

## **Intervention for Struggling Writers in Elementary School**

### **Abstract**

Male students perform significantly lower than female students on tests that measure writing achievement. The purpose of this study was to explore the use of a visual graphic organizer application to engage elementary-aged male students who struggle with the writing process. The results suggest that teachers of male students should consider using a visual graphic organizer application for writing.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The writing process is a series of continuous actions that include: planning, drafting, revising, and editing. For struggling writers, especially male students, they lose interest because the process can become frustrating (Goldberg & Roswell, 2013). The goal of K-12 educators who teach writing is to have students become individuals who can write no matter the purpose or audience. In the case of struggling male writers, the goal is to engage them in writing, not push them further away from it (Goldberg & Roswell, 2013).

When the average male student enters kindergarten, developmentally he can be as much as a year and a half behind his female peers in the area of reading/writing (Gurian, Stevens, & Daniels, 2009). Some male students show a lack of interest in writing and think that it is only for female students. According to Garlid (2014), the reason for the lack of interest in writing may be due to video games, medical reasons, a lack of male teachers at the elementary level, and an increased emphasis on standardized testing. It is critical that male students become engaged writers. Therefore, educators must find ways to meet their needs and find out where their interests and passions lie.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of a visual graphic organizer application to engage male students in writing. The following research question was explored: How effective is the use of Kidspiration Lite during the pre-writing stage of writing for students who struggle during the writing process?

### **Literature Review**

Many researchers (e.g., Lienemann, Graham, Janssen, & Reid, 2006; Re, Caeran, & Cornoldi, 2008) have conducted studies on different methods to help students who are struggling with writing. There are a number of studies that touch on different aspects of writing. There are also many different types of interventions (Jasmine & Weiner, 2007; Gonzalez-Ledo, Barbeta and Unzueta, 2015; Legutko & Trissler's, 2012; Hansen & Wills, 2014; Englert, Zhao, Dunsmore, Collings, & Wolbers, 2007) used during these studies, such as writing workshops, expressive writing, computer-based planning, computerized graphic organizers, and playing music in the background. There are also studies on the types of measurements used to assess writing, since there is a gap in research that pertains to finding valid assessments to identify writing difficulties (Ritchey & Coker, 2014). Most of the studies focus on specific participants such as, students with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), middle school age students, or students with specific learning disabilities (SLD).

### **Research Methodology**

The action research study was conducted in a 1<sup>st</sup> grade general education class in a public charter school in Southwest Florida. There were 18 male participants who used the Kidspiration Lite application on iPads. The following variables were measured (a) writing structure, (b) language conventions, (c) number of words written, and (d) students' attitudes towards writing.

The intervention was a computerized graphic organizer using the Kidspiration Lite application. Before implementation of the intervention, students wrote an opinion paper. The paper was used as a baseline. After introduction and use of the intervention, students wrote an opinion paper using the computer application. These papers were used as the posttest. The baseline and posttest were analyzed to determine whether the intervention, Kidspiration Lite, was successful. The students completed a writing interest survey utilizing a Likert scale, pre- and post-intervention. The survey was used to monitor students' attitudes towards writing. All final writing products were scored using a rubric. The students' pre-writing work samples were collected weekly following their final writing work sample.

### **Results**

The results of this research were consistent with previous studies. Although most of the studies focused on specific participants such as, students with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), middle school age students, or students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). This study focused on an elementary general education class. The intervention allowed the students to explore ways to plan out their writing with the use of an iPad. As a class, there were gains in language conventions, structure, and the total word count between the pre and post writing samples. According to the rubric used to measure writing achievement, the class increased their average by 1.35 points in the writing structure category, and 1.53 points in the language conventions category. Students also increased their total number of words written from 32.5 words to 35.1 words. The results of the average rubric score of structure from the students' weekly writing samples showed a slight increase. The class average for the rubric scores of language conventions showed a steady increase in this as well. There was an ascending trend in the average number of words written from weeks 1 to 3. However, there was a decrease during

week 4 due to five students being absent that week. The results of the students' writing interest survey indicated that students who like writing increased by the final survey. When students were asked if they thought they were good writers, their responses were split evenly (50% *some of the time* and 50% *all of the time*). This was a drop in responses from the baseline survey. When it came to the final survey, more students chose *some of the time* for using capital letters and punctuation as necessary. There was a gain in the numbers of students who responded *all of the time* to this statement. There was also a gain in the responses with the use of transition words. The added question to the final survey indicated that most of the students felt that the use of Kidspiration helped them become better writers.

### **Implications**

Based on the results of the action research study, the use of Kidspiration Lite during the pre-writing stage of the writing process is effective when helping struggling writers in the general education classroom. Future research may focus on the use of the full version of Kidspiration, to ensure that the students' work can be saved. Additionally, there should be more than 4 weeks of data collection. Also, future studies should consider the use of a class set of iPads that are assigned to that particular classroom and not shared with other students in the school. Educators could implement this program or a similar program during the pre-writing stage. With struggling writer, efforts should be made to implement strategies, whether they are technology based or non-technology based, to enhance/foster the writing skills of elementary-age male students.

### **References**

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