All children face challenges in writing. Even some of the strongest writers wrestle with the most common problems: generating content, organizing compositions, formulating goals and higher-level plans, efficiently executing mechanics, and revising text and goals. For some, understanding strategies to overcome these challenges comes more easily. For others, educators must explicitly teach the writing process.

Children who face significant and often debilitating challenges benefit from an approach that directly addresses individuals' affective, behavioral, and cognitive characteristics, strengths, and needs. These children will often require more extensive, structured, and explicit instruction to develop skills, academic and self-regulation strategies, and to understand their peers more easily.

The model for teaching writing which was developed through more than 25 years of research by colleagues and myself and incorporated into the widely used *Imagine It!* program, is referred to as Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD). This model helps struggling students to develop in tandem both powerful writing strategies and critical strategies for self-regulation of the writing process.

Strategies instruction was found to be the most effective researched writing intervention to date, according to *Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High School,* commissioned by Carnegie Corporation and the Alliance for Excellent Education. The report shows SRSD to be the most effective of all strategies instruction approaches.

The goal of SRSD is mastery of higher-level cognitive processes involved in composing; autonomous, reflective, and self-regulated use of effective writing strategies; knowledge of the characteristics of good writing; and positive attitudes about writing and one's own capabilities as a writer. In other words: writing expertise.

Along with powerful writing strategies, SRSD includes explicit development of critical self-regulation strategies: goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instructions, and self-reinforcement.

Goal Setting

The act of goal setting serves several key functions. It enhances attention, motivation, and effort. Second, it provides information as to what is desired or required for the writing task at-hand. Goal setting also facilitates planning and strategic behavior while prompting self-evaluation and self-determined consequences.

The process for goal setting includes five steps:

- Ask students to set the goal, breaking it into sub-steps as needed.
- Have students devise a plan for meeting the goal and assessing progress.
- Set the plan into operation.
- Require students to monitor progress.
- Reset or revise goal(s) as necessary.

Teachers should ensure that students establish appropriate goals for their writing, but ultimately, the child needs to make the commitment. Goals should be specific, challenging, and proximal (reasonably close).

Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring occurs when an individual self-assesses whether a behavior has occurred and then self-records the results (Nelson & Hayes, 1981). Self-monitoring in writing occurs in three areas: attention, performance, and strategy use.

Self-monitoring strategies are most effective with students who have the required skill, but do not apply it. Difficulties in organization, attention, work initiation, and work completion may be decreased through the use of self-monitoring strategies. Increased academic achievement may also be a secondary result of a successful self-monitoring plan.

Self-monitoring works well with goal setting. After the goal has been set, teachers should help students understand their current performance and help students see their improvements. Charting progress

is one way to do this. Teach the procedures of self-monitoring explicitly and offer guided practice.

Self-Instructions

Self-instructions involve self-speech – that which is neither intended for, nor effectively adapted for, communication with others. It is speech directed to the self, which is self-regulatory. It may be overt or covert, voluntary or involuntary. Also, it may operate on motor activity, cognitive processing, or perceptual processing.

Most children naturally use self-speech to help orient, organize, structure, and plan behavior; to help consciously understand or focus on a problem or situation, and to overcome difficulties; to help deal with anxiety, frustration or other forms of arousal; and to provide self-reinforcement.

Deliberate self-speech can greatly help a student's writing. It directs the child's attention to relevant events, stimuli, or aspects of a problem. This helps the child interrupt or control an automatic or impulsive response (in other words, to stop and think). Self-speech assists the student in generating and selecting alternative courses of action. It focuses thinking, increases memory for steps and procedures, and helps the child perform a sequence of actions or steps. That

makes it easier for the child to deal with anxiety, frustration, or other forms of arousal.

Self-instructions state criteria for success and enhance positive attitudes about and attention to the task, reinforce and help maintain task-relevant behaviors, and provide ways of coping with failure and self-reinforcing success.

Six Types of Self-Instructions

There are six basic types of self-instructions throughout the writing process.

#1: Problem Definition

When beginning to write, students must define the problem/situation. They size up the nature and demands of the task and ask themselves, "What is it I have to do here?" and "What is my first step?" Then, they define the task: "I want to write a convincing essay."

#2: Focusing of Attention and Planning

Students then focus their attention and begin to develop a plan. They may think, "I have to concentrate, be careful and think of the steps. To do this right, I have to make a plan. First, I need to…then…"

#3: Strategy Implementation

Next, students self-regulate writing strategy use. They

Identifying Struggling Writers

Struggling Writers:
- Lack important knowledge about writing and the writing process, are less aware of how to write, and may overestimate their abilities
- Have difficulties generating ideas and selecting topics
- Often do little advanced planning
- Engage in "knowledge telling" rather than planning content
- Have difficulties accessing, generating, and organizing the knowledge they possess; lack strategies to do so
- Have difficulties with mechanics and lower-level skills interfere with the writing process
- Engage in little revision; more often make simple word changes or focus on mechanics rather than making meaningful changes to ideas, content or organization
- Overemphasize the role of mechanics in explaining "good writing"

- Frequently overestimate their writing abilities
- Suffer from low self-efficacy and motivation, maladaptive attributions, negative attitudes

Effective Writers:
- Organize their goals and sub-goals and can switch flexibly from simple to complex goals
- Draw upon a rich store of cognitive processes and strategies for planning, text production, and revision to achieve their goals
- Draw upon their knowledge of the patterns and schemas found in different writing genres or models
- Develop novel or modified frameworks as the writing task becomes more complex
- Are sensitive to the functions their writing is intended to serve and the needs and perspectives of their audience
- Use effective self-regulation procedures throughout the recursive writing process

tell themselves, "First, I will write down my essay writing reminder. The first step in writing an essay is… My goals for this essay are … and I will self-record on…"

#4: Self-Evaluation
Next, students evaluate performance, catching and correcting errors. They think, "Have I used all of my story parts? Oops, I missed one; that's ok, I can revise."

#5: Coping and Self-Control
From there, self-speech helps the child cope and develop self-control. They may say to themselves, "Don't worry, I can handle this," and "It's okay to feel a little anxious – a little anxiety can help."

#6: Self-Reinforcement
Finally, they reward themselves by thinking praises such as, "I'm getting better at this!" or "I like this ending – wait until my teacher reads this!"

Self-reinforcement requires self-evaluation compared to some criterion. Students must be able to accurately know when self-reinforcement is warranted. Self-instructions are a powerful form of self-regulation and can add meaningfully to goal setting and self-monitoring, and works naturally with them. When combined with other self-regulation procedures, external reinforcement is not needed for some children.

Implementation Stages of SRSD
This success of SRSD has been achieved across settings, teachers, and writing medium (computer/pencil and paper) as well as differing genres or writing tasks. The most meaningful gains are achieved among students with severe problems when all components (self-regulation and composing strategies) and all six stages of SRSD instruction are included.

Stage 1: Develop Background Knowledge
In the beginning, teachers should help develop and activate students' background knowledge. For instance, students should read works in the genre being addressed (stories, persuasive essays, etc.). This will help to develop vocabulary. Teachers may ask students, for example, "What is an 'opinion'?" This technique can also be used to build knowledge and concepts, such as asking, "What are the parts of a persuasive essay?" or "How does the writer grab the reader's interest?" Teachers can continue background development through the next two stages as needed. Teachers also may discuss and explore both writing and self-regulation strategies to be learned and introduce goal setting.

Stage 2: Discuss it.
This explores students' current writing and self-regulation abilities to assist in goal setting. Graphing may be introduced as a way of self-monitoring. Using prior compositions for graphing is effective for setting a baseline to show improvement. Discuss SRSD directly with students – its purpose, benefits, how and when it can be used, etc. Encourage students to commit to learning the strategy and act as a collaborative partner. Point out that negative or ineffective self-talk, attitudes or beliefs may be addressed in positive ways.

Stage 3: Model it.
Teachers should model effective writing and self-regulation strategies for students, thinking aloud as they work. Analyze and discuss the strategy and model's performance and ask students to make changes as needed. You can model self-assessment and self-recording through graphing of performance, too. Explain to students that they can continue to use self-regulation strategies across tasks and situations.

Stage 4: Memorize it.
While memorizing the strategy typically has already begun in earlier stages, require and confirm memorization of writing and self-instructions strategies now and in following stages.

Stage 5: Support it.
At this point, teachers and students should use task and self-regulation strategies collaboratively to achieve success. Goals and criterion levels established in the beginning should gradually grow more challenging as prompts, guidance, and collaboration are faded out. The self-regulation components that have not yet been introduced should begin. Finally, discuss plans for maintenance and continue support of generalization.

Stage 6: Do it independently.
During the final stage, students should be able to use writing and self-regulation strategies independently with teachers monitoring and supporting their writing as necessary. Fading of overt self-regulation may begin. Plans for maintenance and generalization should continue to be discussed and implemented.

Evaluating Success of Your SRSD Implementation
To know if SRSD is working in your classroom, assess changes in self-regulation and writing performance in your classroom, review changes in attitudes and self-perceptions, and consider how students actually use

the self-regulation and writing strategies. Teachers should include students, family, and other teachers as co-evaluators, assessing use over time and in new situations.

Finally, it's important to be reasonable and to not have inflated expectations. SRSD is not a panacea. Academic and social competence are complex issues, and no single intervention can affect all aspects. SRSD is not a complete writing program, and it is not necessarily the intervention of choice for all students or at all times. However, SRSD significantly and meaningfully changes how and what students write. Research shows that as students' writing improves, self-efficacy, attitudes, and attributions regarding writing all undergo a positive change as well.

References

Graham, S., & Harris, K. R. (2005). *Writing better: Teaching writing processes and self-regulation to students with learning problems.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

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About the Author
Karen R. Harris, co-author of SRA/McGraw-Hill's Imagine It! *and Currey-Ingram Professor of Special Education and Literacy at Vanderbilt University, has worked in the field of education for over 30 years as a teacher, researcher, and author.*

For More Information...

Detailed lesson plans for story writing and supportive materials are offered on the Center for Accelerating Student Learning (CASL) Web site, under Outreach, at www.vanderbilt.edu/CASL.

All of the stages of instruction can be seen in both elementary and middle school classrooms in the video, "Teaching students with learning disabilities: Using learning strategies" (ASCD, 2002). This video offers the most complete view of the process of SRSD, as two classes are followed throughout instruction.

Finally, a free, online interactive tutorial on SRSD is available through Vanderbilt University at: http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/index.html. The tutorial includes all stages of instruction and video from the ASCD video. From the IRIS homepage, select Resources, and then select Star Legacy Modules. Next, click on "Using Learning Strategies: Instruction to Enhance Learning."

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