

Paragraph Writing for Ninth Grade Language Arts Students

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## Abstract

This action research study focused on utilizing Socratic Seminars to teach ninth grade students how to effectively write in-depth analysis paragraphs. The intervention was designed to fit into an intervention instructional unit to improve students' writing skills with the main focus on analysis paragraphs. The research question asked the following: What is the effect of the Socratic Seminar on the student's ability to write in-depth analysis paragraphs? Thirty (30) ninth grade students were assessed using a pre-assessment writing sample to assess student knowledge and a post-assessment writing sample to assess their gain of knowledge. For the post-assessment, they used Socratic Seminar discussions to improve the commentary in their analysis paragraphs. The intervention was implemented into six 77 to 89-minute class periods with six lessons (nine hours) in the Language Arts 9 Honors classroom. The participants are from a 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade, 5A high school in a suburban area in the Midwest of the United States. The study found that 100% of students were able to proficiently write an in-depth analysis paragraph by the end of the instructional unit. Therefore, the use of the Socratic Seminar is an effective method when teaching students how to write in-depth analysis paragraphs.

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## **Chapter 1 - Topic and Problem**

### **Topic**

The topic is the instruction of analysis paragraph writing for struggling ninth grade students. Students do not understand how to format these paragraphs properly or how to write complex ideas and therefore require strong writing instruction (Bearne, 2018; Borsky, 2019; Hochman, 2017). This instruction should include teaching them how to construct relevant context, find strong textual evidence in the form of direct quotes, and develop in-depth commentary. This topic is relevant because, as a ninth grade English teacher, it is important for me to help students create the necessary foundation to begin writing effective essays. As these students progress academically, they will be able to refer back to these skills, as well as strengthen them, to become stronger writers and deeper thinkers in other areas of their education (Marzban & Adibi, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

One of the school district's essential standards of the ninth grade Language Arts classroom is to teach students how to write complex analysis texts using correct organization. When students enter the ninth-grade classroom, they are not able to write analysis paragraphs and require instruction to develop their writing skills.

### **Problem Background and Causes**

As an essential standard, it is very important for students to learn and strengthen the skill of analysis paragraph writing (Scheidler, 2015). Writing is a very demanding process and, while paragraph writing may seem like a basic idea, students need to practice often in order to strengthen their writing skills. If students do not receive strong instruction in this area early on, it could lead to them struggling with their writing as they continue with their education.

There are a few contributing factors to this problem. Students do not understand what to write to start a paragraph, including relevant context that introduces the topic, their opinion, and necessary background information. They do not understand how to smoothly integrate direct quotes that support their analysis instead of their context. In-depth analysis that specifically and thoroughly answers the prompt is also lacking when they write their paragraphs. Some other contributing factors that students may struggle with are appropriate paragraph length and correct use of writing conventions and grammar. The absence of these skills could be from a lack of writing instruction from their previous Language Arts classes (Hsiang, Graham, & Wong, 2018). Unfortunately, as the concern for reading skills has grown, writing instruction has taken a back seat in Language Arts instruction and therefore students do not learn the writing skills they need to be academically successful (Lacina & Griffith, 2017).

### **Research Question**

What is the effect of the Socratic Seminar on the student's ability to write in-depth analysis paragraphs?

### **Topic and Problem Conclusion**

Since students come into the ninth-grade classroom unequipped with the skills necessary to write an analysis paragraph, an intervention is required. Instruction includes reviewing paragraph structure according to the Context→Quote→Commentary (CQC) format. Once they understand the CQC format, they can begin to strengthen those elements in their writing. They will learn what makes context relevant, a quote strong, and commentary in-depth. One of the main strategies that will be used to improve student's ability to write in depth paragraphs includes a Socratic Seminar. This instruction will be provided over six, 77 to 89-minute class periods with six lessons (nine hours) in their Language Arts 9 class. Not only will students

receive instruction that will help their paragraph structure but they will also receive the instruction that will help their analysis go beyond the surface level. A pre- and post-assessment will be used to assess the students' learning throughout the unit. The data from the pre-assessment will be compared with data from the post-assessment and further instruction will occur if necessary. The skills from this instruction will be reinforced as students continue to write throughout the remainder of the school year.

## Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

### Introduction

Writing is a crucial element in most academic classes, from Science to Social Studies to Language Arts. Without the constant practice of writing, students do not have the opportunity to expand their ideas and develop academically. With the introduction of the Common Core State Standards, the instruction of writing took on a more important and creative role in the classroom because “Writing develops one’s thinking, allows one to capture ideas, helps explain to others, expand on points, provides evidence to make a case, promotes research with the vast internet resources to capture knowledge and then present knowledge, breaking free of simple steps that constrain thinking” (Scheidler, 2015). Despite the importance of writing, students still struggle to write paragraphs properly and effectively. The literature on this topic reveals the causes of this problem, but also provides many possible solutions and encouragement for teachers who want to help their students become better writers. One possible solution is the implementation of the Socratic Seminar to help students refine their critical thinking skills. Overall, the topics discussed throughout the literature encourages teachers to guide their students with effective practices during writing instruction to help them achieve success throughout and after their academic schooling.

### Cause of Deficient Writing Instruction

The deficiency of effective writing instruction has many causes but one in particular is the lack of confidence and training for teachers who are required to teach writing in the classroom. According to a study performed by Hsiang, Graham, and Wong (2017), “Teachers’ preparation, beliefs about writing, and frequency of writing classes predicted their instructional practices and how frequently students engaged in specific writing activities.” Because these teachers were left

on their own to make the decisions about teaching writing in the classroom, many of them felt ill-prepared and therefore taught writing infrequently, which did not benefit their students' writing abilities. According to a study involving teachers in England, a majority of teachers felt as though they were effective teachers of writing but "45% reported that supporting struggling writers was a problem for them, and 59% reported that there were limited resources to support children's writing" (Dockrell, Marshall, & Wyse, 2016). Even though these teachers felt like effective instructors, they still require more guidance to help them better support their students. Not only are teachers struggling to feel confident and supported in their teaching of writing, but many teachers find it difficult to incorporate effective methods to teach writing. Veiga, Malpique, Frison, and Marques (2015) found that "practices to promote students' self-regulated writing were used rarely . . . more than 60% of Portuguese and Brazilian teachers reported never using, or only using several times a year, teaching practices for that purpose, such as setting specific goals for writing, developing pre writing activities and self-monitoring strategies for writing, teaching proof reading strategies, and asking the students to study and emulate good models of written composition." Writing can be an incredibly difficult subject to teach and knowing which methods to use to teach it is an immense part of that challenge. However, students deserve the time and effort needed to help them refine their writing skills. Educators need access to effective methods that support their students and are manageable in the classroom.

Although some teachers find it difficult to teach writing, there are many tools out there for teachers to implement in their teaching. In fact, many writing guidebooks for teachers have been published throughout the years such as *Teaching Writing: Landmarks and Horizons* (McDonald & McDonald, 2002) and *Teaching Writing Effectively: Reviewing Practice* (Bearne, Chamberlain, Cremin, & Mottram, 2016), The role of the teacher is to find the practices that

work best for their classroom. This means that they must be able to use these practices effectively as a facilitator of learning and the practices must be beneficial for the specific set of students the teacher is working with. The teacher has a very important role as a writing instructor, they are not just there to teach their students the format, let them write, and then just grade the completed assignments. Instead, according to McDonald and McDonald (2002), “it is necessary for [teachers] to offer assistance to student writers when they are in the process of composing a text, rather than after the text has been completed. Comments create the motive for doing something different in the next draft; thoughtful comments create the motive for revising. Without comments from their teachers . . . student writers will revise in a consistently narrow and predictable way.” Without their teacher using effective methods and constantly helping the them throughout the writing process, students will not be able to refine their writing skills. Therefore, teachers must incorporate strong methods to teach writing in their classroom that will help students refine their writing structure. One method that may help with their writing, is the use of the Socratic Seminar, which will help students delve deeper into their analysis rather than just focusing on the organization and format of their writing.

### **Effective Writing Structure**

In order for teachers to be effective facilitators of learning how to write, they must understand what effective writing structure looks like. Early on, students are taught by their elementary and middle school teachers how to structure a paragraph. The paragraph structure typically includes a topic sentence, supporting details, evidence, commentary, and a concluding sentence. The ability to understand this structure early on, allows students to then focus on finding stronger evidence and providing deeper analysis since they know what they need to look for as they read and examine texts. While this is beneficial to their writing skills,

it is also helpful in improving their reading comprehension as a whole. While studying schools in Iran, Marzban and Adibi (2014) found that “students who received paragraph structure rules as a reading strategy during the treatment process achieved higher means in their reading gain scores than students of the control group . . . Therefore, the identification and use of text arrangement are crucial procedures underlying reading comprehension.” Since reading and writing ultimately go together, this partnership of teaching paragraph structure and reading strategies together helps students to refine their language arts skills as a whole.

Along with teaching paragraph structure to help students with their reading and writing abilities, Language Arts teachers must also teach their students to write effective essay. The most common essay is the expository essay. Throughout their article, “One Sentence at a Time: The Need for Explicit Instruction in Teaching Students to Write Well”, Hochman and Wexler discuss the importance of the expository essay not only in school but also in the workplace. This means that students who learn how to properly structure and develop these essays can be successful during and after their academic career. While teaching this skill is important, Hochman and Wexler acknowledge that there is not very much guidance in how to teach expository essay writing in the classroom. Therefore, their article provides a guide for teachers to effectively teach writing to their students with the “Six Principles of the Writing Revolution.” These principles are referred to as TWR and include teaching writing early, setting up a foundation, and teaching in context. According to Hochman and Wexler, “As important as it is for students to learn to write well, it’s not the only reason to teach writing. When teachers embed explicit writing instruction in the content of the curriculum—no matter the subject area—they see their students’ academic abilities blossom.” By understanding appropriate writing structure, teachers will be able to help their students more effectively and

students will be able to become academically successful in more classes than just their Language Arts class.

While understanding and teaching appropriate writing structure can be helpful to many students, some students may require a bit more support and variety in the instruction. To assist with this, many writing structures, activities, and practices have been designed specifically with struggling writers in mind. Worthman, Gardner, and Thole (2011) created the three Rs to help struggling writers. The three Rs include recognition, relevance, and renegotiation. This strategy allows the content to become more accessible to struggling students and “help ‘struggling’ students become competent, confident, empowered and *emancipated* writers” (Worthman, Gardner, & Thole 2011). Burke (2019) also discusses six academic writing assignments that help teachers teach writing better. Some of these assignments include short-answer writing, writing on demand, process paper, and research paper. The use of these assignments “represent the way we really work, the assignments we actually give, and what we can ask students to do within the constraints of time, class size, student needs, and available resources” (Burke, 2019). Therefore, his writing structure also provides students with a more accessible approach to writing. By understanding, and possibly implementing, these writing structures, teachers have more of an opportunity to reach a larger population of their students as they implement writing instruction in the classroom.

### **Writing Instruction in the Classroom**

Writing instruction in the classroom can be difficult. Teachers may feel unsupported as they teach a wide variety of students with a range of skill levels. They may also feel uncertain about which practices are appropriate to use as they teach writing instruction and this causes many teachers to teach writing skills less often that is recommended. Believing in one’s

teaching ability may not seem like it has that great of an effect but “Teacher’s beliefs and self-efficacy about their capabilities to educate students will influence their decisions on the types of experiences they construct for students. These educational learning experiences play an important role in students’ academic decision making towards a goal” (Mohar, Singh, & Kepol, 2017). It is important for teachers to be willing to try new practices in their classroom and be confident in their decisions and teaching. Even if it does not work out the way the teacher may hope, that is just fine because they can try again with a different approach. Overall, a change in attitude and a willing to try will ultimately help their students to also feel a willingness to try in the classroom.

There are many practices that teachers can implement in their teaching to help their students refine their writing skills. Surat, Rahman, and Mahamod recommend using metacognition strategies to help students effectively write essays. According to their study, “Declarative knowledge, procedural and conditional knowledge about writing technique and strategies are important metacognitive elements as it helps students learn how to learn. Consequently, it contributes to students’ performance in essay writing” (Surat, Rahman, & Mahamod, 2014). Along with the use of metacognition strategies, many educators also encourage implementing technology in the learning process. In Camahalan and Ruley’s (2014) blended learning action study, “The students seem to favor the use of iPad minis and the computer due to the learning opportunities and capabilities of the technology. They were eager to participate and share what they learned while using the technology.” By using technology to teach writing skills, students were able to engage more effectively in the instruction. Lacina and Griffith (2017) also encourage the use of technology but further more state that “Campus principals and leaders need to better support teachers in the

implementation effective writing instruction into each classroom.” This statement shows that while teachers have an important role to implement appropriate writing instruction in their classroom, their administrators need to provide them with the necessary support to do this effectively.

### **Socratic Seminar**

A Socratic Seminar refers to the philosopher Socrates who taught his students to question the world around them. Many teachers have implemented the use of Socratic Seminars in their classrooms to help their students develop their critical thinking skills. According to a study by Polite and Adams (1996), “overall, the array of findings suggests the potential of Socratic Seminars as a viable means of increasing the cognitive and social functioning of middle school students.” With the use of Socratic Seminars, students have the opportunity to engage in intellectual conversations and scrutinize ideas. This technique is a beneficial way to help students analyze texts with their peers. Alfonsi encourages the use of Socratic Seminars because it puts students at the center of learning rather than the teacher. She found that her “students surprised [her] by exploring rich, sophisticated topics with depth and support” about *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. More teachers should be encouraged to use this technique as they teach students how to write. Writing does not only focus on the formatting of the words and sentences, but also focuses on the development of ideas. Participation in Socratic Seminars “[enhance] critical thinking and self-efficacy in completing assignments” (Carvalho-Grevious, 2013), which supports the writing learning process in the classroom. By effectively implementing Socratic Seminars, teachers will not only see an increase in student comfort and participation in the classroom, but their writing abilities will increase as well.

**Conclusion**

Providing effective instruction on writing can be incredibly difficult for many teachers. A crucial aspect of tackling the problem of ineffective writing in the classroom is knowing the causes. Many teachers feel unsupported and ill prepared to teach writing, which causes a lack of confidence to explore instructional practices. It is important for teachers to understand the importance of effectively teach their students writing and becoming familiar with appropriate writing practices. Teachers should understand the needs of their students and implement necessary writing techniques in their classroom. These techniques should be relevant and diverse, and may include metacognition strategies and technology to engage the students in their learning of writing. While a lot of techniques focus on structure, another effective technique is the Socratic Seminar because it helps students develop their critical thinking skills. This can help students develop their ideas in their writing not just the format of their writing. Whatever practices a teacher uses, support from administration and communities is absolutely crucial in order for writing instruction to benefit students. With this guidance students will be able to achieve success in their writing, which will benefit them during and after school. Without understanding these elements and committing to solving the problem, nothing will change and students will not receive the help they need to achieve academically.

### **Chapter 3 - Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The study is an action research study using quasi-experimental design that will collect quantitative data. The intervention involves teaching students how to write in-depth analysis paragraphs in six lessons over three weeks. Students will be given a pre-assessment to assess their knowledge. After the completion of the instructional unit, they will be given a post-assessment and the qualitative data from both the pre- and post-assessments will be compared. The intervention will be considered successful if 85% or more of students score as “Proficient” or higher according to an Analysis Paragraph Rubric (see Appendix B).

#### **Research Questions**

What is the effect of the Socratic Seminar on the student’s ability to write in-depth analysis paragraphs?

#### **Participants**

The participants for this research study include 30 ninth grade students in a Language Arts 9 class at a 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade high school. The high school is a 5A school in a suburban area and approximately 2,300 students attend the school. The specific class for this learner analysis is one period of honors Language Arts 9. 3% of students have an independent behavior plan as at-risk students. Also, about 20% of students come from minority groups. As honors students, they tend to be more motivated to engage in learning, especially when directly involved in the lessons rather than just lectured to.

#### **Data Collection Instruments and Methods**

Quantitative data will be collected using an Analysis Paragraph Rubric. The rubric is designed to assess fundamental paragraph writing skills and will be used to examine the pre-

assessment students take at the beginning of the instruction. The skills the rubric will assess are the students' use of organization, context, evidence, commentary, and mechanics. For each of these skills, students will be given a score from 1 to 10 (scores of 5 and below are considered "Not Proficient" and a score of 10 is considered "Highly Proficient"). This will be used when assessing the pre-assessment paragraphs and the revised paragraphs students turn in at the end of instruction. The data from the pre- and post-assessment will be used to identify if the students' analysis paragraphs improve due to the instruction they are provided. This data will be gathered by adding together the scores (1-10) from each skill to create an overall assessment score (a total of 50 possible points). This score will be compared with the overall test score from the pre-assessment and will be used to answer the research question.

The quantitative data (collected using action research design) will be collected from both the pre- and post-assessments. The scores from each skill described in the Analysis Paragraph Rubric will be added together for an overall assessment score. Scores from 46 to 50 are considered "Highly Proficient", 40 to 45 are considered "Proficient", 30 to 39 are "Approaching Proficient", and any score 29 or below is considered "Not Proficient". Then, using a vertical double bar graph, the quantitative data will be sorted. The four possible grade categories ("Highly Proficient" to "Not Proficient") will be listed along the x-axis while the number of students (1-30) will be listed along the y-axis. The first data group will be from the pre-assessment scores (orange bars) and the second data group will be from the post-assessment scores (blue bars). The double bar graph will reveal how many students fall into each grade category during both assessments. Prior to instruction, a majority of students will most likely be in the "Not Proficient" and "Approaching Proficient" areas. The goal of the intervention is to help students master the skills needed to be in the "Proficient" and "Highly Proficient"

categories. By organizing the data groups into a double bar graph, it will be clear to see if students' paragraph writing has improved after instructional intervention, which will answer the research question. The intervention will be considered successful if 85% or more of students score in the "Proficient" and "Highly Proficient" categories on the post-assessment.

### **Data Security and Confidentiality**

The consent forms and data gathered from this research will be private and confidential. The scores for each assessment will be kept in a locked file. All students' names will not be used in any report. Any personal identifiers will only be seen by the researcher and all data will be reported in the aggregate.

### **Summary**

The action research study will collect quantitative data with the use of pre- and post-assessments to identify the effectiveness of utilizing Socratic Seminars to help students strengthen their writing of in-depth analysis paragraphs. The assessments will be assessed using an Analysis Paragraph Rubric. Using the rubric, students will be sorted into one of four categories ("Not Proficient," "Approaching Proficient," "Proficient," and "Highly Proficient"). Many students will most likely fall into the "Not Proficient" and "Approaching Proficient" categories for the pre-assessment. After the pre-assessment, an intervention will be implemented in the form of an instructional unit. Students will learn how to effectively write an in-depth analysis and will then be given a post-assessment. The intervention will be considered successful if 85% of more students score in the "Proficient" and "Highly Proficient" categories on the post-assessment. The skills from this instruction will continued to be reinforced as students continue to write throughout the remainder of the school year to further strengthen their writing.

## Chapter 4 - Results

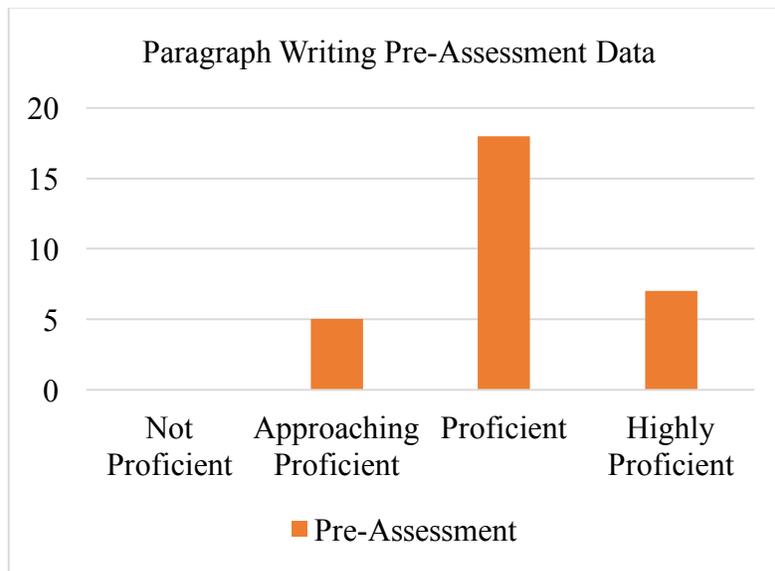
### Results Overview

Ninth grade students struggle with paragraph writing. Prior to beginning the action research study, they were not writing paragraphs proficiently which identified a need to review paragraph structure and use the Socratic Seminar method to develop their paragraph writing skills. At the beginning of the instructional intervention, students were given a pre-assessment. They wrote and turned in a paragraph about a book they read over the summer break. Since this paragraph was turned in after they had already received some instruction on paragraph organization, it was expected that their scores would range from “Approaching Proficient” to “Highly Proficient.” The analysis paragraphs were assessed on the students’ use of organization, context, evidence, commentary, and mechanics. For each of these skills, students were given a score from 1 to 10 (“Not Proficient” to “Highly Proficient”) with a possible total of 50 points. The Analysis Paragraph Rubric was used to determine these scores. The data was then used to identify where they continued to struggle with organization as well as how effectively they were able to write in-depth commentary about a text by responding to a prompt. After receiving the intervention instruction, students were given a post-assessment. The post-assessment involved students rewriting a paragraph after participating in Socratic Seminar discussions. Because they were able to develop their ideas through speaking and listening, the commentary element of their paragraph benefitted. It was expected that their scores would again range from “Approaching Proficient” to “Highly Proficient” but 85% or more of students should score in the “Proficient” and “Highly Proficient” ranges in order for the intervention to be considered successful. By the end of the intervention, 100% of students scored in the “Proficient” and “Highly Proficient” ranges on their paragraph writing post-assessment.

### Data Analysis

Ninth grade students wrote and turned in a paragraph about a book they read over the summer break. They were provided with a prompt and the Analysis Paragraph Rubric. Using the rubric, the instructor calculated scores out of 50 total possible points. 0 students received a score of 29 or below on their paragraph, which is considered “Not Proficient.” 5 students received a score between 30 and 39 points, which is considered “Approaching Proficient.” 18 students received a score between 40 and 45 points, which is considered “Proficient.” 7 students received a score between 46 and 50 points, which is considered “Highly Proficient.” A visual representation of these scores can be found in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

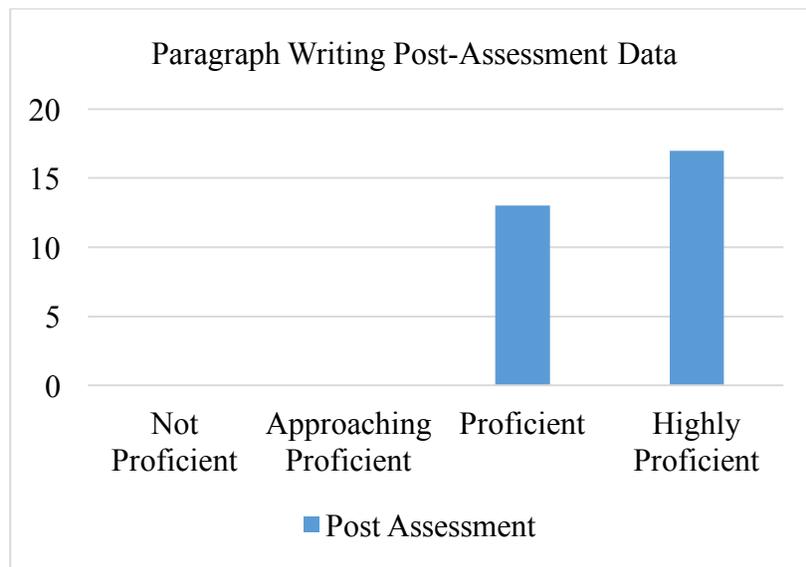


Considering students were in the “Not Proficient” and “Approaching Proficient” areas prior to the start of the intervention instruction with just a bit of a review of paragraph structure, these scores show decent paragraph writing. About 83% of these students are in the “Proficient” or “Highly Proficient” areas and the original goal for the end of the instruction was for 85% or more students to be in these areas. Taking this into consideration, the goal changed to the

following: the intervention will be considered successful if 90%, instead of 85%, or more of students score in the “Proficient” and “Highly Proficient” categories on the post-assessment.

For their post-assessment, students wrote an analysis paragraph, participated in a Socratic Seminar, and then revised and edited their analysis paragraph based on their experience. They were provided with a prompt and the Analysis Paragraph Rubric. Using the rubric, the instructor calculated scores out of 50 total possible points. 0 students received a score of 39 or below on their paragraph, which is considered the “Not Proficient” and “Approaching Proficient” areas. 13 students received a score between 40 and 45 points, which is considered “Proficient.” 17 students received a score between 46 and 50 points, which is considered “Highly Proficient.” A visual representation of these scores can be found in Figure 2.

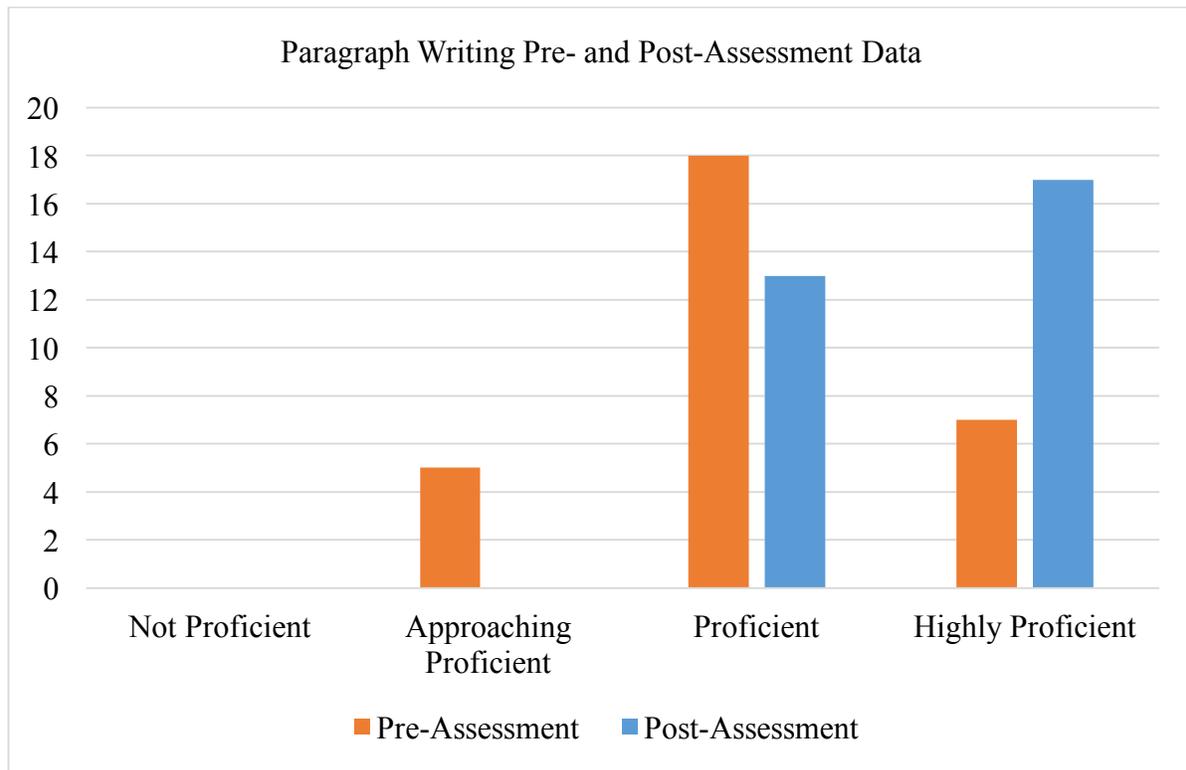
**Figure 2**



The new goal was for at least 90% of students to score in the “Proficient” area or higher. Using the rubric, 100% of students scored in the “Proficient” and “Highly Proficient” areas. 56% of those students scored in the “Highly Proficient” area, whereas only about 23% of students

scored in this area on the pre-assessment. Overall, this instructional unit is considered a success based on the data that was collected. A comparison of the two data sets can be found in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**



### Answers to the Research Questions

The research question asked the following: What is the effect of the Socratic Seminar on the student's ability to write in-depth analysis paragraphs? Overall, the Socratic Seminar improved ninth grade students' analysis paragraph writing skills. The goal of an instructor is to teach students and help them become proficient in content area skills. The Socratic Seminar method allowed for 100% of students to become "Proficient" or higher when writing analysis paragraphs. It even assisted 56% of students to refine their writing skills to reach the "Highly Proficient" area. Using the Socratic Seminar method is an effective tool when teaching students how to write in-depth analysis paragraphs according to ninth grade State Standards.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion

### Overview

When ninth grade students enter the Language Arts 9 classroom, many of them are not able to effectively write in-depth paragraphs. After some instruction, the pre-assessment showed that 83% of students were at least proficient in their analysis paragraph writing. The goal was to provide students with effective instruction to help 90% or higher reach proficiency. With the use of the Socratic Seminar method, 100% of students wrote analysis paragraphs at “Proficient” and “Highly Proficient” levels. Overall, the use of the Socratic Seminar effectively solved the research problem and ninth grade students who participated in this research study can now effectively write in-depth paragraphs.

### Problem Solutions

The research problem of ninth grade students not being able to write analysis paragraphs was solved with paragraph structure review and Socratic Seminar discussions. Reviewing paragraph structure allows students to satisfy the organization requirements of paragraph writing and the Socratic Seminar method allows students to use their speaking and listening skills to enhance their writing of in-depth commentary/analysis. Since 83% of students were considered “Proficient” or higher when they took the pre-assessment, they simply needed to review paragraph structure a little more and then focus on the commentary writing skill for their analysis paragraphs. The Socratic Seminar method allowed them to discuss the questions with their peers and talk out their ideas before they went back their analysis paragraphs and revised their commentary to include what they thought of during the discussion. Considering the improvement of their scores, from 83% proficiency to 100% proficiency, the use of the Socratic Seminar solved the research problem of students not being able to successfully write analysis paragraphs.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

One strength of the project is the use of the Paragraph Analysis Rubric. This allowed for consistency when grading the pre- and post-assessments. Students were also given the rubric while they wrote, which allowed for clarity in the paragraph writing expectations. Overall, the data was collected accurately with the rubric. One weakness of the project is the use of only the pre- and post-assessment as data tools that only collected quantitative data. It would have added more to the research project if a survey or another type of data tool would have been included to provide qualitative data.

**Influential Factors**

One factor that may have skewed the data was the paragraph instruction prior to the intervention instruction. They did learn about paragraph structure with CQC format before focusing on the Socratic Seminar method with paragraph writing. It would have added more to the research study if the study began before any paragraph writing instruction started. That way the pre-assessment could have provided data on their paragraph writing skills before any instruction and the overall learning experience could have been analyzed. Instead, the research project focused on just a part of the analysis paragraph instruction, which may have skewed the results slightly.

**Further Investigation**

Further investigation is necessary to analyze the other aspects of analysis writing in the ninth grade Language Arts classroom, such as the analysis essay. Students have mastered writing a single analysis paragraph, but how does that transfer to body paragraphs in an analysis essay as well as introduction and conclusion paragraphs? Further investigation would include a pre-assessment to collect data on their analysis essay writing skills and the instructional unit would

provide any necessary intervention to help improve their analysis essay skills. A post-assessment would be used to collect data to identify student improvement.

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### Appendix A

Goal of Instruction: Using a provided prompt and rubric, Students will write an in-depth analysis paragraph with proficiency according to the rubric.

State Standard: W 9.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Objective	Activity	Assessment
Using a provided prompt and rubric, students will write an analysis paragraph to the best of their abilities.	Students will be given the following prompt: Write a paragraph analyzing one element of how Sonny develops over the course of <i>October Sky</i> . They will use this prompt and the Analysis Paragraph Rubric to write their analysis paragraphs (about 80 minutes).	The paragraph students turn in is the pre-assessment of their prior knowledge for the intervention.
Using CQC format expectations, students will annotate student analysis paragraph examples by highlighting and providing clear comments explaining each example's proficiency level.	Students will be given a handout including four student examples of paragraphs written at different levels. With a partner, students will highlight and comment on what each paragraph did well and what needs to be improved (about 50 minutes). The instructor will then use a document camera and go over the examples with the students, pointing out anything they missed (about 30 minutes).	The handout acts as a formative assessment to identify how well students understand paragraph expectations in relation to student models.
Using discussion expectations, students will begin to participate in class discussions by effectively speaking and listening throughout the class period.	Students will be introduced to the class discussion expectations, which include appropriate body language, eye contact, and volume. The expectations also include effective participation by building on the ideas of others and by being respectful to others' ideas (about 20 minutes). Students will then be introduced to irony and satire using definitions, general examples, and book examples (about 30 minutes). Students will then partner up to find examples of irony/satire from their reading homework and discuss why the author included these literary devices in the book. The class will then discuss what they found as a whole (about 30 minutes).	An informal class discussion about satire/irony at the end of the class period will act as a formative assessment to identify students' skill levels.

<p>Using Depth of Knowledge expectations, students will begin to develop their own questions ensuring that they are considered “below the surface.”</p>	<p>Students will be introduced to the different levels (1-6) of Depth of Knowledge (DoK) using definitions and examples. They will also be shown the difference between above and below surface questions according to DoK using examples based off of well-known movies. Students will then practice creating their own questions based on a short story (or book) they read earlier in the school year. They will write their questions on the board and the class will identify strengths and weaknesses of each question. Further instruction will be provided if necessary (about 60 minutes). Students will be given the remainder of the class period to work on their homework (see assessment section).</p>	<p>For homework, students will read assigned pages from their book and come up with 2 “below surface” questions that they will turn in the next class period as a formative assessment.</p>
<p>Using a prompt and prepared paragraph, students will participate in a Socratic Seminar ensuring that they demonstrate effective discussion techniques.</p>	<p>Students will be introduced to the Socratic Seminar method along with expectations for the discussion (about 15 minutes). They will also learn how to recognize themes in stories by identifying topics, examples, and underlying messages in example stories (about 20 minutes). They will then prepare to participate in an informal Socratic Seminar by writing a paragraph using CQC format that answers a provided prompt about identifying a theme from their reading homework (about 30 minutes). After they have prepared, they will separate into groups of 5 and will use their paragraphs (and discussion strategies) to help them effectively participate in a group discussion (about 20 minutes).</p>	<p>An informal Socratic Seminar about the theme of the book they are reading will act as a formative assessment to identify students’ skill levels.</p>
<p>Using the Socratic Seminar method, students will discuss a provided prompt ensuring to go beyond surface level thinking.</p>	<p>Students will be provided with a prompt that they must answer by writing an in-depth analysis paragraph to the best of their abilities (about 30 minutes). Students will then participate in a Socratic Seminar. Each Socratic Seminar will include about 10 students who will discuss the prompt they wrote to prepare. The groups will take turns presenting to the whole class. While the other students wait their turn, they will take notes on what the discussing group did well and what they can improve on (this</p>	<p>This lesson/activity is preparatory to their post-assessment.</p>

	<p>will be used to help coach one another). They will also take notes on the ideas their peers made, evidence that was used, and things they thought of as they were listening (about 50 minutes).</p>	
<p>Using their participation in the Socratic Seminar, students will write an in-depth analysis paragraph that meets the proficiency expectations on the Analysis Paragraph Rubric.</p>	<p>Students will review the paragraph they wrote prior to the Socratic Seminar as well as the notes they took during the discussions. The prompt will be given to them again and they will rewrite the paragraph adding detail and evidence they thought of while participating in the Socratic Seminar. Students will turn in a revised analysis paragraph demonstrating what they have learned (about 40 minutes). The rest of the class period will be used to satisfy other class requirements or work time to complete reading homework.</p>	<p>The paragraph students turn in is the post-assessment of their knowledge gained from the intervention.</p>

**Appendix B**

**Analysis Paragraph Rubric**

Organization and Style (Paragraph follows Context → Quote → Commentary format, ideas flow, and transitions are used): 10 points

2                      4                      6                      8                      10

Context (Context identifies the text, restates the question, and includes any necessary background information for the evidence and commentary): 10 points

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Evidence (Evidence is in the form of a strong and smoothly integrated direct quote and is properly written out): 10 points

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Commentary (Commentary thoroughly answers the prompt, explains the writer’s reasoning, and connects back to the evidence): 10 points

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

Mechanics (Sentences are properly structured and spelling/capitalization is correct): 10 points

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**Comments:**

**Score Breakdown**

Score	Level	Expectations
10	Highly proficient	Exhibits mastery of identified writing skill.
8-9	Proficient	Exhibits proficiency of identified writing skill, some areas may need more refining.
6-7	Approaching Proficient	Exhibits understanding of identified writing skill but many areas may need refining.
1-5	Not Proficient	Exhibits a lack of understanding of identified writing skill and most areas need work or are missing.

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

#### Student (K–12) Classroom Research

*Western Governors University - Teachers College*

*Master of Education, Instructional Design*

*Rebekah Crawley*

*Paragraph Writing for Ninth Grade Language Arts Students*

#### Introduction

Rebekah Crawley, a graduate student researcher in the Teachers College of Western Governors University, wishes to conduct an action research study for the purpose of determining the effectiveness of using Socratic Seminar when teaching ninth grade students how to write in-depth analysis paragraphs. Approval of the Timpview High School administration to conduct this study was obtained prior to this announcement. By signing this consent form, parents or legal guardians agree to allow their child to participate in the study. Any data collected will be reported as part of a group; individual student names will not be used.

#### Description of the Project

The study will focus on measuring student learning in regards to participating in a Socratic Seminar and the impact it has on their analysis paragraph writing. Instead of focusing on just writing techniques to build writing skills, participants will be taught to discuss their ideas civilly with their peers to analyze more complex ideas. A pre- and post-assessment method will be used to compare analysis paragraph writing mastery using the Socratic Seminar instruction. The data from both assessments will be collected using a Paragraph Analysis Rubric. The research will be conducted in the researcher's class during the hour and a half Language Arts instruction. The study will run for a three-week period (9 class hours). All students are expected to participate fully in all routine classroom activities and the pre- and post-assessments are considered routine classroom activities.

#### Benefits and Risks of the Study

Some students may feel anxious about discussing complex topics in front of their peers. Students may also experience normal test anxiety when completing the pre- and post-assessments. However, all anticipated risks to participation in this study are minimal and no greater than those which are normally encountered in normal daily classroom activity. The researcher will seek to minimize the anxiety risks by providing detailed information on participating in group discussions in front of peers (a Socratic Seminar). Possible participant benefits may include learning how to effectively discuss important topics with peers. Students will be informed that the study activities are intended to help them write better analysis paragraphs, which will allow them to become more proficient in Language Arts. The study may help the researcher and other educators acquire additional teaching techniques to facilitate student learning.

**Confidentiality**

The data gathered from this research will be private and confidential. The scores for each assessment will be kept in a locked file. Your child's name will not be used in any report. Any personal identifiers will only be seen by the researcher. Data will be reported in the aggregate.

**Voluntary Participation**

Analysis writing instruction is an essential writing standard in the Language Arts classroom. Speaking and Listening skills are also crucial elements 9<sup>th</sup> grade students need to develop in the classroom. As such, all participants are expected to participate in any regular classroom instruction. Since routine data gathering includes the pre- and post-assessments, these data collection forms are considered part of regular classroom instruction.

**Withdrawal**

Participants may withdraw at any time from non-regular classroom instruction and will not be penalized for nonparticipation. To withdraw from the study, the parent or participant must notify the researcher. Parental or legal guardian consent as well as school principal or district administrator permission must be granted in order for the student researcher to gather data for the purposes of their research project. Participants or their parents can request that their individual results be excluded from the final report. Grades/enrollment will not be impacted in any way as a result of withdrawing from this study.

**Questions, Rights, and Complaints**

Participants and their parents/legal guardians have a right to view the results of the study. If you have questions about this study, please contact me by calling 801.221.9720 or email [rcrawl8@wgu.edu](mailto:rcrawl8@wgu.edu).

If you have questions about your rights, unresolved questions, or complaints pertaining to the study, contact the WGU IRB Chairperson by email: [irb@wgu.edu](mailto:irb@wgu.edu).

**Consent Statement**

- By signing this document, the administrator grants permission for student data collection and reporting necessary for this study.
- By signing this document, the parent/legal guardian grants permission for their child to participate in the study and has the opportunity to have his or her questions answered.
- Student participants will be informed of the research purpose and activities and will be asked for their assent to participate upon parental approval. High school students' signatures on this document affirms that they will voluntarily participate and have had their questions answered.