Response to an Expository Writing Strategy across Middle School RtI Tiers

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Seventh grade students, varying in their literacy skills, from a suburban middle school in the United States were taught an expository writing strategy using the Self-Regulated Strategy Development approach. Using an AB design, the students participated in an eight-session expository writing intervention that taught the writing process. The quality of the students plans for their writing and their written essays were evaluated. The results indicate that the pre-placement of the students in school identified intervention groups did not indicate which students would benefit from a writing intervention.

Keywords: **expository writing, middle school, self-regulated strategy development, response to intervention**

 With the increased demand to ensure that today's K-12 students are college and career ready (Common Core State Standards, 2011), literacy instruction (reading, writing, speaking, listening) has become a central focus in schools. In the English/Language Arts area, the teaching of reading has always played a major role in the day-to-day instruction for students across the grade levels. Writing instruction has received much less attention than reading. With the shift to the Common Core State Standards, however, this has changed dramatically (Baker, Gersten, & Graham, 2003; Graham & Harris, 2013). As outlined in the writing standards of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), students are required to write narrative, opinion, and informative essays (Common Core State Standards, 2010). In addition, students need experience writing in different content areas to express and share knowledge and critical thoughts (Graham & Harris, 2013; Taft & Mason, 2011). Strong writers demonstrate the ability to create and organize ideas on a plan, write the essay, edit written work, and revise and rewrite (Baker, Chard, Ketterlin-Geller, Apichatabutra, & Doabler, 2009; Taft & Mason, 2011). It is well documented in the research on writing instruction that to produce skilled writers a teacher cannot take a passive approach but rather has to spend time explicitly teaching the writing process (Baker, et al., 2009). In addition, writing is increasingly identified as an essential skill necessary for success in school and professional life (Graham & Harris, 2013). With this expectation, teachers will have to spend time directly teaching their students the essential skills for becoming an effective writer.

 An essential component of the CCSS is for writing to occur in all content areas (English/language arts, math, science, and social science) as a tool for learning and demonstrating knowledge of newly acquired topics and skills (Graham & Harris, 2013). Equally important, is for teachers to have a good understanding of the writing

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needs of their students and the best way to meet the needs for all learners (Baker et al., 2003). Beneficial for both general and special educators is knowledge of research-based practices that are effective for teaching writing. In addition, knowledge of how students at differing ability levels will respond to a particular writing practice is also beneficial and an aim of the current study.

Writing and At Risk Learners

A student's ability to write effectively has been well-established in the research as a foundational skill that promotes learning and success in multiple content areas (Taft & Mason, 2011). However, it is well documented that writing can be a challenge for students who struggle (Graham & Harris, 2003). Successful writers are able to use their metacognition to simultaneously complete a variety of processes to produce a cohesive composition (Englert & Mariage, 2003; Taft & Mason, 2011). This includes generating and organizing ideas into a well-planned framework, writing and revising compositions, and monitoring the different stages within the writing process (Englert & Mariage, 2003; Englert, Raphael, Fear, & Anderson, 1988; Taft & Mason, 2011). On the contrary, struggling learners have difficulty accessing and coordinating their metacognitive knowledge to efficiently use the stages within the writing process (Harris & Graham, 1999; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003). More specifically, these students have difficulty generating detailed ideas for written compositions, devote less time to planning and actual writing compositions, produce more mechanical errors, and lack skills for editing their writing tasks (Taft & Mason, 2011). Thus instruction in written expression skills for students with learning challenges should be explicit, systematic and include teaching organizational strategies such as creating a detailed plan before composing an essay (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 1993; Harris & Graham, 1996;). As writing tasks get more involved and complex in the middle and high school years, it is important to identify early those students who struggle with written expression tasks.

Over the past decade school districts have been required to establish systems for identifying at risk and struggling learners such as those having difficulty with reading and math skills and then provide immediate interventions to help in the prevention and identification of students that may have learning disabilities (O'Connor, Bocian, Beach, Sanchez, & Flynn, 2013). Response to Intervention (RtI) began as a way to identify at-risk students and intervene early in a student's academic career particularly for those students struggling in reading (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). A common trend in most RtI frameworks is to provide intervention or remedial instruction in the areas of reading and math (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Far less common, is for schools to have designated interventions across the RtI tiers for other important skills now emphasized in the CCSS such as written expression.

RtI models are less developed in middle and high schools but are equally important given the instructional demands for students at these grade levels (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005). A traditional RtI three tier model is often used in middle schools. Middle school students are designated to one of three tiers that consist of those who need classroom interventions such as differentiated instruction at tier 1 to those who need more intensive remediation or special education at tier 3 (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). At the middle and high school levels where expository reading and

writing are expected and emphasized, a potential flaw of the RtI framework is a lack of identifying criteria for those students who might need help with written expression skills found in the CCSS.

Explicit instruction and strategy instruction are two interventions that have been reported as effective methods for improving writing quality for students who are struggling or have learning disabilities in the written expression area (Cihak & Castle, 2011; De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 1993; Harris & Graham, 1996). Researchers agree that explicitly teaching the steps of the writing process along with the conventions for writing in different genres, and the use of peer or teacher feedback to revise writing samples is most effective (Cihak & Castle, 2011). In addition, the use of a specific learning strategy or mnemonic is useful for helping students to to internalize and self-monitor while engaged in a writing task. (Cihak & Chalk, 2011; Graham & Harris, 2000). Given the documented effectiveness of explicit instruction and strategy instruction for improving written expression skills, it is important to explore the effects of using an approach that incorporates these elements, such as Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) for students at different levels in the RtI framework (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 1993; Harris & Graham, 1996).

Self-Regulated Strategy Development

SRSD is a method for explicitly teaching the writing process along with goal setting and self-monitoring procedures for the written composition (De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2007). SRSD has six stages of instruction that include (1) developing background knowledge; (2) discussing the purpose and benefits of the strategy; (3) teacher modeling of the use of the strategy; (4) students memorizing the steps of the strategy; (5) students practicing the strategy with scaffolds and teacher support faded; and (6) students using strategy independently (Santangelo et al., 2007). For students identified as struggling writers, the key to improving writing abilities via the SRSD approach is the inclusion of all six stages during the instructional process. The stages in the process are meant to be combined, repeated, and can be used or taught in the order that best meets the needs of the individual students (Santangelo et al., 2007).

Using a multiple-probe design, across participants, De La Paz (2001) used the SRSD approach to teach middle school students of varied abilities a planning and written composition strategy. Using the SRSD approach, students were taught how to use the mnenomics PLAN and WRITE to complete written essays (De La Paz, 2001). Results of the study reinforced SRSD as an effective approach for teaching writing. Students received instruction in all stages of the writing process and all students produced complete and organized pre-writing plans as well as improved the quality of their written compositions (De La Paz, 2001). These results are consistent with the results of other studies that also taught expository writing using the SRSD approach (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz & Graham, 1997; Graham & Harris, 1989). Researchers have found, SRSD improves the writing skills of students with and without learning disabilities (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 1993; Harris & Graham, 1996), but the degree of improvement for students placed across the different RtI tiers (tier1, tier 2, tier 3) has received much less attention.

The Current Study

The current study builds on a study conducted by De La Paz (1999) in which seventh and eighth grade students with and without learning disabilities were taught an expository writing strategy using the SRSD approach. The results of the De La Paz (1999) study indicated that the SRSD approach is an effective method for teaching writing for both students with and without learning disabilities as both populations did benefit from the instruction. Participants demonstrated growth in their ability to plan an essay, write more in-depth lengthy essays, and were able to maintain these results for as long as a month after the intervention (De La Paz, 1999). The current study used a similar intervention framework. The intervention sessions were planned using the SRSD approach in which the writing strategy was described. First, students' background knowledge was activated and their initial writing abilities were reviewed. Next, the researchers modeled the strategy, followed by students engagement in collaborative as well as independent practice, and then students were required to memorize the strategy and use a self-monitoring and self-evaluation tool to check their own work (Graham, Harris, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1991).

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the effectiveness of a writing strategy, PLAN and WRITE, taught using the SRSD approach (De La Paz, 1999) across students assigned to three RtI tiers by their community middle school. This was a different component from the De La Paz, 1999 study, which included students that had been diagnosed with learning disabilities. The current researchers investigated seventh graders plan quality, writing quality, and the grammatical conventions of expository essays from pre-intervention of the SRSD strategies to post-intervention. The investigation sought to answer these research questions:

1. Does instruction of a planning strategy using the Self-Regulated Strategy Development approach improve the plans of an expository essay for adolescents across all by response to intervention tiers?
2. Does instruction of a writing strategy using Self-Regulated Strategy Development meaningfully improve the holistic writing quality of expository essays for adolescents across all response to intervention tiers?

METHOD

Setting and Participants

The study took place in a diverse middle school in a suburban school district in the Midwest. The school had an enrollment of 426 students; 45% of the students were Hispanic, 38% were White, 10 % were African American, and 5% were Asian. Approximately 48% of the students were receiving free and reduced lunch and 8.5 % of the students were English Language Learners. In addition, 16.7% of the students received special education services.

A seventh grade Language Arts teacher with 7 years of teaching experience taught the participants during a 90-minute Language Arts Block with the assistance of a special education resource teacher who helped by working with small groups or individual students to reteach or review concepts that were taught. The Language Arts curriculum consisted of thematic units designed to meet the CCSS. The writing curriculum was delivered via workshop model in which daily mini-lessons were taught emphasizing specific writing skills such as writing an introduction, narrowing

the focus of one's paper, and improving word choice. During independent writing time the teacher conducted individual conferences with students about their writing. Lastly, students shared their writing with small groups and/or the entire class at the end of the workshop session. The SRSD intervention used in the current study supplemented the classroom instruction.

Students in this middle school were classified into response to intervention tiers (RtI tier 1, 2, 3) based on both quantitative and qualitative data. A variety of measures were used including reading and language usage scores from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAPS) assessment (Northwest Evaluation Association, 2015), and reading scores obtained from Aimsweb testing. Students' scores were highlighted as red (below expectations), green (meets expectations), yellow (on the border of red and green), or blue (exceeds expectations). The seventh grade teaching team plus the school administrator, counselor, school psychologist, and social worker met at the beginning of the year to review the data and determine which tier the students would be placed in. At that time, teachers were encouraged to provide additional qualitative data to help make decisions for tier placement. For example, if a student had a red score on the MAP test but green on another assessment tool, the teacher would share that the student was ill on the day of the MAP testing and therefore might have struggled for that reason rather than their lack of knowledge and/or skills. It is important to note that the students were placed in response to intervention tiers based on reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading fluency assessments.

All students (27) in the Language Arts classroom were given the opportunity to participate in the study. A recruitment letter was sent home to all students outlining the procedures, criteria, and benefits, for participating in the study. Students were determined appropriate for the study based on a phone call screening interview with the parents completed by the researchers. The screening criteria served to eliminate students with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities, hearing impairment and emotional or behavioral disorders. Students were also required to speak English as their first language. Based on the screening, students identified as above grade level, on grade level, at-risk or struggling, or those identified as having learning or language disabilities were eligible to participate in the study.

Eleven students responding to the recruitment letter met the criteria and as a result participated in the study. Five of the participants were girls and six were boys. Based on the RtI tier benchmarks at the school, five of the eleven participating students were classified as tier 1, three of the eleven participating students were classified as tier 2, and three of the eleven participating students were classified as tier 3. Of the eleven participants, five received free or reduced lunch and three of the participant's parents were concerned about their writing skills. The operational definitions of the RtI tiers at the participating middle school followed a traditional RtI model in which the students classified tier 1 received early intervention such as differentiated instruction within the classroom setting, students classified tier 2 received extra small group help by the classroom teacher, reading specialist or special education teacher both in and out of the classroom setting, and students classified tier 3 received much more intensive, small-group interventions often awaiting referral for special education services. The researchers met with the eleven participants to explain the study and to get student assent for participation.

Experimental Design

The effects of the PLAN and WRITE strategy were evaluated using an AB design that included a pre-intervention phase, intervention phase, and post-intervention phase (Kazdin, 2003). For each participant, writing sample probes were collected during all the phases that measured two treatment variables and a control variable. The treatment variables were the pre-writing plans and holistic written quality of the expository essays. The control variable was the writing conventions (e.g., mechanics, spelling, grammar, sentence structure) used in the essays and the PLAN and WRITE interventions did not target improving conventions. The researchers determined the effectiveness of the intervention by visual inspection (Kazdin, 2003). Plotting the scores of the plans and written essays on a graph with clear changes in the level and slope of said scores following the PLAN and WRITE teaching sessions would indicate that the SRSD teaching was responsible for any positive effects. The treatment variables (plans and writing samples) and the control variable (writing conventions) were tracked and plotted on a graph across the baseline, instruction, and post-instruction phases of the study.

Baseline. The baseline phase was conducted over a two-week period in which the researchers administered three writing probes. The participants were instructed that they would be planning and writing an essay and would be given 3 minutes to plan their essay and 10 minutes to write their essay. Participants were given a choice of three expository writing prompts and were encouraged to pick a topic that they had interest in and had knowledge and information about.

Instruction. Teaching the PLAN and WRITE strategy began after all eleven participants completed three baseline-writing probes. The participants were taught the planning and writing strategies during the Language Arts period by one of the researchers. There were eight teaching sessions that lasted 45 minutes each. At the end of teaching sessions 4-8, the researcher administered a writing probe to all participants following the same format as the baseline probes. In total, five probes were administered during the instruction phase.

Post-Instruction. One post-instruction probe was given approximately two weeks following the teaching sessions. Participants completed the probe under the same conditions that the baseline and instruction probes were administered.

General Procedures

Materials. The writing task chosen for investigation in this study was expository writing. This genre was chosen based on the replication of the De La Paz (1999) study and it is a common requirement for students in middle and high school to write increasingly complex expository essays (Graham & Harris, 2013). Before the study began, a list of 30 expository essay topics were generated by the researchers and validated by the seventh grade Language Arts teacher as high-interest topics for seventh graders. The topics were based on timely, current event issues, age-appropriate interests, issues, or problems, and content-area topics that the students may be studying. The list was shared, modified, and approved by the teacher based on how familiar the topics were to the students, their level of interest and their content area knowledge. The essay topics were randomly ordered by groups of three and were preassigned for baseline, instruction, and post-instruction use. Providing a choice of

topics for each probe enabled participants to write on topics that they knew about and found more motivating (Nippold, 2007). Examples of essay topics include: "People live all over the world from Australia to the United States. Imagine you have the chance to live anywhere in the world. Write an essay explaining where you would like to live and why you would like to live there"; "It is exciting to hear about people who win a million dollars in the lotto. Imagine that you were a lotto winner and won one million dollars. Write an essay explaining what you would do with one million dollars if you won it"; and "Sports are fun and exciting to watch. Imagine you have the chance to talk about your favorite sports team to a group of friends. Write an essay explaining what your favorite sports team is."

Writing probes. Baseline, instruction, and the post-instruction probe were given using the same procedures for all students. The probes were labeled *A – I* and the students wrote about them in the same order allowing for comparisons across RtI tier group (De La Paz, 1999). Students wrote essays by hand within a thirteen-minute time frame; three minutes for planning and ten minutes for writing (Espin, De La Paz, Scierka, & Roelofs, 2005). The researcher provided two pieces of paper and a copy of the prompts for the students; informed students that they should choose from the three prompts provided; and read aloud each of the prompt choices. The researcher gave the following instructions:

> You will write an essay based on the topic you have chosen. You should choose a topic that interests you and that you have some knowledge about. First, you will have some time to plan your essay on one of your pieces of paper. After a few minutes you will be directed to begin writing. You cannot begin writing your essay until you are directed to do so – use all the time you are given to plan. Once you are directed to begin writing, you will write an essay based on the topic chosen. Are there any questions? You may begin planning.

Participants were not given assistance in understanding the prompt choices. Nor were they given assistance in spelling or grammatical functions. The researcher informed participants when there was 1 minute left to plan and to write and encouraged them to write their final thoughts or sentences. Essays were collected once the thirteen minutes were up and no feedback was provided to the participants about the quality of their plans or essays.

Scoring

Planning. Written plans from baseline probes, instruction probes and post-instruction probe were collected and analyzed using a rating scale that was adapted by the researchers from De La Paz and Graham (2002). De La Paz and Graham (2002) developed a scale to evaluate plans for expository essays based on procedures by Whitaker, Berninger, Johnston, and Swanson (1994). Plans were evaluated on a 5-point scale with a score of 5 for a fully developed planning map or outline and a score of 1 for no advanced planning (De La Paz & Graham, 2002). Additionally, participants scored a 4 if they had at least three subtopics with two or more details that represented the subtopics they were going to write about; a 3 if they had topics with emerging subordination of ideas that provided some detail about the topic; and a 2 for a list of topics (De La Paz & Graham, 2002). The lead researcher and a col-

league with expertise in the literacy area scored the plans. Interrater agreement was established using agreements/agreements + disagreements X 100 with a reliability percentage of 85%.

      Quality. Essays were evaluated using a holistic rubric for expository essays that was adapted from Chalk, Hagan-Burke, and Burke (2005). The essays were evaluated for translation as well as transcription. In preparation for scoring the essays, all essays were typed exactly as they were written leaving spelling, mechanics, and grammar in the original presentation. A colleague, with an expertise in the literacy area, scored all essays and the lead researcher served as the reliability check. The essays were scored across three levels; high range (6), mid-range (3); and low range (1). The rubric evaluated the focus development, organization, fluency, and conventions, but quality and conventions scores were separated. Quality of the essays was determined by evaluating the focus development and organization of the essay, particularly whether the main idea and supporting details were relevant and well-developed, whether there were effective transitions throughout the essay, and whether there was an effective relationship and sequencing of main points throughout the essay. Twenty-five percent of the essays were randomly selected and were scored by a second rater trained for evaluating with the rubric. Inter-rater agreement for holistic essay quality was 83% with differences being discussed and the final score made by mutual agreement (De La Paz, 1999). Figure 1 provides an example of the rubric used to evaluate the quality of the writing samples.

Figure 1. **Writing Sample Rubric**

Note. Adapted from Chalk, Hagan-Burke, Burke, 2005

High Range 6-5	Mid Range 4 - 3	Low Range 2-1
FOCUS DEVELOPMENT		
____Focus is strong and consistent. ____Main points stand out in complete exploration of the topic. ____All aspects of the task developed. ____Supporting details are relevant and carefully selected.	____Focus is easily identifiable. ____Main points are clear but may be broad, simplistic, or inappropriate. ____Most aspects of task developed. ____Support is uneven, distracting, overused, broad, or limited scope.	____Focus and/or main points are extremely limited or unclear. ____Support is irrelevant, insufficient, illogical, and/or non-existent.

ORGANIZATION		
____Introduction and/or conclusion are strong and effective. ____Transitions are effective among sentences, paragraphs, and ideas. ____Points are logically related throughout the paper. ____Details fit where placed.	____Introduction and/or conclusion are unexceptional. ____Transitions may be repetitive, stilted, or commonplace. ____Points are logically related, but skeletal and/or rigid. ____Details may not always be effectively placed.	____Introduction and/or conclusion are undeveloped or not present. ____Transitions are lacking, ineffective, and/or overused. ____Relationship and sequence among points are unclear and/or ineffective. ____Details are limited and/or randomly placed.
FLUENCY		
____Sentence structure enhances relationships among ideas. ____Sentence structure is effectively varied with fragments used only for effect. ____Fluency is demonstrated with one sentence flowing into the next. ____Use of words is accurate, specific, and/or varied. ____Language is carefully placed for impact.	____Sentence structure requires rereading to clarify ideas. ____Control is present in simple but not complex sentence structure. ____Repetitive sentence structure may detract from flow of ideas. ____Use of words may be accurate & specific with some exceptions. ____Language may rely on overused expressions.	____Sentence structure frequently obscures meaning. ____Sentence patterns are simple, monotonous, and/or confusing. ____Choppy or rambling sentence structure damages the flow of ideas. ____Use of words is imprecise, inadequate, or wrong. ____Language is too limited to demonstrate sentence fluency and word choice.
CONVENTIONS		
____Spelling of both common and difficult words is correct. ____Mechanics are correct (capitalization punctuation, etc.) ____Sentence structure is grammatically correct. ____Paragraph breaks reinforce organizational structure.	____Spelling errors, even in common words, may distract the reader. _____ Mechanics are sometimes incorrect. ____Sentence structure has noticeable grammatical errors. ____Paragraph breaks may run together or occur too frequently.	_____Frequent spelling errors impair readability. _____ Mechanics are sometimes incorrect. _____ Sentence structure errors impairs readability.

Conventions. Conventions were scored across three levels; high range (6), mid-range (3); and low range (1). Spelling, mechanics (capitalization and punctuation), sentence structure, and paragraph breaks were elements of convention that were considered. Inter-rater agreement for conventions was 85% with differences being discussed and the final score based on mutual agreement (De La Paz, 1999).

Instructional Procedures

The students were taught using the SRSD approach to write an expository essay using PLAN and WRITE (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 1997). Before the instruction took place, the researcher created eight lesson plans that were 45 minutes in length based on the teaching sessions in the De La Paz (1999) study. The lesson plans included developing background knowledge for the participants, a description and rationale for using PLAN and WRITE, an introduction to PLAN and WRITE, modeling the use of PLAN and WRITE, guided and independent practice of PLAN and WRITE with a partner and individually, verbal rehearsal of the mnemonics, and goal-setting and self- monitoring of the strategy use (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 1993; Harris & Graham, 1996). Instruction took place during eight teaching sessions that spanned a three-week period and began once all participants completed three baseline probes which was approximately two weeks after the first baseline probe was given.

Participants were taught a writing strategy (PLAN and WRITE) for planning and composing an expository essay using the SRSD approach (De La Paz, 1999). Each of the six stages of SRSD was introduced across the teaching sessions (De La Paz, 1999). Lesson one was dedicated to activating and developing background knowledge for writing an expository essay and described the purpose and use of the PLAN and WRITE strategy (De La Paz, 1999). Time was spent brainstorming how one might plan an essay as well as the different parts of an expository essay. The mnemonics PLAN and WRITE (De La Paz, 1999) were introduced to support the participants' use of the expository writing strategy. In addition, the participants were provided with a cue card (see Figure 2) of the strategy as a tool that they could use while planning their essay and to monitor their progress for writing a complete essay (De La Paz, 1999). Lessons two and three were devoted to modeling and memorizing the strategies. Rote practice of the PLAN and WRITE mnemonics took place and PLAN and WRITE were each modeled (on different days) by the researcher. In addition, the grading rubric for the essays was shared and discussed with the participants. Guided practice was provided and facilitated by the researcher so participants could practice as a whole group using the PLAN and WRITE strategy. Lastly, the participants created goals for themselves related to writing a well-developed expository essay and were given a self-monitoring checklist that they were to use during the times they were practicing their essay writing. Following that, in lessons four and five, participants were supported of their use of the PLAN and WRITE strategy. Reviews of the mnemonics took place and the participants worked with a partner to create an expository essay using PLAN and WRITE. The participants were encouraged to use their self-monitoring checklist while writing and revisit the goals they developed for themselves. The last three lessons were used for independent practice of the PLAN and WRITE strategy. Participants individually worked on an expository essay of their choice and conferenced with the researcher about their essay, goals they were working towards, and their use of the self-monitoring checklist. They were prompted to use components of effective essays in their compositions. These components were, Include transition words for each paragraph, Try to use different kinds of sentences, and Exciting, interesting, 100,000 words. In addition, participants were encouraged

to use the PLAN and WRITE cue card and or to put PLAN and WRITE on the top of their planning and composition paper to remind themselves to use the strategies. At the end of each teaching session, participants would discuss with the researcher how they used PLAN and WRITE in the composition they were working on.

Figure 2. **Instructional Cue Card for PLAN and WRITE**

Pay attention to the prompt	Read the prompt. Decide (a) what you are being asked to write about and (b) how to develop your essay.
List main ideas	Brainstorm what to write about. Decide on the topic, brainstorm and list at least 3 main ideas for your essay.
Add supporting details	Think of details, examples to explain and support your main ideas.
Number your ideas	Number major points in the order you will use them.
Work from your plan to develop thesis statement	USE YOUR PLAN – KEEP PLANNING WHILE USING WRITE.
Remember your goals	Look at your goal sheet.
Include transition words in your paragraph	Use the transition word anchor chart.
Try to use different kinds of sentence	Statements, questions, exclamations
Exciting, interesting, $100,000 words	Use the word wall.

Note. Adapted from De La Paz, 1999, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 2002

RESULTS

The researchers used the score trends from the participants' plans for their essays and the quality of the expository writing samples starting at the baseline probes through the post instruction probe. The results were analyzed and categorized based on the RtI group the participants were identified as being in by the school. It was expected that the intervention would positively affect the plans and the essay quality, which were the treatment variables. Grammatical and mechanical conventions were scored for on each essay but were considered a control variable due to the fact that the intervention did not address or teach for these skills.

PLANS

Before instruction of the PLAN strategy, the participants across all three RtI tiers were planning for their essays at a low level by either just listing ideas or identifying topics with some emerging subordination of corresponding details. Throughout the instruction phase, all eleven participants began to develop planning skills by moving from just listing ideas or topics to identifying an overall topic with at least 3 subtopics and two or more accurate details that aligned with the topic and subtopics. In addition, the students were able to create a planning map or outline for their topic, subtopics, and details. By the post-instruction probe, 5 of the 5 students in the tier1 group, 2 of the 3 students in the tier 2 group, and 3 of the 3 students in the tier 3 group were able to plan at the two highest levels on the rubric demonstrating a positive response to the SRSD Plan strategy (see Figure 3).

Writing Quality

During the baseline phase, 3 of the 5 students in the tier1 group scored at the highest range or ceiling of the rubric for essay quality and 2 students were at the mid-low range. Throughout the instruction phase, the three students at the high range continued to score in the high range for essay quality. The remaining 2 students developed the quality of their essays by increasing their scores from low to mid to high range by the post-instruction probe resulting in 2 of the 5 students in this group responding positively to the SRSD WRITE strategy.

Students in tier 2 also demonstrated a positive response to the SRSD WRITE strategy. Two of the 3 students scored at the mid-range for quality on their essays and 1 student scored in the low range during the baseline phase. While in the instruction phase 1 of the students at the mid-range was absent on days three and four of instruction resulting in a score of zero. By day 3 of the instruction phase, both the remaining students who were at the mid-range during baseline, and the student who was at the low-range during baseline, were scoring in the high-range for the written quality of their essays. They remained in the high-range on the post-instruction probe.

The quality of the written essays for the tier 3 students showed that 1 of the 3 students scored at the ceiling or high range of the rubric at the baseline phase. In addition, 1 of the 3 students scored in the mid-range for essay quality, and 1 of the 3 students scored in the low range for essay quality at the baseline phase. Throughout the instruction phase, 1 of the 3 students continued to score in the high range for essay quality and 2 of the 3 students increased the quality of their essays and scored in the mid-high range. At the post-instruction probe, 2 of the 3 students scored in the high range for essay quality and 1 of the 3 students scored at the mid-range resulting in 1 of the 3 students demonstrating a positive response to the WRITE strategy (See Figure 3).

Conventions

The use of grammatical and mechanical written expression conventions was the control variable in this study. The participants were scored for their use of conventions however were not instructed on specific elements such as mechanics, sentence structure, or paragraph breaks and structure. For 9 of the 11 participants, conventions stayed the same. All eleven of the participants' scored in the mid to

high range for their use of grammatical and mechanical conventions on the post-intervention probe.
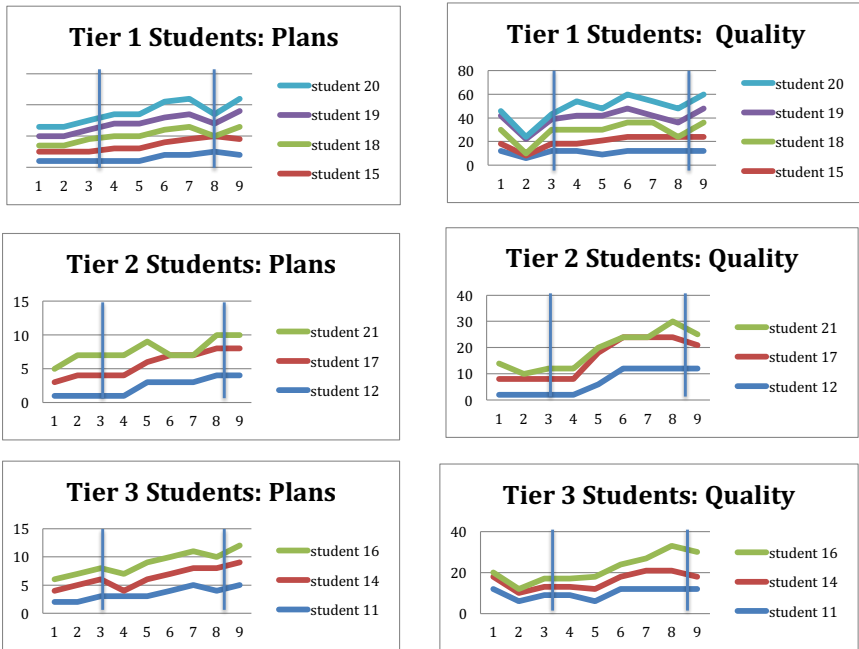
DISCUSSION

Eleven seventh grade students were taught the PLAN and WRITE strategy for composing expository essays using the SRSD approach. A student's ability to express their knowledge and understanding of expository text in written formats is an expectation in middle school language arts classrooms. The results were analyzed and categorized based on the response to intervention tier the students were identified as according to the middle school's benchmark criteria for literacy skills.

As seen in Figure 2, learning and using the PLAN strategy had a positive impact on all students' ability to develop a plan before writing their essay. All the students, regardless of the identified RtI tier made progress in their ability to make a plan for their essay before writing it. These results are consistent with numerous studies that taught the PLAN strategy (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 1993; Harris & Graham, 1996) including the De La Paz (2001)study, which was used by the researchers for replication purposes. While the current study is based on data from a limited number of students, the results support the trend that directly teaching a written expression strategy such as PLAN benefits all learners. In addition using SRSD to teach a specific strategy helps teachers incorporate research-based practices in their teaching so as to develop skills that meet rigorous standards (De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 2013).

The PLAN strategy yielded positive results for all the students, however, the WRITE strategy had a positive impact for only half of the students. These students increased in their ability to write a more detailed and organized expository essay. It is important to note that four of the eleven students scored at the highest level of the rubric during baseline phase so it cannot be determined that a measureable impact was made for those four students. Similar to the results for the PLAN strategy, the results for the WRITE strategy in this study are consistent with other research about using the SRSD approach to teach the WRITE strategy. Researchers have reported that using an SRSD structure for teaching written expression skills positively affects students' ability to write a concise and clear expository essay (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 1993; Harris & Graham, 1996). The CCSS were written with higher expectations for all students in the area of writing, therefore the results of the current study and previous studies supports the notion that teaching a strategy such as PLAN and WRITE the more rigorous expectations for expository writing can be achieved (Graham & Harris, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, it is common in most RtI frameworks that tiered interventions focus on at-risk and struggling readers and the development of reading skills. The students in the current study were categorized into an RtI tier by the district and school standards, which bases placement in a group on the school reading benchmark scores. However, the CCSS in the English/Language Arts area or literacy area take into account both reading and writing skill development (Common Core State Standards, 2010) and it is common practice in most middle school language arts classrooms to include writing as an area that is developed and evaluated regularly. With that said, schools particularly middle or high schools, may want to reconsider using traditional reading evaluation results when considering RtI assignment and also consider students who may need writing support. It is important to note that in the current study the students were placed in RtI tiers based on school reading evaluation results however students at both Tier one and Tier three were scoring at the highest rubric score for quality of their essay in the baseline phase. Given these results, placement in a response to intervention tier may need to be based on all literacy skill areas developed, especially written expression at the middle and high school levels.

Limitations

The current study points to several limitations in which further exploration is warranted. First, this study focused on teaching students to plan for and then write an expository essay at the first-draft stage. The PLAN and WRITE strategy and the ensuing instruction did not focus on post-writing editing skills, which remains an expectation in expository writing. Due to the time constraints of this study, time did not allow for teaching editing skills or addressing the use of grade-level appropriate conventions. With that in mind, it was not surprising that there was no change in the use of conventions, which was the control variable In a follow-up study of longer duration, it would be important to address editing and convention skills so as to give students the specific revision strategies needed for the expository writing activities.

Another limitation of the current study was the duration. This study was conducted during the last few weeks of the fall semester and thus the instruction phase included 5 days of instruction and only 1 post-instruction follow-up probe.

Previous studies completed that taught the PLAN and WRITE strategies with an SRSD approach involved a longer instruction period and multiple post-instruction and maintenance probes to ensure generalization of the expository writing strategies (De La Paz, 1999; De La Paz, 2001; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Harris, 1993; Harris & Graham, 1996). In addition, the researchers did not evaluate students' writing within the classroom setting once the intervention was complete nor did they survey the classroom teacher to determine if expository writing improved within the classroom setting and in classroom activities and/or assignments. Lastly, one of the participants in the Tier two group was absent for two of the instructional sessions thus resulting in a group with 2 students' scores for analysis. Thus, the generalizability of the RtI Tier two scores may not be reflective of all students in the classroom or school who were receiving Tier two type interventions.

Another consideration is the generalizability of this study. Given that different districts and schools use different models of the RtI framework this study cannot address questions about the different criteria, assessment measures used, and interventions chosen for students struggling in writing. With that said, this study does provide one look into an intervention that seems to have an effect on students at all levels regardless of the RtI tier.

Implications for Future Research

It is important to view the results of the current study as having implications for classroom practice and further research. Future investigations could include investigating effective treatments, including SRSD, for writing assignments that appear difficult for students at the middle school level. Regardless of RtI tier, participants who did not have initial high quality expository writing skills (in either the plan or writing area) benefitted from the explicit teaching of an SRSD strategy for writing an essay. This is an important realization for both general education and special education teachers as both sets of teachers should be teaching written expression to learners at differing levels of ability. Another important implication is that the only "true" non-responder had upward movement throughout intervention but failed to maintain the gain. A longer intervention cycle may have been necessary to further develop this student's expository writing skills. In most RtI frameworks the tiered intervention requires a set number of weeks before the determination of outcomes and additional intervention or not so it is essential to consider this if teams consider using strategy instruction as a support for students who struggle with written expression.

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Authors' Note