

Let's use an iPad App: Struggling Writers use of Digital Art Media for making Story Plans

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Abstract

Students' use of technology for writing is becoming increasingly required with the Common Core State Standards and tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). State and NAEP assessments indicate that a large number of students, as many as 75%, cannot write at a basic level. The US and other countries have implemented response to intervention (RTI) in public schools to address the needs of students who struggle with core skills such as writing. With RTI-type interventions, struggling writers have the opportunity to improve and return to general-education programming. As part of an intervention for writing, the author developed STORY as a mnemonic-strategy to help children better manage planning and text generation. In a mixed-methods design format, two intervention specialists provided second-, third-, and fourth-grade struggling writers (N=8) with 31 sessions of intervention programming (45 minutes per session). All students improved with story content but quality lagged in comparison. The author also met with the general education teachers and two writing intervention specialists in four 1-hour sessions to discuss students' progress with the intervention activities as well as the application of RTI components to their school and classrooms.

Keywords: Writing, assistive technology, intervention programming.

Generation of ideas and encoding them into text can be a challenging task for many children in public schools (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2012). To help address this need, many schools are renewing their emphasis on intensive-intervention programming with the response to intervention (RTI) paradigm (Gresham, 2002). RTI processes help students who struggle with core skills such as writing improve and hopefully not need special education classification, remove the use of standardized tests which discriminate against students from diverse backgrounds, and promote team programming between general and special education. In this study, the author explored two aspects of RTI: 1) how students' story products would compare by first saying their ideas aloud and then writing them on paper during the thirty-one 45-minute sessions; and 2) during four 1-hour discussion sessions with the author and two intervention specialist instructors, how do the students' teachers view RTI processes as being employable in their school and classrooms as students progressed in the intervention's timeline? During these discussions, the author had the opportunity to explain the history and rationale for RTI.

RTI's Rationale and Systems for Intervention Programming

The conceptual paradigm of response to intervention is based on a multi-tiered intervention framework, having general and special education teachers dialogue regularly about students' progress, assessment practices based on students' skills as demonstrated with classroom activities, and only considering special education classification if a student's intervention scores indicate a dual discrepancy (i.e., low ability, little/no progress over time; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Mellard & Johnson, 2008).

Since the passage by the US Congress of the Specific Learning Disabilities Act (1969), there have been an ever-increasing number of late elementary, middle, and secondary students whom schools have classified into special education (Lyon, Fletcher, S. Shaywitz, B. Shaywitz, Torgesen, Wood, Schulte, & Olson, 2001). For writing, learning disability (LD) is often the category for which a student is classified (as many as 50% of students in special education; US Department of Education, 2011). In 1980, the Heartland Education Association (Iowa) created and implemented a tiered-system of early-intervention programming to help children improve in

core academic skills and use their progress-monitoring data to classify students, when warranted (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003).

In 1982, the National Research Council commissioned Heller, Holtzman, and Messick to study the issue of late classification into special education. They concluded that special education classification be based on three criteria. First, general education programming needs to be adequate for learning to occur. Teachers should have instructional tools and resources that represent effective means for students to progress with learning. Second, special education programming should hold promise for improved student outcomes so as to warrant classification. Third, the assessment process should be accurate and meaningful. School's classification processes, such as for writing, need to be more inclusive of a review of classroom programming and practices, measuring students' progress over time, and meaningful types of assessment (i.e., based on classroom activities).

Since the development of Barbara Batemen's reading index in the 1930's, the concept of an LD assessment continued for years to be tied to IQ/achievement discrepancy (Bateman, 1965). More recently during the conceptual creation of RTI for educational practices, the use of standardized tests have come under closer scrutiny. Siegel (1999) reviewed the case histories of students with an LD and concluded that standardized tests, such as IQ, are discriminatory against students from diverse backgrounds and present ethical concerns (e.g., asking a student to comprehend a passage when decoding is a challenge). RTI advocates (e.g., Gresham, 2002; Fuchs et al, 2003) suggest that curriculum-based measurement (CBM; Deno, 2003) offers a responsible alternative as they can be created by teachers from the content being taught in the classroom (e.g., words read correctly within one minute, number of words written in a text). Charting students' progress over time can document whether an underlying learning difficulty exists and if more intensive or long-term remedial programming is warranted within RTI's typical three-tier framework (Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2007).

Tier 1

In Tier 1, students receive programming in the general education classroom (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007). As described previously, the curriculum, materials, and practices should be representative of other well-performing classrooms across the nation. For

story writing, a research-validated component is Graham and Harris' (1989) WWW, W=2, H=2 cue questions for what a text should include: who? when? where? what happened, what happened next? how did the story end? how did the characters feel? To employ WWW, W=2, H=2 within a schema for story writing, the teacher can use a step-by-step process (mnemonic strategy; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1992) to demonstrate and teach students how to manage generating a story text.

About 80% of students should be meeting benchmark expectations for a core skill such as writing. The Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association & Council of Chief state School Officers, 2010) now define grade-level writing criteria as focusing on narrative, informative, and opinion types of texts as well as the use of technology for text generation; handwriting is emphasized only to the end of first grade. To assess for this criterion, general education teachers have students do short assessments (referred to as *universal screening*) three times per year (e.g., September, January, and April). In the opinion of this author, teachers should be reflective about students' universal screening scores. If a student who typically does well in class does not meet benchmark criteria for the universal screening assessment, the teacher should consider whether an extraneous circumstance can explain the unexpected result such as difficulties at home, not having felt well while doing the assessment, or the format of the lesson. The teacher's voice is vital in interpreting students' scores (Troia & Maddox, 2004; Wirsing, 2009). Teachers know their curriculum practices and content (e.g., size of their class) which can impact how and to what extent students learn the content being provided. For students who have not met benchmark, the teacher should synthesize any other assessment data, discuss the students cases with the school's multidisciplinary team (e.g., administrator, special education teacher, school psychologist, speech and language pathologist, behavior management specialist, etc.) and develop a follow-up intervention plan.

Tier 2

Tier 2 represents where students who struggle with core academic skills such as writing receive intensive instruction (e.g., 30-50 minutes per day, 4-5 times per week; Haager, Klingner, & Vaughn, 2007). There are three formats to providing Tier 2 programming. First, the standard protocol model has teachers use a publisher-created curriculum (e.g., e.g., writing components of READ 180; Scholastic, n.d.). The premise in this model is that there is a small group of students

with similar needs who would benefit from the activities that the already-created program offers—i.e., standardized, everyone gets the same intervention. A second option is the problem-solving model. When the teacher discusses a student's cases at the multidisciplinary meeting, the team either continues the discussion or meets at another time to develop a set of intervention activities that either the teacher or paraprofessional during the 5-12 weeks that follow. The distinguishing aspect of problem solving is that the intervention components are teacher-created and designed for the unique needs of the student(s).

In the creation of the daily lesson-plan components, the teacher then should consider the children's characteristics. For example, students who struggle with writing often have an affinity for art, which can be part of the planning stage (Freilich, & Shechtman, 2010; Moss, 2011). Students would not have to spend precious mental energy on spelling; rather they could note their ideas and story line as a picture. iPad (Apple, 2013) art apps (e.g., Doodle Buddy; Pinger, Inc, 2011) can serve this purpose.

At every third to fifth session, the teacher collects some curriculum-based measurement (CBM; Deno, 2003) data from the student (e.g., have the student write a story) and score the text for content (e.g., how many key questions were answered such as who? when? where?), quality (the overall text's use of conventions, syntax, storyline progression, etc.), and number of words written for a sense of overall length. These scores are then placed on a chart as a broken line graph. At the end of the sessions' timeline, the multidisciplinary team reviews the data chart and decides if the student made sufficient progress to no longer be dually discrepant (i.e., low ability, and little or no progress over time) or if the intervention's components could be redesigned for the student to better improve in a second series of sessions.

If the student has made even some degree of improvement (e.g., being 150% above baseline by the end of the intervention's timeline; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2004), then the child could return to the general education classroom. If the student has not made progress even after a second intervention cycle, then the child could participate in a more intensive intervention in Tier 3.

Tier 3

What Tier 3 should entail is a topic of much debate (Haager et al., 2007). One option is that students receive an even more intensive intervention (e.g., more time per session, smaller group size, or even just one student with the teacher). A second option is that the intervention's daily sessions focus on cognitive-skills activities (e.g., improving processing speed, attentional skills) as compared to Tiers 1 and 2, which focused on academic tasks (e.g., reading, writing, and/or math; Fuchs & Kearns, 2008). A third idea is that Tier 3 be the timeframe in which a student completes assessment for possible special education classification. A fourth option is that Tier 3 represent special education, long-term programming. Whichever option a school or district chooses for Tier 3, it represents the culmination of a series of increasingly intensive programming for children who struggle with core academic skills such as writing.

Challenges that a Struggling Writer can Experience

Writing is a complex task because idea generation, planning, spelling, sentence creation, generating text during multiple drafts, and revising for a publishable copy must work concurrently and sequentially in order to produce a quality product (Baker, Chard, Ketterlin-Geller, Apichatabutra, & Doabler, 2009; Graham & Harris, 2013). In terms of initiating a text, struggling writers can have difficulty with idea generation: not being sure about what to choose as a topic (Lassonde & Richards, 2013). Even once a topic is selected, the next challenge is to plan what the text should contain. Many students who struggle with writing also have difficulty with reading (Shaywitz, 2003). This demonstrates the Matthew effect (i.e., the rich get richer, the poor get poorer) because if a student does not read regularly to see published writers' prose, struggling writers will not have a framework and set of examples to use in the development of their own writing. Due to this, struggling writers' prose is often short and more of a repetitive list than a well-sequenced storyline with descriptive text. Part of the reason for this is that they do not engage in word and sentence analysis on a regular basis to develop their proficiency in these areas. The increasing prevalence of technology tools may help to address these areas (Butler, Monda-Amaya, & Yoon, 2013; Edyburn, 2013; Karchmer-Klein, 2013).

The growing popularity of eReaders and word-prediction software provides ways for struggling writers to improve their skills (MacArthur, 2009). Students can listen to books being

read as they follow along on the screen. This is especially helpful for content-area textbooks, which often pose the greatest challenge for a struggling reader to decode given the terminology and dense content. For generating text, struggling writers can also text to the computer using text-to-speech software and see their prose being printed on the monitor. To help students manage the process of composing a text, mnemonic-strategy instruction is an research/evidence-based method for organizing and finessing a text.

In this study, the author sought to explore two questions:

1. Would second-, third-, and fourth-grade writers (N=8) improve their writing skills by using the STORY mnemonic strategy, developed by the author, during 45-minute sessions over 31 days?
1. After four 1-hour discussion sessions with the author and two intervention specialists, who provided STORY instruction to the students, would the teachers consider intervention programming to be feasible for writing within an RTI context as feasible within their classrooms?

Methods

The author attained human subjects approval for the completion of this project, which employed a mixed-methods research design (Check & Schutt, 2012). Quantitative data included students' curriculum-based measurement (CBM; Deno, 2003) scores of story content and quality data from students' stories during author-selected progress monitoring sessions across the project's baseline and intervention phases. In using CBM across phases, students should be progress monitored at least 3-5 times in a given phase; if the phase has more than five sessions, CBM data should be collected every three to five sessions. Also during the timeline of the study, the author met with the four general education teachers and two intervention specialists (hereafter collectively referred to as *teachers*) for four 1-hour discussion sessions to review students' progress and talk about RTI and its application to general education classroom contexts.

Both teachers and students provided qualitative data (Briggs, 1986; Hendricks, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Students provided their perspectives about writing at the

beginning of the project and at the end offered feedback about the STORY mnemonic strategy's components and applying it for story writing. The initial writing interest survey (Rhodes, 1993) asked students questions such as: who do you know is a good writer? What makes someone a good writer? Are you a good writer? What do you like about your writing?

At the end of the study, the the intervention specialists asked the student participants the following: 1) Did you like learning the story-writing strategies? Why? 2) Were they helpful in your writing? How so? 3) Did you use the strategies for writing tasks in your classroom or outside of school? When and how? 4) Do you think the strategies could help other children be better writers? Why? 5) Is there any part of the strategies that you would change? How so? Students responded with one- or two-sentence answers. The intervention specialists noted each student's answers at the time of the interview and repeated the children's answers to have them confirm their statements.

The teachers, with the author, discussed response to intervention (RTI) as an instructional paradigm and how programming could be managed within the regular classroom context. For each session, the author asked the group to have read one of four articles (Dunn, 2011; Dunn and Mabry, 2011; Fuchs et al., 2003; Lyon et al., 2001) about RTI and intervention programming to help promote discussion amongst the group. The author audio recorded the end-of-project interviews, which the transcriptionist later typed into text. The author provided each teacher and intervention specialist with a copy of their interview's comments for review, verification of accuracy, and to offer clarifications, if they so choose.

The interview questions were: 1) What now is your understanding of response to intervention; describe its components as you understand them? 2) What are your thoughts about the RTI process as provided the student(s) with the help of the intervention specialist? 3) Do you see the RTI practices as feasible for continuation after the end of this study? Why or why not? The author reviewed all of the qualitative data multiple times, determined themes and outliers, and chose illustrative quotes from participants to explain each theme (Briggs, 1986; Hendricks, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000).

Setting

The study took place at a suburban elementary school in a Pacific Northwest US state during October-December of 2011. The racial demographics for the school were 69.6% White, 1.9% Black, 14.6% Hispanic, 0.4% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 3.3% Asian, 1.8% Pacific Islander, and 8.8% two or more races. A total of 49.1% of the student population participated in the school's free or reduced lunch program. Special Education served 14% of the school population. The district had a constructivist philosophy (Dewey, 1938) but was beginning to implement, in a piecemeal fashion, the concepts and practices of response to intervention such as universal screening (e.g., a district-created literacy assessment administered at the beginning of the school year) and data-based decision making about teachers' instructional choices through grade-level meetings (e.g., professional learning communities).

The author asked the school's principal to inquire with the second-, third-, and fourth-grade general education teachers about participating in 4 one-hour discussion sessions about RTI and having some struggling writers receive intervention programming. One second-grade, one third-grade, and two fourth-grade general education teachers agreed to participate. Their professional experience ranged from 4.5-26 years ($M=14.6$ years). They devoted 50-60 ($M=57.5$) minutes per day for writing. The teachers emphasized their use of the ideas from Routman (2005) as well as the standard writing-process model (plan, rough draft, revise, edit, student conferencing, and final draft) such as in Calkins, Martinelli, Kessler, and Gillette's [2006] *Units of Study for Teaching Writing*. The teachers also referenced a variety of resources in their lesson plans for writing (e.g., *Step up to Writing* by Auman [2002]; *First Steps in Writing* [Remedial Publications, 2011]; Fletcher and Portalupi's [2001] *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide*; and the Six Traits of Writing from Education Northwest [2012]).

Student Participants

Eight students from second to fourth grade participated in this study. Descriptive information about each student participant is listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Student Participants Descriptive Information

<u>Student</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Race/ Ethnicity</u>	<u>Receiving Supplemental Services</u>	<u>Reading Level as defined by district and publisher assessments</u>	<u>General education teachers' rating: reading¹</u>	<u>General education teachers' rating: math¹</u>
Domingo	4	Latino	Yes: 30 minutes daily (150 minutes/week) for English Language Learner (ELL) support	Late third grade	Lower 20%	Lower 20%
Nancy	4	Caucasian	No	Early fifth grade	Upper 20%	Lower 20%
Carter	3	Caucasian	Yes: supplemental reading 4 times per week for 30 minutes per session	Early third grade	Lower 20%	Mid 20%
Oscar	3	Caucasian	No	Late third grade	Upper 20%	Upper 20%
Kate	2	Caucasian	No	Early second grade	Bottom 20%	Bottom 20%
Tom	2	Caucasian	No	Early third grade	Upper 20%	Top 20%
Charles	4	Caucasian	Yes: small-group instruction 2-3 times per week (30-40 minutes total per week) for generating ideas and learn graphic tools for planning and organizing of writing.	Early fifth grade	Upper 20%	Top 20%
Edward	4	Caucasian	Yes: small-group instruction 2-3 times per week (30-40 minutes total per week) for generating ideas and learn graphic tools for planning and organizing of writing.	Early fourth grade	Mid 20%	Mid 20%

¹Note: The author asked general education teachers to rate their students as to where in the range of ability the child placed for reading and math amongst their class overall—knowing that each student placed in the bottom 30% of writing ability. The scale's range was: bottom 20%, lower 20%, middle 20%, upper 20%, and top 20%.

The general education teachers nominated these students for participation in the project as they demonstrated low writing ability and being in the bottom 30% for writing skills in their class. Other intervention studies have used a 30% or lower criterion

(e.g., Coyne, D. Simmons, Hagan-Burke, L. Simmons, Kwok, Kim, Fogarty, Oslund, et al., 2013; Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, Pratt, Chen, et al., 1996).

General Instructional Procedures

The two intervention specialists, Melanie and Elaine, had both recently completed a Master's-in-Teaching graduate degree at a local university. They provided 1:1 instructional programming for up to 45 minutes per session to student participants in the media center. Melanie and Elaine had previously met with the author for four 1-hour training sessions in how to teach the daily sessions' intervention components. The sessions' format was one of the following types across the study's phases: baseline, training, and intervention.

During the baseline phase (total of four sessions), the intervention specialists greeted each student for 2-3 minutes and then presented them with a simple cartoon picture, which had no dialogue balloons, and two other sheets of paper: one for planning, and one for writing. The intervention specialist provided the directions: write a story about the picture or some other topic of your choosing; you can use one piece of paper for planning and the other for writing; spell words as best you can and know that you will not lose points for misspelled words; you can have 10 minutes to plan and 15 minutes to write; you may begin. Once the student had completed their text, the intervention specialist directed the child to return to their classroom. Baseline sessions did not require all 45 minutes as the objective of this phase was only to gather data about baseline levels of writing ability.

During the training phase, each student met with their intervention specialist for all 45 minutes. The objective of this phase was for the student to learn the STORY mnemonic strategy within the self-regulated strategy development (SRSD; Graham & Harris, 2005) format. Graham and Perin's (2007a, 2007b) meta-analyses of mnemonic strategy instruction concluded that it is a highly effective method for helping students learn a step-by-step process for managing an academic skill such as writing.

SRSD comprises six steps which provide a recursive sequence of teaching and review to promote students' mastery of a mnemonic strategy such as STORY. First,

students had completed a story-writing universal probe (i.e., all general education students' writing a story about a cartoon picture in their classroom) as well as a writing interest inventory questionnaire during the first baseline session. These documents provided the author and intervention specialists with a sense of how students felt and managed story writing.

Second, the intervention specialists discussed the aim and components of the STORY mnemonic strategy with each student: to learn and apply a step-by-step means to manage planning and composing a story text with STORY: Start thinking about WWW, W=2, H=2 questions (e.g., who, when, where; Graham & Harris, 1989); Think about your answers and illustrate them; Organize and say your story out loud; Revise your text's ideas and write it on paper; You can make edits and read it to others.

Third, the intervention specialists cognitively modeled the strategy for the students by verbalizing all of their thoughts in preparing and following STORY's steps such as: I need to get my iPad and open it to the Doodle Buddy app (Pinger, Inc, 2011); make a drawing to illustrate each of my answers to the WWW, W=2, H=2 questions; I choose to make my story about a visit to the park; I will have Mary and her mom going to the park at 2pm; after arriving, she meets a friend, Susie, from school; they play soccer, and Mary wins; Susie's mom then invites Mary and her mom to stay for a BBQ dinner with them at the park; Mary was then content to return home with her mom. The intervention specialist then verbalized her story ideas aloud. Next, she made edits to her ideas while writing the text of her story on paper, made final edits, and read her written text aloud. The student then reviewed the story and process with the intervention specialist.

Fourth, each student reviewed STORY so as to memorize its steps. By committing them to memory, the student can better apply them when writing. Also, memorization of the mnemonic strategy includes the student's commitment to applying as well as their energy and interest in doing an activity. Fifth, the intervention specialist demonstrated the strategy a few more times with the student's collaboration. Together, they planned and wrote stories following the STORY mnemonic strategy process. Sixth, the student was the prime story creator and writer in planning and encoding texts with the aim of applying the STORY process independently. In doing so, the student developed an ability to maintain STORY in memory as well as consider how the

mnemonic strategy could be applied to other types of writing tasks such as writing about a historical figure's life or a past event.

The author chose to offer four sessions for training as this was his experience with his other recent writing projects and what other studies had illustrated (e.g., Mason et al. 2012). The goals for students by the end of training were: to be able to recite the STORY steps from memory as well as voice aloud and write a text that was above their baseline levels for content and quality.

In the intervention phase, the intervention specialists followed a lesson plan: 2 minutes to meet and greet with the student; five minutes to read from a story book and discuss its contents; three minutes to practice spelling some of the words from the story; five minutes to create some sentences and add descriptive words (e.g., adjectives, adverbs); five minutes to make a compound sentence with conjunctions (e.g., and, but, or); and 25 minutes to practice applying STORY as learned during the training phase. About every third session, students completed a story-writing assessment. A week after the intervention phase ended, students were reconvened to do a final maintenance probe to ascertain how much of STORY they had maintained in memory.

Assessment of Story-Writing Ability

As part of the data across the timeline for this project, students completed story probes all four days of baseline, every few days during the intervention phase, and one final probe at maintenance. After students completed each cartoon-picture probe, as previously described, the intervention specialists transcribed the spoken story (when done by the student) and written texts into an Excel file. The author then attained two graduate students in education to score the stories on a 0-7 scale for content (i.e., the number of WWW, W=2, H=2 questions answered) and quality, based on a research-validated rubric resulting from this author's previous studies (Dunn 2011, 2012; Dunn & Finley 2008, 2010; see Appendix A), Harris and Graham's (1996) *Making the writing process work: Strategies for composition and self-regulation* book, and the 6+1 Traits of Writing (Education Northwest, 2011).

Prior to their beginning the scoring, the two graduate students met with the author to review the content and quality rubrics, review some example stories from the author's previous projects of a similar nature, and practice scoring them. The author then reviewed the graduate students' practice-scoring results and facilitated their conversation to attain 100% agreement. Later that day, the author emailed the graduate students the stories' Excel file, which they each scored independently and later met to discuss and attain 100% agreement for content and quality across all spoken and written story texts. The graduate students then created two graphs with the scores for spoken and written texts, which they emailed to the author.

The author completed 11 observations across all three phases (baseline, training, and intervention) of Melanie and Elaine's instruction as writing intervention specialists. Their fidelity of implementation was 99%.

Results

Students, teachers, and intervention specialists provided data for this study. The results are presented in the order the author and intervention specialists collected them.

Students' Initial thoughts about Writing

Most students indicated that they liked writing. For example, Edward stated, "I like writing because whatever is on your mind you can write it down and put it into a book" (January 28, 2013). However, Kate did not like writing. "I do not like writing so much. My grandma is an artist. I think I should be in an art class" (January 28, 2013).

One student felt that they were writing longer prose as they progressed through the school year. Nancy said, "They used to be about two sentences and now they're longer." Tom, in contrast to the other students, felt that writing was hard because he found it difficult to generate ideas for writing a text. All students could name someone that they defined as a good writer such as a classmate, a parent, or their teacher.

Students' Story Data and Example Art Products

Student participants' story content and quality scores indicate that many of the children improved in level and trend for story content and quality in the intervention phase. Table 2 provides students' scores for their spoken stories. All students achieved

the criterion of being 150% above above baseline for spoken content and quality by the end of the intervention phase. Domingo, Oscar, Tom, Charles, and Edward had 100% non-overlapping data between baseline and intervention phases. These students all had a stable or increasing trend line for content and quality.

Table 2 - Spoken Story Data across Sessions

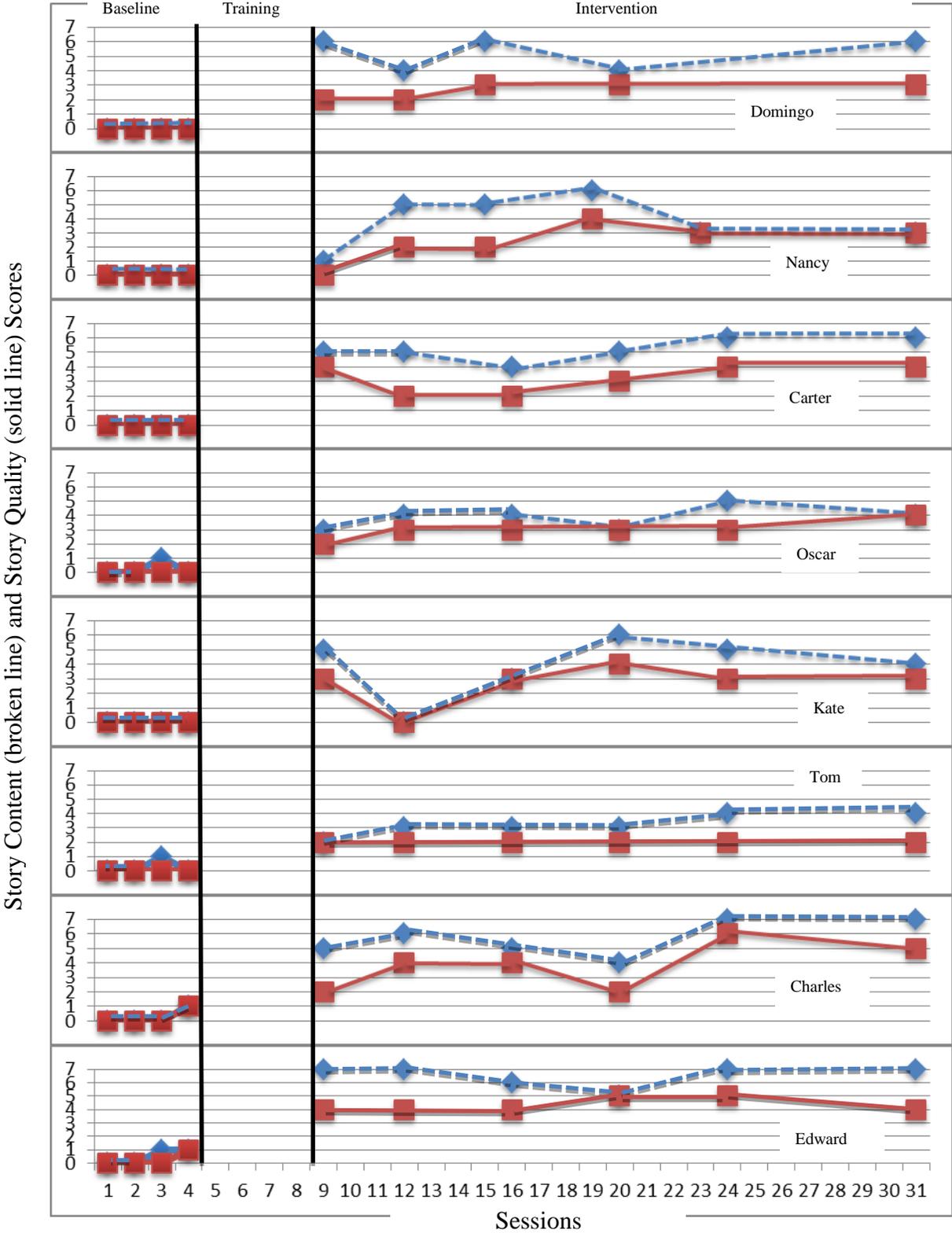
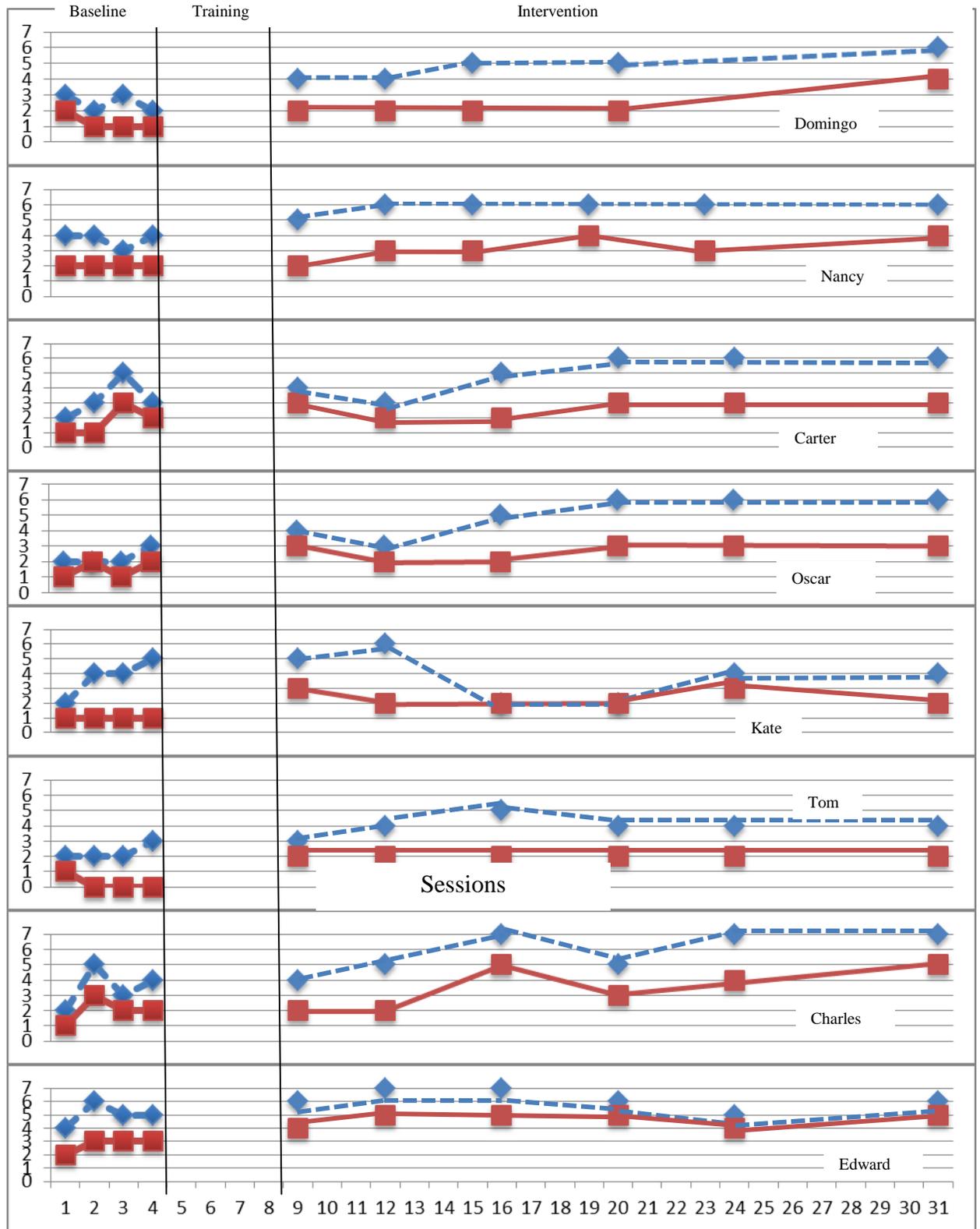


Table 3 - Written Story Data

Story Content (broken line) and Story Quality (solid line) Scores



All students met their 150% above baseline criterion for written content and quality except for two: Charles did not attain his goal for content, and Edward did not make his goals for content and quality. Domingo and Nancy had 100% non-overlapping data for written story content. Kate, Tom, and Edward had 100% non-overlapping data for written story quality.

Table 4 provides a few examples of the students’ art that they made during planning, their story draft spoken aloud, and their final written text.

Table 4 - Example art as well as spoken and written stories (first intervention-phase session)

<p>Carlos</p> 	<p><u>Spoken story’s text:</u> One day at the beach it was sunny. Really sunny. Toby was walking around the beach and then he saw many trees on fire. It was caused by bombs. He saw lots of blood everywhere and he saw a snake and he really liked it so he grabbed it and it was a cobra. It was really nice to him. It did not shoot out poison ivy or anything. So Toby named him Dodge. He went over where his friends were playing at the beach and his friends were playing basketball. When his friend Brian saw him...he doesn’t like snakes and he started to throw up all over the sand and everything. His friend Michael Jordan dropped his basketball and started crying and blood was coming in his tears because he was crying so hard he didn’t have a snake. So Toby brought Michael Jordan to the animal store and took his friend Brian home and when they got there Michael Jordan saw a cobra, but it was a girl. So he said whatever, I’ll take that one. It cost \$579.00. It was already pregnant or it would be 197.00. He took it home and Toby bought a cage for him. Michael Jordan put the snake in there. The tank was as big as Toby’s dresser. Michael Jordan was happy and gave him friend \$1000 for all his help. They were all happy, but still Brian hates snakes.</p>	<p><u>Written story’s text:</u> One day at the beach Toby went walking. Then Toby saw a forest on fire. It was caused by bombs that mean people threw in the forest. Toby panicked. He was crying so hard that the tears were turning into blood. Toby saw a snake. It was a cobra. It was so nice to Toby. Toby went back to the beach. Toby’s friend Brian saw the snake. He was starting to barf. When Toby’s friend Jordan saw the snake he was starting to cry so Toby and his friends went home. Toby and Jordan went to the mall to get a cobra snake. Then Jordan saw a cobra and it was \$599.00. It was that much because it was going to have babies in two months. Then Toby bought it for Jordan. Jordan was so happy that Toby bought it for him. When Toby and Jordan got home, Toby gave Jordan a tank for his snake. It was as big as the dresser that Jordan had. Jordan put his snake in his new tank. They were all happy that they had snakes and still hate snakes!</p>
<p>Kate</p> 	<p>Once there was one girl and two boys. The two boys were walking. The one girl was walking down the street. Then they bumped into here. And she’s like, “oh, hi boys. Do you like my new scarf?” And they are like ‘Huh? That doesn’t look like a scarf. That looks like a snake around your neck.’ She was like, “Don’t be silly, this is a scarf. It’s new fashion called a snake slither.” Then they all went out for ice cream. Then the manager said, “Get that thing out of here!” It’s just the snake that needs to be out. And they were really upset. They can keep the girl. Then they went to a different ice cream shop and left the scarf out of the building. But then she forgot that she wants to make it like a pet. And she forgot to bring the leash and it slithered off into the traffic and then a car was coming by and slid really quick and hit a power pole. And then it went out into the jungle.</p>	<p>One day a girl and two boys they were walking around on school grounds. The girl was bragging about her scarf. The boys said, “What is that?” The girl said, “It is a scarf.” They went and got some ice cream, but the snake slithered away. It went off into the jungle.</p>

Students' Reflections about STORY

Students commented that the STORY mnemonic strategy helped them improve their story-writing skills. Carter said, "STORY helped me with writing and made my stories more descriptive" (March 19, 2013). Tom commented how he liked using the iPad's Doodle Buddy app (Pinger, Inc, 2011): "I liked the iPad part. It helped me because I could change things. The picture also helped me think. The sun image, for example, made me think 'sunny day.'" Nancy, like all of the other students, felt that STORY would be helpful for other children too, "because it helps you think of things to put in your story. I think kids usually think they can write whatever they want."

Reflections of the General Education Teachers and Intervention Specialists about STORY and RTI-Type Programming

The four general education teachers and two intervention specialists, Elaine and Melanie, offered similar perspectives about STORY and RTI; hereafter, these six adult participants will be referred to collectively as *the teachers*. While intervention programming is best practice and happens in many classrooms, the type of intensive help as demonstrated with STORY in this project, would be challenging for a general education teacher to manage in the context of a class of 25 or more students.

Theme 1: RTI has positive attributes but, to be manageable, require support from school personnel

Most of the teachers stated that response to intervention (RTI) had positive characteristics. RTI has to happen in some form because not every student is on the same page at the same time (third-grade teacher, April, 17, 2013). Another teacher voiced that, "RTI has to happen naturally because of different abilities and levels of engagement. I always have students who are more independent than other students" (fourth-grade teacher A, April 17, 2013).

Teachers also voiced their reservations about implementing the RTI paradigm as formally defined by educators (e.g., Fuchs et al., 2003; Gresham, 2002). "The biggest one is time. RTI is especially hard to do in a structured manner. I think it's crucial that it's supported by the

administration, meaning the district and the school” (second-grade teacher, April 17, 2013). “I would think that it would be very feasible to do in a classroom if you had a support teacher with you. Or, if you had a parent helper that had gone through some type of training” (fourth-grade teacher B, April 17, 2013). Elaine felt that small-group formats helped struggling writers’ self-confidence as, “knowing that they are not alone can encourage them not to give up” (March 27, 2013).

Theme 2: STORY helped student participants improve with their story-writing skills

All of the teachers commented how STORY helped students improve in their writing. “Edward is now able to plan a story. He feels so much more positive and confident as a writer. Confidence: I think that is half the battle with some of our struggling writers” (fourth-grade teacher B, April 17, 2013). To facilitate general education teachers seeing STORY in action, the author arranged for them to have a substitute provide 45 minutes of release time from their classroom. A teacher commented that, “there were definitely strategies that I was able to observe that I already have used in the classroom. For example, using the WWW, W=2, H=2 questions. Connecting quick writing assignments to a story. Having students keep a word count. I have incorporated that into our writing practice in the classroom, which I already see having a very positive effect on my students as writers” (fourth-grade teacher A, April 17, 2013). Melanie, an intervention specialist, commented how students liked the “adding adjectives and adverbs” part of the STORY daily lessons so as to make stories more elaborate:

Students would comment about how they wanted to think of some descriptive words.” And I thought, “Oh great, they are really thinking.” Also, I think the telling of the story part really helped them think about what they wanted to say. And as the time went on and I listened to them, I could hear them use more descriptive words--even in their storytelling. So I think that process kind of gives them a chance to get an idea (March 27, 2013).

One teacher had a reserved view of a mnemonic strategy such as STORY. “I would not apply a mnemonic-strategy instruction for a whole class because not everybody needs it. I would not want to confuse the more proficient writers” (third-grade teacher, April, 17, 2013).

Authors' Reflections

This study investigated two questions: 1) would students improve in story content and quality after learning and applying the STORY mnemonic strategy, which included the use of an iPad and art app; and 2) how would their teachers view RTI-type programming for writing as being feasible in general education classrooms? The students' story products demonstrated that they improved in planning and generation of elaborate text as they applied STORY. The students' stories spoken aloud during the planning stage demonstrated a more noticeable improvement in content and quality scores as compared to their written texts' scores. Speaking does not require spelling and text production; hence, students had more mental energy to devote to their story ideas. This also reflected how all students attained the 150% at or above baseline criterion for spoken texts; although, all but two students attained this criterion for their written texts too.

Even with students' improvement as they continued to apply STORY to their written text products, it is interesting to note that some students' scores varied across the timeline of the study (e.g., Kate, Tom, and Edward). While students were nominated for the study based on their universal screening story-writing assessment in their general education classroom as well as their teachers' input, students varied and even improved in their story content and quality levels during baseline and intervention phases. This was especially obvious in their written story data. In Kate's initial interview about writing, she said that she did not like doing it. As she continued through the baseline phase, Kate improved with story content. Her intervention-phase data became more variable in range. The author attributes these scores to two research aspects. First, students may improve in a skill simply by doing the activity a few times (e.g., baseline); this is referred to as regression towards the mean. Second, students who struggle with an aspect of core academics such as writing often have difficulty sustaining their motivation. The intervention's inclusion of iPads and art apps offered a means to help students maintain their motivation, but this does not always result. Nevertheless, 91% of students' end-of-study content and quality scores for both spoken and written texts met the 150% above baseline criterion. Many of the students demonstrated a positive trend line during the intervention phase for story content and quality.

The teachers agreed that STORY and the intervention's daily components (e.g., reviewing a published story, practicing spelling, creating phrases, sentence combining with conjunctions) helped students to improve their writing ability. While this was manageable given Melanie and Elaine's being the intervention teachers, providing this type of programming within the general education classroom would pose more of a challenge (Gerber, 2002). Regular classrooms represent a range of student abilities. To help manage small-group or individual programming and assessment for students, it is realistic, in the opinion of this author, for schools to provide supports to general education teachers such as curriculum/intervention materials as well as staff support (e.g., intervention teachers, paraprofessionals, staff assistants).

Limitations

This study's results should be viewed with caution given its limitations. First, students' improvement could be attributed to maturation. Nancy, one of the student participants, commented how she noticed her writing more text as the school year progressed.

Second, each teacher has their own view of a story's score for content and quality. The general education teachers had all of the students in their classes complete the universal screening probe. It is possible that a given student may have done better or worse with the probe assessment as compared to other writing products done on other days. The general education teachers' input on which students to nominate for participation, along with their universal screening stories, was a means to counteract bias and atypical student performance with the probe. However, a teacher's style and practices in the classroom, for example, could impact how a student performs with writing, and thus, the universal screening probe.

Third, the students learned the STORY mnemonic strategy which included the use of iPads, art apps, and the making of art. While all of the students voiced a willingness and interest in applying these components of the daily intervention lesson plan, not all students are proficient in doing art or using iPads for this purpose. Melanie and Elaine, the two intervention specialists did offer students other art media tools such as paints or markers, but the popularity of iPads made this the students' preference. They may have produced better stories by just writing words on paper with a pencil, but that is not the format of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association & Council of Chief state School Officers, 2010).

Fourth, additional programming for some students (e.g., Domingo, Carter, Charles, and Edward) for reading, in addition to the writing intervention that this project provided, may have promoted their scores for story content and quality than what would have otherwise been the case.

Future Research

In a future study, students could use the iPads' keyboard for generating their text as opposed to writing with paper and pencil. Given the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association & Council of Chief state School Officers, 2010) emphasis on the use of technology for text generation after first grade, keyboarding text would make students' story products more reflective of these new standards.

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Appendix Table

Story Quality Rubric

	<blank>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No text
	John go fishing. Happy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Very short or no text
	The egg is fit to crack. The egg is beside the tree. The grass is green. The dots is black. It is black lines. It is with stuff. People is with them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Simply describes the picture prompt. ● No sense of story line. ● Uses simple sentences. ● Short amount of text.
	There is a house. The people in the house are looking out. There is a space thing. It landed in the people's yard. So the people are looking out. One person is looking out of the door. The other is looking out the window. They are wondering what it is doing there. They are wondering if it will go away. There are stairs and someone is coming out. It looks like there is a door too. There is a window on it too. And it was going to have to go sometime.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Simply describes the picture prompt. ● No sense of story line. ● Uses simple sentences.
	Me and my friend was watching TV. Then I heard a noise. I looked out the door. My friend looked out the window. We both saw a little spaceship and the little door opened and some stairs came down. On the grass and four little aliens came down the stairs and they was making noise. They came down off the grass and on my porch. They saw someone coming. They thought I was their dad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides some sense of a story line/story structure, but lacks a clear intro and conclusion. ● Grammatical and syntactical errors evident.
	It was winter break, and Jack, Peter, and I were having fun. We had just gotten out of school. We were headed for the hills to go sledding. We had our sleds grasped in our hands. We knew we were going to have fun. We	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some evidence of an introduction, main event, and conclusion.

	<p>were bundled up in scarves, sock hats, mittens, socks, and snow boots. It was really cold outside. We started sledding down the icy hill. Lucy went up the hill, but didn't make it far. She went down the hill backwards. Carlos and Suzanne ran after her to catch her. After Lucy hits a tree she said it was fun. We ran and played in the snow for hours.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No use of paragraphs. ● No use of voice. ● Grammar and punctuation mostly correct.
	<p>On Saturday, while walking at the park, Paul found a strange egg. "This is huge!" He said.</p> <p>The next day, he went back to check on the egg. Before his very eyes, the egg hatched. Out came a baby dinosaur! He fed and watered it every day. He fed it some meat scraps from dinner. Later, he found a map. It showed a buried treasure! He quickly rode his bike there. He went inside a cave. He slowly proceeded with caution. He found a spade and started to dig around. After a while, He found an iron chest plated with copper. It asked Sharp Tooth, my dinosaur, to open the chest. He did. Inside was a magnificent emerald gem. It started glowing. Suddenly, his pet dinosaur, Sharp Tooth, started growing and sprouting wings. He flew Paul and his bike back home. Then Sharp Tooth flew off to a distant land. Paul hurried home to find a magnificent sapphire gem. He grinned. He went to the local gem trader and priced the gem. It was worth millions! Of course, he sold it and became a happy rich man.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction, main event, and conclusion are evident. ● May employ some use of paragraphing. ● Some use of voice. ● Grammar and punctuation mostly correct.
	<p>Jack's Trip to the Fair</p> <p>For his tenth birthday, Jack wanted to invite two of his friends, Ben and Larry, to go to the fair that coming Saturday. With his mother's help, Jack wrote the words and made the illustrations on the cards. He took them to school the next day to give to his friends. Ben and Larry told Jack the next day that their parents were ok with them going to the fair.</p> <p>On Saturday morning, Jack ran outside to check the weather and was relieved to see a bright blue sky. His mother said, "Well, it looks like a perfect day for a day at the fair. After breakfast, we can drive to your friends' homes to pick them up."</p> <p>As Jack and his mother drove to the Ben and Larry's street, Jack noticed some dark clouds forming in the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clear introduction, main event, and conclusion. ● Use of paragraphs. ● Use of voice. ● Almost completely correct use of grammar and syntax.

	<p>sky. "Oh, I hope it isn't going to rain," he said, remembering that the fair was no fun last year when it rained.</p> <p>The rain and wind began as Jack and his mom pulled into Ben's driveway, he and Larry got in the car. By the time they arrived at the fair, it was sprinkling but the clouds were passing and sunshine was in sight. "Get your tickets to enter the fair here!" a man yelled as he pointed to the entrance gate. Jack's mother gave him a hug and said, "I am so pleased that the rain has ended and the sunshine is back. I know how much you wanted to come to the fair today with Larry and Ben."</p> <p>After passing through the entrance gate, Jack saw four more of his friends gathered at the ice cream tent. When they spotted Jack, they cheered and began to sing "Happy Birthday." Jack, Ben, and Larry ran to greet their classmates. Jack was surprised to find a table with an ice cream cake and some presents. After eating some hot dogs and some cake, the boys began going on some of the rides and visiting the animal barns.</p> <p>Jack had a great day with all of his friends! "I love going to the fair," Jack told them. "We do too!" They all agreed that they wanted to come back another time someday.</p>	
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