



Professional development in Self-Regulated Strategy Development: Effects on the writing performance of eighth grade Portuguese students [☆]



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ABSTRACT

We examined the effects of the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) for opinion essay writing among 380 eighth grade students in six urban middle schools in a major city in Portugal. Fourteen teachers in six urban middle schools in Portugal participated in the present study; 7 of these teachers participated in practice-based professional development (PBPD) in SRSD before implementation, and follow-up support once instruction began. Schools were matched in pairs based on SES and teacher characteristics; a member of each pair was randomly assigned to either: (a) teacher led SRSD instruction for opinion essay writing; or (b) teacher implementation of the schools' existing curriculum and language program prescriptions for opinion writing. Students in the experimental schools were taught strategies for planning and composing opinion essays once a week in 45 min sessions, over a three-month period. Multi-level modeling for repeated measures indicated SRSD instructed students made statistically greater gains in composition elements than the comparison students immediately after instruction and two months later. Teachers implemented SRSD with fidelity and teachers and students rated the intervention favorably. This study provides initial evidence for replication of the effects of PBPD and SRSD outside of the United States. Limitations, lessons learned, and directions for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Writing is an important skill that cuts across the school curriculum and is useful for a variety of functions in daily life. Although writing is important and challenging to learn, in Portugal as in the United States (e.g., Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Harris, Graham, Brindle, & Sandmel, 2009), its teaching has been neglected. In Portugal, recent reform of the language arts curriculum resulted in new guidelines and standards for language arts instruction (Ministério da Educação e Ciência/Ministry of Education and Science, 2009, 2012). These guidelines recognize the importance of writing, including it as a priority area of instruction. They require not only the development of writing skills related to

grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and sentence construction, but also development of writing processes related to the organization of the text, including planning and revision.

Writing across multiple genres (e.g., narrative, expository, informative, opinion essay, argumentative) is also emphasized. The Standards for Elementary and Middle Grade Levels (2012), for instance, require the instruction on specific attributes for different genre texts, (e.g., premise, reasons, elaborations, and conclusion for opinion essay). These Standards also require development of high quality writing products and the evaluation of writing, but neither specific instructional approaches nor time dedicated to writing instruction are prescribed by the Portuguese curriculum. Teachers are free to choose the teaching methods they use in their classrooms.

Although the importance of writing has been recognized in the Portuguese curriculum, teachers have not been trained to teach writing strategies (Almeida, 2012; Almeida & Simão, 2007) and students have difficulty planning and revising their writing. As in the United States, (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2012), national data in Portugal indicates Portuguese students experience severe problems mastering writing (Gabinete de Informação e Avaliação do Sistema Educativo/Office of

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Information and of Evaluation of Educational System, 2005; Report of Gabinete de Avaliação Educacional/Office of Educational Evaluation 2011, 2012). Difficulties with writing persist at least until university level, as research indicates many Portuguese university students do not plan their writing (Carvalho & Pimenta, 2005) and revise only superficial text features such as spelling and punctuation (Festas, Damião, & Martins, 2010).

Thus, improving writing abilities and developing effective instructional procedures to help overcome problems with learning to write are national priorities in Portugal. The use of evidence-based practices in schools is critical to achieving this goal (Cook, Smith, & Tankersley, 2012). Supported by rigorous studies and research, evidence-based practices are a useful means for improving teaching and their application has been recommended by government policies in many countries (Cook et al., 2012). This is also the case in Portugal, where evidence-based practices are emphasized in the standards-based reform movement and recommended by current government policy (Ministério da Educação e Ciência/Ministry of Education and Science, 2012).

In the writing domain, one of the most effective evidence based methods for writing instruction is Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) (Baker, Chard, Ketterlin-Geller, Apichatabutra, & Doabler, 2009; Graham & Perin, 2007; Institute of Education Sciences, 2012; National Center on Intensive Intervention, 2013). SRSD is appropriate to the needs of Portuguese pupils and the demands of the current Portuguese language arts curriculum and Standards. In fact, as we address next, SRSD includes the teaching of writing processes and self-regulation strategies, features which have been neglected in Portuguese schools and that are essential components of proficient writing.

1.1. Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)

Developed by Karen Harris and pioneered by Harris and Graham more than 30 years ago (Harris, 1982; Harris & Graham, 1992, 1996; Harris, Graham, Mason, & Friedlander, 2008), SRSD is an approach that combines the teaching of writing processes (including planning, drafting, composing, revising and evaluating); instruction in writing strategies; and development of self-regulation strategies, including goal-setting, self-assessment (self-monitoring and self-recording), self-instruction, and self-reinforcement. At the same time, SRSD helps students develop the knowledge and skills needed to use these strategies and purposefully develops self-efficacy for writing, attributions to strategy knowledge and effort, and motivation for writing (Harris et al., 2009). SRSD is a complex, multicomponent intervention based on integrating multiple theories and lines of research which have been detailed elsewhere (Harris & Graham, 2009; Harris et al., 2009). Of particular importance to the present study, research indicates this approach is effective when teaching typically developing writers in a wide range of grade levels, from elementary to high school (Graham, Harris, & McKeown, 2013).

SRSD promotes writing development through the explicit, situated, scaffolded instruction of genre-based and general writing strategies and self-regulation strategies. Specific writing strategies for multiple genres, such as story, personal narrative, expository, opinion, and persuasive essays have been developed (Harris et al., 2008). Such strategies for writing and self-regulation are developed in six recursive, interactive, individualized instructional stages with gradual release of responsibility for writing to students: (1) develop and activate background knowledge; (2) discuss and describe the strategies to be learned; (3) model the strategies; (4) memorize the strategies; (5) support the strategies; and (6) independent performance (Harris et al., 2008). Instruction proceeds based on students' progress; students are given the time they need to make these strategies their own. Procedures for

maintaining what has been learned and determining how to use this knowledge across writing tasks are integrated throughout the stages of instruction.

SRSD has proven to be a powerful instructional approach. Its application and effectiveness have been investigated in over 100 studies (Graham et al., 2013), and a number of meta-analyses have examined its impact on students' writing. Some of these meta-analyses focused on strategy instruction in writing in general, including SRSD studies as part of the analysis (Graham, 2006b; Graham & Harris, 2003), whereas other reviews were broader in scope and examined a broader range of writing treatments, including strategy instruction and SRSD (Graham, McKeown, Kiuahara, & Harris, 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007; Rogers & Graham, 2008). These meta-analyses included studies conducted with students with learning disabilities as well as with poor, average or good writers in both special and regular school settings (Graham, 2006b; Graham & Harris, 2003; Rogers & Graham, 2008) or only students from regular school classrooms (Graham et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007). Some of these reviews focused just on the elementary-levels (Graham et al., 2012), others on elementary and middle school pupils (Graham & Harris, 2003) and still others on pupils from elementary to 12th grade (Graham, 2006b; Graham et al., 2013; Graham & Perin, 2007; Rogers & Graham, 2008).

Across these meta-analyses, SRSD was found to be a highly effective instructional practice, and it yielded better results than other writing instructional methods, including other methods for teaching writing strategies. Large effect sizes (ES) – above .80 – were found in true and quasi-experimental studies (Graham, 2006b; Graham & Harris, 2003; Graham et al., 2013, 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007), and a high percentage of non-overlapping data (PND) – almost above 90% – was obtained in single-subject design studies (Graham, 2006b; Graham et al., 2013; Rogers & Graham, 2008).

1.2. The present study

While previous research has demonstrated that SRSD is a powerful tool for improving students' writing, the present study was designed to address limitations in the data base on SRSD. First, most of the true- and quasi-experiments that have tested the effectiveness of SRSD in writing have involved children in the elementary grades (cf. Graham et al., 2013), and students have typically received SRSD instruction in small groups or one-on-one.

Furthermore, and also of particular importance to the present study, instruction in nearly all of the published studies on SRSD was delivered by trained graduate assistants (Harris et al., 2009). Only three published studies have involved general education teacher implementation of SRSD in the middle school classroom (De La Paz, 2005; De La Paz & Graham, 2002; Wong, Hoskyn, Jay, Ellis, & Watson, 2008). These studies, however, involved only 2–4 classroom teachers, and little information was provided as to how teachers were prepared to use SRSD in their classrooms.

Only one published study was found that focused on professional development for implementation of SRSD classwide in the general education classroom (Harris et al., 2012). This randomized controlled study involved 20 second and third grade teachers who participated in practice-based professional development (PBPd, cf. Ball & Cohen, 1999; Grossman & McDonald, 2008) in SRSD for either story or opinion essay writing (each genre served as the control condition for the other genre). PBPd focuses on teacher development of knowledge, understanding, and skills regarding an effective educational practice before they use it, with support once classroom use begins (cf. Ball & Cohen, 1999). PBPd rejects traditional approaches to professional development that are short-term and top down, do not allow teachers to actively engage in the practices

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