The Relationship between Writing Attitude and Spelling Capabilities in Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Students.

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Abstract

Struggling writers experience difficulty with spelling which can interfere with composing during writing. Spelling can influence their perceptions about their ability as a writer, thus affecting their attitudes about writing. This action research study examined the relationship between attitude about writing and spelling capabilities in fourth- and fifth-grade students with special needs. Self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) is an instructional approach that utilizes explicit, interactive, and scaffolded instruction to assist students with writing challenges to develop writing and self-regulation strategies. SRSD was used in this study to increase the use of efficient spelling strategies to assist with increasing the students' motivation and ability to write to be able to form a positive writing attitude. Results indicated that attitude about writing was not linked to a child's motivation and ability to produce text that is spelled correctly, because of each child overestimating his or her ability. Therefore, further research should be warranted in finding reasons for children overestimating their writing ability, as well as finding a tool or method to effectively evaluate a child's attitude.

Keywords: struggling writers, writing attitude, spelling, self-regulated strategy development

Introduction

Students need to gain a wide range of skills in writing to be able to experience school and career success (Knudson, 1995). They should be able to demonstrate an increasing knowledge in all aspects of the writing process, from developing and organizing ideas, transferring these ideas into written form using vocabulary and rules of grammar and mechanics, revising and editing written pieces, and finally publishing written work. Each aspect of the writing process is important, but from my observations, a child's attitude can play a central role in the writing process and can affect their motivation and ability to write. Attitude can have an influence on writing ability through its impact on cognitive engagement (Graham, Berninger, & Fan, 2007). Moreover, Knudson (1995) indicated that writing attitude is related to writing achievement. Children seem to dwell on the mechanics of writing, specifically spelling, which can disrupt the process of the working memory, affect the coherence and complexity of the content, and cause difficulty translating ideas accurately. Spelling can influence their perceptions about their ability as a writer, which may deter them from writing and develop a mindset that they cannot do it (Graham, Harris, & Chorzempa, 2002). The purpose of the current study was to extend earlier work from an action research project that focused on improving students' writing fluency by integrating interactive writing with explicit strategy instruction in spelling to assist with spelling unfamiliar words. In this study, I sought to expand this idea to study children's attitude about writing and how it may be related to spelling capabilities.

As an educator for the past eight years, I have worked with a variety of students with special needs, ranging from a learning disability, other health disability, to autism spectrum disorder. When working with these students within the area of writing, I have noticed that when they appeared to have a positive attitude, they were enthusiastic about the writing task, willing to

make attempts whether they were successful or unsuccessful, and were able to sustain their effort throughout the task. Whereas, when students appeared to have a negative attitude, they experienced difficulty initiating the writing task, wrote in a "matter-of-fact" manner just to get the task done, and made self-defeating statements about their writing ability. A child's attitude determines how the composing process is carried out and what the final product will be, which is shaped upon a variety of motivational variables (Alexander, Graham, & Harris, 1998; Graham, Schwartz, & MacArthur, 1993). Moreover, Alexander (2004) noted that "motivation and strategic processing are important elements in students' growth in a variety of academic domains" (as cited in Olinghouse & Graham, 2009, p. 39). To promote a healthy writing attitude that increases a child's motivation and ability to write, self-regulated strategy development has been viewed to assist children in the area of writing (Graham & Harris, 1996).

Literature Review

Characteristics of a Struggling Writer

Writers who have difficulties may be labeled as struggling writers, which can be based on numerous factors, such as scoring in the lower quartile on norm-referenced tests (Pressley & Harris, 2006), teacher observation, classroom performance, or performance on formal and informal assessments. Furthermore, writers who have difficulties may be seen as individuals with a learning disability (Pressley & Harris, 2006), which can be defined as "… a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations" (Heward, 2003, p. 242). A learning disability is "…manifested by interference with the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval, manipulation,

or expression of information so that the child does not learn at an adequate rate...” (“Minnesota Administrative,” 2008).

Struggling writers with a learning disability experience difficulty with sustaining the writing effort (Graham & Harris, 2003; Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2005). Further, Graham (1990) found that fourth- and sixth-grade learning disabled students wrote essays in approximately six to seven minutes, whereas when asked to dictate their response, it only took them one minute. The students’ responses to these written tasks appeared to take on a question-and-answer format, instead of elaborating upon their ideas.

Struggling writers with a learning disability have difficulty accessing the knowledge they already have (Graham & Harris, 2003). Graham found that when the students seemed that they could no longer write and were given prompts to continue, the amount of text produced increased substantially in a written, dictated, and scribed format. Results showed their responses could either be doubled or tripled when given a prompt to a writing task (Graham, 1990; Graham & Harris, 2003).

Struggling writers with a learning disability do not have a mature understanding of writing, lack composition skills and basic story elements, and their writing is short in length, poor quality, or incomplete (Graham & Harris, 1989a; Graham et al., 2005; Graham et al., 1993). To increase these skills, Graham and Harris (1989a), investigated whether cognitive strategy instruction is worthwhile for fifth- and sixth-grade learning disabled students with composition deficiencies. Results showed that cognitive strategy instruction had a significant effect on learning disabled students’ composition skills by including more story elements into their writing, as well as enhancing the quality of their writing. However, the study indicated that there could still be room for improvement in learning disabled students’ writing, such as extending the

length or further enhancing the quality of their writing, since these students wrote half as much as their typically achieving peers and post-test quality ratings were much lower than their typically achieving peers.

Additionally, these students have difficulties with mechanics, such as spelling (Graham & Harris, 2003), and grammar (Graham et al. 1993). Difficulties with mechanics can interfere with composing during writing (Graham, 1990; Graham, et al., 2002; Graham & Harris, 2003; MacArthur & Graham, 1987). Due to their lower level language skills, learning disabled (LD) children may have difficulty getting ideas down onto paper, which can interfere with carrying out higher level cognitive processes, such as planning or generating new content which is needed for effective writing. For example, if a child was focused on spelling a word, it could disturb the process of generating content, thus forgetting plans and ideas already developed (MacArthur & Graham, 1987). This was evident in the study completed by Graham (1990) in which fourth- and sixth-grade LD students' quantity and quality of writing was affected by the mechanics of producing written text. Likewise, MacArthur and Graham (1987) indicated that fifth- and sixth-grade LD students misspelled 12% of words when asked to compose a story through handwritten and word processing means, thus affecting the fluency and quality of written expression. Subsequently, they apply immature and ineffective strategies for planning and revising writing (Graham et al., 1993; MacArthur & Graham, 1987).

Additionally, mechanical demands can interfere with the rate of writing because struggling writers are not fast enough to keep up with their thoughts, due to being stuck at the surface level of writing. They use a smaller vocabulary and syntax, in order to avoid words that they do not know how to spell and avoid writing complex sentences. Difficulties with mechanics can affect their motivation and persistence, as well (MacArthur & Graham, 1987).

Graham et al. (2002) examined whether there was a relationship between spelling and the writing process, whether there was a link between spelling and reading, and examined the impact of supplementary spelling instruction for second graders that were experiencing difficulty with learning to spell. (For the purpose of this study, I solely looked at the relationship between spelling and the writing process, as well as the impact of supplementary spelling instruction for poor spellers.) Graham and colleagues predicted that the spelling instruction would improve student writing because they would not have to devote their time to spelling and could focus on other writing processes. Their prediction was confirmed, and researchers found that the supplemental spelling instruction was effective for increasing spelling in two ways: increasing their memory of spelling specific words and their knowledge of the spelling system. Additionally, they found a link between learning to spell and writing development. Students showed progress in their ability to construct sentences, as well as improvements in text-production skills.

Writing and Motivation

Motivation is "an internal state that arouses, directs, and maintains behavior" (Woolfolk, 1998, p. 372). Rothstein and Woolfolk (1990) viewed motivation as "a driving force for students' learning goals, activities they choose to engage in to reach those goals, and intensity in which they engage in activities" (as cited in Somuncuoglu & Yildirim, 1999, p. 267). In a study by Graham et al. (1993), they found that students with a learning disability had a slightly less positive attitude than their normally achieving peers, which may be due to motivation.

Teachers are concerned with developing a student's motivation to learn. A student's motivation to learn can be described as a student finding academic activities essential and valuable (Woolfolk, 1998). To promote this motivation to learn, goals, values, and affect have

been used to understand, predict, and influence achievement motivation in academic areas (Anderman & Wolters, 2006). Another source to promote motivation to learn is an individual's self-efficacy (Woolfolk, 1998).

Goals and motivation. A goal is what an individual is attempting to achieve and "motivates people to act" (Woolfolk, 1998, p. 379). For over three decades, Carole Ames (1984), Carol Dweck (1986), Marty Maehr (Maehr & Nicholls, 1980), and John Nicholls (1984) worked independently and collaboratively to develop a model called "achievement goal" which "…provides a valuable framework and insights that can promote stronger positive attitudes and increased motivation" (Alderman & Green, 2011, p. 599). Achievement goal provided reasons for children wanting to engage in academic tasks or activities (Maehr, 1989). The research focused on two goal types: mastery and performance goals. Mastery goals center on developing competence and task mastery. Students who feel competent are more motivated to engage in academic tasks, which will increase their academic performance (Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003). These students are more interested in developing their skills and internally evaluating themselves (Alderman & Green, 2011). Performance goals center on demonstrating competence and outperforming others. Students view their competencies based on perceptions of others, like parents and teachers (Stevenson & Newman, 1986). These two kinds of students differ in their classroom abilities. Students with a mastery goal orientation are persistent with difficult tasks and do not give up easily when presented with a challenging task, whereas students with a performance goal orientation are easily discouraged and give up more easily (Alderman & Green, 2011).

Similar to personal goal orientations, classroom goal structures are the perceptions of the types of goals that are stressed in the classroom setting which can influence whether a child

adopts a mastery or performance goal orientation (Anderman & Wolters, 2006). Ames (1992) suggested distinct actions a teacher can take to promote learning goals in the classroom by: designing tasks and learning activities that are meaningful and challenging, providing evaluative practices that are private and recognition that encourages effort, and distributing authority or responsibility from teacher to students. This type of classroom goal structure promotes a mastery-goal orientation. However, if a teacher were to emphasize grades in the classroom, it would promote a performance-goal orientation.

The task demands of a situation can shape a child's perceptions on the task, therefore coming up with different personal goal orientations. Thus, these goal orientations lead into the use of learning strategies (Somuncuoglu & Yildirim, 1999). Learning strategies, as defined by Resnick are "... mental processes that learners can deliberately recruit to help themselves learn and understand something new" (Brandt, 1988, p. 14), which is deemed necessary for self-regulated learning (Somuncuoglu & Yildirim, 1999). Somuncuoglu and Yildirim (1999) found that when college students adopted a mastery goal orientation, they were more likely to use deep cognitive strategies, referring to elaboration and organization of information, and metacognitive strategies, referring to planning, monitoring and regulating of behavior. The researchers felt when students had a mastery goal orientation, they had a more realistic attitude to learning, consequently taking part in more meaningful and autonomous learning. When the students adopted a performance goal orientation, specifically an ego-social orientation, which pertains to demonstrating ability and outperforming others, these students were more likely to use surface cognitive strategies. Surface cognitive strategies refer to the rehearsal of information, which demonstrates a preference for short-term memory use and rote-learning behaviors. Deciding to use strategies requires effort, so students will only exert effort if they know it will have a positive

impact on their performance, thus motivating the student to use the strategy. And utilizing strategy instruction will ensure that students learn strategies (Pressley & Harris, 2006).

Personal goal orientations and classroom goal structures can be described in the context of writing because goal setting can improve performance as stated by Locke and Latham (1990) by directing a student's attention to the task, mobilizing their effort, increasing their persistence, and promoting the development of new strategies when old strategies do not work any longer (as cited in Woolfolk, 1998), which would convey a mastery-oriented goal orientation and structure. Whereas, a performance-oriented goal structure and orientation can be detrimental to learning because students would engage in self-handicapping and avoidance behaviors, thus demonstrating lower performance and not being fully engaged with the specific task (Anderman & Wolters, 2006).

Values and motivation. Investigating students' achievement values has been associated with academic motivation. Achievement values are concerned with benefits, rewards, and the advantages that individuals believe may happen when participating in a particular task or activity, which can be referred to as expectancy-value theory (Anderman & Wolters, 2006). Eccles (1983) has identified three different components of achievement values: (1) attainment value, the importance of doing well on an academic task; (2) intrinsic value, how much a student likes doing the task; and (3) utility value, how useful is the current task to a future goal. Students assess academic tasks using these components of achievement value (Anderman & Wolters, 2006).

Values can also be seen from a different perspective by analyzing interest (Anderman & Wolters, 2006). Interest has been found to influence attention, goals, and levels of learning. It is a psychological state, which correlates with your physiological state, consequently affecting an

individual's attitude (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). There are two different types of interest that have been identified: personal (individual) interest and situational interest. Personal interest can be described as an individual's ongoing liking for a particular topic or activity, is stable, and does not vary across time and situations. Whereas, situational interest can be described as an individual's current enjoyment that is made by what is occurring in the environment, is short-lived, and can change quickly based on cues from the environment (Anderman & Wolters, 2006; Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Depending on the type of interest one has, it can determine the value that an individual places on a particular topic or activity.

Values can be described in the context of writing because when children value a task, they are more likely to engage in the task. Also, values can predict outcomes, such as expanding knowledge in a content-area. Interest has been found to have some beneficial outcomes, as well. Children who have personal interest with a task or activity are cognitively engaged, persist longer, and enjoy the task-at-hand. Also, situational interest can be beneficial for low-achieving children who may already lack the personal interest in tasks or activities (Anderman & Wolters, 2006).

Affect and motivation. School is a place where students experience many affective responses to various academic tasks. Affect stems from attributions that individuals make about their life. Attribution theory originated from the work of Heider (1958), Kelley (1973), and Weiner (1986), and can be defined as an individual's explanations or beliefs about their causes for success or failure. Individuals explain their causes of success or failure by their ability, effort, the type of task, and luck. These attributions can influence expectancies, emotions, and behaviors (as cited in Martinko, Harvey, & Dasborough, 2011); thus affecting an individual's motivation to complete a task (Woolfolk, 1998).

Affect can play a role in the type of personal goal orientation an individual selects. If an individual has a positive affect, he or she is more likely to select a mastery-oriented goal, whereas having a negative affect is related to a performance-oriented goal. Furthermore, affect can influence the value you put on a particular task, as well as the amount of cognitive resources you use towards a task. For instance, if an individual values a task highly, which relates to a positive affect, they may experience an intense emotional reaction, therefore being more invested in the task. Being in a negative mood requires more cognitive resources, which leaves fewer resources to attend to tasks, thus leading to less efficient cognitive processing. Hence, affect can serve as a context, precursor, or antecedent of cognitive processing and engagement in learning (Anderman & Wolters, 2006).

Self-efficacy and motivation. Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as one's belief in their ability to complete tasks and reach goals. Self-efficacy can influence effort, persistence, and perseverance (Pajares, 1996). Collins (1982) conducted a study with children with varying mathematical abilities, with either a low or high sense of self-efficacy at each level. He found that after instruction, children with a high sense of self-efficacy, no matter their ability level, completed more problems correctly and continued to work on problems they got incorrect (as cited in Pajares, 1996).

Self-efficacy is related to making attributions, as well as influencing motivation through goal setting. For instance, if an individual has a high sense of self-efficacy, he or she would set higher goals, not be afraid of failure, and sustain their effort with a given task. However, if an individual has a low sense of self-efficacy, he or she may avoid a task altogether (Woolfolk, 1998).

Self-Regulated Strategy Development

Teachers require effective teaching strategies that incorporate motivation, as well as improve a child's writing performance. One such strategy is identified as self-regulated strategy development (SRSD). For more than thirty years, Graham and Harris (1996 & 2003) have been formulating and evaluating this instructional approach to assist students with writing challenges to develop writing and self-regulation strategies. Graham and Harris found that this explicit, interactive, and scaffolded instruction is an effective model for teaching writing and improves students' writing performance, as well (Graham & Harris, 2003).

> Graham and Harris (1996) found that the major goals of SRSD include helping students master the higher-level cognitive processes involved in composing; develop autonomous, reflective, self-regulated use of effective writing strategies; increase knowledge about the characteristics of good writing; and form positive attitudes about writing and themselves as writers. (p. 352)

There are six basic stages of instruction for the SRSD approach. Each stage is not meant to be followed in order, "rather, they provide a general format and guidelines. The stages can be reordered, combined, revisited, modified, or deleted to meet student and teacher needs" (Harris et al., 2003). In Table 1, the six basic stages of instruction for the SRSD approach are briefly explained (Graham & Harris, 1996; Harris et al., 2003; Mason et al., 2011).

Table 1

Stages of Instruction for the SRSD Approach

Stages of Instruction	Explanation of Stages
Develop Background Knowledge	the teacher helps the student to develop the background knowledge and prerequisite skills necessary to carry out the target strategy

Initial Conference: Strategy Goals and Significance	teacher and students discuss current writing performance, strategy to be learned, benefits of the strategy, how and when to use the strategy, students make a commitment to learn the strategy, and students make an agreement to be an active collaborator during the process
Modeling of the Strategy	teacher models the targeted strategy and utilizes appropriate self-instructions (e.g. problem definition, attention and planning, strategy use, self-evaluation and error correction, coping and self-control, and self-reinforcement), teacher and students discuss if any changes need to be made to make the strategy more effective, students create and record self-statements to use when writing
Memorization of the Strategy	students memorize the steps of the strategy
Collaborative Practice	teacher scaffolds the student's strategy use
Independent Performance	students use strategy independently, encouraged to use self-statements in-their-head, and self-regulation procedures may begin to fade out

Also, there are several characteristics that are important to implementing the SRSD model effectively. First, interactive learning needs to take place between teacher and students. Second, instruction needs to be individualized for each student to meet their unique needs. Lastly, instruction is criterion based, so students can go through each stage of instruction at their own pace (Graham & Harris, 1996).

Effects of self-regulated strategy development instruction on self-efficacy and motivation. To foster self-efficacy in writing, instructional procedures are embedded within the SRSD model (Graham et al., 2005) through emphasizing the importance of student effort in strategy mastery, setting goals, self-monitoring, or self-reinforcement (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2003). Likewise, the SRSD approach contains a number of practices to enhance motivation, such as treating students as active participants, adjusting the pace of instruction to meet student's needs, teaching the strategy they need to be successful, emphasizing mastery of target strategies, recognizing and rewarding effort, self-reflection, and emphasizing evaluation of

personal progress and mastery (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006). Furthermore, Graham supported that "motivation shapes writing development" (as cited in Graham et al., 2007, p. 517); however this conclusion must be viewed as tentative because there was limited data and the evidence examined was mixed (Graham et al., 2007).

Graham and Harris (1989b) conducted a study to find out whether self-instructional strategy training would improve three, sixth-grade learning disabled students' skills in writing, particularly in generating, framing (i.e. using a particular structure based on knowledge of genre patterns and deciding what information to use and where it will go), and planning an argumentative essay. Multiple methods were used to evaluate the impact of the strategy, they used: writing performance, a measure of self-efficacy to judge their ability to write and revise an essay, generalization of the skill to a new setting and writing genre, and maintenance of the skill over time. Overall, the students' writing performance increased by including more items that supported the development of an argument, the types of essay elements used, and the quality of their writing, as well. Students were interviewed to determine if the self-instructional strategy training was helpful, and all students reported that they believed the training was useful and would recommend the training to their friends to help improve their writing. When given a measure of self-efficacy, that included five questions on a 10- to 100-point scale, the following baseline scores were received: 64, 52, and 88 points. At the end of training, it was shown that self-efficacy had improved for all students. One student increased by four points, the second student by 18 points, and the final student by 12 points. Graham and Harris wanted to illustrate that the students even had a high score of self-efficacy at the beginning of the training and noted that learning disabled students have a difficult time accurately assessing their ability.

In another study conducted by Graham and Harris (1989a), they investigated whether cognitive strategy instruction is worthwhile for fifth- and sixth-grade learning disabled students with composition deficiencies, as well as investigating the possible incremental effects due to instruction in self-regulation of strategic performance in terms of writing performance and self-efficacy. The fifth- and sixth-grade students were divided into two groups; both groups received story grammar strategy instruction and instruction in the significance of the strategy, whereas one group received additional instruction in explicit self-regulation procedures. Results showed that self-instructional strategy training had a significant effect on learning disabled students' composition skills and increased sense of self-efficacy. However, there were no incremental effects due to instruction in self-regulation of strategic performance evident; both strategy groups increased their sense of self-efficacy significantly. This may be attributed to strategy instruction including implicit self-regulation information.

Graham et al. (2005) examined whether SRSD instruction would be effective with improving the performance of struggling writers in third grade. They examined the impact of SRSD on writing and knowledge for planning and composing stories and persuasive essays, as well as self-efficacy. Also, they examined whether peer support would enhance maintenance and generalization of strategies and skills. Overall, SRSD instruction was shown to be effective for improving the writing performance and knowledge of struggling young writers. They were able to spend more time composing, wrote longer stories and persuasive essays that were more complete by including the necessary basic elements, and wrote qualitatively better stories and persuasive essays. Also, they were able to maintain these skills over time in story writing and generalize these skills to informative writing. The peer support component of SRSD instruction was shown to increase their knowledge of planning, as well as generalize skills to informative

and narrative writing. Based on earlier research showing that strategy instruction can improve the confidence of a child's capabilities, they expected self-efficacy to be increased by SRSD instruction. Although SRSD contains practices to enhance motivation, they found that students' self-efficacy was not enhanced by SRSD instruction; students were generally positive before and after instruction when given five self-efficacy items from a ten-item scale that measured their efficacy about planning and writing a paper. They feel the results may have been attributed to young students being unable to accurately assess their capability and not wanting to estimate their abilities as poor.

Harris et al. (2006) extended the research from the Graham et al. (2005) investigation to find the impact that the SRSD approach would have on second grade students' writing, knowledge, and motivation since there was only one study to examine the effectiveness of SRSD on primary grade students. Harris and colleagues yielded similar results from the investigation done with the third graders and found that second graders' intrinsic motivation was not enhanced by SRSD instruction as rated by teachers' perceptions, instead of children's self-reports.

Bandura and Schunk (1981) illustrated that children making an overestimation of their judgments on their math self-efficacy may be due to misperceptions of task demands, faulty self-knowledge, and selective attention to mastered elements which brings out competencies, whereas focus on partially understood items highlights deficiencies. Furthermore, Harris, Graham, and Freeman (1988) noted that children tend to make overestimations, as well due to not being able to comprehend accurately, use of a self-protective coping strategy, and an inability to match task demands to their ability level (as cited in Graham & Harris, 1989a).

Importance of explicit, interactive, and scaffolded instruction. Research indicates that struggling writers have difficulties with mechanics (Graham & Harris, 2003), which can disrupt

the process of working memory, affect the coherence and complexity of the content, as well as have difficulty translating ideas accurately (Graham, Harris, & Chorzempa, 2002). SRSD instruction has shown to improve a student's knowledge of writing, as well as writing performance (Graham & Harris, 2003). It can enhance motivational attributes (Harris et al., 2003), as well as make students confident of their capabilities (Graham et al., 2005). Yet, this determination must be viewed tentatively because of the limited data and the mixed evidence that was collected (Graham et al., 2007).

Motivation is promoted by goals, values, affect, and self-efficacy. Depending on an individual's affect, values, and beliefs of self-efficacy, it can influence the type of goal orientation an individual selects and the types of strategies he or she uses, which provides reasons for children wanting to engage and sustain efforts with a task. Hence, these components can have an effect on one's attitude.

To direct a struggling writer's attention to the quality of written expression, strategy instruction can be used to increase a student's knowledge and application on efficient spelling strategies, so they would not have to be stuck at the surface level of writing, which can deter them from writing (Graham, Harris, & Chorzempa, 2002). Since a struggling writer has difficulties with spelling (Graham & Harris, 2003) and a child's attitude can determine how the composing process is carried out (Graham, Schwartz, & MacArthur, 1993), the main action research question that emerges here is:

What is the relationship between attitude about writing and spelling capabilities in fourth- and fifth-grade students?

Methodology

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study are five fifth-grade students and one fourth-grade student with special needs who have been identified with a specific learning disability or other health impairment, and receive special education services within the area of literacy. The six students were selected from my current caseload by having goals and objectives written in their Individualized Educational Plans within the area of written language. There are three male students and three female students between the ages of 9-11. Two out of the six students are identified by the district as English language learners. The students in this study attend two schools in a single school district located in suburban neighborhoods in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. The study was conducted within a special education setting located in both schools during the students' regularly scheduled service time, which was a 30-minute time period, as stated in each Individualized Educational Plan. Based on the general education teacher's schedule, as well as my schedule, instruction was delivered at three separate times during the school day. Table 2 lists how the students (all student names are pseudonyms) were divided into groups; two students in the first group, one student in the second group, and three students in the third group. The study spanned over a 9-week time period, including pre-and post-assessments, as well as nine instructional sessions.

Table 2

Grouping of Students

Group	Members of Group
1	Beatrice & Melissa
2	Josh
3	Nick, Chris, & Emily

Materials and Procedures

The students were asked to complete the Writing Attitude Survey (WAS), an instrument used to learn about students' attitudes towards writing was developed by Kear, Coffman, McKenna, and Ambrosio (2000). In this study, the WAS was used as a pre- and post-measurement of attitude toward writing and to monitor the impact of SRSD instruction. Before administering the WAS, I shared the purpose and brief overview of the survey to the students. The survey contains 28-items which used wording with a uniform beginning, "How do you feel…," for each statement about writing. Based on the students' reading ability and comfort level, I provided them with the choices of reading the items aloud to them or completing the survey independently. At the beginning of the study, all students chose to have me read the items aloud. Whereas, at the conclusion of the study, some students chose to complete the survey independently. The instrument uses a four-point Likert scale as depicted by the Garfield cartoon character that displays emotions ranging from very happy to very upset to measure a student's attitude. When the surveys are ready to be scored, the circled Garfield for each question is given a point value. The very happy Garfield is given a point value of four, the somewhat happy Garfield is given a point value of three, the somewhat upset Garfield is given a point value of two, and the very upset Garfield is given a point value of one. The point value for each circled Garfield is totaled up with the highest possible total being 112. Then, the score can be interpreted in two ways. The first way, one can look at where the raw score falls related to the total possible points. For instance, if a student's raw score was approximately 70, falling in between the somewhat happy and somewhat upset Garfields, one can determine that the student has an indifferent attitude toward writing. The second way is to convert the final raw score to a percentile rank based on grade level norms.

Following the WAS, the students were given the Writing Vocabulary (WV) assessment from an Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement (Clay, 2005) to collect information on the number of words they knew how to write and the strategies used while writing in isolation as a means of pre- and post-measurement to monitor the impact of SRSD instruction. The WV assessment requires the student to write down their known words in a 10-minute period of time. If a student has difficulty thinking about words to write, the examiner is able to supply prompts, such as sight words, names of friends or family members, favorite foods, etc. to sustain the student's writing effort during the allotted time. When the assessment is ready to be scored, the student is awarded one point for each word spelled correctly.

Lastly, the students were given a Written Expression-Curriculum Based Measurement (WE-CBM) probe to collect information on the Total Words Written (TWW), Words Spelled Correctly (WSC), and Correct Writing Sequences (CWS) that each student produced as a means of pre- and post-measurement to monitor the impact of SRSD instruction. The WE-CBM asks the student to write a story after being given an orally presented prompt called a story starter that is selected by the examiner. The story starter is designed to elicit narrative writing, so the students avoid writing yes or no to the prompt and can avoid writing lists. The examiner provides a pencil and a piece of paper that has the story starter written on it. The examiner reads aloud the directions and informs the students that they will have 1-minute to think about what they will write and 3-minutes to write their story. When the stories are ready to be scored, the examiner finds the TWW by underlining the number of words produced and totaling the number of words. Next, the examiner determines the WSC by judging the appropriateness of each word in context within the English language. Then, the examiner puts a circle around the words that are spelled incorrectly and totals the number of circled words and subtracts it from the number of TWW to

find the number of WSC. Finally, the examiner determines the number of CWS. A CWS are two adjoining writing units, including words and punctuation that are correct within the context of what is written. This requires the examiner to make inferences on what each student intended to express. The examiner places a caret between words that are mechanically, semantically, and syntactically correct. The examiner finds the number of CWS by totaling the number of carets in the story (Powell-Smith & Shinn, 2004).

I administered the WAS as the first pre- and post-assessment, so the students would not be bogged down with writing from the other assessments, possibly having an influence on the student's responses to the survey. The pre-assessments were given on the same day for Groups 1 and 3, and on two separate days for Group 2 because of time constraints within the schedule. The post-assessments were given on two separate days for Groups 1, 2, and 3 because of time constraints within the schedule, as well.

Following the pre-assessments, I began SRSD instruction. As mentioned previously, each stage of instruction is not meant to be followed in order, "rather, they provide a general format and guidelines. The stages can be reordered, combined, revisited, modified, or deleted to meet student and teacher needs" (Harris et al., 2003). Therefore, I utilized the following stages of SRSD instruction in my study: developing background knowledge, modeling of the strategy, collaborative practice, and independent performance.

During the developing background knowledge stage, I informed the students that I would be observing and evaluating their writing behaviors, as well as their feelings towards writing. The students and I discussed and listed the reasons for why writers write and what do writers write. I eliminated the initial conference stage because I did not want the students to know that I

was specifically looking at the strategies they used to spell unfamiliar words because I wanted the research to be authentic, and knowing that may have caused the students to act differently.

Dahl and colleagues (2003) conducted a study to determine what spelling strategies children were using by examining their explanations during conferences between the classroom teacher and university-based researcher. After analyzing these conferences, Dahl and colleagues revealed that children used numerous spelling strategies, as well as variations of these strategies. The spelling strategies and their variations developed from these conferences are listed in Table 3 and were used during strategy instruction in this study. Based on the information gathered from the pre-assessments, I was able to determine the target spelling strategies that would be utilized during the modeling of the strategy stage for the students. The target spelling strategies used were: trying alternatives, using analogies, starting with known patterns, chunking, picturing words, remembering words, checking with resources, verifying spelling, and working with multiple strategies. I modeled the strategy on an interactive whiteboard using an agreed upon writing topic that the students and I generated. The interactive whiteboard slide was arranged in a split-screen format; one side was dedicated to writing, whereas the other side was used to practice the target spelling strategy, when necessary. Then, the students had the opportunity to participate during the collaborative practice stage by working side-by-side with me to create a written message and scaffold their use of the targeted spelling strategy when they arrived at a word that they did not know how to spell.

Table 3

Children's Spelling Strategies and their Variations

Spelling Strategies	Variations
Visualizing	Remembering words from books Picturing words

	Trying alternatives
Making Connections	Using word families and analogies Starting with known patterns Building words
Focusing on Sounds	Sounding out Chunking
Reflecting	Verifying the spelling Correcting errors Checking with resources
Combining Information	Working with multiple strategies Using a strategy routine

During the independent performance stage, the students were allowed to choose their own writing topic to be given the opportunity to utilize the modeled spelling strategies. I encouraged the students to choose their own writing topic, so they would value what they were writing and be more likely to engage in the types of mental activities necessary for writing, such as using the specific spelling strategy that was modeled (Graham & Harris, 1996). As the students were writing, I observed and recorded the students' spelling attempts and strategies used with a teacher-made checklist that was derived from the spelling strategies and their variations as was developed by Dahl and colleagues.

Finally, when the students' regularly scheduled service time was finished, I asked each student to fill-out an exit slip to assess their own dispositions after writing by circling a feeling word that best matched with how they were feeling. The feelings listed on the exit slip were bored, enthusiastic, frustrated, tired, glad, worried, sad, focused, silly/wiggly, and angry. Enthusiastic, glad, focused, and silly/wiggly were associated with a positive disposition. Whereas, bored, frustrated, tired, worried, sad, and angry were associated with a negative disposition. I reviewed this procedure with the students and explained any unfamiliar vocabulary. To assess whether the student's disposition had an effect on their motivation and ability to write,

as well as using spelling strategies efficiently, I analyzed each student's writing samples using a holistic scoring rubric that contained five levels of performance and four dimensions of writing ability, which I modified to contain four levels of performance (i.e. limited command, partial command, adequate command, and strong command) and five dimensions of writing ability (i.e. content and organization, usage, sentence construction, mechanics, and use of spelling strategies) to serve as the basis for judging each student's writing response. The content and organization dimension includes the following descriptors: opening and closing, focused, logical progressions of ideas, and appropriate details and information. The usage dimension includes the following descriptors: tense formation, subject-verb agreement, pronouns/usage agreement, and word choice/meaning. The sentence construction dimension includes the following descriptors: variety of type, structure, and length. The mechanics dimension includes the following descriptors: correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. The use of spelling strategies dimension focused on whether the student was able to use spelling strategies independently or required scaffolding from the teacher to use a spelling strategy efficiently. Once their writing sample was analyzed, a student could earn the highest possible total of 20 points.

Findings

The results from the Writing Attitude Survey are listed in Table 4 and show that three out of six students increased their writing attitude score. Beatrice and Emily maintained a somewhat happy attitude from pre- and post-test results, even though Beatrice increased her score by ten points and Emily by eight points. Although Josh continued to have a somewhat negative attitude towards writing, his writing attitude still increased by seven points. On the contrary, three out of six students decreased their writing attitude. Although Melissa and Chris' writing attitude slightly decreased, it was not as significant as Nick's results. Nick's score decreased by 17 points

from pre- to post-test. I feel the significant decrease may be attributed to a biography project he was working on in his classroom that involved lots of writing and required extensive assistance from home and at school to complete the project. Therefore, the attributions he made about his ability or the type of task-at-hand could have influenced his responses on the Writing Attitude Survey during the time period the post-survey was taken. Also, while reviewing the results from the survey, I noticed a pattern amongst the boys and girls in this study. It appeared that the girls had a somewhat happy attitude towards writing, whereas the boys had a somewhat negative attitude towards writing.

Table 4

Writing Attitude Survey: Pre- and Post-Test Results

Student Names	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Beatrice	84	94
Melissa	79	78
Nick	81	64
Josh	56	63
Chris	65	62
Emily	85	93

Note. Results are reported as raw scores.

The results from the Writing Vocabulary assessment are listed in Table 5 and show that five out of six students increased the number of words written in isolation. Although Emily decreased the number of words written in isolation, all students were observed to increase the number of spelling strategies used from pre- to post-test, ranging from one to three spelling strategies. During the pre- and post-test, I observed that all students relied on the visualizing spelling strategy (i.e. picturing words, remembering words). Whereas in the post-test, it was

observed that all students utilized the making connection spelling strategy (i.e. starting with known patterns, using analogies) which were two of the targeted spelling strategies utilized during strategy instruction. I observed Chris using the making connection spelling strategy (i.e. starting with known patterns) during the pre- and post-test. While reviewing their spelling attempts on words that may have been familiar, somewhat familiar, or unfamiliar to them, the students attempted a word, regardless if they knew they were going to be correct, which shows that they are willing to take risks to produce words.

Table 5

Writing Vocabulary: Pre- and Post-Test Results

Student Names	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Beatrice	39	50
Melissa	48	57
Nick	53	70
Josh	98	100
Chris	44	49
Emily	96	87

Note. Results are reported as raw scores.

The results from the Written Expression-Curriculum Based Measurement are listed in Table 6 and show that four out of six students increased the number of Total Words Written, Correct Word Sequences, and Words Spelled Correctly. The two students who decreased in their performance were Beatrice and Melissa who are identified as English language learners. Beatrice's performance from pre-and post-test is attributed to her writing less, which is a characteristic of a struggling writer and is shown by the number of Total Words Written being reduced from 28 to 15. I conjecture that Beatrice would have had extreme difficulty with usage

(i.e. semantics, syntax) or mechanics (i.e. spelling, capitalization, punctuation) since she is an English language learner. Even though she did make minimal errors in these areas, it did not deter her writing from being semantically correct. Melissa's scores from pre-and post-test were similar, but her difficulty with mechanics (i.e. spelling) interfered with her writing performance. She spelled 13 words incorrectly during the pre-test and spelled 14 words incorrectly during the post-test, thus affecting the number of Correct Writing Sequences. Melissa's difficulty with spelling may be affected by not having her phonemic awareness skills fully developed at an early age, having difficulty discriminating between similar sounds, the English language not having a regular system of letter-sound correspondence, or not being provided with systematic phonics instructions, which are common difficulties that English language learners encounter (Irujo, 2007).

Table 6

Written Expression-Curriculum Based Measurement: Pre- and Post-Test Results

Student Names	Pre-Test			Post-Test		
	TWW	CWS	WSC	TWW	CWS	WSC
Beatrice	28	22	25	15	10	13
Melissa	57	31	44	55	27	41
Nick	23	19	22	26	21	25
Josh	29	11	26	40	34	38
Chris	24	12	19	50	34	44
Emily	39	30	37	56	38	51

After reviewing each student's filled-out exit slip and analyzed writing sample, I determined whether a student's disposition likely had an effect on their motivation and ability to

write, as well as use spelling strategies, efficiently. Since each student in this study can be characterized as a struggling writer, I predicted that their poor writing ability would affect their dispositions negatively. However, nearly all students rated their disposition as positive after writing, although their writing ability was evaluated as demonstrating partial command. There was a mismatch between their writing abilities and dispositions with the exception of Nick where his positive disposition (i.e. glad) reflected his adequate writing ability. I find this interesting because Nick was the one student whose writing attitude significantly decreased from somewhat happy to somewhat upset. Perhaps Nick is a student who understands the usefulness of a task, which is evident through his adequate writing ability reflecting a positive attitude. Yet, he lacks the intrinsic value of a task, which is evident through his scores on the Writing Attitude Survey that reflected a somewhat upset attitude towards writing. This shows that Nick is indifferent about participating in a writing task. Similar to previous studies (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Harris et al. 1988, as cited in Graham & Harris, 1989a), the students in this study tended to overestimate their dispositions after writing and used it as a self-protective coping strategy, so their writing abilities would not appear incompetent.

Discussion

In the present study, I examined the effect a child's attitude has towards their motivation and ability to produce text that is spelled correctly. I found that there was not conclusive evidence that attitude was linked to a child's motivation and ability to produce text that is spelled correctly, due to nearly each child in this study overestimating their ability by choosing a positive disposition when filling out the exit slip after writing. As students grow older they begin to acquire more knowledge about writing, its importance, and their writing capabilities (Graham et al., 2007) which can have an effect on how they perceive themselves as writers. I feel that the

students in this study understand that they are struggling writers because throughout their school career they have gone through the process of receiving differentiated core instruction from the classroom teacher; structured, highly intense intervention from the reading teacher; and individualized instruction from the special education teacher. So, they are aware that they are not progressing with grade-level writing tasks as their typical peers because of the extra attention they have received from various teachers. For this reason, each student possibly selected a positive disposition as a self-protective coping strategy to not appear incompetent as a writer and to not highlight their deficiencies.

However, their positive dispositions assisted with their motivation and ability to persist at the difficult task of writing because they had a desire to be in that mood which drove their effort and persistence with the task (Anderman & Wolters, 2006). Although there was not a link between children's attitudes and their motivation and ability to produce text that is spelled correctly, the students increased their repertoire of spelling strategies which may help them to learn and understand something new (Brandt, 1988) which is needed to continue to build their self-extending system in writing. Strategies do require effort, but if students know what a positive impact it could have on their performance, they would be more motivated to use these strategies (Pressley & Harris, 2006).

Although attitude did not appear to have an effect on the students' motivation or ability to write in this study, I believe that attitude *does* have an effect on a child's motivation and ability to write because affect serves as a context, precursor, or antecedent of cognitive processing and engagement in learning. Also, affect can influence the type of goal an individual sets (Anderman & Wolters, 2006). Classroom goal structures can also influence the type of goal an individual adopts (Anderman & Wolters, 2006). Therefore, it is our responsibility as teachers to ensure that

each child has a positive experience in school, so they can adopt a goal orientation that assists with developing competence and task mastery.

If I had the students set goals, which assists with motivating people to act (Woolfolk, 1998), as well as emphasizing evaluation of personal progress and mastery, I feel that it would have prompted a link between a child's attitude and their motivation and ability to produce text that is spelled correctly, instead of solely relying on implicit methods of motivation (i.e. treating students as active participants, adjusting the pace of instruction to meet student's needs, teaching the strategy they need to be successful, recognizing and rewarding effort). Although I did not have the students set a goal for themselves, I feel the students implicitly set their own goal by utilizing their affective condition. Affective conditions can be viewed as goal states and drive a student's effort and persistence with tasks (Anderman & Wolters, 2006), which was observed when the students completed writing tasks independently and rated their disposition to reflect a positive affect.

A couple of limitations interfered with the effectiveness of this study. This study took place during state- and district-wide testing, during which I had the responsibility to provide testing accommodations for my students on my caseload with special needs in grades one, three, four, and five. Therefore, state- and district-wide testing interrupted the flow of my study. Additionally, scheduling for two of my fifth-grade students attending one school changed for eight days as they were preparing for the science portion of the state-wide test, which again interrupted the flow of my study. I feel if the SRSD instructional strategy was used on a consistent basis, it could have impacted their abilities and attitude towards writing.

Further research is warranted in finding reasons for children overestimating their writing ability. Moreover, research is needed in finding a tool or method to effectively evaluate a child's

attitude during the writing process since the students' self-report of a positive disposition did not accurately reflect their limited writing ability. Due to the girls having a somewhat happy attitude towards writing and the boys having a somewhat upset attitude towards writing, I feel further research should be done on whether boys have a less favorable attitude towards writing than girls.

Lastly, if we, as teachers provide explicit, interactive, and scaffolded instruction in writing to younger students, we can assist them with formulating a positive attitude towards writing. As students grow older they begin to acquire more knowledge about writing, its importance, and their writing capabilities (Graham et al., 2007) which can have an effect on how they perceive themselves as writers. Also, students have a better understanding of the demands of the writing tasks as they increase in difficulty according to grade level (Knudson, 1993). Therefore, their attitudes towards writing may become more stable, consequently having different types of relationships between attitude and performance. Younger students' attitudes are short-lived and can be molded early on with effective instruction (Graham et al., 2007), which can assist with ameliorating these writing difficulties (Harris et al., 2006).

As I am completing my action research study, I looked back at my results, my instruction and learning during the study, and my action research question to gather key findings. I concluded that SRSD instruction improved the writing performance of these struggling learners by increasing the number of spelling strategies used. Moreover, the students were willing to utilize these taught spelling strategies, due to the collaborative practice of strategy use between the students and myself. I feel this collaboration is vital because it allows the child to become an active participant in their learning which holds them accountable for their learning. It even helps

the child feel good about themselves because they are able to perform a task that they would otherwise not attempt independently.

The impact that this study has on teaching and learning broadly is that teachers need to assist with developing a student's motivation to learn, so he or she can find academic activities essential and valuable (Woolfolk, 1998). Also, teachers need to look at the whole child rather than solely looking at his or hers academic performance because there are so many factors that influence a child's learning, such as the goal orientation he or she adopts, the way he or she values a task, his or her feeling towards a task, and his or her belief in their ability to complete a task. Therefore, in the future I will strive to set goals with my students to motivate them to act to assist with developing their motivation to learn.

Lastly, I feel that this action research study has given me the opportunity to try something different in the classroom, although this "different" got a bit messy at times because of scheduling and job responsibilities. As a newly hired reading teacher, I am eager to incorporate the SRSD instructional approach into my teaching and willing to incorporate new strategies, techniques, or approaches into my teaching, as well to meet the needs of my students.

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