



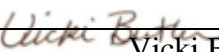
Master Capstone Project

**Action Research: Small Group Writing Instruction**

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I give permission to City University to store and use this MIT Project for teaching purposes.

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**Dedication and Acknowledgements**

I would like to dedicate this research project to my father, Dr. Les Heasley, who passed away in 2014. He would have been very proud of me.

I would like to thank my husband Denis and kids Sam and Andy, who gave me understanding, support, unconditional love, the latitude to ignore housework, fall apart from time to time, and do homework every weekend. I will never be able to repay their sacrifice.

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### **Abstract**

The problem is second grade students are not meeting their writing goals since coming back from remote learning. According to the National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], (2003, 2012) prior to remote learning, in the US three fourths of students do not write with proficiency, so this is a long-term problem that has been exacerbated by the quarantine. Ahmed, Wagner and Lopez (2014) pointed out that longitudinal studies showed the relationship between early literacy skills and later writing skills. This action research study was designed to examine the impact of small group instruction on a targeted group of lower-skilled writers. There were 8-second grade students from a general education classroom who participated in this study. Baseline data was first gathered from a pre-assessment on opinion writing graded with a rubric then compared to a post-assessment after small group instruction was given for a six-week period. The researcher's analysis showed that there was a marked increase in scores from the pre- to the post-assessment.

**KEYWORDS:** writing, second grade, opinion writing, small group instruction, action research, qualitative research

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### **Introduction**

The 2021-2022 school year has brought students back into the classroom with a deficit in writing skills. After 18 months of online schooling students are suffering from a lack of direct instruction in everything from letter formation, handwriting mechanics, and stamina. As much as teachers tried to make writing a part of daily home schooling, they could not be in the same room conferencing, giving face to face instruction and feedback or giving assessments. These deficits became apparent from the first week of school.

Second grade students have not been inside the school building for a full day since they were in kindergarten. Not only do teachers have to bring the students up to the next grade level before June of 2022, but they also have a deficit as nearly half the students are not yet up to their current grade level. Writing was an unfortunate casualty of online schooling. Teachers agree that teaching writing over the web was nearly impossible.

Alongside teaching the basics of both nonfiction and fiction writing, second grade teachers are having to teach conventions that they would normally expect most students to know, such as what constitutes punctuation, letter formation, and what are the various parts of speech.

### **Dilemma (or Problem Statement)**

The problem is second grade students are not meeting their writing goals since coming back from remote learning. According to the National Center of Education Statistics [NCES] (2003, 2012) prior to remote learning, in the US three fourths of students do not write with proficiency, so this is a long-term problem that has been exacerbated by the quarantine. Ahmed, Wagner, and Lopez (2014) indicated that longitudinal studies showed the relationship between early literacy skills and later writing skills.

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### **Rationale**

While reading and writing are grouped together in the term literacy, writing is considered the most complex and hardest skill to acquire (Bitir & Duran, 2021). Representative data from the US has consistently shown that three quarters of students write at or below basic proficiency (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).

The major problem in developing writers is cognitive overload (Bitir & Duran, 2021). Writers must perform several resource-demanding cognitive activities simultaneously, such as activating prior knowledge, generating content, planning, formulating, and revising—all while considering the communicative goal of the text and the intended audience (Graham et al., 2019). Students who struggle with writing experience difficulties, including problems with handwriting, spelling, and mechanics; expressing ideas; organizing, planning, and revising; and producing quality compositions (McMaster et al., 2017). Attention is also an aspect writers must contend with as a low performing writer is less likely to be motivated to write longer (McMaster et al., 2017).

Kuasalai et al. (2019) posited that since writing is the primary way students communicate in school, which means that if they cannot write what they have learned, they are in danger of failing and that explicit instruction is needed to aid these students in overcoming their writing deficits.

The Common Core Standards (2022) for opinion writing state that second grade students should be able to write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic, state their opinion, supply reasons to support their opinion, use linking words to connect the reasons and provide a conclusion. In my classroom, nine of the 20 students did not understand the difference between opinion and fact. Only two of the 20 were able to write an opinion piece at grade level. Instead of coming into second grade with a reasonable idea of what an opinion piece should look like,

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students are having to be taught the basics of conventions like punctuation, capitalization, and how to form full sentences.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Since the adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010 by 46 states students have been expected to write narratives, persuasive, informational, and personal experiences texts. They are also expected to move from using pen and paper to a digital format, and to use writing in all subjects to help build knowledge or show understanding. Writing also includes foundational skills such as, spelling, handwriting, typing, conventions, and grammar (Graham et al., 2015).

Representative data from the US has consistently shown that three quarters of students write at or below basic proficiency (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). For ELL students and students with disabilities writing proficiency levels are significantly lower. Pre-quarantine only 5% of English language learners performed at or above writing benchmarks whereas only 1% of students with disabilities performed at or above proficiency (Graham et al., 2015). The quarantine exacerbated an already inequitable situation in many schools (Miller & Liu, 2021). Students with limited access to the internet, language or cognitive barriers, and other limiting factors missed out on instruction more than students in more affluent situations (Miller & Liu, 2021).

The latest assessment data available in WA state is for the 2018-19 school year. Proficiency levels for writing are lower than reading (Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Decker et al., 2016).

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Why is teaching writing so difficult? How can teachers bring student scores back up to benchmark after eighteen months out of the classroom? The following literature review answers these questions.

### **Writing Strategies**

#### ***Writing skills***

Reading and writing skills are “fundamental instruments” (Mendes & Barrera, Sep/Dec 2017, p. 298) of a literate society and it is posited that academic and professional success is dependent upon an individual’s ability to read and write. Koenig et al. (2016) agreed that writing is an essential skill in modern society. Ahmed, Wagner, and Lopez (2014) suggested that since these skills are intertwined and reciprocal, one influences the other and that growth in reading will promote growth in writing.

The reverse is also true. One study said that writing about a text was effective in improving reading comprehension (Herbert, Simpson, & Graham, 2013). Schoonen (2019) confirmed that studies show researchers do not know for certain that it is reading which facilitates writing or if the converse is true that writing ability facilitates reading. In this way, writing summaries, and note taking improve reading comprehension just as more reading improves writing (Shanahan, 2015). Writing about what they have read or learned dramatically improves reading comprehension (Graham et al., 2017).

This is especially true when speaking of vocabulary. Reading creates a richer vocabulary, which in turn helps writers retrieve words more quickly and easily to match their intent more precisely (McCutchen et al., 2014). Writing also improves reading fluency when a student must think about spelling patterns because their brain must recall those same patterns in their reading. Research clearly states that clear writing instruction raises reading achievement (Tyner, 2019).

#### ***Writing complexity***



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While acknowledging that reading and writing are connected, Ingebjorg and Joron (2015) made it clear that writing and reading are similar but separate given that writing requires more production than reading. Reading and writing are not acquired spontaneously, instead they are learned through systematic intervention (Mendes & Barrera, Sep/Dec 2017). Writing is complex, requiring the coordination of various metacognitive skills (Bitir & Duran, 2021). Writing is a production skill that requires a variety of cognitive and affective processes, including managing a topic, knowledge, composing, and the use of a variety of writing tools (Graham et al., 2015). It requires generating ideas, translating those ideas into words, and then transcribing them onto paper (Young-Suk & Seo-Hyun, 2019).

Developing good writing skills is difficult because it involves skills such as letter formation, producing thoughts legibly, mental skills such as using working memory and self-regulation, cognitive and processing skills as well as executive functioning and attention. Writing skills require time and consistency because it is the most complex and hardest skill to acquire among the four basic language skills (Bitir & Duran, 2021). This is especially true for young writers as they have yet to master the skills of creating a grammatically correct sentence, using accurate spelling, and writing neatly (Lopez et al. 2017). Hooper et al. (2013) concurs and observed that most children find writing challenging because it requires the coordination of cognitive elements and physical and mechanical capabilities not to mention external demands from instruction.

Since children learn to think through the processes of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, any deficit can have lasting effect (Cooper et al. 2012). Hebert et al. (2021) posited that if students' attention focuses too much on coordinating the mechanical skills necessary for writing, they are less likely to be successful at writing.

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The major problem developing writers face is cognitive overload (Graham et al., 2015). Writers must perform several resource-demanding cognitive activities simultaneously, such as activating prior knowledge, generating content, planning, formulating, and revising—all while considering what the text is trying to communicate and the intended audience (Graham et al., 2019). Difficulties with writing include handwriting, spelling, and hand-eye coordination as well as the ability to express oneself, organize and plan, revise and edit pieces of writing. (McMaster et al., 2017).

One way to reduce the burden on the writers' working memory is to work on fluency and automaticity (Schoonen, March 2019). This frees up cognitive space for higher level thinking and processing. Fluency can be achieved by having students write in specific genres or topics extensively (Schoonen, March 2019). Opinion writing is one of the genres that second graders are required to learn.

### *Opinion writing*

Opinion writing is the first step in students learning to writing persuasively, which in turn aids in establishing a writer's identity (Shen, 2014). Through opinion writing, students learn how to state their position, find reasons with examples, and positively consider other points of view (Cuenca-Carlino et al., 2016).

Opinion writing can get progressively more difficult and detailed as students move through elementary school. In kindergarten, students may only have to state an opinion, but by fifth grade students must back up their opinion with facts and details (Shanahan, 2015). The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) states that students in the second grade should be taught to write an opinion piece with an introduction, reasons that support their opinion, connect their opinion with reasons, and provide a concluding statement. One method of instruction is to use graphic organizers.

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### *Graphic organizers*

Research has shown that all students benefit from graphic organizers to help focus and organize writing (Limpo & Alves, 2013). Graphic organizers as a pedagogical tool are used to give scaffolding to students who are struggling to organize their thinking into a piece of writing (VanDerHeide, 2018). They are there to prompt students with how to organize their work with reasons and evidence and remind them to add other important parts like an introduction and conclusion (VanDerHeide, 2018). Teachers have found that in opinion writing graphic organizers are helpful for students to be able to list their reasons and the examples linked to their reasoning (Lott & Reed 2015). The visual a graphic organizer provides makes organizing writing easier for young students. Eitel and Scheiter (2014) stated that graphic organizers are seen as “organizational signals” that point to the information that is critical to the piece of writing and the links between them. They improve learning by being “spatial adjunct displays” (Colliot & Jamet 2021) for the main ideas for a piece of writing. Graphic organizers also help students retain the information they write about longer and comprehend it better as they help students transfer knowledge from working memory to long-term memory (Colliot & Jamet 2021).

Graphic organizers tend to be especially effective because they allow students to write down their thoughts so that they can be easily accessed in an understandable way while improving their confidence and improving their writing performance and fluency (Cuenca-Carlino et al., 2016). This enables students to visualize their thoughts connecting one to another which can work to reduce cognitive overload (Yang, 2021). Students use them until they understand better how to organize their thoughts. The adaptability of graphic organizers makes them useful in all subject and in writing specifically, from narrative to opinion, as some are freeform, and others have specific structures to force students to see the relationship between different elements of a piece of writing (Stabile et al. 2015).

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Stabile, Ershler and Record (2015) said that because there is such ubiquity in the definition of what constitutes a graphic organizer it is necessary to teach a lesson on how to use various graphic organizers and when and where to use certain ones. This lesson can be done whole group or small group.

### **Conferencing/Small Group Instruction**

One on one or small group conferencing can meet the individual student's need for explicit instruction and can be used in conjunction with graphic organizers to focus the student on a particular topic. This method was developed by Donald Graves, Donald Murray and other teacher/researchers in 1994. Since then, it has been popularized by Lucy Calkins and others involved in the Reading and Writing Project (Columbia University, 2006).

Beverly Tyner (2019) explained that small groups are necessary because whole-group instruction is not enough to meet the various needs of readers and writers and differentiated small-group instruction allows the teacher to meet the needs of students on both the high and low end of the spectrum as well as all students in between. After being assessed, students are grouped together with others with their same strengths or weaknesses so that the teacher can differentiate instruction to a specific group. Anne Elliot and Mary Lynch (2020) agreed that small groups are better for communication and collaboration than trying to instruct a whole group. Small groups also make space for explicit instruction that goes deeper than the whole group instruction can go for students who need specialized help (Elliot & Lynch, 2020). However, small group or one-on-one instruction can put a strain on resources in a classroom which can be a barrier in some schools and classrooms (Hebert et al., 2021).

Writing conferences as part of a writing block should be used to ascertain and understand the individual student needs (Elliot & Lynch, 2020). Small group instruction can then be based on grouping students together with the same needs for explicit instruction after full group

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instruction has been given. This time should be part instruction and part collaborative discussion with the student or students (Swain et al. 2015) and should be tailored to each writer's growth and developmental needs (Elliot & Lynch, 2020). When conferencing, the teacher should praise and celebrate what has already been written, this gives the student a sense of accomplishment; give advice and specific direction so that the student will know what to do next and help the student set goals (Heir et al., Dec 2019). The combination of both feedback and goal setting lead to greater writing performance than either component alone as evidence by two different studies (Koenig et al., Sept 2016) (Heir et al., Dec 2019). The teacher should also briefly document these conferences (Elliot & Lynch, 2020).

### **Transcription**

Transcription is the process of taking orthographic symbols from working memory and transforming them into written text, i.e., handwriting and spelling, using fine-motor skills (Limpo & Alves, 2013). Students must develop automaticity in their transcription skills to become fluent writers, and this takes sustained practice (Alves et al., 2016). Hayes (2012) concurred with these findings that as transcription abilities grow, students have a greater capacity in their cognitive resources for processes such as generating ideas.

Kim (2022) indicated that students work in bursts of writing, meaning that a student does not write at a constant rate, rather they produce short pieces of text with pauses between, and that a student's transcription skills influence the bursts of writing produced. These bursts become longer as the student gains skill with adults having longer burst with higher quality writing (Kim, 2022).

Lichtsteiner, Wicki, and Falmann, (2018) posited that most scholars understand handwriting to be a complex skill and Hayes (2012) explained how handwriting involves higher and lower-level processes such as planning and translating to orthographic and allographic

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representation retrieval and fine-motor skills. When a child has not developed automaticity in their writing, they can become overwhelmed which can result in poor writing production (Lichtsteiner, Wicki, & Falman, 2018). Developing fluency in handwriting frees up working memory in students, which has a limited capacity (Limpo & Alves, 2013), and improves their writing performance (Graham, et al., 2012). As students acquire writing fluency, the need for conscious attention to the graphomotor execution decreases, this means that students can concentrate less on the act of writing and expend more energy on the objective of their writing (Girth et al., 2016).

### **Sequential instruction**

Though writing is flexible rather than linear, there are certain components that must be taught, such as, planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing (Graham et al., 2012). Sharing may also be included as part of the revision process and publishing may be included as a final draft. Students must learn to be flexible during the writing process to move back and forth between these components revising when necessary (Graham et al., 2012). Lisa Morris (2016) also described writing as a circular process rather than a linear one but with manageable steps where she includes pre-writing. In a meta-analysis of writing instruction, Graham, McKeown, Kihara, & Harris (2012) found in 20 studies that explicit instruction in the sequence of writing proved to be beneficial to students in grades 2-6.

To teach the concepts of planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing, an instructor typically starts with explicit instruction in these strategies, then proceeds to modeling where the instructor demonstrates how to write, and lastly the instructor encourages the students to emulate with their own texts through modeling (Arrimada et al., 2018).

### **Conclusion**

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The literature review above indicates that writing is such a complex process that it takes explicit instruction for students to succeed. These skills take more than a decade to master, meaning that students in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade are still working toward automaticity in their handwriting while learning how and what to write.

Among other writing tools, graphic organizers have been shown to aid students in the organization of their writing and specifically with opinion writing. Small groups and conferencing are two ways to provide explicit instruction to students who need more help than whole-group instruction can provide, but all students can benefit from small groups and one on one conferencing.

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### **Question**

How will the initiation of small writing groups with explicit instruction in the use of graphic organizers and overall writing skills affect the benchmark scores of low-performing second grade writers?

### **Theory of Change**

I believe that the initiation of small writing groups, with explicit instruction in the use of graphic organizers, will have a positive effect on the overall benchmark scores from pre-assessment to post-assessment. It is anticipated that students will also gain confidence in their writing skills.

### **Methodology**

#### **Design**

This Target Population Action Research study involved two small groups of second grade students in one classroom at an elementary school in the Pacific Northwest. Students participated in small group instruction in a separate part of the classroom after the full class mini-lesson and during individualized writing time. The researcher used explicit instruction, including graphic organizers for planning, modeling, and individualized conferencing during small group instruction.

#### **Context**

This qualitative study was conducted at a rural elementary school in the Pacific Northwest. The school had 450 students enrolled and 24 general education classrooms. The average class size was 20 students. The researcher used data collected from pre-assessments and post-assessments as well as formative assessments during the small group instruction. A pre-assessment was used to gather baseline data. The baseline data was used to determine which students met the criteria to join small groups and identify group placement. Two small groups



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consisted of four students pulled from the classroom to be given explicit instruction in writing skills based on their need.

One group focused on skills such as sentence structure and planning. A second group worked on organization skills as well as editing and revising. Formative assessments included written and research and student conferencing with groups meeting twice a week for six weeks. The researcher kept field notes on all conferences and written assessments. A summative assessment was given at the end of the writing unit and compared to the pre-assessment data. The data was analyzed using a rubric designed by the researcher.

### **Participants**

Participants were from a second-grade classroom in which the researcher completed student teaching. The classroom consisted of 20 seven- and eight-year-old students. Of the eighteen students who did not meet the benchmark score, eight students were selected using pre-assessment data and previous knowledge of the students' writing abilities. The eight students consisted of five boys and three girls with low benchmark scores from writing throughout the school year and specifically in the pre-assessment before the opinion writing unit. All students were white, one has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for social, two have been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) but were untreated, and three who get Learning Assistance Program (LAP), a Tier II intervention, services for reading while the other five read at or above grade level. Participants were informed of the study and gave permission as well as enthusiastic participation. Participants were permitted to leave the study at any point with no penalty.

Students' names were redacted from the study. All participants' confidentiality was protected, and no identifying information was shared. Students were given number designations of 1-8 to maintain anonymity. All data was always stored on a fingerprint-protected laptop.

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Notes were taken on every meeting the researcher had with the students and the notes were always secured.

### **Intervention**

The researcher collected baseline data on writing skills over the course of the previous quarter. Whole class instruction was done prior to the pre-assessment to find out how much of opinion writing students remembered from first grade. The first page of the pre-assessment had instructions for how to select a topic, what to include, and how much time would be available (Appendix A).

The writing intervention used for the target students was small group direct instruction with the use of graphic organizers. The students were pulled from their regular independent writing time to be given explicit instruction. These students met with the researcher twice a week for 6 weeks for 10-15 minutes of explicit instruction.

First, the researcher introduced a custom graphic organizer (Appendix C) to aid students in organizing their opinion writing with instruction on how to fill out the organizer. For the first draft the researcher asked the students to concentrate on their introduction, reasons, and conclusion only. For the second draft the researcher emphasized adding examples to their reasons.

With each draft the researcher taught the students how to turn their notes into an opinion piece of writing. Gradually the researcher found they were able to remove the scaffolding of the graphic organizer from the more skilled small group of students who had become more proficient in their writing, but still encouraged the students to continue using the tool until they were comfortable skipping that step. The second small group was encouraged to continue using the graphic organizer throughout the opinion writing unit.

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### **Data Gathering Instruments/Assessments**

The primary methods of data collection consisted of twice weekly small group conferencing as well as individual conferences. A pre-assessment was given at the beginning of the unit as well as a post-assessment at the end.

**Assessment #1: Pre- and post-test. (Appendices A & B)** The same assessment was given pre-and post- opinion writing unit. This assessment measured the students' initial opinion writing skills as well as their skills after the unit was complete. These two assessments were compared to provide data for the researcher. The title page had instructions for the opinion writing as well as five, lined pieces of paper.

**Assessment #2: Graphic organizer. (Appendix C)** To measure graphic organizer proficiency, the researcher did a formative assessment before the student started writing. The researcher assisted students in filling in the gaps. Once a student was proficient with the graphic organizer the researcher encouraged students to use shorter phrases or single words to fill in the graphic organizer to remove the scaffolding slowly. This was used to ensure the students had all the necessary aspects to their writing pieces.

**Assessment #3: Opinion writing fluency.** The researcher measured success by how each student filled out their graphic organizer, accurately interpreted their notes from graphic organizer into opinion writing, and the number of opinion writing pieces the student created in the six weeks.

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### **Action Research Cycles**

It should be noted that the researcher divided the larger group of eight students into two smaller groups after the first week. Students were placed in one of two small groups based on their level of need.

The researcher met with the small groups twice during each week. During this time, the students would get direct instruction. Then each student would share their writing individually and get explicit direction and encouragement from the researcher. Every day after meeting with the students, the researcher would take notes and develop a plan for each student relative to their needs.

All students started with a graphic organizer and were taught how to fill it out. At first the students were required to write an introductory sentence, three reasons, and a concluding sentence. However, as they became more proficient in the concepts of opinion writing and the use of the graphic organizer, they were required to add examples that upheld their reasons as well as additional sentences to their introduction and conclusion.

At first, the students could write their opinion piece directly from the sentences on their graphic organizer, but they were encouraged to expand their writing to more than one sentence per reason.

Eventually one group of students were encouraged to write just a few words under each heading as a reminder of what they were writing about instead of full sentences. They were then able to take those words and expand upon them in their writing piece. The other group was still struggling with making their evidence match their reasons, so they were encouraged to continue working on filling out the graphic organizer fully.

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### Results

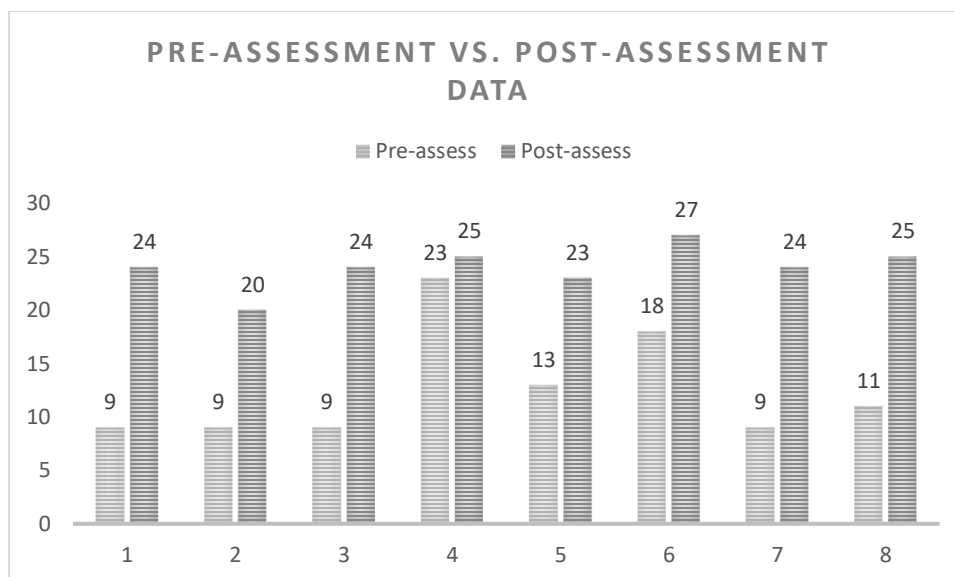
All eight students made marked improvements to their opinion writing. The opinion writing rubric used for grading had a total of 36 points possible (Appendix D). The rubric used for grading had a total of 4 points available for each of the following sections: overall, lead, transitions, ending, and organization. An additional eight points were possible for elaboration and craft.

The sections of the rubric that students initially struggled with most were stating their opinion as the lead, crafting an ending, and stating their reasons in the organization of the writing piece. Using transition words and elaborating on their subject matter were areas students also struggled, but then if they were not stating an opinion, it was difficult to grade it as an opinion piece.

Upon administration of the pre-assessment, the average number of points in the pre-assessment was 12 with the outliers being three students who each scored only 9 points and the student who scored the highest at 23 points. The scores for the lowest scoring students were 25% of the total number of points available.

On the post-assessment, the average number of points was 24. Students 1, 3, and 7 all started at 9 points out of 36 points possible on the pre-assessment but ended up at 24 points possible on the post-assessment. This is a gain of 37% each. There were still students who did not write a true ending or struggled to synthesize their reasons with examples, but overall, each student improved to the point where the researcher is confident the small group model worked well.

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In addition, all eight students increased in their writing confidence.

### Conclusions

The intervention was a success. The conclusion is that one hundred percent of the students showed marked improvement, while 5 of the 8 students doubled their points from the pre- to post-assessments. Table A uses a point system from 0-36 points possible and the breakdown of the ranges. Table shows that, 1 means below grade level, 1.5 below grade level plus, 2 approaching grade level, 2.5 approaching grade level plus, 3 grade level, 3.5 grade level plus, and 4 above grade level. Table B shows the breakdown Using the grading scale below (see Tables A & B), Student 2 went from below grade level to approaching grade level. Students 1, 3, and 7, went from below grade level to approaching grade level plus. Student 8 went from below grade level to grade level, while Student 5 went from below grade level plus to grade level plus. Student 6 went from approaching grade level to grade level. Student 4 showed the smallest growth from approaching grade level plus to grade level. These results suggested that small group intervention and the use of a graphic organizer contributed to higher scores in opinion writing.

### Table A

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Points	Score
7-11	1
12-15	1.5
16-20	2
21-24	2.5
25-29	3
30-32	3.5
33-36	4

Table B

Below grade level	Approaching grade level	Grade level	Above grade level
1	2	3	4
Below grade level plus	Approaching grade level plus	Grade level plus	
1.5	2.5	3.5	

**Implications or relevance**

The findings of the present study indicate that students can benefit from small group instruction and the use of a graphic organizer in writing. Even students who scored higher on the pre-assessment made progress. Moreover, when the student is lower scoring, there can be significant growth.

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### **Limitations**

There were two limitations: the small sample size and time limitations. This research was done with less than half a normal sized classroom population. As a result, the researcher was able to schedule time twice a week to meet with the small groups. Even then, the researcher was only able to meet with the groups 10-15 minutes twice a week. Were small groups to be part of the full-class schedule, the time spent with each group would necessitate significantly shorter periods of time or only once per week.

### **Recommendations**

The researcher has one recommendation for future studies. Within one week of initiating the small group of eight students it became apparent that the group needed to be separated into two smaller groups. The eight students were divided into two groups based on their skill level and need for more individualized instruction in writing basics.



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## Appendix A

## Pre-Assessment Opinion Unit

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Pre-Assessment  
Opinion Unit

Think of a topic you feel strongly about. Write an opinion piece in which you state your opinion and tell three reasons why you feel the way you do. Think about your own feelings and thoughts regarding this topic. You will do all the writing in one sitting, including editing and rewriting.

Please make sure to:

1. Name your opinion
2. Give at least three reasons with examples to explain why you have that opinion
3. Write an ending



Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

**Post-Assessment Opinion Unit****Post-Assessment  
Opinion Unit**

Think of a topic you feel strongly about. Write an opinion piece in which you state your opinion and tell three reasons why you feel the way you do. Think about your own feelings and thoughts regarding this topic. You will do all the writing in one sitting, including editing and rewriting.

Please make sure to:

1. Name your opinion
2. Give at least three reasons with examples to explain why you have that opinion
3. Write an ending

**Appendix C****Graphic Organizer – Opinion Writing**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Opinion Writing Pre-Write Organizer**

Introduction:
Reason 1:  Example:
Reason 2:  Example:
Reason 3:  Example:
Conclusion:



## ACTION RESEARCH: SMALL GROUP WRITING INSTRUCTION

## Appendix D

## Opinion Writing Rubric

Opinion Writing Rubric					
	1	2	3	4	Score
Overall	Not an opinion piece	Wrote opinion and at least one reason	Wrote opinion and reasons with some examples that support the reason	Wrote opinion with reasons and examples that support the opinion	
Introduction	No opinion	Opinion is unclear	Opinion is state clearly	Wrote a beginning that introduces the topic and sets up the reasons	
Transitions	Used no transition words	Used linking words such as <i>and</i> or <i>because</i>	Used linking words ( <i>also, for example</i> ) to connect opinion and reasons	Uses linking words and phrases ( <i>therefore, since, for example</i> ) to connect opinion and reasons	
Ending	No ending	Wrote an ending not connected to the opinion	Provided a concluding statement or section, restated opinion	Provided a concluding statement (thought or comment about opinion)	
Organization	No order	Wrote opinion and listed reasons	Wrote opinion with reasons, a clear intro, body, and conclusion	Wrote several reasons with several sentences about each one. Clear intro, body, & conclusion	
Elaboration	Only named opinion	Wrote just one reason for opinion	Wrote opinion and a few sentences about each one	Named many reasons to support opinion and wrote about each one.	
Craft	Used simple sentences	Used everyday words, compound and simple sentences	Used words that would make readers agree with their opinion	Not only gave opinion and reasons, but wrote to get the reader thinking/feeling a certain way	

Writing Grade	
Points	Score
7-11	1
12-15	1.5
16-20	2
21-24	2.5
25-29	3
30-32	3.5
33-36	4