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THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LEARNERS AS WRITERS
OF OPINION PIECES

by

Auri Ann Squire

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Elementary Education

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Logan, Utah

2017

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ABSTRACT

The Development of English Learners as Writers of Opinion Pieces

by

Auri Ann Squire, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2017

Major Professor: Sarah Clark, Ph.D.

Department: School of Teacher Education and Leadership

The population of English learners (ELs) is growing rapidly across the U.S. Concurrently, elementary students throughout the country are being required to produce more sophisticated writing products than ever before as a result of the heavy emphasis on writing instruction in the recently adopted Common Core State Standards. This qualitative study examined how to best support ELs as they develop as writers. It also addressed the strong need to investigate the impact of students discussing ideas with a partner throughout the writing process.

In order to determine how ELs develop as writers, a multiple case study was conducted in a fourth-grade English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. The ESL teacher used the “Thinking Maps” program to teach students to write opinion pieces. Part of the program included partner talk, in which the students conversed with a partner throughout the writing process. The study took place over a period of 6 weeks. During that time, I did twice-weekly observations, took field notes, collected samples of student

work, audio recorded students as they participated in partner talk, and conducted interviews with the students and the teacher. In addition to an ongoing, reflective analysis of the field notes and audio files, the grounded theory approach was used for final data analysis. The data analysis and interpretation of the data reflects the constructs and theories that initially structured this study.

A number of key elements emerged from the data analysis that indicated that important supports are needed in order for ELs to develop as writers of opinion pieces. These included the opportunity to work with a more knowledgeable other, communicating despite language barriers, utilizing the structure provided with Thinking Maps, a chance to participate in group discussions, and the opportunity to examine written models to use when writing their own opinion pieces.

(145 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The Development of English Learners as Writers of Opinion Pieces

Auri Ann Squire

The population of English learners (ELs) is growing rapidly across the U.S. Concurrently, elementary students throughout the country are being required to produce more sophisticated writing products than ever before as a result of the heavy emphasis on writing instruction in the recently adopted Common Core State Standards. This qualitative study examined how to best support ELs as they develop as writers. It also addressed the strong need to investigate the impact of students discussing ideas with a partner throughout the writing process.

In order to determine how ELs develop as writers, a multiple case study was conducted in a fourth-grade English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. The ESL teacher used the “Thinking Maps” program to teach students to write opinion pieces. Part of the program included partner talk, in which the students conversed with a partner throughout the writing process. The study took place over a period of 6 weeks. During that time, I did twice-weekly observations, took field notes, collected samples of student work, audio recorded students as they participated in partner talk, and conducted interviews with the students and the teacher. In addition to an ongoing, reflective analysis of the field notes and audio files, the grounded theory approach was used for final data analysis. The data analysis and interpretation of the data reflects the constructs and theories that initially structured this study.

A number of key elements emerged from the data analysis that indicated that important supports are needed in order for ELs to develop as writers of opinion pieces. These included the opportunity to work with a more knowledgeable other, communicating despite language barriers, utilizing the structure provided with Thinking Maps, a chance to participate in on group discussions, and the opportunity to examine written models to use when writing their own opinion pieces.

DEDICATION

For Ramsi Lin and Teya Adelaide.

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I would first like to express gratitude to my committee chairperson, Dr. Sarah Clark, for her willingness to embark on this endeavor with me. Her patience, professionalism, and kindness have sustained me throughout the process. Dr. Clark's quick, direct feedback has kept this project moving along and her expertise has transformed it into something great. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Troy Beckert and Dr. Steven Camicia, for their invaluable input. The skills and experience brought to the table by this committee have enhanced this project far beyond my expectations. Dr. Cinthya Saavedra should also be recognized for her contributions, particularly her role in assisting with methodology.

I would also like to thank Terri Brown and the students at Johnson Elementary for their involvement in the study. Mrs. Brown's flexibility was greatly appreciated. I was also very impressed by her positive attitude and dedication to her students. My love for Johnson Elementary runs deep and the people there will always hold a special place in my heart. Amar and numerous students like him have inspired my work over the years. It is my sincere hope that this project will work to the advantage of other English Learners and help improve their educational experiences.

My dear family must also be acknowledged. A very special thanks goes to my girls, who absolutely sacrificed the most. I am also indebted to my husband, Russell, for stepping in to save the day many, many times. It was he who encouraged me from the start and supported me throughout.

Auri Ann Squire

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
PUBLIC ABSTRACT	v
DEDICATION.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
English Learners in America’s Schools.....	2
Writing Instruction for English Learners.....	5
Purpose of the Research Study	11
Research Questions.....	12
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	13
Situating the Study.....	13
Theoretical Framework.....	13
What We Know About Writing and Writing Instruction.....	15
Writing an Opinion Piece.....	20
English Learners and Writing.....	23
Thinking Maps.....	25
Collaborative Learning and Partner Talk.....	30
III. METHODS	33
Research Design.....	33
Participants.....	33
Student Descriptions	35
Context of Study	37
Study Procedures	38

	Page
Data Collection	42
Data Analysis	47
IV. FINDINGS.....	49
Developing as Writers Using Piaget’s Cognitive Development Theory	49
How Do Fourth Grade EL Students Develop as Writers of Opinion Pieces in a Thinking Maps School?	51
How Does Discussing Ideas with Others Influence the Writing and Writing Process of EL Students Who are Writing Opinion Pieces?...	78
V. DISCUSSION.....	87
Importance of the Study.....	87
Implications of Findings	88
Study Limitations.....	95
Recommendations for Future Research.....	96
REFERENCES	98
APPENDICES	108
Appendix A: Thinking Maps Used in Opinion Writing Instruction.....	109
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form.....	112
Appendix C: SAGE Writing Test Sample Question (6 th Grade).....	116
Appendix D: Opinion Piece Prompts	118
Appendix E: Scoring Materials	122
Appendix F: Field Notes Forms.....	126
Appendix G: Student Interview Questions	129
Appendix H: Teacher Interview Questions	132

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Fourth-Grade DIBELS Benchmark Goals	35
2. Data Sources Overview.....	42

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Hyerle's Thinking Maps	28
2. Circle map with frame of reference	28
3. WIDA performance definitions	34
4. Students' pretest and posttest scores.....	45
5. "Should Every Kid Get a Trophy?" prompt	53
6. Antonio's circle maps	58
7. Antonio's pretest and posttest.....	61
8. Sheng's flow map	75
9. Computers in schools' article.....	79
10. Miguel's flow map.....	84

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Amar stared at the white paper his teacher had placed on his desk. This single, blank sheet was designated as “scratch paper” to assist him as he completed a writing exam. The task was to write a complex opinion piece. Ten-year-old Amar was required to read three passages, form an intelligent opinion about the actions of one of the characters, relate that opinion to the other passages, create an organized structure to logically group his ideas, support his point of view with reasons that were reinforced by facts and details, link his opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses, and develop a strong concluding statement. Amar looked around the room at his peers. He wondered if the classroom of fourth graders surrounding him felt capable of meeting these expectations.

On this early spring day, Amar looked forward to summer with climates that felt more like home. He had just endured his third winter in the U.S., and it never seemed to get easier. Amar emigrated from Iraq with his parents and four brothers. Although they had been immersed in the English language for nearly 3 years, he still struggled with the language. His outgoing brother, on the other hand, seemed to pick up English quickly. Amar often watched him, joking and laughing with friends on the playground, and he longed for the ability to communicate better with his peers and express his intelligence. Though Amar was incredibly bright, and knew he was much better at math than any of his classmates, he could not seem to form sentences that made him sound smart.

Writing was exceptionally challenging. It was hard enough for Amar to express ideas on paper using his native Arabic language. Writing proper, complex sentences in

English was no easy task, and putting these sentences together into an articulate, cohesive piece for the writing exam would be very difficult. Amar thought back to an afternoon several weeks earlier when his teacher stood in front of the class and informed her students just how important this writing test was. The students needed to do well. Amar respected his teacher and certainly did not want to disappoint her. Besides, his parents also expected excellence from their children. He knew he simply must do well.

This scenario is not unique to Amar. Across the country, a growing number of students like Amar are struggling to meet the rigorous expectations for writing in schools today. Consequently, teachers everywhere are searching for ways to strengthen writing instruction for the English Learners (ELs) in their classrooms and to provide them with effective tools that can help them succeed.

English Learners in America's Schools

According to census data, the population of students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is growing rapidly across the U.S. (LEP.gov, 2014). The state in which the present study was conducted had the eighth highest growth rate for the LEP population from 1990 to 2010, with an increase of over 235% (LEP.gov, 2014). This recent influx of immigrants has had a profound impact on the demographic makeup of the U.S. and promises vast implications for education and social welfare policy. Based on data from the U.S., the foreign-born and U.S.-born children of immigrants together represented 20% of all children under the age of 18 and 25% of all low-income children (Fix & Passel, 2003).

English learners, like Amar, make up a large portion of the students in our schools today. “During the 2007-08 school year, ELs represented 10.6% of the K–12 public school enrollment, or more than 5.3 million students. In fact, ELs are the fastest-growing segment of the student population” (Calderón, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011, p. 103). As this population continues to grow, so do the controversies and politics surrounding their education (Goldenberg, 2006).

Unfortunately, ELs produce, on average, lower student achievement scores than native English speakers (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011), suggesting a need to further examine the instruction these students are receiving. Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) show that in 2005, the dropout rate for foreign-born Hispanic students was almost four times that of U.S. born Hispanics (Laird, Kienzl, DeBell, & Chapman, 2007). Furthermore, Sheng et al. described a great cultural divide that EL students often experience between home and school that can sometimes impede EL students from acclimating to the culture and expectations of U.S. schools. Different teaching and assessment methods, behavioral expectations, classroom routines, and student/teacher relationships are among the cultural differences to which these students must learn to adapt. By providing effective instruction and meaningful learning experiences educators might help narrow the achievement gap between proficient English speakers and ELs.

Currently, most states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for use during literacy instruction. ELs are affected by these new standards just as much as other students. For example, the CCSS state that

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers strongly believe that all students should be held to the same high expectations outlined in the Common Core State Standards. This includes students who are English learners. However, these students may require additional time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments as they acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b, p. 1)

The CCSS have placed a stronger emphasis on learning how to write and the importance of using writing as a tool for learning (Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012). As a result, many teachers are looking for ways to improve their writing instruction to meet the new instructional demands of the CCSS. More specifically, the CCSS require that upper elementary students write opinion pieces in preparation for a progression to argumentative writing in middle and high school. The CCSS require third-through fifth-grade elementary students do the following: (a) write opinion pieces on topic or texts supporting a point of view with reasons and information, (b) introduce a topic or text, clearly state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose, (c) provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details, (d) link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses, and (e) provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a). These writing expectations demonstrate the increased writing ability that students are expected to have further emphasizing the need for effective writing instruction that meets the specific instructional needs of ELs.

Writing Instruction for English Learners

Writing is one of the most difficult literacy skills for ELs to master and thus “writing instruction of ELLs has become one of the most urgent issues in today’s educational practice” (Lin, 2015, p. 237). The heavy emphasis on writing instruction in the newly adopted CCSS is evidence of this shift in focus to writing, and more specifically the writing of persuasive pieces and informative/explanatory texts. Paquette and Fello (2010) stated, “For many children, writing expository information can be cumbersome and tedious. The task often seems overwhelming...” (p. 236). This is especially true for EL students who find that content driven writing tasks are often beyond their understanding of content knowledge, their background knowledge, and beyond their writing ability. Information and explanatory texts are often more cognitively demanding and more linguistically complex than personal narratives (de Oliveira & Lan, 2014) with which elementary students are most familiar. Thus, EL students are faced with the demands of writing more complex text while simultaneously developing proficiency in a second language. Hruska (2000) described how EL students are essentially “chasing the wind.” They are putting forth extreme effort but their progress feels slow and tedious and they become easily exhausted from the chase.

And yet, learning to write clearly and effectively is an important goal for all students. Graham and Harris (2005) explained that writing is critical to school success as “it is the primary means by which students demonstrate their knowledge in school” (p. 19). Furthermore, several studies have demonstrated how writing ability is a strong predictor of future academic achievement among elementary students (Ackerman, 1991;

Applebee, 1984; Langer, 1985; McCrindle & Christensen, 1995). Yet, data from the writing portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress demonstrated that writing achievement, in general, is low with fourth graders in the U.S. who demonstrate only partial mastery of skills (Graham & Harris, 2005). Based upon what is measured by these assessments, writing achievement among ELs is even lower (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2012).

Historically, EL students have struggled to write effectively and to perform well on assessments for various reasons. Haynes (2015) explained that (a) EL students have a limited vocabulary so the content of their writing is restricted to only the English words they know, (b) ELs are often uncomfortable using inventive spelling and so their writing is frequently limited to the words they know how to spell, (c) EL students often do not understand writing structure and English grammar which can make their writing difficult to read and understand, (d) EL students often feel reluctant to share their writing with their English speaking peers and so they receive minimal feedback to improve their writing, and (e) ELs often use only present tense in their writing making it difficult for them to write about historical events or scientific topics that require past tense.

Additionally, assessments may not be measuring areas where individual ELs might excel (Basham & Kwachka, 1991).

To further complicate the matter, ELs face the challenge of trying to catch up academically to their native English-speaking peers. To close this achievement gap, ELs need to make at least one and a half years' worth of growth each school year (Buckner, 2009). Buckner proposes adapting instructional tools already in place to meet ELs'

specific needs in this area. She recommends providing ELs with instruction geared toward their individual language proficiency levels, and teaching students to recognize and replicate text structures in written discourse. Goldenberg (2006) suggested that in addition to commonly used instructional procedures, teachers need to provide specific accommodations for their ELs as well. Concern regarding the lack of instruction that ELs were receiving prompted two large, federally funded reviews examining the research on EL instruction. Researchers from the Center for Research on Education Diversity and Excellence conducted the first report (Genesee, 2006) and the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2006) completed the other. From these reviews, Goldenberg (2013) identified important principles that could be used to create a stronger foundation for EL writing instruction. First, scaffolded and guided writing instruction has been found to be effective with native English speakers and is likely to be effective for ELs; and second, the use of the home language during writing instruction can also promote writing development in ELs.

Goldenberg (2013) noted that each of the published studies that demonstrated positive effects on EL student achievement included a combination of several features that included the following: (a) clear goals and objectives, (b) clear instructions and supportive guidance as learners engage with new skills, (c) effective modeling of skills and strategies, (d) active student engagement and participation, (e) practice and periodic review, and (f) structured, focused interactions with other students. Following Goldenberg's line of reasoning, educators must ensure that these elements and support structures are present during the writing instruction EL students receive so their

opportunities for writing success are increased. For writing instruction, this means that there should be clear goals, objectives, instructions, and plenty of scaffolding and guidance for students while completing writing tasks.

There should also be plenty of opportunities for students to practice talking about what they are writing and plenty of interactions with other students to ensure that what ELs are thinking and writing about makes sense. Yarrow and Topping (2001) found that students who were given the opportunity to discuss their ideas with a partner throughout the writing process performed better on post assessment writing exams than did their peers without this treatment.

In another study, EL students expressed a desire to use their first language (L1) during the writing process (Lin, 2015) to clarify ideas and thoughts. Goldenberg (2006) recommended that teachers teaching in all English instructional programs implement primary language support for students in their classrooms. In doing so, specific skills are not taught in the home language, rather the language is used to support learning in English. For example, teachers may allow students to brainstorm in their native language prior to writing in English. Additionally, the teacher's role in relation to students' language and culture can be influenced by the societal power structure. Teachers who prohibit the use of home language at school send negative and isolating messages (Cummins, 2001). It is important that teachers of ELs work to provide contexts of empowerment (Gutierrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995). Students who feel empowered are more likely to write freely, rather than trying to write only what they feel is expected of them (Combs, 2010). Goldenberg (2013) asserted, "It is an inconvenient truth that we

lack the knowledge base to fully prepare teachers to help many of their ELs [English Learners] overcome the achievement gaps they face” (p. 11).

In a review of effective practices for ELs, Calderón and colleagues (2011) also noted that cooperative learning has powerful potential for struggling writers. Cooperative learning used during writing instruction allows an opportunity for students to work in pairs or small groups to help each other verbalize their ideas. This strategy has been found to be effective and works especially well for ELs who may be afraid to practice their new language skills in front of their teacher or an entire class (Calderón, Hertz-Lazarowitz, & Slavin, 1998). Cooperative learning groups provide ELs opportunities to verbally discuss content in a small, less intimidating group of their friends and peers. In some cases, this strategy has been found to be as effective as one-on-one tutoring (Calderón et al., 2011).

Another approach for working with ELs that has gained momentum over the past couple of decades is to ensure that strategies and resources are consistent throughout a school so students are able to transition smoothly between classes, teachers, and grade levels with familiarity. This is especially beneficial to students who receive special services within a school, such as a resource class or English as Second Language (ESL) classes, in addition to attending their general education classroom with their English speaking peers (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003). For example, if an EL student is taught to write an essay using a specific technique in his general education classroom, he can expect to use the same method and tools when asked to write an essay in his ESL classroom. When he advances to a new grade, he will see the same methods

and will be prepared to continue to strengthen his writing, rather than spending time learning new techniques and new resources and materials.

The use of graphic organizers is one strategy that some schools are employing to create consistent writing instructional tools across teachers, classes, and grades. Graphic organizers can help students organize their thinking and writing and using the same graphic organizers or maps consistently across the grades can support students each time they write. One such program designed to provide schools with a common set of graphic organizers or maps for writing is the Thinking Maps program. Dr. David Hyerle, developer of the program, described Thinking Maps as “a common visual language for learning” (Costa & Kallick, 2000, p. 151; see also Buckner, 2009; Hyerle, 1996a). The *Path to Proficiency* program is a sub-program of the *Thinking Maps* program and is designed specifically for ELs. Some research studies have examined how well Thinking Maps or graphic organizers help students to comprehend and recall new information about what they read (Hickie, 2006; Leary, 1999; López, 2011). However, there is a dearth of research studies that have examined the effectiveness of *Thinking Maps*, and the *Path to Proficiency* program specifically, as a tool for writing instruction and scaffolding at the elementary level. This gap in the research makes it difficult to determine if the Thinking Maps program can provide highly effective strategies for use during writing instruction. Further, Leary (1999) recommended a qualitative study to investigate the workings of Thinking Map lessons and to examine how the program affects individual students.

Purpose of the Research Study

There is a lot of information that teachers still need in order to provide effective writing instruction to ELs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to address three distinct gaps in the research literature examining writing instruction provided to ELs to strengthen our understanding and to improve the writing instruction provided to ELs. First, most of the research studies examining writing instruction for elementary students does not include EL students in their samples. Second, the few studies that have examined writing instruction limit their analyses to only written products without focusing attention on the process (Gort, 2006). With programs such as Thinking Maps and *Path to Proficiency* on the market, an examination is needed to determine how ELs experience these programs and the recommended instructional writing techniques as part of the writing process. To narrow the focus of this study, I examined the Flow Map that is specifically proposed in the Thinking Maps *Path to Proficiency* program and is used in the context of writing an opinion piece as outlined in the CCSS. Third, noticeably absent from these studies is the added feature of using oral language or partner talk to support and enhance writing. There is a strong need to investigate the impact of teaching students how to appropriately and effectively discuss their ideas with a partner prior to writing and to examine how this influences the students' writing development. The present study sought to fill these gaps in the research literature in order to begin addressing the needs of this larger population of students.

Research Questions

The following questions were employed in the current study.

1. How do fourth grade EL students develop as writers of opinion pieces in a Thinking Maps school?
2. How does discussing ideas with others influence the writing and writing process of EL students who are writing opinion pieces?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Situating the Study

The theoretical framework, as well as several topics that are important in situating this study, is addressed in this review of the literature. In the first section of the review, I provide the theoretical framework used in the current study, and in the second section, I discuss the relevant topics. These topics include what we know about writing and writing instruction, writing an opinion piece, Thinking Maps used during the process of writing, and collaborative learning and partner talk used during the process of writing.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I examine the development or stages that an EL student experiences as he or she learns to write an opinion piece. Therefore, this study will be predominantly through a Piagetian lens. According to Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, learning happens through active, dynamic mental processes, which occur through two functional invariants: Organization and Adaptation. When children take in information, they will first seek to make connections based on prior knowledge. The learner will organize the new information with a previously established schema—a cognitive framework or concept that helps organize and interpret information. Piaget referred to this process of using an existing schema to deal with a new object or situation as assimilation. Equilibrium occurs when a child's schemas can deal with newest

information through assimilation. However, an uncomfortable state of disequilibrium occurs when new information cannot fit into existing schemas. Adaptation becomes necessary when disequilibrium occurs and new material is incompatible with a current schema. At this stage, a process of both assimilation and accommodation—changing schema to fit new information—will work together to adapt to the new, incongruent information (Piaget & Inhelder, 1973).

Thinking Maps are a combination of oral, numerical, and illustrated representations that are drawn together through language (Hyerle, 1996b). These cognitive maps are often associated with Piaget's (1981) constructivist theory. Constructivism is supported by cognitive research that tells us that the key to developing long-term memory and the ability to apply classroom learning in other contexts is making connections within the brain (Smilkstein, 1991).

Constructivism is important for teachers and learners of English, because ELs must be actively involved in order to construct meaning as they go through the process of learning to understand and speak a new language. Constructs from a Vygotskian perspective can help illustrate this point. Both Piaget and Vygotsky have been used to inform the current research on second language learning. With his social culture theory, Vygotsky introduced the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which tasks are selected carefully for students based upon what they can accomplish with some help from a teacher or a more capable peer (Vygotsky, Hanfmann, & Vakar, 2012). Hyerle (2009) believed Thinking Maps are a great way to scaffold student learning and to keep students from emerging beyond their ZPD. Further, Vygotsky believed that as

children are taught mental tools and given opportunities to practice using them, their minds and external behavior are transformed, leading to higher mental functions (Vygotsky et al., 2012). He also believed that students first experience knowledge and skills through their interactions with peers and adults. He stated, “any higher mental function necessarily goes through an external stage in its development because it is initially a social function” (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 162). To demonstrate this idea, Alanis (2011) noted substantial evidence to support the idea that students benefit from working closely with a peer.

The students in this study were in what Piaget (1981) described as the Concrete Operational stage. Many linguists, psychologists, and educators agree that graphic organizers can effectively activate access to long-term memory for language acquisition and content knowledge (López, 2011) for students who are operating in this developmental stage. Visual learning strategies like Thinking Maps engage students in making connections, building knowledge, and developing schemas by actively forming intricate visual illustrations of their thinking process. Constructing these visuals generates deeper meaning for ELs (López, 2011).

What We Know About Writing and Writing Instruction

What do we know about writing and writing instruction? Historically, research examining writing and writing instruction has been underfunded and has been typically conducted in post-secondary education settings (Juzwik et al., 2005). Compared with reading research, writing research has received considerably less attention over the years.

As a result, reading research has a richer and much longer history, and has been greatly invested in by policymakers, educators, and the public (Pressley, Billman, Perry, Refitt, & Reynolds, 2007). When writing research has been done at the elementary level, researchers have been inclined to examine the effectiveness of writing strategies in isolation from each other. For example, a planning strategy may be explored, without also looking at the impact of editing or revising strategies on writing performance (Graham, 2006). Furthermore, Pressley et al. (2007) stated that

...in contrast with process-oriented instruction (e.g., writing workshop), traditional writing instruction: (a) is more teacher-directed; (b) focuses more on discrete skills; (c) uses less authentic writing tasks; (d) devotes limited time to composition of whole texts; and (e) values product over process. (p. 150)

Pressley et al. (2007) suggested that future writing research needs to evaluate the effectiveness of combining writing strategy instruction with a strong writing program, particularly with emphasis on how to maintain writing strategies over time and to generalize across writing assignments.

Research on writing instruction has also examined motivation and its critical role in building effective and consistent writers. Hidi, Berndorff, and Ainley (2002) determined that one's attitude towards being identified as interested in writing, one's enjoyment in writing in a variety of genres, and one's self-efficacy about one's own writing all seem to develop in unison and these attributes may influence each other developmentally. The writing performance of struggling writers, as well as competent writers, can be affected by motivational factors and perceived competence to accomplish the writing task (Pajares, 2003).

In general, students who struggle with writing tend to produce writing pieces that

are shorter, are more poorly organized, and are overall weaker in quality than their more capable peers (Englert & Raphael, 1988; Graham & Harris, 1991). Moreover, their writing often contains irrelevant information, as well as mechanical and grammatical errors that make their writing difficult to read (Graham & Harris, 1991; MacArthur, Graham, & Skarvold, 1988; Pressley et al., 2007). Typically, struggling writers will either plunge into writing without taking the time to properly plan and consider the objectives of the assigned writing product, or they will become debilitated by the daunting task and the blank screen in front of them (Elbow, 1981). Those who do not take the time to plan typically do not have the tools and strategies needed to elaborate their ideas. Rather, they simply put together a list of potential content, which actually hinders their ability to develop their thoughts (Pressley et al., 2007).

Poor writers usually struggle to recognize inaccuracies between what they intend to communicate and what is actually written, and are often better at detecting problems with papers written by others than their own work (Beal, 1987; Fitzgerald, 1987). Furthermore, struggling writers lack the ability to conceptualize an acceptable final product. They often generate content in a narrow, linear manner without planning first and forget to consider broader goals related to style or quality (Pressley et al., 2007). Pressley et al. (p. 21) cited Pollington, Wilcox and Morrison (1995) who stated;

...in contrast with process-oriented instruction (e.g., writing workshop), traditional writing instruction: (a) is more teacher-directed; (b) focuses more on discrete skills; (c) uses less authentic writing tasks; (d) devotes limited time to composition of whole texts; and (e) values product over process. (p. 150)

Effective instructional practices were ascertained through a meta-analysis conducted by Graham et al. (2012), who examined the research on writing instruction for

elementary age students. Graham et al. noted that the following teaching interventions have been shown to improve students' writing quality: (a) using explicit teaching of writing strategies, (b) encouraging students to set goals and self-assess, (c) teaching the structure of the text, (d) teaching students how to be more creative or how to produce visual images, and (e) teaching transcription skills, such as spelling and/or keyboarding (Anderson, 1997; Carr, Bigler, & Morningstar, 1991; Crowhurst, 1991; Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony, & Stevens, 1991; Glaser & Brunstein, 2007; Graham, Harris, & Mason, 2005; Harris & Graham, 2004; Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006; Harris et al., 2012; Lane et al., 2008; Sawyer, Graham, & Harris, 1992; Sinclair, 2005; Torrence, Fidalgo, & Garcia, 2007; Tracy, Reid, & Graham, 2009; Welch, 1992). Graham was unable to find evidence that teaching grammar to students would significantly influence the quality of student writing. The implementation of the following scaffolding procedures also had a positive impact on writing quality: involving students in prewriting activities, having students work together, and providing students with specific goals (Ferretti, MacArthur, & Dowdy, 2000; Graham & Harris, 2006; Midgette, Haria, & MacArthur, 2008; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Yarrow & Topping, 2001). Additionally, the use of word processing, increasing how much students write, and the implementation of comprehensive writing programs also improved the quality of student writing (Croes, 1990; Englert, Zhao, Dunsmore, Collings, & Wolbers, 2007; Owston & Wideman, 1987; Raphael, Englert, & Kirschner, 1986).

Gleason and Antonioson (2001) identified similar components of effective writing instruction during a review of the research examining writing instruction, but in addition,

their review also identified the importance of explicit modeling. For most students, exposure to the writing process is not enough for them to become proficient writers (Dowel, Storey, & Gleason, 1994). Teachers need to model the process and verbally explain their thought processes as they write (Englert et al., 1991; Gleason & Antonioson, 2001). This enables students to see specific tactics and perhaps understand the strategies an experienced writer employs (Englert, Raphael, & Anderson, 1992). Furthermore, Dickson (1999) found evidence to support the practice of teaching text structure to improve student writing. In her study, Dickinson had students examine several texts from each genre and then they practiced identifying specific features and organization prior to writing their own pieces. Compared to their peers, these students were better able to label, order, evaluate, and change their ideas as they wrote.

Along with good modeling during writing instruction, young writers need ample time to write and practice the process of writing and the strategies being learned. A solid routine, consisting of teacher modeling, practice incorporating writing procedures, teacher scaffolding, and a designated time for sustained writing every day is important if students are going to master writing content, style, organization, and conventions (Gleason & Antonioson, 2001; Troia & Graham, 2003). According to Gleason and Antonioson, providing instruction about the writing mechanics and conventions are also crucial in students' writing development. However, there is concern that if teachers put too much emphasis on proper formatting and conventions rather than on content, their students will allow the organizing structures to limit their creativity. Graham et al. (2012) concluded that, in general, most writing strategies could be applied across all genres, with

just a few strategies being genre-specific. One writing genre, opinion writing, has been receiving a lot of attention in schools lately because of the increased emphasis of this writing produce expected within the CCSS. With the new focus on writing opinion pieces at younger grades, it is important to determine what the research literature says about writing opinion pieces.

Writing an Opinion Piece

What is an opinion piece? There is often uncertainty among educators surrounding three different types of writing: *opinion, persuasive, and argumentative*. Kinneavy and Warriner (1993) explained, “In a persuasive essay, you can select the most favorable evidence, appeal to emotions, and use style to persuade your readers. Your single purpose is to be convincing” (p. 305). There seems to be a consensus that opinion and persuasive writing can be used interchangeably, but argumentative is more distinct. Hillocks (2011) stated, “Argument...is mainly about logical appeals and involves claims, evidence, warrants, backing, and rebuttals” (p. xvii). To meet the demands of the CCSS for argumentative writing, students must acknowledge opposing claims, as well as support their own position on a topic or issue with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate evidence (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a). Clearly stated, “The difference between persuasive (opinion) and argumentative writing can be understood, respectively, as an attempt to change readers’ point of view or incite them to act versus an act of inquiry in which logical conclusions are drawn based on a careful evaluation of evidence” (O’Hallaron,

2014, p. 306).

Students in the U.S. school system have traditionally performed poorly in writing opinion discourse over the years (Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1986; Crowhurst, 1991; Pringle & Freedman, 1985). There has been some concern in the past that elementary age students are simply not cognitively able to write quality opinion essays due to the conceptual and structural demands (Andrews, Torgerson, Low, & McGuinn, 2009). However, in one study, Crowhurst found that students' opinion writing scores went up dramatically after being explicitly taught the text structure of an opinion piece, identifying those structural elements in other texts, and then practicing to write opinion pieces. These results indicate that writing quality opinion essays is a skill that can be taught through modeling and scaffolding. Students who were participants in Crowhurst's treatment group received direct instruction and opportunities to practice writing and as a result, produced writing that was more organized and produced better-written conclusions than the control group. Based on her findings, Crowhurst came to the conclusion that although generating relevant material and other aspects of opinion writing are conceptually quite challenging for upper elementary students, developing a conclusion or using linking words are not too cognitively difficult for students to learn.

When writing an opinion piece, struggling writers often present a list of reasons to support a position without further elaborating their claims or providing evidence to support a claim (Crowhurst, 1983, 1991). Expounding upon reasons to support an idea is difficult for students, particularly when the prompt poses an abstract question. Very few students whether they are struggling or successful writers can consistently produce

reasons of the same quality and thus, learning to explain and justify reasons thoroughly enough is an ongoing process (O'Hallaron, 2014).

Additionally, there appears to be a relationship between reading opinion pieces and writing them, as scores in writing quality and organization of compositions also increased significantly when students were given only one lesson on the structure of opinion text, followed by several opportunities to read well-written opinion pieces (Crowhurst, 1991). A study conducted by De La Paz and Graham (1997) also looked at similar teacher modeling strategies. In their study, fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-grade students with learning difficulties were put into one of two groups: a planning group or composition group. Students in the planning group received instruction on how to develop, evaluate, and organize their ideas before writing opinion essays. The composition group was taught about essay structure and provided with opportunities to revise sample pieces of writing as well as the opportunity to compose and share essays with their peers. This study also examined the effectiveness of allowing students to compose their essays orally, so half the students in each group wrote their essays traditionally, while the other half dictated their essays. When given the chance to write on their own, the students who were taught planning techniques did spend more time planning. It was determined that the most complete and qualitatively better essays came from students in the planning group who orally dictated their essays and planned their writing. The researchers made it clear that it was the combination of oral composition along with having received instruction on how to properly plan that made these students outperform their peers.

Reznitskaya et al. (2001) found evidence to support the idea that children who engage in oral argumentation are better able to transfer that knowledge. Fourth and fifth grade students who participated in a series of teacher-led discussions about controversial issues prior to writing wrote opinion essays that contained more arguments, counterarguments, rebuttals, and evidence from text than those of their peers who were not provided with the treatment.

In regards to successful strategies to use when teaching opinion writing, there seems to be a general consensus that the use of explicit scaffolding has a sustained effect on students' writing (Englert et al., 1991; Ferretti et al., 2000; De La Paz & Graham, 1997) as does having clearly established writing goals (Ferretti et al., 2000; Midgette et al., 2008).

English Learners and Writing

Considering the dearth of research available on effective instructional practices for EL students generally, it is not surprising that there is also very little research literature on how best to specifically help ELs write effectively. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that ELs be included in statewide standardized testing, includes assessment of listening, speaking, reading, and writing ability (Schulz, 2009). As a result, this large subgroup of students can no longer be ignored.

In a three-year study involving ELs, researchers found writing scores of EL students to be much lower than native English speakers and those students who had exited from ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programs. However, it has

been shown that culturally and linguistically diverse students can succeed in their literacy development and the achievement gap for ESL students can be narrowed as long as special attention is given to designing and implementing instructional interventions that focus on promoting achievement and equity among students from diverse backgrounds (Lee, Penfield, & Maerten-Rivera, 2009) and as long as assessments are carefully designed and deemed valid (Hamp-Lyons, 1990). There is also evidence to support the idea that explicit instruction in the form of intensive hour-long workshops and individual conferences is an effective and practical way for urban minority students, many of whom are ELs, to acquire better writing skills (Sinclair, 2005).

Another ethnographic study found that when educators incorporated learning activities and materials from home and the community into the classroom, ELs' writing improved (Kenner, 1999). Quiocho and Ulanoff (2012) conducted a qualitative study in which they observed one EL student to discover how scaffolded writing instruction impacted second language writing ability. The researchers concluded that it is crucial to observe students in their classrooms, analyze their work, and watch and learn from their teachers. Their belief is that "it is only when we understand students' strengths and needs that we can work toward making connections between what they bring to school and what they need to learn" (p. 102).

Following a thorough review of writing research, Pressley et al. (2007) concluded that more studies needed to be done in order to develop specialized interventions for non-native English speaking students who seem to struggle with basic writing skills. EL teachers could benefit greatly from a solid body of research identifying valid instructional

adaptations designed to maximize the writing potential of their students (Pressley et al., 2007).

There are other findings in the literature, which may also potentially impact EL writing proficiency. For example, many scholars agree that good vocabulary instruction benefits ELs indefinitely (Carlo et al., 2004; Calderón et al., 2011; Goldenberg, 2006). Knowing and understanding more words fosters better reading comprehension and good reading comprehension encourages more reading and increased opportunities to learn more words (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006). It is important for educators to keep this in mind because a strong vocabulary (verbal and written) will also enhance students' abilities to write well (Hinkle, 2013). Researchers have determined that ELs benefit most from in-depth vocabulary instruction that uses student friendly definitions to provide students with authentic opportunities to utilize word meanings, and to engage students in the meaningful use of word meanings across all domains (Gersten et al., 2007). Additionally, consistent instruction in academic English increases the EL's ability to understand the core curriculum (Francis et al., 2006; Gersten et al., 2007) and prepares them to participate more successfully in writing exams (Hamp-Lyons, 1991).

Thinking Maps

As teachers consider ways to strengthen their writing instruction with ELs, one popular strategy has been to use graphic organizers. Graphic organizers are visual tools and are used to organize information, to express knowledge, concepts, ideas, and to identify relationships. Nussbaum (2002) found graphic organizers to be helpful in

teaching sixth-grade ELs to write an historical argument, though it was determined that those students would have performed better if they also had explicit instruction on how to write historical writing. Over the years, graphic organizers have also been referred to as Thinking Maps, knowledge maps, concept maps, cognitive organizers, advanced organizers, and concept diagrams.

Moore and Readence (1984) conducted a meta-analysis to review research on all types of graphic organizers, in which they identified three important themes. The first theme is the role of the teacher. Teachers who used graphic organizers felt more confident and capable as they guided their students through content. Second, they noticed teachers originally viewed graphic organizers as a way to activate prior knowledge and a way to link prior knowledge to new material. However, teachers eventually began to use graphic organizers to aid student comprehension by providing a way for students to process input at different levels and rehearse information (Barron & Stone, 1974). Third, Moore and Readence (1984) found that in studies where no significant findings were reported, it was noted that students viewed graphic organizers as isolated learning activities, rather than part of ongoing classroom routines, and therefore were unable to connect graphic organizers with new material they were learning.

Griffin and Tulbert (1995) reviewed studies that examined over 45 graphic organizers and their use during instruction. It was determined that without explicit instruction on the use of the graphic organizers, students did not perform any better than they would using traditional methods without graphic organizers. Overall, however, the researchers found contradictory results and recommendations. The issue, it seems, is the

lack of consistency across study designs. For example, studies of teacher-made graphic organizers are not distinguished from studies of student-produced organizers. Thus, effect sizes are often misleading. Griffin and Tulbert recommended that future studies be organized in a way that similar graphic organizers and teaching procedures are used in comparisons.

Working as an inner-city middle school teacher in Oakland California in the 1980s, David Hyerle struggled to help his students make connections with the content he was teaching. He began utilizing visual mapping in an attempt to analyze their thinking. Inspired by a thinking skills program initiated in his school, he asked the question, “What would happen if teachers and students had basic maps for applying different, fundamental thinking processes?” (Hyerle, 1996b, p. 2). Soon, he began to develop several graphic organizers, which eventually became known as the eight Thinking Maps, where each map linked to a specific cognitive process. See Figure 1 for a chart of Hyerle’s (2009) Thinking Maps.

Each map also utilizes a Frame of Reference. The Frame of Reference includes additional information to be written around the outer edge of each map to give additional meaning to the Thinking Map. A Frame of Reference might include the prior knowledge held by a student, a specific source the student referenced, a unique perspective, a book the student has read, etc. (Hyerle, 2009). See Figure 2 for an example of a Circle Map with a Frame of Reference.

It is important to note the differences between graphic organizers and Thinking Maps. Thinking Maps are clearly associated with specific thought processes for



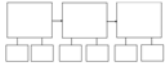



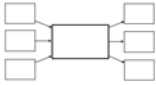
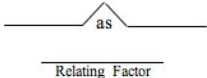
Map	Purpose	Example
Circle	Defining in context	
Bubble	Describing with adjectives	
Flow	Sequencing and ordering	
Brace	Identifying part/whole relationships	
Tree	Classifying/grouping	
Double Bubble	Comparing and contrasting	
Multi-Flow	Analyzing cause and effect	
Bridge	Illustrating analogies	

Figure 1. Hyerle’s Thinking Maps.

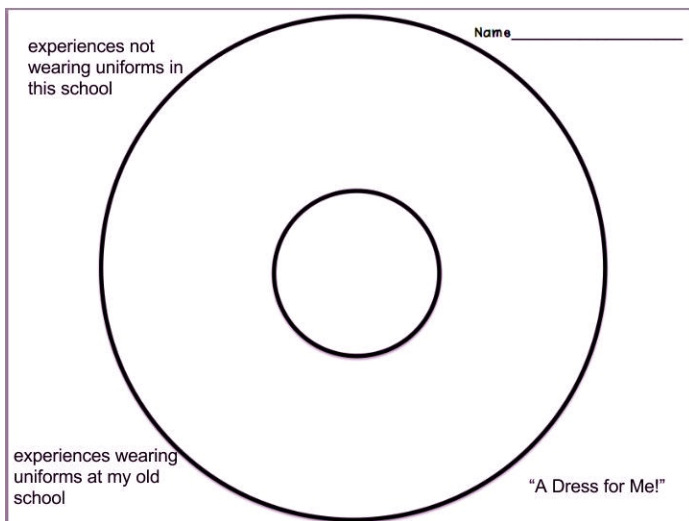


Figure 2. Circle map with frame of reference.

understanding information, while graphic organizers are not. For example, one type of Thinking Map, the Double Bubble Map, was designed to be used specifically for comparing and contrasting two things or ideas. A student may use the Double Bubble Map to examine that characteristics of two characters from a story and compare and contrast them with one another. On the other hand, a popular graphic organizer known as the herringbone encourages students to write information on the v-shaped extensions of a fish. One way students may use this is to simply record the names of characters from a story they've read. No other types of thinking are recorded. On the other hand, using the Thinking Maps enables an interconnection between cognition, language, and learning (López, 2011). These maps are based on the notion conveyed by John Dewey in the 1930s, that good thinking is a skill that can be taught (Leary, 1999). Something else unique to Thinking Maps is their ability to engage students and teachers in the process of constructing knowledge by helping them make specific connections among thinking, meaning, and learning. The learners construct their own maps as they receive information (Hyerle, 1996b).

It is intended that the Thinking Maps program be implemented on a school-wide level so teachers across and throughout the school can utilize a common, cognitive tool. Thinking Maps can be used with all subject areas, as well as for attendance and other behavior initiatives. Rather than being given numerous inconsistent strategies and organizers, teachers throughout the school are able to own, use, and transfer the eight maps in their instruction to whichever subject or content they are teaching (López, 2011). One claim made by the Thinking Maps program is that since the maps are used by all

teachers and in all content areas, they help lower the affective filter as students move to different grades and classes within the school (Buckner, 2009).

It was found in several studies on writing instruction that many students who become proficient at using a writing strategy fail to use the strategy after treatment. Students tend to maintain changes in writing behaviors and performance for only about a month (Pressley et al., 2007). Since Thinking Maps are utilized consistently throughout a school and from grade to grade, the idea is that with school-wide adoption, students will use Thinking Maps and maintain writing skills, such as the organization of ideas, the development of ideas, the inclusion of introductions and conclusions, sequencing, and the use of linking words for longer than when taught using traditional methods.

The research examining Thinking Maps suggests that they are likely to be an effective tool for ELs (Hyerle, 2009; Leary, 1999; López, 2011). This sub-group of students and their teachers are under intense pressure to improve student achievement and meet the increased instructional demands of CCSS. ELs tend to perform better when they are supported with a whole-school approach (López, 2011) and this is the case with the Thinking Maps program. For example, Leary found that in several studies, graphic organizers were shown to assist lower achieving students, many of whom were ELs. It is crucial that teachers of ELs scaffold their writing instruction for students (Schulz, 2009), and the use of Thinking Maps is one way to accomplish this (López, 2011).

Collaborative Learning and Partner Talk

A component of the Thinking Maps program, *Path to Proficiency*, provides

Thinking Maps schools with additional supports for ELs. In *Path to Proficiency* and other Thinking Maps materials, the authors suggest the use of a Flow Map to assist ELs in organizing opinion pieces (Buckner, 2009). Students are also encouraged to utilize a Circle Map for brainstorming. See Appendix A for examples of how these two Thinking Maps can be used (Buckner, 2009, pp. 135, 296). Another important element of the opinion writing process outlined in *Path to Proficiency* is the incorporation of cooperative learning and the use of partner talk, in which young writers verbally share with a partner what they're planning to write prior to putting anything on paper. The author claims that working with other students increases student motivation and helps them put their thoughts into words (Buckner, 2009). Simon (2015) recommended the use of partner talk by stating,

One of the main goals of the English Language Arts Common Core Standards is to build natural collaboration and discussion strategies within students, helping to prepare them for higher levels of education and collaboration in the workforce...partner talk is a best practice that gives students an active role in their learning. (paragraph 2)

ELs are in a position to benefit greatly from being paired with a partner to discuss their writing, particularly if they share the same first language. Alanis (2011) discovered many benefits of bilingual pairs collaborating together through dialogue. It was determined that children reinforced each other's knowledge of their languages, children expressed and exchanged ideas as they built communication skills, children developed close relationships with each other, children were actively involved in their learning, and children were more willing to take risks.

There have also been studies that have examined cooperative learning in writing

(Chen, Liu, Shih, Wu, & Yuan, 2011; Palmer, Evans, Barret, & Vinson, 2014; Schultz, 1997). These studies involved students working together on a single writing project or students providing feedback to one another after writing was completed. No studies were located where ELs were specifically asked to pause throughout the writing process and talk to their partner in an effort to put their ideas into words, with each student writing their own individual opinion piece. A thorough examination of how this will play out for ELs will be particularly significant.

In summary, the use of teacher modeling, Thinking Maps, collaboration, and partner talk all hold great promise in supporting ELs in their development as writers, but no studies have examined these influences. The current study was designed to gain greater understanding on how ELs develop as writers of opinion pieces in a Thinking Maps school that incorporated partner talk. In review, the following research questions were employed in the current study.

1. How do fourth grade EL students develop as writers of opinion pieces in a Thinking Maps school?
2. How does discussing ideas with others influence the writing process for EL students who are writing opinion pieces?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Research Design

A multiple case study using purposeful sampling was utilized in this research design. In a multiple, or a collective case study, several cases are used to understand the similarities and differences between cases (Stake, 1995). Yin (1984, p. 23) defined a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context...and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.” This design allowed the researchers to identify patterns and issues within each case, and then look for common themes that transcended the cases (Yin, 2003). A detailed description of each case (a within-case analysis) was conducted as well as a thematic analysis across the cases (cross-case analysis) in order to make assertions and to interpret the meaning of each case. In this chapter, the methods used to conduct this qualitative study are explained and described including the research design, sampling, research context, procedures, data collection, and data analysis.

Participants

The bounded system for this study was a public Title 1 elementary school in the Central School District (pseudonym). All fourth grade students designated as English learners by the school and who were enrolled in the ESL class were identified as potential participants. ESL students who received resource services in addition to ESL were excluded from the study due to scheduling conflicts. All eligible students for whom a

parental consent form was obtained participated in the study. In order to ensure that the students had similar instruction and experiences, this study explored one ESL classroom with one teacher providing instruction for all students. For this study, the participants included one female and five male students. Birthdates for the students ranged from October 2005 to August 2006. Pseudonyms were used to identify the participants and to protect their identity.

Upon entering the ESL program, all students are given language assessments developed by WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) and assigned an English Language Proficiency Level. Students are regularly assessed and monitored and their levels change based on these assessments. Levels range from 1 - Entering, to 6 - Reaching. See Figure 3 for the WIDA performance definitions.

At each grade, toward the end of a given level of English language proficiency, and with instructional support, English language learners will produce...

	Discourse Level	Sentence Level	Word/Phrase Level
	Linguistic Complexity	Language Forms and Conventions	Vocabulary Usage
Level 6 – Reaching Language that meets all criteria through Level 5, Bridging			
Level 5 Bridging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple, complex sentences Organized, cohesive, and coherent expression of ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of grammatical structures matched to purpose A broad range of sentence patterns characteristic of particular content areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical and abstract content-area language, including content-specific collocations Words and expressions with shades of meaning across content areas
Level 4 Expanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short, expanded, and some complex sentences Organized expression of ideas with emerging cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of grammatical structures Sentence patterns characteristic of particular content areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific and some technical content-area language Words and expressions with expressive meaning through use of collocations and idioms across content areas
Level 3 Developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short and some expanded sentences with emerging complexity Expanded expression of one idea or emerging expression of multiple related ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repetitive grammatical structures with occasional variation Sentence patterns across content areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific content language, including cognates and expressions Words or expressions with multiple meanings used across content areas
Level 2 Emerging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phrases or short sentences Emerging expression of ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulaic grammatical structures Repetitive phrasal and sentence patterns across content areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General content words and expressions Social and instructional words and expressions across content areas
Level 1 Entering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Words, phrases, or chunks of language Single words used to represent ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phrase-level grammatical structures Phrasal patterns associated with common social and instructional situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General content-related words Everyday social and instructional words and expressions

...within sociocultural contexts for language use.

Figure 3. WIDA performance definitions. (WIDA, 2012)

ESL students also take the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) assessment three times yearly along with their peers. The DIBELS assessment measures phonemic awareness, alphabetic principal, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Students are described as proficient readers if they receive a composite DIBELS score of 391 or higher by the end of fourth grade. See Table 1 for the fourth-grade DIBELS benchmark goals.

Student Descriptions

In this section I describe the students recruited for this study. All names in this document are pseudonyms. Edis is from Romania and has been in the States since the beginning of the school year. He was 10 years old. His English Language Proficiency was at Level 1- Entering, and he scored 269 on the DIBELS assessment. Edis tends to be very serious. During my observations, I only saw him smile a handful of times and I remember clearly the one time he laughed. Edis focused hard on his work and relied heavily on his teacher to make sure he was doing it correctly.

Ten-year-old Sheng was born in Vietnam and has been in the U.S. for about 6 months. His mother taught English in Vietnam, so he had been exposed to the language a little bit prior to coming to the States. Sheng can be a bit anxious. He was not afraid to

Table 1

Fourth-Grade DIBELS Benchmark Goals

Beginning of year	Middle of year	End of year
290	330	391

ask questions in order to make sure he was doing exactly what was expected of him. He was usually quite serious, but was friendly with the other students. His English Language Proficiency was at Level 1 - Entering, and he scored 51 on the DIBELS assessment.

The remaining four students were Hispanic and their parents reported that they were all born in the U.S. Nine-year-old Isabella came from a close-knit, Spanish-speaking family that had been through some difficult things together. Isabella was quiet, but brave. She worked hard at her schoolwork. She was not always confident in her abilities but she did careful work. Isabella's English Language Proficiency was at Level 4.5 - Expanding, and she scored 259 on the DIBELS assessment.

Miguel was a very outgoing 9-year-old boy. He enjoyed talking with the teacher and his peers, especially Isabella. He often had a smile on his face and seemed to love life. He had a good sense of humor. Miguel was usually in a hurry to move on to the next thing, whatever that may be. His ESL level was 4.6 - Expanding, and his DIBELS score was 392.

Although he would like you to believe otherwise, Antonio was very concerned about what others thought of him. He did not act as though he was too serious about his schoolwork, but I believe he wanted to do well. If a task was difficult, he would goof off or simply not work on it. He rarely asked for help. Antonio liked to have fun, and I was completely charmed by his thick accent. He was 10 years old. Antonio's ESL level was also 4.2 - Expanding and his DIBELS score was 319.

Ten-year-old Carlos was the "cool kid." He somehow managed to quietly goof off with Antonio, while still completing his work, and without attracting enough attention to

get in trouble. He was clearly quite smart, but did not push himself too hard. Carlos's ESL level was 4.4 - Expanding, and he received an excellent DIBELS score of 479.

Context of Study

EL students at Johnson Elementary School (pseudonym) were serviced using an ESL pullout method. All grade levels in the school participate in a school-wide literacy approach, known as Power Hour, with established instructional times throughout the day. During Power Hour, the students attend rotating groups for instruction in reading comprehension, fluency, and spelling skills based on student ability in each of these areas. The groups are fluid, with several groups of varying proficiencies operating in all classrooms across the grade level. Teachers regularly monitor the students' progress and occasionally make changes to ensure students receive the most appropriate instruction. Paraprofessionals enter the classrooms to assist the general education teachers with teaching these groups. The Thinking Maps program is used during this time to meet literacy goals. It is during Power Hour that the EL students leave their classrooms and spend some or all of that time in the separate ESL classroom.

The students' individualized learning plans based on their WIDA proficiency levels determine the amount of time spent in the ESL classroom. The ESL teacher is a certified teacher with an ESL endorsement. She works closely with the classroom teachers to coordinate language arts content in order to enhance what is happening in the general education classrooms. The same reading and writing strategies taught in the general education classrooms are taught in ESL with a greater focus on language and

vocabulary and in a smaller group setting. For example, a classroom teacher will share with the ESL teacher which story she will be reading from a basal reading program and which reading comprehension strategy she will be teaching to go along with it. The ESL teacher will read that same story with her ESL students before it's read in their general education classroom, taking advantage of the small group setting to work closely with the students on the comprehension strategy and using discussion and visuals to ensure they understand the vocabulary. All six fourth grade ESL students in the school participated in the present study.

Study Procedures

Permission to complete this study was obtained from Central School District, as well as the principal and ESL teacher at Johnson Elementary School. Prior to data collection, approval for this study was also obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Utah State University (USU). I visited the ESL class to explain the study to the students before it began. At that time, each student was given an informed consent form (see Appendix B) to bring home to parents.

The school in the present study began implementing the Thinking Maps program five years prior to the study. All teachers in the school, including specialists, have been trained by Thinking Map representatives on how to use the eight Thinking Maps in all subjects in their classrooms. The Thinking Maps program also includes an EL component, *Path to Proficiency*, which is being newly implemented in the school during the year this study was conducted. ESL teachers in Thinking Maps schools are trained in *Path to Proficiency* to learn how to extend and adapt Thinking Maps to meet the needs of

ELs. The *Path to Proficiency* program encourages EL teachers to scaffold their students' writing instruction with Thinking Maps and to teach students to recognize the text structure of opinion pieces. Prior to the study, the ESL teacher had given no opinion writing instruction to the students.

I observed in the ESL classroom twice weekly for a period of 6 weeks. During this time, writing instruction was scheduled to occur for 20 minutes. The class was then scheduled to have science instruction for another 20 minutes before returning to their general education classrooms. However, more often than not, the entire 40-minute block was dedicated to working on writing. The students always sat at the horseshoe table, facing their teacher. I sat behind them, but moved around a lot in order to better see or hear what was happening. I spent the entirety of each class period typing field notes on my laptop and occasionally using a recording device to audio record their conversations. The students typically greeted me with a smile or friendly greeting on their way in, but rarely acknowledged my presence during class. During the 6 weeks I spent observing, the fourth-grade teachers in the school were focused on opinion writing instruction, leading up to the writing assessment that is given to all fourth graders in the state. See Appendix C for an example of an assessment question (<http://www.sageportal.org>). The classroom teachers generated prompts and the ESL teacher provided extra support for the students to respond. Based on my twice weekly, 40-minute observations, the writing method was not taught in a straightforward and explicit way by the ESL teacher. However, that likely occurred when the students were in their general education classroom.

Beginning in kindergarten, students at Johnson Elementary are taught to use

Thinking Maps as a tool for learning across all content areas. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate these maps into their instruction throughout each day. All students are expected to be able to produce each of the eight maps independently and connect them to several different thinking processes. The students were taught to write opinion pieces using two Thinking Maps they were already familiar with: The Circle Map and the Flow Map (see Appendix A).

The teacher introduced the opinion writing method to the students, modeling each step. As students went through the process, they participated in partner talk in which they discussed their thoughts with an assigned partner as they wrote on their Thinking Maps. English was mostly used in these discussions, but students were allowed and encouraged to utilize their first language, as well. Throughout the study the teacher gave the students opportunities to practice the method as a group, in partners, and independently. The opinion writing method included the following:

1. Students read an **information sheet and prompt**, which introduces two opposing sides of an issue. See Appendix D for examples of prompts (<http://www.science-z.com>, 2015).
2. Students use a **Circle Map** (see Appendix A) to brainstorm their position on the issue.

Partner talk: Students share their Circle Maps orally with a partner and invite their partners to suggest additional ideas.

3. Students use a **Flow Map** (see Appendix A) to organize their opinion piece.

Partner Talk: Students use the following format to discuss the reasons they generated on their Circle Maps.

Student A: My opinion is...

Student B: Why?

Student A: (Dictates first reason from Circle Map, then writes reason in first box on Flow Map.)

Student B: Tell me more.

Student A: (Gives a detail or example related to the reason, then writes it below the box.)

Student B: Tell me more.

Student A: (Gives another detail or example related to the reason, then writes it below the box.)

Student B: Tell me more.

Student A: (Gives another detail or example related to the reason, then writes it below the box.)

At this point, the students switch roles. This time Student B begins by telling Student A his/her opinion about the prompt. They go through the same process with Student A, encouraging Student B to provide him/her with more details. The students repeat similar exchanges once or twice more depending on how many reasons they have to support their opinions.

4. The students write an **opening statement** at the top of their Flow Maps and a **closing statement** at the bottom of their Flow Maps.
5. The students use their Flow Map to write out a **rough draft**, discussing with a partner as needed to help develop good sentences.
6. Students **type** their opinion piece on the computer.

These steps were not always completed in this order and sometimes steps were left out of the process.

Over the course of the 6 weeks the students were given four topics to write about. First, they read about a student named Matt who wanted a cell phone. The participants needed to write an opinion piece to either support Matt getting a cell phone, or to support the argument of his mother, who did not feel that he should have a phone. The second issue was regarding whether or not all children who participate in sports should receive a

trophy, or if trophies should be reserved just for students who do well. Third, the students needed to share their opinion about whether or not all students in a hypothetical school district should have their own computers for schoolwork. The final article proposed changing the school week from five days to four. The students were to decide which they agreed with and write an opinion piece to argue their position.

Data Collection

Several data sources were collected to ensure triangulation. Opinion pieces written by the students were collected throughout the study: one as a pretest, several for practice, and one as a posttest. I also completed observations twice weekly over the course of the study. During these observations field notes were taken, audio files were recorded of student conversations, and samples of the students' Thinking Maps were collected. Additionally, the students were interviewed before and after the study, and the teacher was interviewed following the study. See Table 2 for an overview of the data.

Opinion Pieces

Prior to instruction, students wrote an opinion piece in order to provide an

Table 2

Data Sources Overview

Opinion pieces		Observations		Interviews	
Pretest	1 per student	Field notes	14 days	Student pre	1 per student
Posttest	1 per student	Audio files	4 files	Student post	1 per student
Practice	11 total	Samples	29 total	Teacher post	1 total

example of how well they wrote opinion pieces prior to the study without any Thinking Maps or discussion. Students read the information sheet provided and were asked to write an opinion piece to accompany it. Students were given a blank sheet of paper for use in organizing their piece prior to typing it. They worked independently and were given as long as they need to complete the task. Throughout the study, students responded to similar prompts as they received instruction. I collected samples of the students' work, including scratch paper and Thinking Maps, in order to capture a progression of their writing over time and examine the process they each went through as they wrote the opinion pieces.

In order to demonstrate student development in writing opinion pieces, the expectation for these opinion pieces needed to be established. All students in the study were asked to complete a writing pretest and posttest sample as one way to document student growth. Additional writing samples were collected to document student growth from beginning to end. The Opinion Writing Rubric designed by the Utah State Office of Education for the SAGE writing exam was used to score the students' pretest and posttest writing samples.

Based on the Opinion Writing Rubric, students were expected to become proficient in the following three areas: (a) statement of purpose/focus and organization, (b) evidence/elaboration, and (c) conventions/editing. Making up 40% of their total score, the statement of purpose/focus and organization piece was very important. The students were to develop a response that was fully sustained and consistently and purposefully focused. Their opinion was to be clearly stated, focused, and strongly maintained. It also

needed to be communicated clearly within the purpose, audience, and task. The response was expected to have a clear and effective organizational structure creating unity and completeness. Effective, consistent use of transitional phrases, a logical progression of ideas from beginning to end, and effective introductions and conclusions for audience and purpose were also required. The evidence/elaboration element also made up 40% of the students total score. In order for students to show mastery, their response needed to provide thorough and convincing evidence for the writer's opinion that included the effective use of sources, facts, and details. A variety of elaborative techniques were required and use of evidence was to be smoothly integrated, comprehensive, and relevant. Use of precise language, including appropriate academic and domain-specific vocabulary, was expected for students to clearly and effectively express their ideas. An additional 20% of the students' scores came from conventions/editing. This included spelling grade-appropriate words correctly, using commas and quotation marks appropriately, using correct capitalization, producing complete sentences, forming and using the progressive verb tenses, and using conventional adjective ordering. Each student in this study performed much better on the posttest than they did on the pretest, indicating positive development in their writing. The class scored an average of 2.5 out of 10 on the pretest and an average of 5.3 out of 10 on the posttest. As mentioned, the students' growth can be attributed to several strategic scaffolds.

The opinion pieces completed by the students were examined using the Opinion Writing Rubric designed by the Utah State Office of Education for the SAGE writing exam, which all fourth- and fifth-grade students are required to take at the end of the

school year. All writing samples were collected using the same format as the first writing sample. Each sample was compared to the individual student and not the other participants. Holistic scores were given based on Statement of Purpose/Focus and Organization (40%), Evidence/Elaboration (40%), and Conventions/Editing (20%), with a possibility of 10 points. See Appendix E for the scoring descriptions (Utah State Office of Education, 2010). Participants in the study scored an average of 2.83 points higher on the posttest than the pretest. See Figure 4 for the students' pretest and posttest scores.

Observations

I observed the students twice weekly for six weeks in order to monitor the students' development over time. The frequency of observations and duration of the study were determined based upon recommendations by the ESL teacher as well as my own professional teaching experiences of working in a Thinking Maps school. Field notes were taken following each observation to describe classroom conditions, lesson

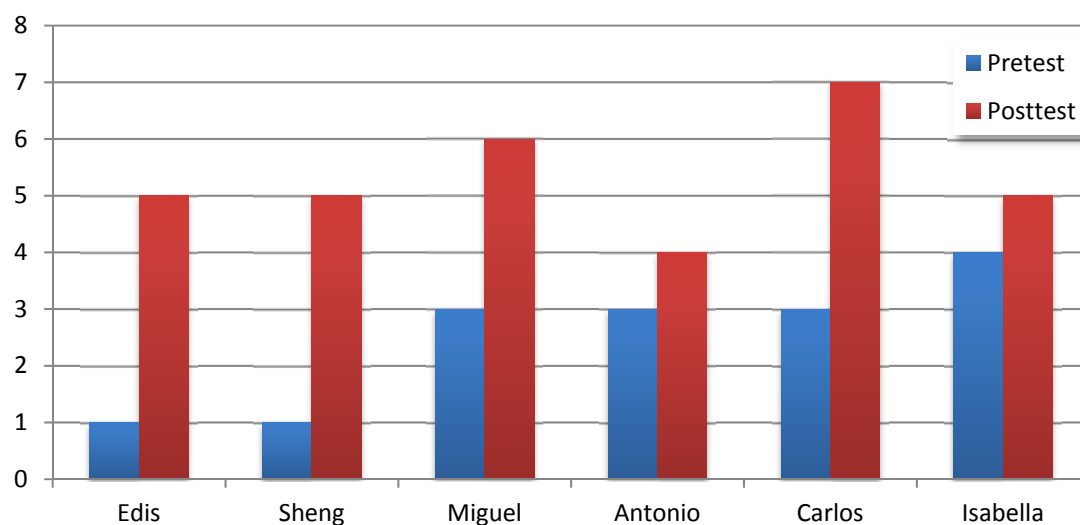


Figure 4. Students' pretest and posttest scores.

objectives, the use of Thinking Maps and other materials, teacher/student interactions, student engagement, and observed student growth. Field notes regarding partner talk described specific peer interactions and details of the students' conversations. See Appendix F for field notes forms.

During any session in which partner talk occurred, I selected a pair of students to audio record. During the first partner talk session, I simply audio recorded the pair that was closest to the teacher. In subsequent sessions, I was careful to select pairs that had not been recorded yet in order to get samples from all students. These audio recordings were made to analyze the quality and effectiveness of the conversations and to assist me in answering the following questions: Do students choose to speak in English, their native language, or both? What is discussed on-topic? What is discussed off-topic? Are new ideas generated during the discussions? Does one peer tend to dominate the conversation? Are students able to maintain appropriate discussions without the help of the teacher? Do the conversations support students in their writing? Other useful information that emerged from the recordings was also collected. All audio files were transcribed.

Interviews

I interviewed the students, both at the beginning and the end of the study, to help assess their feelings regarding writing opinion pieces and about their experiences with partner talk. Both open-ended and closed-ended questions were posed to elicit in-depth information from the students about their writing experiences. I took notes of the students' responses and interviews were recorded and transcribed. See Appendix G for interview questions. Students were interviewed in English. Google Translate was used to

assist with specific words in an interview conducted with a student whose English was limited.

Several weeks after the study, I also interviewed the ESL teacher. We sat down together for about an hour and discussed her perception of each of the students' development as well as some of her concerns and opinions regarding certain aspects of the study. See Appendix H for the questions that guided our discussion.

Data Analysis

The data analysis and interpretation of the data reflects the constructs and theories that initially structured this study. As recommended by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), a copy of the theoretical framework, research questions, and goals of the study were always readily available in order to stay focused. The grounded theory approach as defined by Corbin and Strauss (1990) was used to identify open codes, axial codes, and selective codes in the observation data, interview data, and student sample data.

Throughout the study I completed an ongoing reflective analysis of the field notes and audio files recorded. Following the study, all the data collected from the writing samples, observations, and interview responses were examined to get an overall perspective of each case. Then initial codes were developed based upon notes, theoretical frameworks, emerging themes, and using a constant comparison between and within data sources. As each data source was examined, previous memos and codes were adjusted and refined. For example, the analysis of student posttests shed further light upon their pretests and upon the review of the field notes. A clear view of the students' growth

provided greater understanding of the process and enhanced my perspective of the field notes. Over thirty themes were narrowed to the six most salient.

The qualitative data analysis was iterative. Dr. Clark served as a second reader and coder to provide additional insight and reliability of the interpretation. Categories and themes interpreted were coded and compared with other cases and between researchers. Two researchers reviewed the data at separate times for each case, acting as data and coding auditors. Connections between categories and themes have been used to further our understanding of the development of ELs as writers of opinion pieces.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study was to examine the development of fourth grade ELs as they learn to write opinion pieces in a Thinking Maps school. The following research questions informed this study: (a) How do fourth grade EL students develop as writers of opinion pieces in a Thinking Maps school? and (b) How does discussing ideas with others influence the writing process for EL students who are writing an opinion piece?

The research findings shared in this chapter were determined after an analysis of the following data sources: interviews, student samples, field notes, and assessments. I have divided the chapter into three sections. The first section begins with a discussion of Piaget's developmental theory as it related to the students included in this study and the stage each of these students were currently experiencing. This becomes important to establish a foundation of understanding about the lens through which data was reviewed and analyzed before I share the final two sections. The final two sections of this chapter are dedicated to sharing the themes and findings generated from each of the two research questions.

Developing as Writers Using Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

In his observations of children, psychologist and theorist Jean Piaget noted four stages of cognitive development including sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational. At ages nine and ten, the students in this case study

were in the concrete operational stage. During this stage a child's thought processes becomes more mature and they start solving problems in a more logical way than they do in sensorimotor and pre-operational stages. However, hypothetical thinking is not yet developed. Children at this stage can only solve problems that apply to concrete objects or events (Piaget & Inhelder, 1973). Unfortunately, this seemed to limit the development of the students over the course of the study. It became apparent that the students struggled with understanding hypothetical situations or examples. Many skills and tasks, such as comprehending an article with unfamiliar ideas and vocabulary, providing evidence and details to support an opinion, and organizing a lengthy essay were required of these students in order to complete an opinion piece. It is unclear whether or not all of these students were developmentally ready to perform all of these tasks. Furthermore, all of the prompts to which students were required to respond involved hypothetical events or concepts. Thus, the students faced the challenge of forming an opinion about an issue that was not concrete or necessarily real to them.

Despite these developmental challenges, the students in this study were still able to progress as writers of opinion pieces. Researchers have stated that the use of explicit scaffolding has a sustained effect on students' opinion writing (De La Paz & Graham, 1997; Englert et al., 1991; Ferretti et al., 2000). I discovered similar results. The findings of the current study revealed that these fourth-grade ELs were able to progress as opinion writers as long as strategic scaffolds were put into place. The six key scaffolds that were determined necessary for their development arose as themes during analysis. Each subsection of this chapter will explore one of these themes.

- Working with a more knowledgeable other
- Communicating, despite language barriers
- Participating in group discussions
- Utilizing Thinking Maps
- Examining written models
- Conversing with a partner throughout the process

How Do Fourth Grade EL Students Develop as Writers of Opinion

Pieces in a Thinking Maps School?

A number of key elements emerged from the data analysis that indicated that important supports are needed for ELs to develop as writers of opinion pieces. These included the opportunity to work with a more knowledgeable other, communicating despite language barriers, utilizing the structure provided with Thinking Maps, a chance to participate in on group discussions, and the opportunity to examine written models to use when writing their own opinion pieces.

Working with a More Knowledgeable Other

Vygotsky et al. (2012) described the need for a more knowledgeable other to help students progress from their current state of understanding and ability in order to progress to a more advanced level. In the specific context of writing, it is important for students to have the opportunity to work with a more experienced writer throughout the process of learning to write opinion pieces. For the students in this study, that more knowledgeable other was their teacher. During my post-interview with Edis he told me, "*It's a teacher help or it's too hard.*" Edis and others in his class were aware that they really needed their teacher's help to write these essays. At times, the students stopped working and

seemed to become stuck on a certain word they were reading, a sentence they were writing, or another task. It appeared they couldn't continue without the one-on-one support Mrs. Brown provided because once she gave them a bit of guidance, they were able to continue making progress. She helped the students understand vocabulary as they read the articles. She was there for her students to assist with revisions, computer issues, and to meet their individual needs. She also helped her students understand how to demonstrate an opinion, form appropriate sentences, and to organize and expound upon their ideas.

The teacher supported her students as they developed necessary vocabulary skills throughout the process of learning to write opinion pieces. While the rest of the fourth graders in this school were also learning to write opinion pieces within the concrete operational stage, this group experienced additional challenges in understanding and performing related tasks due to their limited understanding of the English language. For the students in this study, the first step in writing opinion pieces was to read an article where the author often used vocabulary that was unfamiliar to them. Mrs. Brown stated that her biggest concern going into the study was that the students would not be able to comprehend the articles well enough to really understand what the prompts would be asking them to write about. The way students reacted to some of the vocabulary presented in a new prompt is an example when students needed their more knowledgeable other. For example, the students were introduced to a new article where the idea of giving kids trophies for competitive events, even if they don't win, was discussed. See Figure 5 for the 'Should Every Kid Get a Trophy?' prompt. It was clear

Should Every Kid Get a Trophy?

Walk into the bedroom of 12-year old Lucas, a sixth grader from New Jersey, and you might think you've stumbled into a sports hall of fame. There are trophies everywhere: Little League trophies lined up on his bookshelves, basketball trophies crowded on his dresser, soccer awards dangling from ribbons on his bulletin board. There's even a bronze-colored football trophy lying on his floor; he uses it to keep his door from slamming shut.

Lucas admits that he didn't exactly earn these trophies for his athletic gifts. "I'm actually not so good at sports," he says. Like many kids in sports programs, Lucas has earned his trophies by simply showing up to practices and games.

"This has become practically a universal policy in many communities," says Karen Coffin, a coach who writes about youth sports.

Experts say that the "trophies for all" policy is part of a bigger change that has swept youth sports over the past two decades. Back when your parents were learning how to swing a bat, team life could be brutal. Often, coaches openly favored their star athletes. Less-gifted players would spend entire games sitting on the bench.

Today, rules in many leagues require equal playing time for all team members. "The focus isn't on winning," says Coffin. "It's about building skills."

This is a welcome change for many. Today, more kids than ever are playing a huge range of team sports. Coaches are encouraged to support everyone on their teams, not just the future LeBrons. "The idea is to motivate kids to play sports, to have fun," says Dr. Michelle Anthony, an author and psychologist who works with kids and schools. Studies show many benefits for kids who stick with team sports, from better fitness levels to higher grades. Getting trophies can encourage kids to continue playing even if they're not superstars. No kid feels overlooked.

But some experts suggest that giving trophies to everyone sends the wrong message. In real life, people are not always rewarded for just showing up. A person doesn't get A's just for coming to class. A worker doesn't get a raise just for arriving on time. Shouldn't only the hardest working or highest-performing athletes get the trophies?

Both Coffin and Anthony point out that trophies can lose their meaning when everyone gets one. Coffin also emphasizes that trophies are not an effective way for coaches to motivate players. "Receiving a pat on the back, a thumbs up from a coach...any show of appreciation is what keeps kids coming back."

As for Lucas, he sees both sides of the debate. He agrees that getting trophies has made him feel good about being on his teams. But there is one problem, he confesses.

"I'm out of space."

What do you think? Should every player get a trophy?

Figure 5. "Should Every Kid Get a Trophy?" prompt.

from student reactions and questions that they did not understand what a trophy was nor the implications of giving a trophy to everyone regardless of performance.

The following conversation was heard and observed as the class attempted to read through and discuss the new prompt together:

Teacher: *Should every kid get a trophy? We're going to read through the article and look for reasons why all kids should get a trophy.*

Sheng: *What is 'trophy'?*

The teacher shows him and the other students a picture of a trophy from the article.

Mauz, Sheng, and Carlos all seem to understand now: *Oh!*

I notice that several students are saying 'trophy' under their breath as the teacher moves on.

It should be noted that students did not always access the resource of their more knowledgeable other. Sheng didn't seem to be afraid to ask his teacher the meaning of a word he didn't know, but from the reactions of Edis and Carlos after they were shown a picture of a trophy (mouthing the word trophy) told me that perhaps they had also been unaware of the meaning of the word, though they hadn't asked. The teacher used her own discretion to decide which words to discuss as they read the articles together often stopping on unique or longer words she thought they might not know. She also asked occasionally if the students had come across a word they didn't know, as she did on the day I took the following notes:

Teacher (to the class): *Is there anything in the article you didn't understand?*

Isabella (searching back through her sheet): *Coffin?*

The teacher explains that in this article, the word 'Coffin' was used as a person's last name. She goes on to explain that it is also where a body is placed when someone passes away.

As I discovered in the literature review, knowing and understanding more words fosters better reading comprehension (Francis et al., 2006). I imagined Isabella getting a bit confused as she read this article, trying to fit the word “coffin” into her existing schema. To the reading, she brought with her a preconceived understanding of certain words and little or no understanding of others. It would have been difficult for her to focus on generating an opinion of the issue, as well as identifying supporting reasons and details, while being distracted by so many unfamiliar words. Thus, the need for a more knowledgeable other in this context is clear. A student with a greater grasp on the vocabulary in the article could focus more easily on understanding the gist of the article as a whole than one who must stop to determine the definition of several words along the way. Students who simply continued reading words they do not know, without taking the time to consider word meanings, will most likely have several gaps in understanding upon finishing the article. This limited understanding, combined with a limited vocabulary, would make it very difficult for a student to form an opinion and develop a strong opinion piece. It is crucial for these students to have their teacher available to ensure they learn and understand key vocabulary in the articles.

Researchers have determined that ELs benefit most from in-depth vocabulary instruction that uses student-friendly definitions to provide students with authentic opportunities to utilize word meanings, and to engage students in the meaningful use of word meanings across all domains (Gersten, et al., 2007). In the present study, most of the vocabulary instruction consisted of a small group discussion of unfamiliar words. The teacher typically provided the students with student-friendly definitions. She also

encouraged students who were familiar with the words to provide those definitions for other students. Taking time to understand vocabulary along the way likely contributed to the students' development as writers of opinion pieces throughout this study. Over time, the students began to use more sophisticated vocabulary in their writing. For this next example, see Appendix D for the prompt, which encouraged the students to debate whether to remove a bees' nest found in a city's botanical garden. Here was Carlos's response to the pretest writing prompt:

I think they sould [sic] keep the bees because they collect pollen from flower to flower. I think they sould [sic] have the bees because they collect honey from the people that need it for their lunch but if you see a behiev [sic] that doesn't have bee you just take it off.

Carlos's response included very basic vocabulary, and most words came directly from the prompt. The student didn't seem to experiment at all with more adventurous words or phrases. The following is his posttest from 6 weeks later. Notice that he has fixed the word "should" and included more advanced words and phrases such as: according to the article, deathly allergic, venom, and pose a threat.

According to the article, it said should we let the bees go or we should let them stay. I think we should let the bee go because bees have a stinger that can hurt people and other animal. They can bother people and kids by flying around them.

first of all, bees have a sting that can hurt people. The bees stinger can hurt kids or dogs. Some people are deathly allergic to bees venom. bees may pose a threat to nearby people and other animals.

Another reason, They can bother people and kids. They fly around you. They swap at the bee and the bee might sting them. So it said if the bees should go or stay and I think we should let the bees go because they can hurt people and animal. also, they can bother people and kids. So if you Help me, the bees will be gone.

Carlos's use of transitional phrases, such as "according to the article" were all a

result of learning from the example of their more experienced other – Mrs. Brown. Carlos used vocabulary he read in the article, but he was also comfortable using phrases that had come up in discussions with the teacher, including the phrase “deathly allergic.”

In addition to assisting with vocabulary, the teacher was available to assess and meet the students’ individual needs as writers. Antonio especially benefitted from working closely with his teacher. Without proper guidance, he often spent much of his time in class goofing off or simply not working on assigned tasks. This could quite possibly be due to behavior problems or lack of interest, but it is also likely that these behaviors occurred when tasks became too difficult for him or the language barrier caused too much distress. Sinclair (2005) suggested that teachers have been able to help their EL students acquire better writing skills by holding individual conferences with them. When Antonio’s teacher sat with him and wrote the words he dictated he was then more quickly able to make progress on his opinion pieces.

I observed one day in class as the students brainstormed reasons to support children having computers in school. The teacher sat with Antonio and wrote down his reasons for him. It had taken him several minutes to write only one reason on his own, but with his teacher’s help, he got several ideas down in just a couple minutes. The ideas that were stuck in his head would have stayed there if his teacher hadn’t provided the extra assistance of writing them down for him. See Figure 6 for Antonio’s Circle Maps from that day.

Prior to spending time with his more knowledgeable other, Antonio was only able

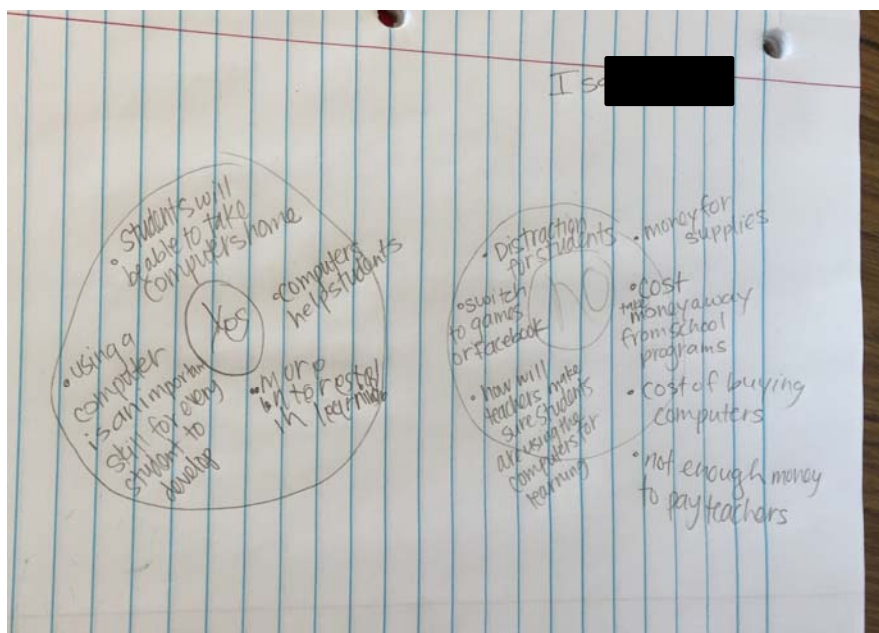


Figure 6. Antonio's circle maps.

to record that providing computers for students at school would make them more interested in learning. This would not be enough material for him to use when writing a quality opinion piece. However, once the teacher simply wrote down the ideas for him he was able to give three more reasons in support of students having computers at school, as well as seven reasons to support the opposing opinion. Having these ideas on his Circle Maps empowered Antonio to move forward with writing his opinion piece with plenty of ideas (his own) to write about.

From their experienced teacher, the students also learned to demonstrate an opinion, form appropriate sentences, and expound upon their ideas. The following example illustrates how this looked in practice. These notes were taken about a month into the study as the class worked on a prompt about whether or not all students in a particular school district should be given a computer for use at school. The students were

supposed to be engaged in partner talk and then write their reasons and evidence on their Flow Maps, but the students simply weren't very engaged. Notice how much support the teacher provides her students:

Teacher: *Come on* (urging them to get to work). *What's your next reason?* (She reads off his map.) *For their careers...what do they need? 'For their careers...'*

Carlos: *Computers?*

Teacher: *They need computer skills.*

Mrs. Brown acknowledged Carlos's appropriate response, but provided additional information to make it more specific. The small elaboration ensured that Carlos's paper would be more clear and meaningful. Here are some more examples of teacher support in student thinking and writing:

Teacher (to Antonio): *What is your first reason?*

Antonio: *Um, distractions for students.*

Teacher: *K, first of all--that's good. First of all, computers are distractions for students. Write it down. Then when you have it written...*(She notices Antonio's look of distress on his face.) *Do you want me to?* (She writes it down for him.)

As I mentioned before, the teacher recognized that if she wrote what Antonio dictated, he made much more progress in his writing.

Teacher (to Antonio): *Tell me more.*

Antonio: *Um, can I put 'help with writing assignments and homework'?*

Teacher: *That would probably be its own reason.*

Antonio: *They take too much money away from school programs.*

Teacher: *K, so that's your reason.*

The teacher helped her student recognize the different elements of an opinion

piece by pointing out those words he really needed to understand in order to be a successful writer of opinion pieces. It was important for Antonio to be able to identify what a reason is in order to further in his progress as a writer.

Antonio (dictating what he'd like his teacher to write): *Too much money from school programs.*

Teacher: *K. (she writes)*

Antonio: *Not enough money to pay teachers.*

Teacher: *K, do you think that goes with this right here? K, so that's right here? (He shows her on his map where it should be written.)*

Teacher: *K, tell me more. Any other examples?*

As Quiocho and Ulanoff (2012) discovered, it's important for teachers to assess their EL students' strengths and needs, adjusting how and when to provide scaffolding as they move through the writing process. In the preceding example, the teacher wrote Antonio's ideas for him and she also prompted Carlos to expand his sentence. However, when Antonio came up with an appropriate reason that was structured correctly, she did not interrupt his dictation and wrote it down word-for-word. She also let him show her on the map where it needed to be written to ensure he would be able to put it in the correct place without her help in the future.

As the students worked closely with their teacher they began to develop the ability to provide evidence for their reasons and elaborate their ideas, which are important expectations to meet the evidence/elaboration requirement from the rubric. By modeling for the students and working closely with them, the teacher was able to portray the expectations required in opinion pieces which included thorough and convincing support for their opinions, sources, facts, and details, and a smooth integration and use of

academic and domain-specific vocabulary. The more knowledgeable other provided support, as needed in each of these areas.

The following example illustrates the difference between Antonio's pretest and his posttest. These examples demonstrate his growth as a writer, which was not possible without teacher support. Notice how he provides a much stronger support for his opinion in the posttest and he presented more evidence. See Figure 7 for Antonio's pretest and posttest.

This writing sample demonstrates strong evidence of Antonio's development as a writer. In his pretest Antonio simply wrote, "I think that the bees should stay because [sic] if we don't have bees we do not have honey." His posttest was much longer and provided much more support for his opinion, which he stated as, "My opinion is we should not get rid of the bees." He supported this by pointing out that bees help flowers reproduce, they make honey, and they help pollinate crops. He also provided details about each reason.

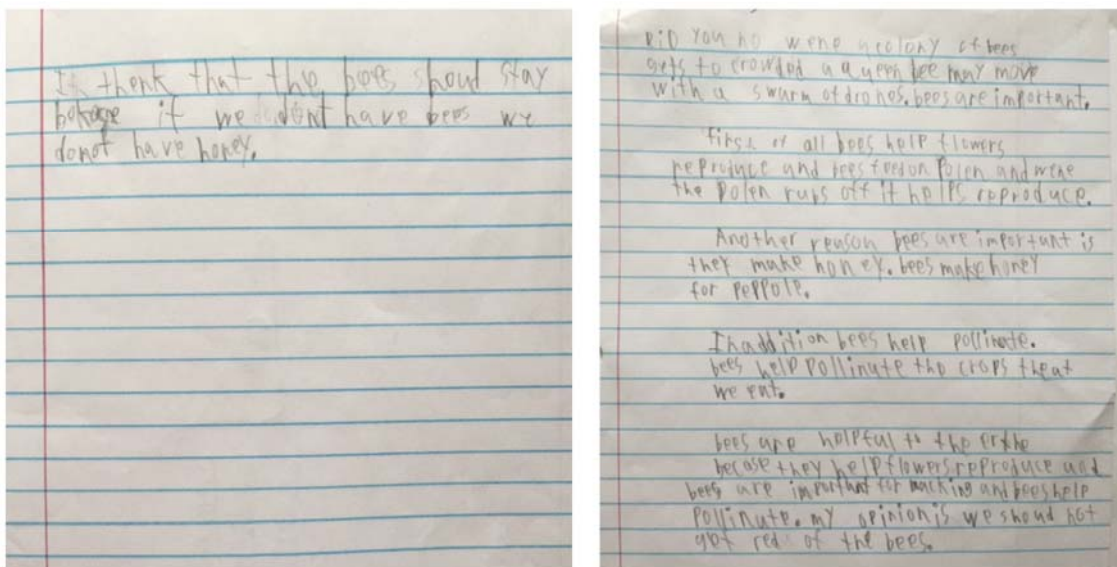


Figure 7. Antonio's pretest and posttest.

The time he spent observing and working with his more knowledgeable other (his teacher) was crucial in getting him to this point of writing development. This example shows Antonio's growth, but also how Mrs. Brown's students benefitted from working with her and learning from her experience as a more knowledgeable writer and speaker of the English language.

Communicating, Despite Language Barriers

In order for ELs to progress as writers, they need to be able to communicate using a common language with their teacher, peers, and in writing. It's imperative that EL students are provided with a tool or tools to help them translate their thoughts and ideas from their native language into English. In this study, students used Google Translate. Google Translate is a multilingual online translation service, which translates text or speech from one language to another. Since Edis and Sheng still struggled with English so much, their teacher often allowed them to use Google Translate in class. Each student had a laptop that was provided by the school. They brought these laptops to their ESL classroom daily. The other students typically left their laptops closed, often at the back of the room, unless they were typing essays. Edis and Sheng, however, usually kept their computers with them at the horseshoe table throughout the class period. During class they would occasionally type or speak an English word they heard into Google Translate in order to find the translation into their own language. When they were working on their opinion pieces, they would often speak a word or phrase from their native language into Google Translate to help them translate their thoughts and ideas into English. I also noticed Sheng often speaking an English word into his laptop in order to learn its correct

spelling. In this way, Google Translate served as an important and necessary reference tool to assist the students in developing appropriate conventions to meet written requirements expected in the Opinion Writing Rubric.

I first used Google Translate with both Edis and Sheng during their pre-interviews by typing my questions into the service to be translated into the boys' native languages. This helped ensure they understood what I was asking them. Google Translate also became a big part of the partner talk between these two boys. Though Edis and Sheng had a huge language barrier between each other and everyone else in the school, they were still able to participate in partner talk because of this tool. Although they weren't necessarily speaking to one another, they were still speaking during that time. The following excerpt from their partner talk illustrates the key role Google Translate played in their conversations. In this example, Edis and Sheng were discussing their opinions, reasons, and evidence and then recorded and transcribed these ideas onto their Flow Maps.

Sheng: *Ok.* (He speaks Vietnamese into Google Translate.)

Google Translate: *The children you want to get a trophy.*

Sheng: *Oh, ok. Kids should get a trophy.* (He writes this in the 'opinion box' on his Flow Map.)

Sheng appeared to know his opinion in Vietnamese, but he used Google Translate to convert it to English. Sheng's English was advanced enough that although the translation came through a bit choppy ("The children you want to get a trophy"), he was able to use it and turned it into a more appropriate sentence ("The children should get a trophy."). Sheng was then able to write his opinion in English on his Flow Map. See the

following examples collected from observations:

The teacher interjects at this time to help them find where they wrote their evidence on their map and to model partner talk for Edis.

Sheng: (whispering words under his breath, then speaking aloud, though not necessarily to Edis). *Kids should get a trophy because study hard and keep going play the things, study hard and play, better.*

Edis: (prompting Sheng) *Write.*

Sheng: *I know. Um...* (He speaks Vietnamese into Google Translate.)

Google Translate: *Continue to do this thing.*

Sheng: *Ok (he writes).*

Edis: *Because...um, ok. Kid um is, um, goodly and um...*

While Sheng was getting enough information from Google Translate to move along with completing his Flow Map, Edis was still struggling to come up with words that made sense to him. He began speaking Romanian into Google Translate and writing responses in his Flow Map. Here are more of my observational notes capturing this process:

Several moments go by as the boys write on their Flow Maps and look at their articles. Edis uses his Flow Map to make sure he has all the reasons he needs.

Sheng: (speaking aloud into Google Translate) *No kid feel left out.* (He receives a response in Vietnamese). *Oh...Ok.* (He speaks in Vietnamese.) *I know this is.*

As Edis writes, Sheng and the teacher discuss adding in a transitional phrase before writing his evidence. He refers to Google Translate again as he works on his sentence.

Sheng: *Nope. Nope.* (He's speaking into Google translate but doesn't seem to be getting the response he's looking for. He tries something else.)

Google translate: *No confidence.*

Sheng: *Oh! Confidence! Ok.*

Both students are engaged, writing on their maps after using Google Translate. Sheng smiles a lot. While they are not talking to each other, they do seem comfortable speaking aloud. They are able to continue writing and they stay quite focused.

Google Translate provided these students with the opportunity to seek out words and answers for themselves, rather than relying too much on the teacher or simply trying to progress without an understanding of key words. As we see from the example, the students seemed happy and confident as they worked. Cummins (2001) found that minority students who are empowered in their school experiences develop the ability, confidence, and motivation to succeed academically. Perhaps Google Translate empowered the students, and kept them from becoming frustrated by the process. The development of students who feel disempowered can be severely hindered without necessary supports (Cummins, 2001). It was very important for the students in this study to have the Google Translate tool to help them progress as writers. This tool made it possible for them to translate their thoughts and ideas into English in order to communicate their thoughts and ideas with each other, their teacher, and in their writing.

Participation in Group Discussions

Another scaffold that was put into place for these students was small group discussions. Much of the time spent in this ELS pullout writing class was devoted to having conversations as a small group. These group discussions helped the students grasp and clarify ideas related to the topics they were required to write about, learn related

vocabulary, and practice developing and expressing their opinions.

The ESL pullout method used in this school provided the students with the unique opportunity to engage in plenty of small group discussions with their teacher and other ELs – some discussions specifically related to the educational task at hand while others were not related to the task but rather the concerns of the student. The following notes were recorded during one of my observations. This is an example of what a typical day looked like in this particular ESL classroom. Consider the support this small group of students received through group discussions like this that likely would not have occurred in the general education classroom.

The six fourth-grade ELs at Johnson Elementary walked through the doorway of their ESL classroom, which was covered in greetings from several different languages. The students chatted briefly with their peers and each took a seat at the horseshoe table. When class started, the teacher led them as they recited the objective that was written on the whiteboard in front of them together. This was the same objective that was written in their general education classroom, *“I can write an opinion essay, using transition phrases and evidence from the text. I can also edit and revise my essay looking for spelling errors, and incomplete sentences, or thoughts.”*

Teacher: *‘Revise it’ means change it, make it better.*

Today they’ll type their essays. The teacher reminds the students to make sure they have evidence from the article. The students begin typing, but after a few moments Sheng suddenly stops typing and begins talking to his teacher about something he needs to discuss with the After School Club leaders. He seems concerned that they won’t understand him. Carlos and Antonio both offer to talk to the leaders for him.

Carlos: *We’ll tell them.*

Antonio: *I’ll tell them.*

Teacher (to Sheng): *They’ll talk to them for you.*

Sheng (satisfied): *Ok, I can have Carlos tell or Antonio tell.*

Everyone gets back to work.

Sheng had been quite concerned about his After School Club issue and unable to focus on his work until it was resolved. The small, tight-knit group was willing and able to easily solve his problem so he could redirect his focus towards typing his essay. After this group discussion, the rest of the class quickly reengaged with their typing. The teacher keeps the conversation and thinking going:

Teacher (to Carlos): *Is this a complete thought? Who are 'they'? Let's be more specific.*

All the students are engaged in typing.

The teacher talks with Carlos more, asking him questions to make sure his details and examples really support his reasons and encouraging him to be more specific. She moves on to work with Edis, and prompts him to add more details.

Teacher (to Edis): *What will they do when they get bored?*

Carlos (jumping in to their conversation): *Log in to Facebook.*

Edis points out that sometimes the teacher can't see if the students are on Facebook.

Carlos: *Like on the back row.*

Sheng: (speaking into Google translate) *"Cont!" "Cont!"*

Teacher: *Sheng, are you looking for "Can't"?*

Sheng: *Oh, 'can't'! I know can't! I know can't!* (He excitedly types it.)

Not only was the teacher there to encourage better writing from her students, but she was also accessible when Sheng was stuck on a word. She could easily hear that he was having trouble and quickly provided support to help him get past it. This give and take between students and teachers provided valuable support in their progress as writers. Here is another example of the engagement between and among the teacher and students

which demonstrates support for students as writers:

The teacher works with Antonio on transitional phrases, and then turns her attention back to Edis.

Teacher (to Edis): *What can we add here? We want to add information.*
Edis shares several details about cost.

Teacher: *Good! Where did you find that? "In the article it says..."*

He's typing confidently.

Teacher (reading a line from Carlos's article to him): *"For instance, turn in assignments on time." We need a few more words.*

Carlos: *For instance, kids can turn in assignments on time.*

Teacher: *Good, let's point out that it's the computers helping with that.*

He types, "For instance, computers help turn in assignments on time."

Teacher: *Do the computers turn in the assignments?*

Finally, he types, "For instance, computers can help kids turn in assignments on time."

Edis is helping Sheng with a computer problem.

Carlos (also trying to help): *Highlight it.*

Teacher (leaning in to help too): *Do you want me to show you a trick, Sheng?*

Carlos gets his teacher's attention and they discuss appropriate transition terms.

Edis begins thinking about a personal experience that relates to his essay. He laboriously tells his teacher that every Tuesday at 1:00 they go to the computer lab and play the same game for 30 minutes and that this makes his brain crazy. He laughs.

Teacher: *Good! Use your personal experience.*

Edis begins typing. He speaks into Google translate to come up with 'lab'.

Edis: *Lab! Aha!*

He also uses Google Translate to come up with ‘tiresome’.

The students have, for the most part, stayed on task the entire time but no one has finished. The teacher tells them to finish the sentence they’re working on and save their work. They’ll finish typing on Monday.

As you can see, typing the essays on that day felt much like a group effort, with the teacher and students stepping in to provide ideas and support as needed. In a general education classroom, the teacher ideally should be available to help her students as needed. However, the ratio of teacher to students is much higher in a general classroom than these smaller group discussions make it possible for an ESL pullout teacher to provide her students with more frequent one-on-one or small group support. The example above showed how often the teacher was able to work with individual students while the others were listening. She worked with Carlos to help ensure he wrote complete thoughts, provided supporting details, and created better sentences. She assisted Edis in adding more information to his paper and Antonio with his transitional phrases. Proximity is also a factor. Since all of Mrs. Brown’s students are right in front of her at the horseshoe table she is able to see exactly what each student is writing and can quickly assist as needed. She was also able to see that none of the students were finished typing once class was over and assure them they would have time to work on it the following Monday.

Further, the students were able to work in a non-threatening environment among their EL peers. The students seemed comfortable speaking with one another and to their teacher about their writing. There is no way to know whether or not Edis would have taken several minutes to painstakingly tell about his personal experience with the computer lab to a general education teacher, but I do know he was comfortable enough to

do that in his ESL class. It was also interesting that Sheng used some time in the ESL class to solve his problem about talking to his After School Club teachers. Mrs. Brown later told me that issues like that are often brought up in ESL, so the students must view it as a safe place where their concerns can be discussed and addressed.

There are several different ways ELs are provided support in schools. Though widely used, the ESL pullout method is often criticized for being ineffective and expensive (Crawford, 2004). However, at Johnson Elementary it seemed to be a useful tool to give the students the extra support they needed to progress as writers. As I sat observing in the classroom on that day, I could see the value of this type of program for these students. I wrote the following:

At this moment I'm feeling sold on the ESL pullout method. The small group is such a great setting for these students. They have a teacher right at arm's length helping them with vocabulary, computer issues, formatting, etc. They're also helping each other.

The students' engagement in small group discussions also provided them with opportunities to explore vocabulary and practice developing their opinions. As Piaget would expect during this stage, the students' logical and in-depth thinking seemed to grow over the course of the study. In the following example, which came from notes taken during the second week of the study, the class struggled to identify reasons to support all students getting trophies. Their work as a group helped them to progress in their understanding. Here is how the class began:

Teacher: We're going to read through the article and look for reasons why all kids should get a trophy. You'll notice this article hasn't laid out the two different views. You'll have to figure them out.

Carlos: This is going to be hard!

Miguel moans and puts his head on his desk.

Teacher: This is real life. You will have to determine what the different sides to an argument are.

The teacher asks Carlos to begin reading the prompt aloud, but instead he starts an off-topic conversation about a guest speaker that will be coming to their class. Eventually they read through the article, stopping to discuss vocabulary along the way.

Teacher: Now you're going to read through this again with your partner. Look for reasons that all kids should be given trophies and underline them with a pencil.

After sharing an example of a reason she found in the article and verbalizing her thought process for them, she puts them into partners and encourages them to get started.

Antonio: *Can I get a crayon?*

The teacher nods. The crayon box becomes a distraction for the kids. Edis takes several minutes to search through it and rather than using the crayons to underline their reasons, Edis, Carlos, and Antonio focus on peeling the paper off. The teacher encourages them to get started on the assignment.

As soon as the teacher explained her expectations in this example the students immediately began complaining about the task. No students seemed excited or confident about what they would be doing that day and seemed to seek out distractions. After several minutes with little success, the teacher decided to conduct a group discussion to provide the students with greater support in identifying reasons.

Teacher: Carlos, will you share one of the reasons you guys found?

Carlos: 'It's about building skills.'

Teacher: Good! Think about it. Why is this a reason? Antonio, can you tell me why?

Antonio just looks at his paper.

Teacher: If it's about building skills, do we care who wins?

Carlos: It doesn't matter who wins.

Teacher: Miguel, Isabella. What do you think supported the argument?

Miguel (pointing to something he highlighted): That supports it. It's a good example.

Teacher: Is that a good example? This seems to support the argument that 'No, all kids should not just get trophies for participating'. I'm glad we're talking about this so we can figure this out.

As you can see, the student really struggled with identifying reasons to support the opinion that all kids should get trophies. They had a hard time staying on task throughout and most students seemed unable to identify appropriate reasons and explain why they were relevant. However, after a bit more practice and discussion as a group, the students began to be able to think more deeply about the articles and were able to identify and defend reasons to support their opinions. Three weeks later the students were much more successful in their attempts at identifying and supporting reasons to support an opinion on the question as to whether or not all students in a school district should be given a computer. Here are some excerpts from the observational notes for that day:

Teacher: Today we'll be reading articles about a new topic: Should all students have a computer at school? While we read the articles, you are going to underline why every kid should have a computer.

After the students create a Circle Map, which they will use to brainstorm their reasons, the teacher invites Carlos to begin reading the article aloud. He reads it, and they stop occasionally to discuss vocabulary.

Teacher: Are there any reasons in that section that support why every kid should have a computer?

Carlos (re-reading from the article): 'Using a computer is an important skill for

every student to develop as they will be using technology throughout their school careers and as adults who work in different businesses.’

Teacher: Good! That’s a good reason. Let’s summarize it into a short statement. What’s a way we can say these two lines in just a few words?

Miguel begins: ‘Using a computer is an important skill...’

Teacher: Stop! What is all the rest of that? (She points to the line he was reading.) Is that a reason or supporting detail?

Miguel (and others): Supporting detail.

Teacher: Good! Are you starting to see?

The kids nod and say “yes.” Next, Antonio reads aloud from the article. His section is talking about concern the district has about how much the computers will cost. They stop on the word ‘concerned.’

Teacher: It means worried. Is that supporting our reason?

Several students say “no” and shake their heads.

Miguel: That’s a reason kids should not get a computer!

Teacher: Very good! So should we highlight it?

After reading a paragraph from the article, Carlos was easily able to point out a clear reason to support the opinion and Miguel was able to identify a supporting detail. The students also quickly recognized when a reason was in support of the opposing opinion. Deeper understanding was also portrayed a few minutes later when Sheng came up with an idea for a reason that was not in the article and shared it with his teacher. The teacher praised him and shared it with the class:

Teacher: Sheng is thinking that everyone may not have a computer at home, so if they get one from school they can do their assignments at home.

Isabella (looking at the article): I’m underlining this.

Teacher: Good, read it out loud.

Isabella: 'Students should learn in a way that is comfortable and familiar to them.'

The other students underline this sentence as well. Then, Antonio reads another section of the article aloud.

Teacher: Anything in there that supports kids getting computers?

Miguel: Yes.

Teacher: Really? What did you find?

Miguel (reading from the article): 'The school district won't have to buy expensive text books...' Oh, whoops! (He puts his head down and laughs.)

Teacher: Is that for or against?

Miguel: Against!

The growth the students made in those few short weeks is quite apparent in their ability to find specific reasons both for and against the designated position and identify supporting details. Sheng was even able to develop his own reason and Miguel caught his own mistake in thinking. All students were more willing to participate in the discussion during the second example, which may indicate greater confidence in their ability. The small group discussions that happened regularly in this classroom helped the students gain a greater understanding of the topics, increase their vocabulary, and provided them with opportunities to develop stronger opinions, which also resulted in better writing.

Utilizing Thinking Maps

Hyerle (1996a) claimed that Thinking Maps are engaging for students. This is critical because ELs must be actively involved in their learning in order to construct meaning, particularly as they go through the process of learning to understand and speak

a new language (Calderón et al, 2011). Throughout the study there were many instances in which students commented on how quickly the time was passing. Perhaps that is a testament to how busy the students were as they went through the process of writing opinion pieces and progressing as writers. Thinking Maps enabled students to (a) visualize and organize their thinking, (b) record their ideas and personal experiences, and (c) pace themselves as they worked.

As the students worked actively on their Thinking Maps, they developed organizational skills that helped them visualize their thinking. On the pretest, all students scored either a 0 or a 1 for statement of purpose/focus and organization, for a combined total of five points. Every student showed growth in this area on the posttest, with the group scoring a total of eleven points. The Flow Map provided the students with a clear and effective organizational structure. It also prompted them to use transitional phrases, an introduction, and a conclusion. See Figure 8 for a Flow Map completed by Sheng.

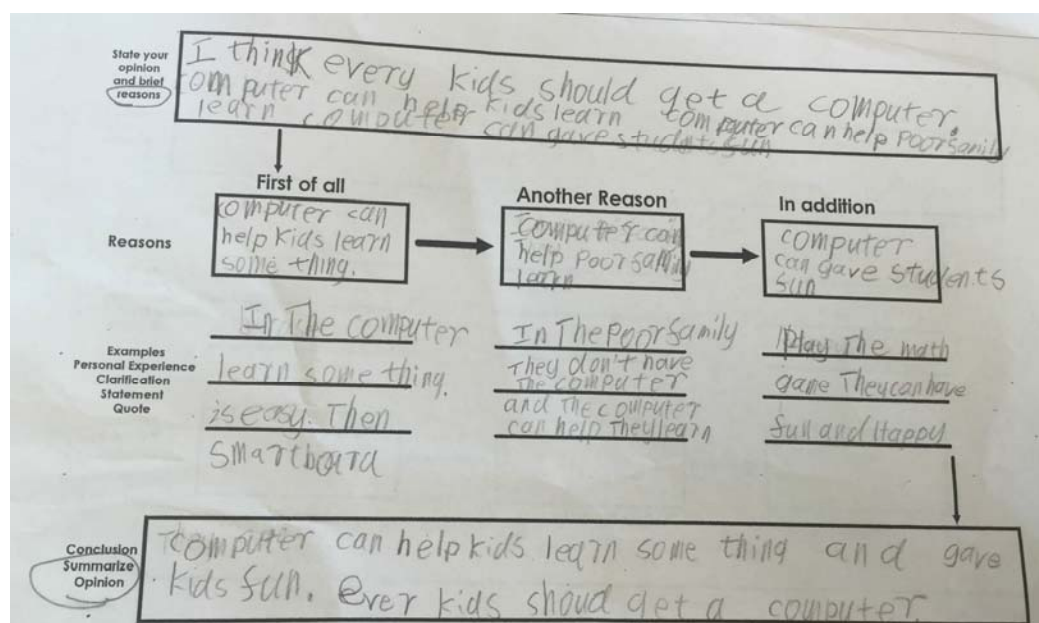


Figure 8. Sheng's flow map.

As you can see, the Thinking Map worked as a guide to encourage a logical progression of Sheng's ideas from beginning to end. He had to actively develop and record his own ideas, but the Thinking Map provided a structure to aid with organization and comprehension of ideas. Over time, the students learned which elements needed to go in each box. If a box was left blank the students knew they were missing a necessary element. Furthermore, the students seemed to have transferred the basic structure they learned using the Thinking Maps to other writing genres. The teacher stated:

After the study we went into expository writing. The way an essay should be written transferred over completely. They were able to remember it. They knew what had to be in the introduction. They knew what had to be in the body. They knew what had to be in the conclusion and they were able to see that it still pretty much had the same format.

Once the students learned the basic structure of the Thinking Maps, they seemed to feel comfortable using it to record their ideas and personal experiences. They all became able to develop much longer, more intricate opinion pieces than when they started. Students went from writing an average of two sentences on the pretest to an average of ten sentences on the posttest. The use of transitional phrases also increased. No students used transitional words or phrases on the pretest, but students used approximately three each on the posttest. Having a place to record these ideas made it easier for students to remember what to write.

Additionally, the Thinking Maps served as a formative assessment for the teacher, so she could easily check their progress. She was able to look at their Flow Maps and quickly see how far the students were in the process and if they were missing any pieces. The students used them in much the same way, which helped with their pacing. When

they worked with their partners it was easy to get off track for several reasons, but once they returned their focus to the Thinking Map they were able to quickly see where they had left off.

For example, as Miguel and Isabella worked on the trophy prompt they got quite distracted by the word “motivating” so they spent some time discussing it together and with their teacher. Once they were both satisfied with the meaning of the word they both sighed loudly, apparently feeling overwhelmed and lacking the motivation to continue working. But then Isabella glanced down at her map.

Isabella: Oh, I need one more reason. (She turns to Miguel, who’s begun playing with his pencil led. She shows him her paper.) I need one more reason. What do you have right here? I have...

Miguel: Yeah, yeah. I wrote down ‘a person...’

Isabella: ...doesn’t get A’s just for coming to class.

From there they were back to work, helping one another stay focused. If that map hadn’t been sitting there in front of Isabella, it would have been much more difficult for these students to get back on track. Thinking Maps played a crucial role in helping the students stay engaged in the process, which enabled them to make great strides in the ability to organization their pieces, record their ideas, and pace themselves and their partners as they worked.

Examining Written Models

Based on the students’ pretests, it seemed quite clear that they were unsure of the expectations of an opinion piece. In order to learn what was expected of them, the students needed written models to demonstrate content, length, and appropriate

conventions. The articles that were given to the students to provide background information and writing prompts acted as these models for the students.

One of the articles was about whether or not students should be issued computers in schools. The article provided the students with a good model for how an opinion piece should look. It has introductory and concluding paragraphs and a body, which provides clear reasons and details. From the article, students can learn about style. This particular article used questions to make points, such as “Who will pay for the damage if a computer is dropped or a student spills a glass of water on it?” I noticed some students using this technique later in the study. Appropriate conventions and spelling were also modeled in the article. See Figure 9 for the computers in schools article.

Ultimately, despite concerns regarding the students’ developmental readiness to master the writing of opinion pieces, the findings from this study suggest that with appropriate strategic scaffolding ELs can indeed make great progress in their development as writers. In order to develop as writers of opinion pieces, fourth grade ELs need the opportunity to work with a more knowledgeable other and tools to help them communicate. They also need to be able to participate in group discussions, utilize Thinking Maps, and have access to written models.

How Does Discussing Ideas with Others Influence the Writing and Writing Process of EL Students Who are Writing Opinion Pieces?

One of the key ideas proposed in the literature review was the concept of partner

Do Computers Help Students Learn More?

Some schools are now providing students with laptop computers. They feel that students will be more interested and involved in learning if they have a computer in front of them. Students are used to spending a lot of time online, anyway. So, they should be learning in a way that is comfortable and familiar for them.

Another reason that schools are buying laptops, is to replace textbooks. If schools use e-books online, they will not have to buy expensive textbooks and replace them when they get lost or ruined. Computers are also helpful for keeping students organized. Keeping assignments and papers in a computer file can be a lot handier than having a lot of papers in a folder.

There are problems with giving students laptops, though. The biggest problem is cost. It is very expensive to buy computers for every student. The schools either need to take money from other programs, or raise taxes. Most citizens do not like having to pay more taxes. Another problem arises when students are allowed to take the computers home. Who will pay for the damage if a computer is dropped or a student spills a glass of water on it?

Also, how will teachers make sure that students are using the computers for learning and not just playing games? When students get bored, whether during class or at home, they will likely switch to a game or Facebook, instead of staying on the lesson material. It can be a distraction for students who are thinking more about what they can do with the computer than about the lesson.

And finally, a computer can never take the place of a teacher. Interesting lessons, class discussions, and working with classmates are all better ways of learning and really understanding school lessons. A teacher can help a student in ways that a computer never can.



Figure 9. Computers in schools' article.

talk or the opportunity to verbally share ideas with another before writing these ideas down. The purpose of the second research question was to examine how partner talk influenced the development of ELs as writers. In this section, the findings related to this question are presented with the key theme centered on the importance of ELs being able to converse with a partner throughout the writing process.

Conversing with a Partner Throughout the Process

A major goal of this study was to examine the students' partner talk that students participated in where they interacted with one another throughout the writing process. As I interviewed the students at the end of the study, it became very clear that the social interactions that occurred during partner talk were significant. The students were quite serious during these interviews. However, as I asked them individually, "*Did partner talk make writing more fun?*" each and every one of them suddenly smiled, apparently thinking back fondly on their experiences with partner talk. Knowing the critical role motivation plays in building effective writers (Hidi et al., 2002), we can conclude that students enjoyed their time working together and that it contributed to their development as writers. Isabella made a comment that stood out to me during the interviews. Her response when she was asked, "*Do you think you are good at writing opinion pieces?*" was, "*I'm better with someone.*"

Haynes (2015) found EL students reluctant to share their writing with English speaking peers. However, in this setting, none of the students seemed to mind sharing their writing as all students were learning English to some degree. Students were able to

receive feedback from their peers and their teacher to improve their writing because they were willing to share with other EL students.

I was able to observe the following four benefits of bilingual pairs participating in partner talk, as predicted by Alanis (2011): (a) the students expressed and exchanged ideas as they built communication skills, (b) the students developed close relationships with each other, (c) the students were actively involved in their learning, and (d) the students were more willing to take risks.

An example of these benefits in play is portrayed in the following excerpt between Miguel and Isabella's partner talk that occurred when they were working on the Matt vs. Mom cell phone prompt:

Teacher: Isabella, you're going first.

Miguel (whispering, encouraging her to speak in Spanish): En Español!

Isabella (in English): Ok. First of all, the smartphone costs too much money.

Miguel: Why?

She hesitates.

Miguel (prompting her, whispering): My opinion is...

Isabella: My opinion is Mom.

Miguel: And then we write it. (He begins writing.) My...opinion...is...

Isabella: (Also writing.)...because it costs too much money.

Miguel: How much do you have to pay for, um, a...

Isabella: ...a smartphone...

Miguel: ...for a month? (They look at what's written in the article.)

Isabella: It says is costs \$200.

(They write that on their maps.)

Early in the study the teacher had given her students permission to use their native language during partner talk if that was something they wanted to do. Miguel took a risk by encouraging Isabella to speak in Spanish, even though she chose not to. He guided the first part of their partner talk, remembering the guidelines set by the teacher.

Miguel: My turn (waits for Isabella to finish writing). Ok. My opinion is that Mom also wins because he already has a lot of electricity and it gets him more, like, dumb so when he goes to school only the video games will get stuck in his head and, like, he will have too much. It'll cost too much money because they'll buy video games for him. He already has a tablet. He already has a computer. What does he want an iPhone 6? Why does he want more electronic?

Isabella: (pauses) So. Um. (She tries to condense his words so they can write it on their maps). So...too much screen time for his life.

Miguel: And because...(He begins writing.) He...already...

Isabella: ...has...other...devices.

Miguel: ...has...other...devices.

Isabella: Ok (pauses, then continues writing). In addition lots of kids don't have one so...

Miguel: So (thinks for a moment)...millions of kids and parents don't have any smartphone.

Isabella: (reading from her map) 56% of kids don't have one, so...(She writes.) lots...of...kids...

Isabella was a strong partner. She was able to condense Miguel's large idea into fewer words they could work with more easily. When she was unsure whether millions of kids and parents don't have smartphones, as Miguel suggested, she showed him the article to confirm that 56% of kids don't have one. Still unsure of what that number was

exactly, she felt comfortable using “lots of kids.”

Miguel: (also writing) lots of kids...

Isabella: lots of kids don't have an iPhone 6...

Miguel: ...don't have smartphones.

Isabella: ...don't have smartphones (she writes it).

They move on to the next reason.

Miguel: Why?

Isabella: He can do other stuff.

Miguel: Yeah, like the chores.

Isabella: Like, do his chores, read books, take care of the dog he's getting for his birthday.

Miguel: And his name can be iPhone.

Isabella: Yeah (laughs).

Miguel: So the dog's name can be iPhone.

Isabella: So I'm writing this down. So he can do other stuff like chores...

Miguel: (writing) he...can...do...other...stuff...like...chores...

Isabella: (writing) take care of his dog...getting for his birthday. Instead of birthday I'm going to write b-day.

Miguel: Oops, forgot my period (fixes that). Ok. Let's add more details on this one.

Even though Miguel was getting a little bit off track, Isabella was able to guide him back by showing him what she was writing on her map. However, his willingness to be creative and play around somewhat with the characters from the article likely contributed to the students' enjoyment of the experience and the development of their

relationship.

As you can see both students were willing to speak and engage in partner talk. Miguel shared his ideas about Matt having too much screen time fearlessly with his partner, despite being unable to use all of the words correctly. Isabella took a risk by condensing his ideas into a single thought, which was really helpful. She also played with the language a bit when she said, "I'm going to write b-day instead of birthday." The students were able to talk about their ideas until they made sense to them. See Figure 10 for the Flow Map Miguel created as he participated in partner talk with Isabella.

Notice in his map, Miguel's opinion is stated as "My opinion is Mom wins because he has too much devices." This sentence was developed through his partner talk

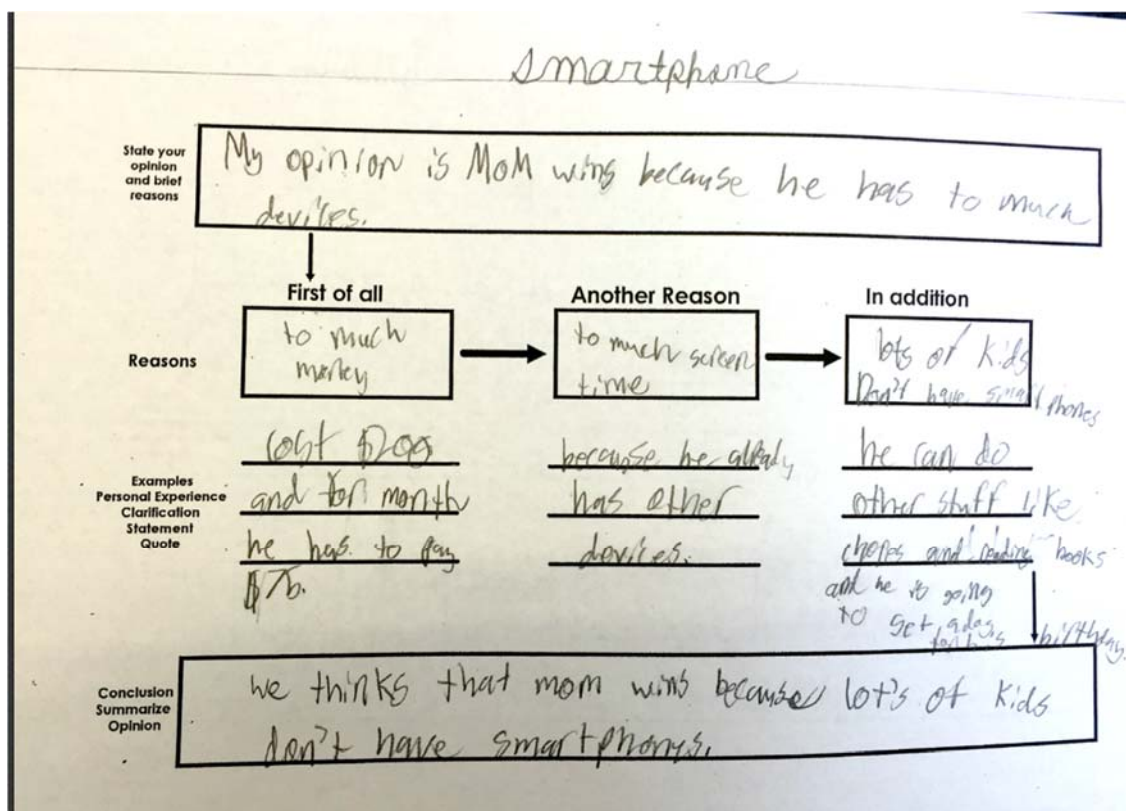


Figure 10. Miguel's flow map.

with Isabella. The long paragraph he had initially stated to her would have been lost if he had attempted to write it all down. Together, he and Isabella were able to develop three distinct and appropriate reasons to support their opinions and added details for each opinion.

It is also important to note that the teacher viewed partner talk as a success and quite beneficial to her students. She stated:

I loved partner talk! I felt like when they really used it, it was powerful. They got ideas from each other and helped each other think about things in different ways. It's also an incorporation of the auditory learning style. They get to hear themselves say their ideas. They're also practicing another domain. They're practicing speaking and seeing the connections between speaking and writing, which I don't think is pushed and utilized enough as a powerful tool.

I'm just so passionate about partner talk. This is something I think would benefit all kids. Talking it out is so vital! What a disservice we're doing for our students if we aren't letting them talk about what they're learning and share with others and experience it and really take it in. That's what this piece did. They were able to share and experience with each other. That's taking it to one of the deepest levels of understanding.

Mrs. Brown's experience using partner talk to teach opinion writing provided insight into its benefits and its value to her students. She appreciated that partner talk helped her students share ideas with one another and that it provided them with opportunities to verbalize their thinking. She also recognized that this was a helpful tool for students who may be auditory learners. In addition to the scaffolds these fourth-grade ELs needed to develop as writers of opinion pieces, conversing with a partner throughout the process was another important component of their development.

In summary, this chapter reviewed the key findings that emerged from the data. It was determined that working with a more knowledgeable other, communicating despite

language barriers, participating in group discussions, utilizing Thinking Maps, exploring written models, and conversing with a partner throughout the process were important contributors to the development of ELs.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the findings presented in Chapter IV and divide this chapter into four sections. The first section will explain the importance of the study. The second section will present implications of the findings and is arranged according to the six themes discovered during the study as important scaffolds needed for ELs to develop as writers of opinion pieces. The six key scaffolds include the following: (a) working with a more knowledgeable other, (b) communicating, despite language barriers, (c) participating in group discussions, (d) utilizing Thinking Maps, (e) examining written models, and (f) conversing with a partner throughout the process. In the third section, I discuss the study limitations and in the final section, I provide recommendations for future research.

Importance of the Study

The current study was necessitated so as to provide information for educators and researchers on how best to support ELs as they develop as writers. Elementary students throughout the U.S. are required to produce more sophisticated writing products than ever before as a result of the heavy emphasis on writing instruction in the recently adopted Common Core State Standards. Moreover, the growing EL population in U.S. schools provides additional urgency. This study is unique in three distinct ways. First, the few studies that have examined writing instruction at the elementary level have focused on the final product produced by students, while the current study has focused on the writing

process and the development of students as writers. Second, the current study finally addressed the strong need to investigate the impact of having students discuss ideas with their partner throughout the writing process so as to encourage higher quality writing. Third, the current study was the first of its kind to include EL students in the sample that examined writing instruction on opinion pieces. Pressley et al. (2007) called for a more solid body of research identifying valid instructional adaptations to maximize the writing potential of ELs. This study helped shed some light on the use of Thinking Maps as an instructional adaptation to writing instruction for ELs. This study helps fill these and additional gaps in our understanding so as to increase our efforts to better serve EL students.

Implications of Findings

This study has provided interesting insight into how ELs develop as writers. It is important for teachers to have realistic expectations for their students. As an observer, I could see the students experiencing growth as writers and communicators throughout the study. There were times that I felt like they were really understanding what was required and expected of them and they became quite good at performing the skills needed to write an effective opinion piece. Before too long, however, I saw them struggling again and suddenly it felt like they were not progressing as well as I had originally thought. These findings mirrored those of O'Hallaron (2014), who found that very few students can consistently produce writing of the same quality. Teachers can expect their students to experience these fluctuations of understanding and in their growth as writers as they

learn to write.

The present study also found how valuable the use of Thinking Maps and partner talk was in assisting fourth-grade ELs become better writers of opinion pieces. It was discovered that over the course of the 6-week study, fourth-grade ELs at this Thinking Maps school began to (a) organize their ideas before writing in a logical way, (b) write longer opinion pieces, (c) develop their own opinions on an issue or writing topic, (d) exude more confidence in their writing as demonstrated through student interviews, (e) increase the use of more sophisticated vocabulary in their writing, (f) improve their conventions, and (g) increase their scores on writing exams. The progress the students made can be attributed to several scaffolding techniques. This section will examine the findings related to these changes the students made in their writing and the implications of these findings for the field of education.

Working with a More Knowledgeable Other

In order for students to progress as writers they absolutely need opportunities to work closely with a more experienced writer. Dowel et al. (1994) found that exposure to the writing process is not enough for students to become proficient writers. Teachers need to model the writing process for their students, verbally explaining their thought process along the way (Englert et al, 1991; Gleason & Antonioson, 2001). The students in this study had access to their teacher due to the nature of the ESL pullout program offered at the school. It is crucial that teachers find a way to ensure each student has opportunities for one-on-one and small group discussions throughout the writing process. The teacher is needed to ensure that all aspects of the writing process are explicitly modeled for

students (i.e. discussion about topics, complex ideas, and vocabulary, questions to encourage student thinking, examination of student work to highlight gaps in learning or writing, etc.).

Communicating, Despite Language Barriers

Findings revealed that in order for ELs to progress as writers of opinion pieces, they must be provided with some type of tool that can help them communicate with their teacher, peers, both verbally and in their writing. In this study, the students used Google Translate. It really was a lifeline for Edis and Sheng as they did their best to keep up with their peers that had a better grasp of the English language. It provided them with an understanding of what those around them were saying in English, as well as was key words to use in their discussions and writing. The students used Google Translate throughout the writing process. The translation service also played an unexpectedly large role in the students' progress with vocabulary development and also helped them improve upon their writing conventions. While interacting with Google Translate the students were exposed to appropriate spelling, capitalizations, and word usage, which they immediately used in their writing. It is possible for a student to rely too heavily upon Google Translate, so it's important for teachers to monitor its use. However, this is a tool that could be very beneficial to ELs in many different areas.

Participating in Group Discussions

An element that cannot be ignored when teaching ELs to write is the opportunity to participate in small group discussions. In this study, these discussions provided the

students with opportunities to verbally discuss and clarify the topics they wrote about. This made it possible for them to develop and defend their opinions. The group discussions were also a great way for the students to develop their vocabulary. Many scholars believe that a strong verbal and written vocabulary will enhance students' abilities to write well (Hinkle, 2013). In most cases, the vocabulary of ELs is much less advanced than that of their native English-speaking peers. Prior to writing their opinion pieces, the students, read through the articles as a group and led by their teacher. A very large portion of this time was spent discussing vocabulary words. Word meanings that were used and discussed several times when reading the articles, or as students were writing, seemed to eventually help the understanding of these words sink in for the students.

Utilizing Thinking Maps

EL teachers can use Thinking Maps to help their students become better opinion writers. Thinking Maps served as an important scaffold for students in the present study. They allowed the students to visualize and organize their thinking, record their ideas and personal experiences, and pace themselves as they worked.

One benefit to Thinking Maps is that they help make abstract ideas more concrete and visual for students. Teachers certainly need to be aware of their students' developmental level. At ages nine and ten, these students were all in Piaget's Concrete Operational Stage. During this stage, children can only solve problems that apply to concrete objects or events, and not abstract concepts or hypothetical tasks (Piaget & Inhelder, 1973). This makes it very difficult for students to develop an opinion about an

issue that does not really exist as a concern or problem in their world. Thinking Maps helped bridge the gap between their reality and situations presented in articles. They provide students with a way to visualize and organize their thoughts in a way that makes sense to them.

Thinking Maps also encourage students to share their ideas and personal experiences. EL teachers can expect that their struggling writers will likely produce short, poorly organized, and weak writing pieces (Englert & Raphael, 1988; Graham & Harris, 1991). The students' prewriting samples produced in the current study were similar to those found by Englert and Raphael and Graham and Harris in that they, were all very short and lacked direction. These findings corroborate the notion that struggling writers will typically plunge into writing without taking the time to properly plan and consider the objectives of the writing assignment (Elbow, 1981). By providing the students with an effective strategy, which clearly laid out the structure of opinion pieces, the Thinking Maps program helped the students develop and elaborate upon their ideas, and organize their writing. Over time they were able to put the appropriate elements into the correct spaces on their Thinking Maps, and eventually write more advanced opinion pieces using these maps.

The maps also acted as a guide, which helped the students in the study pace themselves during partner talk. Students could easily see the different parts they needed for their opinion pieces and would often point to their maps to show their partner what they needed to be working on next. In this study the Thinking Maps program was determined to be a useful scaffold for ELs who are learning to write opinion pieces.

Examining Written Models

There appears to be a relationship between reading opinion pieces and writing them (Crowhurst, 1991). Students need to be exposed to good models of opinion pieces in order to learn appropriate content, length, and conventions. In this study the articles that were provided to the students for their prompts presented information about the topics the students could use to develop and defend their opinions. They also served as helpful models, which helped the students gain a much greater understanding of the expectations for opinion pieces.

Conversing with a Partner Throughout the Process

Another factor, which has been shown to have a positive impact on writing quality in the past, is working together with a partner (Ferretti et al, 2000; Graham & Harris, 2006; Midgette et al, 2008; Schunk & Swartz, 1993; Yarrow & Topping, 2001). The students in this study accomplished this through partner talk. Students who struggled to develop their own opinions on an issue eventually learned to do so through their partner talk experiences.

Discussing ideas with others influenced the writing process for these EL students as they wrote opinion pieces in a variety of other ways as well. First, the students were able to “talk out” their ideas. Even when the students were not necessarily talking “to” each other, the fact that they were encouraged to vocalize their thinking seemed quite helpful. They also helped one another develop better reasons for their opinion and to identify supporting details. Additionally, while students may get off task or lose focus

when working alone, some students in this study seemed to keep their partner focused and engaged during partner time. Students did this by moving conversations forward and reminding their partner of the assigned task if they seemed to get off track. Finally, the students seemed to enjoy partner talk. Even though this sometimes meant that the students were enjoying each other's company rather than focusing on their writing, the fact that they were happy as they interacted enhanced the experience for all of them and often helped spark creativity. Since the writing performance of struggling writers can be affected by perceived competence (Pajares, 2003), much benefit can be drawn from the confidence the students gained during partner talk.

Teachers can use partner talk to their advantage and to the advantage of their students when designing writing instruction. In order to effectively implement partner talk, a teacher must first model appropriate discussions for her students. Next, the teacher should put students into pairs. The students should be instructed to stop frequently to discuss with their partner as they go through the process of brainstorming and organizing their writing. It is also helpful to provide the students with words or phrases they can use to encourage their partner to add more details. The phrase "tell me more" works well. While partner talk was found to be an effective tool for helping the fourth-grade ELs in this study develop as writers of opinion pieces, it is a component of the Thinking Maps program that can be implemented in a variety of subject areas for all different levels of students.

The overall experience of the students in this study contributed to higher scores from the pretest to posttest writing samples. Just as ELs have complex needs, the journey

to helping them achieve success in writing is a complex process. This process involves strategic scaffolding in the form of working with a more knowledgeable other, having tools to assist with communication, participating in group discussions, utilizing Thinking Maps, being exposed to written models, and conversing with a partner throughout the process.

Study Limitations

Unfortunately, this study cannot answer all the complicated questions surrounding ELs and their development as writers of opinion pieces. While there is much to be learned from our six participants, this case study examined only a small sample of students from one elementary school in one school district in a Western state of the U.S. Thus, this limits the generalizability of findings from the study to other schools and student populations. A study conducted in a different location with students from different backgrounds could have yielded much different results.

The data was analyzed through a Piagetian lens. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development provided a strong framework, but also possibly created some bias during analysis. Additional or different themes may have arisen if I had been working from a different theoretical framework. Furthermore, I was mindful of my position as an observer in the classroom. However, my experiences as a former elementary teacher may have formed biases in me that could be evident in my findings or prevented me from realizing additional themes and findings.

Additional limitations may have occurred due to the lack of focus on culture in

this study. The participants came from different cultures and backgrounds, some of which were vastly different. It was noted that culture did not appear as a theme in the data collected, in the instruction provided, or the assessments implemented throughout the study. It is also possible that unrecognized cultural biases tainted the findings or did not show up as an important consideration in this ESL classroom.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on a small group of fourth grade ELs. Elementary students in grades three through six are also required to write opinion pieces in the U.S. It would be interesting to see the development of the ELs in third grade or in any other grade level besides fourth. It would also be interesting to design a longitudinal study to examine how ELs progress in their writing over the course of elementary school starting in kindergarten and progressing through to fifth or sixth grade. It is also my hope that this study will open the door for other studies involving the use of Thinking Maps as an instructional strategy to use when teaching ELs to write. It would also be beneficial for future studies to include additional types of writing to include instruction for writing pieces such as narratives, problem/solution, expository text, and so forth.

Partner talk was an interesting component of this study and there is much more to learn about it. For example, even though the students in this study were allowed to speak in their native language, they very rarely did. It would be interesting to see if there are any benefits to how partner talk plays out with students who used their native language. In the current study, the teacher also played a large role in partner talk. In a setting where

students do not rely so heavily on adult intervention, it would be interesting to see how the students work through questions, ideas, and vocabulary concerns together. In this study the teacher always put students together in pairs. It would be interesting to determine if larger groups of students talking together would be more or less effective than having only two students working together. Finally, questions arose surrounding the language proficiency and academic levels of the students. It would be helpful for future research to consider the following questions: Is it best for students to be paired with a student who is on a similar language proficiency or academic level as they are? Should students always work with the same person or should they switch up partners often? Is there any benefit to students selecting their own partner?

Finally, because culture did not play a significant role in this study nor did it emerge in the themes gleaned the data. This is surprising given the importance of culture in a student's life – especially in the area of writing instruction. Students draw on personal experiences to interpret, make sense of, and generate arguments and responses related to reading other opinions and ideas. In the current study, the students' diverse backgrounds and funds of knowledge were not highlighted and remain unexplored.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Thinking Maps Used in Opinion Writing Instruction

Circle Map for Brainstorming

Where is the best place to go on a class trip? Explain why you think so.

The teacher helps the students understand the prompt by focusing on key words: *best place*, *class trip*, and *explain why*. The teacher stresses the importance of selecting only one topic and focuses attention on the purpose of the prompt: *explain why*.

Brainstorm Ideas for Writing

The teacher creates a **CIRCLE MAP** and places “possible class trips” in the center of the map. She explains that she is going to brainstorm all of the places her class could go on a trip.

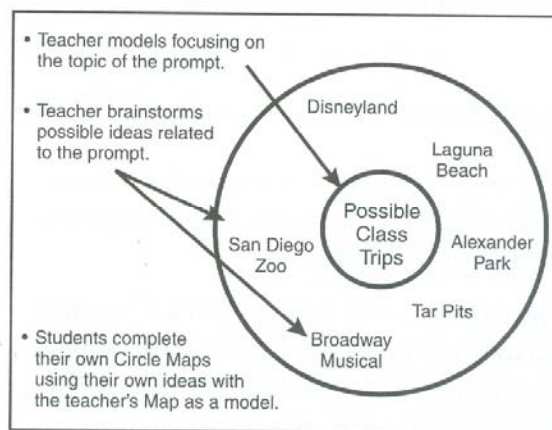
The students create a **CIRCLE MAP** with their own ideas about a possible class trip, using the teacher’s map as a model. The teacher could prompt with:

What type of class trip would provide the most fun?

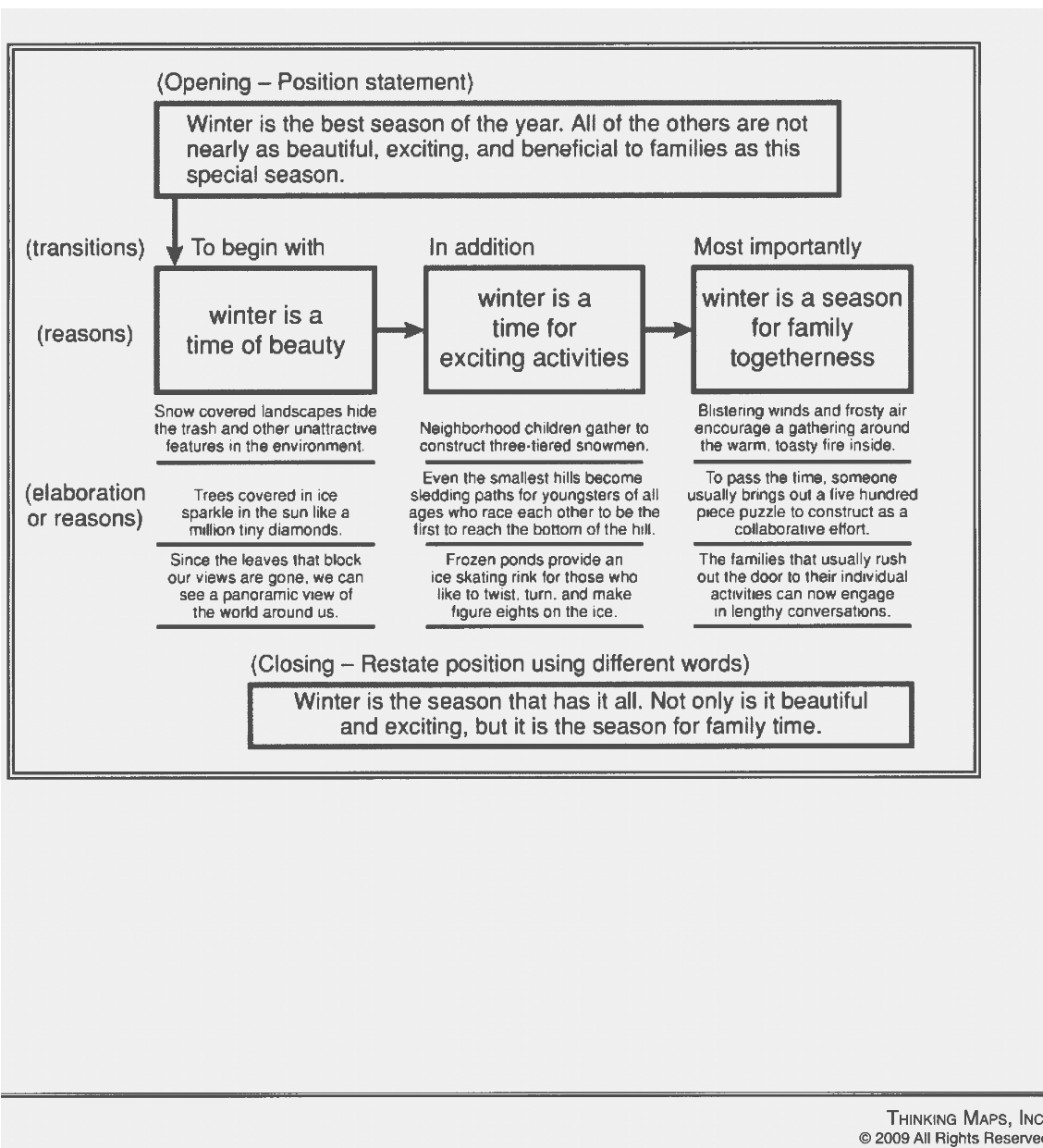
Where could we go that would be educational?

Which places would be the most affordable?

Monitor and Check: Ask the students to share their **CIRCLE MAPS** orally with a partner and to invite their partners to suggest additional ideas for possible class trips.



Flow Map for Organizing



Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

Letter of Informed Consent

Introduction/ Purpose

Dr. Sarah Clark, of the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at Utah State University is supervising a research study to explore the opinion writing development of ELs (English Learners) in a Thinking Maps school, particularly the effectiveness of peer discussions during the writing process. Your child has the opportunity to take part because he/she is a fourth grade ESL student at Johnson Elementary School in Central School District. There will be approximately six participants in this research study. With the exception of one questionnaire following the study, your child will not need to do anything different than what has already been planned as part of the fourth grade ESL curriculum instruction. Auri Ann Squire, a graduate student in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership will be collecting these data as part of the requirements to fulfill her master's thesis. She is a former fifth grade teacher and has completed a background check for Central School District.

Procedures

If you agree to let your child participate in this research project, your child will be asked to do the following:

- Your child will be asked to write opinion pieces as they participate in their regularly scheduled ESL writing instruction.
- During writing instruction, your child will have the opportunity to discuss their ideas with a partner. Audio files of these discussions will be recorded so the researchers can analyze their effectiveness.
- Your child will be interviewed by the researcher following the study to share their feelings about the experience.

New Findings

During the course of this research study, you will be informed of any significant new findings (either good or bad), such as changes in the risks or benefits resulting from your child's participation in the research, or new alternatives to participation that might cause you to change your mind about your child continuing in the study. If new information is obtained that is relevant or useful to you, or if the procedures and/or methods change at any time throughout this study, your consent to allow your child to continue participating in this study will be obtained again.

Risks

Participation in this research study may involve minimal risks but none that are unusual to normal school attendance, instruction, or assessment activities.

Benefits

There may or may not be any direct benefit to your child from participating in this study. However, the investigators may learn more about how to provide the most effective opinion writing instruction for ELs. Further, researchers may be able to determine how to effectively facilitate productive discussions between students.

Explanation & offer to answer questions

This letter has explained this research study to you. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Dr. Sarah Clark at (435) 797- 0370 or sarah.clark@usu.edu.

Voluntary nature of participation and right to withdraw without consequence

Your child's participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to have your child participate or withdraw at any time without consequence or loss of benefits. Your child may be withdrawn from this study without your consent by the investigator if the investigator deems that information gathered is no longer necessary.

Confidentiality

Research records will be kept confidential, consistent with federal and state regulations. Only the investigator and the student researcher will have access to the data, which will be kept in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected computer in a locked room to maintain confidentiality. To protect your child's privacy, pseudonyms will be used. Data will be kept for ten years so as to be in accordance with the Data Management Plan, but participant identification will not be shared.

IRB Approval Statement

The Institutional Review Board for the protection of human participants at USU has approved this research study. If you have any pertinent questions or concerns about your rights or a research-related injury, you may contact the IRB Administrator at (435) 797-0567 or email irb@usu.edu. If you have a concern or complaint about the research and you would like to contact someone other than the research team, you may contact the IRB Administrator to obtain information or to offer input.

Investigator Statement

"I certify that the research study has been explained to the individual, by me or my research staff, and that the individual understands the nature and purpose, the possible risks and benefits associated with taking part in this research study. Any questions that have been raised have been answered."

Signature of Principal Investigator

Sarah K. Clark, Ph.D.
435-797-0370
sarah.clark@usu.edu

Signature of Co-Investigator

Auri Ann Squire
435-770-6923
auriann2@yahoo.com

Refusal of Consent

If you would not like your child to participate in this study, please sign below.

Name of Child Age/Grade of Child

Parent or Guardian's signature Date

Appendix C

SAGE Writing Test Sample Question (6th Grade)

SAGE Sample Writing Task**Grade 6: Argument Essay**Prompt:

This is a claim made by a solar panel company:

“Using solar panels for heating can save home owners money.”

Based on the readings, write an essay that supports this claim OR an opposing claim. Be sure to include evidence from the articles to support your claim.

Text Set:

- Article with information about the cost of installing solar panels
- Information and illustrations about the amount of energy generated by solar panels on houses with full sun to shaded exposures
- Report on the amount of energy homeowners have to buy to supplement solar energy provided by panels
- Personal anecdote from a consumer who has purchased and uses solar panels for heating

Appendix D
Opinion Piece Prompts



Learning A-Z Research Permission Statement

Issued to: Auri Ann Squire

This license agreement (the "Agreement") is made and entered into as of the February 9, 2017, by and between Learning A-Z, a division of LAZEL, Inc., with offices at 1840 E. River Rd. #320, Tucson, Arizona 85718 ("Learning A-Z"), and Auri Ann Squire ("Recipient"), at 2247 Ground View Dr., Auri Ann ("Recipient"), and Learning A-Z agree to the following:

Learning A-Z grants the above named recipient the limited license and the right to use its copyrighted resources, such as books, lessons, worksheets, and quizzes in a research study, thesis, or research paper (the "Work") under the following conditions:

1. This Agreement shall begin immediately and end as follows:
 - a. Science A-Z expires 2/22/2017

Written request to extend the term of this Agreement must be received prior to the expiration for each product. If no request is received, this Agreement will automatically expire on the above dates.

Learning A-Z may, in its sole and absolute discretion, elect not to extend such term.

2. The Recipient shall use the following copyright notice on any and all forms of disclosure of the Work:

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INVERTEBRATES

What to Do with the Bees?

Purpose

To debate whether to remove a bees' nest found in a city's botanical garden

Background

Bees are insects of the arthropod group of invertebrates. They are in the same subgroup as ants and wasps. Like butterflies, bees are important pollinators. Bees have thick hairs that act as "pollen baskets" on their hind legs. As they feed on pollen and nectar from flowers, pollen collects between these hairs. They carry this pollen from flower to flower. When the pollen rubs off, it helps flowering plants reproduce. The plants that bees help pollinate include many of the crops that we eat for food, as well as many of the flowers people enjoy in their gardens.

When a colony of bees gets too crowded, a queen bee may move with a swarm of drones and worker bees to a new location. Some bees have a sting, and some people and animals are deathly allergic to bee venom. Because of this, the location of a swarm may pose a threat to nearby people and other animals.



Situation

The Plantasia Botanical Garden is a popular place. Schools arrange trips for students there to study the many types of plants and the ecosystems in which they live. People who live near the gardens enjoy walking among the beautiful displays. The administrators of the garden have built an enclosed dog park in one area to encourage more people to use the grounds.

Mr. Honeycomb, the head gardener, has discovered a large swarm of bees in a tree near the dog park. The bees have broken away from their main hive located in an out-of-the way part of the grounds. The garden's manager, Mr. Satay Safe, wants Mr. Honeycomb to remove the swarm that is near the dog park.



Vegetable Garden or Forest?

Purpose

To debate whether people in a town should remove forest trees to plant a community vegetable garden

Background

Community gardening is popular. In these public gardens, many people from a neighborhood or town work together. They plant and care for the crops. Then at harvest time, they all share the vegetables and fruit.

Community gardens can make open fields and vacant lots useful again.

However, some gardens use chemical fertilizers and insect sprays that can be harmful to soil and water. Organic gardens use natural fertilizers and pest control methods that do not involve chemicals or harm the environment. A garden requires sunlight, so in some cases, trees might have to be cleared to make room for a garden. Those trees provide important habitats to many animal species. Also, trees that grow along riverbanks provide root structures that keep the soil from eroding when it rains.

Whether a garden is truly beneficial depends on where it is placed and how it is grown.

Situation

The people of Greenville love fresh vegetables and fruit. They want to plant a community garden. Greenville has a problem though. The town does not have a lot of open space for a large garden. Mayor Woods has an idea. Why not remove some trees in the forest area of the town park along the river? That would make room for the garden. It would even be near a source of water for the plants.

The people of Greenville are determined to start a community garden. However, they also appreciate the beautiful forest along the river. They understand that the riverside trees serve as a habitat to many living things. The trees also help prevent soil erosion. Mayor Woods and the Greenville citizens must consider the best garden location, or whether to have a garden at all.

Appendix E
Scoring Materials

Opinion Essay Writing Rubric Writing Rubric (Grades 3-5)		
Statement of Purpose/Focus and Organization Weight: 40%	Evidence/Elaboration Weight: 40%	Conventions/Editing Weight: 20%
<p>The response is fully sustained and consistently and purposefully focused:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> opinion is clearly stated, focused, and strongly maintained opinion is communicated clearly within the purpose, audience, and task <p>The response has a clear and effective organizational structure creating unity and completeness :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a variety of transitional strategies is consistently used to effectively clarify the relationships between and among ideas logical progression of ideas from beginning to end effective introduction and conclusion for audience and purpose 	<p>The response provides thorough and convincing support/evidence for the writer's opinion that includes the effective use of sources, facts, and details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> use of evidence from sources is smoothly integrated, comprehensive, and relevant effective use of a variety of elaborative techniques <p>The response clearly and effectively expresses ideas, using precise language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> use of academic and domain-specific vocabulary is clearly appropriate for the audience and purpose 	<p>The response displays adequate command of all grade level and preceding level conventions of writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some errors in usage and sentence formation may be present, but no systematic pattern of errors is displayed use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling is adequate

Opinion Essay Writing Rubric (Grades 3-5)			
Score	Statement of Purpose/Focus and Organization (4-point rubric)	Evidence/Elaboration (4-point rubric)	Conventions/Editing (2-point rubric begins at scorepoint 2)
4	<p>The response is fully sustained and consistently and purposefully focused:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opinion is clearly stated, focused, and strongly maintained • opinion is communicated clearly within the purpose, audience, and task <p>The response has a clear and effective organizational structure creating unity and completeness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective, consistent use of a variety of transitional strategies to clarify the relationships between and among ideas • logical progression of ideas from beginning to end • effective introduction and conclusion for audience and purpose 	<p>The response provides thorough and convincing support/evidence for the writer's opinion that includes the effective use of sources, facts, and details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of evidence from sources is smoothly integrated, comprehensive, and relevant • effective use of a variety of elaborative techniques <p>The response clearly and effectively expresses ideas, using precise language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of academic and domain-specific vocabulary is clearly appropriate for the audience and purpose 	
3	<p>The response is adequately sustained and generally focused:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opinion is clear and for the most part maintained, though some loosely related material may be present • context provided for the claim is adequate within the purpose, audience, and task <p>The response has a recognizable organizational structure, though there may be minor flaws and some ideas may be loosely connected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adequate use of transitional strategies with some variety to clarify the relationships between and among ideas • adequate progression of ideas from beginning to end • adequate introduction and conclusion 	<p>The response provides adequate support/evidence for the writer's opinion that includes the use of sources, facts, and details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some evidence from sources is integrated, though citations may be general or imprecise • adequate use of some elaborative techniques <p>The response adequately expresses ideas, employing a mix of precise with more general language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of domain-specific vocabulary is generally appropriate for the audience and purpose 	
2	<p>The response is somewhat sustained with some extraneous material or a minor drift in focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may be clearly focused on the opinion but is insufficiently sustained within the purpose, audience, and task • Opinion on the issue may be somewhat unclear and unfocused <p>The response has an inconsistent organizational structure, and flaws are evident:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inconsistent use of transitional strategies with little variety • uneven progression of ideas from beginning to end • conclusion and introduction, if present, are weak 	<p>The response provides uneven, cursory support/ evidence for the writer's opinion that includes partial or uneven use of sources, facts, and details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence from sources is weakly integrated, and citations, if present, are uneven • weak or uneven use of elaborative techniques <p>The response expresses Ideas unevenly, using simplistic language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of domain-specific vocabulary may at times be inappropriate for the audience and purpose 	<p>The response demonstrates an adequate command of conventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some errors in usage and sentence formation may be present, but no systematic pattern of errors is displayed • adequate use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
1	<p>The response may be related to the purpose but may offer little or no focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may be very brief • may have a major drift • opinion may be confusing or ambiguous 	<p>The response provides minimal support or evidence for the writer's opinion that includes little or no use of sources, facts, and details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use of evidence from sources is minimal, absent, in error, or irrelevant 	<p>The response demonstrates a partial command of conventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • errors in usage may obscure meaning

	The response has little or no discernible organizational structure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • few or no transitional strategies are evident • frequent extraneous ideas may intrude 	The response expression of ideas is vague, lacks clarity, or is confusing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses limited language or domain-specific vocabulary • may have little sense of audience and purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inconsistent use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
Grammar, Mechanics, Usage, and Punctuation Expectations by Grade-Level			
Grade Level	Standard 1: Conventions of standard English Grammar and Usage	Standard 2: Conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling	
4th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use relative pronouns (who, whose, whom, which, that) and relative adverbs (where, when, why). • Form and use the progressive (e.g., I was walking; I am walking; I will be walking) verb tenses. • Use modal auxiliaries (e.g., can, may, must) to convey various conditions. • Order adjectives within sentences according to conventional patterns (e.g., a small red bag rather than a red small bag). • Form and use prepositional phrases. • Produce complete sentences, recognizing and correcting inappropriate fragments and runons. • Correctly use frequently confused words (e.g., to, too, two; there, their). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use correct capitalization. • Use commas and quotation marks to mark direct speech and quotations from a text. • Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction in a compound sentence. • Spell grade-appropriate words correctly, consulting references as needed. 	
5th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form and use the perfect (e.g., I had walked; I have walked; I will have walked) verb tenses. • Use verb tense to convey various times, sequences, states, and conditions. • Does not contain inappropriate shifts in verb tense. • Use correlative conjunctions (e.g., either/or, neither/nor). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements. • Spell correctly. 	

Appendix F
Field Notes Forms

General Observations

	Description	Reflections
Date		
Time		
Students Observed		
Lesson Objectives		
Thinking Maps, other materials used		
Unusual Conditions		
Teacher/student interactions		
Student engagement --Are students engaged? --In what ways? --Is the engagement sustained?		
Changes, specific growth observed since previous observation		

Partner Talk Observations

	Description	Reflections
Peer interactions		
Do the students choose to speak in English, their native language, or both?		
What do students discuss? --on topic --off topic		
Are new ideas generated during the discussions?		
Does one peer tend to dominate the conversation?		
Are students able to maintain appropriate discussions without the help of the teacher?		
Other observations		

Appendix G
Student Interview Questions

Opinion Writing
Pre-Intervention Interview Questions

Have you ever written an opinion piece?

If yes...

Can you tell me a little about your experience (what grade were you in, what tools did you use, etc.)...

Can you explain to me briefly how to write an opinion piece?

What do you like most about writing opinion pieces?

What do you like least about writing opinion pieces?

Do you think you are good at writing opinion pieces?

At school, are you given opportunities to discuss with a partner when you write?

If yes...

What do you like and/or dislike about discussing with a partner?

Do you ever speak to your partner in your native language? Why or why not?

Opinion Writing
Post-Intervention Interview Questions

What do you like most about writing opinion pieces?

What do you like least about writing opinion pieces?

Which of the following do you feel are benefits of “partner talk”? Check all that apply.

- It helped me put my ideas into words.
- It helped me organizing thoughts better.
- It helped me get new ideas.
- It motivated me to come up with good ideas.
- It made writing more fun.
- Other (please specify) _____

What do you not like about “partner talk”?

Do you think you are good at writing opinion pieces?

Appendix H
Teacher Interview Questions

Teacher Interview

1. Please describe the development of each individual student as writers of opinion pieces. Identify elements of progression as related to writing.
2. What concerns did you have, individually or as a group, about the students' development as writers of opinion pieces?
3. What successes did you see?
4. How did the students progress as writers, compared to when you've worked with them with other types of writing? Were you able to see any of the skills they learned during the study transferred to other areas?
5. Did you notice any students moving from writing surface level ideas to those that were more in depth? What do you think contributed to this?
6. What are your thoughts on the effectiveness of partner talk regarding the students' development? What would you do differently next time?
7. In what ways did Thinking Maps aid the students' development?