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Supporting Primary Students' Story Writing by Including Retellings, Talk, and Drama with Strategy Instruction

Zoi A. Traga Philippakos
University of Tennesee at Knoxville, philippakos@gmail.com

Sarah Munsell

Logan B. Robinson

Introduction

Writing is both a cognitive and a social task. From the cognitive perspective, models have been developed to explain writers' thinking processes as they viewed writing as an individual effort, explained through processes and sub-processes that were hierarchically organized (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Hayes & Flower, 1980; Hayes, 2006; Nystrand, 2006). These models (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1983) pointed out the complexity of writing and the cognitive demands it sets for learners (McCutchen, 2000). From the social perspective, writing is a social task situated within a discourse community that can shape its content (Cole & Engestrom, 1993; Prior, 2006; Shaughnessy, 1977). Thus, writing has a social nature and strives for purposeful and meaningful communication and collaboration with others, making it not only a linguistic process but also a social one. This collaboration is influenced by the context of the participants (Prior, 2006) and views literacy not only as application of knowledge—such as the alphabetic system—but as "a set of social organized practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing it and disseminating it" (Schribner & Cole, 1981, p. 236). Writing within this view is "a mode of social action" (Prior, 2006, p. 58).

Writing has been often viewed as a cognitive or social task and instructional practices are influenced by one or the other perspective. However, alternatives may need to be considered that are not as polarized and consider individuals, their environment, their development, their needs, and the role of community (Graham, in press).

The purpose of this paper is to provide instructional guidelines for the application of an approach to teaching stories that stems from self-regulated strategy instruction and emphasizes

social interactions and oral discourse through oral retellings of stories that are read during read alouds, oral production of stories, drama, and perspective taking (Moore & Caldwell, 1993) Philippakos, Robinson, & Munsell, 2017; Philippakos, 2017b; Philippakos, Robinson, & Munsel, under review; Philippakos & MacArthur, in preparation). The approach was developed through design research (Brown, 1992; Collins, 1999; Reinking & Bradley, 2008) and was evaluated across one cycle of implementation from November to December with 12 teachers and 219 students (across grades Kindergarten to 2). Students were asked to compose stories at pretest and posttest, and papers were evaluated using a 5-point holistic rubric (r = .90). The results showed statistically significant differences on the writing quality of students' papers (p <.001). Teachers positively commented on the systematic and structured instruction of the writing process and on the use of oral discourse through retellings, drama, and dialogic interactions. Teachers acknowledged that even though Kindergarten and first-grade students were not –yet- all able to effectively apply phonics and knowledge of orthography in order to compose, they were able to learn the steps of the writing process, how to navigate through it, and how to use sentence structures relevant to the genre of story writing to develop their stories. In the following section we explain the instructional components of the process and provide guidelines for classroom application.

Instructional Components

Self-regulated strategy instruction is an evidence-based approach and its effects have been examined in regular and special-education settings with positive results on writing quality (Graham, 2006; Harris & Graham, 2009; Harris & Graham, 1999; MacArthur, 2011). Overall, strategy instruction provides a systematic instruction of the cognitive processes for writers to develop papers that are clear to readers. Strategy instruction teaches students how to plan, draft,

evaluate to revise, and edit their work. This instruction is done through the use of teacher modeling, collaborative practice, and guided practice supporting students' mastery, and through self-regulation, their independence (Harris & Graham, 2009; Harris et al., 2017). Self-regulation strengthens the results of strategy instruction, which in turn strives for students' independence. Therefore, in self-regulated strategy instruction students are taught how to effectively complete demanding cognitive tasks by not giving up, by setting manageable goals, and by using fix-up strategies (Harris, Graham, MacArthur, Reid, & Mason, 2011).

Self-Regulated Strategy Development is a specific approach that showcases the effectiveness of self-regulated strategy instruction (Graham, Bollinger et al., 2012). The approach includes six steps or six instructional stages: 1) Develop and activate background knowledge on the type of writing, 2) discuss it, 3) model it, 4) memorize it, 5) support it, and 6) practice it (Harris, et al., 2017). The effectiveness of SRSD has been found in special education (e.g., Asaro-Saddler, 2014; Asaro-Saddler & Saddler, 2010; Lane et al., 2011; 2010; 2008; Saddler, 2006), and in regular education classrooms (e.g., Harris, Graham & Mason, 2006; Zumbrunn & Brunning, 2013) demonstrating the power of systematic instruction of cognitive and metacognitive tasks and processes.

Oral discourse, interactive learning, and the use of talk exemplify the social aspect of writing and have been a part of instructional approaches. For instance, in the instruction of argumentation, collaborative reasoning (CR) is used which is based on interactions and the development and explanations of arguments about texts (Anderson, 1998; Anderson, et al., 2001 Anderson, Chinn, Waggoner, & Nguyen, 1998); Newell, Beach, Smith & VanDerHeide, 2011; Reznitskaya, Anderson, & Kuo, 2007). In CR teachers and students engage in dialogic discourse, and through this dialog, students learn how to develop reasons and evidence and how to consider

convincing reasons and evidence that would appeal to the audience. This form of dialogic interaction supports the needs of the genre as argumentation requires from the writer to consider the reader's reaction in order to develop convincing reasons and respond to appeals.

Story writing is a type of writing that does not lend itself for this type of dialogic interactions; however, for students to better understand the use of dialog within a story, the descriptions of characters and events, and the inclusion of all needed elements of the genre in their writing, we found that the use of dialogic interactions would be helpful. Stories and story writing are connected with human nature (Bruner, 1991) and storytelling begins early in recorded written word with Hesiod and Homer. Several studies on story writing and on story grammar show that learning its structure improves reading comprehension and retelling (Rumelhart, 1975; 1980; Baumann & Bergeron, 1993). Learning about the form and its components could also support the writing performance of young learners (Simmons et al., 1994) and this may be possible from as early as Kindergarten.

Drawing from our work on argumentation and on persuasive writing (Philippakos, 2017a; Philippakos, MacArthur & Coker, 2015; Traga Philippakos, MacArthur & Munsell, in press), we followed the same instructional process for story writing (Strategy for Teaching Strategies; Philippakos, 2017b; Philippakos & MacArthur, under review; Philippakos, MacArthur & Munsell, 2016). The tasks were based on the systematic instruction of writing processes (Graham, 2006; Harris & Graham, 2009; MacArthur, 2011), on evaluation and use of genre-specific evaluation criteria (Philippakos, 2017c; Philippakos & MacArthur, 2016a; 2016b), on reading and writing connections using read alouds (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991), on the use of text structure for planning and revision (Englert et al., 1991), and on self-regulation with goal setting and reflection (Harris & Graham, 2009; Harris, Graham, MacArthur, Reid & Mason,

2011). However, we infused talk and drama throughout the instruction and especially when teachers collaboratively wrote a paper with students. The reason for this decision was twofold: First, primary grade students may benefit from the process of being the character in order to understand the feelings, actions, and intentions of her/him. If students are able to understand who the character is, they may be better able to provide a description of the character, the character's inner thoughts, and even the dialogue between that character and others in the story. Second, we knew that strategy instruction is an effective approach and anticipated effects on students' writing. However, for Kindergarten students and for students in grade 1, it may be a challenge to learn the writing process and write without oral practice in retelling and in story writing because their phonics skills are still developing. Besides, the common core standards (CCSS, 2010), expect kindergarten students to produce their work through drawing, dictation, and writing. Thus, talk could be a vehicle for their written production and growth as writers.

How to Apply this Work in The Classroom

> "*Having a format to follow that I could teach the children, going over the sentence structure each time, it was an organized system that the students could do on their own*."

The comments by this teacher show the value of systematic instruction on teachers' instructional delivery and on students' independence. The Strategy for Teaching Strategies (STS) is a guideline for teachers to deliver lessons and also for teachers to develop their own lessons (Philippakos, MacArthur & Coker, 2015). In the next section we explain how each component of the STS is taught for story writing and what questions to ask to promote language. oral discourse is a strong component of strategy instruction and of SRSD where emphasis is given on the use of

vocabulary related to the type of writing, on its use, and on transition words. The suggestions that follow provide those components and suggestions for retellings, oral development of stories, drama, and role play for the development of dialogue among characters.

Introduction to the writing purposes. At the start of the lesson teachers explain to students (or review with students) the writing purposes and state that when writers write, they write in order to **P**ersuade, **I**nform, **E**ntertain or **Co**nvey an **E**xperience (PIECE of writing purposes' pie; Philippakos, in press). Teachers explain that in the writing purposes' pie they have different genres and that their focus would be on story writing. Teachers discusses with students the different titles of stories they have read and comment on the different genres (e.g., fairy tale, folk tale, myth, fable, etc.), on their similarities and differences. We find that it is important for students to be exposed to genres and to understand the differences among them. Thus, we also encourage teachers to develop a table and record the different genres they encounter during read alouds, and explain to students how the elements of those specific readings differ from other genres (e.g., a fable compared to a fantasy) (See Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 Approximately here]

Discussion about the genre and its elements. Teachers discuss with students the importance of stories and share with students how stories are part of everyday life experiences. They exchange information with students about stories and about times that they had to tell a story or listened to a story. Then teachers explain to students the elements of story writing and discuss why a story would not be of good quality if it missed specific elements (e.g., did not have a solution). This discussion is based on consequences to the comprehension and quality of stories. Therefore, consequences are discussed from the point of view of the reader and emphasis is given that writers write to readers besides writing for their own pleasure.

Read aloud. Teachers explain that they will conduct a read aloud and use the elements of the genre to take notes and tell others, who have not read this story, about it so they may want to read it, too. Further, teachers explain that as they read, they will consider how those elements are represented and whether they can "see" the character and pick up some personality traits from the way s/he acts, or talks, or interacts with others. Teachers read the book and during the reading, they stop to comment on the presence of an element and on its quality. For example, after reading the character's name and information about the character, teachers may stop and say to students,

> "*This was a nice section about the character, and I learned quite a lot about this character. What did the author share? Yes, I know the character's name. I also know that the character looks like. I wonder what would this character say if _____. He seems to be _____. It was easy for me to consider this personality trait because the writer has provided such nice explanations about his actions and interactions with others that I could see this character in my mind*."

Teachers continue the read aloud and a discussion with students about the elements and their development. At the end of the read aloud, teachers review the elements and record in the form of notes information about the books next to each element. Next, they use that information to summarize and retell the book. At this point teachers also use of sentence frames that could better assist with retelling and also with writing (e.g., In this book written by _____, the character is _____. The story takes place _____., etc.)

Pre-Assessment. In order to examine growth across time, it is helpful to collect pre-assessment information on students' writing performance. Also, this information could be used

to construct a portfolio with students' work (across several genres) that students will add to throughout the year and be able to reflect on their progress.

Evaluation of good and weak papers. Teachers explain and review the importance of including all the elements in a story without omitting any. Further, they explain that the use of dialogue and descriptions of characters and setting (time and place) help readers better understand the characters' feelings and personality. Teachers discuss the use of some adjectives that could be used to provide such descriptions and comment on the use of words such as *marvelous* versus *good*.

Teachers introduce an evaluation rubric that includes the same elements as the ones used to retell and explains that the elements used to retell now turn into evaluation criteria. The rubric could also include additional questions about the use of dialogue and the use of descriptions about the characters and setting (Philippakos, MacArthur & Coker, 2015; Philippakos & MacArthur, 2016b). Then teachers think aloud and evaluate a well-written paper and then a weaker paper. Collaboratively with students they then evaluate another weak paper and discuss ways that the writer could have improved the paper. With reference to the inclusion of dialogue, teachers and students engage into a conversation as if they were the character/s of the story to determine what the character could have said or what the character could have thought in a specific situation. Teachers would say, "*Imagine I was this person. What could I say to myself as I was trying to solve this problem? Why would I say it? What would the other character say? Let's practice this*!" At this point, teachers and students would engage into a role play and then teachers would comment on ways the writer could have made revisions.

Teacher explanation of the writing process and introduction of the writing strategy ladder. In this section, teachers explain the importance of each step of the writing process,

display a chart that presents the process as a ladder, and engages with students into a conversation about the consequences of skipping a step (e.g., not planning). Then teachers model how to write a story using a think aloud and explain how to overcome challenges (e.g., how to stay focused and continue even when they want to give up). Initially, teachers analyze the writing task using a rhetorical-task analysis process (Form, Topic, Audience, Author, Purpose; FTAAP; Philippakos, in press; Philippakos & MacArthur, in preparation), develop ideas, and organize them using a graphic organizer that has the same elements as the ones used earlier to retell. As teachers model how to draft the ideas, they say a sentence, repeat it, write it, reread it, and add to it if needed (Philippakos, under review; Philippakos, Robinson, Munsell, under review; Philippakos & MacArthur, in preparation). Teachers complete the modeling by evaluating the paper using the same rubric they used earlier and set goals for revision and future story writing (Englert et al., 1991; Philippakos & MacArthur, 2016b).

Collaborative writing. Teachers explain that it is important to learn the elements of the genre and sentence frames to introduce those elements to readers with clarity. Then teachers collaboratively work with students to plan, draft, evaluate to revise, edit, and share a paper. When teachers and students discuss the elements or the steps of the writing process, teachers engage with students in an argumentative conversation asking them to explain why a specific element would be needed (e.g., *Why do we need to evaluate a paper? I could just give it to the teacher once I finish writing it*. *Correct?*" Teachers engage in a conversation with students in which they explain the consequences of the lack of specific elements or of skipping a step of the process (e.g., the effects of not evaluating to revise) on the quality of a paper and on a reader's comprehension. Then teachers and students follow the writing process to write a paper as a group. In the process of planning and of completing the graphic organizer, teacher and students

"dramatize" events and character's actions in order to better represent them in the paper. With older students, (e.g., second-graders), teachers could ask them to orally work on possible dialogues and then record them in their collaborative draft or share them with the teacher to include them in the classroom draft.

Guided practice. At the guided-practice stage, students work to compose their own story; however, it is important at this stage to continue practicing their oral skills and consider ways that characters would interact or think or look like. Also, students continue to orally develop their stories and sentences for those before they encode them. Teachers differentiate by meeting with students in small groups according to their specific needs (e.g., developing dialogue, supporting dictation, etc.).

Mini-lessons. Mini-lessons are ways to differentiate and support students' specific needs. Teachers may provide additional support on dialogue or in the use of adjectives or in the use of onomatopoeia for an interesting beginning. The genre lends itself to specific mini-lessons and those can be provided to the whole group and/or to small groups or individual students.

Preparation for peer review, reviewing, and self-evaluation. After papers are completed, teachers model how to evaluate papers and how to give feedback. The process that was used during the evaluation of good and weak examples is repeated, but with an additional emphasis on the provision of suggestions for revision. Teachers read a paper written by unknown others (Philippakos & MacArthur, 2016a; 2016b), and use the elements of the genre to examine its quality. When information is missing, they act out a specific section or engage in role play to determine what specific suggestions they would give to the writer. After practice, students evaluate their own papers to set study goals and revision goals, and then work on peer review.

Editing. Editing addresses grade-level standards and students' needs. Thus, in second grade, teachers may still work on the suffix –es, -s, and –ies, even though this is a first grade expectation. A generic mnemonic called SCIPS (Spelling, Capitalization, Indentation, Punctuation, Sentences; Philippakos et al., 2015) could be used to guide editing practices and support students' rereading of their work. Overall, it could be used as an overall focus of the editing process.

Postassessment. A final assessment could help teachers confirm improvements and also set professional and instructional goals in order to learn more about specific practices (e.g., how to support evaluation) or reteach specific skills or revise components of their lesson (e.g., to include more drama in the collaborative section.

Technology. Technology can support written production and sharing students' stories is a powerful way to increase their motivation. With Kindergarten students, teachers could use Voicethread for them to read their work and share it with their community. This Web 2.0 tool equips the audience with a variety of response tools such as audio, video, and writing. Teachers may also record students' dialogues as they work with their partners to discuss tone. Students could also read their stories and record them electronically and share them with their families. Teachers and students could work on plays and could perform and share their work.

Further, based on the semiotic and multiliteracies perspective (New London Group, 2000), meaning making is examined through the use of sign systems (Baker, Pearson & Rozendal, 2010). Thus, a mode is a resource for meaning making, which may employ the use of more than one modes; for example, the use of still image, speech, written language, moving image. The potentials for meaning making "enables sign makers to do different work in relation

to their interests and their rhetorical intentions for designs of meaning, which, in modal ensembles, best meet the rhetor's interest and sense of the needs of the audience (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 172). Therefore, through the use of Glogsters, students' videos, students' writing, and links to their drawings (if those are also available) or even introductions to their stories and themes could be constructed and showcased online for others to see the classrooms' work.

Discussion

Strategy instruction is a powerful instructional approach that is even more powerful when it is paired with self-regulation (Harris, Graham, MacArthur, Reid & Mason, 2011). For younger populations (such as Kindergarten and beginning first-graders) instruction on writing as students still develop their phonics skills might be challenging. However, the use of drama, role play, and interactive conversations with teachers and classmates can support students' written production. Also, alternatives in collaborative writing could support teachers and students as writers. As one first grade teacher shared, "*Seeing the story developed for them, and including the elements as the story unfolded was a good base for them to understand the genre. And, of course, reading so many stories in the classroom and identifying the elements was good groundwork*." The use of reading to support writing helped students better understand the structure of stories and also the value of including descriptions and dialogue for stories to be of good quality and appeal to readers. The use of retellings and role play seem to support students' understanding of dialog usage and the need to bring characters to life when composing a story. Strategy instruction with self-regulation is an instructional approach with strong evidence of effectiveness. Even though more research is needed with primary grades that integrates dialogic interactions with the

systematic instruction of cognitive processes and task, there is evidence of promise for the value of this integration that could be further explored.

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Table 1

Recording of information during read alouds with sample information

Author	Title	Purpose	Genre	Type	Uniqueness
Aesop	Zeus and Frogs	Entertain	Fable	Fiction	- Moral - Animals talk like humans
Doreen Cronin	Click Clack Moo	Entertain	Fantasy	Fiction	- Animals have human attributes
Seymour Simon	Mars	Inform	Report	Nonfiction	- Categories of information - Real pictures
					-