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Evidence-based Writing Strategies to Build Proficient and Lifelong Writers

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EVIDENCE-BASED WRITING STRATEGIES TO BUILD PROFICIENT AND LIFELONG WRITERS

A MASTER'S THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY

AMANDA SUE VAUGHN-TRAASETH

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ABSTRACT

Writing is an essential skill that teaches many ways for students to explain, inform, persuade, defend, and express themselves in a way that communicates a clear and concise message that will be used abundantly throughout their educational, professional, occupational, and personal worlds after high school. The 21st-century classroom is a place with growing concerns for student progress toward varied learning goals. A significant area of interest across all content areas is the need for better writing instruction for students, as students continue to struggle to achieve writing proficiencies. This thesis identifies and provides teachers with effective evidence-based practices such as skill-based writing instruction as well as strategy instruction through the writing process to help students improve their writing skills.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

- **Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)**– "Practices in the classroom that have been backed by research and shown to be effective in the classroom for student outcomes" (*What Are Evidence-Based Practices?*, 2023)

- **Writing Process**– A five-step process developed by literacy expert Donald Graves that engages writers to develop a piece of writing through a series of important steps. The five steps in the writing process are prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Wyse, 2018).

- **Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)**- SRSD is "an approach for helping students learn specific strategies for planning, drafting, and revising text" using 6 steps of "explicit teaching, individualized instruction, and criterion-based versus time-based learning". The steps include: Develop Background Knowledge; Describe It; Model It; Memorize It; Support It; and Independent Use (Graham and Perin, 2007a, p. 15)

- **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)**- Nationally mandated skills in English language arts and mathematics adopted in 2010 that sought to bring national cohesion to the K-12 instructional core in the United States of America (Greer, 2018)

- **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**- The U.S. Federal Law called The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 "aimed at improving public primary and secondary schools, and thus student performance, via increased accountability for schools, school districts, and states. NCLB introduced significant changes in the curriculum of public primary and secondary schools in the United States and dramatically increased federal regulation of state school systems. Under the law, states were required to administer yearly tests of the reading

and mathematics skills of public school students and to demonstrate adequate progress toward raising the scores of all students to a level defined as 'proficient' or higher by 2014. Teachers were also required to meet higher standards for certification. Schools that failed to meet their goals would be subject to gradually increasing sanctions, eventually including replacement of staff or closure" (*No Child Left Behind*, 2023)

- **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**- The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the "federal K-12 education law of the United States. ESSA was signed into law in 2015 and replaced the previous education law called "No Child Left Behind." ESSA extended more flexibility to States in education and laid out expectations of transparency for parents and for communities" (*What Is the Every Student Succeeds Act?*, 2020).

- **Special Education (SPED)**- "Special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including: (a) Instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and (b) Instruction in physical education. (*Sec. 300.39 Special Education*, 2017)

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Research Question

The guiding question for this educational thesis is: How can evidence-based writing practices create writers with improved proficiency in English Language Arts classroom? How can evidence-based instruction be embedded into the high school language arts classroom to help develop proficient writers? How can evidence-based practices in writing instruction create environments where students can find their voice, share community, and become lifelong thinkers and writers?

Rationale for Research

U.S. schools are failing to get secondary students over the proficiency mark in writing, a stark concern for the future of students. Not only are students showing a lack of writing skills, but they are also showing a lack of writing confidence and motivation, leading to negative mindsets about writing. While there will always be various unique circumstances that account for why students are falling behind, research shows clear contributing factors that highlight the need to be urgently addressed. Instead of falling into deficit thinking, or blaming students for these deficiencies, schools must intentionally become aligned with evidence-based practices (EBPs) in writing instruction to help students meet learning goals, and hopefully increase students' interest in writing.

Students in U.S. classrooms today vary in almost every way possible, including: (a) vast ranges in their background knowledge and literacy skills; (b) multilingual assets as well as language and literacy gaps in the English language predominantly used in U.S. schools; (c) technology proficiencies and deficiencies, as well as technology overuse and undisciplined use

that have left learners distracted; (d) neurodivergence that produces many gifts within students, but can also be a barrier to learning in a traditional school setting; (e) beautiful and differing cultural ways of knowing and understanding, as well as living in a world that is racially and culturally divided; (f) LGBTQ+ students navigating and honoring their identities, paired with an immense amount of hate and fear surrounding beliefs on gender and sexual orientation; (g) students living through trauma, poverty, food insecurity, housing transience, and much more; (h) ways of practicing and understanding religion, spirituality, and the purpose of life; (i) embracing mental health and self care, and also serious mental health crises and suicidal thoughts; (j) and lastly, all the normative biological developmental waves young people go through on their journey to adulthood (Wells & Clayton, 2019). Working with young people in the classroom is not one for the faint of heart, but rather takes an immense amount of humility, patience, continuous learning, perspective, and love. Steve Graham, literacy researcher and professor states:

> Too little research has focused on the connections between the communities where writing occurs and is learned, the cognitive resources and capabilities that members of these communities (writers, collaborators, teachers, mentors, and readers) bring to bear when writing or learning to write, how writing is acquired and taught in various writing communities, and how broader societal, cultural, institutional, political, and historical forces shape and bound writing communities and their constituents (p. 67)

As teachers work to draw students into the learning environment, one essential skill that students must have in their toolbox when they leave the classroom is the gift of literacy, more specifically the ability to write proficiently and effectively. Although the vastness of the ways in

which we learn, communicate, exist, know, and grow are daunting and large, there are many strategies that have been studied to give educators a place to start developing student writing proficiencies to support a successful future.

Studies highlight the very need for a writing curriculum transformation in U.S. schools. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (2011) quantitatively measured over 50,000 U.S. 8th and 12th grade students' proficiencies in persuasive, explanatory, and narrative writing through a digital writing test. Results of the test showed that only 24% of 8th and 12th grade students scored proficient in overall writing skills, while the majority, 52-54% between 8th and 12th grade students respectively, showed only basic writing proficiencies, with Black and Hispanic students showing the greatest gaps of proficiency (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012, pp. 1-2). Additionally, ACT scores of high school students reported in 2022 from the class of 2021-2022 are at an all-time low since 1991, reporting a national average score of 19.2 out of a total of 36 points. While the article mentions how the class of 2022 suffered great set-backs due to the Coronavirus Pandemic, trends in student performance is "particularly alarming, as we see rapidly growing numbers of seniors leaving high school without meeting the college-readiness benchmark in any of the subjects we measure'' (*Fast Facts: ACT Scores*, 2022, Pitofsky, 2022) . Multiple data points across literature continue to showcase that U.S. students are struggling to meet proficiencies in their writing. These tests have limitations including not adequately capturing growth that striving learners have made, only capturing a minority number of students in the country, as well as not capturing a diverse understanding of student differences and ways of knowing. Many of these tests have been under national scrutiny for their detrimental nature, as evidence-based practices do not identify nationally mandated

standardized tests as a proven strategy to help students grow in their writing skills (Harris & McKeown, 2022). In fact, Harris and McKeown (2022) report that "high stakes standardized assessments often have a negative effect on both what and how writing is taught", but testing continues to be a pervasive strategy to gauge student learning in U.S. schools (p. 438).

Standardized Tests and Teacher Preparation to Teach Writing

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2002 was created to ensure all students received a quality education by observing schools around the country that were not meeting adequate yearly progress to fulfill national learning standards, and intervening with help to get schools back on track to ensure student success. While this act uncovered many issues school systems are still trying to find solutions for today, the strict prescriptive nature of this act was overwhelming for schools. Because failing to meet adequate yearly progress resulted in schools facing hosts of ramifications, pressure to perform was high. States had the ability to create their own high stakes tests that were often disconnected from other states, causing illusions of what essential skills in the classroom were being taught with national fidelity. Jeffery (2009) explored the variability of national data on constructs of writing proficiency by looking at their standardized tests, testing procedures, assessment criteria, and how they define proficiency. Jeffery (2009) states, the "NCLB revealed substantial discrepancies in how states assess proficiency…and if NCLB's purpose is to hold schools accountable for student performance, the 'elastic' yardsticks states use to measure proficiency have defeated this goal" (p. 4).

NCLB was replaced with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 by the U.S. Department of Education. ESSA highlighted specific goals for fully preparing all students for success in both college and careers, as well as ensuring underserved students were given a "fair,

equitable, and high quality education to close the achievement gap" (*What Is the Every Student Succeeds Act?,* 2020). However, this new act still calls for some forms of standardized testing to measure student learning. While tests given to students may give school systems a basic snapshot of what writing skills students are learning, and can show some tangible data of what's being taught in the classroom, they are also indicating that these national mandates and standardized tests do not help teachers become better instructors of writing, nor do they create better student writers, as data continues to stay stagnant, or even decline in current years. In order for U.S. students to progress into proficient, lifelong learners, school systems must transform their mindsets around how learning is built, as well as provide research-based strategies to help teachers grow students' essential skills.

Gathering teacher opinions helps understand students' struggles. Applebee and Langer (2011) examined what writing instruction looked like in the classroom by surveying over 3,000 core subject (math, English, social studies, and science) teachers in a wide range of middle and high school settings throughout five states. The researchers assessed 140 student written works from over 8,500 assignments gathered from all four core subjects. Results indicated less than twenty percent of written assignments were extended writing assignments (more than a page). Over eighty percent of student work was writing without original composition in assignments such as short answers, fill in the blank, and/or taking notes from the teacher's lesson. Teachers in this study were compelled to teach to standardized tests, knowing that they omitted critical writing instruction. While writing to comprehend is an important thinking and writing skill for developing writers, as noted by Graham and Harris (2016), secondary students must engage in

extended writing activities that studies indicate (Graham, 2019) impact student learning in a positive way, as well as help them to make relevant meaning of the world around them.

Kiuhara et al.'s (2009) study also noticed the same gaps in extended writing opportunities for students in a similar writing practice assessment. While evidence-based practices such as planning, revising, and editing were used, they were not done with fidelity, and "the effectiveness of these practices is likely compromised if they are not applied regularly" with the main focus to respond or to get the correct answer. Additionally, Applebee and Langer (2011) highlighted the fact that while writing instruction has become more developed since Applebee's extensive previous study of writing instruction entitled, *Writing in the Secondary School: English,* from the 1979-1980 school year, there is still much confusion and disconnect in the classroom on students using writing to compose, versus preparing for high stakes standardized testing. Writing must go far beyond filling in answers, copying down words from a lecture, and writing to pass a test for students to become proficient and articulate writers.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that were created in the United States in 2010 to nationally align learning goals in mathematics and English language arts to prepare students for college, call upon students to perform tasks in argumentative, informative, as well as narrative writing. CCSS has provided the standards students should be learning but do not outline how to teach different forms of writing using proven strategies. Troia et al. (2015) narrows in on how the CCSS signpost to evidence-based practices within how writing standards are written and perceived. Learning standards that are void of how to deploy said learning standards lead teachers astray to figure out their own "pedagogical knowledge" from external sources (p. 293). Troia et al. (2015) noted, "the effects of professional development might be greatly enhanced if

standards included companion materials that link the standards to EBPs and provide concrete implementation guidelines" (p. 317). Professional development that models best evidence-based practices for teachers is tantamount to providing excellent learning outcomes for students.

Teacher preparation programs do not provide adequate writing implementation instructional strategies. Kiuhara et al.'s (2009) nationwide survey of 1,200 random core subject high school teachers investigated writing proficiencies, instruction in the genres of writing, use of evidence-based practices, evaluation, interventions, and other data markers to assess writing instruction. Over 70% of teachers in this test group reported that they "received either no, or minimal formal preparation to teach writing in their college teacher education program" (Kiuhara et al., 2009, p. 153). Additionally, Lehman (2017) interviewed three new middle and high school teachers about their training. All teachers said they were not given direct instruction on how to teach writing in their classes training to become a licensed teacher. Without intentional instruction for incoming new teachers, paired with many school districts lacking developed writing plans, curriculum, and/or instructional strategies to proficiently teach writing, it leaves U.S. classrooms in a deficit to properly teach secondary students to develop more advanced writing.

Fanetti et al. (2010) interviewed writing professors from a large metropolitan university and middle and high school language arts teachers from local communities surrounding the college. The goal of the study was to seek more information about how writing is taught in the secondary setting, and reflect on how students struggle once they get to the university. University instructors noticed incoming students struggled with writing and held rigid beliefs about the writing process. Two predominant messages reported from secondary teachers were

that these teachers felt obligated to teach to the standardized writing tests, as well as defaulting to teaching the 5-paragraph paper. As the goals of ESSA are to prepare students for career and college, data points to the need to transform U.S. schools writing programs, as it is essential for school and life beyond school.

Long-Term Impact of Standardized Testing

There is a growing consensus in the literature that indicates the detrimental effects of standardized testing on student growth and achievement. For example, Fanetti et al. (2010) comments, "We are turning out Big Macs instead of the 'lifelong learners' for which every school's mission statement seems to indicate a desire" (p. 80). Whether or not every student attends college, writing skills will follow them in life, to college, or within their careers, as Graham et al. (2015), found that "Over 90% of white-collar workers and 80% of blue-collar workers must write while working" (p. 499). Additionally, studies show that literacy rates are strongly correlated to drop-out rates that often lead to continued economic disadvantages for students, as well as a higher likelihood for incarceration, especially for brown and black communities that are already enduring socioeconomic disadvantages (Bruce et al., 2011). If school systems want students to achieve, the curriculum must be grounded in evidence-based writing instruction, as "the importance, versatility, and pervasiveness of writing exacts a toll on those who do not learn to write well, as it can limit academic, occupational, and personal attainments" (Graham, 2019, p. 278).

With high-stakes testing, national mandates, and common core standards, classrooms can create an undesirable environment for student learning. Improving writing proficiencies within our students has to come from a place that means so much more than passing a stressful

standardized test, but one that follows proven strategies that allow students to be motivated to learn to write with authenticity, accuracy, and purpose. Part of the learning process requires students to make mistakes and to be vulnerable. As Camacho et al. l (2020) found throughout the literature surrounding writing motivation, students are more likely to have positive mindsets about writing when students can show self-efficacy, be engaged in "a pleasant emotional environment surrounding writing", and students can "write for a variety of purposes and audiences" (p. 236). While schools can continue to post standards and execute testing, writing is so much more than tracking student performance; writing is a beloved craft connecting people to their humanness of emotions, experiences, and perspectives.

Inspiring a Passion for Writing

McConn (2020) humanizes the feat of writing, as he reminds educators of the great vulnerability it takes to write, as many students shy away from it, fearing their peers and teachers will think they are incapable of writing. This is an important component to consider when looking at the writing classroom, as McConn states, "successful teachers navigate vulnerability that comes with writing in a way that develops students' voices...guiding students into confidently facing the lonely, scary task of sitting with their own thoughts" (p. 21). While the basics of learning to spell and write can be very formulaic, once learners are no longer beginners, writing can become a medium allowing students to navigate their thoughts, express their worldly perspectives, as well as their creativity.

Writers must be engaged in a supportive environment that is passionate about writing (Graham & Harris, 2016). While research notes that having this atmosphere in the classroom helps produce a better quality of writing, exceptional literacy teachers are the guiding force

behind creating a classroom where striving writers can grow (Graham & Harris, 2016). Not only must educators be cued into evidence-based practices, but they additionally need to have an actionable vision for how they will teach writing. Graham (2022b) uses a rhetorical avatar he named 'Ms. Howard' to showcase how paramount it is to have a detailed action plan to tackle writing in the classroom. Graham (2022b) states, "the community within which writing takes place shapes what students will write, how they write, and how they acquire needed writing skills" (p. 477). He highlights how intentional a teacher must be to establish "goals for writing and writing instruction, valuing writing, determining the characteristics of good writing, specifying writing audiences, supporting students' identities as writers, as well as how to implement instructional adaptations and modifications when students are struggling" (p. 480). It is a teacher's privilege to be welcomed into a student's world through their writing, and it is one that teacher's must do with tenderness, intentionality, and passion.

Writing is an art that is developed over time with mindful practice and guidance, even though it seems as if it comes out quite naturally with little effort for some. The most beloved authors of the world seem to write with ease, stacking pages that speak to the reader's heart, with stories that make the reader laugh, ooh, ahh, gasp, and smirk in amusement, and at times wipe away a tear or two. Graham and Harris (2016) argues that "Good writing is not a gift. It is forged by desire, practice, and assistance from others" (p. 359). Everyone must start somewhere, and likely, those highly respected and loved writers were once guided by a teacher who influenced their writing skills to write with accuracy, technique, creativity, and voice.

Thoughtful writing not only awakens the human spirit but "supports learning and development across our lifetimes and is vital for communicating, self-expression, self-advocacy,

identity development, work, social and political engagement, and more" (Harris & McKeown, 2022). Students will not only write academic papers, but other forms of writing will be paramount to their development and connection with others as they move forward in life. A personalized card can create a sense of ease for someone who needs to hear an encouraging word from someone that cares. A new book in one's hand can allow for new worlds to be dreamed of, as well as different perspectives to be contemplated. A poem or song written with truth and vulnerability can be an anthem for young people experiencing a tough time in life, helping them to stand strong in the face of adversity. A powerful speech can encourage the community to step up and act for good. All these modes of writing are examples for students, but these styles of writing will only develop with time, effort, and proven strategies.

In school, students must follow paper requirements adhering to a rubric in order to keep their paper's purpose clear and concise, as well as adding in any stylistic necessities such as textual evidence, citations, and well-developed arguments. When that has been completed, editing and revising ensure all work has been spelled correctly and sentences are grammatically correct. Writing difficulties a student may encounter include a lack of writing motivation, being stuck in their thinking, language barriers, or learning needs. Becoming a proficient writer takes much practice, thought, coaching, and time. Teachers and school staff must be mindful of this process when looking at striving writers' work, as writing not only includes thinking about what to write but also processing a variety of motor, cognitive, and affective skills (Graham & Harris, 2016). Writing is complex, and at times, messy. The process of writing must be honored by educators to find a "blended approach" that includes getting to know each student as a unique and developing writer who will likely need help learning different writing skills along the way, as

well as becoming proficient in the writing process that is endorsed by writing networks such as

The National Writing Project (Harris & McKeown, 2022). The goal of the thesis is to equip

educators with evidence-based approaches to develop students into proficient writers.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search Procedures

Literature was found using Bethel's Library Lib Search, which showed many options for research in JSTOR, Educator's Reference Complete, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and EBSCO MegaFILE. Searches for relevant content started with keywords that included "evidence-based writing instruction," "evidence-based practices in writing instruction", "high school language arts writing instruction," "teaching high schoolers to be better writers," "writing development in the classroom," "writing proficiency high school", "literacy practices in the classroom", as well as various other forms of these words and phrases that were observed from continued review of more peer-reviewed articles. Finding new information led to more extensive searches and the selection of the right articles for this thesis. Both qualitative and quantitative peer-reviewed articles dated from 1980 to 2023 were reviewed, although most research for this thesis is more current in the last forty years. While this thesis does not exclusively point to a specific grade level in the language arts classroom, the majority of literature found for this research was aimed towards middle and high school evidence-based practices, as the researcher is a high school teacher in a beautifully diverse suburban Minnesota school district. When searching for this thesis in the Bethel Digital Library, keywords such as 'evidence-based writing instruction' or 'evidence-based practices in writing instruction' can be used.

The structure of this review of literature will be categorized under the four sections of: Evidence-Based Practices to Develop Student Writers, The Integral Connection of Reading and Writing, Honoring Writing as a Process, and Self-Regulated Strategy Development to Enhance the Writing Process.

Evidence-Based Practices for Writing Instruction

A majority of the data gathered around writing instruction in the classroom has been through qualitative surveys given to teachers, observational studies done in United States' classrooms, and meta-analysis that has assessed proven research studies. Effective, proven strategies are helping teachers advance student writing. Graham (2022) states, "there is no single best way to teach writing;" however, it is essential to have an evidence-based plan as you walk through the year with students (p. 475). Teachers can educate themselves in evidence–based writing instruction to help develop more proficient and confident writers.

Writing more frequently in the classroom has shown to increase writing quality; the time and space to produce written work is foundational to engaging students in writing development (Applebee & Langer, 2011). Graham (2019) reports that "writing is a complex and challenging task, requiring a considerable amount of instructional time to master" (Graham, 2019, p. 280). Yet, survey data shows that teachers in grades four to six spend less than 15 minutes per day on writing instruction, whereas secondary levels do not spend time writing substantive text, but instead, most writing comes in the form of short answers on worksheets (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Harris & McKeown, 2022). Teachers also express concerns about the lack of time to teach writing due to a focus on reading, math, and STEM (Harris & McKeown, 2022), while other survey data shows a lack of writing instruction beyond 4th grade because teachers assume students know how to write. Multiple research studies have proven that what students write and how they're taught matters substantially (Graham & Harris, 2016), and that "supporting teachers to work on integrating writing and aspects of writing instruction with content area instruction should be a priority" (Harris & McKeown, 2022, p. 438).

Graham (2019) reviewed over 25 mixed-method, survey, and observational studies to which he found evidence that the determining factor of well-taught writing instruction is the teacher. Data shows when teachers devote more time to writing instruction, learning develops for both teacher and students. A teacher's beliefs and knowledge around the importance of writing instruction is strongly correlated to how much writing is taught, how confident teachers feel in teaching writing, as well as heightened levels of pleasure for both students and teachers engaging with writing instruction. Time devoted to writing in all contents will not be in vain, as Graham (2019) reports in their literature review of dozens of proven studies that "writing enhances students' performance in other important school subjects" as well (p. 284).

For writers to write for multiple purposes with varied audiences, writers need to have explicit skill-based instruction. Graham (2019) states:

Writers must learn the purposes and features of different types of texts (e.g., how writing is used to accomplish different purposes, the features of different types of text, attributes of strong writing, specialized vocabulary for specific types of text, and rhetorical devices for creating a specific mood) as well as how to transcribe ideas into text (e.g., spelling, handwriting, typing, and keyboarding), construct written sentences (e.g., punctuation, capitalization, more frequent use of subordinate clauses when writing specific types of text), carry out processes for creating and revising text (e.g., schemas for text construction and strategies for setting goals, gathering and organizing possible writing content, and drafting text, as well as monitoring, evaluating, and revising plans and text), use the tools of writing (e.g., paper and pencil, word processing), and respond to an absent audience (e.g., consider what an audience knows about the topic). (p. 285)

Graham (2019) confirms that writing is complex, and writers need specific and differentiated skill-based instruction, based around their needs in their writing journey. Research substantiates the need for young writers to learn and be proficient in foundational elements of writing such as handwriting, spelling, typing, and sentence construction to "reduce cognitive overload, freeing up mental resources for other important aspects of writing" (p. 287). Standardized testing has shown many students come to the secondary classroom setting lacking some of these foundational skills (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). While foundational skills are taught at the elementary level, some skills may need to be retaught explicitly in the secondary setting, as all writers develop differently, and some students have gaps in their skills for a range of reasons (Graham, 2019).

Graham et al. (2015) conducted an analysis of quantitative and qualitative data literacy on writing instruction for kindergarten through 8th grade students. Through this study, the researchers were able to pull together some of the best evidence-based practices in writing instruction, including skill-specific lessons on sentence-construction, handwriting, and vocabulary. Being a masterful writer comes with acquiring proficient skills in the basics of writing at a young age. Studies showed that when demonstrating how to combine simple sentences into complex ones, and allowing students to practice this skill frequently, 3rd through 7th grade students showed significant improvement in the quality of their writing. Additionally, teaching vocabulary alone did not affect students, however, teaching specialized topic or genre specific vocabulary showed a positive effect on students from grades 3 to 8 (Graham et al., 2015).

Graham and Harris (2016) provide additional data points from a review of literature of over 20 peer-reviewed articles in effective evidence-based practices. Studies show students made a 21 percentile-point jump in writing development when given specific writing instruction on how to combine simple sentences to create complex sentences. After students watched the teacher, the students attempted writing independently with continued feedback. Additionally, students increased their writing quality by a 21 percentile-point jump by learning to be proficient typers, handwriters, and spellers. Learning these essential writing skills freed up the brain space to do other higher-level thinking, such as developing stronger sentences, and drawing connections.

Smith (2017) notes in her literature review of over 60 years of researched writing studies, it is imperative that teachers get to know their students and their level of development, because generic writing lessons are not shown to work. Individual writing conferences or different inventories given to students can help teachers assess student skill-level. Classroom time can then be intentional and personalized, adding specific skill-based instruction to the right set of students to help them further develop as proficient writers in the classroom.

Bazerman et al. (2017) engaged in a discussion with a team of nine world-renowned writing experts looking over both theoretical and methodological perspectives that exist on writing development over one's lifespan. They presented eight principles of writing development that served as a meta-review of the literature for continued discussion, inquiry, and research. One principle that was identified, pertinent to this research, was the need for differentiated writing instruction. The current understanding of writing development shows that writers are vastly different. Multilingual students develop language and use language transfer

skills while writing. Gifted students need acceleration. Students identified for special education services need interventions and encouragement. Additionally, researchers noted the imperativeness of the wide range of curricula needed to support specific genres, writing for specific purposes, as well as supporting writing in specific contents. Bazerman et al. (2017) stated, "fair and authentic writing assessments that display the full range and variation of student writing development are needed" (p. 358). The researchers remarked that teachers are allowed flexibility in their teaching, knowing that the writing development is unique to each student and can vary due to "cognitive capacities and processes, language capacities, motor systems, motivational dispositions, and social practices" (p. 355). These conclusions support the need for personalized, skill-specific evidence-based practices in writing instruction in the classroom.

Johnson and Sullivan (2020) reviewed over 50 peer-review articles on writing instruction, highlighting the importance of creating a writing environment that honors cultural groups of African Americans. This review of literature looks at writing pedagogies that center on student writing identities, as well as cultural and individual identities. The documented, historical issue of racialization in U.S. schools has harmed Black and Indigenous students, and continues to be pervasive in the data that shows up in student groups that are not meeting writing proficiency benchmarks. Johnson and Sullivan (2020) note that researchers across the board continue to examine how students with marginalized identities might need different and new approaches to teaching writing that allow writers to use their voices to write. Johnson and Sullivan mention U.S. school issues pertaining to teacher views on their lack of confidence and time to teach writing, as well as "ambitious roadmaps of what students should be able to do but providing

little direction on how writing benchmarks are to be achieved" (p. 423). Johnson and Sullivan (2020) quote Steve Graham, stating writing environments should be non-threatening, pleasant, and motivating, and that educators need to consider these things when they are creating their environments for student writers. When Black students have the ability to use writing in a space that confronts historical truths, it allows students to "tap into students' intellectual heritage and invite students to connect to what they do and learn while at school" (Johnson & Sullivan, 2020, p. 435).

Graham, Harris, and Beard (2019) reanalyzed data from five true experiments that were conducted on Black male students struggling to learn to write. These experiments all used at least one evidence-based writing strategy. Researchers Graham et al. (2019) reanalyzed these experiments to see if the writing processes and self-regulation procedures helped these students to advance their writing skills. The studies concluded that the teaching of planning and self-regulation skills had a positive effect on writing development with Black male students. Other summaries of the studies showed that explicit teaching on constructing complex sentences yielded moderate and positive advancement of their skills, and helped students advance their handwriting and spelling skills. Graham et al. (2019) noted that each study observed small groups of students. The data supported the use of evidence-based writing practices to support Black male students who were struggling to become writing proficient. Researchers also noted that the use of culturally relevant pedagogy in these experiments allowed students to write about topics that were culturally and personally connected to them was a "prominent part of the instructional process" and could have added to the success of the Black males in this study (Graham et al., 2019, p. 28).

The Integral Connection of Reading and Writing

Writing researchers, like Graham (2019), know the integral connection of reading and writing which is that one does not go without the other. The ability to analyze, connect, and categorize into writing what one has read helps with comprehension. Graham (2019) states, "Writing provides students with a tool for visibility and permanently recording, connecting, analyzing, personalizing, and manipulating key ideas in text" (p. 284). Writers and readers understand the structure of how texts are written. Readers can use various texts as models to write their own compositions. Graham (2019) shows that learning the deep connection between language and writing is integral for the "foundation of writing including phonological awareness, vocabulary, syntactic structures, discourse organizations and structures, and pragmatics" (p. 285). Graham (2019) points out that students who become strong readers and fluent in language development, learn how to write for a whole host of purposes, audiences, and styles. The writing classroom must be an intentional place where reading, language development, and writing are used to maximize literacy growth in students (Graham, 2019).

Graham et al. (2018) underscored this message of the important balance between reading and writing in the classroom, by conducting a meta-analysis that reviewed 47 studies that looked at literacy in preschool through 12th grade classrooms. One of their guided questions was, "Do literacy programs balancing reading and writing instruction improve students' reading and writing performance?" (p. 282). Graham et al. (2018) decided studies had to meet six requirements in order to be considered for meta-analysis research. Previous studies satisfied the following requirements including only students from preschool to 12th grade, papers written in the English language, comparing inclusion of data/statistics, at least one

measure of assessing literacy, a quasi-experiment model to test, with pretests included, and studies that had balanced reading and writing programs where neither were done more than 60% of the time. Data from this analysis showed positive effects between schools that balanced reading and writing instruction in the classroom. Graham et al. (2018) stated the importance of continued research on how to best deliver reading instruction paired with writing instruction. Students performed better in reading than in balanced reading and writing instruction, while other students performed better progressing in their writing. The study proved that both reading and writing can be learned together effectively, and learning writing separately from reading is productive, too, (p. 300).

Graham (2022a) provided continued research proving how integral it is for evidence-based practices to be used in the classroom. In a meta-analysis using over 100 peer-reviewed studies, Graham highlighted the major conclusions that impacted student writing development. Effective strategies included understanding the importance of embedding reading and writing together in the classroom, teaching both writing skills as well as processes, peer and teacher feedback on writing, and creating an environment where making mistakes, and taking risks was paramount to developing writers. Studies provided evidence that writing about what one is reading is a key skill in developing spelling and understanding the writing process. Students who struggle with language proficiencies are likely to struggle with reading and writing in the classroom (Graham, 2022a). Additionally, whether it be one-on-one, whole class, or small group teaching, explicit instruction on spelling, handwriting, content-specific vocabulary, phonics, and sentence construction helps writers enhance foundational skills in writing. Graham (2022a) also highlighted getting feedback from the teacher, peers, and computer word

processors developed strong writers. Lastly, Graham (2022a) reinforced the importance of teachers creating environments where writing was talked about with passion. Students can be vulnerable when high expectations are set in how a writer performs in the writing process, so thoughtful activities are included to help develop writers. With all the things listed above, Graham also noted the importance of knowing your writing community, to share writing with one another and understand the specific needs that each student has in order to help them develop into proficient writers.

Honoring Writing as a Process

The writing process was first introduced and developed by a man named Donald Graves who pioneered ideas that children could do much more than adults realized. He encouraged high levels of writing achievement through the writing process. Graves (2004) was famously quoted as saying, "children want to write" (p.88). In an editorial backed by evidence-based writing instruction, Graves (2004) highlighted the many aspects and people who have paved the way making the writing process and literacy development an ongoing researched topic of interest to help classrooms across the nation. Graves was highly criticized for his methods were not scientifically tested, however, over the last 30 years, he used the writing process paired with individualized instruction for skills and strategies, which became known as an evidence-based practice for writing development in children and adolescents (p. 90). Graves (2004) highlighted researchers in the literacy realm like Nancy Atwell, Linda Rief, Tom Newkirk, Lucy Calkins, Frank Smith, Tom Romano, Shirley Brice, and Karen Ernst as other pioneers in the literacy field who helped to advance writing development. He highlighted Atwell and Rief who were both strong in their own literacies, and said no matter what policies or methodologies the government

wanted to mandate, the central most important figure in the classroom was the teacher, for the

teacher was the one to steer the ship of writing and learning to its goal. Graves (2004) stated,

"but whenever method supersedes teacher judgment, teachers are relegated to being mere

mechanics''. He pointed out the importance of teachers getting to know their students and

instructing with evidence-based practices as major components to advance students in their

writing development (p. 89).

　　　Graves (2004) used personal narrative and allowed students to pick their topics,

alongside teaching students to expand their writing from a lens Graves called "teaching the

world" (Graves, 2004). His evidence-based approach of "take their writing where it is, and show

them how to make it better" was the ideology that helped him create his five steps of the

writing process: (1) pre-writing and brainstorming, (2) drafting, (3) revising, (4) editing, and (5)

publishing (Graham, 2004). To end his article, Graves (2004) noted that while things continue to

shift and change, his practices and research have held the same six things to be true:

1. Children need to pick most of the topics they write about, but the teacher must

    also help them to understand all the places writing can come from.

2. Children need regular feedback from their teachers and their peers to help them

    learn and grow.

3. To build strong writers, 3 out of 5 days in the classroom should be dedicated to

    writing, but "4 or 5 are ideal".

4. "Children need to publish, whether by sharing, collecting, or posting their work".

5. Children need to see their teacher model good writing and instruction, talking it

    all out while it's being taught.

6. Children should have a collection of work in a thoughtful space where they can "establish a writing history". (p. 91)

Koshewa (2011), a mentee of Donald Graves, developed a peer-reviewed article on Donald Graves' work encompassing what Koshewa had learned from Graves' practices with writing and the writing process. In an interview with Graves, Koshewa asked Graves what was the most important thing he'd learned about conferencing (with student writing) over the years. Graves responded that "It's all about finding the heartbeat…I ask the writer what the most important part of their writing is, and I help them figure out how to highlight that…remember that we are teaching the writer, not the writing" (p. 48). Throughout Graves' expansive history in the classroom, Koshewa noted how Graves embodied the evidence-based practice of individualized skill and strategy development, knowing that "each student has something important to say" no matter their skill-level, and "a teacher should meet students at their developmental level" (Koshewa, 2011, p. 54).

In a 2021 viewpoint article written by Steve Graham, a respected expert and researcher of writing instruction, Graham (2022b) used a rhetorical avatar named Ms. Howard to advance his writing, showcasing all the intricacies it takes to teach writing backed by years of proven writing strategies. Ms. Howard is precise and detailed in her multi-page vision on how she plans to execute writing in the classroom. Graham (2021), speaking through the voice of Ms. Howard, highlighted how research has proven that "The community within which writing takes place shapes what students write, how they write, and how they acquire writing skills'' (p. 477). Without the writing communities that are artfully crafted and grounded in evidence-based practices, students are less likely to develop as proficient writers. As Ms. Howard speaks to the

parents of her prospective students, her voice is strong in evidence-based theories on writing, that "writing is thinking…and your children will learn new strategies for planning, assessing, and revising...strategies to facilitate the brainwork of invention, speculation, deliberation, reflection, and evaluation" (Graham, 2021, p. 475). Graham (2021) continued to point out how tedious and multi-stepped writing is, but with the development and knowledge of a teacher, students can be set up for success to become proficient writers through using an array of evidence-based strategies, including skill development and utilization of the writing process.

Graham's (2019) review of over 25 peer-reviewed research articles on writing instruction found that a student's writing development takes years of consistent and intentional practice. Not only does a student develop their writing skills in a classroom setting, but a whole host of factors contribute to their progression forward. While social norms of how students should progress in their learning in the classroom are often directed by things like the Common Core State Standards, writing progression varies greatly from person to person. In his review of literature he stated, "writing development is variable, with no single path or end point…it is uneven, as students are better at some writing tasks than others" (p. 287). Data points are used to engage students in a classroom model that honors writing as progress and not as a product. Data points can help students visually see that writing growth is continuous and should be the main focus for learning.

Sieben (2017), a high school language arts teacher, conducted an action-based research project that used interviews, focus groups, and surveys from both students and teachers to answer a guiding question, "What type of feedback is most effective in secondary students' development as hopeful and competent writers?" (p. 48). Using open coding to overlap themes

that emerged from her work, she concluded with six main strategies that help educators as they engage in the writing process and give feedback to students. Sieben (2017) cites writing research that shows "language arts teachers must be strategic in the type and amount of feedback that is provided…as effective feedback is a strategy for making students care about their academic writing" (p. 49). The six strategies are as follows, in hierarchical order:

1. Relate and react to the content/ideas in the piece.

2. Provide a balance of compliment and critique (Positivity Ratio– 3:1)

3. Use minimal marginal notes and summative endnotes

4. Keep it conversational and ask questions.

5. Ask students to write feedback response letters and highlight paper revisions.

6. Use emoticons (speak the digital language). (p.49)

Through Sieben's (2017) study, data evidenced creating a caring climate for writers through strength-based feedback. Using strengths to propel the feedback when conversing with students developed their writer's skills, as well as enhanced motivation to write.

The continued effectiveness of feedback on student writing through the writing process led to an action-based research study performed by Schunn, Godley, and DeMartino (2016). Schunn, Godley, and DeMartino investigated "whether high school Advanced Placement (AP) students in a diverse school setting could accurately assess their peers' writing if given a carefully designed rubric to guide their assessment and feedback" (p. 13). Researchers collected data from 28 AP language arts teachers from 26 different schools across 12 states that included over 1,200 students (Schunn et al., 2016). Research suggested that without specific guidance, teens often gave their peers ``empty praise", or low-level feedback on basic spelling and

grammar errors due to a fear of negative social consequences (p.14). Furthermore, studies showed that feedback was more valid and reliable when students were held accountable for their feedback through a graded process, peer-reviews were double-blind with "both authors and reviewers are anonymous and students have a clear rubric to follow (p. 14). Peerceptiv, a web-based system was used for the action-based research. Students uploaded their essays, and were anonymously delivered 5 essays to give feedback. Students were given student-friendly rubrics developed by the researchers that included numerical ratings as well as open-ended prompts for the student reviewers to respond to peer papers. When student reviewers were finished, papers were returned to the authors, and the authors read through the feedback. After reviewing their feedback, authors rated their reviewer based on the helpfulness of the comments. At the end, Peerceptiv generated individual student grades for the peer review task based on the quality of the essays (as determined by the average of peers' ratings), the quality of the peer reviews, and the on-time completion of all aspects of the task. Essays were then graded by AP trained teachers who correlated to student grading. Surveys were distributed to teachers and students about this whole process. Schunn's (2017) study revealed that students from every context, both lower-performing, as well as higher-performing students were able to judge "complex aspects of essay quality" (p. 19). The study also concluded that:

> (1) both teachers and students could validly and reliably give helpful feedback with the use of a "carefully designed rubric", (2) some student ratings proved to be more valid than that of the teachers, (3) students responded that the predominant benefit to peer feedback was seeing "successful strategies and weaknesses in other students' essays, (4) students did not like having grades on their having to provide feedback, (5) students felt

concerned with the workload that went into providing feedback, (6) "only a minority of

students preferred teacher feedback or face-to-face peer feedback, suggesting that

student buy-in for peer feedback instead of teacher feedback is strong." (pp. 20-21)

In summary, Schunn et al.'s (2017) study of AP high school language arts students providing peer

feedback was a success, that "online peer assessment of this form significantly adds value to

student development of writing" (p. 21). The study showed a substantial and proven way to

reduce teacher workload and increase student buy-in to advance writing development.

In an action-based research study with a classroom of 10th and 11th grade students,

Vogel and Seitz (2016) taught the writing process and studied students' reactions while working

on a *This I Believe* essay. The study embedded a structure including flexible due dates, writing

groups in which writing was shared out loud, feedback in the form of one conference with a

teacher, multiple verbal feedback sessions after reading drafts out loud, and journaling. It was

remarked that a student named Alex, given extended time and flexible due dates, produced

over six drafts that allowed him to navigate what he wanted to say in an atmosphere that

encouraged him to authentically and meaningfully say what he wanted. Vogel and Seitz (2016)

reported that Alex, as well as another student in their study group, stated how easy they

thought the writing would be, but it turned out to be quite difficult for them. Researchers noted

from student feedback that "extended time allowed these two students to find and develop

their voices in what they wanted to express" (p. 108). This study also embarked on a "no-grade"

premise, which was a hurdle for some students. In this environment, time was devoted to

writing and providing personalized feedback, which was reported to help students thrive.

Educator Joe Bower, of the study, remarked, "Grades can only ever gain short term compliance

from students when what we really desire is their authentic engagement" (p. 110). This study

provided insight in how the time and space to write with feedback and no-grades helped

developed writers.

Graham (2019) agreed with the notion that writing takes time from students as well as

patience from educators. It is proven that when educators apply more methods and sufficient

time into the process of writing, writing grows. Graham (2019) highlighted recent empirical and

qualitative studies in 2015, 2016, and 2018 that provided insight into what "exceptional literacy

teachers" do to advance writing growth. The studies spotlight writing frequently for real and

different purposes, supporting students as they write, teaching writing skills, knowledge, and

processes, creating a supportive and motivating writing environment; and connecting writing,

reading, and learning" as the major landmarks to framework curricular objectives in the

classroom (p. 288).

Researcher Jessica Cira Rubin (2022) embarked on a post-qualitative study with

twenty-seven 11th and 12th grade students in a creative writing class that explored the

question of "what becomes possible when the teaching of writing emphasizes 'becoming'

rather than products/achievement" (p. 51). This study used daily writing in notebooks,

collaborating with"notebook voices", interviewing a human "maker" and a process for making,

writing about boundaries and boundary extensions using the writing workshop, and sharing

authentic space with one another (p. 52). The instructor used a pedagogical approach called

Response-able Practices that saw teaching as "inherently ethical and political" and based

practices on the "ability of all members of the assemblage to respond," both human and

non-human, with non-human being notebooks and space (Rubin, 2022, p. 52). This approach

allowed high school writers the space and time to write, as well as respond to one another in a low-stakes space. Using the notebook to write as their central source, students were encouraged to "follow the energy." This approach "conceptualizing writing as following energies serves to invite and cultivate attentiveness and curiosity…rather than requiring a specific process…leaving space for the unexpected" (p. 55). Not only did this allow students time to explore, but it gave the teacher space to craft one-on-one conversations and personalize learning. As students experienced sharing their notebook writing, research on makers, and boundary writing with their peers and teachers, students remarked that they felt so "understood" (p. 58). The researcher noted that this study showcased the possibilities in which teachers consider the process of how students create and build writing skills and "imagine how students can experience the electricity and joy of being present and in-relation with others" (p. 59). This qualitative study highlights the importance of the vulnerability, space, and time that it takes to write, and teach writing well.

Smith (2017) continued to showcase research that aligned with evidence-based practices of teaching the writing process. In a literature review of over sixty years of writing research, Smith put together a list of six of the top evidence-based practices that consistently helped writers develop over the years. The number one component supported by research is to give students the time and space to process their ideas and writing. Research shows that students are often led through teacher lectures consisting of instructing students on the parts of the assignment, or generic writing skills, which various research studies note "have little or no impact…even a negative effect on the way students write" (p. 71). Sixty years of writing research indicates that writing takes time, and teachers must allow for the processing of ideas

and the process of writing to unfold mindfully, without rushing students through to get a final

product to be graded. However, large bodies of surveys from teachers around the country have

shown that teachers feel rushed to complete as many standards as possible to prepare students

to pass high-stakes tests (Fanetti et al., 2010).

Graham and Perin (2007b) highlighted evidence-based practices in their meta-analysis

research over 120 documents on writing growth in 4th through 12th grade students in public

schools. Their research yielded 10 consistent evidence-based writing strategies to improve

student achievement in 4th through 12th grade students. The strategies include:

> (1) Teaching the writing process for strategies in planning, revising, and editing written
>
> compositions; (2) Teaching strategies and procedures for summary writing; (3)
>
> Developing collaborative writing opportunities for students; (4) Teachers setting clear
>
> goals and expectations for student written assignments; (5) Using word processing as a
>
> primary tool for writing; (6) Teaching students to write complex sentences; (7) Providing
>
> teachers with professional development to teach the writing process; (8) Involving
>
> students in writing activities designed to sharpen their skills of inquiry; (9) Engage
>
> adolescents in activities that help them gather and organize ideas for their compositions
>
> before their first draft; and (10) Provide adolescents with good models for each type of
>
> writing that is the focus of instruction. (pp. 466-467)

While all 10 recommendations listed above name evidence-based practices that were shown to

provide student growth in the classroom, Graham and Perin (2007b) noted that the

"combination of activities or how much of each of the recommended activities is needed to

maximize writing instruction" is incomplete, as well as missing how to teach specific aspects of

writing (like handwriting, spelling, and vocabulary) and other proven instructional models (p.

468). In conclusion, after reading over every study and corresponding them, findings indicated

there were "a variety of instructional procedures that improve the quality of the writing for

adolescent students" (p. 464). As can be seen from Graham and Perin's (2007b) research,

evidence-based practices that work are plentiful, but selecting the evidence-based practices

that work for a specific classroom of learners is vital.

One evidence-based practice backed by Graham and Perin's (2007a; 2007b) research is

teaching strategies that help students to learn the methods of planning, revising, and editing

their writing. Their study evidenced struggling writers who used the writing process strategies in

a self-regulated strategy development model or other writing process approaches were

effective. While data showed slight variation depending on what type of process taught and

purpose, teaching strategies for planning, revising, and editing were successful to help

struggling students advance their writing skills (Graham & Perin, 2007b, p. 466). Additionally,

the writing quality of learners identified for special education (SPED) services increased when

taught explicit planning strategies in writing. Over every writing intervention study, SRSD had

the strongest impact on writing performance and development (Graham & Perin, 2007b; Ray &

FitzPatrick, 2022).

Graham et al.'s (2015) research also supported the use of teaching strategies for

processing writing. After reviewing the literature, researchers Graham, Harris, and Santangelo

(2015) reported over 80% of students improved the quality of writing depending on grade level.

All grades, Kindergarten through 8th grade, showed positive improvement from a teacher's

strategies. Studies indicated strong results due to three factors that included extended

opportunities to write, learned routines in writing (drafting, revising, and editing), and process writing allowing students to engage with individualized instruction and feedback. These data showed students improved writing when working together during the writing process. One particular program, called the Paired Writing Program, led students through strategic lessons about "exploration, demonstration, clarification, practice, monitoring, coaching, and reinforcement" to work with a peer through a writing project (Graham et al., 2015, p. 509).

Additionally, Graham and Harris (2016) showed a 31% increase in writing quality when students were allowed to work with their peers to plan, draft, revise, and edit. The initial teaching of those writing process skills of planning, drafting, revising, and editing showed a 35% jump in writing quality with peer-collaborative writing.

Graham and Perin's (2007a) meta-analysis report showed students who were able to collaborate together to plan, draft, and revise improved writing quality. Researchers studied the research on how well students did independently in the writing process, versus working with peers through the writing process. Their investigations revealed a "strong, positive impact on quality" for the group of studies who allowed peer writing collaboration compared to students writing alone (p. 16). This study maintained that teaching the writing process was an effective evidence-based practice, and with collaborative elements, it helped students grow even more.

Self-Regulated Strategy Development to Enhance the Writing Process

Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) developed by literacy experts Steve Graham and Karen Harris, is defined as "intervention designed to improve students' academic skills through a six-step process that teaches students specific academic strategies and self-regulation skills". This is another effective strategy to build strong writers (*Self-Regulated*

Strategy Development, 2017). SRSD has proven positive outcomes in writing development for special education students with neurodivergent ways of learning, as well as students in the mainstream classroom. This process is teacher focused. As students learn different strategies, teachers provide coaching and feedback until the student has developed as a learner and become self-sufficient. Graham and Perin (2007a) note the 6-step process:

1. Develop Background Knowledge: Students are taught any background knowledge needed to use the strategy successfully.

2. Describe It: The strategy as well as its purpose and benefits is described as discussed.

3. Model It: The teacher models how to use the strategy.

4. Memorize It: The student memorizes the steps of the strategy and any accompanying mnemonic.

5. Support It: The teacher supports or scaffolds student mastery of the strategy.

6. Independent Use: Students use the strategy with few or no supports. (p. 15)

Graham and Perin (2007a) remarked how impactful self-regulated strategy development was for learners viewed by extensive data pools. This strategy "yielded a larger average effect size than all other instructional approaches combined" (p. 462).

Four key studies evaluating the outcomes of SRSD on student learning will be discussed. Along with the 6-stage process, students were taught four self-regulating strategies including self-monitoring, self-reinforcement, goal setting, and self-instruction. Mnemonics included in the strategies are as follows:

➔ PLAN: Pay attention: List the main idea: Add supporting ideas; Number your ideas.

➔ WRITE: <u>W</u>ork from your plan to develop your thesis statement; <u>R</u>emember your

goals; <u>I</u>nclude transition words for each paragraph; <u>T</u>ry to use different kinds of

sentences; <u>E</u>xciting, interesting, $10,000 words. (p. 15)

Research showcased these mnemonics as an effective strategy to help students learn the tools

needed to become self-propelled, proficient writers (Graham & Perin, 2007a).

A meta-analysis report entitled "Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of

Adolescents in Middle and High School" was created by researchers Graham and Perin (2007a)

from a large pool of empirical evidence in writing instruction. This report, developed for the

Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Alliance for Excellent Education, was created due to

the concerning trends that had been seen in student proficiencies in writing. This report

identified 11 evidence-based strategies proven effective to produce proficient writers. Data

from this report supported by other research in this thesis indicated students need

differentiated instructional models, for there is not a single approach that fits every student.

While limitations indicate further research in writing interventions is needed, 11 strategies

highlighted include: 1) teaching writing strategies, 2) summarization, 3) sentence combining, 4)

models of writing, 5) word processing, 6) student engagement in specific goals, 7) collaborative

writing, 8) prewriting activities, 9), inquiry activities, 10) process writing, and 11) writing for

content learning. Research suggests meeting a learner's specific needs pairing a mixture of

these 11 elements key to producing the greatest results. Researchers agree these 11 strategies

are not a full curriculum and it is a teacher's discretion and knowledge of these strategies that is

most impacting.

After rigorous research looking at experimental and quasi-experimental research, Graham and Perin (2007a) found strategy development around the writing process, such as planning, revising, and editing, produced the most dramatic effect on writing quality. Whether it was teaching strategies such as brainstorming, how to do a peer revision, or expressing a new writing style, data showed strategy instruction was most impactful for students in 4th to 12th grade. Strategy instruction in drafting, planning, revising, and editing also proved to be more effective for less developed writers using the model of Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD).

Zimmerman (2002) notes experts are proficient in spending around 4 hours a day studying, practicing, calculating, and goal-setting. However, this is not true for many beginners in fields that need much skill-building. Zimmerman (2002) stated, "Few beginners in a new discipline immediately derive powerful self-motivational benefits, and they may easily lose interest if they are not socially encouraged and guided" (p.66). Zimmerman (2002) notes how the 21st century has become distracting for learners. Data confirms how strategies in Self-Regulated Strategy Development impact student academic achievement, performance, and lifelong self-awareness. Additionally, research has shown that not only are these strategies teachable, but can produce more motivated students in the classroom. Zimmerman (2002) confirms the need for beginning learners to have effective strategies to help them develop as learners and writers.

Harris and McKeown (2022) provided evidence-based practices in a literature review of proven studies that highlight Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) as key in developing the writing for 4th through 12th grade students. Studies provided evidence that the process

approach to writing is not as effective as instruction strategies. Many teachers believe that all

students should know how to write once they get to a certain grade-level, the writing process of

drafting, revising, and editing are not taught. Harris and McKeown's (2022) research affirms that

the SRSD model supports effective "reliance on formative assessment, teacher judgment, and

situating writing development within the writing process", all things that the writing process

inherently has along the way (p. 432). The biggest differentiating factor between the writing

process and SRSD is the need for explicit instruction on skills and strategies that students lack.

SRSD helps with individualized instruction and whole class instruction indicating meaningful

growth and writing outcomes (Graham & McKeown, 2022). When the writing process is

mindfully taught using the SRSD framework, teachers model every step of the process for

students, making it explicit what students are learning and why they're learning it. SRSD

empowers students to take ownership of their learning. Furthermore, Graham and McKeown

(2022) stated that with continued use of the SRSD model in the writing process, strategies are

built and goals are established so that students can continue to develop in their sophistication

as self-regulated and developed writers and learners.

In an evidence-based research article citing over 39 studies, Mason et al. (2011)

showcased that SRSD instruction was a proven method to help students in both elementary and

secondary settings advance writing development. Students with Attention Deficit Hyperactive

Disorder (ADHD) and Learning Disability (LD) diagnoses were positively affected by the use of

SRSD in the classroom when teachers followed the six-step strategy stages and the four

self-regulating procedures. Mason et al. (2011) reported that these evidence-based strategies in

Self-Regulated Strategy Development were better when used by a whole school model allowing

teachers the discretion to know what to teach considering student development at different rates. Data continues to evidence strategy development must work in tandem with "writing mechanics such as grammar, spelling, and handwriting" when skills are identified as unmastered. Skills should be taught with strategies, but not at the same time, which could cause cognitive overload (Mason et al., 2011, p. 26). It is vital for learners to develop fundamental skills before being provided with advanced strategies for writing. Additionally, studies have proven that SRSD works in all settings, including contained classrooms, and inclusive classrooms, as well as one-to-one settings, small group, or whole class instruction (Mason et al., 2011).

CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of the Literature

Teachers express there is not substantial time devoted to writing in U.S. classrooms that is guided by explicit writing skills and strategies. This lack of devotion to teaching writing is due to high-stakes testing, national mandates, and common core standards. National data showcases how students are failing to meet proficiency in writing skills. However, there are many ways evidence-based writing practices create writers with improved proficiency in the English Language Arts classroom. Teachers use skill-based instruction, teach the process of writing, and use strategy development to help students become self-regulated learners.

Overall, Chapter II reviewed evidence-based practices educators use in the classrooms to help students become proficient writers. The data from these studies indicate the most important features for educators are as follows:

1. Develop a writing vision and intentional plan to deliver writing instruction in the classroom.

2. Create a classroom environment where students feel comfortable to be themselves and to express opinions

3. Honor the process, accepting and acknowledging that writing development takes time.

4. Get to know how students learn and honor their unique styles, perspectives, and skills.

5. Devote attention to teach writing through explicit skill and strategy instruction using evidence-based practices (e.g., use of SRSD strategies, writing process, strength-based feedback, collaborative writing and sharing, skill-building, etc.).

6. Build lessons to teach the whole class, as well as individual instruction around
   evidence-based skills and strategies of writing.

Professional Application

The author is more equipped with knowledge on evidence-based practices in teaching writing after completing the research for this thesis. Graham (2022) shared that it is critical to have multiple strategies in teaching the writing process but implementation makes the difference. After reviewing the literature, the author has goals for the classroom and will create a vision focused on the writing process and implement evidence-based writing strategies such as strategy development and organizing the time for writing that is meaningful and consistent. At the beginning of each course, the students will take a writing survey and write an extended essay to assess the skill-level and areas of growth. The author will continue to use the English Language Arts (ELA) Minnesota State Standards for reference to ensure that students have clear guidelines. Student-friendly language rubrics will be provided for student feedback and evidence-based strategies will be used throughout the writing process.

A classroom atmosphere that values pairing reading with the writing process will enhance the writing process by providing examples of well written literature. The students will collaborate when writing, brainstorming and providing feedback. The author will focus less on creating multiple online documents and more focus on skill and strategy-based instruction. Students will access a writer's notebook and computer for creative and academic writing. Significant time will give students the opportunity to extend writing compositions so they will share their thinking and struggles with one another. To reduce fear and anxiety, the author will create a welcoming environment that encourages students to build their skills.

The author's colleagues in the English Language Arts (ELA) department will discuss specific skill-based instructional strategies that include language, grammar, content-focused vocabulary, computer processing, and research aligning different types of writing styles (narrative, persuasive, informative/expository, poetry, etc.). Meeting as a department will develop consistent strategies across grade levels so students will not have to learn new strategies each year. Giving students the choice on what they will write about will instill motivation as researchers Graves, Graham, and Harris have stated.

The author plans to make an appointment with the school principal to present writing research on evidence-based practices. When meeting with the principal, the author will present research and ask for permission to meet with departments in every content area to assess writing skills and strategies. After meeting with each department, the author will summarize findings and develop an evidence-based writing strategies action plan for teachers in all departments. Progress monitoring and idea exchange will continue so that teachers can learn and grow together with an eventual goal of presenting these findings to the district. District administrators will then formulate a plan to implement this action plan in other buildings districtwide. Implementing a districtwide plan PreK-12 follows the research on the importance of aligning writing evidence-based strategies.

All research-based writing strategies found in the literature are helpful for teachers across the United States. Having developed a clearer understanding of proven instructional practices, these actionable strategies will help the author develop into a seasoned writing teacher, and encourage others to implement evidence-based writing strategies. The author will present at conferences and encourage participants to embed these strategies into their writing

instruction. The conferences will encourage collaboration among other participants who have similar interest in developing a deeper dialogue on evidence-based writing practices.

Implications of Future Research

There is great potential for future research on evidence-based practices in writing instruction. As world-renowned researchers such as Graham, Harris, McKeown, Langer, Applebee, Graves, and others have noted about writing instruction throughout the literature, it is paramount that the nation come together to enact a clear vision to teach writing by helping teachers align writing instruction with effective writing pedagogies. Graham (2019) states, "It is not enough to know what to do; knowledge and vision must be enacted if meaningful change is to take place" (p. 290). While effective evidence-based instructional strategies have been studied and identified, and Common Core State Standards have been written to provide a vision of what writing skills students need to become proficient writers, action needs to provide teachers the tools to put these strategies into practice. For example, future research can focus on instructional methods on how to teach writing, how to set-up one's classroom, and procedural methods effective with students. A national database of videos that show effective writing instruction in the classroom can be established. There are some descriptive research studies and educational networks that show "the how to", teachers must be more equipped in the classroom if evidence-based instruction, the writing instruction vision and plan, and the "how to do it", all work in tandem. The author is optimistic writing instruction will progress in our nation's schools as research continues to address skill gaps and effective methods. As Graham (2019) states, "There is no single agreed-on set of skills, knowledge, processes, or dispositions for teaching writing…but writing instruction is likely to be more effective when

goals, curriculum, instructional methods, and assessment are all aligned" (p. 288). Learning to be an effective writing instructor will always be perplexing, rewarding, and ever-growing. As writing and writing development are as vast as human existence, the author will enjoy learning what teaching writing provides, and hopes to continue their pursuit in discovering stronger skill-based instruction that can lead to developing writing skills in the classroom.

Limitations of the Research

Graham and Perin (2007b), as well as numerous other writing researchers (Graham, 2019; Troia et al., 2015; Graham & Harris, 2016) note that the array of evidence-based practices are many, but research surrounding writing instruction has gaps, showing the continued need for study. Bazerman et al. (2017) express the pressing need for more writing research, stating, "Educators have no coherent, well-substantiated picture of what writing development across the lifespan looks like, even in a few individual cases, let alone in a more comprehensive model that incorporates the kinds of variety we have presented here, sensitive to the varying social needs, opportunities, resources, and technologies of writers' times and places. Such fundamental research can inform assessment, instructional practice, curriculum, and policy that support the full development of writers" (p. 358). The author feels overwhelmed and curious to know more by all there is to consider when teaching writing; it's a large and important task.

When performing literature searches on the benefits of evidence-based instruction, the author thought there would have been much more research done on evidence-based instruction on writing. Surprisingly, there were many, many articles on teaching writing in the creative sense and allowing students to find their voice, but not as many that specifically noted "evidence-based practices for writing instruction" in the title. In that same breath, literature

surrounding evidence-based practices is saturated with multiple strategies that work, pointing to the fact that writing is a tedious, multifaceted process. Harris and McKeown (2022) highlight that "EBPs do not mean abandoning best practices that work for teachers and their students, but rather EBPs and best practices must be thoughtfully integrated by well-prepared teachers as part of cohesive writing instruction" (p. 430). Additionally, many of the strategies that teachers are using to produce writing development in the classroom have not yet been scientifically tested. Graham and Harris (2016) state the limitations of knowing all the pieces that are yet to be discovered and tested, such as "how to develop audience awareness, develop a young writer's voice, reduce grammatical miscues in children's text, or teach writing to students who are second language learners or who have disabilities" (p. 364). Yet, this does not mean that the literature is flawed, just that it is not yet as robust as it could be to reflect all the ways in which we teach and learn how to write.

The author acknowledges that the literature review provided does not include robust information on topics like developmental writing skills for children and outside factors that contribute to writing deficiencies. The research found for this project begins from a stance that students have basic reading and writing skills, yet through evidence-based practices, students can become proficient writers. The Common Core State Standards in the United States have identified many benchmarks of proficiency for students. Because this thesis aims at looking at a holistic view of all EBPs, there are many areas of study that can expand methods and strategies that are proven and seek more of the "how-to" and "what this looks like" in the classroom in regards to planning and engaging with students, activity creation, building rubrics, etc.

Additionally, due to the wide range of evidence-based writing instructional models that range in grade level and skill proficiencies, there are articles that address the overarching evidence-based practices, but do not explain their implementation. Areas not addressed in this thesis include the fullness of the history of writing instruction, the history of state and national mandates inside education, as well as writing interventions that exist. It is to be noted, however, that while specific writing interventions for different groups are not highlighted, these evidence-based writing strategies have become interventions due to the lack of evidence-based practices being used to teach proficient writing skills in the classroom. Schools need a reset to bring back strategies into the classroom that are effective. Self-Regulated Strategy Development promotes the most effective strategy to help struggling students. Additionally, while research leads to broader evidence-based practices in the English language arts classroom, the literature is not as robust for learners in English Language (EL) and Special Education (SPED). The author is aware there is much more literature about other evidence-based practices to further help diverse learners.

A final limitation about the research is that it does not encompass how to embed relevant and culturally conscious content in the classroom. There are many peer-reviewed studies that validate the need for students to feel connected to the curriculum. While the goal of this research is to showcase evidence-based practices in writing instruction that encompass skill-based instruction and writing as a process, these strategies could easily be paired with relevant stories, examples, texts, and much more. It is imperative that each teacher knows their students' cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and unique ways of being. Building these backgrounds and relationships with students helps teachers use relevant content while

implementing evidence-based "blended approaches" to learning, using the writing process and teaching specific writing skills, that Harris and McKeown (2022) mention. Johnson and Sullivan (2020) also noted the history of schooling in the United States, "driven by racialization" with students of color, namely, Black students, in "institutionalized conditions that contradict their humanity" (p. 434). Curriculum in classrooms can be both culturally responsive and based in evidence-based practices highlighted in this thesis. All researchers pointedly note the importance of a classroom atmosphere that appreciates each writer as an individual. It is imperative that educators focus on evidence-based practices, along with personal equity to learn about the students who enter their classrooms (Johnson & Sullivan, 2020).

Concluding Remarks

A critical component when teaching writing is to embed evidence-based practices in the classroom to create proficient and effective writers in a world that asks students to use writing to communicate in a plethora of ways. Some of the strategies teachers can use in the classroom are: lessons to build specific skills in writing; honoring and teaching writing as a process, not as a final product; and intentionally embedding reading to enhance writing skills. When teachers are knowledgeable about the proven strategies that help students, changes can be made. School districts that mindfully talk about writing instruction encourage real change to happen. When students see every classroom cares about literacy growth, sustainability will thrive. Teachers, schools, districts, and policymakers have the potential to impact a child's ability to become a proficient writer. Teachers are successful in reaching struggling writers when instruction emphasizes the full writing process. Writing research suggests that, especially for struggling writers, planning and pre-writing development, authentic inquiry activities, and

collaboration with peers improve writing instruction and the quality of students' written

products. It is critical teachers guide students and provide support so students learn to enjoy

writing as a way to personally express themselves.

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