Remind students what they should do</li> <li>● Independent- continue writing rough draft</li> </ul>	observation note sheet
Week 4			
10	I can create a conclusion sentence for my research writing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “drafting” their writing</li> <li>● Conclusion definition</li> <li>● Model- using sentence starters</li> <li>● Guided practice- using sentence starters as whole group, then with partners</li> <li>● Independent- creating conclusion for writing</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet
11	I can edit and revise sentences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “editing” and “revising” their writing</li> <li>● ARMS and CUPS acronym</li> <li>● Model- looking for and fixing mistakes in writing</li> <li>● Independent- fixing sentences</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet
12	I can edit and revise sentences in my research writing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “editing” and “revising” their writing</li> <li>● Model- using editing/revising checklist to help students with fixing their writing</li> <li>● Independent- revising/editing writing</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet
13	I can write the final draft of my animal research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “publishing” their writing</li> <li>● Model- writing final</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet

Week 5			
14	I can write the final draft of my animal research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Independent- writing final drafts</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet
15	I can write the final draft of my animal research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Remind students they are “publishing” their writing</li> <li>● Independent- finish writing final drafts</li> </ul>	Teacher observation note sheet
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Model- make cover page</li> <li>● Independent- create cover page</li> <li>● Share writing (post-assessment)</li> </ul>	Writing process rubric (to grade post-assessment)

## Data Sources

This section presents information on the data sources used in this study. This study is designed to answer the research question: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* Data was collected throughout this research through several different methods.

### *Pre-assessment writing*

Before teaching the writing process, the students will complete this teacher-created pre-assessment to show the researcher their writing abilities. Students will be given a paper with the prompt “Tell me all about your favorite animal” with lines to write about an animal. This data will be collected within a day, as students will complete the assignment within a class period.

When evaluating students' written work, the researcher will assess students' sentences for length and complexity, coherence, and proper use of capitalization and punctuation.

#### *Graphic organizer*

During the teaching of the “prewriting” stage, students will be introduced to the graphic organizer that will hold and organize their research information. The researcher will explain the organizer to the students, reading each component of it. Then, the researcher will model how to fill out the graphic organizer, so students can see how to use it. Last, the students will complete their own graphic organizer, based on the animal they chose to research and write about. The researcher will analyze the information students to see if student performance in class influences their writing abilities.

#### *Teacher observation note sheet*

Throughout teaching each step of the writing process, the researcher will take notes on students and their performance. This qualitative data will help the researcher determine if certain aspects of student behavior affect their performance and understanding of the writing process. For example, if a student is participating in class discussions, doing well on lesson activities, and scored well on the writing process rubric, the researcher may conclude that the student's participation was a factor that led to their success. It would also be good to note if students are absent or in different moods to see if that also affects their writing performance.

#### *Post-assessment writing*

As the researcher teaches the writing process, students will apply what they've learned to researching and writing about their animal. For example, during the “prewriting” step, students will be researching and filling out the graphic organizer to organize their research about their animal. They will then write about their research, writing a topic sentence, facts about their

animal that they found when researching, and then a conclusion. Lastly, students will revise and edit their work before creating their final copy or the post-assessment writing piece. The researcher will assess how students do based on this final writing piece. This will demonstrate how students have used the writing process to create their pieces.

### *Writing Process Rubric*

Once students complete their final drafts of their informative writing using the writing process, the researcher will assess students through the rubric. The rubric assesses whether students have fulfilled each component of the writing process and scores accordingly. The researcher can evaluate students' performance by referring to the notes they made during the instruction of each step.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

This section presents information on what procedures were used to analyze the data that was collected. This study was designed to answer the research question: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* In this study, there were four sources analyzed. These sources include: the pre-assessment writing sheet, graphic organizer, teacher observation note sheet, and the post-assessment writing that will be graded/analyzed with the writing process rubric.

The first source is the pre-assessment writing sheet. The data from this assignment allowed the researcher to see what students already knew and could do before teaching the writing process. It also allowed the researcher to see the growth in students' writing abilities by the end of the research.

The second source is the graphic organizer. The qualitative data from this source allowed the researcher to monitor student progress during the “prewriting” step. They assist students in organizing information by emphasizing the quality and characteristics of the data. By visually representing data, graphic organizers allow students to process and assess information more effectively, leading to a deeper understanding of what they’re writing. Students can better structure their draft/information

The third source is the teacher observation note sheet. The note sheets allow the researcher to record their observations of students' behaviors, interactions, and performance in a narrative and detailed manner. By emphasizing the quality of student responses, engagement, and progress, the researcher can gain insights into the students' understanding and needs. This qualitative approach allows the researcher to make informed judgments, identify areas for improvement, and tailor teaching methods to better support students.

The fourth and fifth sources are the post-assessment or final draft of students’ writing and the writing process rubric that the researcher will use to assess students. This rubric goes in hand with the qualitative data from the teacher observation note sheet because the researcher can see how well students did in each step of the process. Analyzing rubric scores can help both the researcher and students understand performance and identify areas for growth. It promotes a systematic and data-driven approach to assessment and feedback. The post-assessment contains quantitative data while the rubric contains both quantitative and qualitative data. This data will inform the researcher where students did well and where they struggled with the writing process. When examining the pre-assessment and post-assessment, it becomes evident that there has been progress, indicating improvements in students' writing skills.

## **Validity and Reliability**

This section presents information on the validity and reliability of the data that was collected. This study was designed to answer the research question: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* In this study, the research and data are reliable since several different data sources collect quantitative and qualitative data to measure the impact of instruction. The data is authentic and what is naturally occurring in the classroom. Several data sources were used to identify and analyze themes that occur. Students in the research study knew this was occurring and that they were participating, completing work as “normal” for them. The research setting occurred in the classroom that students usually learn in and instruction was done by the researcher, their usual teacher for Language Arts.

The data points collected in this research are also valid. Through the different data that was collected, validity was acknowledged. Student work samples were collected and analyzed through the writing process rubric. Teacher observation notes of the student were also taken during the time of instruction throughout the entire study. The schedule and instruction methods occurred as students would normally expect them to.

## **Limitations**

This section presents information on the limitations of the data that was collected. This study was designed to answer the research question: *What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting?* A limitation lies in the diverse writing backgrounds of the students. In this research study, the researcher included students from classrooms with different teachers in the previous year, potentially resulting in varied writing instruction.



Another limitation is the duration of the study. While the study spanned five weeks, it had several interruptions caused by holidays and days off. Furthermore, the researcher had a limited timeframe for conducting the study and gathering data for analysis. A study without stringent time constraints could potentially yield more accurate results. The time limitations also made it challenging to provide individualized support to students. Writing conferences were brief and straightforward, typically addressing students' specific needs, instead of utilizing small group sessions to reinforce particular skills.

Another limitation is that the researcher did not use the writing process rubric to grade or assess the pre-assessment. This is because the writing process was introduced after the pre-assessment was given to the students. For further research, a researcher should note that a rubric should be created to assess both the pre and post assessments.

A final limitation is the instructor's expertise and experience in the classroom. Teachers from different experiences and with different beliefs may have their ideas for using the writing process in the classroom to teach writing. The effectiveness of direct instruction may heavily depend on the expertise and skill of the teacher. The study may not adequately control for differences in the quality of instruction provided. A limitation is a form of constraint or boundary that restricts the applicability of a concept or idea. Limitations point out the specific situations where a concept or idea might not work well or might not be true. These limitations give a general idea of the problems or weaknesses in a theory or model, showing where it might not be so good and helping us figure out where it does work.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

This section reveals the discoveries derived from analyzing the data collected from the references outlined in Chapter 3. Data was collected from various sources including: the pre-assessment writing, graphic organizer, teacher observation note sheet, post-assessment writing, and the writing process rubric. Themes and patterns that reoccurred in the data are discussed in this chapter. The research of this study was conducted to answer the following question: What are the effects of the process writing approach on the development of writing skills among elementary special education students in a self-contained setting? A follow-up question I will address in my research is:

In what ways do students in special education respond to/engage with the process writing model?

The results of the data sources in the five-week study developed into three main categories: student engagement, work completion, and increased independence in writing. The themes that fell into these categories are student excitement about writing, engaged in their writing, students knowing what to do after the teacher models, and student independence when writing.

#### **Student Engagement**

Throughout the five weeks of the study, seven students in the classroom were provided direct-based instruction and taught informative writing through the writing process. The data was analyzed to find recurring themes. One of the themes in the category of student engagement was an increase in student excitement. While teaching how to research and having students research an animal to write about, Student 2 was noted in the observation note sheet to be “excited” and

said, “I love this!” Another instance of student excitement occurred when creating topic sentences during the drafting step of the writing process. Student 3 was noted in the observation note sheet to be “enthusiastic” and showed enjoyment while creating topic sentences. Lastly, Student 7 was noted in the observation note sheet to ask the researcher when it would be time to work on the “animal project.” These points corroborate the theme of student excitement about their writing.

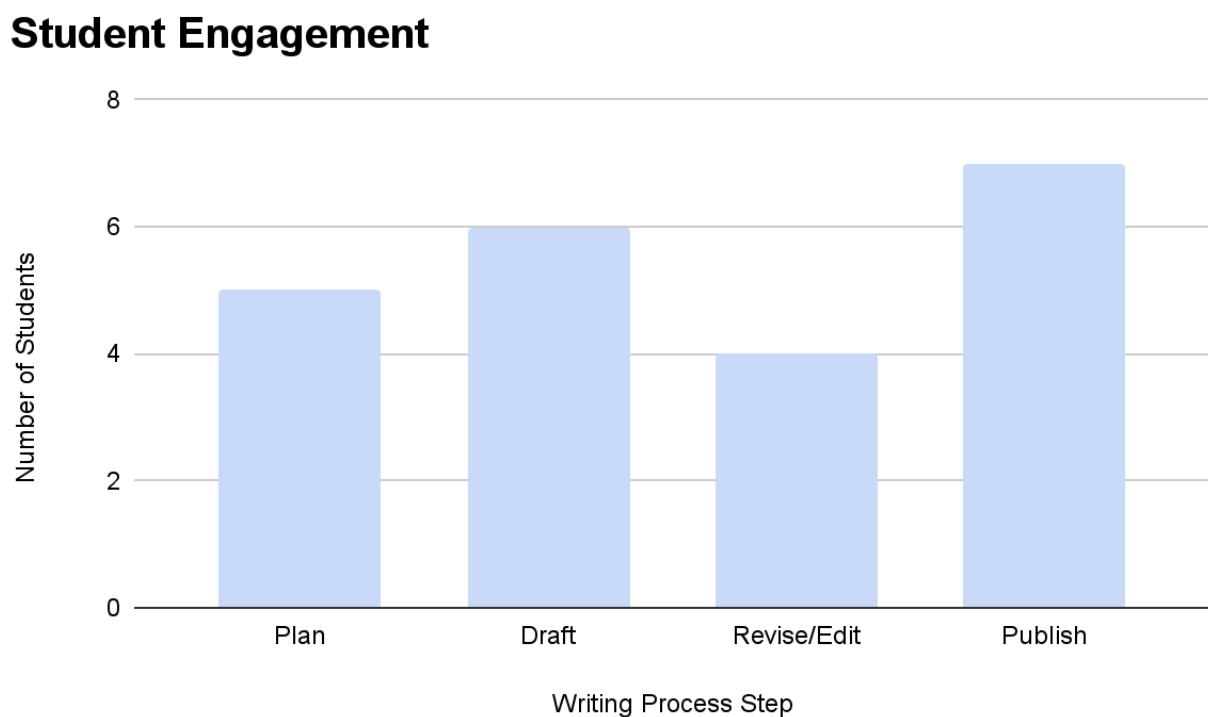
Throughout the research study, students were observed several times to be engaged in their writing. One example was during the planning step of the writing process. Students were researching to find information about their chosen animal in order to complete their graphic organizer. On the teacher observation note sheet, Students 1, 2, and 7 were noted to be engaged in their research because they were quiet while typing and reading through websites. The researcher noted that as engagement in the writing process and assignment. Additionally, some students picked unique animals that a child their age would not know about unless they looked it up online or read somewhere such as a blue marlin and viper snake. One last specific example was also during the planning step of the writing process when students were choosing their animal to write about. Student 3 originally picked a general animal (turtle), but as she was researching, she found a specific kind of turtle that was interesting to her, so she switched her animal to a leatherback sea turtle.

In addition to these specific examples that occurred during the research study, the researcher noted how many students were the most and least engaged during each step of the writing process in Figure 1. Engagement is defined as students being attentive to their work and focused. During the planning step, five out of the seven students were engaged, based on Figure 1. These five students did not require assistance or prompting during this step of the writing

process. These students were doing what they were supposed to be doing, quietly, and effectively completed their work. Based on Figure 1, six out of seven students were engaged in the drafting step of the writing process. These six students were on task, required little help, and understood what was being asked of them. Based on Figure 1, four out of the seven students were engaged in the revise/edit step of the writing process. This step of the process was difficult for a few students, however, four students were on task and understood what was being asked of them. When it came to publishing and finalizing their writing, all seven students were on task and understood what they were doing, based on Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Student Engagement during each step of the Writing Process*



## Work Completion

Throughout the five weeks of the study, seven students in the classroom were provided direct-based instruction and taught informative writing through the writing process. The data was analyzed to find recurring themes. One of the themes found was an increase in work completion. The researcher found that after she modeled and showed students what they had to do, the students knew what they needed to do in their writing.

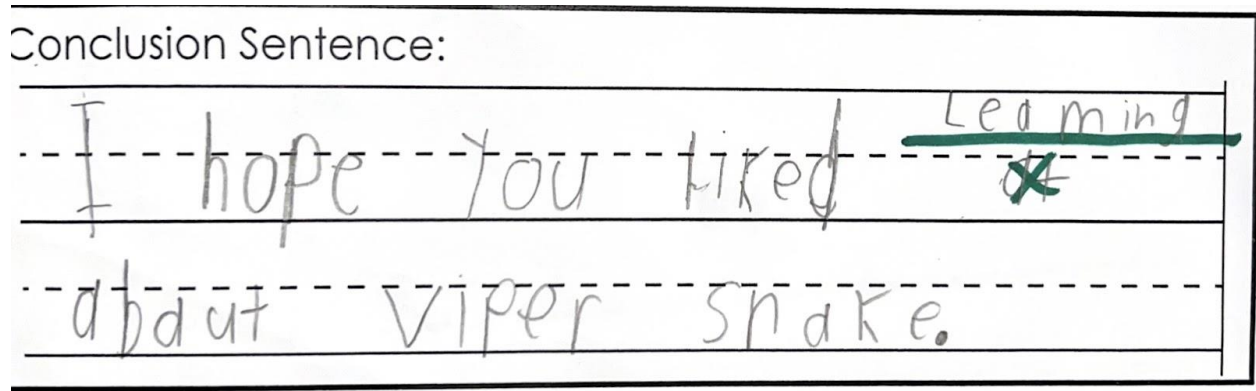
During the planning step of the writing process, Student 2 was noted in the teacher observation note sheet to have tried the organizer independently, but as he continued, he “asked for help” when filling out his graphic organizer. The researcher reminded the student by modeling how to find the description of an animal so the student could do it independently. With the reminder, Student 2 was able to find the description of his animal and write it down in his organizer. During this same step, Student 7 was noted to be “answering questions [on the procedure of the assignment] in class” as they were being asked by the researcher and completing the graphic organizer with little to no help. The researcher noted she checked in with the student to ensure he was on the right track.

During the drafting step of the writing process, most of the students had great success. According to the observation note sheet, Students 4 and 6 were observed to have “went to work right away” and “picked up [the skill] right away and wrote one [topic sentence] successfully” when creating their topic sentence for their introduction. There were similar results when students were working on conclusion sentences using sentence starters. According to the observation note sheet, Students 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 went “right to work” and needed minimal help when writing their conclusion sentence. Though Students 2 and 6 wrote their sentences using the sentence starters given to them by the researcher, they needed assistance with their sentence

formatting. For example, Student 2 wrote “I hope you liked at about viper snakes.” The researcher worked with the student to correct his work to “I hope you liked learning about viper snakes.” This is shown in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2**

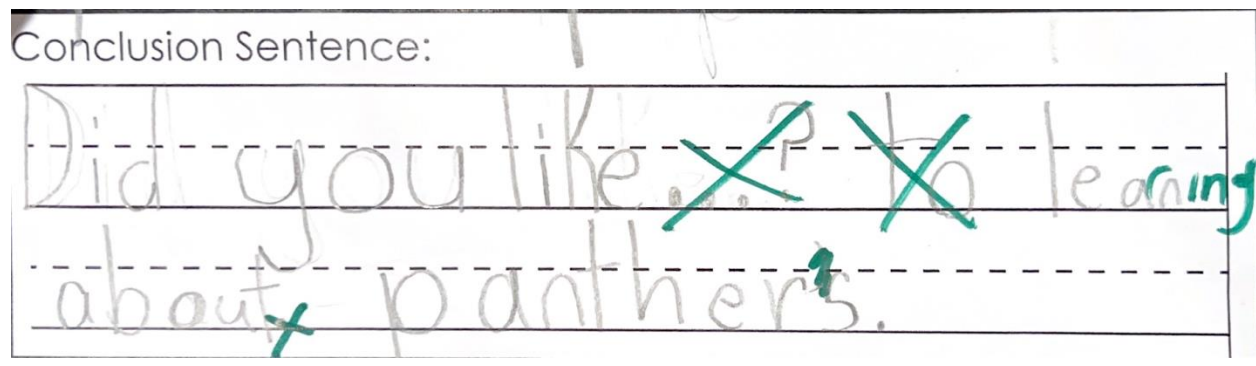
*Student 2's Work Sample*



In Figure 3, Student 6 wrote “Did you like...? to lean about. panther’s.” She used the sentence starter correctly, but the researcher could tell she copied it, putting in the ellipsis and question mark, and then inserting the rest of her sentence (about panthers).

**Figure 3**

*Student 6's Work Sample*



During the editing step of the writing process, Students 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 completed their checklist independently after watching the researcher model how to complete the checklist to revise and edit their writing. Student 7 was heard by the researcher reading his writing out loud to hear if there were mistakes in his sentences. This signified that Student 7 was doing each step of the checklist, as one of the steps was to read over their writing out loud. This was observed and recorded on the observation note sheet.

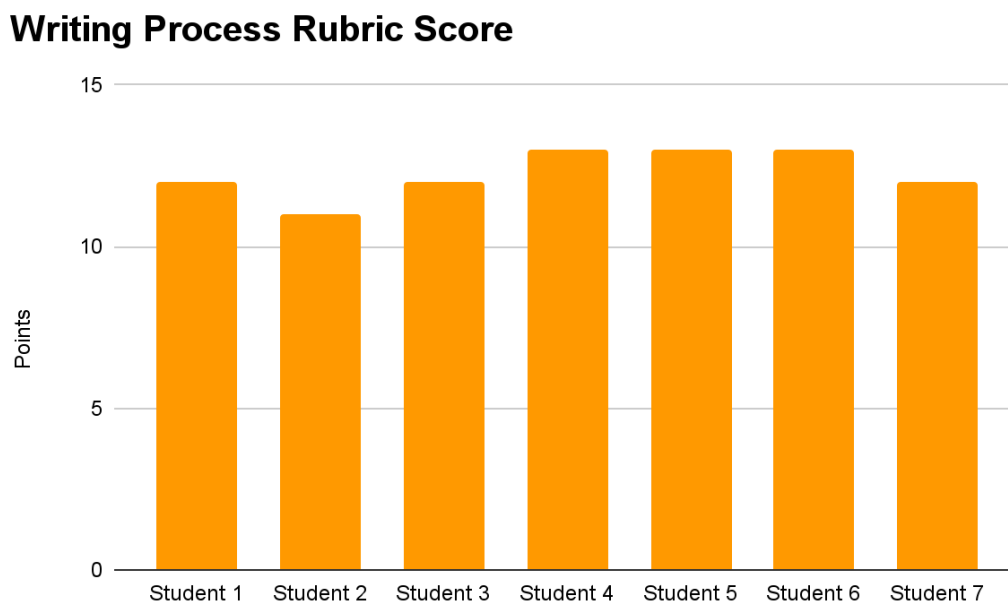
Though most of the students were able to understand what was being asked of them for each lesson and step of the writing process, Student 5 had difficulties completing his work independently. As noted in Chapter III, Student 5's work ability and moods are inconsistent, therefore it can be difficult to analyze and understand his academic ability. He will frequently not ask for help on his own (even when just asked to raise his hand) and struggles to do work independently.

Throughout this research study, Student 5 needed help and prompting to get started with his work. During the planning step of the writing process where students completed their graphic organizer, Student 5 was observed saying facts out loud. For example, for description, he said a lion has "orange, brown hair" which the researcher wrote on a whiteboard for him to copy onto his graphic organizer. The next day when students had to finish their graphic organizer, Student 5 was not asking for help, even when reminded twice. Student 5 was observed trying to "look busy" when the researcher would walk around the room. The researcher had to find a read-aloud book on a computer that read him facts to include in his graphic organizer. Student 5 looked over the book twice and still needed help to fill out the description and facts. He finally asked for help and wrote down facts that were prompted to him by the researcher.

When editing writing with a checklist, Student 5 was observed to be playing with items on his desk while the researcher was modeling how to use the checklist. The student was redirected twice. When the student was given the checklist to complete independently, he started randomly checking off the list. The researcher had to sit one-on-one with the student in order to complete it. He did well with correcting his capital letters (with some prompting) and he needed prompting to correct his punctuation (“Do we need a period or question mark?”) but got most of the questions that were prompted to him correct. Correcting spelling mistakes was done by the researcher and the student could not read over his work independently to check for cohesiveness, so the researcher had to do that and inform him what she was doing as she went. For example, the researcher would say to the student, “This sentence makes sense, so we can leave it. It is good to go.”

Students’ total scores on the post-assessment writing assignment are shown below in Figure 4. The assignments were scored based on the writing process rubric, which signifies which step students completed in their work. As shown in Figure 4, all seven students' scores were similar. Students 1, 2, and 7 scored 12 out of 15 total points. Student 2 scored 11 out of 15 total points. Lastly, Students 4, 5, and 6 scored 13 out of 15 points.



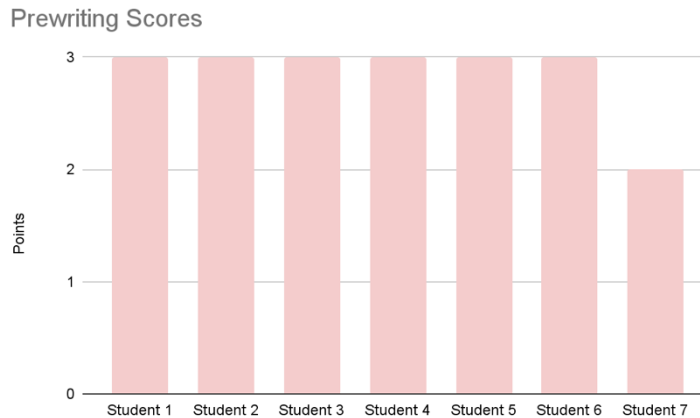
**Figure 4***Writing Process Rubric Scores*

There isn't a substantial difference between the breakdown of the scores. Figure 5 shows a breakdown of scores for each student in the prewriting step of the writing process. Six out of the seven students or 86% of students, scored at a 3 on the rubric. Student 7 did not score as well because he did not complete his graphic organizer. He was observed in the note sheet to be taking his time, which affected his completion of the organizer in a timely manner.

Figure 6 displays that all seven students, or 100%, scored at a 3, the highest score possible, on the rubric. All seven students completed their draft, and the draft reflects what was completed in the prewriting stage. However, it should be noted that Students 4 and 5 were prompted and assisted as needed, though their work ability is not measured with the rubric.

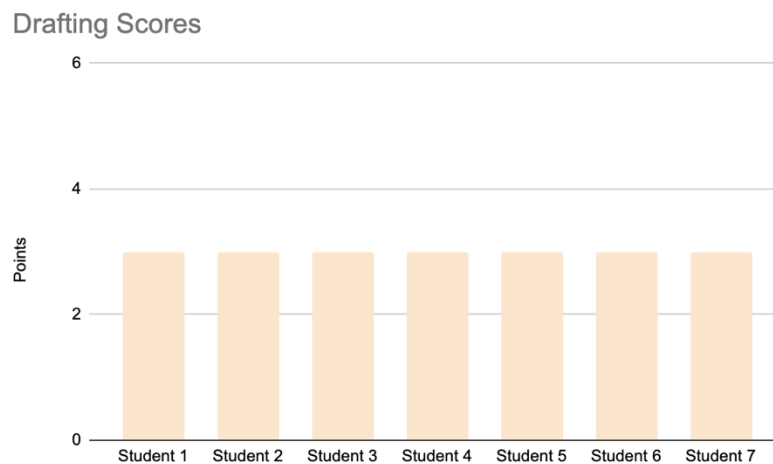
**Figure 5**

*Prewriting Score Breakdown*



**Figure 6**

*Drafting Score Breakdown*



**Figure 7**

*Revising Score Breakdown*

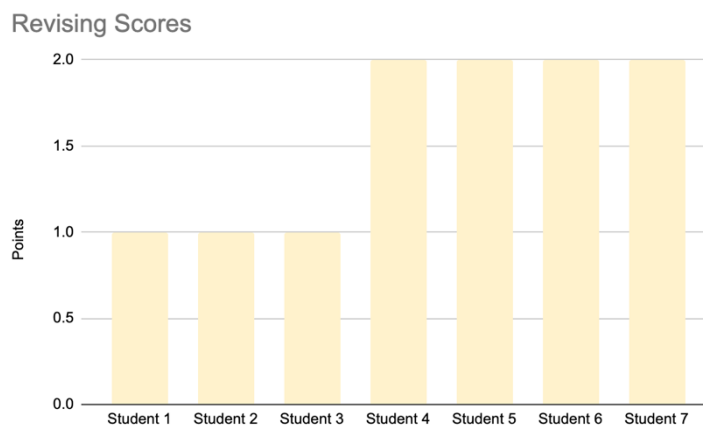
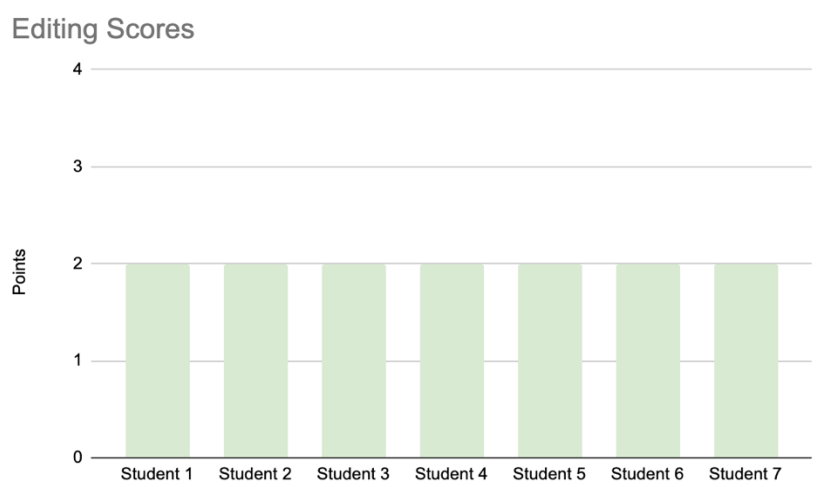


Figure 7 displays that three out of the seven, or 43% of the students did not revise their work. This was discovered when comparing their first drafts to their final drafts. As mentioned earlier, Student 4 and 5 continued to be prompted and assisted with their work to ensure they were on track. Independently, these students would most likely not be able to revise their work. Four out of the seven students, or 57% of students scored a 2 and made some revisions to their work.

**Figure 8**  
*Editing Score Breakdown*



**Figure 9**  
*Publishing Score Breakdown*

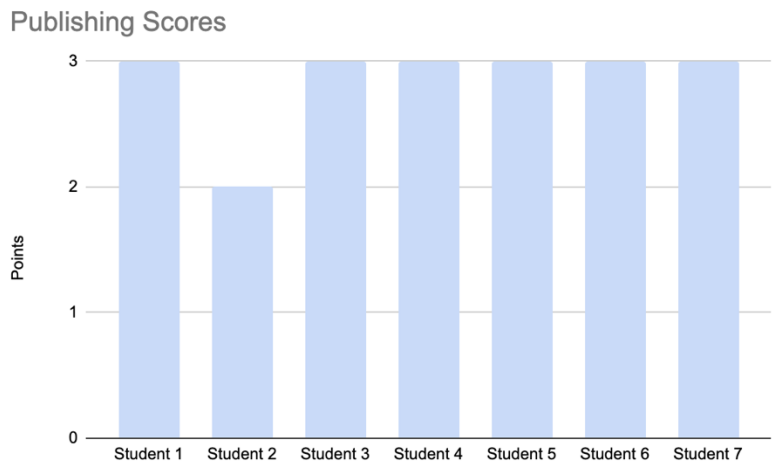


Figure 8 demonstrates that all seven students, or 100% of the students, scored a 2 on editing their work, meaning they made some edits to their writing. Figure 9 displays that six out of the seven students, or 86% of students scored 3, the highest possible score on the rubric. 86% of students' final drafts reflect most or all edits made in the previous steps of the writing process.

Tables 2-4 display data that compares the pre-assessment writing to the post-assessment writing. Each table analyzes a component that was noticed in the pre-assessment- sentence length/complexity, sentence coherence, and capitalization/punctuation.

**Table 2**

*Pre-Assessment vs. Post-Assessment Data for sentence length/complexity*

Student	Pre Assessment	Post-Assessment
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 3 sentences but no punctuation</li> <li>• Not complex but make sense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 9 total complete simple sentences</li> <li>• Some are complex</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 2 sentences</li> <li>• Not complex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 7 total complete sentences</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 3 sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 6 total complete sentences</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 3 sentences</li> <li>• Simple sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 10 total sentences</li> <li>• Some are complex</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 1 sentence</li> <li>• Simple sentence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 6 total sentences</li> <li>• One incomplete sentence</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 3 sentences</li> <li>• Simple sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 9 total sentences</li> <li>• Some are complex</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 3 sentences</li> <li>• Simple sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrote 6 total sentences</li> </ul>

**Table 3***Pre-Assessment vs. Post-Assessment Data for sentence coherence*

Student	Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences make sense</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences make sense</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used “because” to explain a point made, but hard to understand what student wrote</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences are clear and easy to read</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences are clear and make sense</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences are somewhat clear</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences make sense, but do not tell facts about chosen animal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences make sense</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some sentences make sense, hard to understand what student wrote</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences make sense</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most sentences make sense</li> <li>• Doesn’t give facts about chosen animal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most sentences make sense</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences make sense, not all facts (include opinions)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentences make sense</li> <li>• Sentences relate to chosen animal</li> </ul>

**Table 4***Pre-Assessment vs Post-Assessment Data for capitalization/punctuation*

Student	Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No capitalization</li> <li>• No punctuation (run on sentences)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No capitalization mistakes</li> <li>• Used punctuation correctly</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No capitalization</li> <li>• Entire piece is a run-on sentence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-2 capitalization mistakes</li> <li>• Used punctuation correctly</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used both!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No capitalization mistakes</li> <li>• 1-2 punctuation mistakes</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used both!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No capitalization mistakes</li> <li>• Used punctuation correctly</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used capitalization, no punctuation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No capitalization mistakes</li> <li>• Used punctuation correctly</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used some capitalization</li> <li>• Used some punctuation (not always the correct one)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-2 punctuation mistakes</li> <li>• 1-2 capitalization mistakes</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used both!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No capitalization mistakes</li> <li>• Used punctuation correctly</li> </ul>

## Writing Independence

Throughout the five weeks of the study, seven students in the classroom were provided direct-based instruction and taught informative writing through the writing process. The data was analyzed to find recurring themes. One of the themes in the category was independence in writing. This means that students were able to write and use their tools and skill sets on their own. Students were observed to be more independent while they were writing. One example was during the planning step of the writing process when students completed the graphic organizer to plan their writing. Student 7 was noted to be answering questions asked by the researcher when teaching/modeling the organizer and taking their time, therefore he did well completing the organizer independently. Students 2, 3, 6, and 7 were observed to be “trying on their own” to fill out the organizer.

Another observation was made during the drafting step of the writing process using the observation note sheet. Students 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 were able to use the sentence starters to “plug in” their information onto their rough draft writing paper. These students understood and were able to use the sentence starters to create coherent sentences for their writing.

During the drafting step where students were writing their conclusion sentence using sentence starters, Student 4 could pick a sentence starter for his conclusion sentence but needed help formatting his sentence. Additionally, during the editing step of the writing process, Student 4 needed prompting to check his spelling but did well with the other components of the checklist. He needed prompting when it came to asking if a sentence made sense. For example, he wrote a sentence about one pig, but he wrote “pigs.” The researcher said “If we are talking about one pig, should we put ‘pig’ or ‘pigs?’” Student 4 was able to identify the correct form of the word.

One last observation was made on the observation note sheet during the drafting step when students were writing their rough drafts using sentence starters. Student 5 attempted to use sentence starters. He had difficulty “plugging in” information because he couldn’t read his work over. The researcher had to read over the sentence starters and assist the student in picking one to use to write about his animal.

### **Summary**

Data was collected from various sources including: the pre-assessment writing, graphic organizer, teacher observation note sheet, post-assessment writing, and the writing process rubric. Themes and patterns that reoccurred in the data are discussed in this chapter. The results of the data sources in the five-week study developed into three main categories: student engagement, work completion, and student independence in writing. The themes that fell into these categories are student excitement about writing, engaged in their writing, students know what to do after the teacher models, and student independence when writing.

The qualitative data shows that after receiving direct-based instruction and using the writing process to give students a format to follow, students were more excited and engaged while writing. Students are also more aware of what they are writing about and are writing independently. When comparing the pre and post-assessment data, students were able to write more coherent sentences. Students also created more complex sentences and were able to use punctuation and capitalization to separate the sentences appropriately.

The quantitative data shows that no student scored below a 11 on the writing process rubric. 43% of students scored 13 out of 15 on the rubric. 43% of students scored 12 out of 15 on the rubric. 14% of students scored 11 out of 15 on the rubric.



## CHAPTER IV

### Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine how the writing process and direct-based instruction influenced students' writing skills and abilities. From the data analysis, it can be concluded that: (1) Student engagement and excitement increased when writing. (2) Students completed more writing tasks. (3) Students were more independent while they were writing.

#### Conclusion I

Student engagement and excitement increased when writing.

#### *Discussion*

The data analysis of the findings of the five-week study showed that struggling students became more excited and engaged in their writing. From the data analysis, students were found to be proclaiming their love and enjoyment for the writing assignment. These observations were substantiated by specific examples such as students expressing excitement during research and demonstrating eagerness to refine their chosen topics, reinforcing the theme of heightened student enthusiasm throughout the study. Overall, this theme was recognized by analyzing the observed behaviors and participation of students during the informative writing sessions.

Grünke et al. (2018) created a research study to assess the effectiveness of a motivational support system in improving the writing performance of students with learning disabilities or those at risk for them in a typical classroom setting. The results of the study indicated that this motivational support system had significant potential to engage a class of low-achieving elementary school students in writing enthusiastically. The results of this study mirrored the observed trend in the current research, suggesting that such motivational support systems have significant potential to engage low-achieving elementary school students enthusiastically in

writing tasks. The alignment between these findings further validates the effectiveness and significance of fostering excitement and engagement among struggling students through targeted instructional methods, as observed in both studies.

The research study findings, demonstrating increased excitement and engagement in writing among struggling students, directly align with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. By allowing students to choose relevant topics and express ideas through various mediums, UDL fosters engagement and emotional connections in writing tasks. The study's success with a motivational support system echoes UDL's emphasis on multiple means of engagement and expression, validating the effectiveness of tailored instructional approaches for enhancing enthusiasm and participation among struggling students. This correlation emphasizes UDL's role in creating inclusive learning environments where diverse learners can thrive and actively engage in their writing experiences.

## **Conclusion II**

Students completed more writing tasks.

## ***Discussion***

The data analysis of the findings of the five-week study showed that struggling students were able to complete more writing tasks. The data analysis from the five-week study highlighted a noticeable theme: a marked improvement in task completion among the seven students. Observations across different writing stages revealed increased independence and progress, showcasing enhanced work completion. This underscores the effectiveness of the instructional approach in fostering students' overall engagement and productivity during the writing process.

Clark et al.'s (2021) research encompassed 41 students from various grade levels, implementing an instructional approach based on the TCRWP workshop model. This approach focused on personalized support through daily conferences, delivering explicit instruction, and tailored scaffolding to address individual writing needs. The research findings concluded that students demonstrated noteworthy progress when engaged in instruction customized to meet their specific writing needs. This emphasizes the essential nature of differentiated writing instruction, particularly for struggling writers. It signifies a departure from the traditional one-size-fits-all approach to writing instruction and emphasizes the critical role of individualized support in enhancing students' written expression and overall writing achievement. The alignment between the research outcomes and the observed improvements in task completion among the seven students underscores the significance of tailored writing instruction in addressing varying writing abilities and fostering student progress.

Flower and Hayes' 1981 theory describes the phased nature of the writing process. Initially, it involves brainstorming and organizing ideas before transcribing them into a draft, subsequently revising and enhancing the content. This framework aids in breaking down the writing task into manageable components, aligning with the theory's premise that existing knowledge significantly influences writing proficiency. By applying this theory, students can segment their writing assignments into more achievable portions.

The differentiated writing instruction highlighted in Clark et al.'s study resonates with UDL's emphasis on providing multiple means of representation and engagement. By customizing instruction to address specific writing needs, educators can effectively support students at different stages of the writing process, aligning with the phased approach described by Flower and Hayes' theory. UDL's principles support breaking down writing tasks into manageable

components, allowing students to navigate each stage with personalized guidance and strategies tailored to their strengths and challenges.

### **Conclusion III**

Students were more independent while they were writing.

### ***Discussion***

From the data analysis conducted over the five-week study period, a significant theme emerged: the development of student independence in writing. Observations across writing stages highlighted this progress, evident in their enhanced autonomy and application of learned skills. Students independently completed graphic organizers, and used sentence starters effectively in drafts, though some needed minor guidance. Overall, structured instruction notably fostered heightened autonomy, seen in improved engagement and independence during writing tasks.

In a study conducted by Shen and Troia (2018), the effectiveness of planning and revising strategy instruction using the SRSD instructional framework was explored in students with Language Learning Disabilities (LLD). Three participants with IEPs, normal nonverbal cognitive abilities, and oral language impairments engaged in a four-week intervention utilizing the mnemonic "TREE BRANCH" for compare-contrast text composition. The students received structured lessons focusing on planning and revising strategies, gradually progressing from introduction and modeling to independent practice. After the planning instruction, all three students exhibited significant improvements in writing performance, evident across various measures of the writing process. They also demonstrated enhanced planning skills, reflected in well-structured plans incorporating the graphic organizer, traits, and supporting details. Both

studies emphasize the positive impact of structured instructional approaches in enhancing students' writing capabilities and fostering independence in the writing process.

Flower and Hayes' 1981 theory emphasizes the recursive nature of the writing process, highlighting how writers generate and organize ideas while self-regulating their writing strategies. The observed student progress, notably in the independent completion of graphic organizers and effective use of sentence starters, resonates with Flower and Hayes (1981), showcasing students' growing ability to apply learned skills throughout various writing stages.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings of the study of how teaching the writing process affects the development of writing skills in special education students in a self-contained classroom, there are several recommendations for further research. Conducting this study over an extended or indefinite period could reveal varying or evolving data patterns. Such an approach might influence the conclusions drawn in this study but could also unveil novel insights that remained undiscovered in the current research. Extended studies enable the tracking of students' development over time, offering a comprehensive view of how continuous exposure to writing instruction impacts their writing skills.

A study that can continue with this concept can also be done across other grade levels and different types of classrooms. Exploring the impact of teaching the writing process on students' writing skills in different educational contexts, such as middle or high school levels, could offer a broader perspective on its effectiveness. By examining how this instructional approach

influences students' writing abilities across multiple grade levels, researchers can gain insights into its applicability and effectiveness across the educational continuum.

This study was done with a mixed-methods approach. A study that can continue with this concept can also use observations, interviews, and student reflections to gain a deeper understanding of special education students' experiences with writing instruction. Researchers can explore their perceptions, attitudes, and emotional responses to different writing strategies employed in self-contained classrooms.

### **Recommendations for Teachers**

After analyzing the insights from this study, teachers can refine their instructional approaches, incorporating tailored strategies and structured writing processes to better support the writing skill development of special education students in self-contained classrooms. Based on the findings of this study, teachers may want to consider implementing a more direct-based instruction approach when teaching writing skills. Emphasizing a structured writing process can be beneficial. Teachers can adopt a systematic approach to teach writing, including explicit instruction on planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. This process, as highlighted in the study, can enhance students' independence and engagement during writing tasks.

Teachers may also want to create a more individualized approach for their students. They can use this insight to implement personalized support mechanisms, such as one-on-one conferences, assistive technologies, or differentiated assignments, to address specific writing challenges of students in self-contained classrooms. This would benefit general education teachers as well, as they can create more time for writing conferences where they can give that individualized approach.

Lastly, teachers should do what's best for their class in terms of instruction. The study's findings can guide educators in understanding the importance of personalized writing instruction and the effectiveness of adapting teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities.

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