

Identifying Effective Assessment of and Remediation for Struggling Writers:

An Urban Elementary Middle Grade (4th - 8th) Public School Experience

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EDLP 6050-60

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However you got to it, this title really works!

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Abstract

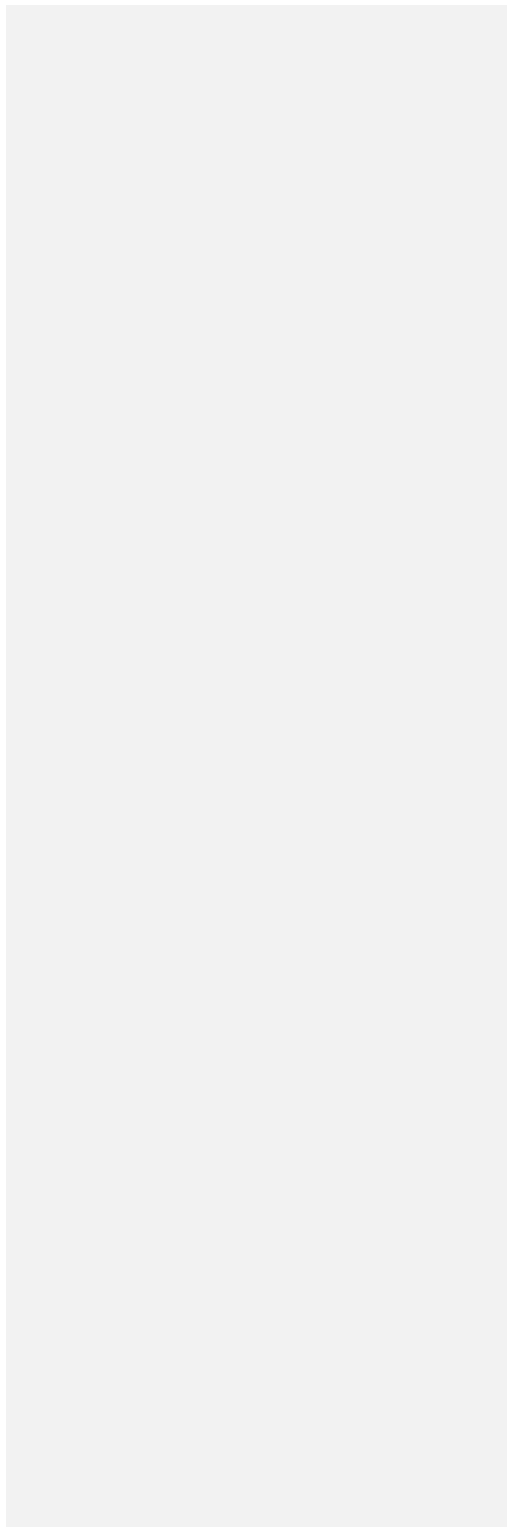


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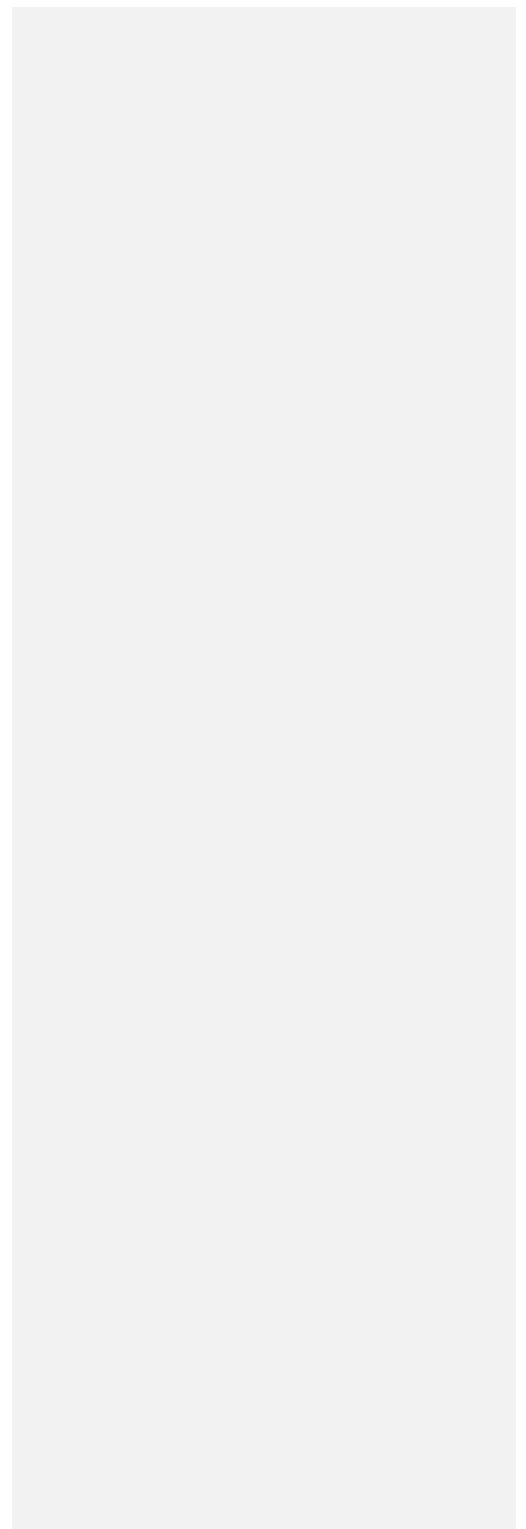
Abstract

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Introduction

The Road Map APA Format – No sub-head for the opening section. The opening paragraph is assumed to be an overview of the chapter.

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Writing, as a form of communication, is a metacognitive requirement for success; however, not enough 21st century students have mastered the skills and conventions of effective written expression. When I was a young middle school student in Maryland, I don't remember all of the details that defined my own writing roadmap, but I do know that my teachers provided generous amounts of support, which helped me to become a rather prolific and ebullient writer, over time. My school developed a rich learning environment in which I found joy and a desire to build upon those fledgling skills. As I got older, I developed and continue to sustain my life-long lexicon, learning new words constantly and I now would like to pass this ability on to my current students.

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The class sizes were significantly smaller in my small private all-girls college preparatory school, (which I attended from 6th through 12th grades), compared to the urban-centered public school in which I currently teach eighth grade English language arts (ELA). DEV- Why is class size important enough as a variable to mention up front?

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My experience developing a love of words, syntax construction, paragraph flow, message making and general writing conventions was compounded by working with an assortment of public relations professionals in a high-profile corporate communications management job; this career experience is the lynchpin of my work as a highly qualified ELA teacher. As a dually certified teacher, I use my Orton-Gillingham multisensory therapy knowledge when teaching literacy, particularly writing because teaching with visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile techniques appeals to all children. Might your reader not need a fuller description of this

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specialized technique? The assessment and writing skill activity tools discussed in this study are authentic and designed primarily for clinicians of students with language struggles, however I want to try to tailor them to classroom teacher use. I do feel as if you rushed to this preliminary statement of purpose a bit quickly in this last paragraph.

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Upon entering the 21st century, writing prowess has begun to wane, and I plan to shed light on a problem-solution model for fixing the substandard written expression plaguing this district. I will examine some of the reasons why urban youth, in particular, struggle to write and how educators might be able to rectify the situation. First job is to assess student ability for the purpose of obtaining a baseline and then follow through to provide a range of specific remedies. The ultimate goal is to present data, which will enhance curriculum design for writing.

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Nature of the Issue Under Study

When I came to this district, I saw a weakness in student writing ability, teacher writing-teaching time as well as low teacher confidence/knowledge about the subjects of writing and the teaching of writing. [I recognize those patterns from the start of my career in the 1970s.] I knew that teachers needed to raise the administration's awareness in order to affect change. Writing well is absolutely necessary for successful communication. It is a crucial life skill, which can determine choice job opportunities and, when not mastered, can undermine them. Teachers should be equipped to prepare their students to be successful in college and career. True. But does the sentence belong at this point in the flow of the paragraph? Students need to be assessed to determine relative ability level for written expression and then teachers need to create and implement multiple measures and a variety of evidence-based tools to mitigate the deficiencies.

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As an ELA teacher in a vast Northern New Jersey district, I try to infuse writing opportunities into my lesson planning, however I am frequently confronted with a lack of student

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attainment of grade-level proficiencies, student self-regulation and low writing stamina. DEV-
Can you provide brief evidence of these deficiencies?

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Writing is a key skill that unfortunately can be a challenge for teachers to teach and students to learn. In the urban school where I teach, the student performance data for writing assessments have been abysmal for many years throughout grade levels. Decriptive, but not concrete evidence. Recently during a vertical articulation meeting (VAM) in my building, our data-driven vice principal remarked on the overall scores and stated, "Well the writing is low and in the red, which has been the case for a long time." For two years, the writing segment of English language arts unit assessment for the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has been eliminated in our district. This must have been a statewide mandate indicating that we are not alone. [Actually, it may have been the adoption of the reading and math focuses of the CCSS that caused this sad curriculum shift away from writing instruction.]

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There is an epidemic of poor writing skills by our adolescents. The data we received come from an assessment given four times a year, testing a variety of writing genres in a cope and sequence after a nine-week course of instruction. Please help me to answer why a district that measures writing proficiencies four times a year eliminates writing instruction from the LA curriculum. In the district, writing instruction time allotment is scheduled at the discretion of each building principal. With many transient families in the district moving from one school to the next, most of the curriculum is aligned, but writing depends on teacher time, talent and resources. Inconsistency of instruction from year-to-year and from school-location to school-location is another hurdle that many urban students must jump. And how many of those transient students clear the bar?

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Urban-dwelling students enter school with a variety of disadvantages that arise from their socioeconomic status (I think). Many enter the starting gate of school with below par academic foundational experiences and exposures. Many students have parents who struggled in school and that parental influence, albeit indirect, reflects on to the child, manifesting itself often as high absenteeism, low motivation/low interest and poor follow-through on work tasks. I would be careful about even implied class stereotypes absent specific evidence. Unlike some countries, we live in one that endeavors to educate ALL of its population. The U.S. mandates that all children be required to get an education, but since we are a country of immigrants, some families hail from places where education was not a priority and therein lies another preparation disconnect. Even at the beginning, the playing field is not an even one. OK. I accept the conclusiob, but you do realize that your comparison is incompletely stated. Ar you coming first or second-generation American school children with children whose parents were born in this country?

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Evidence of an issue

In this urban district, for four years, I have held a position as English language arts lead teacher in as many grades, and each year in each school the students have had below grade level writing skills. [Have you served in four different schools over the four years of your tenure in the district?] This current year during a vertical articulation meeting (VAM) earlier in the year, there was some discussion of how poorly student write and spell across grade levels in our school and the district, with teachers citing questions about what can be done about it. Who initiated the discussion? Significance? Our vice principal brought up the same discussion again in another VAM meeting three months later. It is an acknowledged reality that many of our students have

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immigrated to the United States with little focus on education and currently live in low-income, poverty-riddled neighborhoods. The brain of a child coming from that background is functioning **in a stunted capacity** for many reasons. Eric Jensen (2009, p.55) **APA – page citation needed only for direct quotation – should be placed at end of quotation.** reveals in his description of the human brain’s operating system “to succeed in school, students need to have an academic operating system in place.” He describes this academic apparatus as a crucial component to succeeding in school. Jensen says the must haves are:

- The ability and motivation to deter gratification and make a sustained effort to meet long-term goals;
- Auditory, visual, and tactile processing skills;
- Attentional skills that enable the student to engage, focus, and disengage as needed;
- Short-term and working memory capacity;
- Sequencing skills (knowing the order of a process); and
- A champion’s mind-set and confidence.

These skills form the foundation for school success and can give students the capacity to override the adverse risk factors of poverty. These are not simple study skills; they enable students to focus on, capture, process, evaluate, prioritize, manipulate, and apply or present information in a meaningful way.

Without improving **the capacities of students’ brains** to process incoming data, student **will not achieve at the same rates as their peers who possess these skills.**

To improve students’ processing capacity, you must give them support as you

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challenge them. (Jensen, 2009, pp.55-56) [Sorry! I just realized I edited Jensen!

How presumptuous of me!]

Though most of these students do not have diagnosed learning differences or disabilities, the poverty element presents challenges to the brain that manifest as a disconnect requiring a creative problem solving approach to teaching writing.

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In a recent School Improvement Plan meeting, a teacher in her first year in our district responded to her post-observation feedback which is lacking rigor not clearly written with, [paraphrasing] "How can I teach my students to write paragraphs rigorously when in the fourth grade they do not know what an adjective is or how to form sentences properly." [I would say you can teach paragraphing without a student's knowing the parts of speech, but sentence syntax is a foundational skill. What would you say, Diedre?]

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For students to acquire the skills of writing, by its very nature, they must have supportive scaffolding in place and those supports must be available to students even when there is not teacher around. Writing is the last literacy skill to be mastered for most students and the reason relates to its complexity and multi-leveled structure and the detachment from self and the required ability to anticipate and meet the needs of a reader other than the self.

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Students can learn to read through learning to write. The dawn of the digital age has shed light on the possibility that computers will replace the art of handwriting, which some say is already dead. Unless you are talking about penmanship, how is the highlighted phrase relevant to the flow of the paragraph? Writing is a metacognitive, fine-motor skill with a neurological connection. Oh, you may be talking about penmanship.

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Moved up [1]: Though most of these students do not have diagnosed learning differences or disabilities, the poverty element presents challenges to the brain that manifest as a disconnect requiring a creative problem solving approach to teaching writing.

Since writing has been a tough subject for teachers to assess and teach, a newly marketed screening tool that is backed by 30 years of research coupled with the use of self-regulating regulated by the studentwriter? strategy development tools can be used once the need to successfully attack writing problems head-on is acknowledged.

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One caveat to the success of this action research is related to three major challenges, which are (1) assessing student writing is a one-to-one process, which might be daunting for a teacher with class sizes exceeding 10 students; (2) many teachers will need substantial professional development to execute the task of remediating writing, especially in terms of writing conventions; and (3) the negative attitude about writing among older students in particular, must be overcome. Writing also has a somewhat subjective characteristic i.e., it is not necessarily cut and dried, i.e. easy to monitor. I do not agree with this last sentence, but we can debate the point at some other time.

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Focus of proposed research

The focused purpose of this research is to find out if urban middle grade students' written expression skills will measurably improve, across all grade levels tested, after being screened using the groundbreaking assessment tool that tests oral and written language skills in students ages 6-18 years. This tool, which can identify and track a student's strengths and weaknesses. The assessment will occur only after I have provided the teachers in my school training with SRSD instruction (citation?) designed by education researchers Drs. Karen Harris and Steve Graham. The SRSD tool was designed out of the research findings that "three out of every four 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students exhibited only partial mastery of the necessary writing skills and

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knowledge at their respective grade levels” (Persky, Danne, & Jin, 2003). Whose test arrived at these percentages?

Additionally, students will receive their own copy of *Writing Adventures Workbook & Journal Book 1* (Cargill-Austin, & Padgett 2001, 2011) as a resource to hone their writing skills. The third writing enhancement tool is one that has been embedded into the curriculum, which is PARCC Writing component, which is a scripted series of PowerPoint Presentations designed to be followed to the letter by teachers as a part of the district’s curriculum initiative to improve students’ writing for the PARCC tests. Awakward double embedding – Can you revise the syntax for greater readability? Assessment of writing is a key component of a standards-based curriculum model (Graham, Hebert & Harris, 2015), such as our district has.

Can teachers infuse this level of writing focus into their lesson plans while supporting the district curriculum? How ae you introducing this question? Is this one of the questions that will shape your study? Since writing is such a key skill to success, how can our school develop cross-curricular activities supporting the use of SRSB strategies, particularly in ELA and Social Studies? When administering the writing assessment tool how often should it be administered so that progress is effectively monitored? In my teacher professional learning community (PLC) presentation I would include first and second lessons on the suggested strategies for infusing this pilot program into the existing jam-packed district curriculum with an established scope and sequence. The last sentence moves on to methodology. In the presentation of your questions, please guide your reader by identifying the controlling and the subsidiary questions.

As a result of increasing emphasis on educational standards, writing is playing a greater role in literacy for middle school students across the country. Did you not write that your dstrict has left the teaching of writing to the discretion of the teacher? Consistency? The purpose of this

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study is to determine if, after obtaining a baseline written expression score for 35 students over five grade levels (consisting mostly of **CLD/SES** middle grade students), these students can use SRSB methods and regular workbook/journal writing tasks to develop their writing skills? Will this same initiative build teacher confidence to teach writing?

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For the purpose of this study the key terms will be defined as follows:

- Self-regulating strategy development (SRSD) model– an implementation model for cognitive strategy instruction and is based on research work by Graham, Harris, Read, Ryan, Short et.al. According to Read (2005) “The goal of SRSD is to make the use of strategies habitual, flexible, and automatic...”
- Self- regulated strategy development (SRSD) – an instructional approach designed to help students learn, use and adopt the strategies used by skilled writers. It is an approach that adds the element of self-regulation to strategy instruction for writing.
- Logic? Have you not present the same term defined two different ways? How does this multiple presentation help your reader?
- Test reliability – refers to the stability with which ability is measured and is critical attribute of research for guiding the selection of an appropriate diagnostic tool when looking at a variety of assessments.
- TILLS – the Test of Integrated Language and Literacy Skills which are scaled with a mean =10 and a standard deviation (SD)=3. Is this too a test of written fluency? This definition requires more detail.
- Measurement error – variability both in child’s performance and in the test administrator’s ability to score the test reliability (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997; Haynes & Pindzola, 2004). Why will I need this term to understand your proposal?

- Written expression subtest – an assessment requiring student listen to a story and then **rewrite** that story using more interesting terms and less choppiness. “. . . is a complex, integrated language task that allows **you** to observe the student’s written expression skills at both sound/word and sentence/discourse levels. This subtest provides three scores that examine three different aspects of writing – a discourse score, a sentence score, and a word score. Where does the quotation end? From what source is the quotation taken?
- T-units – syntactic units, consisting of a main clause with all of its dependent clauses.
- **Administration of test – test administration is on an individual and per child basis. This term is part of a general knowledge of a teacher, isn’t it?**
- Metacognitive – of or relating to conscious mental change (such as thinking, understanding, learning, remembering)
- Vertical articulation meeting (VAM) – a meeting of peers teaching similar grade levels or similar content to discuss commonalities among students, construct support systems for colleagues and share successful outcomes.
- Middle grades – middle grade are grades our through eight (Tompkins, 2010) Not always, though. Different districts use different grade level configurations in schools/
- Meta-analysis- “a statistical tool used to summarize the direction and magnitude of the effects obtained in a set of empirical studies examining the same basic phenomena” (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001)
- CLD – culturally and linguistically diverse (Graves & Rueda, 2005, p. 214)
- SES – socioeconomic status (Graves & Rueda, 2005, p. 215)

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Review of Literature

Writing quality is a subjective measure And yet, evaluators who are appropriately trained can assess writing with a strongly positive inter-rater reliability. It “is based on readers’ judgment of the overall merit of a paper, taking into consideration factors such as ideation, organization, vocabulary, sentence structure, tone, and so forth” (Graham & Perin, 2007a). “These evaluations are quantified on a numerical scale, representing a single overall judgment (holistic score) or a score for each attribute assessed analytic score) (Graham, Hebert & Harris, 2015). Perhaps. That method is one of many ways to assess and respond to writing.

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Transition? As well, writing and writing proficiency is by its very nature one of the hallmarks of critical thinking and critical thinking is a key component of the 21st Century learning model.

Writing is [also] an essential part of schooling in all subject matter areas, as it gives students the opportunity to synthesize information from multiple sources and perspectives, to decide what information is relevant and important to share, and to judge how best to organize and present this information, all of which help students clarify, deepen, and expand their thoughts and feelings about a topic (Bruer, 1999; Lindemann, 1995).

This need to write well spans academic arenas, worldwide. International studies have drawn the same conclusions as those performed in the U.S., with some citing teacher preparedness as well as student discomfort with writing tasks, as part of the problem. Have you identified a problem? Is subjectivity a problem?

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A team of researchers from Portugal and Brazil found by sampling teacher perceptions and practices that teachers weren’t particularly confident in their ability to produce good writers

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(citation?). These teachers reported on everything from the time they devoted to teaching writing to their practice to scaffold student writing self-editing. “Teachers reported little time devoted for writing and the teaching of writing in their classes.” (citation for direct quotation?) Both Brazilian and Portuguese teachers noted the importance of producing strong student writers.

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This addresses that fact that writing education around the globe is facing similar obstacles and overcoming those obstacles in a similar fashion. Though these teachers were aware of the importance of teaching writing most of them very infrequently used explicit methods like self-regulated writing. Though once they were more formally and directly taught to use the SRSB practices, a “positive correlation was found between teachers’ preparation to teach writing and their practices to promote students’ self-regulated writing (Veiga Simao, Malpique, Frison, Bragagnolo & Marques, 2016). OK, but also, of course. If they were taught the method and then the students were measured in terms of indicators valued by the method, why would these results not be expected?

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Many districts do not allow for the appropriate amount of time-on-task to produce good writers and since writing competence helps determine eligibility for graduation and is pivotal in reaching decisions regarding grade retention and promotion in some states (Conley, 2005), it is imperative that poor writing be addressed before it reaches epidemic proportions. Writing also deepens meaning when learning concepts that are read first keeping in mind that the brain is the catalyst to learning. Studies show that peer-learning can be very impactful to retention of information. (Conley, 2005)

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As a teacher of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) urban youth, I understand the value of being able to identify my students’ weaknesses so to better design a fix. It is also important for students to learn to recognize and self-correct errors as an internal process. Even

this self-correction process must be modeled and taught explicitly. “Explicit instruction in learning strategies can increase the comfort and learning potential of students needing support” (Graves & Rueda, 2005, p. 220). Very good point!

Socioeconomic realities affect students’ aptitudes for writing, specifically, and affect emotional connections to school, in general. Sociocultural approaches to learning must be used to affect change for these students, and educators must realize that: “(1) learning is social; (2) learning is facilitated by assisted performance that is responsive to individual needs; (3) learning is mediated by cultural tools and artifacts; and (4) learning takes place in communities of practice and is indexed by changes in participation within these communities” (Graves & Rueda, p. 217). Do you know whether these researchers are Vygotskyans???

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) circumstances compounded by lower SES backgrounds may also have an added degree of difficulty when it comes to writing.

Data results for a significant number of CLD students who also have a low (SES) or expeience poverty have shown that the combination can hamper student achievement in school. “When families are in poverty, students may be affected by factors related to nutrition, child care, access to print, family job security, accumulation of school-relevant prior knowledge, and a host of other indices of social and cultural capital” (Graves & Rueda, p. 220). Supporting students who carry this baggage with diverse learning strategies is one potential key to success.

Diversity in achievement is a reality in the U.S. where “in 2002, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments of writing proficiency indicated that “28% of fourth graders, 31% of eighth graders, and 24% of 12 graders performed at or above proficient levels, but fewer African American and Hispanics were in the ‘proficient’ group than whites or Asian Pacific Islanders” (Graves & Rueda, 2009 p. 214). OK , but why? What does research tell

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us about the performance levels of different immigrant groups? What other sociological factors might be important?

Transition? Eric Jensen, one of the pioneers of brain-based learning and author of several books on the effects poverty on learning, uses an activity that helps students capture the meaning of a particular writing task. Jensen (2013) discusses using visual and tactile teacher tools to help low socioeconomic (SES) students’ retention and peer-work to aid their retention. The team approach requires students to share their work repeatedly over five-minute segments. The students stop writing and pass their four-to-eight sentence summaries for peer review. At the end of the activity, the students are able to read their **peers** comments and “make use of the peer feedback” before turning it in to the teacher. (Jensen, 2013, p. 103)

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When students are taught in a direct way with the regular support of teacher feedback, the results are **more successful**. Comparison unclear. Teachers who understand some of the cultural barriers recognize how burdensome it can be for **them** to retain and understand new information. These students are often operation in “survival mode- attempting to manage demanding-academic tasks and at the same time maintaining an egocentric concern for their own well being. (Graves & Rueda, 2009)

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Researchers have discovered that learning self-regulating strategies can prove incredibly helpful because of their multisensory nature. Students can also practice role-modeling with peers.

In general, cognitive strategy instruction aims to shape behavior by teaching strategy steps, cognitive modeling, guided instruction, and self-regulation (Hallenbeck, 2002). One well-documented model for strategy instruction is the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD model developed by Graham and

Harris at the University of Maryland (Graham & Harris, 2005). The SRSD model is an approach in which students learn specific strategies and self-regulation procedures (e.g., goal setting, self-assessment, and coping self-talk) for using the strategies during writing activities. Teachers model the use of the strategies and provide diminishing amounts of scaffolding (e.g., guided collaborative practice with ample feedback) while the students master the skills to reach a criterion for learning. The findings of research conducted using SRSD and other strategy instruction studies show that, across content areas and differing student needs, strategy instruction is effective. When strategy instruction is used in an inclusive classroom, it can lead to positive outcomes for students with and without disabilities. (Graves & Rueda, 2009, p.221)

A few of the key elements of strategies can be effective for CLD students and are considered useful for SRSD approaches to writing are to: (1) align the curriculum’s scope and sequence with specific strategies; (2) use language that is easy to understand for the CLD student; (3) have extensive teacher modeling in order to cement the use of the simple and clearly comprehensible strategy; (4) use “think-aloud for each step”; (5) connect the strategies to students and make them personally relevant to the lives of students while linking them to “content-learning objectives” ; (6) make practice, practice, practice the road to Carnegie Hall, in other words use the strategies repeatedly and apply them to an assortment of practical situations. (Graves & Rueda, 2009). I am unclear as to where quotations begin and end in the previous paragraph.

The written expression skills of urban middle school students can measurably improve, across all grade levels tested, after initially being screened using the groundbreaking assessment

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tool that tests oral and written language skills of students ages 6-18 years. The assessment identifies and tracks a student’s strengths and weaknesses after providing the teachers in my school with the SRSD instruction supports designed by education researchers Harris and Graham. We know that visuals are important when teaching all students, especially urban middle school students with multicultural backgrounds. All of the senses come into play, but the visual sense is most prevalent when writing. I thought I read this paragraph in your Introduction. Do not repeat paragraphs from one section to the next. Citations for the assertions made?

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“SRSD is one of the most effective writing interventions (Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012) and has improved the writing skills of students with emotional and behavior disorders (McKeown, FitzPatrick, & Sandmel , 2010). Jenson says that poverty can produce levels of stress for some students such that emotional and behavior challenges come into play. Research supports its effectiveness across measures, including increased word count, sentence count, number of paragraphs, number of transitions, number of essay parts, and overall quality (Ennis & Jolivette, 2014; Losinski, Cuenca-Carlino, Zablocki, & Teagarden, 2014). Yes, but who decide that these counts, even taken together, represent maturity as a writer?

SRSD is a direct approach to the writing planning process, and it has “six recursive steps which are(a) develop background knowledge, (b) discuss it, (c) model it, (d) memorize it, (e) support it, and (f) independent performance. Using collaborative modeling and later peer support, students practice writing and self-regulatory skills with support” (McKeown, FitzPatrick, & Sandmel , 2010).

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Self-regulating strategy development (SRSD) tools can focus on expository writing skills instruction and increase teacher instructional effectiveness and higher state student assessment score growth in the writing process for struggling middle grade students in an urban, multi-

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lingual setting **provided the correct combination of variables are aligned.** Explain what this proviso means. Professional development for teachers must be thorough and engaging providing ample opportunity for modeling practice time. Multiple resources state that writing is a challenge to teach and teaching preparation for this task is under represented and under researched in the pre-service arena and professional development for veteran teachers, worldwide. Why is there no citation for any of the statements in the previous paragraph? This section is a review of the literature; information taken from source material must be documented.

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“Learning strategies are not a curriculum but cut across all curricular areas. Strategies that enhance access to content are used in literature, science, social studies, and math classes and facilitate knowledge acquisition” (Graves & Rueda, 2009, p. 220). It is important for teachers to provide ample opportunities for students to practice strategies during each lesson. Why? Connect explicitly to the point made in the quotation. Studies show that the use of strategy instruction is effective at both the elementary and secondary levels (Graves & Rueda, 2009, p. 220).

McKeown et al. (date) indicate that **teacher’s** require intensive professional development to actuate the use of SRSD in their classrooms. The pedagogy is not easily transmitted and adopted as an instructional strategy. Teachers **in her study** felt they would benefit from seeing the use of SRSD, an instructionally complex concept, modeled before they could gain confidence of their own success using it. The practice-based professional development (PBPD) approach was more fruitful than a hands-off webinar approach (McKeown, FitzPatrick & Sandmel, 2010).

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Practice-based professional development provides teachers **a net** while learning to execute this **high-flying procedure** because it focuses on the “educational practice and development of skills

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rather than simply on information and materials” alone (McKeown, FitzPatrick & Sandmel, 2010).

In a study using both PBPD and SRSD, a group of fourth grade teachers experienced success with their 17 assigned students, with no differentiation in the instruction for general education and special education students. In fact all six of the rooms were inclusive ones. After a two-day intensive PBPD, the teachers began to work with the students using the strategies they had practiced. The results yielded “high levels of fidelity” at 96%, and students improved the quality of their writing (ES=1.35 for elements. How much student improvement? As measured by what indicators? (Kuihara, Harris, Grahan, Brindle, & McKeown, 2013). In her own study, McKeown (date?), drew on a variety of schools and teacher volunteer participants and most of them were very positive at the outset, which may have impacted the outcome. “These teachers entered PBPD with positive attitudes, excited to learn a new strategy, and remained consistently involved throughout the two days” (McKeown, 2010). This confirms that teaching is a people business, not a widgets business and appealing to the teachers that want to affect the writing awareness and metacognitive consciousness of one’s students while doing it with enthusiasm and even glee, is a variable that must be considered when decided who to pilot a program like this. Dierdre, do not move into editorializing.

Assessment of students utilizing a baseline tool and then a posttest is one of the most reliable quantitative instruments to gauge growth in the area of writing (citation?). Any pilot program would require a tool for measuring growth. A researcher in Connecticut explored the writing ability of several 7th and 8th grade boys in a suburban middle school in Connecticut for six weeks. The key to the success of this experiment was that the researcher, Dr. Sperger, designed it to “examine the effect of instruction in the Self-Regulated Strategy Development

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(SRSD; Harris & Graham, 1996) writing approach” on this population’s writing achievement (Sperger, 2010, p. ____). Teacher training provided through six hours of professional development was a key aspect of the experiment. Time spent with the teachers by the researcher was also substantial and represented another important variable (Sperber, 2010).

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Graphic organizers and clever acronyms also help students to grasp a visual the complex demanding process of writing any words omitted here? (Harris, Graham, Mason, & Friedlander, 2014). “Although children typically begin school with a positive attitude toward writing, this attitude becomes more and more negative during the elementary school years” (Applebee,

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Langer, Mullis, Latham, & Gentile, 1994). These are the years for fruitful development of foundational skills. We as teachers need to find strategies that appeal to students and will help them to hold onto these skills. SRSD has a wide assortment of techniques that can be incorporated into the curriculum. SRSD is a tool that supports, not supplants, the more expansive elements of the writing curriculum. Where is the highlighted source in your reference list?

There is no pre-scripted sequence to utilizing SRSD, it is simply a tool that can be shared effectively with teachers and placed in the right hands can produce better writers. Teachers must make the decision how the strategies best fit their classroom. For the younger grades the program concentrates on having, the students are able to write sentences. Sentence writing must precede use of the SRSD strategies. Why???? Adaption of strategies for each grade level is encouraged. Teachers and administrators can decide. (Harris, Graham, Mason, & Friedlander 2014). Based upon what criteria?

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“Results indicate that for both boys and girls, at all grade levels, the mean posttest score [a routinely administered statewide standardized test] was significantly higher than the mean

pretest score” (Sperger, 2010, p. ____). The key to this project’s success was that the teacher’s received constant communication and PD support as well as the six-week cycle of student instruction where SRSD writing approaches were infused into the student’s lessons (Sperger, 2010.) Sperger (2010) writes, “Researchers have identified elements of instructional programs and interventions that are effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well.”

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Teachers would require additional time in their schedule to bring the students of this district to full writing mastery. The PARCC writing curriculum is extremely specific; however its major challenge is that feedback is not immediate. The school and students find out PARCC scores almost a year after if students take. The alternate assessment, TILLS coupled with the use of certain sections of the *Writing Adventure Workbook & Journal*, a tool filled with “pages of fun activities to build writing skills from basic sentences to paragraph” (Cargill-Austin & Padgett 2001, 2011). Sentence fragment.

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Feedback, as part of the process of writing is the critical component “in effective formative assessment, as it provides information that is used by students to improve their writing or learning and by teachers to make changes in their instruction,” (Graham, Hebert & Harris, 2015, p. ____) which is the best way to help them to self-regulate when writing. Accordingly, students use feedback about their writing to close the gap between what they write and the desired goal for a better paper. Such feedback can come from adults (including teachers and peers), a computer, or through self-assessment (Graham, Hebert & Harris, 2015).

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For years, it has been reported across the country that writing instruction is the weakest link of the literacy chain. It is not easy to teach assess or to teach because of the individual, differentiated nature to the process (Dinkins, 2010). Assessment can measure the effectiveness of the product that the process yields. Writing well opens doors for students to escape lives of

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poverty and closes doors to cultural, economic and social consequences (Graham & Perrin, 2007a; National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003). For many years, even decades, no one has successfully tackled the challenges of reaching **these students**, affording them the same opportunity to practice writing while establishing a comfort zone of optimal ability. I would argue that the final sentence is not at all fair.

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For 30 years, educational researcher, Dr. Karen Harris and her colleague, D. Steve Graham have been researching a new concept called Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD), which has had good results among the populations that have been exposed to it Why introduce the developers again here? Concentrate on the place of your proposed study. Even though as of late, other writing models, like writer's workshop model have received more notoriety and recognition of success becoming the most dominant choice for instruction, particularly in the middle school years (Graham, 2006b; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006). The work of doctoral candidate Elizabeth Dinkins produced positive data from her "nine-week study which included 30 observation hours, 11 teacher interview hours five student interview hours, instructional documents and student writing" (Dinkins, 2010).

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Dinkins produced five major findings from her work with a group of eighth grade students. Writing is a subjective process that can yield teacher bias when conferencing with students and making determinations during the editing process. "Autonomous classroom instruction was the product of teachers acting with and reacting to external forces in order to sustain a commitment to their convictions about education and student learning" (Dinkins, 2010, p. ____). By the eighth grade many students had already established who they were as writers and their staunch stances regarding their writing experiences impacted the study. Finally many students did gain a positive benefit from new and alternative ways to gauge the procedural

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component of good writing and the self-regulating component was enlightening to many of the students in the study. Students basically now understood the why of certain writing style elements (Dinkins, 2010).

Understanding “the why” will enhance students’ ability to self-regulate “the how” of their writing (Harris, Graham, Mason, & Friedlander (2014). Teacher feedback and support will gradually glean student self-regulation, self-efficacy and success.

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Methodology

When studying the writing abilities and techniques of middle school students, I want to explore the pedagogical approach of their teachers before and after application of the treatment.

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This language is the language of an experimental design. You are not creating an experiment, are you? My plan to is to select September writing samples from the beginning of the school

year written by 35 students (three students selected by the ELA general education teacher and three students selected by the grade level Social Studies teacher) from each class of 4th, 5th, 6th,

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7th and 8th graders. The pool of students for this study will be gathered from each of three academic tiers (high-growth, medium-growth and low-growth) and the lead ELA teachers in

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collaboration with the social studies teachers will have the final say in who will be the participants. What about the volunteer status of research participants? What you have written so

far does not speak to the criteria for student participant selection. The reason for examining such an expansive number of grade levels is to get a better, more comprehensive data pool. Maybe.

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But why would not all students in one grade be at least equally comparable? The limit of six students per grade level allows for a realistic management of cases since hands-on evaluation of

writing can be tediously time-consuming. An unmanageable and unwieldy data collection would not yield appropriate management of information. Why not? How are you defining

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unmanageable and unwieldy as descriptors of data collection?

Additionally, surveys and interviews collected on line via Google classroom, which gauge both student and teacher opinion as the research unfolds. I would like to know how both students and teachers feel about the writing process, so I plan to create a survey of pertinent questions for each group. This general a focus? The students will be asked via the Google forms survey tool questions that have multiple choice, short answer and yes/no responses. Before the

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experiment begins, a baseline needs to be established and these three tools-- surveys, interviews and TILLS individual student assessment of written expression - will provide that baseline.

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The teachers will also be surveyed to determine (1) the feelings about teaching writing; (2) teacher aptitude/knowledge and (3) teacher effectiveness. In order to triangulate the data, I will also ask to see the teacher's lesson plans as they pertain to teaching writing. Lastly, I plan to observe each participating teacher before, as a baseline and after I share some self-regulating strategies with each of these instructors to try. Both the student and teacher surveys will have an introduction explaining the purpose of the survey and directing them to answer openly and honestly in order to give me the best feedback.

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Artifacts, including student writing samples from prior years, would be helpful for progress monitoring, but since we are in a brand new school, I am unsure as to whether student files have migrated with them. Writing samples can be evaluated by quantity of errors in syntax structure and content development.

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Writing tool and instruments placed at the fingertips of students are a necessary requirement, and there are many to choose from on the market. One that I find easy to use is the Sentence Sense workbooks 1 and 2. Williams Van Cleave, a leading education researcher and developer of content, authored these books for students who struggle with literacy. Van Cleave's workbooks begin at a third grade level and span through secondary school integrating everything from basic parts of speech needed for scaffolding to compound/complex sentences to independent and dependent clauses.

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Students are reminded by Merek the Dragon, in this user friendly book, to always use his/her best handwriting; otherwise the teacher and the dragon will be unable to read it. I really do not think that penmanship should be a trait observed. I have used this books with a variety of

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grad_v leveled students with a great deal of success. Students are also encouraged at periodic intervals to construct sentences that have a minimum word count equivalent to their age. This direction is designed to teach students **to vary the length** of their sentences to make writing more interesting. Van Cleave worked directly with Kildonan co-founder and visionary, Diana Hanbury King. Kildonan School happens to focus on students with language impairments – generally in the areas of specific learning disability and dyslexia. The remedies that fix what ails these children and adults has been fruitful for the general education populations as well. Although Van Cleave’s workbooks are excellent tools, Sentence Sense Books 1 and 2 are not reproducible resources. My preference will be to use the *Writing Adventures Workbook and Journal* for the teacher-selected 35 students.

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Another very popular approach to supporting student writing is the use of graphic organizers and there are a variety of them on the market. SRSD has an assortment of acronyms accompanied by a myriad of graphic organizers with catchy names. There are even electronic graphic organizers available for schools, like ours, which have one-to-one technology and they are called Holt Interactive Graphic Organizers (<http://my.hrw.com/nsmedia/intgos/html/igo.htm>). These multisensory approaches are memorable for most students and in particular those in our urban school environment. Time dedicated to teacher training and development of comfort with using these tools is a function of student success.

Once the teachers receive training in the self-regulating strategies for writing process and **pass that knowledge** on to their students, I will provide a **similar backend set of surveys** and “exit interviews” to obtain feedback on the success or failure of using a variety of tools to make students better writers. Not as clear these the highlighted phrases could be. Additionally, I will be looking for feedback from teachers in their own words. The writing samples will speak to

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increased skill over time due to teacher practice and student engagement in the process, keeping in mind that every classroom is an island, of sorts.

The 35 selected students will undergo the written expression subtests of the TILLS. The TILLS measure of reliability has been published in peer-review articles, and although it is a fairly new tool which is “designed to assess language in the oral and written modalities for school-age children” it is, nonetheless backed by over 30 years of research (Mailend, Plante, Anderson, Applegate & Nelson, 2016). It recommends that a research assistant/clinician/academic therapist should administer the subtests and obtain required written responses from the child’s response form. Since the TILLS are so new, the research sample was designed to include including two subsets of students- typically performing as well as those with diagnosed language impairments. Relevance to your proposed study? “Furthermore, well-designed norm-referenced tests are ideal for some clinical or research purposes but not others (Pena, Spaulding and Plante 2006). “For example, standardized tests are typically not suitable for selecting therapy techniques and targets” (McCauley & Swisher, 1984, Merrell and Plante, 1997) and many are not appropriate for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Gutierrez-Clellen & Pena 2001). The TILLS is standardized for use with native speakers of American English.” (Mailend, M.L., Plante, E., Anderson, M.A., Applegate, E.B. & Nelson, N.W., 2016) I feel as though I am reading the test specifications and directions. Why are they necessary here? For tracking progress in a specific skill, test administrators may wish to give only those subtests relating to that skill. TILLS subtests are curriculum-relevant because they correlate directly to “language demands of the curriculum.” (TILLS) A clinician is key to successful progress monitoring, since teachers do not always have ample time to do it.

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Although PARCC writing is incorporated into the curriculum, the only current data I will be able to glean is from public opinion since the PARCC scores are calculated over the Summer and distributed in the late Fall. Archival information from past scores may be available to shed light on a student's progress.

Where have you explained Mills's Three Es and the researcher's rationale for multiple sources to minimize the effects of researcher bias especially in qualitative research designs?

Triangulation Matrix

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCE 1	DATA SOURCE 2	DATA SOURCE 3
<p>Controlling Question:</p> <p>How can urban middle grade students’ written expression skills measurably improve, across all grade levels, after initially being screened using among other things, the groundbreaking assessment tool (TILLS) that has 15 subtests which assess oral and written language skills in students ages 6-18 years, which identify and track a student’s strengths and weaknesses after providing the teachers in my school with SRSD writing instruction? <u>This question is too long. Cut to the essence of the question.</u></p>	<p>Enquiring:</p> <p>Using TILLS, the reliable, valid, and comprehensive test kit (introduced in 2016 with 30 years of research behind it) to test oral and written language skills in students ages 6- 18 years, specifically in the area of written expression. This test yields 3 scores.</p>	<p>Examining:</p> <p>If I could get a hold of the subset of the populations writing samples from past years that would provide a great resource to each student’s progress over the years. In Paterson students’ files follow them from school to school. <u>Maybe. But how would you distinguish the effects of your program from the antural maturation of the student writers?</u></p>	<p>Experiencing:</p> <p>Observing subset of students interacting with the writing process. <u>For what purposes?</u></p>

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCE 1	DATA SOURCE 2	DATA SOURCE 3
<p>Subsidiary Question 1:</p> <p>How can self-regulating strategy development (SRSD) tools focusing on expository writing skills positively impact teacher instructional effectiveness resulting in higher state student assessment score growth in the writing process for struggling middle grade students in an urban, multi-lingual setting?</p>	<p>Enquiring: Questionnaires/SURVEY assessing strengths and weakness in writing process (electronic via Google docs) <u>Administered to whom?</u></p>	<p>Examining: Observing students in a writing task <u>and</u> interview the <u>teacher's</u> who are working with me on this research project to obtain their observations</p>	<p>Experiencing: Use graphic organizers with my own <u>8th</u> grade students and watch their development. <u>Why only your students? Why the shift in participants?</u></p>

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Research Questions	Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3
<p>Subsidiary Question 2: What are some instructional tools currently on the market and available to ELA classroom teacher use to remediate substandard writing in this student population?</p>	<p>Enquiring: Questionnaires/SURVEY assessing strengths and weakness in writing process (electronic via Google docs) Surveys will be distributed a different intervals of the process to receive feedback from both student and teacher. Interviews will also be conducted. Conduct interviews with teachers about what they are currently doing that works to build their students' writing skills.</p>	<p>Examining: Observing students in a writing task or interview the teacher's who are working with me on this research project to obtain their observations</p>	<p>Experiencing: Use graphic organizers with my own 8th grade students and watch their development. Students in grades 4-8 will work in the Writing Adventures Workbook provided to them.</p>

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCE 1	DATA SOURCE 2	DATA SOURCE 3
<p>Subsidiary Question 3: What would some of the key elements be in establishing a school-wide pilot program to teach student self-regulating writing process strategies and how would teachers monitor progress, establish a baseline and then implement multiple vehicles to gauge student improvement/remediation in these areas?</p>	<p>Enquiring: Surveys will be distributed a different intervals of the process to receive feedback from both student and teacher. Interviews will also be conducted. <u>Why do you need both surveys and interviews?</u></p>	<p>Examining: Provide a journal for each student to write their thoughts about the writing process as the new strategies are introduced interview teachers to get their relative thoughts and feelings on progress monitoring and effectiveness.</p> <p><u>I like this mode of data collection vey much.</u></p>	<p>Experiencing: Respond to my own experience using the SRSD with my own students.</p> <p><u>I would be wary of you, the primary researcher, being the sole source of this data collection method.</u></p>

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCE 1	DATA SOURCE 2	DATA SOURCE 3
<p>Subsidiary Question 4:</p> <p>At its core, what is the nature of writing problems for struggling writers living in urban districts and what are the challenges that both students and teachers face when teaching and learning to perform this most crucial and essential component of daily life – communicating effectively via the writing process?</p> <p><u>I think that this question moves beyond the scope of your particular study. Discuss with your advisor.</u></p>	<p>Enquiring: Surveys will be distributed a different intervals of the process to receive feedback from both student and teacher. Interviews will also be conducted.</p>	<p>Examining: Student writing samples randomly through total population selecting every 3rd person on the roster (4th through 8th grades)g Artifacts are key</p>	<p>Experiencing:</p>

REVERSE TIMELINE

December 1, 2017	Action Research Report due to Advisor <i>Summary of AR due to Advisor (30 credit candidates)</i>
November 1, 2017	Report of Findings due to Advisor
October 1, 2017	Revision of Sections I, II, III due to advisor (suggested) <u>YOUR TIMELINE IS OVERPLANNED WITH DATA COLLECTION. THERE IS NO ENOUGH TIME FOR THE ANALYSIS AND REPORTING OF FINDINGS.</u>
September 2017	RESEARCHER: Continue the monitoring process once findings are summarized and create a “Steps to Action Chart” and then establish a writing routine which includes an outline. Seek feedback from trusted friends and loyal colleagues. Triangulate my research and determine the mean and standard deviation data.
August 2017	RESEARCHER: Develop action plan and answer the question: “Based on what I have learned from this investigation, what should I do now?”
July 2017	RESEARCHER: Analyze findings from data collection and prepare qualitative and quantitative data for analysis.
June 2017	RESEARCHER: Collect each student’s personal writing journal and Sentence Sense notebook to analyze. Collect back-end feedback in the form of Google surveys and personal interviews with both students and teachers. SCHOOL-LEVEL: Conduct personal one-to-one retesting using TILLS (35 students across 5 middle grade levels).
May 2017	SCHOOL-LEVEL- Students will produce writing samples based on tools provided to teachers by researcher and modeled by teachers. January, February, March, April, May and June will be the main months for students to actively engage in the process from which researcher will cull data.
April 2017	SCHOOL-LEVEL- Students will produce writing samples based on tools provided to teachers by researcher and modeled by teachers. January, February, March, April, May and June will be the main months for students to actively engage in the process from which researcher will cull data.
March 2017	SCHOOL-LEVEL- Students will produce writing samples based on tools provided to teachers by researcher and modeled by teachers. January, February, March, April, May and June will be

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	the main months for students to actively engage in the process from which researcher will cull data.
February 2017	SCHOOL-LEVEL- Ask teachers to participate in a Google docs survey inquiring about teaching writing. Ask teachers (ELA and Social Studies) to select three students, one from each tier for this project and obtain the necessary parent permissions for participation. Once selected, whole class of students will take a Google survey, gauging their feeling about writing. Additionally, I will ask for a writing sample from earlier in the year. Students participating in study will receive a personal Writer’s notebook. Do a PLC on SDRD for teachers, paraprofessionals and school administrators on what? . Conduct personal one-to-one initial testing using TILLS (35 students across 5 middle grade levels). February, March and April will be the three main months for students to actively engage in the process from which researcher will cull data. Will endeavor to incorporate the Writing Adventure Workbook & Journal into use by the 35 selected students with no conflict with district PARCC writing initiative.
January 2017	WPUNJ - CARP Proposals read and returned – Share with Field Advisor. Use Field advisor’s input fine tune survey/interview questions. DISTRICT-LEVEL – Share CARP with Board of Education and request permission to administer TILLS to six students randomly selected in five grade-levels. Discuss the reliability of this evidence-based test, TILLS, with the Interim Associate Chief Academic Officer. SCHOOLWIDE LEVEL- Share CARP with Principal and receive her approval to proceed. Students and teachers will be preparing to undertake PARCC writing model in preparation for PARCC assessment. Since TILLS assessment requires a six-month window, I must administer the TILLS to the 35 selected students in January once they have been identified by the seven teachers (5 ELA teachers and 2 Social Studies teachers).
December 15, 2016	Action Research Proposal Submitted

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[015-9606-8](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11145-015-9606-8) Why did you chose an international study? Was this the only study using culturally diverse students that you could access?

