

Running Head: DRAWING A PICTURE AS A PRE-WRITING STRATEGY

## Drawing a Picture as a Pre-Writing Strategy in First Grade

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## Abstract

In this study the writing products of 21 first-grade students, who drew a picture before writing a story, was compared with the writing products of 21 first-grade students who wrote without drawing a picture. The students in the group which drew before writing showed more motivation and tended to produce more ideas than the students who wrote without drawing. These findings were mostly consistent for boys as well as girls.

## Introduction

### Problem

Most children's books are filled with pictures. When students learn to read they partly rely on pictures to get an idea of what the story is about. Pictures also help by giving the reader an idea of what words might be on the page. Visuals are used to allow readers to get a sense of the story elements. Yet, when students learn to write, the role of visual images is often ignored. Historically, methods for teaching writing have focused on text to stimulate story ideas (Bailey, 1995). How can students be expected to be successful writers without the use of a visual tool? Even when students are planning their story with a pre-write, they are instructed to write words to organize their thoughts. Even though students' first interaction with literacy is primarily focused on pictures and words, they are rarely given the chance to draw a picture before writing.

Teaching writing to students is the researcher's biggest challenge as a teacher. When the researcher gives her first graders a topic to write about or when she allows them to come up with an idea of their own, many students have a difficult time organizing their thoughts in a way which allows them to get their ideas down on paper and be able to turn it into a story. The researcher is constantly searching for ways to help students get their many creative ideas down on paper. The strategies the researcher has tried so far, all dealing with using words when planning, have not been successful for all students, especially boys. She is intrigued with what the research has stated about using a visual as a pre-writing strategy. In one study, the students who drew before writing tended to produce more words, more sentences and more ideas and their overall writing performances were higher than the students who wrote without drawing (Norris, 1998). The researcher is excited to see if using a visual as a pre-writing strategy will allow her students to become more successful writers which will result in writing that is more detailed and in depth. The researcher is also looking forward to doing this research because there is little documented on the benefits or applications of visuals in the writing process (Bailey, 1995).

Review of Literature

As a result of there being limited primary sources that deal directly with the topic, it was difficult to find many research sources. However, the researcher did find a few that focused on using a visual to improve student writing.

The first primary source found was a study about using clip art on the computer as an aid to help second graders in writing while planning their story. The study sought to measure the effects of the introduction of computer clip art on the writing process (Bailey, 1995). Researchers wondered if the use of these visuals would affect length and quality of writing, student motivation and esteem, and student ability to organize their thoughts. The study examined 25 second graders who are engaged in a daily writer's workshop that included brainstorming, story webbing, drafting, editing, publishing, and presenting. Data was collected through observations, final product and interviews with both students and teachers. It was stated that before being able to use a visual as a pre-write, many students had difficulty applying themselves to the writing process. As a result of being able to use computer clip art to assist them in planning their story, students were instantly engaged and motivated. They were able to quickly choose a topic and begin the process of writing. The results also show that the integration of visuals into the writing process had positive affects on the length and quality of student writing. The majority of students' final stories reflected longer length, and greater risks taken with vocabulary, dialogue and sentence structure (Bailey, 1995). This

study is related to my research in that it shows the many benefits of using a visual tool during the pre-writing stage of writing.

The second primary source found was about a study that addresses how students who are learning second language writing skills can use pictures as an effective writing tool to help with the writing process and to help improve their writing proficiency (Lee, 1994). The participants in the study were 53 university students who had prior knowledge of Spanish in high school. All students were enrolled in an intensive review class. When learning to write in a different language, students often struggle with constructing ideas or being overly concerned about grammatical forms. The writing topics were selected and pictures were used as a guide to get students writing. The results show that the instruction of using pictures as a guided writing environment assisted beginning foreign language students to develop, and to improve their writing skills as well as to lower their anxiety of expressing themselves in the target language (Lee, 1994). In addition to using visuals when writing, students of this study were also required to take a survey regarding their writing experience. The results are as followed: 72% said that pictures were extremely helpful to them while organizing, expressing thoughts, and developing writing skills. 59% said that pictures served as a visual stimulus and increased their recall of learned vocabulary. 44% said that pictures attracted their attention and encouraged them to write.

This study relates to the researcher's study in that her first graders have a lot in common with students who are learning another language. Many first graders are just learning how to write. It is difficult for them to form words and they also worry about grammar and spelling when writing. These aspects of writing hold them back from being successful writers. As a result of her students still learning how to write in English, this study showed the researcher that pictures can also help those who still have trouble simply getting words down on paper. It was also interesting to learn from this study that pictures were proven to lower student anxiety when writing. Many of the researcher's students are reluctant to start writing because they are afraid they are going to do it incorrectly and they are often confused on how to organize their story.

The third and final primary source of research found was a study on 60 third grade students who drew a picture before writing a story (experimental group). Their results were compared to 59 other third grade students who wrote their story without drawing a picture (control group). In the study, each student was asked to write three different stories during three sessions approximately three weeks apart. Several choices of story topics were given as well as the option of choosing their own topic (Norris, 1998). Students' papers were scored as follows, content: 50%, organization: 30%, and mechanics: 20%. The results revealed significant differences between the experimental and the control group. Students

who drew before writing wrote significantly longer and better stories than those who wrote without drawing (Norris, 1998). The data indicated that drawing became an effective planning strategy for the students who relied on their drawing as a reference point to prompt them towards what should come next in their writing. The study also states that the results were consistent for both boys and girls. This was a surprising discovery, because in most schools boys usually score significantly lower in writing than girls (Silberman, 1989).

The results found in the study are directly related to the researcher's questions in that it is comparing students who use a picture as a pre-write to those who did not use a picture. The researcher plans to conduct this same study with her first graders. She also plans to compare the differences, if any, between boys and girls writing scores.

As a result of the researcher's interest in the topic, the following questions emerged.

Will the use of drawing as a pre-writing strategy help students become more successful writers?

Will the use of drawing as a pre-writing strategy increase student motivation for writing?

Will boys' writing improve as a result of using a picture as a pre-write?

Method

### Participants

The participants of the researcher's study will consist of 21 first graders, 11 girls and 10 boys. Based on a recent descriptive study, the researcher learned that 16 of her students always enjoy drawing, while 5 students enjoy drawing sometimes.

### Instruments

In order to determine if students are more successful writers as a result of drawing a picture as a pre-writing strategy, students' writing will be scored. The scores will be based on their ability to write clearly and effectively. Students' writing will be scored on ideas and organization. The idea score will mainly focus on the inclusion of details, staying on topic and in-depth thinking. The organization score will focus on how the story is written. Is the story easy to follow and does it have flow? Does the story have a logical beginning, middle and end? The rubric the researcher will be using is provided by the school district in which she is currently teaching (see Appendix A). The students have been scored by the contents of this rubric all year. Students will receive two scores for each story. One score will be for ideas and one for organization. Students will either receive a 4, 3, 2, or 1 for ideas and organization. If a student receives a 4, this will indicate the student is working above grade level in this particular assignment. If a student receives a 3, this indicates the student is working right at grade level. If a student receives a 2,



this indicates the student is working below grade level. A score of 1 indicates an area of concern. This is the best way to measure success because it will show growth in all areas of writing.

#### Design and Procedure

Students will be asked to write two stories over a two week period. For both stories, students will be given a topic to write about (Appendix B). Both stories will require students to include several details in their writing.

Students will write their stories during their normal writing time in the day. The students will be divided into two groups. The groups will have equal numbers of boys and girls. Students' desks will be in rows and each student will receive privacy folders to put up around his or her desk for privacy and to eliminate distractions. Before students start to write, the researcher will explain the writing topic. In the first week of writing the experimental group will be told to draw a picture before writing their story. The control group will be told to write their story without drawing a picture. The next week, the experimental and control groups will be switched. This will give each student the opportunity to draw a picture as a pre-write. During all of the writing assessments students will not receive any help from the researcher or others while writing. Students will be given as long as needed to finish their story. When students have completed their

assessment they will be given a writing checklist (Appendix C). The checklist is used to help students edit and revise their stories if needed.

While students are writing their stories the researcher will be closely observing their behavior in terms of writing ease or difficulty. Writing ease and difficulty will be determined by how students are behaving during the writing assessment. The answers to the following questions will determine whether students are completing the assessment with ease or difficulty. Is the student able to start on the assessment quickly? Does the student seem to be having trouble starting the assessment? Is the student staying on task or is the student distracted when writing? Does the student seem frustrated when writing? These questions will help determine whether or not drawing a picture before writing helps students in regards to motivation. Does drawing a picture before writing allow students to feel more at ease about writing their story or does it produce more strain and difficulties?

## Results

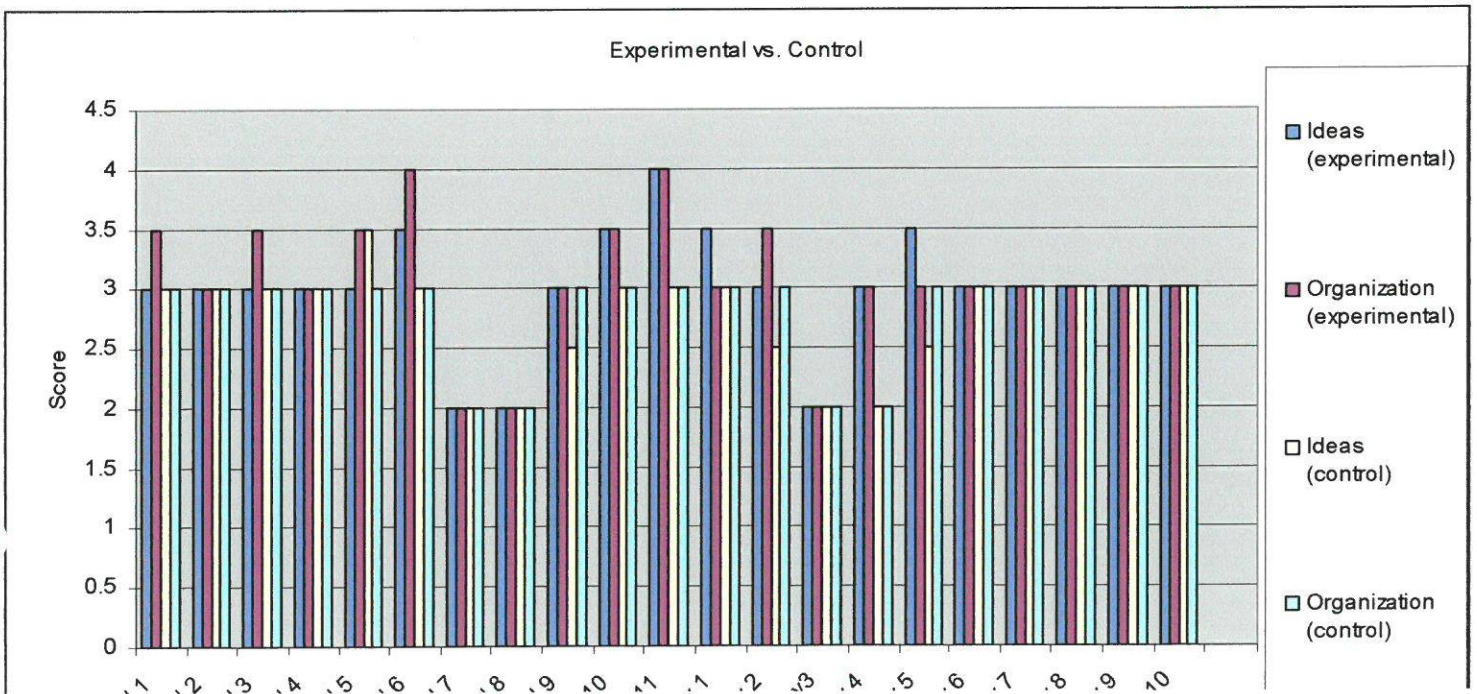
All 21 students were able to complete both writing assessments. During the first week of testing, all of the students wrote a narrative on the assigned writing topic: Write about your favorite toy. Half of the students began by drawing a picture and then writing their story. The other half of the class wrote their story without drawing a picture. Once the directions were given to the students, they

began working on their assignment. The researcher noticed that the students who were in the experimental group (those chosen to draw a picture before writing) were more excited to start their assignment than those who were in the control group (those who weren't able to draw a picture before writing). Once able to start working, the experimental group quickly started to draw a picture and added details. The control group took a longer time to get started. The researcher noticed that the control group was having a difficult time organizing their thoughts in order to start writing.

For the second week, the experimental and the control group were switched. When administering the second assessment, the researcher noticed the same type of behavior she saw the week prior. Students in the experimental group were eager to start drawing their picture, while those in the control group had more difficulty starting the assessment. During both weeks the researcher noticed that as students were completing the writing assessment, the experimental group took a longer time to complete the assignment than the control group. Some students in the experimental group spent a lot of time drawing and adding details to their picture. It was for this reason that they didn't get started on the actual writing until quite a while after those in the control group. Some students even wanted to add color to their picture before writing, but the researcher only allowed students to use pencil while drawing.

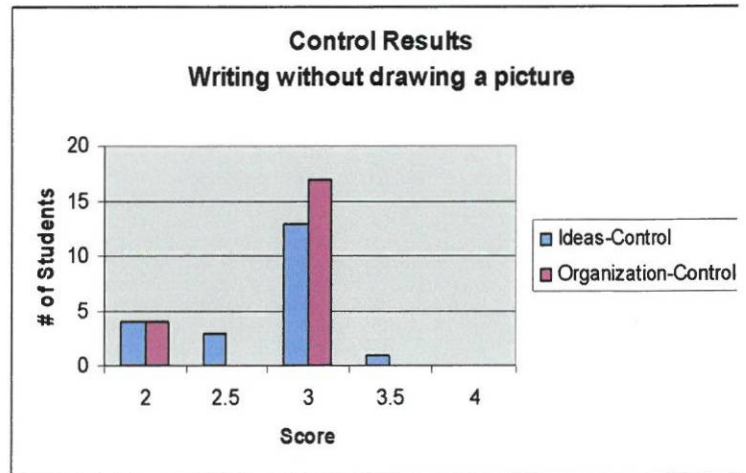
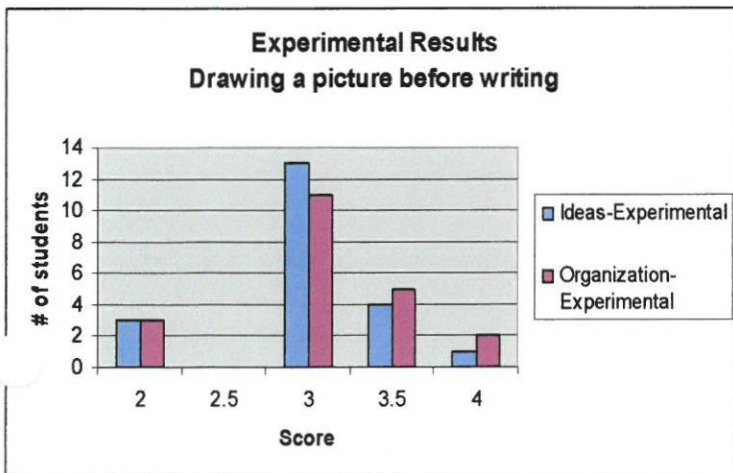
While analyzing the assessments, the researcher carefully gave each assessment a grade based on the contents of the rubric. If a student was in between a score of a 4, 3 or 2, they might have received a score of a 3.5 or 2.5. A score of 3.5 represents that the student’s writing deserved more than a 3, but was not quite a 4. A score of 2.5 represents that the student’s writing was more than a 2, but not quite a 3.

As a result of this study, the researcher planned to answer three research questions. The first question to be addressed is as follows: Will the use of drawing as a pre-writing strategy help students become more successful writers? In order to determine the answer to this question, the researcher took the results from the two weeks of assessments and compared each student’s score both experimental and control. The graph shows the scores for both ideas and organization. The following bar graph shows the results from both assessments.

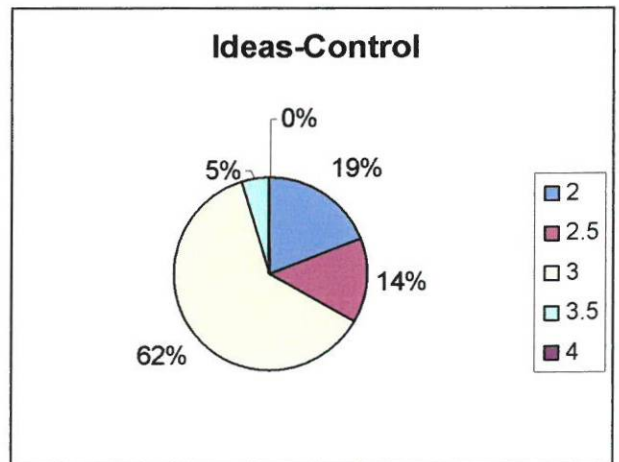
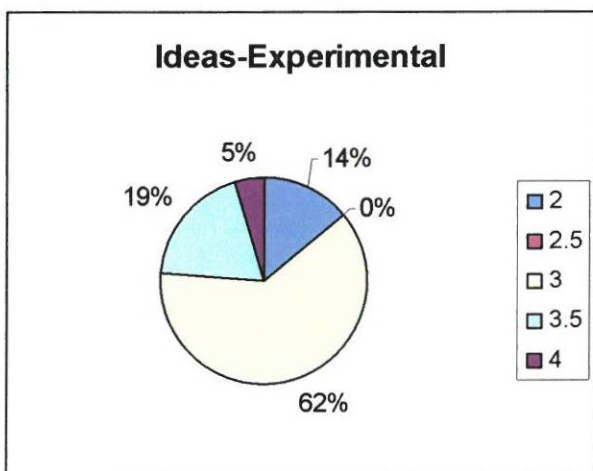


From the graph, it is noticeable that most students score a 3 for both assessments and for both ideas and organization. Receiving a 3 as a writing score is what is expected of first graders. 9 of the scores that were higher than a 3 are from students who drew a picture before writing their story. Based on this information, the researcher is beginning to determine that drawing a picture before writing will only help some students excel in writing.

In the two following graphs, the researcher separated the data from the experimental group and the control group. These graphs clearly show that when students were able to draw a picture before writing, higher scores were received. Scores improved in both ideas and organization. The researcher noticed that there were higher scores in the area of organization when students were able to draw a picture before writing. This could be contributed to the fact that the picture helped students mentally organize their thoughts so they would have a concrete beginning middle and end to their story. Scores for ideas also increased when students were able to draw a picture before writing. The visual may have helped students remember more details to include in their story.

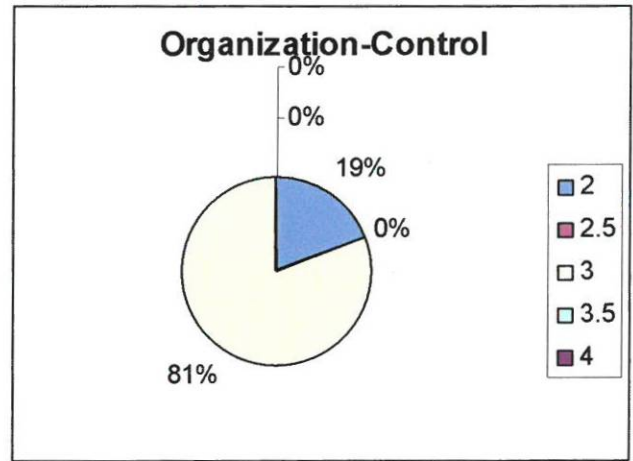
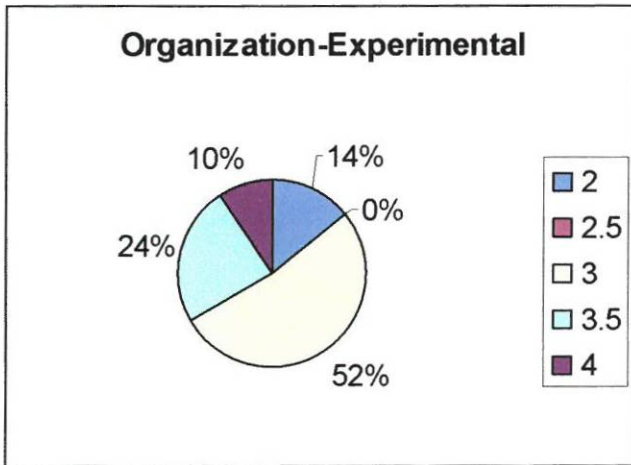


The next four graphs have the same information as the last two, yet the number of students who received a certain score is given as a percentage. In comparing the pie graphs for ideas, it is interesting to see that for both groups, experimental and control, 62% of students received a 3. Yet, there was a significant difference in percentage of the amount of students who received a score of 2, 2.5, 3.5 or 4. 19% of experimental students received a 3.5 in ideas while only 5% received the same score in the control group. In addition, 5% of experimental students received a 4. However, there were not any 4's in the control group.



In looking at the organizational pie graphs below, the researcher noticed the large percentage difference of students who received a 3. 81% of students received a 3 in the control group, while only 52% of students received a 3 in the experimental group. 24% of students were able to score higher than a 3 in

organization when they were able to use a visual. No student scored above a 3 for organization in the control group. The percentage of students who received a 2 was lower for the experimental group versus the control group.

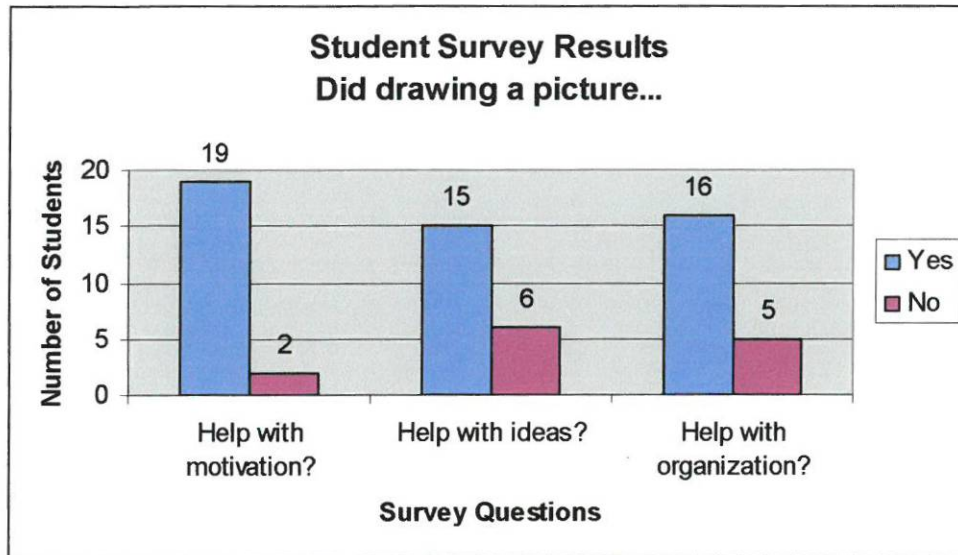


Did the use of drawing as a pre-writing strategy help students become more successful writers? The results show that when students were not allowed to use a visual they received lower scores than those who were able to use a visual. The use of a visual did allow students to be successful writers. The drawing helped a percentage of students to become more successful writers than before. The research has proven that using a picture as a pre-write has allowed students to add more details to their writing and it has helped the writers organize their thoughts in order to write a story.

The next question to be addressed will be: Will the use of drawing as a pre-writing strategy increase student motivation for writing? Student motivation for writing is very important. Motivation is the key to students' success on stories they write. If a student is not motivated, they will most likely not put their best effort forward on that certain assignment. To determine student motivation for these particular writing assessments the researcher used observation and a student survey. While giving the writing assessments, the researcher observed how students were behaving while taking the test. As previously stated, the researcher noticed that when students were in the experimental group, they responded with excitement and enthusiasm to get started on the writing assessment. Those who were in the control group, were less excited about starting and it took them more time to get started writing than the experimental group.

To gather a more accurate idea about how students were really feeling about the writing assignments, the researcher had each student complete a survey. The survey was very simple and had three questions. Students were asked if drawing pictures before writing got them motivated about writing their story. They were also asked if drawing a picture helped with gathering ideas and organizing their thoughts. See Appendix D for an example of the survey. The results of the survey are as follows:





As shown by the graph, the majority of students felt positive about drawing a picture as a pre-writing strategy. Most students felt motivated to write as a result of drawing a picture. The majority of students also felt that drawing a picture also helped with gathering ideas and organizing their thoughts. The results of this survey were not surprising to the researcher. Students in first grade often enjoy drawing pictures and using visuals while learning.

The final research question examined was the results of whether or not boys' writing improves as a result of using a picture as a pre-write? As a result of the fact that boys usually score significantly lower in writing than girls (Silberman, 1989), the researcher was particularly eager to find out the results of how the boys' scores compared to those of the girls. The results are as follows:

	Ideas (experimental)	Organization (experimental)	Ideas (control)	Organization (control)
Average score for boys	3	2.95	2.7	2.8
Average score for girls	3	3.2	2.8	2.8

The results show that the boys were more successful when allowed to draw a picture before writing in comparison to when they weren't able to draw a picture. However, the girls still scored slightly better in most areas.

#### Conclusions and Applications

Based on the results of the study, the researcher concludes that overall drawing a picture before writing allows students to be more successful writers. Drawing increases student motivation to write and helps to recall details and organize thoughts. Now that the researcher has knowledge of the benefits of drawing a picture, she plans to share this information with her co-workers. In the researcher's experience, she has noticed that other teachers view drawing, in relationship to writing, as a waste of time. Drawing as a pre-writing strategy is not a common way to start the writing process. Drawing is usually associated with the publishing stage of writing. However, based on the current research, teachers will hopefully not discard drawing as a pre-writing strategy. Drawing as a pre-writing strategy would especially benefit the students who feel unmotivated to write.

If this research study was completed a second time, there would be some aspects that the researcher would change. Next time the researcher would allow for more time to draw a picture. The experimental group took a lot longer to complete their writing assignment than the control group. Drawing the picture took up a lot of time that the researcher didn't originally count on. When allowing students to draw a picture before writing, it is important to allow for more time than normal. If the story is not being used for grading purposes: drawing a picture at home might be a solution to the time issue.

As a result of this study being conducted on first graders, the researcher feels that she might not have received the most accurate account of how a picture might help in the writing process. First graders have very similar writing skills and abilities because they are all just really starting to learn how to write. It would be very interesting to see the results if this study was conducted on much older students. With older students there would be a much wider range of skills and abilities.

The researcher is glad she had the opportunity to conduct this research in her classroom. It has broadened her view on the importance of allowing her students to use visuals while writing. The results will hopefully encourage other educators to allow students to draw a picture as a pre-writing strategy.

## Appendix A

## Writing Rubric

	Ideas	Organization
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writes several related sentences</li> <li>Presents original ideas-shows in-depth thinking</li> <li>Consistently stays on topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing is easy to follow.</li> <li>Writing has a beginning, logical sequence, and an effective ending.</li> <li>Important ideas stand out.</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writes several related sentences</li> <li>Presents predictable ideas- needs more specific support and details</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing has a beginning, logical sequence and an effective ending.</li> <li>Key ideas begin to surface.</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writes more than one related sentence</li> <li>Lacks details</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiments with beginnings, and grouping of ideas as attempts at sequencing</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writes to convey meaning, but ideas are unclear</li> <li>No details</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lacks a sense of beginning or end</li> <li>Connections between ideas are confusing</li> </ul>

## Appendix B

## Writing Topics:

Week 1: Write about your favorite toy. Describe why that toy is special.

Week 2: Write about a day you will always remember. Give details about what happened on that day.

Appendix C

Writing Checklist

1. I started each sentence with a capital letter. (Aa)
2. I ended each sentence with an ending mark. (. ? !)
3. I think my spelling is correct. (ABC)
4. I re-read my story.
5. I added more details.
6. My story makes sense.

Appendix D

Student Survey

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle either yes or no for each question:

1. Did you enjoy drawing a picture before writing your story? Yes or No
2. Did drawing a picture help you get ideas for your story? Yes or No
3. Did drawing a picture help you organize your story? Yes or No

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