

PILOT STUDY:
TEACHING WRITING STRATEGIES TO STUDENTS
WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

HOWARD DU BOSE, JR.: Pilot Study: Teaching Writing Strategies to Students With Learning Disabilities
(Under the Direction of M. R. Coleman)

This study is predicated on the need for a strategy to better teach writing to high school students with learning disabilities. Most schools of education do a good job of showing new teachers how to teach writing to non-disabled students, but sometimes do not teach specific strategies for teaching writing to students with learning disabilities.

This paper first examines several different strategies designed to teach writing to students with learning disabilities, then picks a strategy developed by researchers at the University of Kansas and examines how well this strategy works with learning disabled students in a real world public high school resource class. Specifically, this researcher attempts to replicate the original research findings.

To my wife Susan Hester, for putting up with this effort for so long,
and to all my students who have studied, worked on, and learned
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Most students with learning disabilities are being taught in the regular education classroom for much of their school day (Boudah & Weiss, 2002; Hallenbeck, 2002). This is part of the growing trend of mainstreaming students with disabilities, both to better their education by interaction with their non-disabled peers (as legislated in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and its successor statute, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, reauthorized in 1997 and 2004) and at the same time save money, and in part because of the U.S. Government mandates of No Child Left Behind (Cutbirth & Benge, 1997; Mcleskey, Henry, & Hodges, 1999). Historically not enough attention has been given on an undergraduate level to developing and teaching special instructional strategies to better teach students with learning disabilities and instructing teachers how to use these techniques (Coleman, 2000; Dice, Dieterich, Gammon, Schultze, & Starr, 1996; Paul, Epanchin, Rosselli, & Duchnowski, 1996). Indeed the greatest number of students in public schools do not have learning disabilities, and therefore may not need special instructional techniques. Many teachers, even teachers of students with learning disabilities, have little time or opportunity to go back to graduate school to learn these special techniques, once they start teaching.

This can make a teacher feel frustrated. Many regular education and some special education teachers feel unprepared and overwhelmed when they face students with disabilities in their classrooms (Larrivee, & Cook, 1979; Wilczenski, 1992; Coleman, 2000).

In a survey by the U.S. Department of Education (1999), only 20 percent of teachers felt they were well enough prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Many teachers have therefore struggled and to this day continue to struggle to make regular education techniques work with special education students. Teacher burnout can be the result of this struggle, especially when all this work shows few positive results (Sagor, 2000, p. 10).

Learning disabilities show up in many ways: memory, metacognition, social and behavioral characteristics, as well as reading, math, and written language (Boudah & Weiss, 2002). The identification and greatest emphasis in remediation, resource or inclusion, in public schools have usually been in the areas of mathematics, reading, and writing. As far back as the post-WWII golden years of homogeneous schools, and in the non-MTV, non-computer age, reading problems were rightly identified as major stumbling blocks for students with learning disabilities, indeed all students, and reading remediation programs were developed, even for these students without learning disabilities (Flesch, 1955).

Research has shown that students with learning disabilities learn better when instruction is direct, explicit, and contains strategies that work in a step-by-step fashion. It is also important that feedback is provided during the learning process (Boudah & Weiss, 2002; Swanson & Hoskyn, 1998).

I was exposed to special reading programs before initial certification and licensure, but not to any special writing strategy programs. While teaching high school students with learning disabilities, I saw that teaching reading was good, but that assuming reading instruction would improve writing ability, was not working. I felt that since writing is such a critical skill for students a specialized writing program or strategy was needed to enable these

students with disabilities to learn how to write, to help ensure their high school success, and eventual graduation.

Driven my desire for student success, I searched for such a writing program, and my research revealed a number of programs that could possibly be effective. The question then was: which one of these strategies seems easy enough for the students to learn and use, as well as lending itself to direct and effective instruction in a Special Education resource setting?

In my search, I reviewed the following strategies. They will be elaborated upon in the literature review section of this paper.

One of the strategies reviewed was the Self-Directed Organizational Strategy of L. M. Barry and W. E. Moore, IV. This is a whole language writing strategy taught over a twelve-week period, that covers the entire writing process from planning to product. It involves a five-finger reminding device for use with the five parts of the process. In their research Barry and Moore taught this to middle school students with learning disabilities, and were able to bring their subjects up to the test mean for that state (Barry & Moore, 2004).

Another strategy reviewed, that of B. J. Scott and M. R. Vitale, uses the Writing Wheel device as a writing aid. This strategy is another whole language process starting with prewriting planning. Generalization is not part of this strategy. Scott and Vitale also focused on middle school students and offered anecdotal evidence of success from one student (Scott & Vitale, 2003).

M. L. Marchisan and S. R. Alber offered a four-part whole language writing process that used mnemonics and lists as memory aids. Their strategy was reminiscent of Scott and

Vitale. Marchisan and Alber also offered only one middle school student as proof of success. No mention was made of generalization (Marchisan & Alber, 2001).

M. J. Hallenbeck published another five-step holistic strategy involving the whole writing process, that was heavy on planning and organizing. He did involve high school as well as middle school students as subjects in his study. His results indicated that all his subjects showed improvement in their writing over one school year. Generalization was again not part of the process (Hallenbeck, 1996).

The final strategy that I reviewed was developed by the University of Kansas, and was supported by two research studies (Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, & Alley, 1989; Schumaker & Deshler, 2003). This strategy was focused on the actual technical process of writing, rather than the whole writing process of idea, planning, and organizing. The University of Kansas had separate strategies for sentence writing, paragraph writing, theme writing, and editing. These strategies use generalization as the last part of each of these strategies.

With a narrow focus on how to write the three parts of a paragraph, and different types of paragraph, Schmidt, Schumaker, and their co-authors presented a process that was more concrete, easier to learn, and easier to teach than many of the others. The generalization part was also unique to this strategy. Results of the paragraph writing strategy showed that it worked well with high school students, which were the target group of this study.

As a result of the reviews of all these strategies, I chose the Paragraph Writing Strategy developed by the University of Kansas team for use in my study skills resource classes. This was a learning process for students and teacher. Even though instruction was sometimes imperfect, the results showed improvement in writing by most of the students

participating in the instruction. This paper is the result of this search for a good writing strategy, as well as one teacher's attempts to learn how to teach it in the classroom.

At this point the question became: Does the University Of Kansas Paragraph Writing Strategy produce positive gains on paragraph writing scores for high school students with learning and other health impaired disabilities in a real-world, multi-ethnic public high school resource room setting?

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

Teachers of students with learning and other disabilities recognize and struggle with the fact that their students have a very high incidence of writing difficulties (Boudah & Weiss, 2002; Schumaker & Deshler, 2003). This is arguably at least as prevalent as the incidence of reading problems. Reading and writing difficulties seem to be linked or at least occur in some of the same disabled students (Bardine, 1997; Boudah & Weiss, 2002).

Many teachers and researchers see that students with learning disabilities have:

- a) difficulty learning information,
 - b) difficulty processing and remembering information, and
 - c) difficulty expressing and writing about the information that they have learned
- (Bardine, 1997; Boudah & Weiss, 2002).

Even though students with learning disabilities may have average or above average intelligence, they may have difficulty learning both the information they will need to write about, and the skills needed to write (Bardine, 1997).

Studies conducted in 1998 indicated that a sizeable minority of students, with and without learning disabilities, have very poor writing skills (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). The results of a student's learning are often assessed by how well he or she can generalize the learned information to other tasks and situations, and this assessment is usually, but not always, a test or some sort of written product. So it is problematic if a student

has obtained the knowledge that is expected by educators, but is unable to express his knowledge in written form.

Standardized writing tests are also challenging for students with learning disabilities. In North Carolina, for example, 10th-grade students are expected to pass a writing assessment in order to graduate and receive a diploma. Students with learning disabilities have serious problems with writing assessments such as this (Barry & Moore, 2004). In addition, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), which is used by many colleges in the admissions process, now has a writing portion that is worth one-third of the possible total of points.

Writing has become increasingly important to a high school student's educational success, and for graduation and college entrance. Younger students with learning disabilities may become so frustrated that they see no pathway to college, and may even be discouraged enough to wonder about finishing high school (Coleman, 1994). Further more, teaching good writing skills is even more important for students with learning disabilities, who traditionally have more trouble graduating and getting into college (Barry & Moore, 2004). Being accepted to college becomes even more difficult for students with learning disabilities, if they have difficulties writing a coherent essay during the application process.

Even for the non-college-bound student with learning disabilities, a lack of effective writing skills can adversely affect job and promotion prospects, since written communication can be deemed essential for success in the workplace (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003). In addition to this, lifetime earnings for students with writing problems, with or without a high school diploma, may be lower than for other workers, due to their inability to obtain higher paying jobs, and to the loss of opportunities once in the workplace (Barry & Moore, 2004).

Successful Writing

So what, exactly, does successful writing encompass? Most English teachers understand that good writing is a multi-part process. Firstly, the student must have the knowledge and information about which to write or must know how and where to go get this information and how to retain it. Secondly, the student must be able to organize the information. Thirdly, the student must be able to communicate the knowledge and information to a reader in written form.

When addressing these elements of writing, research and literature on the writing problems of secondary and high school students with learning disabilities suggest that writing strategies generally divide into three areas:

- a) the process of prewriting and organization, (Marchisan & Alber, 2001, Scott & Vitale, 2003)
- b) the mechanics of the writing process itself, (Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, & Alley, 1989; Schumaker & Deshler, 2003) and
- c) a holistic combination of the two (Bardine, 1997; Hallenbeck, 1995).

Problems with Writing for Students with Learning Disabilities

Students with learning disabilities have a multitude of problems with the writing process. These problems start at the beginning, with ideas. These students often have trouble generating ideas (Marchisan & Alber, 2001), and in some cases even understanding that the writing task requires more than “yes” or “no” answers (Bardine, 1997).

These students also have problems with prewriting tasks. Many times high school teachers regularly observe that non-disabled students just sit down and start writing without doing any thinking. Many students with learning disabilities also do this and indeed do no,

little, or at best poor planning (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003; Barry & Moore, 2004; Schumaker & Deschler, 2003; Scott & Vitale, 2003). Basic writing organization tools, in the form of written or pictorial outlines or organizers, are seldom used, and organization of any kind may be totally lacking with these disabled students (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003; Bardine, 1997; Barry & Moore, 2004; Boudah & Weiss, 2002; Marchisan & Alber, 2001). Understanding what audience they are writing for is another prewriting problem that these students have (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003).

Once the actual writing has started, students with learning disabilities often have trouble with sentence structure, and in writing complete and complicated sentences (Boudah & Weiss, 2002; Schumaker & Deshler, 2003) Some students have similar problems producing coherent writing (Marchisan & Alber, 2001) and in paragraphing (Bardine, 1997).

Students with learning disabilities often have trouble producing enough volume of writing (Boudah & Weiss, 2002), and in general produce shorter essays and written work than their non-disabled peers (Bardine, 1997; Barry & Moore, 2004). They also struggle with elaboration, or being able to fully expound upon ideas, reasons, or explanations (Bardine, 1997).

Student writers with learning disabilities have special trouble with writing mechanics: spelling, punctuation, and capitalization (Bardine, 1997; Boudah & Weiss, 2002; Marchisan & Alber, 2001; Schumaker & Deshler, 2003; Scott & Vitale, 2003). Correcting these mistakes can be a problem as well (Schumaker & Deshler, 2003). Vocabulary and word choice is a problem for some writers (Boudah & Weiss, 2002).

The final difficulty that writers with learning disabilities can have is with revision. For many of these students, the first draft is the only draft. They cannot seem to make their written work better by re-working it (Schumaker & Deschler, 2003; Scott & Vitale, 2003).

Studies of Approaches to Writing

Much of the research focuses on special education students with learning disabilities, on systematic approaches, systems, or strategies for learning and on teaching techniques for writing sentences and paragraphs. To be useful for students with learning disabilities, writing strategies need to include direct instruction with tasks organized in a step-by-step approach. Modeling, practice, and feedback are an essential part of this process (Boudah & Weiss, 2002). Explicit instruction—which seems much like direct instruction—and feedback are mentioned as extremely important in one study (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003).

In an effort to explore different avenues for teaching students with learning disabilities to write better, I examined the following papers and studies in this review of the literature: Barry and Moore (2004); Scott and Vitale (2003); Marchisan and Alber (2001); Hallenbeck (1995); Schmidt, Schumaker, Deshler, and Alley (1989) and Schumaker and Deshler (2003). These six studies will be summarized below. These studies address prewriting, writing techniques and combinations, also described as 1. organization and content, 2. mechanics and writing process, 3. organization, content, and mechanics. More simply stated: The reviewed literature addressed what to write, how to write, and what and how to write.

Several studies (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003; Bardine, 1997; Barry & Moore, 2004; Scott & Vitale, 2003) have shown the following writing problems for students with learning disabilities:

1. their essays were generally shorter and of poorer quality,
2. they were less likely to adequately plan and organize their essays, and
3. they were more likely to include irrelevant and extraneous material.

Study 1: Self-Directed Organizational Strategy

Looking at standardized writing exams, Barry and Moore in their paper, “Students with Specific Learning Disabilities Can Pass State Competency Exams: Systematic Strategy Instruction Makes a Difference” (2004), examined how students with learning disabilities were able to pass State writing assessments now required in many states by No Child Left Behind. In this paper, the authors discussed some of the specific problems students with learning disabilities have with these assessments, and offered their own systematic writing strategy.

Strategy Used by Barry and Moore. Barry and Moore’s strategy, the Self-Directed Organizational Strategy, involves the student writer using the thumb and four fingers of one hand as a memory prompt. Each of the digits represents a specific sentence of a paragraph, or a paragraph of an essay.

The thumb stands for the topic of the paragraph or essay, and reminds the student to think about the topic and write down three things that support or illustrate the topic. These can also be reasons or arguments.

The index finger, middle finger, and ring finger each stand for one of the reasons or arguments. Each is a reminder to only write about that idea in that section of the piece. In a paragraph, these would be three detail sentences.

The little finger or pinkie, stands for the conclusion sentence in a paragraph or the conclusion paragraph in an essay. Students are reminded of four things by this finger. They

are: 1. State the conclusion. 2. Restate the topic. 3. Summarize the three reasons, arguments, or ideas. And 4. Relate these to the topic.

Barry and Moore's instructional methods over 12 weeks include:

1. explanation, 2. modeling, 3. practice, 4. feedback, and 5. peer review

Students in Barry and Moore Study. Barry and Moore used a group of 20 students with learning disabilities, 15 boys and 5 girls, with a mean age of 13.5 years all of whom were in the eighth grade. The female to male student ratio in the target group was 25% to 75%. 90% of these students were Caucasian, and 10% were African-American. They were compared with a group of 207 regular education students, who had an average age of 13.3 years, and a similar 90%–10% racial mix. The ratio of females to males in the control group was 45% to 55%.

Findings of Barry and Moore Study. The pre-test to post-test scores of the instructed group went up from a mean of 2.7 to a mean of 3.4. With the pre-test only 2 of 20 students passed, while with the post-test, 16 of 20 passed. When compared to the mean of the regular education students at that school in scores on the state competency exam, the instructed group had a mean of 3.9, and the regular students had a mean of 4.1. The state mean on the test was 3.9.

Study 2: The Writing Process Wheel

Another holistic, whole language, writing process or strategy was outlined by Scott and Vitale in "Teaching the Writing Process to Students with LD" (2003). Here the authors promoted a five-step process of writing:

- a) planning/prewriting,
- b) drafting

- c) revising
- d) editing, and
- e) publishing.

For Scott and Vitale, planning/prewriting involved stimulating ideas, collecting information, and organizing ideas and information before writing. Drafting meant to develop the ideas and information into meaningful words, sentences, and paragraphs. Revising involved being able to add, delete and move text around in a draft. Editing covered all the mechanicals, grammar and spelling. Publishing was where their students shared their written products with their peers.

Strategy Used by Scott and Vitale. Instead of mnemonics or the fingers of a student hand, Scott and Vitale's strategy uses the writing wheel, which has their five strategy writing steps printed on it in pie-shaped sections. A circular cover with a wedge cut out is provided. This cover reveals only one step at a time through this cut. Using the wheel, student writers can simplify the writing task by only focusing on one step at a time, in order, instead of skipping around. The steps printed on the wheel cover the complete writing process as Scott and Vitale see it.

Students in Scott and Vitale Study. Scott and Vitale gave an anecdotal case study of one student, a seventh grader with learning disabilities. Before use of the strategy, this student avoided working on writing, was disorganized, and often off task in his regular education classroom. He thought of writing as miscellaneous parts and pieces, and not as a whole process. The authors felt the writing wheel would help teachers become better writing teachers as well.

Findings of Scott and Vitale Study. Scott and Vitale gave as an example of their findings this seventh grade student who avoided writing whenever possible but after introduction to the writing wheel, during a 10-day period, learned to think of writing as a whole process, not just as miscellaneous parts. The student's task completions were consistently high, and he received a grade of B on this particular essay. The student stated, "It worked because it has all the details on it—what you have to do. All I have to do is look at my wheel."

The authors feel the writing wheel would help teachers become better writing teachers as well. It gives something for each student writer to look at and be reminded of the writing steps.

Study 3: The Write Way

An article by Marchisan and Alber, "The Write Way: Tips for Teaching the Writing Process to Resistant Writers" (2001), described an almost identical process to Scott and Vitale, albeit a four-part one, and used several checklists for revising and editing. Their process involves the following steps:

- a) prewriting,
- b) writing,
- c) revising, and
- d) publishing.

Strategy Used by Marchisan and Alber. Marchisan and Alber proposed more of a process and less of a strategy for improving writing. They call it tips for teaching the writing process. They break writing down into the four stages listed above.

First is the prewriting stage, where the student writer answers five questions. The are: 1. Why am I writing? 2. What am I writing about? 3. What am I going to be saying? 4. How am I going to say it? And 5. For whom am I writing this?

In stage two, the actual writing stage, the student writer works on the first draft, based on the answers to these five questions. Here content is more important than mechanics. The emphasis is on getting information on paper. Modeling and co-writing with the teacher are useful tools here.

State three is the revision stage. This is where the rough draft produced in stage two is hammered into shape. The authors provide Editing and Revision Checklists for use in the classroom. Peer editing, self editing, even computer editing are encouraged here.

The final stage is publishing. This is where the final product is displayed in some way for other students and teachers to enjoy, and to help give the student writer a sense of pride in his or her accomplishment.

Students in Marchisan and Alber Study. Marchisan and Alber also presented just one student, a seventh grader with learning disabilities and a history of academic failure. They called him a resistant writer who felt he had much to say, but did not have the ability to say it, and as such was a disruptive influence in the class room. Using this technique, teachers were able to help this student become a communicator and a contributing member of the classroom.

Neither Scott and Vitale nor Marchisan and Alber described generalization of the student's performance. The process itself and the written output of the process seemed to be their main focus. The publishing part of these processes seemed to be aimed at student self-esteem and pride, which can certainly help make a student less reticent to write. These two

processes both seemed to be aimed at directly helping students with learning disabilities produce a good written product during the instructional process.

Findings of Marchisan and Alber Study. Marchisan and Alber also used a single student case study to illustrate their findings. This student was a 10th grader with a history of academic failure, as well as behavior problems, and learned helplessness. This student did have interests and ideas, but was unable to express them in writing, and felt that no one cared.

At the end of his writing experience with Marchisan and Alber's process, the student had evolved socially and academically, calmed down a significant amount, developed a sense of humor, and even found a girlfriend. Marchisan and Alber attribute this transformation to the confidence and feeling of self-worth gained through his newly learned ability to express himself in writing.

Study 4: Cognitive Strategy in Writing

One other paper, Hallenbeck's "Cognitive Strategy in Writing: Welcome Relief for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities" (1996), actually offered a cognitive strategy as a "Holistic enterprise, involving the process of planning, organizing, writing, editing and revising." This was another five-step approach. Hallenbeck's article involved 7th- through 12th-grade students, and focused on only two types of written products: 1. knowledge of a topic, and 2. explaining a process.

Strategy Used in Hallenbeck Study. Hallenbeck calls this the Cognitive Strategy in Writing. This strategy was first developed by C. S. Englert (1990) for students in the upper elementary grades.

The strategy uses the acronym or mnemonic POWER to stand for the five parts of the strategy: plan, organize, write, edit, and revise. It uses “think sheets” for each step. Since this is a cognitive strategy, these sheets force the student writer to think and remind him or her what to think about. Each sheet employs self questions or self-instructions designed to promote the student’s development of that particular writing skill. The student answers the questions on the sheet, then uses the answers during the actual writing process.

Each of the five parts of the strategy has a think sheet, and the editing part has two.

Students in Hallenbeck Study. Hallenbeck’s subjects were 7 white students in grades seven through twelve from a rural Midwestern secondary school. Four were male and 3 were female. All 7 met state and local criteria for learning disabilities placement, and were in a resource room for remediation, and assistance in regular education subjects. The 7 students averaged 4 years below grade level in written language. As measured by pre-test and post-test scores, all students showed significant improvement in all measures of their writing ability over the school year.

Findings in Hallenbeck Study. Hallenbeck’s results showed that students with learning disabilities can be taught and will learn to write paragraphs of these types. In his paper, Hallenbeck mentions his belief that the Kansas strategies focus too much on the writing strategies and techniques themselves, and not enough on prewriting and organization, thus losing the holistic idea of a well-rounded strategy that teaches multiple aspects of writing. In their defense, the University of Kansas Researchers have devised multiple separate strategies that perhaps cover in much more detail than Hallenbeck does, much of what he wrote about. These specific, different, strategies are taught individually, instead of

being lumped into a larger, more generalized, and less easily taught and learned, writing strategy as Hallenbeck recommended.

The Final Approach Reviewed: The Paragraph Writing Strategy

Researchers from the University of Kansas—Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, and Alley in “Effects of Generalization Instruction on the Written Language Performance of Adolescents with Learning Disabilities in the Mainstream Classroom” (1989) and Schumaker and Deshler in “Can Students with LD Become Competent Writers?” (2003)—have focused very strongly on strategies to produce written forms: Sentences, Paragraphs, and Themes. This can be seen as a necessary first step in the holistic, or whole language, writing process, where the student needs to master the medium (writing) before being able to use it adequately to express ideas, knowledge, opinions, or even produce fiction. These two studies zeroed in on only one of these parts: the actual writing process, in order to make instruction and learning simpler.

The Strategy of Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, and Alley. The 1989 paper was based on a study using the University of Kansas Paragraph Writing Strategy. This is one of their strategies which uses this same programmed method of teaching the various parts of writing. The other three University of Kansas strategies studied were:

- a) Sentence Writing Strategy,
- b) Error-Monitoring Strategy, and
- c) Theme Writing Strategy

These three use almost identical teaching methods.

Students in Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, and Alley Study. In this study 7 white high school students (6 male and one female) with learning disabilities were used as subjects. All were mainstreamed, but were in resource room classes 1 or 2 periods a day.

Results of Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, and Alley Study. The results of the 1989 study showed that students with learning disabilities can use the Paragraph Writing Strategy to write better paragraphs and that it is possible to generalize the strategy to their regular classroom work.

Later Study: Schumaker and Deshler. In a later study, Schumaker and Deshler (2003) wrote about the extreme dichotomy of on one hand the “explicit approach” and on the other hand “an implicit, constructivist approach,” and come out in favor of a combination approach. This approach started with a very explicit (supportive) teaching method in the beginning, and moved to a more implicit, independent student approach as the students learned and understood more of the writing (learning) strategies.

Methods of Schumaker and Deshler Study. The University of Kansas researchers support this with data from 14 different studies they have conducted on similar groups of students, using the full range of their Learning Strategies program. Not all of them have involved teaching writing, but all have involved a similar strategy for instruction. To them, the explicit approach usually applied to resource room (or separate) instruction, and the implicit approach applied better in the regular classroom. The resource room, with a smaller number of students, and a resource teacher, allowed for more individual student feedback than is possible in the larger student body of a regular classroom. By starting in the resource room, and later moving into the regular classroom, instructors facilitate better generalization, which was one their primary goals.

Findings of Schumaker and Deshler Study. Schumaker and Deshler (2003) found that their results indicated that middle school and high school students taught these writing strategies were able to significantly improve in two important aspects of writing:

- a) the percentage of complete sentences, and
- b) the percentage of complicated sentences (as opposed to simple sentences).

Other aspects also improved but these two seem important, real world measures. Students in several different geographic areas who had writing strategy instruction also showed improvement on end-of-year standardized writing tests.

The results also showed that students with learning disabilities can use the Paragraph Writing Strategy to write better paragraphs and that it can generalize to their regular classroom work and standardized writing assessments (Schumaker & Deshler, 2003).

Explanation of University of Kansas Strategies. The University of Kansas strategies of Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, and Alley (1989) and Schumaker and Deshler (2003) were more narrowly focused, as well as instructor and student friendly. When developing the individual strategies on such important aspects of writing as sentences, paragraphs, themes, and error-monitoring, they designed into each strategy the same eight basic teaching stages. Once a teacher has mastered this teaching method, he or she can apply it to any of the University of Kansas strategies.

The method is essentially direct instruction, followed by increasing amounts of student participation. Each strategy is contained in an all inclusive teacher manual with specific directions on how it is to be taught. The manual contains many visuals, canned cue cards, examples, work sheets, and other materials that can be copied out onto transparencies and student copies.

University of Kansas: Stages of Strategy Instruction. Stage One is called Pre-Test and Commitment. Students are asked to demonstrate their current level of competence in a given strategy in some sort of pre-test or classroom assessment. This allows the teacher to determine where to start class or individual instruction. At this stage, the importance of the strategy is explained to students, and student promise of enthusiastic participation obtained. This can be done in several ways, but a reciprocal contract was suggested, where the teacher contracted to help the students become better writers, and the students contracted to work hard and learn the strategy.

Stage Two is the Describe stage. The particular strategy, or some part of a strategy, is explained and described to the students. Visuals are normally used to enhance direct instruction and to facilitate the explanation of the strategy to the students.

Stage Three is the Modeling stage. The instructor demonstrates the strategy by performing it with the students observing and participating as much as possible. In this stage the students get to see the strategy used properly. They are able to ask and answer questions and help the teacher model.

Stage Four is Verbal Practice, where the instructor talks the students through the strategy. Everyone practices, talking, explaining, and working together. Each student produces a product that can be used to assess progress.

Stage Five is Controlled Practice, and here mastery should be obtained. There are specific guidelines to the practice. Mastery is obtained when students are successful on 80% or more of the individual tasks. The strategy instruction manual contains worksheets or other tasks in a gradable form. In the Paragraph Writing Strategy, each part of the paragraph: Topic sentences, Detail sentences, and Clincher sentences, are taught separately to mastery in this

stage. After mastery of the parts, controlled practice is applied to the whole paragraph, and to different types of paragraphs.

Stage Six is Advanced Practice. For most strategies this stage is where the students start doing real world work that relates to school tasks, or even the real school tasks themselves.

Stage Seven is the Post-Test and student commitment stage, where students perform a similar task to the pre-test to ascertain how much improvement has been obtained, and if mastery has been obtained. The students at this stage also pledge to use the newly learned strategy in their every day school work.

Stage Eight is the Generalization stage, where the students are shown how to transfer their new knowledge to other topics, classes, and even to tasks outside of school.

At the end of most stages, especially the practice stages, the decision must be made to go back and re-teach, or move on to the next stage. Re-teaching is necessary if mastery is not obtained.

The Present Study

Surveying this research enabled this teacher to decide which writing strategy might work the best in the three Study Skills classes. A strategy was needed with direct instruction, which is often necessary for best results with Special Education students, that was easy to understand, to teach, and to learn. A strategy was needed that could occupy these classes for the two to three months remaining in the school year, and that had a fair chance of being successful.

Since the University of Kansas Paragraph Writing strategy was more narrowly focused, more direct, and seemed easier to teach than the other methods reviewed, it was

chosen. This study was an attempt to see if the teacher was correct, by analyzing student achievement to see if it matched the results of the 1989 University of Kansas study,

The question for this study was: “Does the implementation of the University of Kansas Paragraph Writing Strategy produce positive gains on paragraph writing scores for high school students with learning and other health impaired disabilities in a real-world, multi-ethnic public high school resource room setting?”

Chapter 3.

Method

This study was done using an Action Research model (Sagor, 2000). Action Research is a process of inquiry or investigation conducted by the folks who will later take action based on the research, such as teachers. One of the primary motivations of this type of research is that it helps the researcher improve what he is already doing. In this case, it helped me improve my teaching of writing to learning disabled students in my study skills class. This paper will be presented using first person voice to better capture the tone of the action researcher and to share the case-stories.

Action Research

Action Research uses a seven-step research process. Step number one is to select a focus. In this case my focus was on writing strategies for learning disabled high school students. Step number two is to clarify theories. Here I looked at several strategies and ideas for teaching writing to learning disabled students. Having picked one I thought was best, I went on to the next step. Step number three requires the researcher to identify the research question or questions. My question was whether I could replicate the results of the original study in my classroom. Step number four is collecting data. Here I used the pre-test, post-test, and learning sheet scores required for mastery in the strategy I was using. Step number five is analyzing the data. I looked at whether or not there was improvement in my students after instruction with this strategy. Step number six is reporting the results, which I am doing here. Step number seven is taking informed action. The action that resulted from this study

was that I was able to write lesson plans for my school district to implement the paragraph writing strategy and several of the other University of Kansas Strategies in a new curriculum named Learning Strategies, which eventually should be taught district-wide to all learning disabled students.

Case-stories will be used to show the progress of each student through the learning process. These case-stories will illustrate how the Paragraph Writing Strategy was used with each student.

The Classes Involved in This Study

Data from three high school resource classes will be used for this research. These classes were taught by the researcher. Each class initially had 3 to 6 students, not all of whom were students with learning disabilities. These students had previously been randomly assigned to these 3 classes during the regular scheduling process for this school. The initial criteria for assignment was that each student had 'Study Skills' listed as a required service in their Individual Education Plans (IEP). The only other criteria was availability of space in each student's seven-class schedule. Non-IEP students were occasionally placed in these classes by the school administration on a temporary and sometimes long-term basis. There were other Study Skills classes at this school that did not participate in this study.

Study Skills was intended to be a resource class where individual students could get intensive help in order to succeed in school. This formed an ideal subject group and setting with whom to implement the Paragraph Writing Strategy. Because class time was also used by the students to make up work, get their extended time on tests, and do homework, however, only an average of 25 to 30 minutes of a 50-minute period was actually used for the instruction of this writing strategy. Some students and parents were resistant to the change in

focus from “study hall” to “strategies sessions.” Some weeks, for various reasons, all five days of instruction could not be used for a learning strategy instruction.

The school involved is an arts magnet public school for grades 6–12 with about 1400 students in a medium-sized (about 150,000) southern town. Students are chosen for this school by a blind lottery. Racial balance generally remains close to 50% African-American and 50% white. There is a small but growing body of Hispanic students. Some students spend all seven years of their secondary education at this one school, while others enter by lottery just for high school. Other students lottery-in for sixth grade, and leave after middle school, seeking to attend a more traditional high school.

Participants in this Study by Ethnicity, Gender, and Socio-Economics

The participants in this study were all high school students with disabilities, in 1 of these 3 study skills classes. No class had more than 6 students. There were a total of 9 students, of the 10 who started, who completed the instruction studied here. Only 8 students participated in both the pre-test and post-test and were included in the achievement results, even though the 2 other students participated in some or all of the actual instruction and are also included in the case-stories. There were 2 females and 8 males. There was 1 Hispanic, 3 African-American, and 6 white students. By grade they were divided as follows: 3 ninth-graders, 5 tenth-graders, 1 eleventh-grader, and 1 twelfth-grader. The name of each student has been changed to ensure confidentiality

The socioeconomic level of the families of these students ranged from lower to upper middle class, with the predominant level being lower middle class. Seven of the 10 came from homes that were single-parent families at the time.

Disability Identification

By Exceptional Children category, there were 4 students with learning disabilities, 4 students identified as Other Health Impaired, and 1 student identified as Educably Mentally Disabled. In North Carolina, identification as a student with learning disabilities required a 15-point discrepancy between full scale IQ and an educational achievement score. In most cases, the WISC-III, administered by a licensed Psychologist, was used to determine IQ, and the Woodcock-Johnson III educational inventory was used to determine the educational achievement. Other Health Impaired, as an identification, was usually based upon a medical doctor's evaluation of a student as Attention Deficit Disabled, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disabled. To be identified as Educably Mentally Disabled in North Carolina a student must have an IQ between 50 and 70.

Six of these students were identified in written language, five were identified in reading, one in organization, and one in math. Some students were identified in multiple areas. (See Table 1.) Statistically this group of students broke down as follows:

Median IQ	97.5
Mean IQ	98
Range of IQ	57 (69 to 126)
Median WJIII Writing	87
Mean WJIII Writing	87.2
Range WJIII Writing	46 (61 to 107)
Discrepancy Median	-11.5
Discrepancy Mean	-11.5
Discrepancy Range	-16 (+11 to-27)

Table 1

Students Participating in the Study

Name	Gender	Race ^a	Grade	Disability ^{b,c}		IQ ^d	WJ-III WL Score ^e	Student #
Aurora	F	W	10	OHI	rd/wl	77	89	1
Quatro	M	AA	10	LD	math	108	97	2
Marty	M	W	11	OHI		108	96	3
Brad	M	W	9	OHI		126	107	4
April	F	W	10	LD	wl	113	105	5
Dan	M	Mix	10	LD	rd	96	85	6
José	M	H	10	LD	rd/wl	98	79	7
Elmo	M	AA	9	LD	rd/wl	88	61	8
Roy	M	W	12	OHI	wl/org	97	79	9
Rashid	M	AA	9	EMD	rd/wl	69	74	10

^a Race: AA=African-American, H=Hispanic, Mix=Mixed, W=White.

^b Disability: EMD=Educably Mentally Disabled, LD=Learning Disabled, OHI=Other Health Impaired.

^c Areas identified: math=mathematics, org=organization, rd=reading, wl=written language.

^d IQ: Usually from the WISC-III, administered by a licensed Psychologist.

^e Written Language Score from Woodcock-Johnson III educational inventory.

Teacher Conducting Study

As with all Action Research, the teacher instructing the class and the teacher conducting this study were one in the same. At this time, I had five years teaching experience in the resource room setting, teaching Study Skills, and several social studies curricula (American History, World Geography, and Economics and Government), and at least four years of inclusion experience. I was a 57-year-old Vietnam veteran lateral-entry teacher, certified in secondary social studies and learning disabilities. Before teaching the Paragraph Writing Strategies to these students, I received no formal training in any of the University of Kansas strategies.

Instructional Procedures in Study

The instruction covered in this study took place in the spring semester of the school year over approximately 3 months, from February through April. Instruction conformed, as much as possible, to the guidelines included in the University of Kansas paragraph writing strategy.

A pre-test and a post-test were given. On the pre-test, instructions were verbal, with important words written on the board. The students were allowed to choose their own topic and were instructed to write a good paragraph, skipping every other line. Students were allowed to use computers, but none did. Paper was provided.

The post-test was given much the same, except that there was a prompt. This was given verbally and written on the board. The other instructions were the same.

During instruction, students used learning sheets provided in the paragraph writing strategy *Student Lessons Volume* (Schumaker & Lyerla, 1990). Students kept track and recorded their own scores on a Student Progress sheet. No attempt was made to check their

recording for accuracy, as I was converting their raw scores into grades. These went into the calculations for their nine-week grades.

The paragraph writing strategy has divided paragraph writing into three distinct types of sentences: 1. topic sentences, 2. detail sentences, and 3. clincher or conclusion sentences. The eight-step instructional methods were used, in series, on each of these sentence types, and mastery was to be obtained before going on to the next sentence type.

For each type of sentence, worksheets examining and assessing student achievement towards mastery after each stage of instruction are included in the student manual. The worksheets were called Learning Sheets and for each type of sentence, Topic, Detail, and Clincher, there were several different sets of learning sheets. Each set assessed a different skill set of learning that particular type of sentence. For example, for Topic sentences, the skill sets were as follows:

- a) identifying and underlining the topic sentence in a paragraph,
- b) identifying which of the 3 types of topic sentences a given sentence is, and
- c) writing a topic sentence of a particular type, when given the necessary information.

The number of sets of learning sheets depended on the particular number of individual skills needed to master that type of sentence.

Within each set of learning sheets were four sections, each one of increasing complexity and difficulty, but all testing only the particular skill for that set. Mastery was considered to be 80 percent correct. In most cases assessment scoring was based on thirty points, with each of the ten questions worth three points. There was a Student Progress Chart where scores could be plotted by each student, and where indicated improvement would be

an incentive for harder work and better efforts. The intention was for each student to show improvement over the four sections, or, once attaining mastery on two consecutive learning sheets, to be able to skip any remaining sheets. Samples of all of these learning sheets can be found in Appendix A.

The Paragraph Writing Strategy also included instruction in eight different types of paragraphs. These paragraph types are: narrative paragraphs, step-by-step paragraphs, descriptive paragraphs, facts paragraphs, reasons paragraphs, examples paragraphs, compare paragraphs, contrast paragraphs, and, of course, compare and contrast paragraphs. This allows the students to learn more about writing paragraphs than just putting the proper types of sentences together. This instruction was included at this time of this study, but mastery was not tested.

Performance Measurement of Study Results

The paragraph writing strategy *Instructors Manual* (Schumaker & Lysterla, 1991) contains a fairly complicated rubric for grading the pre- and post-tests, that goes with the Paragraph Score Sheet.

First, the scorer numbers each line that is written on. Then the topic, detail, and clincher sentences are identified by line number.

Second, up to 4 points each are awarded for the topic sentence, each of four detail sentences, and the clincher sentence. This depends on the quality of these sentences. There are a maximum of 24 points. Points are also given for transitions between detail sentences.

Third, up to four points each are awarded for point of view and verb tense. The detail sentences must be in the same tense, and written from the same point of view.

Fourth, up to two points each are given for title and format, and up to six points are awarded for sentence variety. There are fourteen types of sentences that can be used.

The total of all the points earned is the mastery score, with a maximum of fifty points, and when the mastery score is multiplied by two, it gives the mastery percentage. Mastery is considered at or above ninety percent.

The student learning sheets were also contained in the student materials book and as stated above were used for each area of instruction. Examples of the learning sheets are included in Appendix A. The first and second set of these sheets dealt with simple identification of type of sentence. The third set of sheets required the student to write sentences using hints and aids, while for detail sentences the fourth and fifth set of sheets requires sentences to be written completely independently by the student. Once mastery was obtained on two sheets in a row, the student went on to the next task. For this study, mastery was used for instruction pacing, but overall improvement was measured by comparison of pre-test and post-test results. Even though progress should have shown up on each student's progress chart, it was found that individual learning sheet scores varied widely day-to-day, and did not seem to be indicative of overall improvement.

During the period covered by this study and the classroom instruction of these students, the entire strategy was taught, but the assessment learning sheet sets were only used for the Topic and Detail sentences. Therefore there are scores for most students for the first twelve assessments of each of these two sentence types, and none for clincher sentences. This was due to insufficient time. In addition, due to absences, almost all of the nine students missed some learning sheets and therefore had missing scores.

Chapter 4.

Results

The results from this study were compared to the results of the original study on the University of Kansas Paragraph Writing Strategy (Schmidt, et al., 1989), and it was found that the post-test mean improvement in paragraph writing was similar. Two students in this study achieved mastery while no students achieved mastery in the original study. Since some of the scoring methods have been changed since that original work was done, making a more direct comparison was difficult.

The pre-test scores of the 9 students in the study ranged from 24% to 72%, with a mean score of 42.8%, and a median score of 48%

Post-test scores ranged from 48% to 84%. The post-test mean was 67.25%, an increase of almost 25 points. The post-test median was 68%, 20 points higher than the pre-test.

Two of the students in this study scored mastery on the post-test, one at 80% and one at 84%. Neither of these were pre-test high scorers. Both were below the pre-test mean, one at 26%, one at 36%. Two students actually had lower scores on the post-test. One decreased from 72% to 68%, which is close enough to be scoring error. The other decreased from 58% to 48%, for reasons that did not seem evident. The mean improvement was 22 points, with a range of -10 to +54, or 64 points. The increases of post-test over pre-test was mostly much larger (18 to 54 points) than the decreases (-4 to -10 points). Even though only 2 out of 9

students achieved mastery, and 2 of 9 did not show post-test improvement, the others improved a measurable amount. See Figure 1 and Table 2.

It should be noted in Figure 1 that there were essentially two groups of students, the five who scored close to or above fifty percent on the pre-test, and the three who did not. It can be seen on the graph that the three lower-scoring pre-test students all did much better on their post-test, two achieving mastery. Of the five higher scoring pre-test students, three improved, but two actually went down slightly on their post-test. We have incomplete data from two students.

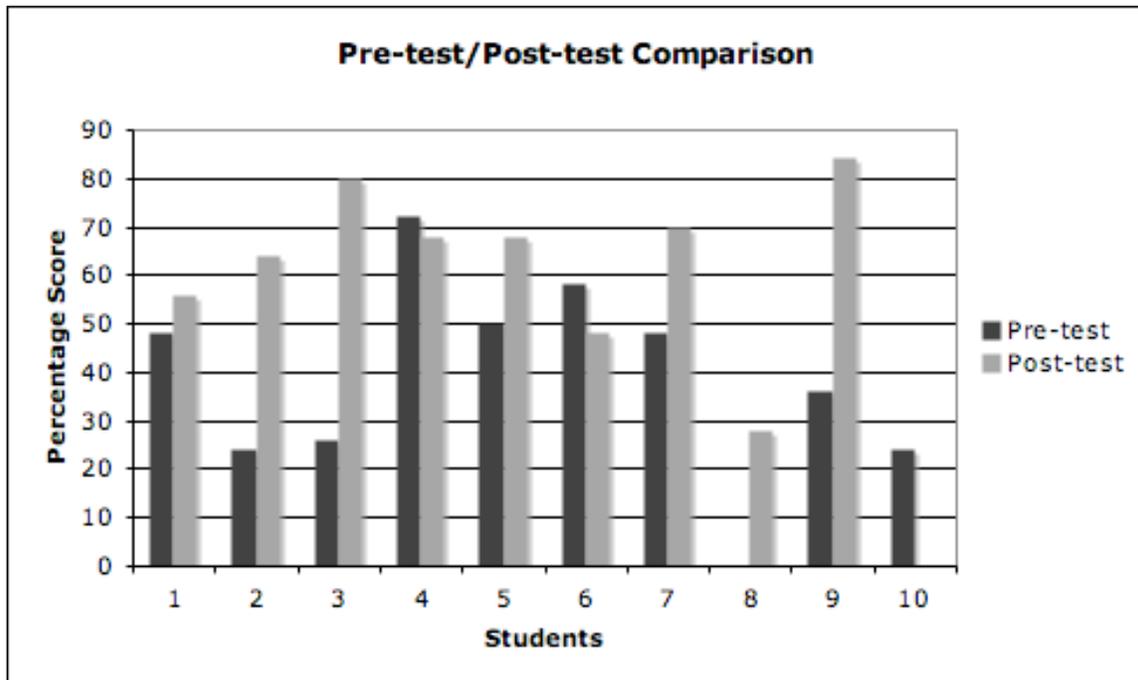


Figure 1. Percentage Scores on the Pre-test and the Post-test

Table 2

Pattern of Achievement for Participants

Name	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score	Change	Reference #
Aurora	48	56	8	1
Quatro	24	64	40	2
Marty	26	80	54	3
Brad	72	68	-4	4
April	50	68	18	5
Dan	58	48	-10	6
José	48	70	22	7
Elmo	N/A	28	N/A	8
Roy	36	84	44	9
Rashid	24	N/A	N/A	10

Pre- and Post-test Scores and Change are given in percentages.

N/A means datum is not available.

Individual Participant Results

To better understand the students and some of the particular writing challenges each faced, individual results of the Paragraph Writing Strategy are presented in three ways: as case-stories, as learning sheet scores, and as writing samples, where available.

Student Number One

Aurora was a 10th-grade, white female, identified as Other Health Impaired (OHI). When you looked at her, slender and willowy with long, brown hair, you would think of some 1960s flower child, attending the summer of love in San Francisco in 1968. Unfortunately, her disability, a petit-mal epilepsy, sometimes rendered her inattentive in class as if she were as flower child who had had a few too many hits of acid. Still, she was able to improve her writing a little bit.

Her pre-test was a 48% with a post-test of 56%, an improvement, if not a dramatic one. Her topic sentence learning sheet scores, which are the only ones available, showed an 80%, or mastery, score on the first set and a varying set of scores from 50% to 90% on set two. On the third set, her scores climbed from 10% to 60%, not enough for mastery, but showing much improvement.

Aurora was in several of my study skills classes in subsequent years, and continued to improve until late in her senior year, when she seemed to lose interest. Senior year, when she was getting additional writing instruction in her learning strategies class her handwriting degenerated, as did her organization. The last grading period that year, she made the minimum possible passing grade in my class. At the last moment before graduation, she managed to make enough failing grades in enough classes not to graduate.

PRETEST #1

My Best Friend

1. My best friend in the world is Amanda, and none will
2. change that. I love Amanda
3. like a sister. She has been there
4. for me during the ups and down. She cheers me up when I'm down.
5. We have so much in common.
6. Fun together. We do everything together.
7. We never leave each other out of anything, cause that's the way we understand each other.

PRETEST STUDENT #1 POSTTEST

What I did over Spring Break

1. I did all kinds of fun activities! I tried six.
2. I had to find some interesting things I could do with some of my friends.
3. I had to decide which friend to do with.
4. I finally started to do so but it was with Amanda, who asked me to go to her Dad's house.
5. We watched TV, and a movie, then we listened to music.
6. When it was around six we went out to dinner at China Buffet (they have great food).
7. If you ask my opinion, Amanda and I came back to her Dad's house and did database.
8. After that I went back to her room and watched BET and listened to music or radio at same time.

3. Decide what to do
 4. I had to decide which friend to do with.
 5. I finally started to do so but it was with Amanda, who asked me to go to her Dad's house.
 6. When it was around six we went out to dinner at China Buffet (they have great food).
 7. If you ask my opinion, Amanda and I came back to her Dad's house and did database.
 8. After that I went back to her room and watched BET and listened to music or radio at same time.

Figure 2. Writing samples for Student #1, Aurora.

Student Number Two

Quatro was a 10th-grade African-American male, identified as Learning Disabled (LD) in Math. He showed a wry sense of humor, and an interest in politics, public affairs, and current events. He participated in class more than most students, and always made class very interesting, asking questions that challenged other students. Quatro has an IQ that is slightly higher than normal. His performance in many classes was inconsistent. He was always charming and friendly and easily could be a teacher's favorite student.

His pre-test score was 24%, with a rise to 64% on the post-test, the third largest increase of scores in this group. For this student, topic sentence and detail sentence worksheet scores were available. On set one of the topic sentence learning sheets, his scores increased from 60% to 100%, while on set two his scores rose from 50% to 80% (Mastery) but dropped back off to 70%. On set three, his scores bounced from 40% to 30%, twice. His detail sentence learning sheet scores hovered around mastery, in the range of 70% to 100%. Of the eight recorded scores, six were mastery or above.

Quatro continued to work on his math ability. He was not in any more of my Study Skills classes, but senior year developed an interest in the film and the news industries. After he graduated, he pursued a career in the news/television industry.

Zombies Ate My Dreams

1. My favorite movie of all time well it isn't a movie it is kind of a trilogy of
2. movies, but I like them all as one. This collection of classics is The Living Dead tria. Created by the great G. Romero.
3. With these movies comes a well driven
4. plot (subtract the third movie's plot if you will), Romero made these movies to the point of being afraid to walk pass a grave without wonder could the dead come after you.
5. That's what made this movie a horror classic, and a mile stone for zombie movies
6. in general.

PRE-TEST
STUDENT #2
POSTTEST

- 1 I did three of the most fun
- 2 things during spring break. The first
- 3 was as soon as school let out I ~~went~~ ^{went}
- 4 ~~with~~ my girlfriend to the mall,
- 5 where I showed her my favorite stores.
- 6 Game Stop, EB Games, and the book store.
- 7 ② The second thing I did was ^{also} with
- 8 my girlfriend yet again. this time we
- 9 went to the library, ~~to~~ ^{to} goofed
- 10 off a lot, and she taught me
- 11 the meaning of being "chilet".
- 12 ③ The third and final thing I did
- 13 during the break was go to the
- 14 movies with my best friend for his
- 15 birthday.

Figure 3. Writing samples for Student #2, Quatro.

Student Number Three

Marty was an 11th-grade white male, identified as OHI. Marty was short and an extremely friendly, smiling person. He was very interested in music, and at this point in high school, played the guitar quite well. The next year he developed an interest in bluegrass and the mandolin, and managed to become quite skilled at that as well. He was an active church member, and had church folks who took a great interest in his education and even came to his IEP meetings.

This student had a pre-test score of 26% and a post-test score of 80%. He was one of only two that attained mastery, or 80%. Scores for topic sentence practice and detail sentence practice sheets were available for this student. His scores on topic sentence practice started low and usually ended up higher in each section. His scores ranged from 40% to 100%, and of the 12 scores recorded, 6 were mastery or above. Detail sentence scores, on the other hand, started higher in each section, then dropped. Of the 9 recorded scores, 6 were mastery or above.

After graduation, Marty attended a 2-year college that offers services to students with learning and other disabilities. He had plans to pursue his musical career in a professional manner.

PRE
#3

My favorite movie

1. My favorite movie is Dumb and Dumber.
2. It is my favorite because it is funny, has great actors, and I never get bored of watching it.
3. It is such a funny movie because it has
4. a lot of physical humor. Getting stoned in the
5. bathroom, and eating hot peppers. It is also funny because it shows how dumb people can be, with the lack of education.
6. There are actors in the movie that are some
7. of the best in comedy.

PRETEST
STUDENT #3
POSTTEST

Post
#3

what I did over spring break

← ←

- 1 I did ^{just} ~~only~~ ^{only} about 3 things ^{only} for spring ^{break.} ~~break.~~
- 2 ~~First on~~
- 3 ① The first thing I ~~remember~~ ^{remember} ~~do~~ ^{did} ~~over~~ ^{do} during my spring break
- 4 was I ~~went~~ ^{went} ~~over~~ ^{to} a friend's house to fly paper airplanes.
- 5 ② The next thing I did during my vacation was ~~finally~~ ^{finally} getting
- 6 the chance to ^{go} ~~go~~ to the driving range on hillendale rd.
- 7 ③ Finally, on ~~friday~~ ^{friday} I ~~ended~~ ^{went} ~~spring~~ ^{to} nowhere, but I was
- 8 able to write ^{some} scores for ⁱⁿ the mandolin. In conclusion,
- 9 I've realized ^{that} I should plan my spring breaks better.

Figure 4. Writing samples for Student #3, Marty.

Student Number Four

Brad was a ninth grade white male, identified as OHI. His disability was an anxiety disorder. His IQ was the highest of all the students I had in any of these Study Skills classes. He has a very strong, perhaps overpowering mother. Brad is still at our high school, and to this day wears shorts and t-shirts year around. In my study skills classes Brad almost never needed to do any work, spending most of the time reading the daily newspaper and working all the puzzles. After being very much of a loner for much of the time that I have known and taught him, this past year Brad found a girlfriend!

Interestingly enough, while his pre-test was 72%, his post-test score actually went down, to 68%. Topic sentence and detail sentence practice data was available for this student. Of his 12 topic sentence scores, only one was below mastery, and all of his detail sentence scores were above mastery.

One possible cause for this anomaly, is that Brad had for several summers attended a writing camp, whose main focus seemed to be stream of consciousness writing, with no planning beforehand. He had to adapt to our writing strategy. He continues to do well in school, takes French, and seems headed for a college career.

PRE
#4

My Favorite Movie

1. My favorite movie is, currently, LotR: Return
2. of the King. It is great, primarily, because it is
3. based on the last part of the greatest book of
4. all time. It conveys the book very well.
5. It also has action and drama to stand on
6. its own. Plus, it has some stunning visuals
7. and funny lines. That is why LotR:
8. Return of the King is my favorite
9. movie.

Post
#4

PRETEST
STUDENT #4
POSTTEST

- 1 I did not do much over spring
- 2 break. ^{the} Most fun I had was playing a games
- 3 new game. It ^{was} fun, and took tv.
- 4 up plenty of ^{time}. Also ^{was} fun was watching sleep
- 5 television constantly. ^{At least} ^{some} fun, but
- 6 still good, was getting twelve hours
- 7 of sleep. It wasn't much, but it
- 8 was a fun break.

Figure 5. Writing samples for Student #4, Brad.

Student Number Five

April was a 10th-grade white female, identified as LD in writing. She was one of the friendliest girls in school, and was constantly late to class because of hugging and kissing so many of her friends in the hall between classes. She was unfortunately overweight, and yo-yo'ed from being a little overweight to being very overweight. April had an opinion about everything. She had an above average IQ, but had to take the same Algebra One class three times to pass it.

Her pre-test score was 50%, and her post-test score was 68%. Scores for two of her topic sentence sets are available, and all of her detail sentence sets scores are available. Her topic sentence scores ranged from 40% to 100%, generally going up, with 4 of 8 at mastery or above. Her detail sentence scores range from 0% to 90%, with 5 of the 11 scores at mastery or above. Detail sentence scores varied.

April had one letter to the editor published in the local newspaper during this writing instruction, and another was published the subsequent school year. Her writing style was very conversational, and she had to struggle to be more formal. She has graduated and will attend a technical junior college in the state of New York where her family comes from.

Figure 6. Writing samples for Student #5, April.

Student Number Six

Dan was a 10th-grade bi-racial male, identified as LD in reading. Dan was very friendly, but not well motivated. This is possibly due to a marijuana habit that he seems to have indulged at school sometimes. He lived with his grandmother, his mother being a drug addict living in a nearby city. Dan had red hair and usually wore it in a large afro. Very striking!

Dan's pre-test was a 48%, and his post-test was a 58%. Three of his topic sentence sets scores were available, and three of his detail sentence section scores were available. His topic sentence scores range from 10% to 80%, with only 2 of the 12 available scores at or above mastery, and these were the first 2 practice sheet scores. His topic sentence scores varied. His detail sentence scores range from 30% to 100%, with 8 of the 11 scores at or above mastery. Again, the higher scores in each section were the earliest ones.

Dan always wanted to be the first finished with a task, so sometimes he did not apply himself as much as he should. He generally lacked ambition, and coasted through much of high school. It was easy for other students to lead him into skipping and other minor trouble. As he grew older and matured, he outgrew some of his earlier behavior problems. Dan graduated on time, planning to get a job and start working for a living. He was always a friendly, very polite student.

Figure 7. Writing samples for Student #6, Dan.

Student Number Seven

José was a 10th-grade Hispanic male, and was identified as LD in reading. He was a legal alien, and his family was from south Texas, almost on the Mexican border. His aunt and uncle, who lived in Mexico, were murdered in their beds. José's mother spoke almost no English, but worked to support the family. She had no husband when I knew her. José was very friendly, very popular with the other students, and spoke English like a native. He had a normal IQ, but had a 79% testing score in writing.

His pre-test was 48% and his post-test score was 70%. Three of his topic sentence section scores were available, as well as three of his detail sentence section scores. Of his 12 topic sentence scores, 3 were at or above mastery, with a total score range of 20% to 100%. His detail sentence scores range from 0% to 100%, with four of eleven at or above mastery. With both sentence types, his scores varied widely, and were very inconsistent.

José was always very friendly and polite, and seemed to thrive in school despite setbacks at home. At one point in high school, his mother pulled him out of school and moved him back to Texas. In the middle of his senior year, his mother moved back to Texas leaving him in North Carolina. One of the more traumatic occurrences of his young life occurred in his 10th grade year when he discovered that he was probably gay. By senior year, he was comfortable with and open about his gayness. Despite all this, José was able to graduate on time, and plans to attend junior college in Texas, near where his mother lives.

Figure 8. Writing samples for Student #7, José.

Student Number Eight

Elmo was a ninth-grade African-American student, who was identified as LD in reading and writing. He transferred out of the district before finishing instruction, and did not take the post-test. He completed few of the learning sheets, having problems getting started, then actually finishing once he started. Elmo had the second lowest IQ in this group of students, and was not motivated at all. He had the lowest educational testing scores in writing of anyone in any of my classes. His efforts at writing, if they were serious, indicated that he was practically written language illiterate. He had significant difficulties writing a complete sentence, and his punctuation and capitalization were very poor. He also had a poor attitude, and was a source of behavior problems in the class.

His improvement during the short instructional time he was present, was minimal. I have no idea where he went, or how he might have progressed when there.

Figure 9. Writing samples for Student #8, Elmo.

Student Number Nine

Roy was a 12th-grade white male, identified as OHI. He tried very hard to please, sometimes being unctuous to the point of disgust. Every teacher was his “favorite teacher!” He had issues with his mother, who constantly belittled him in parent-teacher and IEP meetings. Roy was very friendly, and was obsessively in love with a very intelligent African-American girl. I do not know if this had anything to do with getting back at his mother.

This student’s pre-test was a 36%, and his post-test was an 84%, which was the second from the largest increase of this group. He was one of two whose post-test was at or above mastery. His topic sentence scores were available, with a range from 10% to 100%, and 5 of the 12 are at mastery or above. His later topic sentence scores were much lower than his earlier ones. Only 6 of 12 possible detail sentence scores are available, with a range of 0% to 70%, and none were at mastery or above. He started each section with high scores, and as he went on, they dropped. His lowest score, 0%, was his last one.

Roy graduated, but was unable or unwilling to attend college. Shortly before graduation, he moved out of his mother’s house and moved in with a high school dropout. When I last heard, he was working at a convenience store, waiting to get into a truck-driving school. When his girlfriend went off to college, she discovered how nice a non-smothering relationship could be, and she broke up with him.

Figure 10. Writing samples for Student #9, Roy.

Student Number Ten

Rashid was a ninth-grade African American male, identified as Educably Mentally Disabled (EMD). He had the lowest IQ, under 70, of any my students at that time. It was difficult to tell whether Rashid understood he was not on an intellectual level with the rest of the students, since he postured and tried to fit in. His frustration level sometimes caused behavior problems. He sometimes refused to do any work. He had great difficulty reading, and thought in fairly simplistic terms. Rashid had played middle school football was convinced that he was going to be drafted out of high school by either the NFL or the NBA. Unfortunately, Rashid was only 5' 6" tall.

This student scored a 26% on the pre-test, and was absent for the post-test. He had significant difficulty completing many of the detail sentence learning sheets in a reasonable amount of time, finishing only three of eleven possible practice exercises. Of these, one was a 90%, but the other two were a 10% and a 30%. This student completed 12 of 12 topic sentence learning sheets, with a range of 0% to 70%. All but one of the sheets were 40% or below, and none of his scores were at or above mastery.

Efforts were made by his case manager several times to get Rashid moved to a school where the Occupational Course of Study was taught, but Rashid and his family resisted this. The final resolution was a plan to move him to another high school for his senior year, where he could play football and enter some sort of electronics program. As his teacher, I worried that his frustration would lead to a senior year dropout situation.

Figure 11. Writing samples for Student #10, Rashid.

Chapter 5.

Discussion

Reviewing the literature on teaching writing to students with learning disabilities showed that researchers generally have concentrated on at least two different aspects of teaching and learning how to write: a holistic approach and a technical approach. The whole-writing or holistic approach to writing includes content as well as technique. The technical approach to writing strongly concerned itself with technique.

As the other research explored the totality of the writing experience in various complicated ways, the University of Kansas strategies, studied and written about by Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, and Alley (1989) and Schumaker and Deshler (2003) were focused more narrowly, and they seemed more instructor and student friendly. When they developed the individual strategies on such important aspects of writing such as sentences, paragraphs, themes, and error-monitoring, University of Kansas educational researchers designed strategies with the same eight basic teaching stages. This made teaching and learning them much easier. Once a teacher has mastered this teaching method, he or she can generalize it to any of the University of Kansas learning strategies. Once a student has experienced one of the strategies, it would be much easier to relate to the similar teaching methods of the other strategies.

In the attempt to implement the Paragraph Writing Strategy in a real-world high school class with actual students, the results of this study were promising, but the attempt was frustrating. Part of the frustration came from serious student resistance to buy-in. These

students had been used to doing little or no work in study skills class, which had no real curriculum. Surprisingly, part of the frustration came from parent resistance to their children actually having to learn a curriculum, instead of being permitted a graded study hall. Part of the frustration also came from the problems involved with pursuing a coherent teaching plan on a part-time, non-daily schedule. Instructor non-familiarity with the materials added to this frustration. This instructor had to learn the special teaching methods used almost at the same time as he was teaching the content.

Although the final determination of results rested solely on the pre-test/post-test comparison, in the case-stories the work sheet results were noted. Missing or incomplete worksheets were a result of absences, which for Exceptional Children Department students has often been a problem. This was a continuous source of frustration, and caused much re-teaching and delays in schedule.

No clear overall pattern emerged when comparing the worksheets of the individual students. One apparent correlation was noted: students who had confidence in their ability to learn usually did better than those who felt the work was “too hard”.

Even though two of the ten students in this study did not show post-test improvement, their scores during the learning program showed as much variation and improvement in learning the parts of the strategy as the other students. What was not known was how the amount of resistance to the new ideas would affect the post-test. Perhaps these two students felt no need to really exert an effort at showing what they had learned. This could also have been connected to buy-in resistance.

Clearly there were significant limitations to this study. Having a teacher who was untrained and inexperienced in teaching this strategy was an important limitation. I would

recommend that all teachers attempting to teach this strategy be trained first. A teacher trained in and teaching the paragraph writing strategy will also have more success the second year than the first year he or she teaches it. Since many students with learning disabilities have trouble on the sentence level, sentence writing strategy training for the teacher, and instruction for the students, should be a prerequisite. I had to teach basic sentence writing before and during my teaching of the paragraph writing strategy.

As previously stated, student resistance to buy-in and to any change in the way things had been done in these classes for years was another limitation. An additional limitation was the inability of this researcher to study and assess generalization of the strategy into the regular education classroom. The factor of available time and the demands on teacher and student time for continuity of instruction and for make-up of missed work was another limitation. However, even with these limitations of the effectiveness of the instruction and the study, measurable improvement was made.

In my experience with this strategy, I found that even though all students can learn and benefit from this strategy, the more motivated and enthusiastic students were, the better they did. This did not depend on IQ, or the basic level where the student started. One of my most enthusiastic students in one of these classes subsequently wrote and had published two letters to the editor in the local newspaper. This same student still had problems in other classes where she was not motivated or enthused.

Limitations to instruction in these classes were sometimes serious. The classes that were being used for this instruction and this study were listed as "Study Skills," where the plan was to help students as they had a need, by teaching them individual skills that could help them be successful in other, particular classes. In reality, the class was sometimes used

by the school administration as a dumping ground for problem non-special education students, was used by regular education teachers as a convenient location for students to get their Individual Education Plan modifications for extra-time and separate setting on tests, and used by the students as a place to finish up as much new homework as possible before going home, or to complete old homework before going to class. In a 50-minute class period, it was difficult, but possible, to teach coherent sections of the Paragraph writing strategy. In a 25–30 minute time frame, it was sometimes impossible. These were not 20-minute kids! Many of the tasks took twice as long as expected.

Added to this was the higher than usual absence and tardy rate of special education students, which made for much missing of instruction and necessitated much subsequent re-teaching. In the results in this study, all missing scores were due to student absences. In the best of regular education situations, students miss work that must be made up. In this special education classroom situation, even more work was missed and due to scheduling and the pace of instruction many times was never made-up. Students with learning disabilities seem to have extra trouble making up work.

Student absences, which occur frequently with this population, disrupted the instruction, but not fatally so. The re-teaching that was necessary actually helped some other students to comprehend more. Typical absences were for illness or doctor's appointments, but I noticed that the study skills class period was too often used by the school administration to schedule things like guidance sessions, parent meetings, testing, and test make ups. I am sure my students learned less than they could have had they been absent less. When trying to keep three classes on the same schedule, sometimes most of one class was out, and a lesson

had to be delayed for all, until everyone was back. Students with the higher post-test scores did seem to be absent less, but no data is available to support this.

If another study of the Paragraph Writing Strategy or any of the other University of Kansas learning strategies was to be done by this teacher, a more coordinated approach with regular education teachers would be needed. Recently this school district dictated a change for high school resource classes for students with learning disabilities. The Study Skills classes have been replaced by four different learning strategies classes, one in math, one in reading, one in writing, and one in decision making. These were devised to match four areas of need that many students with learning disabilities and students with attention deficit disorders have historically had. This change, had it been made earlier, would have made this study easier to do, and would have allowed for a more in-depth, multi-year, longitudinal study, that would include generalization, that is, assessment of how this strategy transfers and applies to core classes, like English and Social Studies.

If I were to make recommendations to school boards and administrations, I would have two suggestions:

1. Treat the learning strategies classes as real, serious classes, where important learning takes place. Such classes should probably be required for all students with learning disabilities identified in writing or reading. Perhaps it should be thought of as a multi-year effort.
2. Connect the writing strategies classes with English and Social Studies classes so generalization can take place. Familiarizing English and Social Studies teachers with the strategy would help them to be able to reinforce the strategy in regular education classes. In fact, the writing strategies could be taught to non-disabled students as well.

Appendix A.

Sample Worksheets

The following sample learning sheets, discussed in Chapter 3, Methods, are used in the University of Kansas Paragraph Writing Strategy (Schumaker & Lyerla, 1990). They are reproduced here with permission of the authors:

Topic Sentences Learning Sheets:

Lesson 1A. Identifying topic sentences in text	62
Lesson 2A. Identifying 3 types of topic sentences	63
Lesson 3A. Writing 3 types of topic sentences	64

Detail Sentences Learning Sheets:

Lesson 1A. Identifying detail sentences in text.....	65
Lesson 2A. Identifying lead-off and follow-up detail sentences.....	66
Lesson 3A. Listing components of detail sentences.....	67
Lesson 4A. Listing components and writing detail sentences	68
Lesson 5A. Complete paragraph diagram and write paragraph.....	69

Clincher Sentences Learning Sheets:

Lesson 1A. Identifying clincher sentences in text.....	70
Lesson 2A. Identifying 3 types of clincher sentences	71
Lesson 3A. Writing 3 types of clincher sentences	72

Sample T-1. Lesson 1A. Identifying topic sentences in text.

Sample T-2. Lesson 2A. Identifying 3 types of topic sentences.

Sample T-3. Lesson 3A. Writing 3 types of topic sentences.

Sample D-1. Lesson 1A. Identifying detail sentences in text.

Sample D-2. Lesson 2A. Identifying lead-off and follow-up detail sentences.

Sample D-3. Lesson 3A. Listing components of detail sentences.

Sample D-4. Lesson 4A. Listing components and writing detail sentences.

Sample D-5. Lesson 5A. Complete paragraph diagram and write paragraph.

Sample C-1. Lesson 1A. Identifying clincher sentences in text.

Sample C-2. Lesson 2A. Identifying 3 types of clincher sentences.

Sample C-3. Lesson 3A. Writing 3 types of clincher sentences.

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