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The Start of My Writing Evolution

Coming from a journalism background, writing was my thing. I had always been a strong writer. I thought when I left my job as a producer at a local newsroom to become a 5th grade teacher that teaching writing would be a walk in the park.

I quickly realized I was wrong. I floundered as I tried to help my students effectively put their ideas into words. I felt like I was failing them. My students did not want to write, and I, likely in response, began to shrink away from teaching it.

Then SRSD (Self-regulated Strategy Development) entered the scene. My district chose to foreground explicit writing instruction, and chose SRSD because of all the research (over 200 studies!) that supported it, and the success colleagues in nearby schools had with it. SRSD embeds all writing instruction into the content our students learn, and the highly rigorous texts we use. We used it to write about novels we read, social studies topics and even all through science.

This writing framework transformed my writing instruction, and, even more importantly, my students' writing. I knew what writing skills to teach, but SRSD taught me *how* to teach, and how to help my students become independent writers. And - SRSD made my students LOVE writing time. Not only that, the proof of SRSD's power became obvious when not only did my school's [writing scores increase significantly](#), but my [students wanted to write all day](#).

The following are the core routines of this approach. They are routines because they are more like strategic thinking processes that we explicitly cultivated rather than skills or lessons. Students use them repeatedly, and internalize the ideas behind each. In doing so, they become better writers. Each routine is grounded in research on what works in the teaching of writing. What makes SRSD so unique is that it foregrounds explicitly teaching planning and revision systematically, but it also gives primary importance to directly developing self-regulation as well.

Routine 1: Exemplars & Tools

How we teach it...

The SRSD framework instruction begins with analyzing exemplars to illustrate for students the features of strong writing. Exemplars model grade-level work that is at or above standard. When we analyze these strong samples, we also introduce how the writer would have used the writing process (POWeR- Pull apart the prompt and pick my ideas; Organize my notes (TIDE); Write and say more; edit; Revise). These are the core thinking processes writers use when composing, and POWeR explicitly teaches students how to use them.

Exemplar A:

Topic sentence
Important Evidence
Detailed examination
Ending

Ants do many jobs to help the colonies survive. First, worker ants dig nests with their jaws and use saliva to make solid walls. This makes a strong home where they can be safe. Next, scout ants make a scent trail when they locate food so others can find the food. This way others can help carry the food back to the nest to store it since they will need food later. Finally, soldiers protect the nest. They use their enormous heads to block the entrance and tunnels. They also fight predators who try to enter. These are important jobs that these tiny insects do.

Why it is powerful...

Peer exemplars just above students' current writing level bring POWeR and TIDE alive for students. Exemplars allow students to see the value of POWeR, which includes the steps of the writing process all writers use. Students can also see the impact of TIDE through exemplars, which includes all of the parts of good writing. By showing students what POWeR and TIDE look like in student writing, we are setting them up to successful when they use these tools themselves.

Students learn to recognize all layers of good writing at this point – from text structure to syntax to vocabulary choices. They then engage in directed, explicit, systematic, deliberate practice of each during later lessons.

Routine 2: Plan and Organize

The next step is practice using POWeR and TIDE. How do we do this? Through exemplars! We work together with our students to backward map an exemplar into a TIDE planner. Backward mapping means we “go back in time” and create the planner that the exemplar writer may have used to write their piece. We then take it back even further and pull apart the prompt and list the ideas for the P in POWeR, like the exemplar writer did.

Teaching planning and organizing through the back door - backward mapping an exemplar - makes the writing process and the components of strong writing real for students. They are able to see the parts and the writing process as they complete their TIDE organizer based on the exemplar. Students also will use this map out later on as a reference tool when they do their own writing.

T	Topic Introduction <i>Ants jobs colony</i>	
I D	Important Evidence <i>Worker - dig nest jaws</i>	Detailed Examination <i>Saliva walls, extra outside</i>
	Important Evidence <i>Scout - scent trail - find food</i>	Detailed Examination <i>Carry back to nest</i>
	Important Evidence <i>Soldiers - large head, protect, fight predators</i>	Detailed Examination <i>Invaders eat</i>
E	Ending <i>Important jobs</i>	

Routine 3: Revise and Edit

We now move on to one of the most difficult (and powerful!) parts of the writing process for both children and adults - revision! First, we make clear to students what revision is versus what editing is. Think ARMS vs. CUPS. Revising has to do with strengthening ideas - we add, remove, move or substitute words or sentences to make our point clearer (ARMS). Editing is conventions - capitalization, usage, punctuation, and spelling (CUPS). We focus on revision because this is the strengthening of ideas and of the writing at its core. But, how do we teach this? Again, student writing samples come to the rescue! This time, we use a below level writing sample. We work with students to identify what is strong about the writing in the sample, and what must be strengthened. After modeling adding a revision to a below level piece, students then can work collaboratively to add/strengthen the writing in the below.

Soldier ants have enormous heads. There is also a scout ant. Scout ants look for the food and bring it back. The worker ants dig tunnels and build a pile of dirt. They use their jaws to dig.

It is hard for any of us, especially children, to begin revision work on our own writing. Some of the reasons revision is so challenging for students (and adults!): we don't know where to begin; we have done the writing and feel "done"; we feel criticized. Honing revision skills on a below level writing sample lets students remove themselves from the process, making it less of a social/emotional challenge. They then can focus on the parts of the piece that need to be strengthened, practicing revision with little risk!

Routine 4: Self-Talk

This is the lesson that really starts to get to the heart of SR in SRSD - self-regulation. We make students aware of the self-talk that takes place in their

subconscious all day, everyday. We also discuss with them the very real effects these words have on our moods, our self-esteem, and our ability to write effectively. Students learn to replace the negative self-talk they may have regarding writing with more positive self-talk. Over time, positive self-talk helps them have more control over their thinking and consequently, their success in writing.

If we teach the strategies, but don't discuss self-talk as part of self-regulation, we are only doing the SD in SRSD! By teaching students to be more mindful of the words they say to themselves as they write, we can transform their attitude towards the writing process from one of "I can't" to one of "This may be a challenge, but I am up for it." Not only is this powerful in their writing lives, it can be transformative for our students in all areas of their lives (and in ours, too!). We are teaching both the head AND the heart.

Routine 5: Think Alouds

Even further strengthening self-regulation, the next routine lesson is the think-aloud, which is just what it sounds like...you "think out loud" as you demonstrate going through the writing process. You are cognitively modeling for students what goes on in a writer's head - making the invisible visible- as you: review POW and TIDE; model taking notes for text sources; organizing your notes in your planner; write your essay. You also model the effective side of writing too - getting off track and the self-talk you use to persist through the process.

The think aloud will be a tool you use not only as you work through routine 5, but throughout the year in your reading lessons. They help students see what a writer's mind looks like, and allows them to hone these same self-regulation skills within themselves. Students also begin emulating what they see you doing in the think-aloud during their writing process, growing as writers as they become more self-regulated.

Routine 6: Collaborative Practice

This is where everything you have taught comes together. And by now, your students are going to be amped up to write! Together as a class, you will work through reading the text sources (using step by step reading strategies to do this), working through POW and TIDE, and writing a piece together. You will begin by writing a piece of positive self-talk and pulling apart the prompt- what is the prompt asking? You will then move on to reading the text sources together, once to enjoy, and then again to find and mark information that answers the prompt. Next you will work as a group to list your ideas and choose the strongest. This often leads to rich conversation that helps with student understanding and also builds your community of writers. After listing, you will complete your class TIDE planner, guiding the students and modeling as needed. And finally, you will draft your essay. Students at this phase are often excited to share and build off each other's ideas. This whole process, as it is being done as a whole

group, may take three to four lessons.

Collaborative practice is so important, because it lets students hone the new skills they have been learning in the previous five lessons. You may do several pieces at different levels of collaboration before students are ready to fly on their own. It's important the whole class goes through at least one full collaborative write to see the writing process unfold in real time. Students may choose to begin writing independently soon, but they should continue to watch at least parts of this collaborative practice all year. Also, as you work on different writing genres throughout the year, you will also be using collaborative practice.

Also, collaborative writes are where we teach explicit, systematic skills lessons on syntax, transitions, word choice and the more linguistic side of writing. This is done in between phases of the writing process such as when students are ready to move from planners to creating drafts, or for 10-15 skill practice at the start of class each day, depending on the needs of your students.

Routine 7: Scoring

It is here that we introduce the scale for scoring students writing. This is an analytic scale that is aligned to SRSD writing. It actually lists your FULL writing curriculum. For this lesson, you are going to score your collaborative writing piece together, discussing why each part of the piece receives the score it is getting. Just as important is the end of the scale, where you list what was done well in the piece, and goals for their next writing piece. Building that growth mindset!

Scoring Scale



Goal Setting Menu (Grade 2)

Author: _____ Date: _____
 Informative/Explanatory Opinion
 Topic: _____ Used Graphic Organizer

	Pts	Ex	Below
Topic Introduction			
1 pt = almost full topic, 2 pts = full topic stated			
Full topic sentence / State opinion	2		
Important Details / Reasons & Elaborations (Information and details relate to topic)			
1 pt = adds more, 2 pts = strengthens fact/reason's support of topic/opinion			
Information from text: Fact / Reason	1		
Details explain how: facts develop topic / reason support opinion	2		
Information from text: Fact / Reason	1		
Details explain how: facts develop topic / reason support opinion	2		
Information from text: Fact / Reason	1		
Details explain how: facts develop topic / reason support opinion	2		
Ending			
Conclusion	1		
Links			
Use links	1		
Language			
Strong vocabulary	2		
Varied sentences (long, short, compound)	1		
Conventions			
Neat handwriting	1		
Grammar: nouns, verbs, prepositions adjective/adverbs & conjunctions	1		
Punctuation: Every sentence has capitals and end marks	1		
Spelling	1		
Total	20		
Done Well:			
Goals:			

Students can see their growth over time. Students know what goals to set and therefore write with their next piece with that goal in mind. Scoring let's you know what to teach! Scoring takes practice, as well as a fair amount of self-regulation and reflection. To score their own writing and the writing of others accurately takes practice, so letting them score strong exemplars, and weak samples for extra practice is helpful. The goal is for our students to see where they are currently as writers, and to be able to set accurate goals to grow themselves as writers. It's a marathon, not a sprint, but one that is achievable.

Routine 8:Peer Feedback

Students love to give each other feedback on their writing, but in this lesson, you will model with a student (you will be playing the role of a peer) how to give constructive, helpful feedback as you score a peer's work. After you discuss with the class what they observed, you can come up with several ground rules for peer feedback sessions before letting students practice.

Peer feedback allows students to have meaningful conversations as writers about writing. They often learn the most from each other. Also, by giving a fellow student constructive praise and criticism on their writing, students learn to look at their own writing with a more critical eye. They are going to need practice in order for peer feedback sessions to be their most meaningful. Rule of thumb: Students should be able to score exemplars with about 90% accuracy before they can peer score.

Conclusion:

In summary, the SRSD framework can be "the way in " for our students in their writing, radically changing writing instruction. It helps teachers feel in charge of their writing instruction. And finally, in the current situation through which we are living, through a pandemic which requires social distancing, a writing framework that encourages us to foster a supportive community of writers in our classrooms, virtual or not, might be just what we need.