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## Supporting the Argumentative Writing of Students in Linguistically Diverse Classrooms: An Action Research Study

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### Abstract

The number of English language learners (ELLs) mainstreamed into regular classrooms continues to increase. Curricular writing standards required by the Common Core State Standards require students to write essays analytically in response to text(s). Many English Language Arts (ELA) teachers may worry about effectively delivering essay writing instruction to their ELL students while still meeting the needs of their proficient English-speaking students. This action research study is a direct response to the concern of two middle level teachers about the writing performance of students in their linguistically diverse classrooms on their state's writing assessment. The study examined the effects of strategy-focused writing instruction on the argumentative essay-writing skills of 47 linguistically diverse seventh-grade students. The students received the strategy-focused writing instruction five days per week for 40 minutes over a

16-week period. Analyses of the data revealed that students' overall writing performance increased significantly from pretest to posttest. Students also made significant gains across the pre- and posttest period in the following two domains: (1) Evidence and Elaboration and (2) Conventions of Standard English, but not on the Purpose, Focus, and Organization domain.

*Keywords:* analytic text-based writing, argumentative writing, English language learners, linguistically diverse students, strategy-focused writing instruction

Classrooms in the United States are becoming increasingly diverse with more and more English language learners (ELLs) mainstreamed into the regular classroom. Despite the linguistic diversity in their classrooms, ELA teachers are held accountable for the writing performance of every student. Many English language arts (ELA) teachers may worry

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about effectively delivering writing instruction to their ELLs while still meeting the needs of their proficient English-speaking students.

Proficient writing is vital for success in school and in life beyond school. The very nature by which we assess students requires proficient writing (Graham & Perin, 2007b). Proficient writing skills also enhance student learning, increase opportunity for employment, and facilitate economic success (Langer & Applebee, 2011; National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges [NCW], 2003). Despite this high need for proficient writing, the 2011 NAEP Report Card indicated that only 24% of eighth graders performed at the *Proficient* level in writing (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012).

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) presents even greater challenges to ELA teachers in linguistically diverse classrooms and compels them to change the way they teach essay writing to their students. Traditional argumentative essay writing relies mostly on students' opinions, but with the CCSS students are required to engage in analytic text-based writing (i.e., write analytically in response to stimulus texts). Although the CCSS specify what to teach, they do not provide any directives for mastering analytic text-based writing (Common Core State Standards, n.d.).

There is little current literature that documents effective writing instruction to scaffold linguistically diverse middle school students' analytic text-based essay writing. This action research is a direct response to the concern of the second author about the writing performance of students in her linguistically diverse classroom on the Florida State Assessment. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of strategy focused writing instruction on the argumentative essay writing skills of students in a linguistically diverse middle level classroom. The study addresses two important areas of research in middle level education: (1) effects of the implementation of standards and standardized assessments on instruction, and (2) the ways in which marginalized ELLs respond to standards and standardized assessments (Middle Level Education Research Special Interest Group, 2016).

## Literature Review

Teachers in today's classrooms are expected to effectively deliver instruction to linguistically diverse

students who may be proficient in English or are still learning English as a second language. Regardless of language proficiency, all students are expected to demonstrate competent writing across various genres and are held accountable to the same standards as proficient English-speaking students (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005). The CCSS specifically demands that seventh graders engage in analytic text-based argumentative writing in which they (a) introduce claim(s) and identify alternate or disputing claims, (b) use logical reasoning to provide supporting evidence for the claim(s), (c) effectively use words and phrases to create a cohesive essay while maintaining a formal style, and (d) conclude the argument with supportive information (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010).

### *Argumentative Writing*

Argumentative writing is not an easy communication task because it requires complex cognitive and linguistic skills (Nippold & Ward-Lonergan, 2010). Argument is the essence of critical thinking that entails making a case to sustain a claim, identifying supporting evidence from multiple sources that connects the claim logically, using warrants that support the link between the claim and the supporting evidence, and backing the warrants with support (Hillocks, 2011). For students to demonstrate proficiency in argumentative reading and writing, they should master all these skills. Analytic text-based writing involves both reading and writing. Newell, Beach, Smith, and Vanderheide (2011) defined argumentative reading and writing as follows:

Argumentative reading and writing both involve identification of a thesis (also called a claim), supportive evidence (empirical or experiential), and assessment of warrants connecting the thesis, evidence, and situation constituting an argument. In contrast to simply attempting to persuade someone to believe or do something, evidence-based argumentation involves making a claim supported by reasons or evidence from multiple sources that connects to the claim in a principled way. (pp. 274–275)

The above definition demonstrates the multifaceted nature of argumentative essay writing. In addition to mastering the complex aspects of argumentative writing, students must also master the art of analytic text-based essay writing.

### ***Analytic Text-Based Essay Writing***

To meet the writing requirements of the CCSS, ELA teachers implement analytic text-based essay writing instruction in their classrooms. With analytic-text-based essay writing, students read and process up to three source documents and then use the information to construct an argument and provide supporting evidence from the source texts without plagiarizing. Researchers have investigated different aspects of analytic text-based writing. Matsumura, Correnti, and Wang (2015) were concerned about the instruction teachers provide in hopes of developing their students' text-based writing skills. Consequently, they investigated the role that writing task quality plays in students' mastery of analytic text-based writing. They focused on the tasks teachers deemed most challenging for their students and examined 149 text-based writing tasks collected from 27 fifth-grade classrooms. They found that a large majority of the writing tasks teachers assigned to their students led to the retrieval of low-level cognitive tasks. To increase students' text-based writing skills and help them meet the required standards, they concluded that teachers should design cognitively demanding text-based tasks that facilitate students' ability to reason analytically.

Other research focused on the use of graphic organizer with text-based writing. Collins, Lee, Fox, and Madigan (2017) examined the effects of integrated reading and writing instruction on the reading comprehension of 1,062 fourth- and fifth-grade students in low-performing schools. Results indicated that integrated reading and writing facilitated by thinksheets (graphic organizers) improved reading comprehension better than traditional instruction. Thus, thinksheets may be effective tools for use with analytic text-based analytical writing.

### ***Strategy-Focused and Explicit Writing Instruction***

Teachers must provide all students, including ELLs, with writing tools or effective strategies to help them succeed academically and later in life. Researchers have found strategy-focused instruction to be an essential element in adolescent writing instruction. Graham and Perin's (2007a) meta-analysis identified 11 key elements of adolescent writing instruction and found strategy-focused instruction the most effective (effect size = 0.82). With strategy-focused writing instruction, the teacher identifies a strategy, introduces the strategy to the students through teacher modeling, and allows the students to engage in guided practice with the strategy until individual students finally achieve mastery through repeated practice and reinforcement (Collins, 1998). With strategy-focused

writing instruction, students are explicitly and systematically taught the steps necessary for undertaking specific writing tasks (Fitzgerald & Markham, 1987).

Explicit instruction involves sequencing lessons systematically, teaching new content and target skills directly, providing guided practice, and giving students sufficient opportunities to respond and receive feedback (Kame'enui & Simmons, 1990). Key features of strategy-focused instruction are explaining, teacher modeling, and using think-alouds (De La Paz, 2007; Tompkins, 2006). Effective teachers use explicit instruction to facilitate student learning (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Taylor, Peterson, Pearson, & Rodriguez, 2002). With explicit writing instruction, teachers model targeted behaviors and then provide opportunities for guided practice with corrective feedback, followed by independent practice of the targeted behavior. The teacher gradually withdraws support as students internalize writing skills, thus becoming independent and self-regulated writers (Cannella-Malone, Konrad, & Pennington, 2015).

### ***Scaffolding***

In addition to teaching writing explicitly and strategically, teachers should also provide sufficient instructional scaffolding. Instructional scaffolding refers to types of support provided by teachers (or peers) to help students accomplish a specific task that they are unable to accomplish on their own. Vygotsky (1986) stated that children learn through meaningful social interactions in a supportive learning environment, accompanied by instructional scaffolding. Bruner (1986) described scaffolding as the support that teachers provide to students to facilitate their learning and mastery of new tasks. As students gain knowledge, the teacher gradually withdraws the scaffolding so that students transition from social interaction to working independently.

### ***Peer Review***

Students need feedback on their writing to develop into skilled writers. Peer editing, or peer reviewing, is one way student writers can receive feedback on their writing. Peer reviewing is "[a]n instructional approach that is based on collaboration" (Philippakos, 2017, p. 2). During the peer review process, partners read each other's writing and then provide reciprocal feedback. The peer review process is beneficial for both readers and writers. Writers gain insight into how readers understand their written work and in the process, become aware of areas that need improvement. Readers, on the other hand, develop skills in critically

evaluating the written work (e.g., learning how to identify sections that need clarification or elaboration). The peer review process thus develops analytic and critical thinking skills (Graves, Juel, Graves, & Dewitz, 2011; Kim, 2015; Philippakos, 2017; Philippakos & MacArthur, 2016). Peer reviewing is also motivational. Newell and associates (2011) maintained that students might be more motivated to write for their peers than for their teacher.

Despite the benefits of peer review, several factors may hinder ELLs from optimally using the peer review process, including limited English proficiency, lack of confidence in their language ability and the feedback they must give to their peers, and a preference for teacher feedback. Teachers can facilitate active engagement of ELLs during writing instruction through carefully planned peer review training sessions (Kim, 2015).

## Methodology

### Research Questions

The purpose of this action research study was to examine the effects of strategy-focused writing instruction on the argumentative essay writing skills of linguistically diverse students as measured by one of the Florida State Assessment (FSA) writing rubrics (i.e., the English Language Arts Text-based Writing Rubrics Grades 6–11: Argumentation, henceforth ELA-TBWRA). The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- (1) Will strategy-focused writing instruction improve the argumentative writing skills of students in linguistically diverse middle school classrooms on each domain of the ELA-TBWRA?
- (2) Will strategy-focused writing instruction improve the overall argumentative writing skills of students in linguistically diverse middle school classrooms, as measured by the ELA-TBWRA?
- (3) Will strategy-focused writing instruction improve the argumentative writing skills of ELLs in mainstreamed classrooms on each domain of the ELA-TBWRA?
- (4) Will strategy-focused writing instruction improve the overall argumentative writing skills of ELLs in mainstreamed classrooms, as measured by the ELA-TBWRA?

### Sample

The study used a convenience sample (Mills & Gay, 2016) drawn from a middle school in South Florida. The total school population consisted of 1,449

students that included 41.2% Hispanic, 33.7% Black, 18.6% Caucasian, and 6.5% other students. Most students (83.9%) receive free or reduced lunch. The sample consisted of linguistically diverse seventh-grade students ( $N = 47$ ) including ELLs.

### Instrument

The main data source was the ELA-TBWRA (Florida Department of Education, 2014), a test aligned to the FSA Standards. The total number of possible points a student can obtain on the ELA-TBWRA is 10. The ELA-TBWRA consists of the following three domains:

- Purpose, Focus, and Organization (four possible points);
- Evidence and Elaboration (four possible points); and
- Conventions of Standard English (two possible points).

### Procedure

A pre- and posttest were administered before and after implementation of the strategy-focused writing instruction. Students received the strategy-focused writing instruction five days per week for 40 minutes during a 16-week period. At the beginning of the school year, prior to implementing the intervention, writing instruction mostly consisted of helping students become acquainted with and comprehending the new terminology contained in the FSA–ELA Writing (i.e., informative vs. expository and argumentative vs. persuasive). Students also must understand that they were expected to engage in analytic, text-based essay writing as opposed to relying on their opinions. They also must learn that both argumentative and informative essays do not use first- and singular-person pronouns; in these types of writing, it is not about what the writer thinks or states, the focus is on what the text states and how well the ideas are supported by textual evidence. Teachers had students use Cornell notes to facilitate the correct way of stating textual evidence. Once the students mastered the new terminology, the two participating teachers focused on implementing the strategies identified by the school administrators for improving students' essay writing performance.

The school mandated that the following four strategies be implemented across school curricula: (1) interactive read-alouds, (2) close reading (and text markup), (3) Cornell notetaking, and (4) restate-answer-prove (RAP). All teachers combined the strategies with

vocabulary instruction and were required to implement the RAP strategy as part of their 5- to 7-minute “Do Now” activities at the beginning of class.

**Read-alouds.** With this instructional practice, the teacher reads the stimulus text(s) aloud, and the teacher and students discuss the topic and vocabulary in the text (s). Read-alouds are particularly beneficial for ELLs and students with poor reading skills as they facilitate deeper understanding of language and text structure, and build vocabulary knowledge (Graves et al., 2011).

**Close reading (text markup).** With close reading, students critically examine a text through repeated readings. Close reading provides students with the opportunity to explore the deep structures of the stimulus text(s) and helps with building stamina when students read complex texts (Fisher & Frey, 2012). The focal teachers in this study used cognitive modeling (think-alouds) to teach students how to annotate a text (i.e., text markups) before they engaged in close reading.

**Cornell notetaking.** The Cornell notetaking system is an established notetaking system that includes the following six-step learning strategies: (1) record, (2) reduce and question, (3) recite, (4) reflect, (5) recapitulation, and (6) review (Gunning, 2012). The focal teachers in this study engaged their students in Cornell notetaking throughout the duration of the intervention.

**RAP (restate-answer-prove).** RAP is a metacognitive strategy that facilitates paraphrasing and identification of supporting text evidence. The focal teachers introduced students to RAP with the following two statements:

- Restate and Answer: In one sentence, restate the performance task in your own words and answer the questions.
- Prove: Prove your ANSWER by analyzing particular lines of the text. Cite three pieces of textual evidence to support your analysis.

### ***The Intervention***

To facilitate their students’ essay writing skills, the two participating ELA teachers started by providing each student with a writing folder that contained the following:

- The RAP statements (the RAP statements were also posted on the classroom walls);
- Seventh-grade anchor papers (i.e., examples of student work at different levels of performance, along with rubrics);
- Lists of active verbs and transition words; and
- The weekly writing prompt.

The first page of the packet contained instructions for the writing prompt. The teachers ensured that all the students understood the instructions. The teachers spent the first two weeks on essential vocabulary, using the lists of active verbs and transition words, and on writing a short story/narrative. The students showed significant weakness in the use of mechanics and grammar. The teachers provided the necessary remediation, focusing on sentence structure and mechanics through modeling, and both guided and individual practice. Teachers continuously taught vocabulary development, grammar, and mechanics throughout the intervention period. Each class period lasted 45 minutes, and students received the writing intervention five times a week for 40 minutes. The five-day writing instruction cycle was implemented as described in the following paragraphs.

**Day 1: Explanation and discussion of organizational structure.** The teachers read the assigned prompt aloud, while students followed on their copy. While the teachers read aloud, the students underlined the verbs and circled the nouns within the prompt. Students also indicated in the prompt box any adjective(s) that defined the type of writing in which they would engage over the next few days. Teachers typically used day one to explain and discuss the organizational structure of an argumentative essay and the importance of planning. If time permitted, the class began with analysis of the anchor paper.

**Day 2: Analysis and planning.** On the second day, each teacher first modeled how to analyze the anchor paper by projecting it on the SMART Board. As she engaged in close reading of the anchor paper, she modeled the use of a simple “Mark the Text” annotation process through think-alouds.

The students next worked in small groups and continued with the close reading and text markups while the teacher provided guided feedback. Groups then used the assessment rubric to assess the anchor paper. This helped them understand what type of writing would meet the required standards. Annotating the anchor paper also compelled students to read metacognitively as they applied fix-up strategies like clarifying, predicting, monitoring, and questioning.

After analysis of the anchor paper, students analyzed the writing prompt and then planned their essays. Analysis of the prompt involved marking the text within the prompt, underlining and explaining verbs, and locating and explaining nouns as well as substituting nouns with synonyms for a future use in the essay. All these small

steps helped students plan thoroughly, but these steps were often absent in the normal planning process for the large majority of the students.

Planning is an essential component in the writing process that not only helps students reflect on what they want to say, but also on how they want to say it. To plan their essays, students in the study used a blank sheet (included on the prompt sheet) and create a structural outline for the essay. This outline consists of a graphic organizer like a web, a list, a map, or a sequence of boxes that signal the introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion, and so forth. Students can use an outline of their choice.

**Day 3: Introduction.** The teachers modeled how to write an introduction (i.e., must contain a topic sentence, a claim, and a thesis statement) by restating the prompt and writing one body paragraph. The teachers also demonstrated how to use the list of active verbs and high academic vocabulary. The students then practiced writing the introduction, while the teacher provided guided feedback.

**Day 4: Body paragraphs.** Using their previous knowledge about claim, counterclaim, argument, and rebuttal, the students continued writing the rest of the body paragraphs, while the teacher provided guided feedback. Some students constructed a three-paragraph essay, while others constructed longer essays. Teachers reminded students daily that a correctly written essay should contain a minimum of three paragraphs. Extended essays were based on the writers' perception of the supporting details of the main idea found in the introduction (i.e., the thesis statement).

**Day 5: Conclusion.** After the teachers modeled writing the conclusion, students were given opportunity for guided practice, and then revised their essays based on teacher and peer feedback. This feedback and revising process took up to three days and was a vital component of the writing process. Using a sample text projected on a screen, the teacher used think-alouds to model the peer review process. Before students provided feedback to their peers, they first must practice how to provide constructive feedback. The teacher continuously monitored and guided the peer review process.

## Results

The study used a one-group, pretest-posttest design with a within-subjects *t*-test (paired samples) to analyze the data and to answer research questions one and two. Paired sample tests are used for comparisons with a

continuous dependent variable when there is one measurement variable and two nominal variables (Macdonald, 2014). The dependent variable in this study was argumentative writing achievement as measured by the ELA-TBWRA, and the independent variable was type of instruction (strategy-focused writing instruction). Results are organized by research question.

Research question one examined the relationship between strategy-focused instruction and the argumentative writing skills of linguistically diverse students ( $N = 47$ ) on each domain of the ELA-TBWRA. Data analysis suggested that students made significant gains during the pre- to posttest period in two domains of the ELA-TBWRA: Evidence and Elaboration, and Conventions of Standard English. There was a statistically significant difference in students' Evidence and Elaboration scores from pretest ( $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) to posttest ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ );  $t(46) = -3.14$ ,  $p = .003$  following the strategy-focused instruction. There was also a significant difference in students' Conventions of Standard English scores from pretest ( $M = 1.62$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ) to posttest ( $M = 1.89$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ );  $t(46) = -3.28$ ,  $p = .002$  following the strategy-focused instruction.

Research question two examined the relationship between strategy-focused instruction and middle school students' overall argumentative writing skills as measured by the ELA-TBWRA. Analyses of the data indicated a significant difference in students' overall scores from pretest ( $M = 6.5$ ,  $SD = 1.99$ ) to posttest ( $M = 7.34$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ );  $t(46) = -9.958$ ,  $p = .002$  following the strategy-focused instruction. Results are presented in Figure 1.

Research question three examined the relationship between strategy-focused instruction and the argumentative writing skills of ELLs in mainstreamed classrooms ( $N = 14$ ), on each domain of the ELA-TBWRA. Analysis of the data suggested that students did not make any significant gains on any of the domains of the ELA-TBWRA. There was no statistically significant difference in students' Purpose, Focus, and Organization scores from pretest ( $M = 2.32$ ,  $SD = 0.77$ ) to posttest ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ),  $t(13) = -1.524$ ,  $p = .151$ . There was no statistically significant difference in students' Evidence and Elaboration scores from pretest ( $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) to posttest ( $M = 2.43$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ),  $t(13) = -2.59$ ,  $p = .022$ , and there was no statistically significant Conventions of Standard English scores from pretest ( $M = 1.36$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) to posttest ( $M = 2.43$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ),  $t(13) = -2.69$ ,  $p = .019$ .

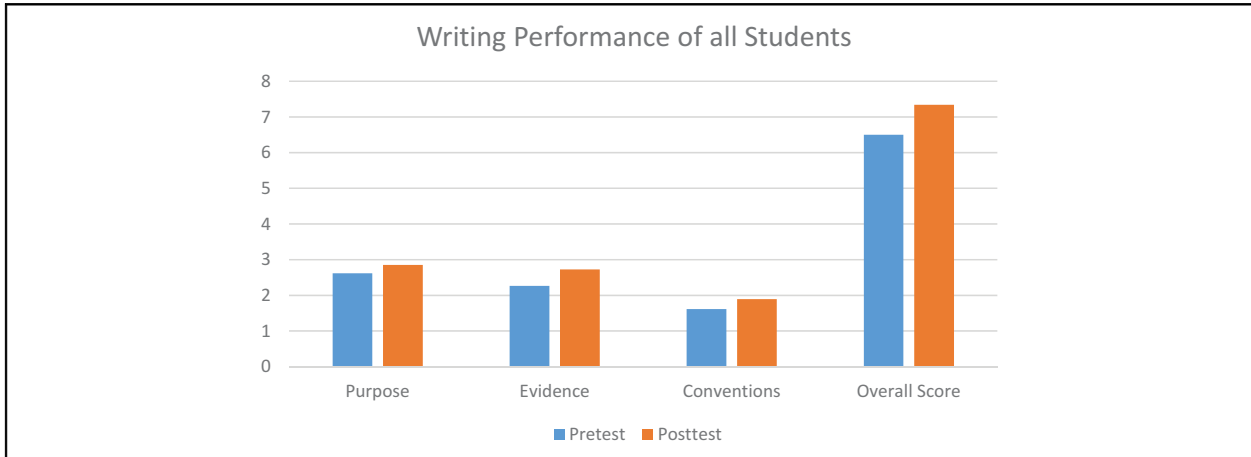


Figure 1. Combined mean scores of both proficient English-speaking students and ELLs as measured by the ELA-TBWRA

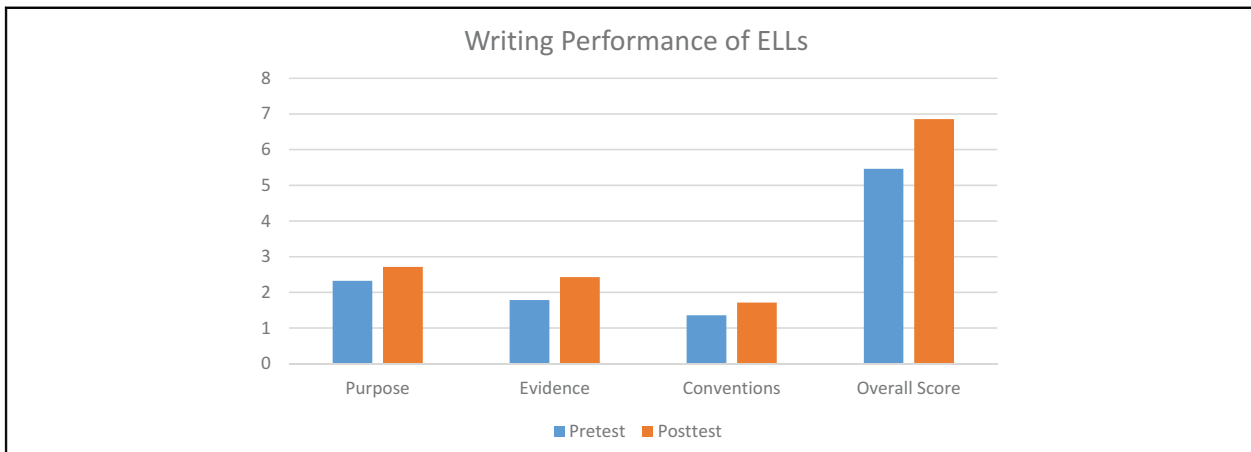


Figure 2. Mean scores of ELLs as measured by the ELA-TBWRA

Research question four examined the relationship between strategy-focused writing instruction and the overall argumentative writing skills of ELLs in mainstreamed classrooms as measured by the ELA-TBWRA. Analysis of the data indicated no statistically significant difference in students' total scores from pretest ( $M = 5.46$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) to posttest ( $M = 6.71$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ),  $t(13) = -3.22$ ,  $p = .007$ . Results are presented in Figure 2.

### Discussion

Even in linguistically diverse classrooms, ELA teachers are held accountable for the writing performance of every student because all students are expected to be equally successful on state-mandated writing assessments. Thus, many ELA teachers may be concerned about effectively delivering writing instruction to their mainstreamed ELLs while still

meeting the needs of their other students. This action research study examined the impact of strategy-focused writing instruction on the argumentative writing performance of students in linguistically diverse middle school classrooms. Results suggest that when students receive strategy-focused writing instruction, their overall writing performance can improve. Results also suggest that strategy-focused writing instruction can improve students' performance on the (1) Evidence and Elaboration, and the (2) Conventions of Standard English domains of the ELA-TBWRA. Results indicate that the students did not show significant improvement on the Purpose, Focus, and Organization domain. This is also the domain on which the ELLs made the least gains, which probably affected the overall Purpose, Focus, and Organization scores. Low scores on the Purpose, Focus, and Organization suggest that students demonstrated difficulty in (1) addressing alternate or opposing claims, (2) using a variety of transitional strategies to clarify the



relationships, (3) using logical progression of ideas from beginning to end with a satisfying introduction and conclusion, or (4) maintaining and establishing appropriate style and tone.

The ELL students received the same strategy-focused writing instruction within their mainstreamed classrooms, and their teachers scaffolded their writing experiences in the same way they did for the rest of the students. The writing scores of the ELLs did not indicate a significant difference. Mean scores on each domain of the ELA-TBWRA as well as overall writing scores suggest an increasing trend, from pretest to posttest, following the strategy-focused writing instruction. This finding suggests that in addition to the strategy-focused writing instruction, ELLs need instruction that takes into account their unique personal experience and diverse backgrounds (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005). ELLs would thus benefit optimally from strategy-focused writing instruction coupled with culturally relevant writing instruction that adopts specific strategies and supports to meet their unique needs (Ladson-Billings, 1995). “Business as usual” will not work.

Learning to engage in analytic text-based writing seems to be a challenging task for ELLs. Even with teacher modeling and guided feedback, following the steps involved in the strategy-focused writing instruction was difficult for them since many of them were still learning to speak English. Although there was some structure in their writing, they often combined English and Spanish words, which resulted in confusing or ambiguous claims, and frequent extraneous ideas that impede comprehension (i.e., the same elements assessed on the Purpose, Focus, and Organization domain). Some ELLs also displayed poor oral communication in English, often resorted to Google translator, and did not have confidence in their written and oral language skills. On the other hand, other ELLs who demonstrated lack of elaborate paragraphs were able to produce longer sentences containing context-specific vocabulary. This calls into question the validity of tests like ELA-TBWRA: Do they really assess ELLs’ argumentative writing skills, or do they merely measure their English proficiency? See Panofsky and associates (2005) for further explication of issues associated with the assessment of ELLs’ writing.

### Limitations

As with any action research, this study has certain limitations (Mills & Gay, 2016). The study used a

one-group, pretest-posttest design. One limitation of this type of design is that it has almost no external validity. However, a key characteristic of action research is to assist teachers in becoming more efficient in the teaching and development of their own students (Sagor, 2000). In this study, the teachers were concerned about their students’ writing skills and thus provided strategy-focused writing instruction to help them improve their writing performance. Another limitation of the one-group, pretest-posttest design is a possible history effect as events outside the experiment or participants may have affected the student scores.

Furthermore, the four selected strategies were implemented school-wide and thus supplemented the strategy-focused writing instruction delivered by the two teachers. This supplemental instruction could also have affected students’ posttest results. In addition, the strategy-focused writing instruction lasted only 16 weeks. Hillocks (2010) contended that an effective argumentative writing instruction curriculum that includes the teaching of claims, warrants, and logical reasoning takes time. A longer intervention that includes more support for ELLs might significantly improve their essay-writing performance.

### Implications and Directions for Future Research

Overall, the study demonstrates that explicit and direct strategy-focused writing instruction, coupled with teacher scaffolding, may be effective in improving the overall writing performance of students in linguistically diverse middle level classrooms. Based on the findings, continuously providing grammar and mechanics instruction appeared to be an important component of an effective writing instruction curriculum. Students should also have time to practice how to give feedback to their peers before engaging in the peer feedback process. Additionally, teachers should consistently monitor and guide peer feedback.

Although the study demonstrates that strategy-focused writing instruction is effective in improving the overall writing performance of students in linguistically diverse middle level classrooms, the students in this study did not achieve mastery on the Purpose, Focus, and Organization domain of the ELA-TBWRA, and neither did the ELLs as a subgroup make significant improvement in their writing performance. The findings warrant further research that can add to the knowledge base about

argumentative text-based essay writing instruction. Given the linguistic diversity in today's classrooms, there is a specific need for the investigation of writing instruction interventions that feature a comprehensive curriculum for teaching argument that includes teaching claims, warrants, and logical reasoning (i.e., essential elements assessed on the Purpose, Focus, and Organization domain of the ELA-TBWRA). Such interventions should be designed with ELLs in mind (Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005), but should also meet the needs of the English-speaking students in linguistically diverse classrooms. Although future research in this area is clearly needed, the findings of this study emphasize the potential that strategy-focused analytic writing instruction has in enhancing the writing proficiency of students in linguistically diverse middle level classrooms.

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