

Revamping Revision:  
Improving Grade 7 Students' Writing Skills Through the Teaching of Revision Strategies

by

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## Abstract

The purpose of this project was to examine the role of revision in the development of Grade 7 students' writing abilities. A review of the literature focused on the following topics: the writing process, the process of revision, the cognitive processes involved in revision, six-trait writing, teacher-led strategies to develop revision, collaboration and writing, and writing assessment. Spandel's (2009a) revision program, *Creating 6-Trait Revisers and Editors: 30 Revising and Editing Lessons*, provided the framework for the development of the 14 lesson unit, Revamping Revision. The goals of the unit were to develop students' understanding about the characteristics of quality writing and to introduce the students to revision strategies to help them improve the quality of their writing. The collaborative nature of the unit was consistent with social constructivist theory. The unit was taught to a class of Grade 7 students over a period of 12-weeks. Reflection on the literature review and the teaching of the unit revealed that the successes of the unit were directly linked to the use of the six-traits to develop an understanding of strong writing, the scaffolded lessons that taught the specific revision strategies, and the incorporation of constant collaboration opportunities.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
What is Revision? .....	1
Why is the Teaching of Revision Important .....	2
Finding a Revision Program .....	3
Development of the Revision Unit.....	5
Theoretical Foundations.....	6
Project Overview.....	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
The Writing Process.....	8
The Revision Phase.....	10
Cognitive processes involved in revision.....	12
Six-Trait Writing.....	14
Teacher-Led Strategies to Develop Revisions .....	16
Collaborative Writing .....	19
Writing Assessment .....	23
Rubrics.....	25
Conclusions.....	27
Chapter 3: Instructional Unit: Revamping Revision.....	29

Unit Goals .....	29
Materials.....	32
Overview of the Unit.....	32
Classroom Demographics .....	33
Lesson Plans and Reflections.....	34
Lesson 1 – Good versus Bad Writing (Part 1).....	34
Lesson 2 – Good versus Bad Writing (Part 2).....	37
Lesson 3 – What Makes Writing Work.....	40
Lesson 4 – What Teachers Value in Writing .....	44
Lesson 5 – My Writing Inventory .....	48
Lesson 6 – First Draft.....	51
Lesson 7 – Revising versus Editing .....	53
Lesson 8 – Revising by Showing .....	56
Lesson 9 – Revising by Making a Scene.....	60
Lesson 10 – Revising Beyond the List (Part 1).....	64
Lesson 11 – Revising Beyond the List (Part 2).....	68
Lesson 12 – Revising with Consequences .....	72
Lesson 13 – Revising to Connect Ideas.....	73
Lesson 14 – Revising Under Pressure.....	75
Chapter 4: Reflection.....	77
Success of the Unit as Linked to the Literature .....	77
Limitations of Spandel’s Revision Program .....	80
Suggestions of Teachers’ Pedagogy .....	81

My Future Writing Pedagogy .....	81
Recommendations for Future Research .....	82
References.....	84
Appendix A: Good versus Bad Writing – Calvin and Hobbs Comic .....	88
Appendix B: “The Redwoods” and “Mouse Alert” Handout .....	89
Appendix C: “What Teachers Value in Writing” Handout .....	91
Appendix D: Student Checklist Handout.....	92
Appendix E: Revise by Showing Handout .....	93
Appendix F: Sample A & Sample B.....	95
Appendix G: Sample C & Sample D Handout & Overhead.....	97
Appendix H: Suggested Revisions of Sample C & D Overheads .....	99
Appendix I: Finished Whole-Class Revision of Sample C.....	101
Appendix J: Revise by Making a Scene Handout.....	102
Appendix K: Revise Beyond the List Handout .....	104

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Revision is a fundamental aspect of the writing process. For most writers, usually more than one “quick and easy attempt” is needed to construct their thoughts into a piece of writing that clearly articulates their intentions. Donald Murray reiterates the importance of revision by stating that, “Writing *is* revision, and the writer’s craft is largely a matter of knowing how to discover what you have to say, develop, and clarify it, each requiring the craft of revision” (as cited in MacArthur, 2007, p. 141).

Even though revision plays such a major role in the writing process, the teaching of revision strategies is limited in classrooms (Heard, 2002; Spandel, 2009a). Knowing that I wanted to develop and extend my own learning of writing, I decided to focus my project on the teaching of revision skills in student writers. Revision was a part of writing that I thought could best benefit my students’ progress as writers. In this chapter, I define revision, explain why I believe it is important, share information on the Spandel’s (2009a) revision program, and describe how I developed my unit, Revamping Revision.

#### **What is Revision?**

The term “revision” means different processes to different people. Some people use terms such as editing or proofreading interchangeably to describe the process. For this project, I embraced Spandel’s (2009a) definition of revising that states, “revising is re-seeing, re-thinking text, and making internal changes that affect message, voice, and readability” (p. 2). These internal changes are also commonly referred to as content changes. Content changes have also been referred to as text-based (Dix, 2006), deep structure (Torrance, Fidalgo, & Garcia, 2007), meaning (Chanquoy, 2001), form (McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007) and revision (Davis & McGrail,

2009; Sandmann, 2006). Changes that affect the meaning of the text may include additions, deletions, substitutions, and restructuring. Surface changes, in contrast, include all mechanical adjustments related to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. These changes mostly do not alter the meaning of the text at all. Other terms related to surface changes include lexical or sentence-level errors (McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007), editing (Sandmann, 2006), copyediting, and proofreading (Davis & McGrail, 2009). Although these types of surface changes may be considered revision in the reviewed literature, these types of changes were referred to as editing within my unit.

Within the British Columbia Prescribed Learning Outcomes for English Language Arts (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006) surface changes are also referred to as editing.

### **Why is the Teaching of Revision Important?**

As mentioned above, revision is a key part of the writing process. According to Humphris (2010) revision is often the key to improving the quality of writing and to building students' confidence as writers. However, this important skill is often left out or rushed over during writing instruction. Spandel (2009a) states that traditionally, teachers have not really taught revision; instead, they only assign it: "Revise your essay for homework." As a result, students are left not understanding the process and end up typing their work to make it neater or correcting only surface level errors. Heard (2002) agrees that without explicitly teaching revision, students' views around revision are incredibly distorted. She goes on to share that many students perceive revision as a punitive process that only reinforces their insecurities around writing. To clear up these misconceptions, Heard states that educators must be clear about their vision of revision. To do so teachers must explain to students that revision is a natural and integral part of the writing process that occurs at all phases of writing. With increased knowledge of the revision process, students' beliefs around revision can shift.

The fundamental role of revision in the writing process is acknowledged in the British Columbia Prescribed Learning Outcomes for English Language Arts (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006). At the Grade 7 level, there are two specific prescribed learning outcomes within the strategies for writing and representing section that require revision strategies: “C6 - Select and use various strategies during writing and representing to express and refine thoughts” and “C7 - Select and use various strategies after writing and representing to improve their work” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 60). These two outcomes reinforce the notion that revision is a continuous process that occurs both during and after writing. Within the Student Achievement section of the document, revision is shown as one of the four discrete parts of writing along with prewriting, drafting, and editing. The document also lists “revising and rewriting” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 80) as one of the key criteria of a good writer and presenter. Attention to revision within the Prescribed Learning Outcomes makes it clear that educators must teach these revision strategies to improve student writing and to meet the required curriculum that the government prescribes.

### **Finding a Revision Program**

Knowing that revision is included in the Prescribed Learning Outcomes and that revision is a key component the writing process, I searched for a revision program that I could use to teach my students specific revision strategies. When I was referred to Spandel’s (2009a) book, *Creating 6-Trait Revisers and Editors: 30 Revising and Editing Lesson* I was thrilled that the program connected the six-traits writing model with revision strategies.

The six-traits model is a popular framework taught by a number of teachers to identify the features of quality writing. The traits that are used to describe quality writing include ideas, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency, and conventions. The importance of these

traits extends beyond their increasing popularity, because these traits are also directly featured in the British Columbia Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Writing (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006). The Prescribed Learning Outcomes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006) define quality writing through the six-traits, which include ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency, voice, and conventions (p. 25). Although the British Columbia Writing Performance Standards (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009) use different vocabulary to describe various aspects of writing – meaning, style, form, and conventions – these terms still incorporate all of the writing traits. The correlation between the terminology of the six-traits and the Writing Performance Standard document is as follows: meaning is equivalent to ideas; style incorporates word choice, voice, and sentence fluency; form is equal to organization; and conventions are the same for both.

Within Spandel's (2009a) program, there are three revision strategy lessons for each one of the traits. Since each lesson is focused on a specific skill within that trait, the revising task is more focused to help students build confidence in their revising abilities. The lessons that Spandel created are designed to be both teacher and student friendly. First, the lessons extend students' revision practice by having them revise a text written by someone else. Second, the students see what revision looks like as they track their changes on the original text. Third, the revision process is manageable given that the students use a short text and focus on one strategy at a time. Overall, the instructional sequence used in each of the lessons is based on the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006). Each of the easy to manage lessons follows the same format that emphasizes the understanding of a foundational revision strategy, connecting to literature, modeling of the strategy by the teacher,

collaborating between students, and providing opportunities to discuss, share and brainstorm ideas.

### **Development of the Revision Unit**

After discovering Spandel's (2009a) program, I originally thought I would pilot the program with my Grade 7 class to see how effective it was in building my students' writing abilities, specifically their revision skills. However, once I started to thoroughly read the book, I realized two things: first, addressing all of the six-trait lessons would be far too large an undertaking to accomplish in one term, and second, introducing the concepts of both revision and the six-traits model had to be done before implementing Spandel's complete program.

Therefore, I elected to focus my unit on the ideas and organization writing traits. These two traits seemed to be an excellent starting point for my class, as these traits are the foundation for all pieces of text. Spandel (2009b) somewhat confirmed my decision as she focused on these traits first in the revision program. To help introduce the six-traits model to my class, I used Spandel's (2009b) book, *Creating Writers through 6-Trait Writing: Assessment and Instruction*. This book proved to be an excellent complement to her revision text, *Creating 6-Trait Revisers and Editors: 30 Revising and Editing Lesson* (Spandel, 2009a), as it works to create an understanding of how the six-traits help define quality writing.

By creating the unit, *Revamping Revision*, I hoped to create awareness for what quality writing is and to develop students' revising skills to help them improve their writing. During my research, I came across a quote from Heard (2002) that encapsulates my thoughts around this unit perfectly: "Revision is a way of seeing and then reseeding our words, training our eyes and ears to what good writing sounds like, and learning and practicing strategies that will make a difference in our writing" (p. x).

While I developed my unit, I knew that I wanted to create a writing community within my classroom where students felt supported by and connected with their classmates. To support the development of this environment, I included some form of collaboration within almost every lesson of the unit.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

The collaborative nature of the developed lessons is consistent with social constructivist theory. According to social constructivism, meaning is not made alone by the individual, but instead through his or her interactions with others (Creswell, 2007). Vygotsky (1978) believes that people create their understanding through talking with others. As students use language to communicate, they can develop an increased understanding of their thoughts. I based the development of my unit on this thinking by allowing my students to constantly make sense of their understanding of writing and revision through class discussions, brainstorming, and group and partner work.

Developing students' metacognitive awareness around writing and revision also played a significant role in this unit. The focus also shifted away from the written product to the process of writing, to help students understand the demands that revision places on the writer. The ability to self-regulate and self-monitor one's own writing is also based on metacognitive understanding (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Throughout these lessons, students had opportunities to learn the metalanguage to be able to talk about both the writing process and revision. The six-traits played a major role in teaching this metalanguage, which then facilitated discussions about students' writing.

## **Project Overview**

Chapter One has provided an introduction to what revision is, why revision is significant, the Spandel revision program, the development of the unit, and the theoretical foundations.

Chapter Two provides a literature review of the academic literature and research that specifically addresses the process of revision, the cognitive processes involved in revision, six-trait writing, teacher-led strategies to develop revision, collaboration and writing, and writing assessment.

Chapter Three contains the unit Revamping Revision, which includes plans and reflections on each lesson. Finally, Chapter Four is a reflection on the implementation of the unit, which makes connections to the literature and shares recommendations for future pedagogy and research.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

There is a vast amount of literature related to revision and the extent of the literature makes it clear that researchers and educators see revision as central to the achievement of proficient student writers. This chapter reviews the academic literature and research connected to the writing process. Specifically, I discuss the process of revision, the cognitive processes involved in revision, six-trait writing, teacher-led strategies to develop revision, collaboration and writing, and writing assessment. All of these topics can further our understanding of the complexities of revision within the writing process, and can assist in the teaching of revision to improve the overall writing ability of our students.

### **The Writing Process**

The views of educators and researchers on writing and writing instruction have dramatically evolved over time. The emphasis of writing has shifted from an emphasis on product to process, from a linear view of the process to a hierarchical one, and from a rigid approach to instruction to a more flexible one. Early models of writing, such as Britton's Conception/Incubation/Production model, depicted distinct stages of the writing process (cited in Flower & Hayes, 1981; Humphris, 2010). These models viewed writing as a linear process, where writers progressed through each stage to produce a product. Over time, these stage models were challenged. Flower and Hayes (1981) stated that, "the problem with stage descriptions of writing is that they model the growth of the written product, not the inner process of the person producing it" (p. 367).

Through their critique of stage process models, Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed the cognitive process model. This model looked more at the thinking process that writers engage in

and use when composing, which focused in depth on the process of writing rather than the product. The model includes the three basic processes of planning, translating, and reviewing. The planning process is where writers build an internal representation of the knowledge that will be used and this process involves the sub-processes of generating ideas, organizing, and goal-setting. The translating process is the writing or putting ideas into visible language. The reviewing process is the reading of the text and involves the sub-processes of evaluating and revising. All of these processes have a recursive structure meaning that these mental acts are not sequential and can occur at any time during the composing process. Further, these processes may even be embedded within one another. Flower and Hayes compare the writing process to a tool kit, where the writer is not restricted to use tools in a fixed order, but where one tool may create the need for another.

More recent literature on writing continues to support the process model. Graves (1994) advises teachers that the writing process is untidy and that it cannot be taught by taking students deliberately through the phases of making a choice, rehearsing, composing, and rewriting. While these phases are part of the writing process, teachers must remember that each student may engage in these processes differently. Although these phases occur, teachers cannot dictate their precise timing or order. Rief (2006) concurred with Graves, stating that writing is recursive and that “there is no one process that defines the way all writers write” (p. 33). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2008) notes that writing should be taught using a holistic approach where writing is seen as a “multidirectional and multifaceted activity” (p. 4). The NCTE also reminds educators that writing does not occur in a linear manner from prewriting to drafting to revision; instead of students merely learning the steps in a process, they constantly reflect on their own writing performance.

## **The Revision Phase**

Researchers and educators may agree that revision is central to the writing process; however, they cannot agree on when the revision process should occur. Some believe that revision should be incorporated into the entire writing process, while others suggest that it should be a process left until after the initial writing is complete.

Expanding the view of revision to include the revising of thoughts before they are written down incorporates the broadest view of when revision can take place. MacArthur (2007) supports this broad concept and believes that teachers must understand that revision includes the “mental evaluation and revision of sentences before writing them, changes in text during writing, changes in plans, and evaluation and revision of completed drafts” (p. 142). Myhill and Jones (2007) concur and suggest that instruction should develop revision at every stage in the writing process. Research by Dix (2006a, 2006b) found that student writers in Grades 4, 5, and 6 were capable of reworking their text during all stages of the writing process. The study followed nine fluent writers from three different schools for 20 weeks. During this time, the students were interviewed four times to discuss the changes they made to their writing. From the transcribed interviews the researchers found that the writers made text-based and surface-level revisions, were cognitively aware of their revision practices, and revised continuously. These results are encouraging for young writers and their teachers; it should be noted that the students in the study were all fluent writers based on the school’s assessment procedures.

Although many researchers and educators view revision as a recursive process that occurs throughout the writing process, others have a more narrow approach stressing that revision should take place only after the first draft has been written. Many of the people who share this perspective believe that the content changes should be the first focus of writers instead of surface

changes (McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007; Saddler, 2003; Sandmann, 2006). Both Saddler (2003) and Sandmann (2006) discuss how revision of surface changes should be left until the final stage of revision right before the polishing of the finished product. Trying to simultaneously manage both content and editorial changes can challenge the cognitive processes of young writers, as they struggle to correct errors and alter the delivery of their message (Sandmann, 2006). Further, many students view good writing as neatly written and focus on the mechanics associated with surface changes (Baer, 2008). Therefore, when students are asked to revise at both the content and surface level, many often focus on only one aspect. If students are not required to focus on surface changes during the early stages of revision, they can concentrate on exploring what they want to say by reshaping the message and improving ideas (McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007; Saddler, 2003).

This notion of separating content revision and surface editing is not shared by all. Davis and McGrail (2009) believe that these two processes can occur simultaneously in what they call “proof-revising” (p. 522). Davis and McGrail described how they used podcasts with their Grade 5 students to help in the revision process. To begin, students recorded themselves reading their writing aloud as a podcast and then they listened to their work to identify the changes they needed to make to both the content and the surface errors. Unfortunately, this article did not provide any data that would allow readers to see if the students were capable of making adequate changes in both areas.

To support students who may be struggling with the cognitive processes involved in revising, some researchers believe that postponing revision until well after the composition of the writing is most beneficial for writers. In France, Chanquoy (2001) studied 60 Grades 3, 4, and 5 students to examine if a delay between writing and revising would improve the frequencies and

the nature of revisions. Students were asked to write three separate pieces of text and revise each in another colour of ink either during writing, directly after writing, or the day after writing. The texts were analyzed and the results showed that postponing the revision to the day after writing led to the greatest increase in content-based revision. Chanquoy (2001) stated that “postponing the revision seems [sic] a powerful strategy, allowing the children to free cognitive resources and to focus on the text to be corrected” (p. 36).

Myhill (2009) conducted similar research with 38 UK students aged 12 to 16. In her study, Myhill completed 82 observations of classroom writing opportunities and interviewed a sample of students following the observations. The results revealed that students displayed a range of different composing patterns based on their varying degrees of maturity. Evidence from the study confirmed that the high-achieving writers were engaged in more revising during writing than less confident writers.

If revision practices are dictated by a writer’s level of experience, should teachers be altering their instruction of when revision takes place based on the age of their students? Teachers must decide if revision should be taught throughout the writing process at all phases of composition or focused to after the students have written their first draft.

### **Cognitive processes involved in revision.**

Regardless of its timing, revision is a complex practice that requires writers to perform a number of cognitive processes. Understanding the cognitive processes involved in reading comprehension, critical evaluation, social cognition, and metacognition can assist teachers in helping their students to become better at revision.

Reading comprehension is the foundation of revision. Revision cannot take place unless the writer can reread the text and identify the problems (Baer, 2008). Without developed reading

skills, writers may unsuccessfully examine the text and miss errors in their text (MacArthur, 2007). Even with advanced reading comprehension skills, this reading of text can still be an issue when writers have been composing a piece of text for a prolonged period of time and have had no time away from the text. Effective rereading can assist a writer to re-plan, re-structure and re-represent (Hollaway, 2004).

However, reading comprehension on its own will not lead to revision. To revise, a writer must be able to critically evaluate the text. Each change requires attentive judgement to decide if and how revision will improve the message (Saddler, 2003). One of the challenges young writers face is making the decision of what sounds best. Writers of all ages constantly second guess themselves and their decision-making ability to write exactly what they intended in the best possible way. Knowledge of both the general writing criteria and the criteria specific to the task is also crucial in evaluating the text (MacArthur, 2007). Students must be able to identify good writing from poor to know when changes should be made.

To help students become more efficient at evaluating their work, they must begin to examine their text from the position of the reader. This process brings in the social cognitive aspect of revision. Being able to shift perspective from writer of a text to the reader of a text requires an understanding of the possible social and cultural context in which the text is read (Hollaway, 2004; Myhill & Jones, 2007). In the school setting, students often write for an ambiguous audience and as a result, this aspect of revision can be a challenge (Myhill & Jones, 2007). Acknowledging the potential for the text to miss its intended meaning can be a challenge for developing writers. However, the reader's perspective is a crucial factor that students must consider when revising their work.

Managing all of these cognitive aspects simultaneously is the challenge of revision. Proficient writers have the metacognitive skills to manage the multiple processes involved during revision (MacArthur, 2007). To revise, writers must self-regulate and self-monitor the skills needed “to know when, where, how and why, using, evaluating and controlling cognitive strategies” (Chanquoy, 2001, p. 19). Humphris (2010) believes that a lack of metacognitive understanding is the reason why a number of writers struggle to revise effectively or improve their work. Myhill and Jones (2007) argue that teachers need to focus more instructional attention on developing students’ metacognitive awareness of the revision process. They believe that if students are more aware of the cognitive processes involved in revision, then they will be more likely to activate the appropriate strategies. Myhill (2009) encourages educators to incorporate more opportunities for students to discuss how they write, instead of focusing on only what they write. The metalanguage of revision and the writing process must also be incorporated into these discussions to ensure that students develop and share a common language (Humphris, 2010). These metacognitive discussions may help writers to consider other approaches that may be more beneficial to their writing.

If students can become more aware of all the cognitive components of revision, then they will be able to develop these skills to a deeper level. These improvements will not come from broad discussions of revision, but from specific process examples, discussion, and practice.

### **Six-Trait Writing**

While teaching students about the writing process, and specifically revision, is vital to their development as writers, learning about the process does not provide students with enough guidance about how to be a strong writer. Perchemlides and Coutant (2004) believe that the six-

trait writing model is the teaching approach that best addresses the need for common language about quality writing. Spandel (2009b) clearly explains the importance of six-trait writing:

Six-trait writing is not a curriculum. It is not a program. It is a vision – a way of thinking and talking about writing that helps teachers, and even more important, helps students answer the question all writers must ask: What makes writing work? Answering this question enables students to revise with purpose and, in addition, makes the teaching of writing easier. (p. 2)

The six-traits are based on ideas, which include the main message and supporting details; organization, which focuses on the internal structure of the piece; voice, which is the writer's tone and attention to audience; word choice, which focuses on precise language and phrasing; sentence fluency, which is the rhythm and flow of a piece; and conventions, which is the mechanical correctness (Culham, 2003; Perchemlides & Coutant, 2004; Spandel, 2009b).

As mentioned by Spandel (2009b), six-trait writing is not a program; rather, it is an instructional support that enhances the writing approaches taught in the classroom. However, merely providing the list of traits to students is not enough to make them good writers. Students must first be taught how to recognize these traits in strong writing before they can be expected to use them within their own writing (Perchemlides & Coutant, 2004). To avoid overwhelming students with all six of the traits at once, educators recommend focusing on one trait at a time (Culham, 2003). Educators can assess student work based on one specific trait allowing students to benefit from more focused feedback.

Collopy (2008) conducted research with teachers and students from five American elementary schools to investigate the role of professional development in the six traits analytic writing model and students' writing gains. The one-year study involved 39 teachers, who had all

taken part in professional development on the six traits model, and 100 Grade 4 students, who were organized into a treatment group and a comparison group. Data were collected through pre- and post-writing samples from students and two teacher surveys, one survey after the professional development and one end-of-the-year survey. The results from both teacher surveys indicated that the teachers perceived the training as effective for both them and their students. The majority of teachers believed that their classroom instruction had improved because of the professional development they received. The results of the student writing samples indicated that both the treatment and comparison group made significant gains in their writing. However, the impact on the student writing achievement resulting from the six-traits writing model was minimal, especially compared to the teachers' perceptions of the model's success. Collopy stated that the lack of measureable student improvement may be linked to the district's high achieving students and suggested that future research should be done with more diverse populations.

### **Teacher-Led Strategies to Develop Revision**

While research on the six-traits writing model is limited, the same cannot be said for research related to revision strategies. Since revision is viewed as a key aspect of the composition process, an array of strategies have been designed to develop students' revision skills. These approaches to teaching revision can be either part of a writing-process program or separate strategies focused on solely revision.

Providing students with a cognitive framework for the strategies involved in writing composition helps to support students with this complex task. Within these instructional processes, revision is incorporated to some degree. De La Paz and Graham (2002) examined how the effectiveness of a self-regulated strategy development model for improving student writing. The research, which involved 58 Grade 7 and 8 students, took place in two middle schools in a

suburban school district in southeastern United States. The model that was used explicitly taught students writing strategies along with the procedures to regulate goal setting, self-monitoring, and self-instruction. The mnemonics “PLAN” and “WRITE” were designed to help the students remember each of the steps, with the I, T, and E steps focused directly on areas of revision. The students were to: a) “Include transition words for each paragraph,” b) “Try to use different kinds of sentences,” and use c) “Exciting, interesting \$100,000 words” (De Le Paz & Graham, 2002, p. 693). These steps gave the specific criteria students needed, so they would refer back to the steps and revise as needed. Data were collected through a pre-test essay and two post-test essays, which followed a six-week instructional phase teaching the program and another one month after the instruction had finished. The results indicated that the writing program had a positive effect on writing performance both at the end of the intervention and after one month. The students produced essays that were longer, contained more mature vocabulary, and were qualitatively better than prior to the intervention.

Torrance, Fidalgo, and Garcia (2007) implemented a similar study with 71 Grade 6 Spanish students from a middle-class suburban native-Spanish area. The 10-week study focused on the effects of cognitive self-regulation instruction for planning and revision development, but did not have the same positive results as the research by De La Paz and Graham (2002). Unlike the mnemonics used by De La Paz and Graham, the mnemonics used in the Torrance et al. study lacked the specific criteria focus for the revision process. As a result, at the end of the study, there were no increases in the time students spent revising. These results indicated that revision can improve within a writing-process program; however, success is dependent on the specificity the strategies and instruction. It should also be mentioned that the success of the research by De La Paz and Graham was connected to the effectiveness of extensive teacher scaffolding. The

teachers in their study modeled how to use the strategies, and provided extensive instruction, practice, and assistance until the students could confidently work independently; in contrast in the Torrance et al. study, the teachers modelled the strategies through think-alouds, but did not provide as much time for group practice or collaboration. Instead, the students were asked to emulate their teachers' modeling at home where there was no teacher assistance.

Specific revision strategies can be flexibly included in most writing programs. Some of these strategies work within all phases of the writing process, while others fit after the initial draft has been completed. As seen in the studies above, students benefit from specific criteria to guide their revision. Saddler (2003) suggested that teachers provide students with revision checklists at each stage of the writing process. In Baer's (2008) study with Grade 6 students in Ohio, the students generated their own guidelines for good writing as a class and then created task-specific rubrics that students used to aid revision. Providing grades for the revision process is another strategy recommended by both Saddler (2003) and Sandmann (2006) to stress the importance of revision. When teachers assign a mark for only the finished product, they give students the impression that anything that happened prior is insignificant. Providing "process points" (Sandmann, 2006, p. 23) for proof of multiple drafts that illustrate the quantity and quality of revision, emphasizes that writing is about the process not just the product.

Once students have written their first drafts, the use of read-alouds can help them identify areas that need revising. Podcasting can be a new and innovative way for students to listen to what they have written and hear parts of their text that have mechanical errors or parts that may need to be reshaped to be more engaging (Davis & McGrail, 2009). Baer (2008) also used read-alouds with her Grade 6 students after they have completed their first drafts. Baer and her

students found that this strategy effectively aided revision as it required the authors to pay attention to every single mark they put on the page.

Teacher feedback on early drafts of work can also contribute to student revision. McGarrell and Verbeem (2007) suggest that feedback should focus on only content to motivate students to want to revise their work. Feedback should be personalized with a focus on drawing more information out of writers with questions about the content. Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, and Valdes (2004) conducted a two-year study with 11 teachers from five diverse urban middle schools to investigate how teacher responses to student writing impacted the quality of future drafts. The teachers were asked to complete a one-page information sheet and submit samples of student writing assignments. The researchers examined 64 cases of student work that had at least one early and one final draft. These samples were then analyzed to measure the type and amount of feedback and the quality of student writing. The results showed that the students did respond to the feedback they received; however, the teachers' comments focused more on surface changes rather than content and as a result, students made few content revisions between drafts. Patthey-Chavez, Matsumura, and Valdes believe that teacher feedback on final drafts is not an effective instructional tool, as few students apply these comments to subsequent work.

Providing students with opportunities to improve their revision skills should be a priority in every classroom. Whether revision teaching occurs as part of a writing program or as a separate strategy, teachers must ensure that instruction is specific and scaffolded effectively.

### **Collaborative Writing**

Collaboration can play an important role in the development of students' writing and revision skills. However, writing is often viewed as a solitary activity that lacks the social interaction and dialogue that is considered crucial for learning (NCTE, 2008; Yarrow &

Topping, 2001). Vygotsky's (1978) theories emphasize that human beings construct their understanding and knowledge through talking with others. The oral component of collaboration involves "students working together to use talk as a meaning-making strategy to achieve a common goal" (Lyle, 2008, p. 279). Collaborative writing enables students to work together during all stages of the writing process to benefit from the social interactions that can positively impact many other areas of the curriculum (NCTE, 2008). Research has indicated that collaborative writing opportunities within the classroom have the potential to:

- encourage students to view writing as a social, flexible, and holistic process (Dale, 1994; Humphris, 2010);
- foster engagement and increase the amount of time on task (Dale, 1994; Galton, Hargreaves, & Pell, 2009);
- promote metacognitive talk between students by asking them to justify their decisions and reasoning (Dale, 1994; Galton, Hargreaves, & Pell, 2009; Humphris, 2010; Lyle, 2008; Yarrow & Topping, 2001);
- develop supportive relationships within partnerships that can enable the sharing of ideas, the providing of assistance, and the reinforcing of positive feedback (Dale, 1994; Galton, Hargreaves, & Pell, 2009; Humphris, 2010; Yarrow & Topping, 2001);
- improve achievement (Galton, Hargreaves, & Pell, 2009);
- reduce the fear of failure by creating shared ownership of the final writing product (Humphris, 2010; Yarrow & Topping, 2001); and
- facilitate the development of a writing community in the classroom (Dale, 1994; Humphris, 2010).

Humphris (2010) used two types of collaboration models in her study of a Grade 7 UK class: co-authoring and paired writing. In the co-authoring activity, pairs of students were responsible for creating a shared piece of writing. To ensure individual accountability, co-authoring required each member of the dyad to use a different coloured pen and both colours had to be visible on the finished shared writing piece. During the paired writing activity, students took on more of a peer tutor role where each student was required to complete his/her own piece of writing. Throughout this activity, students were encouraged to communicate and support one another during all phases of the writing process. Following these collaborative strategies, data collection took place through questionnaires and interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. The results of these collaborative activities showed that students demonstrated an increased level of engagement, while feeling more supported by their partner. Humphris believed that through this collaboration, students developed a better understanding of the writing process.

Yarrow and Topping (2001) also used a paired writing system in their study to see if peer assisted learning could improve the quality of writing and student attitudes toward writing. The study was implemented over a six-week period with 28 ten- and eleven-year-old students from a medium sized primary school in an area of average socio-economic status in Britain. This highly structured paired writing system placed students into the role of either the Helper or the Writer. Each pair followed a structured framework through the six steps of the writing process with strict requirements outlined for both the Helper and the Writer. Throughout the six-weeks, each pair produced a total of five pieces of writing. Students were also asked to complete pre- and post-intervention writing tests. To evaluate the system, the researchers observed eight of the writing sessions and compared students' pre- and post-tests writing assessment scores to an averaged score for the five writing products completed during the intervention. While this system failed to

promote the flexibility and holistic nature of the writing process through its strict stepped process, Yarrow and Topping reported that this structure improved the writing of all participants and increased the self-esteem of the writers.

Dale (1994) also observed collaborative writing in her study of a Grade 9 class from a socioeconomically diverse high school in a midwestern city in the United States. The study occurred while Dale co-taught the first quarter of an English class. The 24 high functioning students were organized into eight triads and each triad collaboratively wrote three argumentative essays. Data were collected through transcribed audio recordings, individual questionnaires and student interviews. The findings suggested that collaborative writing has the potential to foster engagement in writing and learning. In Dale's opinion, dialogic interaction is the key to effective coauthoring.

Galton, Hargreaves, and Pell (2009) conducted a study to compare group work and whole-class teaching with 11- to 14-year-olds in English, mathematics, and science classrooms. A total of 14 English, 12 mathematics, and 16 science teachers from the Cambridge, UK area took part in this two-year study. The teachers used three types of groups during the study: collaborative groups, where students worked collectively on the same activity; cooperative groups, where students had individual accountability towards a common goal; and seated groups, where students worked individually but helped each other by checking and comparing answers. The researchers gathered data through pre- and post-tests and a lesson observation system. Even though the researchers did not specify which type of group was most effective, the results showed that, overall, the group work improved achievement and the quality of interactions between students. Therefore, Galton, Hargreaves, and Pell recommended using group work to

develop ideas, solve problems, carry out investigations, and perform higher-level cognitive activities.

All of the studies reviewed in this section demonstrated the positive impact that collaboration can have on developing students' writing abilities. In other areas of the curriculum, many teachers incorporate collaboration to engage students, expand student understanding, and promote individual strengths. Students also deserve to benefit from the positive gains that can result from collaborative writing. It should be noted that peer-revision strategies, which are ideally collaborative in nature, are not included in this literature review as this area of revision is beyond the scope of my project.

### **Writing Assessment**

While collaboration and teacher-led strategies aid in the development of students' writing abilities, teachers must be able to assess student progress and build their instruction on these results. Writing assessment should play a key role in guiding teachers' instruction and in identifying and developing students' writing abilities. Fang and Wang (2011) state that, "classroom assessment should help teachers not only identify students' levels of performance but, more importantly, provide insights into students' strengths and needs for the purpose of planning instruction and remediation" (p. 147). Similarly, Ferrel and Skillings (2000) believe that teachers' writing assessments should create a constructive and ongoing relationship between assessment and instruction.

Writing assessments fall into two categories: formative and summative assessment. Formative writing assessments are diagnostic tools that are used throughout the course of a unit to provide feedback to both teachers and students. These diagnostic methods include written feedback on drafts, peer response, self-evaluations, and writing conferences. Formative

assessments can play a major role in developing students' writing abilities by encouraging revision. Summative writing assessments usually assign a value to the writing that identifies a measure of student achievement. These assessments usually occur after some instruction has taken place. Summative writing assessments often provide letter grades or scores for tests, final essays, and projects (NCTE, 2008).

Teachers can utilize a number of different types of both formative and summative assessments in their teaching of writing. Peterson and McClay (2010) executed a national Canadian study to report on the types of assessment and feedback practiced by Grades 4-8 teachers. A total of 216 teachers from rural and urban schools across Canada were interviewed over the phone, and a sample of teachers were observed, submitted student writing samples, and completed face-to-face interviews. The results of the study showed that the teachers were most concerned that their feedback enhanced student motivation and self-esteem as a writer. Participants identified peer editing along with written and oral feedback as essential in developing student writing. Many teachers shared that they used provincial scoring guides and rubrics to provide feedback and to determine grades. These tools were seen as objective forms of assessment that focused on specific criteria.

Applebee and Langer (2011) conducted a much broader study in the United States to examine writing instruction across the content areas in middle schools and high schools. Data were collected from visits to 260 English, mathematics, science, and social studies classrooms in 20 American middle schools and high schools. These schools were selected specifically based on their reputation for excellence in teaching writing. As well as surveying 1,520 randomly selected teachers, the researchers interviewed 220 teachers and 138 students. The results revealed teachers' concerns with being clear about their expectations for particular writing assignments.

The teachers addressed this concern through an across-subject emphasis on rubrics that highlighted the characteristics of a good response. The English teachers reinforced these rubrics by having students read and analyze models of effective responses.

### **Rubrics.**

Rubrics can be an effective tool for both formative and summative assessment. A rubric is a form of assessment that evaluates a student's work on a numbered scale based on a set of written criteria (Flynn & Flynn, 2004). Spandel (2006) states that rubrics are among the most useful instructional tools. She writes that rubrics

give us direction and a basis for conversation. They cause us to go deep inside performance and question our traditional beliefs about what we define as proficient. They keep us honest, for when we put our thinking on paper, there is no longer a place to hide. Best of all, they serve as a guide to revision, giving student writers an insider's view of what makes writing work. (p. 19)

Flynn and Flynn (2004) believe that rubrics should be used in the teaching of writing because they promote teacher and student accountability, clearly communicate expectations, reduce teacher subjectivity, and ensure writing standards are met.

Skillings and Ferrell (2000) also support the use of rubrics and state that rubrics can become more effective when students take an active role in generating the rubrics. As a teacher, Ferrell witnessed that when criteria were displayed with the performance levels, her Grade 3 students were more supported and more successful in meeting performance goals. Skillings and Ferrell believe that rubrics help to clarify the differences between best product, acceptable product and unacceptable product. Once students begin to see these distinctions between products, they can begin to self-evaluate their own work, which can aid in the revision process.

Spandel (2006) also believes that students should be active in the design and use of rubrics. She states that once students are active in the use of rubrics and view them more as a writing guide, they can begin to take charge of their writing process.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education (2009) used rubrics when they developed the B.C. Performance Standards to support ongoing instruction and assessment in reading, writing, and numeracy. These Performance Standards “emphasize criterion-referenced assessment in which students’ performance is compared to explicit criteria” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 1). The B.C. Performance Standards can be used as both a formative assessment tool to support and guide learning and a summative assessment tool that documents student learning. Instead of using a numbered scale to describe student achievement, the Performance Standards follow four levels based on the descriptions not yet within expectations, minimally meeting expectations, meeting expectations, and exceeding expectations.

Despite their recognition and popularity, not all educators and researchers support the use of rubrics. Fang and Wang (2011) criticize rubrics, specifically those based on the six-traits writing model, stating that they are neither exact nor objective because they fail to provide examples of or elaborate on the terms used. In addition, Fang and Wang note how the rubrics are not genre specific, and different genres have different expectations as writing requirements.

Spence (2010) also identified faults with the six-traits writing rubrics. Spence stated that these writing assessment rubrics fail to take into account the sociocultural context of different classrooms. She expanded on this concern by stating that “analytical rubrics reward students whose language closely adheres to a language standard valued by rubric developers” (Spence,

2010, p. 339). Spence believes that the focus on writing traits and descriptors interferes with recognizing the complexity of the writing process.

In response to this criticism, Spandel (2006) admits that rubrics, like any instructional tool, can be misused. If a rubric is vaguely written, then it may lack the detail that Fang and Wang (2011) mention. However, Fang and Wang's criticisms are vast generalizations, since both the British Columbia Performance Standards (2009) and Spandel's Six-Trait Writing Rubrics (2009a) offer detailed examples of what is required at each level of the rubric. In addition, a number of different Performance Standards for a variety of genres are available in the British Columbia documents, which directly discredits Fang and Wang's remark about rubrics not being genre specific. In response to Spence's (2010) concern that rubrics do not consider the sociocultural context of the classroom, Spandel (2006) states that "using a rubric well is an interactive, interpretive process, in which a teacher's wisdom, insight, experience, and judgement play an important role" (p. 20). Using a rubric does not mean that teachers abandon individuality or stop responding on a personal level. Teachers are not ruled by the rubrics they create, instead the rubrics make teachers accountable for the grade or scores they assign (Spandel, 2006).

## **Conclusion**

In order to develop our students' writing abilities, educators need a strong understanding of the complexities within the writing process, and specifically with respect to the role of revision. Working with students to introduce the cognitive processes of revision and develop a common language around quality writing through the six-trait writing model, can help students to grasp all of the components that they must manage to revise their work. Teachers can also assist students to consider when revision will be most effective for them. By providing students with opportunities to collaborate and by teaching specific revision strategies, students should be

able to develop their revising capabilities. Finally, teachers must use writing assessment tools, like rubrics, that will not only guide their writing instruction, but will also identify and develop students' writing abilities. These rubrics can also help students to understand the characteristics of quality writing.

Chapter Three describes how all of the topics discussed in this chapter came together with Spandel's (2009a) six-trait revision lessons to create my unit, *Revamping Revision*. Chapter Three includes the unit overview, connections to learning outcomes and performance standards, assessment strategies, and detailed lesson plans and reflections.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Instructional Unit: Revamping Revision**

This chapter describes the goals of my unit, “Revamping Revision,” identifies connections to both the Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2006) and the Grade 7 B.C. Performance Standards of Writing (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2009), as well as the assessment techniques and materials. As well as providing an overview of the unit, Chapter 3 includes a description of the classroom demographics, the lesson plans and the reflections for lessons 1-11, and the lesson overviews and reflections for lessons 12-14. Each lesson plan includes information about the source of the strategy, connections to the Prescribed Learning Outcomes, goals, materials, lesson sequence, assessment, and reflection. (Please note that due to the structure of the lesson reflections, the levels of headings are not consistent with APA recommendations.)

### **Revamping Revision**

#### **Unit Goals:**

- Identify the features of successful writing (i.e. ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions)
- Develop a personal writing inventory
- Identify the differences between revising and editing
- Learn revision strategies to improve the ideas and organization writing traits
- Collaborate with peers to practice and extend revision strategies

Connections Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Purposes (Oral Language)*

- A1 - Use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of discussing and analyzing ideas and opinions

*Strategies (Oral Language)*

- A4 - Select and use various strategies when interacting with others, including accessing prior knowledge and taking turns as speaker and listener.

*Thinking (Oral Language)*

- A8 - Use speaking and listening to respond, explain, and provide supporting evidence for their connections to texts

*Thinking (Reading and Viewing)*

- B8 - Respond to selections they read or view, by expressing opinions and making judgments supported by reasons, explanations, and evidence

*Purposes (Writing and Representing)*

- C1 - Write a variety of clear, focused personal writing for a range of purposes and audiences that demonstrates connections to personal experiences, ideas, and opinions.

*Purposes (Writing and Representing)*

- C3 - Write a variety of imaginative writing for a range of purposes and audiences

*Strategies (Writing and Representing)*

- C6 - Select and use various strategies during writing and representing to express and refine thoughts, including referring to class-generated criteria, analyzing models of literature, accessing multiple sources of information, consulting reference materials,

considering and applying feedback from conferences to revise ideas, organization, voice, word choice, and sentence fluency, ongoing revising and editing

- C7 - Select and use various strategies after writing and representing to improve their work, including checking their work against established criteria, reading aloud and listening for fluency, and revising to enhance writing traits (e.g., ideas, sentence fluency, word choice, voice, organization), and editing for conventions (e.g., grammar and usage, capitalization, punctuation, spelling).

Connections to the Grade 7 B.C. Performance Standards of Writing:

*Meaning*

- Comes from thoughts, feelings, opinions, memories, and reflections

*Style*

- Demonstrates clarity and some variety in language

*Form*

- Begins with a clear introduction and follows a logical sequence through to a conclusion

*Conventions*

- Follows standard conventions for basic spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure; has been checked for errors

Assessment Techniques:

- Monitor students' productivity and involvement during discussions, group work, and partnerships
- Read and evaluate students' writing to ensure the skills being taught are being used effectively within the text.

**Materials:**

Spandel, V. (2009a). *Creating 6-trait revisers and editors: 30 revisions and editing lessons*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Spandel, V. (2009b). *Creating writers through 6-trait writing: Assessment and instruction*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

**Overview of the Unit**

When I started to develop this unit, my focus was entirely on revision strategies that would provide my students with tools to improve their writing from their first drafts to their final copies. Early in my research, it became evident to me that revision can occur only if the writer knows what improvements need to be made to advance his or her work. From this development, I created the first four lessons of the unit so that students could identify the features of successful writing. During these lessons the students were introduced to the six-traits of writing which became the standards for defining successful writing.

Once the students identified the features of successful writing, they developed their own writing identity by creating a list of writing topics that they were comfortable writing about. If we want students to take the time needed to successfully revise their work, they must feel invested in the piece to want to put in this added effort. After the students compiled their writing inventories, they had the opportunity to select one of their topics and write a first draft. Using this first draft, the concept of revision was introduced and the differences between editing and revising were examined as students worked to make improvements to their drafts.

After differentiating between revising and editing, the unit focused on developing specific revision skills related to the *ideas* writing trait. Within these lessons, the students learned to revise by adding showing details, revise by making a scene distinctive and vivid, and revise

beyond listing facts to make a point. These four lessons followed Spandel's (2009a) lesson sequences found in *Creating 6-Trait Revisers and Editors: 30 Revision and Editing Lessons*.

After lesson 11, I discontinued the unit before continuing on with the remainder of the unit that focuses on revision skills related to the *organization* writing trait. I suspended the unit because these last three lessons of the unit also followed Spandel's (2009a) lesson sequence and I was concerned that the students would become bored by the repetitive format. I used the break in the unit delivery to provide the students with more opportunities to write from their inventories and practice the revision strategies previously taught.

I finished off the unit with the revising lessons on *organization*. Within these three lessons the students developed the skills needed to revise a summary ending to show consequences, revise by adding and changing transitions, and revise when under a time restraint. Even though these lessons concluded the unit, I recommend that students be provided with the opportunity to practice these revision skills on their own writing samples.

### **Classroom Demographics**

The class that I worked with to develop this revision unit was a Grade 7 middle school class in a middle- to upper-socioeconomic area. The class was composed of 28 students, 13 boys and 15 girls. Within the group, a number of students have Individual Education Plans for the following designations: two ESL, four gifted, and three learning disabled, who are high functioning. The class was an extremely social group, and they thrived participating in both group and partner work. The classroom felt like a community because the students were bonded together and willing to work with anyone. With their high energy and enthusiasm, the classroom was rarely dull.

## Lesson Plans and Reflections

### Lesson 1 – Good versus Bad Writing (Part 1)

Strategy from:

Baer, A. L. (2008). Creating a shared definition of good and bad writing through revision strategies. *Middle School Journal*, 39(4), 46-53.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Purposes (Oral Language)*

- A1 - Use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of discussing and analyzing ideas and opinions

*Purposes (Writing and Representing)*

- C3 - Write a variety of imaginative writing for a range of purposes and audiences

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Create two versions of comic, with the second version being worse than the first
- Brainstorm and list ideas of what makes writing “bad”

Materials:

- 60 Blanked out Calvin and Hobbs Comics (Appendix A)

Lesson Sequence:

1. Announce to the class that we are focusing on developing their writing over the next number of lessons.
2. Give each student a copy of a Calvin and Hobbs comic with the words blanked out. To ensure that everyone has some familiarity with the genre, briefly discuss the characteristics of comics and the main characters featured in this comic strip.

3. Ask students to create a storyline for blanked out comic, either using the characters in the Calvin and Hobbs comic or creating their own. Before students begin, emphasize that each developed storyline should be original, but does not need to be humorous.
4. After about 10 minutes or once most students appear to be finished with their comic, instruct them to write “Number One” at the top of the comic.
5. Handout another copy of the blanked out comic to each student and ask them to write “Number 2” at the top of the page.
6. This time instruct the students to create a comic that is worse than Number 1. Students may question what “worse” means and just ask them to do whatever they think will make this storyline not as good as their first. Do not give them any suggestions; instead let them create their own definition for worse.
7. Once the majority of the class has completed their storyline, instruct the students to flip over their comic and write the question, “What makes writing bad?” on the back. Ask students to create a list of potential answers to the question. After a few minutes of working on their own, ask students to share their lists.
8. While students share their responses about what makes writing bad, record their ideas on a piece of chart paper. This list will be referred to again in the second lesson.
9. Finally, ask students to look at the list of, “What makes writing bad?” and separate the aspects of writing that refer to the mechanics of writing from the content based examples. The students may need prompting to differentiate between the two characteristics. As a class, put a “C” beside all content examples and an “M” beside all mechanical ones.

10. Ask students to staple their comics together, with Number 1 on top. Announce that we will continue on with these comics and our lists tomorrow. Both comics are collected at the end of the lesson.

Assessment:

- Read over both versions of the students' comics and their lists of "What makes writing bad?" and look for similarities among student lists. Determine whether students' lists are balanced between mechanical and content-based ideas. If the lists are mostly made up of mechanical ideas, a further class brainstorm of content-based ideas may be needed.

Reflection:

Each time I begin a new unit or area of focus, I want to create enthusiasm toward the topic. I anticipated my students' low moans when I announced that our focus for the term was developing our writing, so I knew I had to catch their attention with a unique twist on the topic. The use of the Calvin and Hobbs comic achieved this goal perfectly. From the moment I handed out the comics, the students were buzzing with excitement about the opportunity to use this alternative genre. Since I required three samples of writing, two samples in lesson one and one more in lesson two, I needed to provide a task that would not become monotonous and the Calvin and Hobbs comic accomplished just that. I selected a Calvin and Hobbs comic because I noticed that our classroom collection of the comic was always in high demand. As I expected, most students were familiar with the comic strip, so minimal explanation was needed about the characters or the features of a comic.

When I posed the second task of creating a "worse" comic, I was met with both outrage and confusion. These students had never been asked to make their work worse before and as a result, they had plenty of questions about what I meant by this instruction. I had to restrain

myself from providing any examples, as I wanted to see how they defined “worse.” Although most students met my expectations of “worse” work by writing messy and spelling poorly, many others went beyond the obvious and altered more of the content in their comic. When they answered the question, “What makes writing bad?” I was impressed that the class came up with an array of ideas that were fairly balanced between mechanical and content-based. The class list included no descriptive words, spelling errors, boring plot, rude humour, messy writing, bad grammar, hard to follow, repetitive word choice, predictable ending, and no punctuation. Overall, the lesson achieved my goals: I created enthusiasm, I got my class writing, and I was able to get an idea of what they view as “bad” writing.

## **Lesson 2 – Good versus Bad Writing (Part 2)**

Strategy from:

Baer, A. L. (2008). Creating a shared definition of good and bad writing through revision strategies. *Middle School Journal*, 39(4), 46-53.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Purposes (Oral Language)*

- A1 - Use speaking and listening to interact with others for the purposes of discussing and analyzing ideas and opinions.

*Purposes (Writing and Representing)*

- C3 - Write a variety of imaginative writing for a range of purposes and audiences.

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Create one version of a comic, which is better than their original comic
- Brainstorm and list ideas of what makes writing “good”

Materials:

- 30 Blanked out Calvin and Hobbs Comics (Appendix A)

Lesson Sequence:

1. Handout Number 1 and 2 comics to each student. Recap the steps followed yesterday and reread the class-created list for the question, “What makes writing bad?”
2. Ask if anyone can predict what we might be doing for today’s lesson. Allow a few students to share their predictions. If no one guesses correctly, explain that we will be creating a comic that is “better” than comic Number 1.
3. Ask students to reread their Number 1 comic, as blanked out comics are handed out to each student. Have students write “Number 3” at the top of the page.
4. Students may question what “better” means. Ask them to do whatever they think will make this comic better than their first. Do not give them any suggestions; instead let them create their own definition for better.
5. Students may take more time to complete this comic as they are trying to make improvements to their original. Once the majority of students have completed their comics, ask them to flip over their page and write the question, “What makes writing good?”
6. Ask students to create a list of potential answers to the question. After a few minutes of working independently, have students share their lists with the class.
7. While students share their responses of what makes writing good, record their ideas on a piece of chart paper. This list will be used to create a bulletin board in the class, so students are constantly reminded of their ideas around good writing.

8. Finally, instruct the students to look at the list of “What makes writing good?” and to separate the aspects of writing that refer to the mechanics of writing from the content-based examples. As a class, put a “C” beside all content examples and an “M” beside all mechanical ones.
9. Direct the students to star the top three aspects of good writing that they believe are most important to good writing. Discuss which aspects of writing are most important and why. Connect the discussion to mechanical versus content-based aspects and start to introduce the connection to revision versus editing.

Assessment:

- Read over each student’s final comic and compare it to the original to see what changes were made. Compare these changes to the list of “What makes writing good?” and note common trends.

Reflection:

After the success of the last lesson, I was confident that my students would want to continue on with their comic creations during the next class. My assumption was correct and after they guessed that their next task was to make a third comic “better,” they immediately focused on their work. Since the students had the experience of the “make it worse” task, there was much less confusion around what I meant by “better.” Overall, the class was extremely focused on wanting to improve their original comic and as a result, it took them longer to finish.

Once again I was impressed by the variety of ideas that were generated to answer the question, “What makes writing good?” Almost all of the ideas focused on content-based aspects of writing. The list included smart humour, relatable characters, description, elicits emotion, no run-on sentences, creates a movie in your mind, hooks you from the start, lots of variety in word

choice, neat penmanship, builds to an epic climax, keeps you entertained from start to finish, interesting details, and makes sense. Creating a bulletin board that featured these ideas enabled me to constantly connect these ideas to other texts that we read or write about.

When I surveyed the class to see which aspects of writing they thought were the most important, most students selected description, keeps you entertained from start to finish, and makes sense. During this discussion, some of the students challenged their peers' choices and mini-debates emerged as students shared their reasoning and attempted to switch others' opinions. Students were not able to express the difference between revising and editing as well as I had hoped. As a result, I knew I needed to spend more time clarifying these aspects of writing in future.

### **Lesson 3 – What Makes Writing Work**

Strategy from:

Spandel, V. (2009b). *Creating writers through 6-trait writing: Assessment and instruction*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Thinking (Oral Language)*

- A8 - Use speaking and listening to respond, explain, and provide supporting evidence for their connections to texts

*Thinking (Reading and Viewing)*

- B8 - Respond to selections they read or view, by expressing opinions and making judgments supported by reasons, explanations, and evidence

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Compare two samples of writing and provide specific examples of what works or does not work in each sample

Materials:

- 30 double-sided copies of writing samples – “The Redwoods” (p. 39) and “Mouse Alert” (p. 41) (Appendix B)
- 8 pieces of blank 11x18 paper

Lesson Sequence:

1. Post the class lists of “What makes writing bad?” and “What makes writing good?” on the front board. Explain to the class that today we are going to continue exploring aspects of writing that work and do not work by comparing two samples of writing.
2. Distribute copies of “The Redwoods” and “Mouse Alert.” After reading each sample of writing aloud to the class, have each student highlight examples within the writing that stand out as either “good” or “bad.”
3. After completing both samples, organize the students into groups of four and give each group a piece of the blank paper. Explain that each group is to brainstorm what worked and what did not work for each writing sample and remind students to be as specific as possible when they give examples. To begin the brainstorming, have each member of the group share what he/she highlighted and why in each sample.
4. Circulate to ensure that each group is on task and is able to generate an array of examples for each sample. You may want to stop the groups and inform them that one sample will have more positive aspects and the other will have more negative aspects. If groups are

struggling, you may also need to provide a few examples from each sample or ask volunteers to share their ideas.

5. Once most groups seem to have finished, gather the class back together in preparation for groups to present their ideas. Have each group present their findings for each of the samples. Ask other groups to listen for similar ideas to what they came up with in their groups.
6. Once all of the groups have presented, refer back to the class's original lists for good and bad writing. Have students share any ideas that may have been missed on the original lists and add these new aspects of writing. Point out any positive or negative aspects of writing from the samples that may have been missed by the groups.

#### Assessment:

- Monitor students' productivity within their groups.
- Evaluate each group based on productiveness of brainstorm and ability to point out specific examples from each sample.

#### Reflection:

While lessons 1 and 2 provided an excellent foundation for the unit, lesson 3 provided the students with opportunities to take their ideas about what makes writing good or bad and look for examples of both within the written samples. As I read both "The Redwoods" and "Mouse Alert" aloud, my students recognized almost instantly that "Mouse Alert" was the superior writing sample. While I appreciated this discovery, the real work came when they had to provide examples of what worked and what did not in each writing sample.

After reflecting on the group brainstorm portion of the lesson, I would use groups of three the next time I implemented this lesson. I found that not all students were as vocal as I would

have liked and I believe that with fewer group members, students would be more involved in the brainstorm session. When students were organized into groups, I noticed that certain groups struggled to pinpoint specific examples rather than general statements. As a result, I stopped the students a few minutes into their brainstorm and provided examples of how they could go from general statements, like “It is funny” to a specific example within the piece, such as, “We hold the world’s record for shortest time spent in the park.” For “The Redwoods” selection, the class brainstormed the following examples of what did not work: title is not explained, boring, no specific details around what the characters did or ate, no personality, and repetition of words like “wonderful” and “fun.” Because this piece of writing is the weaker sample, the class generated few examples of things that worked aside from there being limited errors in the mechanics. For the “Mouse Alert” selection, the class agreed that examples of elements that worked included the use of specific details, such as the pickle jar and mother’s nightgown, that facilitated the creation of a detailed movie in students’ minds (e.g., the students stated that they could picture the chaos of the sister and mother screaming); the use of sarcastic humour (e.g., “It put everyone in a lovely trip starting mood”); the inclusion of relatable characters, especially the siblings complaining in the backseat; and the use of similes to describe details, like “Her eyes were as big as her fists.”

The class discussion revealed that one of the common misunderstandings of the groups was that writing about a positive experience such as that in, “The Redwoods,” is better than writing about a negative experience, such as in “Mouse Alert.” After the students explained their thinking and I clarified this misunderstanding, we added the use of poetic devices, such as similes and metaphors, to our list of “What makes writing good?”

Overall, this lesson was an excellent progression from our previous lessons as students progressed from talking solely about features of writing to locating these features within writing samples.

#### **Lesson 4 – What Teachers Value in Writing**

Strategy from:

Spandel, V. (2009b). *Creating writers through 6-trait writing: Assessment and instruction*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Strategies (Oral Language)*

A4 - Select and use various strategies when interacting with others, including accessing prior knowledge and taking turns as speaker and listener.

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Brainstorm what teachers value within the 6-traits of writing

Materials:

- 6 pieces of chart paper
- 30 copies of the handout “What Teachers Value in Writing” (p. 43) (Appendix C)

Lesson Sequence:

1. Post the class lists of “What makes writing bad?” and “What makes writing good?” on the front board. Remind students that these lists contain only some of the aspects of writing that they value. Explain that today they will be generating a larger list of what they believe teachers value in writing.
2. Explain that their ideas will be grouped based on the six-traits of writing (i.e. ideas, word choice, organization, sentence fluency, voice and conventions/layout). Ask the students

for suggestions about what these six-traits may be and record any correct responses on the board. If necessary, write the missing traits that were not generated by students on the board.

3. Talk about each of the six traits to ensure that students have a general understanding of the terms.
4. Organize students into 6 groups. Give each group a piece of chart paper and some markers. Provide each group with one of the traits and ask them to write this trait at the top of their chart paper.
5. Inform the class that each group will have four minutes to generate aspects of writing that teachers value for each of the traits. After four minutes, the chart paper rotates to the next group and the process starts again. Tell the class that if another group has already recorded your ideas, put a star beside that idea to show that your group agrees with the previous group.
6. Circulate among groups to check that each group is on the right track. If groups are struggling, prompt them with ideas to get them started or correct some of their incorrect ideas.
7. After each group has had an opportunity to contribute ideas to each piece of chart paper, instruct each group to post its original trait around the room. Distribute the “What Teachers Value in Writing” handout to each student.
8. Have each group read out the ideas on their piece of chart paper and look for similarities and differences with respect to class’s ideas and the ideas on the handout. Have students highlight the ideas that are the same on both the chart paper and the handout.
9. For each trait, elaborate on each of the missed ideas that appear on only the handout.

10. Explain that although all of these traits are important aspects to consider when writing, the focus this term will be on developing ideas and organization.

Assessment:

- Monitor students' productivity within their groups and each group's ability to focus on the task.

Reflection:

When I first introduced this lesson, I was surprised that none of my students knew the six-traits. With plenty of prompting and referring to our original list, I was able to help the students to name the organization, word choice, and conventions traits. However, I had to tell them the other three traits. I tried to describe sentence fluency and voice, but these two areas proved to be a challenge for them to understand both during our discussion and the group brainstorm.

Once the students got into their groups and the chart papers were circulating, the students were focused on the task. I found that as the circulation of the pieces of chart paper advanced through the groups, most groups needed more time to read all of the previous ideas and then generate their own. All of the groups liked that they could star the ideas that they agreed with, so they always felt like they were contributing. Some of the students' ideas that matched the handout are as follows.

**Ideas:** focused idea, not too big of a topic, interesting, unique perspective, and makes sense.

**Word choice:** wow words, no repetition, powerful verbs, adjectives describe the little details.

**Organization:** strong hook grabs reader's attention, doesn't rush through important details, ending leaves the reader satisfied, builds to an epic climax, organized into paragraphs that focus on a key point, and easy to follow.

**Sentence fluency:** sounds good when read aloud, flows nicely, and variety in sentence structure.

**Voice:** sounds like the person who wrote it, evokes emotion, and makes reader feel connected to the text.

**Conventions and layout:** each paragraph is indented, correct punctuation, errors do not take away from the meaning, visuals and title support the text, font is not distracting, and free of spelling mistakes.

As stated above, the class did not have a strong understanding of sentence fluency and voice and as a result, I spent some extra time trying to elaborate on these two traits. For voice, I referred back to the novel *Flipped* (Van Draanen, 2001) that we had read at the start of the year and reminded students of how obvious it was to tell the difference between the alternating chapters of Bryce and Julianna. This example helped them to construct a better understanding of voice. For sentence fluency, I read examples of authentic dialogue from *Hunger Games* (Collins, 2010) and also discussed how we can write in different tenses.

Overall, I thought this lesson provided my students with the chance to expand on their earlier ideas about good writing by grouping together certain aspects of writing into the six-traits. I was pleased with how this lesson introduced my students to the six-traits of writing in a more creative and engaging way. Some teachers may have reduced the amount of time this lesson took by merely providing the handout and reading it aloud; however, I believe this lesson enabled my students to connect more with concepts and as a result, hopefully retain more of the information. My students were also more engaged with my instructional sequence than they would have been if they had solely read a sheet with ideas.

## Lesson 5 – My Writing Inventory

Strategy from:

Spandel, V. (2009b). *Creating writers through 6-trait writing: Assessment and instruction*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Purposes (Writing and Representing)*

C1 - Write a variety of clear, focused personal writing for a range of purposes and audiences that demonstrates connections to personal experiences, ideas, and opinions.

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Create a list of writing topics they could easily write on

Materials:

- Lined paper

Lesson Sequence:

1. Begin by writing your own “Writing Inventory” on the board. This list is comprised of topics you are comfortable writing about. These may be personal experiences, passions, or topics of interest.
2. Initially, do not tell the students what you are doing. Instead, instruct the students to read your topic ideas as you record them on the board. After you have listed about 10 topics, have students share their ideas about the nature of the list (i.e. What is it?).
3. If students are unable to guess correctly, tell the class that this list is your writing inventory and explain what is meant by this phrase.
4. Ask students to take out a piece of lined paper and write the title “My Writing Inventory.” Instruct students to reflect on their lives and record events and experiences

that they would feel comfortable writing about in the future. Encourage students to create a detailed inventory that will assist them in their future writing opportunities. Provide an example of how they can improve a broad topic like “My trip to Disneyland” and make it more specific by focusing on a certain moment during that trip, such as, “Riding Splash Mountain for the first time.”

5. Circulate to ensure that students are on task and assist struggling students by brainstorming with them memorable moments in their lives.
6. Allow students to generate topics continuously for about 20-30 minutes. Challenge the students to build a long a list.
7. Once the majority of the class seems to have exhausted their inventory ideas, instruct students to star their favourite three topics. Have each student share his/her favourites.

Assessment:

- Read each student’s writing inventory and evaluate based on the specificity of the writing topics.

Reflection:

This lesson played an important role in preparing my students to write and, in time, revise. I believe most students struggle with writing because they are not motivated with the assigned topics. How can we expect our students to spend time polishing their writing, if they have no connection to the topic? This lesson provided the students with the opportunity to sift through events in their lives and select important memories to write about in the future. Ideally, if students have the opportunity to write on the topics they generated, they will be motivated to take the time needed to revise their own work.

As soon as I started writing my list of topics on the board, the students were anxiously reading my ideas and trying to figure out what I was doing. The mystery of discovering what I was writing helped to capture their interest much better than if I only explained what is meant by a writing inventory.

By modeling the process on the board, my students were able to read some examples and learn more about me at the same time. My Writing Inventory included the following topics: growing up as an only child, planning a stress-free wedding, meeting my amazing friends, having my appendix burst, finding out my Dad had a heart attack, running a half marathon, learning to love my crazy singing and dancing advisory class, loving chocolate, eating dinners with my loud and chaotic family, and losing my brother-in-law.

Once I asked my students to begin writing their own inventory, I was astonished by how focused they became. My room was silent for almost 35 minutes, a true accomplishment for my class! As I circulated the room, I read over their shoulders to check that they were providing detailed topics. Some students struggled with this aspect of the assignment and I had to assist with them to narrow their topics to specific moments and details.

After the students had starred their favourite three topics, they were excited to hear their classmates' ideas. The sharing portion of the lesson was the highlight. This activity bonded our class together as we found out new aspects of everyone's lives. Afterwards, I overheard many students continue to discuss other details of their inventories and go into detail about some of the specific details from the topics they shared.

## Lesson 6 – First Draft

Strategy from:

Spandel, V. (2009b). *Creating writers through 6-trait writing: Assessment and instruction*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Purposes (Writing and Representing)*

C1 - Write a variety of clear, focussed personal writing for a range of purposes and audiences that demonstrates connections to personal experiences, ideas, and opinions.

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Select a topic from their writing inventory and create a first draft on this topic

Materials:

- Student Checklist on (p. 165) (Appendix D)
- Lined paper

Lesson Sequence:

1. Have students flip to the “What Teachers Value in Writing” handout in their binders.
2. Distribute the Student Checklist handout. As a class, work through the sheet and find commonalities between the two sheets. Explain that the Student Checklist is a more simplistic version of the “What Teachers Value in Writing” handout that they will be using to guide their future writing. Provide students with the opportunity to ask questions or request clarification about any area on the handout.
3. Instruct the students to take out their writing inventories. Explain that students will be selecting one topic from their inventories to write on and using the Student Checklist handout to guide their writing.

4. Remind the students that their writing is a first draft and they should not expect for it to be polished on the first attempt. Reinforce that you would rather the students write continuously for the entire class than they devote a lot of time to each sentence and generate limited content. Remind the students to double space their writing.
5. Circulate to ensure that the students get started on their writing and assist any students who are struggling. Have the students write for the remainder of the block. If any students finish early, have them read a book for the remainder of the class.
6. Stop the class with about five minutes left in the block, instruct those students who are still writing to take their pieces home to finish. Remind the students that their work is a first draft and that they are to finish their work, without word processing their drafts at home.
7. Ensure that students finish their writing piece at the start of the next lesson.

Assessment:

- Monitor students' progress on their drafts.

Reflection:

When the students were asked to find commonalities between the two handouts, they easily matched the simplistic ideas on the Student Checklist to their more technical counterparts on the "What Teachers Value about Writing" handout. The students did not ask for clarification on any of the points on the new handout.

When asked to take out their writing inventories, the students seemed excited about the potential of using their lists. When the students were asked to select one of their topics there was enthusiasm throughout the classroom, as students debated what topics to select and conversed with their peers. As I anticipated, most students seemed very motivated to write on one of the

topics from their writing inventories. Consequently, they all began writing almost instantly and needed little assistance from me. Two of my students, who struggle with written output, used a computer to compose their drafts as they are both able to produce more when using a word processing program. As the students wrote, I noticed that few referred to their Student Checklist handout on a regular basis. Perhaps the latter was due to the students focusing on getting their thoughts down on paper or to the students feeling overwhelmed by the number of aspects for them to consider on the handout.

These drafts were used in the upcoming lessons as the students developed their understanding of the 6-traits and revision.

### **Lesson 7 – Revising versus Editing**

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Strategies (Writing and Representing)*

C7 - Select and use various strategies after writing and representing to improve their work, including checking their work against established criteria, reading aloud and listening for fluency, revising to enhance writing traits (e.g., ideas, sentence fluency, word choice, voice, organization), and editing for conventions (e.g., grammar and usage, capitalization, punctuation, spelling).

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Brainstorm different examples of revision changes versus editing changes
- Implement revision and editing changes to their first draft writing pieces

Materials:

- Chart paper

Lesson Sequence:

1. Ask students to take out their first draft of their writing piece. Explain that today's lesson will focus on exploring changes that could be made to their writing to improve the work.
2. Write REVISE on one piece of chart paper and EDIT on the other. Tell the class that the changes they make to their writing will fit into one of these two categories.
3. Have students share with a partner what they believe are the differences between revising and editing. Ask for volunteers to share what they discussed with their partner.
4. After students have shared their ideas, clarify that revising refers to changes that enhance the content of their writing and that editing refers to mechanical changes.
5. Instruct the students to turn to their "Student Checklist" in their binders. Have the students use this handout to help guide their revising and editing process. To get the students started, ask them to make three changes to their writing to improve the piece. Remind the students to make their changes in a different colour to help them track their changes.
6. Stop the class after about 10 minutes. Ask students to share one of the changes they made. As a class, decide whether this change belongs on the REVISE or EDIT page. Record the change on the correct page.
7. Provide the students with another 15-20 minutes to continue revising and editing their work.
8. Ask the class to reflect on the changes made by them and their peers and pose the question, "What type of change makes the piece of writing significantly better: revising or editing?"

9. Discuss their answers and explain why revision is the correct answer. Share some of the tools that assist in the editing process (e.g., word processor and spell check). Explain that in the upcoming lessons they will be developing some skills to assist them with their revising ability.

Assessment:

- Read over the changes made to improve the first drafts. Evaluate based on how well the changes improved the original piece.

Reflection:

When I first posed the question, “What is the difference between revising and editing?” the students struggled to articulate their thoughts with their partner. Some students recognized that editing referred to corrections made to spelling and punctuation and that these changes are made after their first draft prior to their good copy. Many dyads could not come up with a definition for revision, while other groups agreed on the basic definition, “changes that you make to improve your writing that are not related to editing.” Once I clarified the differences, the students seemed pleased that they had come close with their definition of editing. To help reinforce the concept of the revision, I had them refer to their “Student Checklist” handout and pointed out the types of improvements that could be made to each of the writing traits.

When the students began to revise and edit their own work, I was pleased to hear that no one thought their piece already perfect. Instead, the students promptly began rereading their work and making the necessary improvements. Sharing their changes and classifying these examples as a class enabled the students to build a greater understanding of the differences between editing and revising. Some of the editing examples shared include corrections to misspelled words, misused homophones, added commas, added apostrophes, and capitalized

names, movies, cities, and companies. While a number of revision changes were shared, the types of changes were mostly limited to improvements related to word choice and the lead or hook of their piece. I had constantly reminded the students to focus on both of these aspects during previous writing lessons earlier in the year.

In the closing portion of the lesson, I was shocked to hear that some of my students thought that editing was more important than revising. To help reinforce that editing is less significant, I had my students flip back to “The Redwoods” and “Mouse Alert” passages. I reminded the class that “The Redwoods” is almost completely free of any editing errors, while “Mouse Alert” had more editing errors. I questioned if the editing errors in “Mouse Alert” make it a weaker piece of writing. Of course, the class disagreed and I was able to emphasize that while editing is important, substance in what is written/content is far more significant.

### **Lesson 8 – Revising by Showing**

Lesson from:

Spandel, V. (2009a). *Creating 6-trait revisers and editors: 30 revisions and editing lessons*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Strategies (Writing and Representing)*

C7 - Select and use various strategies after writing and representing to improve their work, including checking their work against established criteria, reading aloud and listening for fluency, and revising to enhance writing traits (e.g., ideas, sentence fluency, word choice, voice, organization).

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Distinguish between writing that shows and writing that tells

- Revise a paragraph by replacing telling details with showing details

Materials:

- Revise by Showing Handout (Appendix E)
- Sample A: Heading Home (p. 25) & Sample B: Wishful Thinking (p. 26) Handout (Appendix F)
- Sample C: Whole Class Revision (p. 28) & Sample D: Revising with Partners (p. 29) Handout and Overheads (Appendix G)
- Suggested Revisions of Sample C (p. 30) and Sample D (p. 31) Overheads (Appendix H)

Lesson Sequence:

1. Explain to the class that over the next few lessons they are going to develop their revision strategies that are connected to the *ideas* writing trait.
2. Write the following statement on the board, “The storm was growing dangerous.”  
Instruct the students to visualize what comes to mind when they read this sentence and ask a few students to share their images.
3. Write the following statement, “Rain was falling harder, loosening the earth’s grip on the big maple. With each gust of wind, it tilted ever so slightly farther toward the old barn that lay in its path.” Again, instruct the students visualize these statements in their minds. Ask the students which example better describes what is happening.
4. Explain that the second example is writing that shows, while the first example is writing that tells. Read over the first page of the Revise by Showing Handout together. Have students read over the four passages silently and check the passages that include showing details.

5. Once the students are finished, read over each passage aloud and discuss as a class those statements that are showing. Ask the students to look closely at the telling passages and determine what should be removed in order to turn it into a showing passage.
6. On the back of the handout, have students change each telling sentence into a few showing sentences. Circulate to ensure all students understand the task. Once most students appear to be done, have volunteers share their new showing passages.
7. Explain to the class that this writing technique is used in most novels. Share the passage from *Dovey Coe* (Dowell, 2000, p. 22) to make the reading-writing connection. Ask the students to identify why this paragraph was selected to share. Challenge the students to look for their own examples the next time they are reading a novel.
8. Distribute Sample A & B handouts. Ask the students to read each sample and look for indications of showing versus telling details. Question which piece of writing is superior. Once students have determined that Sample B is the stronger piece, go back to Sample A to look for sentences that tell and brainstorm showing details that could replace these sentences.
9. Distribute Sample C & D handouts. Explain to the class that Sample C will be revised as a class. Display Sample C on the overhead and read one sentence at a time, and have the students identify each as either a showing or telling detail. For each telling sentence, have a few students suggest changes and record the revision on the overhead. Remind students that they should also be making the changes on their sheets.
10. Once the whole passage has been revised, reread the improved paragraph. Next, display the Suggested Revision of Sample C overhead to compare and discuss the similarities and differences between the two.

11. Partner students and ask them to complete Sample D. Remind students that each of them is responsible for recording the changes on their handouts.
12. Circulate to ensure everyone is on task and provide assistance when necessary.
13. Bring the group back together after about 10-15 minutes and have a few dyads share their revised pieces. Display the Suggested Revision of Sample D overhead and note similarities and differences.

Assessment:

- Monitor partnerships to ensure that each student is an active participant in the revising of Sample D.
- Read over each student's revision of Sample D to ensure each of the telling details have been replaced with showing details.

Reflection:

As I prepared for this lesson, I was apprehensive about the number of steps and handouts needed to teach this revision strategy. However, once I started the lesson I saw that my students were not only kept accountable, but also engaged by the development of the lesson. Each step was scaffolded perfectly to assist the students in learning this revision strategy.

The one change I made to Spandel's original lesson was providing more initial sentences to revise at the start of the lesson, prior to the whole-class revision. I thought my students could use more practice of this skill in isolation before they worked with a whole paragraph. I believe this change strengthened the lesson, as the students appeared very confident during both the whole-class and partner revising opportunities.

At first, I was unsure whether I would use the Suggested Revisions of Sample C and D as I thought that these samples might mislead my students to believe that there is one correct

answer when revising. However, I elected to use the samples but in a more light-hearted manner. Once we were finished our whole-class revision on the overhead (see Appendix I), I framed it as a bit of a game to see how close we came compared to the “experts” and the class became excited to make the comparisons.

Overall, I was thrilled with how smoothly this lesson was implemented and how quickly the students became efficient at using this revision technique.

### **Lesson 9 – Revising by Making a Scene**

Lesson from:

Spandel, V. (2009a). *Creating 6-trait revisers and editors: 30 revisions and editing lessons*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Strategies (Writing and Representing)*

C7 - Select and use various strategies after writing and representing to improve their work, including checking their work against established criteria, reading aloud and listening for fluency, and revising to enhance writing traits (e.g., ideas, sentence fluency, word choice, voice, organization).

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Practice scene-building strategies
- Revise a paragraph by making a scene with distinct and vivid details

Materials:

- Revise by Making a Scene Handout (Appendix J)
- Sample A: Bus World (p. 40) & Sample B: Behind the Scenes (p. 41) Handout

- Sample C: Whole Class Revision (p. 43) & Sample D: Revising with Partners (p. 44)  
Handout and Overheads
- Suggested Revisions of Sample C (p. 45) and Sample D (p. 46) Overheads

Lesson Sequence:

1. Explain to the class that they are going to continue to develop their revision strategies that are connected to the ideas writing trait.
2. Engage the class in a brainstorming activity about the kinds of details that are important to include when writing about a scene so that readers feel like they are in the moment with the writer. Record students' ideas on the board.
3. Distribute the Revise by Making a Scene Handout and read over the first page of together. As a class, brainstorm possible sites/locations that would be the perfect backdrop for a number of sensory elements. Record students' suggestions and vote to select one as a focus.
4. As a class, brainstorm sensory details that fit within each of the four categories: sights, sounds, tastes/smells, and feelings. Have students record these details on the chart located on the back of the Revising by Making a Scene Handout. Scaffold and guide the students to be as specific as possible with the details.
5. Once completed, have students look at their chart and consider the top five details that are most significant to this location. Explain that creating the most vivid descriptions does not mean overloading the reader with sensory details; instead, they should be selective and include only the most distinctive and appropriate details.
6. Read aloud the passage from *The Wednesday Wars* (Schmidt, 2007) on page 37 of the Spandel (2009a) book to make the reading-writing connection. Direct the students to

listen for different sensory details that are included in the passage. Have students share their favourite details that the author used to describe spring break and explain why they selected this detail.

7. Distribute Sample A & B handouts. Instruct the students to read each sample and look for the sensory details that create a powerful scene. Question which piece of writing is superior. Once students have determined that Sample A is the stronger piece, revisit Sample B to look for opportunities to add details to create a more vivid account of the sandwich shop.
8. Display Sample C on the overhead and read over the entire passage aloud. Instruct the students to think of important sensory details that the author missed. Create a sensory chart on the board and fill in some of these missed details. Distribute Sample C & D handouts. Go back to the overhead and begin to revise the passage by adding the most powerful details. Remind students that they should also be making the changes on their sheets.
9. Once the whole passage has been revised, reread the improved paragraph. Next, display the Suggested Revision of Sample C overhead and discuss the similarities and differences between the two.
10. Partner students and ask them to complete Sample D. After each dyad has read through the passage, have them create a sensory chart before they start to revise. Remind the students that each of them is responsible for recording the changes on their handouts.
11. Circulate to ensure everyone is on task and provide assistance when necessary.

12. Bring the group back together after about 15 minutes and have a few dyads share their revised pieces. Display the Suggested Revision of Sample D overhead and note similarities and differences.
13. Have the students share how today's and yesterday's revision lessons will impact their writing.

Assessment:

- Monitor partnerships to ensure that each student is an active participant in the revising of Sample D.
- Read over each student's revision of Sample D to ensure each that the passage has been improved with the addition of sensory details.

Reflection:

As I prepared for this lesson, I was concerned that my students would be bored by the format of the lesson as its structure is nearly identical to the previous lesson. However, my students expressed no complaints about the similar format of the lesson; instead, they were focused and eager for each of the steps.

The sensory detail chart proved to be an effective tool in developing students' observations of details in a scene. From our class brainstorming, I noticed how the students were quick to fill in details related to sights and sounds, but struggled with the details related to taste, smell, and feeling. I believe the latter is a reflection of how students' writing usually relies heavily on details that involve sights and sounds, while details relating to tastes, smells, and feelings may be left out. As we completed the first chart together, I had to scaffold and guide my students to give me details that were distinctive and vivid, rather than dull.

Once the students partnered and began working on their own, I noticed that some dyads skipped the completion of a sensory detail chart. I questioned these students about how they were monitoring the kind of details they should be adding and in most cases these pairs were unable to provide any method to their revising. I kindly instructed the students to create a chart to ensure that they were adding the most distinctive details in their revising.

When I read over the students' revisions of Sample D, I was impressed by the changes they made. I believe this lesson did a sufficient job of providing my students with a tool to add sensory details that strengthen their writing. My only critique would be that there could have been more discussion around the type of sensory details to include on the chart. I do not want my students to settle for dull details; instead, they need to be coached on how to make their details distinctive and vivid.

### **Lesson 10 – Revising Beyond the List (Part 1)**

Lesson from:

Spandel, V. (2009a). *Creating 6-trait revisers and editors: 30 revisions and editing lessons*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Strategies (Writing and Representing)*

C7 - Select and use various strategies after writing and representing to improve their work, including checking their work against established criteria, reading aloud and listening for fluency, and revising to enhance writing traits (e.g., ideas, sentence fluency, word choice, voice, organization).

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Recognize the difference between a list of random facts and a clear message

- Group facts based on a common main point
- Revise a “listy” paragraph so that it consists of a main message and supporting details

Materials:

- Revise Beyond the List Handout (Appendix K)
- Sample A: The Ant (p. 57) & Sample B: Australia (p. 58) Handout

Lesson Sequence:

1. Explain to the class that they are going to continue to develop their revision strategies related to the ideas writing trait. However, today’s lesson is focused on how to effectively incorporate research information into their writing.
2. Instruct the students to think of a time when they researched a topic and ended up with a list of facts. Have students share their memories and their feelings about what they thought the next step should be.
3. Distribute the Revising Beyond the List Handout. Read through the first page of the handout together.
4. Instruct the students to read over the four samples on the back of the Revising Beyond the List Handout. Ask students to place a check beside the samples that make one clear point and offer a message with substance.
5. Once the students are finished, read each sample aloud and discuss as a class which samples have a main point. Direct the students to look closely at sample #2, which has no core meaning and instruct them to highlight the first sentence of the sample. As a class, brainstorm the kinds of information that a reader would expect to read next, based on this first sentence. Explain that this first sentence is the topic of focus and it guides what

information fits. Compare the new list of information to the original and talk about the differences.

6. Repeat this same process for sample #3.
7. Read aloud the passage from *The Complete Cockroach* (Gordon, 1996) on page 53 of the Spandel (2009a) book to make the reading-writing connection. Direct the students to listen and see if they can identify the main point of this passage. Ask students whether these sentences sound like random facts or convey one clear message. Have the students share what they believe to be main point of the passage.
8. Distribute Sample A & B handouts. Instruct the students to first read the fact sheet for each piece and then as they read the paragraphs question whether the sample merely lists the facts or creates a unified message around one clear main point. Once the students have read both samples, talk about which sample is superior. After the students have determined that Sample B is stronger, discuss the differences between the two samples.
9. Direct the students to look at Sample A and have them identify the main focus of the piece. Have the students share their suggestions and agree on one focus. As a class, decide on those pieces of information that should be kept in the paragraph and those that should be removed. Refer back to the fact sheet and determine any additional pieces of information that might fit with the main focus, as well.
10. As the lesson wraps up, remind the students that they also need to consider how they plan on incorporating their own voice into these pieces of writing. Explain that even though they are using information that they have acquired from elsewhere, they still must make these facts their own.

11. Tell the class that they will be continuing with this lesson next day, when they will take part in the whole class revision and partner revision.

Assessment:

- Monitor students' involvement in class discussions.

Reflection:

When I read over Spandel's lesson for *Revising Beyond the List*, I was thrilled to see the incorporation of how to use researched facts. Middle school students are often asked to research a topic and present their information. I have found that many students struggle to organize their research and put the facts into their own words. I believe this lesson did an excellent job of clearly demonstrating that one does not need to use all of the information that is gathered during the research phase. Instead of bombarding the reader with fact after fact, this lesson helped students to understand the importance of sifting through their research and indentifying one clear main point to connect the facts to.

Since this lesson is a such a shift from the previous two lessons, I thought that the students might require more time to read the research, find a main point, select facts that build on the main point, and contribute their own thoughts and opinions into the piece. Therefore, I divided the lesson into two parts so we could spend more time on scaffolding the necessary skills.

My students were engaged right from the start of the lesson, as they could easily relate to being stuck with a list of facts and not knowing what their next step should be. Once we got into the lesson, the students easily identified the difference between a piece of writing that had one clear message with substance and a choppy list of facts with no real purpose. They also experienced no difficulties generating the supporting facts that should accompany the main

point. The students did, however, struggle with identifying the main point of Sample A: The Ants. Once I clarified that more than one main point could be made from the information on the fact sheet, the students seemed more at ease. I believe that the students were worried that they were going to make the wrong choice and as a result, hesitated in making a decision. In the end, we did more of a whole class revision of Sample A to provide further modeling and scaffolding of the skill. This change confirmed that I made the right choice in splitting the lesson because the students needed further modeling prior to getting into their partner revisions.

### **Lesson 11 – Revising Beyond the List (Part 2)**

Lesson from:

Spandel, V. (2009a). *Creating 6-trait revisers and editors: 30 revisions and editing lessons*.

Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Grade 7 B.C. Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Language Arts:

*Strategies (Writing and Representing)*

C7 - Select and use various strategies after writing and representing to improve their work, including checking their work against established criteria, reading aloud and listening for fluency, and revising to enhance writing traits (e.g., ideas, sentence fluency, word choice, voice, organization).

In this lesson, students should be able to:

- Group facts based on a common main point
- Revise a “listy” paragraph so that it consists of a main message and supporting details

Materials:

- Sample C: Whole Class Revision (p. 60) & Sample D: Revising with Partners (p. 61)

Handout and Overhead

- Suggested Revisions of Sample C (p. 62) and Sample D (p. 63) Overheads

Lesson Sequence:

1. As a class, review the main steps taught in the previous lesson regarding revising beyond the list. Through this discussion, record these steps on the board: 1. Review research 2. Identify one main point of focus 3. Select facts to support the main point 4. Omit details that do not align with your main point 5. Add in your own voice through inserting comments and opinions.
2. Distribute Sample C and D handouts and display Sample C on the overhead. Provide the students with time to look over the fact sheet at the top of the page. As a class, read the fact sheet and the paragraph aloud.
3. Have the class consider whether the writer has made the best use of the provided information. Pose the following questions: Does the paragraph have a clear message or is it merely a list of facts? Does the writer provide information that is not relevant? Does the writer overlook some key facts?
4. As a class, identify the main point of the paragraph. Remind the class that there is more than one possibility, but that they must select only one. Once a main point has been selected, have the students go back through the paragraph and underline the parts that should remain. Have the students share their suggestions and underline these statements on the overhead.
5. As a class, review the fact sheet and select the details that support the main point and that should also be included in the revised paragraph.

6. Have the students assist in revising the original paragraph using all of the information that has been gathered. Remind the students that they should add any personal knowledge or comments to the paragraph.
7. Once the whole passage has been revised, reread the improved paragraph. Next, display the Suggested Revision of Sample C overhead and determine if both pieces focused on the same main point. If they share the same main point, discuss the similarities and differences between the two paragraphs. If they do not share the same main point, identify the main point and discuss how well the supporting details add to the main message.
8. Partner students and ask them to revise Sample D. Instruct the students to follow the same steps that were completed for Sample C. Have the students write their revised paragraphs on a piece of lined paper to allow for more space.
9. Circulate to ensure everyone is on task and provide assistance when necessary.
10. Bring the group back together after about 25 minutes and have a few dyads share their revised pieces. Display the Suggested Revision of Sample D overhead and note similarities and differences.
11. To end the lesson, have the students share some of the key points they learned from the last two lessons that will help them in their future writing experiences.

Assessment:

- Monitor partnerships to ensure that each student is an active participant in the revising of Sample D.
- Read over each student's revision of Sample D to ensure that the paragraph consists of a main point and supporting details.

**Reflection:**

As this lesson was a continuation from the last, my students needed little prompting to recall the concepts covered in the previous lesson. After recalling the steps needed to revise beyond the list, we quickly progressed to the whole class revision of Sample C. After reading over the fact sheet and the paragraph, the class was confident that the paragraph was merely a list of random facts. The students agreed that the paragraph should focus on the near extinction of whales and were quick to identify all of the irrelevant facts within the paragraph. While the class and I revised the original piece, I observed how the students were able to provide me with facts that supported our main detail but struggled to add any of their own thoughts or opinions. To help elicit some thoughts from the students, I asked them for their opinions about the previous legal practice of killing whales. Once the students shared that they were shocked and disgusted by this practice, I encouraged them to incorporate some of their reactions with the facts into the revised paragraph.

Within their partnerships, the students were focused and diligent in following the steps that had been scaffolded and modeled for them. When I read over their revised paragraphs, it was clear that these lessons gave my students the tools they needed to be able to work with a list of facts and develop a focused piece of meaningful writing. My only criticism of Spandel's original lesson was the lack of explicit instruction about how to rework the facts with the addition of personal knowledge and opinion in order to create a unique piece of writing.

Due to the length of the unit and repetitive lesson sequence, I have elected to share the last three *organization* lessons as overviews with reflections.

## Lesson 12 Overview – Revising with Consequences

Lesson 12 focused on the *organization* writing trait by helping students to revise persuasive endings. Initially, the students were taught the difference between a summary ending and an ending that calls for action. Students read over five concluding sentences and identified those endings that offered the reader a consequence rather than a summary. The conclusion to an article from *National Geographic* was shared to illustrate how a quote from an expert can help to add impact to a conclusion. Once the students were able to clearly differentiate between the two endings, they read over Sample A and Sample B (Spandel, 2009a, pp. 72 & 73) to look for a powerful conclusion that prompts readers to take action. After identifying the stronger writing sample, the class considered how they could revise the weaker sample to make the conclusion stronger. Next, the students were given Sample C (Spandel, 2009a, p. 75) to complete a whole class revision of the piece. As a group, the students read the sample, identified the type of ending, brainstormed consequences, revised the piece by rewriting the ending, and compared their revised ending with the Suggested Revision of Sample C (Spandel, 2009a, p. 77). In pairs, students followed these same steps again to revise Sample D (Spandel, 2009a, pp. 76 & 78).

### Reflection

Many of my students struggled with writing a conclusion and as a result, many of them resorted to using the summary ending because they were unsure of what else to do. This lesson provided the much needed instruction of how to develop an ending that spurs the readers into action by clearly stating the consequences. Initially, my students struggled with the first task of identifying the concluding sentences that demand change. This task was challenging because they were given only the last couple of sentences and did not know whether the information that was given was a summary or new information. Once we moved onto Samples A and B, the

students were much more successful as they were given the full pieces of text to read. As the class considered how to improve Sample B, I assisted them by providing the sentence starter, “If the students are not able to work in the high school ...” and had students share how they could finish this statement to clearly state the consequences to the readers. I was impressed by the revised endings that the students generated for the Samples B, C, and D. These conclusions demonstrated that the lesson was successful in teaching students the needed skills to revise their persuasive endings.

### **Lesson 13 Overview – Revising to Connect Ideas**

This lesson worked to strengthen students’ organization in their writing by teaching the importance of using transitions to connect ideas. As a class, the students brainstormed transitions that they have used or read. To help show the variety of transitions and their uses, students received a handout (from <http://www.smart-words.org/transition-words.html>) with transitions separated into categories of use (i.e. agreement, opposition, time, examples, and conclusion). The students were asked to read examples of text with incorrect uses of transitions, underline the transitions, and create new transitions that clarified the meaning. A passage from *Oh Rats! The Story of Rats and People* (Marrin, 2006) was read to demonstrate how the transitions worked to connect the facts. Next, the students evaluated Samples A and B (Spandel, 2009a, pp. 87 & 88) by locating strong transitions that linked together ideas. After identifying the stronger sample, the students worked to improve the weaker sample by revising the existing transitions and adding their own transitions. The students were then given Sample C (Spandel, 2009a, p. 90) to be revised as a whole class. As a group, the students read the sample, identified the transitional words and phrases, brainstormed opportunities to add transitions, revised the piece by adding and changing transitions, and compared their revised ending with the Suggested Revision of Sample

C (Spandel, 2009a, p. 92). In pairs, the students followed these same steps again to revise Sample D (Spandel, 2009a, pp. 91 & 93).

### Reflection

This lesson was extremely useful, since many of my students rarely incorporated transitions into their writing. During our initial brainstorm, the class generated a relatively small list of transitions that they were familiar with. I anticipated this lack of knowledge about transitions and had created a handout that contained an extensive list of possible transitions, which were organized into categories of use. After we reviewed this list and read over the Revising to Connect Ideas Handout (Spandel, 2009a), the students were much more confident in being able to identify transitions within a text. Even though the students could identify the misused transitions in the example sentences, they struggled to find a suitable replacement. Since the students seemed so indecisive about the correct use of transitions, I wanted to build their confidence around the skill. I asked them to write their own two sentences about anything they wanted and the only requirement was that each sentence had to contain at least one transition to link the ideas together. Once the students were finished, they shared their sentences while the rest of us listened and then identified the transition. The next time I use this lesson, I would have students write these sentences prior to correcting the example sentences to better develop the students' understanding.

Recognizing that the students struggled to revise the use of transitions, I elected to do an additional whole class revision of Sample A after the class had determined that it was the weaker piece of writing. I believe the additional modeling provided the class with the scaffolding they needed to be more successful in the partner revision of Sample D. When I read over the students'

revised copies of Sample D it became evident that my more advanced writers had a good grasp of the concept, while my struggling writers needed further teaching of the skill.

### **Lesson 14 Overview – Revising Under Pressure**

Lesson 14 focused on developing students' revision strategies during time-restricted situations. The students were introduced to the 5-minute plan that focused on four key areas – the lead, conclusion, title, and one “just right” word. Initially, the four key areas were discussed as students shared some of their favourite books, essays, and stories. A few sample texts were shared, so that the students could identify which elements were present and why they worked so well. The lead and conclusion from *Escape! The Story of the Great Houdini* (Fleischman, 2006) were shared to illustrate how a writer can make an impression with very few sentences. Next, the students evaluated Samples A and B (Spandel, 2009a, pp. 102 & 103) by locating strong leads, conclusions, and titles. After identifying the stronger sample, the students worked to improve the weaker sample by changing the lead, the conclusion, or title. Next, the students were given Sample C (Spandel, 2009a, p. 105) to be revised as a whole class. As a group, the students read the sample; brainstormed ways to improve the lead, conclusion, one word within the text, and the title; revised the piece within the five minute time constraint, and compared their revised ending with the Suggested Revision of Sample C (Spandel, 2009a, p. 107). In pairs, students followed these same steps to revise Sample D (Spandel, 2009a, pp. 106 & 108).

### **Reflection**

This lesson was the essential wrap up the unit, as it provided my students with a quick revision guide to use in their future writing. I appreciate that Spandel recognizes that students do not always have time to revise multiple drafts of their work over multiple days. In reality, students are sometimes required to complete writing assessments in restricted timed sessions and

they need a short and effective strategy to improve their work. When I shared the 5-minute strategy, the class seemed shocked that they could make revisions in such a short period of time. During our initial discussion of their favourite titles, leads, and conclusions it became evident how important the title and the lead are in determining if the students will continue to read the book or not. My students also shared that the book's ending often determines whether they will recommend the book and read another book by the same author. From this discussion, I asked the students to brainstorm what their favourite authors do that is so effective for each of these elements and then asked them to use these examples to prompt their revisions of the Samples A, B, C, and D.

When the class read over Sample A and Sample B, most students knew that Sample A was the stronger piece based on the title alone. During our whole class and partner revision, I pulled out a stop watch to challenge the class on how quick and efficient they could be. The timer created an element of fun in the lesson and also kept the students extremely focused. Overall, this lesson taught the students to make small changes that can greatly impact the overall enjoyment of their writing.

In conclusion, my unit on Revamping Revision proved to be quite successful in helping my students to develop their writing abilities, and specifically their revision skills. During this unit, I discovered how the six-traits can help my students and I talk about strong writing in a way that will assist my students to build awareness of their own writing. Throughout this unit, I was shocked at and pleased by how quickly my students learned and used the new revision strategies. I also learned how well my students could work collaboratively to revise a piece of text together.

Chapter Four discusses how the implementation of the unit connects with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and offers recommendations for future use of the unit.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Reflection**

My perception that the Revamping Revision unit was successful is evident in the lesson reflections in Chapter Three. While these reflections communicate my immediate reactions to the lessons, they are not connected to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. In this chapter, I make connections between the elements of the unit that contribute to its success and the academic literature, identify some limitations of Spandel's (2009a) revision program, and share suggestions for teachers' pedagogy, my future writing pedagogy, and recommendations for future research.

#### **Success of the Unit as Linked to the Literature**

The success of the Revamping Revision unit is directly linked to the academic literature and research that were reviewed in Chapter Two. I believe that the unit's success was a result of the following three main features: the use of the six-traits to develop an understanding of strong writing, the scaffolded lessons for teaching specific revision strategies, and the incorporation of frequent collaboration opportunities.

The introduction of the six-traits at the start of the unit created a common language for the students and me to talk about the features of quality writing. Humphris (2010) stated that the metalanguage of revision and the writing process must be incorporated into discussions of writing to ensure that students have a greater understanding of what is expected of them and how they can develop their writing. The six-traits also worked to create knowledge around general writing criteria, which MacArthur (2007) believed to be crucial for students to be able to distinguish good writing from poor. Knowledge of the characteristics of good versus poor writing is the foundation for students knowing when revision is necessary.

The structure of Spandel's (2009a) revision lessons further supported the teaching of the six-traits by continuously exposing the students to exemplars of the featured trait. Within these revision lessons, samples from contemporary literature were shared to highlight how a specific author used the trait being taught. Students also read two sample texts and had to identify indications of the trait that make one sample superior. Exposing the students to samples of strong writing supports the belief of Perchemlides and Coutant (2004) that students must first be taught how to recognize these traits in writing before they can be expected to use them within their own writing. By identifying the weaknesses in the sample texts, my students were also improving their ability to detect problems within their own writing, an area that Humphris (2010) identified as an issue for developing writers.

The organization of Spandel's (2009a) lessons so that each focused on one revision strategy played a major role in supporting students during the revising progress. The explicit focus on one trait at a time helped to avoid overwhelming students with too much new information (Culham, 2003). By concentrating on learning only one strategy the students also more quickly gained confidence as they progressed through the lesson. Limiting the students to only content-based changes allowed the students to concentrate entirely on exploring what they wanted to say by reshaping the message and improving ideas (McGarrell & Verbeem, 2007; Saddler, 2003). The specific nature of each revision strategy closely aligned with the explicit steps in the study by De La Paz and Graham (2002) that showed how the students benefited from focused and straight forward criteria. The anonymous nature of the samples that the students revised may have also played an important role in the success of the lessons as MacArthur (2007) reported that students find it easier to revise text from an unknown author.

While the text and the type of strategy introduced all contributed to the success of the lessons, I believe the key attribute of these lessons was the delivery of the information to the students. Each revision lesson scaffolded the students' learning of the strategy through the progression of explicit teaching, teacher modeling, whole-class revision, and partner revision. This gradual release of responsibility played a key role in the planning of each of the revision lessons. As I proceeded through each of these phases, I closely monitored my students' progress to ensure that my pacing met their needs. If students appeared to be struggling, I provided them with extra instruction and assistance to ensure that they could work independently. This scaffolded teaching was also found to be imperative in the research by De La Paz and Graham (2002).

Finally, collaboration played a key role in the creation of the unit. Whether it was through whole-class discussions, group brainstorms, or partner revising sessions, collaborative talk helped to engage my students and facilitate the growth of their understanding of the writing process and, specifically, revision. The increased engagement and support between students during these lessons is consistent with the claims made by both Humphris (2010) and Dale (1994) who noted that collaboration can increase the amount of time on task and develop supportive relationships between students. Of all the collaborative opportunities offered during the unit, I was most impressed by the type of negotiations that occurred during the partner revising of Sample D activities. Listening to my students defend and explain their revision suggestions demonstrated how important talk can be in creating understanding of new concepts. During these moments, I also was impressed by the peer teaching that occurred between the mixed ability dyads. This observation echoed the results described in the studies by Humphris (2010), and Yarrow and Topping (2001).

### **Limitations of Spandel's Revision Program**

With all of the successes of the unit, my criticisms of Spandel's (2009a) revision program are limited. My first issue is purely a logistical concern related to the number of handouts needed for each lesson. While I appreciated that Spandel provided the entire selection of sample texts needed for the unit, I was slightly overwhelmed by the number of handouts that accompanied every lesson. Each lesson required an instructional handout that introduced the revision strategy and Sample texts A, B, C, and D. In trying to reduce the number of handouts, teachers could rely on projectors to show Samples A and B; however, this solution runs the risk of losing students' focus by asking them to read off the board or screen and not being able to make notes on the samples. Perhaps a better solution is to reduce the size of each sample to enable all four samples to fit on both sides of one page. Although this modification would require students to reduce the size of the revisions on the page, this change may be worth it since it would require one-half of the amount of paper.

My only other concern with Spandel's (2009a) program is related to the format of the lessons. Each of the lessons follows the exact same format, which allowed the students and me to quickly master the routine and focus all of our attention on the skills being taught. While this repetitive format supported the instruction, it also restricted us from being able to do too many lessons in a row. During the unit, I sensed that my students were becoming bored by the repetition and as a result, I took a needed break before introducing the new trait. I was surprised that Spandel made no mention of this issue or recommended that a break be taken between each of the traits.

### **Suggestions for Teachers' Pedagogy**

After reflection on the success of the unit, I would definitely recommend the use of Spandel's (2009a) revision program, *Creating 6-Trait Revisers and Editors: 30 Revising and Editing Lessons*, to fellow teachers. I believe this program does an excellent job of showing revision in action and teaching easy-to-use revision strategies that connect to the six-traits framework (and hence to the B.C. Language Arts curriculum and the Writing Performance Standards). I believe that teachers will best support the development of their students' writing abilities by coupling this revision program with the six-traits writing framework, rather than as a standalone program.

### **My Future Writing Pedagogy**

My knowledge of the writing process, revision, and writing instruction has been significantly increased through the completion of this project. The information that I have gained through my research, development of the unit, and reflection will positively impact my teaching and my students. My experiences will contribute to several changes in my teaching of writing.

First, I will allow my students to take much more time to work through writing. This change will result in more opportunities for students to reflect on their writing, discuss their processes, assess their early drafts using rubrics, and revise their work to improve the end product. While I acknowledge that these changes will most likely result in the completion of fewer polished pieces, I believe that the increased quality of work will make the reduced number of assignments worthwhile.

Second, I will certainly continue to use Spandel's (2009a) revision program; however, the pace of these lessons will be altered. When I use these lessons again, I plan to take more time between each lesson to provide my students with more opportunities to practice each new

strategy. Within her book, Spandel provides a list of “Next Steps” at the end of each lesson, which I would like to take time to explore with my students.

Third, I will provide more opportunities for collaboration within all aspects of my teaching. This unit showed me the positive effect of students engaging in collaborative talk. My students impressed me with the high level of metacognitive talk that occurred during their group and partner work, which reinforced how important this type of structured communication is within the curriculum.

Finally, I will continue to further research how I can carry on to improve my own teaching of writing through the use of the six-traits framework. Much like the teachers who participated in the study by Collopy (2008), I feel much more confident in my own teaching of writing since being introduced to the framework.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As I read the literature connected to revision, I quickly noticed the lack of primary research articles connected to both teacher-led and collaborative revision strategies. Within the literature I reviewed, only two articles examine the effects of specific revision strategies (Baer, 2008; Patthey, Matsumura, & Valdes, 2004). With this lack of research, teachers are left wondering what instructional techniques are most effective. This lack of research is troubling since there is no shortage of revision programs that publishers and others are trying to put into operation in our classrooms, yet they lack any evidence that they work. I recommend that research be conducted on Spandel’s (2009a) revision program, as I believe this program has the potential to make significant improvements to students’ writing.

Many of the studies I read did not include the wide ability levels that are present in most classrooms. I believe that more research needs to include students who have lower ability levels,

as the writing of these students will most likely require an extensive amount of revision. There is also a definite need for more Canadian research. I was able to locate only one Canadian study on writing assessment in the middle years' classroom (Peterson & McClay, 2010).

In the end, the completion this project has transformed my teaching of writing. This project will have a positive impact on my teaching future as I work to help my future students become proficient, reflective writers.

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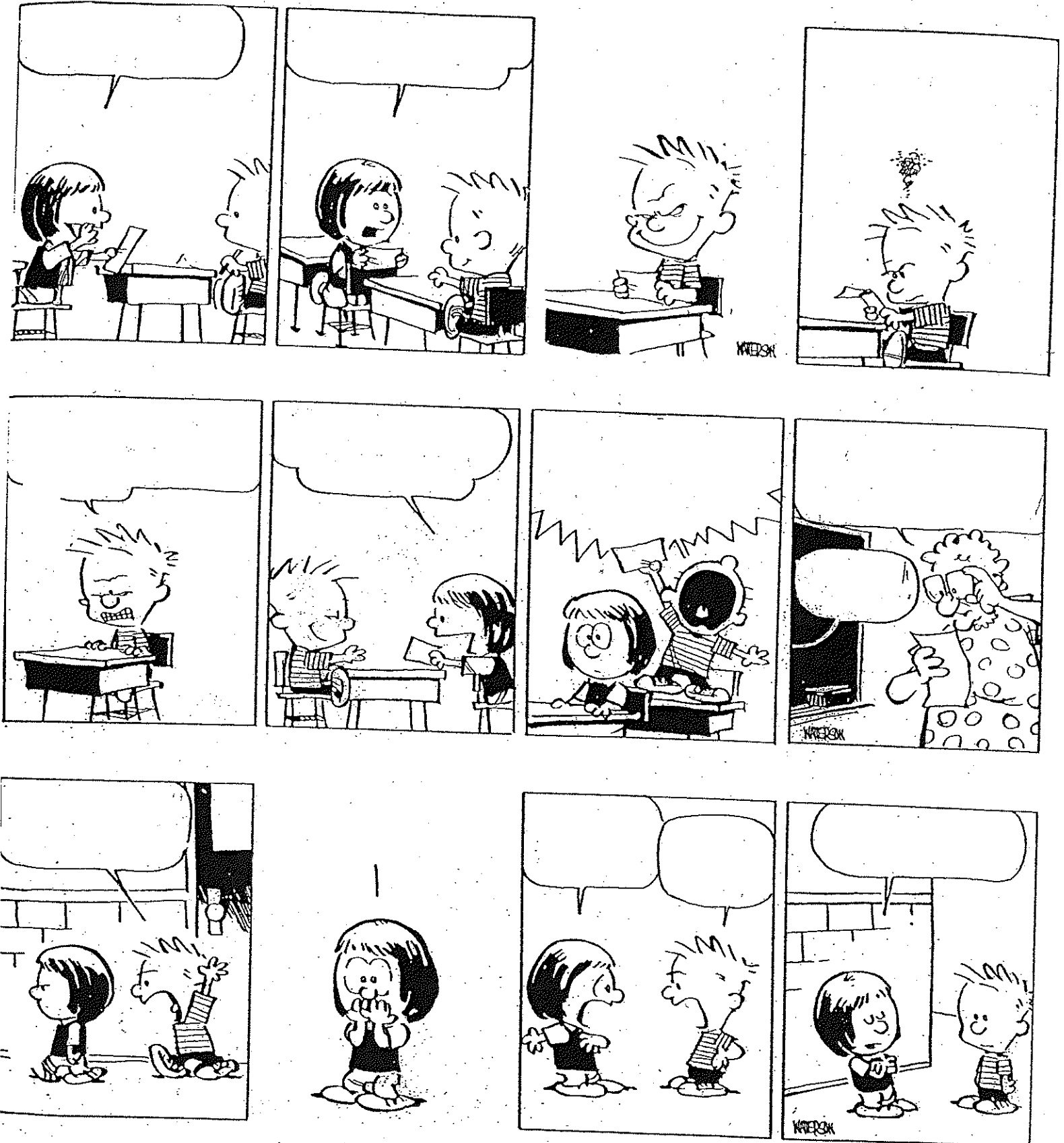
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Appendix A

Good versus Bad Writing – Calvin and Hobbs Comic



## Appendix B

## "The Redwoods" and "Mouse Alert" Handout

## FIGURE 3.3 The Redwoods

Last year, we went on a vacation and we had a wonderful time. The weather was sunny and warm and there was lots to do, so we were never bored.

My parents visited friends and took pictures for their friends back home. My brother and I swam and also hiked in the woods. When we got tired of that, we just ate and had a wonderful time.

It was exciting and fun to be together as a family and to do things together. I love my family, and this is a time that I will remember for a long time. I hope we will go back again next year for more fun and an even better time than we had this year.

**FIGURE 3.4** MouseAlert

As soon as school was out, we left on vacation. Nothing went the way it was supposed to. Dad backed into a tree on the way out of the driveway, pushing the bike rack through the rear window and nearly scaring my sister to death. She was cranky the rest of the trip. We had to take our other car, which is smaller and you can't hook the bike rack up to it. Now my sister and me were crowded together so much she kept complaining about me breathing on her and taking up all her air and foot room. Plus now Dad knew a big bill would be waiting for him when we got home. It put everyone in a lovely trip starting mood.

We were supposed to go to Yellowstone Park. Well, actually, we did but just barely. I think we hold the world's record for shortest time spent in the park. This was all due to my mother's new attitude toward animals. The night before yellowstone we stayed in a cabin on the edge of the park. It had a lot of mice, but most of them had the good sense to stay hidden in the walls. One poor furry guy had a death wish and showed himself. The whole family went into action. My father got a broom, which looked like an oversized weapon for a mouse. My mother hugged her pink flanel nightgown around her knees, jumped up on a wood chair and started shrieking "Kill him! Kill him!" Her eyes were as big as her fists. I had never seen her quite so blood thirsty. My sister spent the whole time dancing on the bed crying her eyes out and yelling, "Don't kill it Dad! Don't kill it!" It was up to Dad and me to trap it. We got it in a pickle jar and took it down to the lake and let it go. It seemed really happy to get away from us. I thought I knew how it felt.

The next day we raced through Yellowstone and then headed home. My Mother said she had enough of animals. For weeks afterwards, this was the big story she told everyone who asked about our vacation. You'd have thought the whole point of our trip was to go on a mouse hunt. Dad said all the money we saved by not staying at Yellowstone could go to pay for the broken car window, so for him the trip worked out perfect. As for me, I'm still planning to get back to Yellowstone one day. I want to see something bigger than a mouse.

## Appendix C

## “What Teachers Value in Writing” Handout

FIGURE 3.5 What Teachers Value in Writing

**Ideas**

Clear—makes sense  
 Topic narrowed to manageable size  
 Focuses on key message(s)  
 Teaches me something  
 Holds my attention  
 Fresh, original perspective  
 Important, telling details that go beyond common knowledge  
 Minimal “filler” (unneeded information)  
 Shows insight  
 Authenticity

**Organization**

Inviting lead that draws me in  
 Starts somewhere, goes somewhere  
 Provides connections—detail to detail, paragraph to paragraph  
 Well paced, spending time where it matters  
 Like a good road map—easy to follow  
 Satisfying conclusion—sense of resolution  
 Doesn't end with “Then I woke up and it was a dream”  
 Doesn't end with truisms or clichés or literal summaries

**Voice**

Sounds like this writer—no other  
 Writer is “at home” in the writing  
 Writer seems engaged with topic  
 Brings topic to life  
 Shows concern for me—the reader  
 Individual, distinctive—unlike others  
 Makes me respond—cry, laugh, smile, get chills  
 Confident—writer knows his/her stuff  
 Lively, energetic, spontaneous

**Word Choice**

“Just right” words  
 Memorable words—worth highlighting, quoting  
 Creates word pictures, movies in the mind  
 Accurate, precise  
 Enlightening—helps me “get it”  
 Strong verbs  
 No modifier “overload”  
 Simple language used well  
 Repeats only as necessary—or for effect  
 Uses language to teach—not to impress  
 Defines difficult terms

**Sentence Fluency**

Easy to read aloud  
 Rhythm, cadence, flow  
 Easy to read with voice  
 Carefully crafted sentences  
 Variety in length, structure  
 Concise, direct sentences in informational writing  
 Fragments used only for effect  
 Authentic dialogue  
 Consistency in tense (present, past, future)

**Conventions and Layout**

Clean, edited  
 Free of distracting errors  
 No “mental editing” needed  
 Conventions guide reader through text  
 Conventions support meaning/voice  
 Design draws reader's eye to key points  
 Avoids distracting visuals—hard to read fonts  
 Uses graphics, as needed, to enhance text  
 Makes good use of white space

## Appendix D

## Student Checklist Handout

FIGURE 8.2 Student Checklist

## Student Checklist

**Ideas**

- My writing is clear and focused.
- Key points are well developed.
- You can tell I know this topic very well.
- I chose my details carefully. They're interesting—and important.
- I whittled this topic down to manageable size

**Organization**

- My lead will pull you into the piece.
- My conclusion will leave you thinking.
- Transitions connect ideas clearly.
- You will never feel lost reading this.

**Voice**

- This writing sounds like me—and no one else.
- It's as if I'm right there having a conversation with you.
- You might choose my piece to share aloud.
- I have strong feelings about this topic and it shows.
- Once you *start* reading this, you'll want to *keep* reading.

**Word Choice**

- I found my own way to say things.
- I stretched for the BEST words—not just the first ones I thought of.
- I cut words I didn't need.
- Strong verbs carry the weight.
- I did *not* overdo the adjectives.
- My words help you picture things, feel things, or understand my topic.

**Sentence Fluency**

- This is easy to read aloud *with voice*.
- You won't believe how much sentence variety I have.
- I read this aloud and I like how it sounds.
- If I repeated phrases or used fragments, it was for emphasis.
- My dialogue is realistic. It sounds like real people talking.

**Conventions**

- I edited this *well*. I read it silently and aloud.
- I corrected any errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization, or paragraphing.
- This piece is ready to publish.

## Appendix E

## Revise by Showing Handout



## Introduction

At some time or other, most writers are told, “Show, don’t tell.” Great advice, all right. But what does it really *mean*? The line between showing and telling can actually be a lot more murky than those giving this advice sometimes admit. In the end, *showing* means letting a reader draw his or her own conclusions—as opposed to telling the reader directly what to think. For example, you might write, “The storm was growing dangerous.” That would be *telling*. You have already drawn the conclusion for the reader—who doesn’t have to figure things out for him- or herself. But let’s say you write, “The rain was falling harder, loosening the earth’s grip on the big maple. With each gust of wind, it tilted ever so slightly farther toward the old barn that lay in its path.” That’s *showing*. You are allowing the reader to decide how worried to be—but you have provided plenty of clues, along with some good imagery. And therein lies the secret to good “showing”: offering just enough clues to support the conclusion you’d like your reader to draw.

## Step 1: Dropping Clues

Some of the following passages tell the reader what to think—and some are showing passages, offering clues that allow the reader to make his or her own decisions. Put a check (✓) beside each *showing* passage.

- “I . . . I came in here by mistake . . . and I’m leaving.” Karla did her best to stop her voice from trembling. She hid her hands behind her back so he could not see they were shaking.
- Tyler, who was seven months old, jumped up and down in his baby swing whenever his older brother and sister played video games. He squealed as the characters bounded across the screen. His eyes grew bigger and bigger as lights flashed and colors popped. When they turned the game off, Tyler cried uncontrollably.
- Madison felt nervous making a speech in front of the class.
- Dylan was a daredevil. Nothing scared him.

Now take a second look. What conclusion can you draw from each showing passage? Look again at the telling passages. What information would you *remove* to turn each telling passage into a showing passage? What clues might you add?

## SHOWING, NOT TELLING

Memorable writing shows more than it tells!

Telling = Mary was angry.

Showing = Mary stormed into the room, grabbed the phone, and slammed it into the wall.

**Improve the following sentences by adding showing details.**

1) I am sad.

---

---

---

---

2) The old man is kind.

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---

---

---

3) My friend can be cheap.

---

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---

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## Appendix F

## Sample A and Sample B

Creating Revisers and Editors, Grade 7

Lesson 1: Revising by Showing

## Sample A: Heading Home

Telling words?

or

Showing clues?

It was raining hard. Clouds were building in the sky.

Rachel didn't mind. She liked rainy weather. She actually *enjoyed* it. Her little brother Noah felt different. He thought it might be fun to stop at the bowling alley. They could warm up there. They could even get something to eat—and bowl a line or two. Rachel thought bowling was boring. She felt like walking home in the rain—the long way.



## Sample B: Wishful Thinking

Telling words? or Showing clues?
--

Each morning, Dylan walked past the Johnsons' house because there was no other way to reach the main road unless you had your own personal helicopter—something Dylan wished for on a daily basis. As soon as he got within six feet of their rather rickety wooden fence, Simba would begin his routine: *growl ominously, rush the fence, hit the wooden slats full speed, show ugly yellow teeth.*

Dylan liked to fantasize that the Johnsons were moving—to a faraway country, preferably across a very wide ocean. Some place surrounded by high mountains too dangerous to cross, or bordered by deserts in which nothing could survive.

“Just *talk* to Simba,” Dylan’s dad had said when Dylan explained the situation. “Talk to him in a low, soothing voice.” Soothing Simba would be, Dylan thought, like trying to sooth a falling rock. Pointless, and possibly hazardous—depending on where you were standing.

## Appendix G

## Sample C and Sample D Handout and Overhead

Lesson 1: Revising by Showing

Creating Revisers and Editors, Grade 7

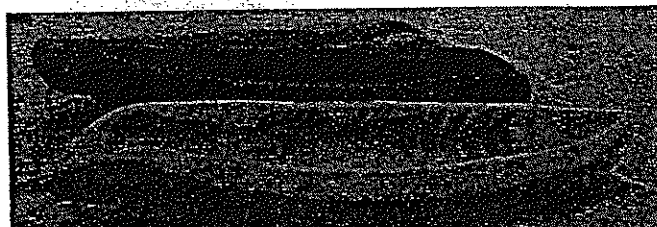
## Sample C: Whole Class Revision

Telling words?

or

Showing clues?

It was the time Hunter had been dreading since he'd come to camp three weeks ago. All the kids were going to swim from the beach to an island in the lake. The island was about half a mile away, and Hunter was positive he could not swim that far. The other kids seemed excited about it. Hunter did not feel excited at all. One of the counselors, named Sam, blew a whistle. It was time for everyone to get into the water. Hunter felt reluctant to even do this at all, and extremely worried. His feet left the sand, and he started swimming. He was pretty sure he was going to drown, and it was the scariest feeling he'd ever had in his life. About halfway across, Sam pulled alongside him in a boat. "Are you OK, buddy?" he asked Hunter. Hunter really wanted to get into that boat! Then he could feel safe.



## Sample D: Revising with Partners

Telling words?

or

Showing clues?

When the substitute teacher walked into the room, we could tell she was nervous. It seemed like it might be her first time teaching. You could tell she just wanted the whole day to be over with. She seemed to like reading, but she was shy.

The class did not help. They were not especially cooperative or nice. She tried hard to make friends, but we didn't let her. Later, watching her eat lunch by herself, I felt sorry for her. She looked lonely.



## Appendix H

## Suggested Revisions of Sample C and D Overheads

Lesson 1: Revising by Showing

Creating Revisers and Editors, Grade 7

## Suggested Revisions of C and D

## Sample C: Whole Class Revision

It was the time Hunter had been dreading since he'd come to camp three weeks ago. All the kids were going to swim from the beach to an island in the lake. The island was

*but it might as well have been to Fiji and back.*

about half a mile away, ~~and Hunter was positive he could~~

*were jumping up and down and pointing out to the island.*

~~not swim that far. The other kids seemed excited about it,~~

*hung back behind the canoes, hoping no one would notice him.*

~~Hunter did not feel excited at all. One of the counselors,~~

named Sam, blew a whistle. It was time for everyone to get

*eased into the lake as slowly as he could. It felt cold on his skin.*

into the water. Hunter ~~felt reluctant to even do this at all,~~

~~and extremely worried.~~ His feet left the sand, and he started

*His arms felt tired almost immediately.*

swimming. ~~He was pretty sure he was going to drown, and~~

*What if he went under? Would anyone even notice? He started breathing harder.*

~~it was the scariest feeling he'd ever had in his life. About~~

halfway across, Sam pulled alongside him in a boat. "Are

*couldn't answer. He reached for the side of the boat, and held on for dear life!*

you OK, buddy?" he asked Hunter. Hunter ~~really wanted to~~

~~get into that boat! Then he could feel safe.~~

## Sample D: Revising with Partners

When the substitute teacher walked into the room, ~~we could~~  
~~her face was pale and serious. She sat down, then stood up again~~  
~~like she couldn't figure out what to do. She started to take roll,~~  
~~then collected assignments, then got very red when we laughed.~~

~~^~~ ~~tell she was nervous. It seemed like it might be her first~~

~~^~~ ~~by the way she kept staring a~~  
~~hole through the clock that she~~

~~time teaching~~ You could tell ~~she~~ just wanted the whole

~~^~~ ~~spent most of the class period reading aloud to us—but her voice~~  
~~was so soft we could barely hear her, and she skipped some parts.~~

day to be over with. She ~~^~~ ~~seemed to like reading, but she~~

~~was shy~~

~~^~~ ~~Kyle and Ethan talked to each other and snickered the whole time.~~

The class did not help. ~~^~~ ~~They were not especially~~

~~^~~ ~~smiling and asking questions, but no one smiled back—or even talked to her.~~

~~cooperative or nice~~ She tried ~~^~~ ~~hard to make friends, but we~~

~~didn't let her~~ Later, watching her eat lunch ~~^~~ ~~off in a corner,~~  
~~by herself, I felt~~

like a total jerk.

~~^~~ ~~sorry for her~~ She looked ~~lonely~~ ~~^~~ ~~like the last inhabitant~~

of planet Earth, like she would die if someone didn't

talk to her pretty soon.

## Appendix I

## Finished Whole-Class Revision of Sample C

Lesson 1: Revising by Showing

Creating Revisers and Editors, Grade 7

## Sample C: Whole Class Revision

Telling words? or Showing clues?
--

It was the time Hunter had been dreading since he'd

come to camp three weeks ago. All the kids were going to

swim from the beach to an island in the lake. The island

was about half a mile away, ~~and~~ Hunter was positive he <sup>but looked like it was as far as China.</sup>

could not swim that far. The other kids <sup>jumped up and down</sup> ~~seemed excited~~

with smiles on their faces.

~~about it.~~ Hunter ~~did not feel excited at all.~~ One of the

<sup>slowly backed away from the group with shame.</sup> counselors, named Sam, blew a whistle. It was time for

everyone to get into the water. Hunter <sup>hesitated as he felt his stomach</sup> ~~felt reluctant to even~~ turn and heart

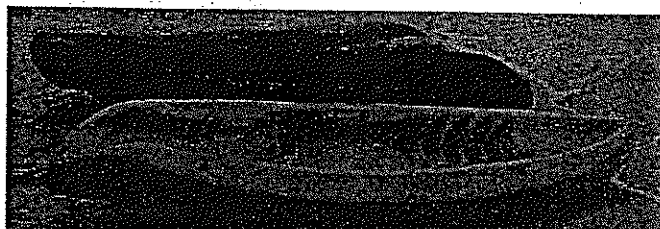
~~do this at all, and extremely worried.~~ His feet left the sand,

<sup>dog paddling in the icy water.</sup> and he started swimming. He ~~was pretty sure he was going~~

<sup>gasped for air, certain that his</sup> ~~to drown, and it was the scariest feeling he'd ever had in his~~

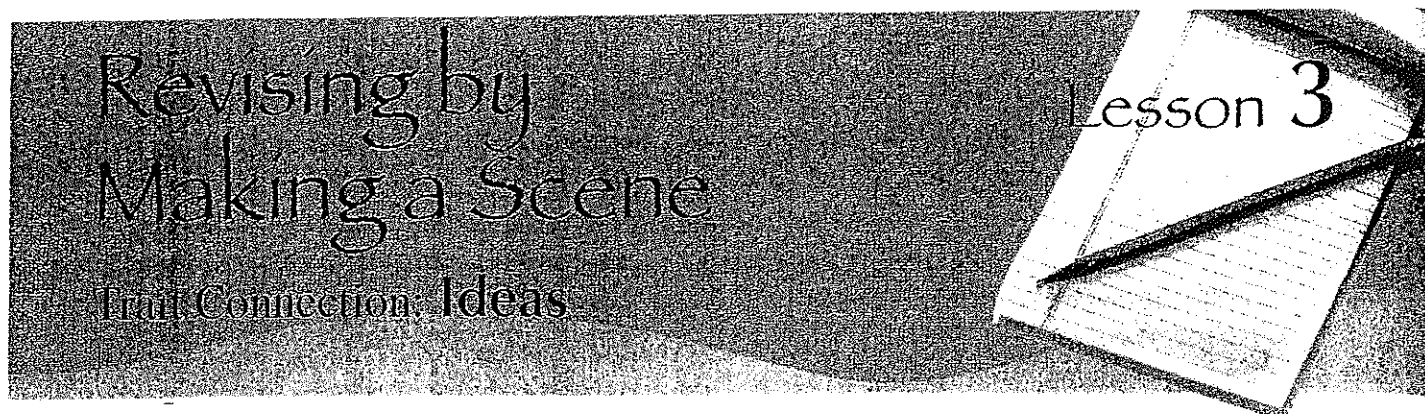
lungs were going to burst. His life flashed before his eyes. ~~life.~~ About halfway across, Sam pulled alongside him in a

boat. "Are you OK, buddy?" he asked Hunter. Hunter <sup>clung to</sup> ~~really~~ the boat and finally felt safe. ~~wanted to get into that boat! Then he could feel safe.~~



## Appendix J

## Revise by Making a Scene Handout



## Introduction

Making a *scene*—bigger than a single *image*—is a writer’s opportunity to show off awareness of detail. That’s because a scene comprises so many different *kinds* of detail: color, motion, shape, scents, sounds, feelings and textures, to name a few. When you think like a writer, you take in details like this all the time, knowing that sooner or later, you’ll want to use the most interesting details in your writing. Think of the last time you walked through a garden or forest, sat in a kitchen, wandered through a zoo or museum, made your way down a busy street, waited in a grocery line, cheered for a sports team, watched a theater performance, or sat in traffic. If you can call up in your mind just how it looked, sounded, smelled, and felt to be in that moment, you’re ready to make a scene.



## Teacher’s Sidebar . . .

A good scene is made up of many sensory impressions—but some always stand out. Good writers never try to capture *every* detail because in so doing, they turn a description into a list—something few readers appreciate. In planning their writing, however, they may create a sensory inventory of all the impressions their memories hold, then select those that will have the greatest impact on the reader’s imagination. Questions the writer can ask in doing this are, *What stands out?* and *What makes this particular scene different from others?*

List possible scenes you think would fun to write about:

### Step 1: Setting the Stage

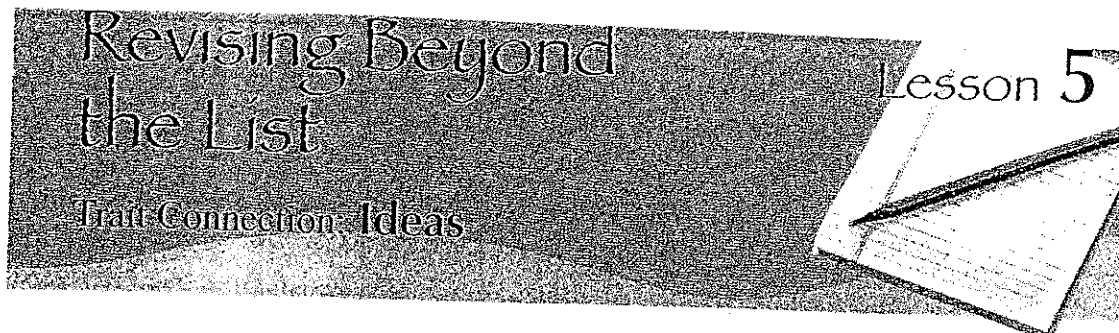
As a class, choose a scene on which you'd like to work. Think of yourselves as staging a play that takes place in this particular setting. In creating a stage set, directors must think about creating in viewers' minds the illusion that they are right there—on the apartment rooftop, in the restaurant, at the beach, or whatever you choose. That is very similar to what a writer does in putting a reader at the scene. Possible scenes: a classroom during a test, a dugout during a playoff baseball game, an alley behind a restaurant, a street corner during rush hour, a pet shelter with people going up and down the aisles, a shopping mall during a holiday, and so on. Brainstorm a list of five or six possible sites, then choose one. Next, brainstorm all the sensory details you can think of to fill in this chart. (Keep in mind that “feelings” can include what you feel *through your skin*, or what you feel *in your heart*.)

Sights	Sounds	Taste & Smell	Feelings

Look over your chart carefully. What are the top five impressions—the ones not everyone would think of when first picturing this scene? Are there dominant impressions—such as a smell you can't get out of your head? Or a sound that won't stop ringing in your ears? Put stars by those. Those will form the basis of your writing. You have set the stage.

## Appendix K

### Revise Beyond the List Handout



### Introduction

Many writers are good at hunting up information—then wind up sharing it in the form of a random list. When information comes in an avalanche of miscellaneous facts and observations, it's difficult for the reader to make sense of it, or figure out the writer's main point. A good research piece cannot just say to the reader, "Here! Have some data!" It needs to say, "I've sifted through the data for the best information—and now let me help you make sense of it." Make sure that your own writing goes beyond the "list" stage. Lists are helpful in planning writing (or shopping), but they do not make for good reading, and they do not help readers think through issues or learn new information. Whether you are creating an informational or a persuasive piece, *have a main message*. Then share what relates to that message—not *every fact* your research has uncovered.

### Step 1: Unmasking the Lists

Following are three-sentence samples, some of which are really lists masquerading as informational messages. The others actually have a point to make—and could be the start of a strong informational or persuasive piece. Read each one carefully, and put a check (✓) beside each set of statements that makes *one* clear point and offers readers a message with substance.

- U.S. housing prices have risen fairly steadily during past decades. In recent years, however, prices have seen a sudden decline in many parts of the country. Several economic factors have contributed to this decline.
- Lions hunt in groups, sometimes at dusk—sometimes even at night. Lions in zoos tend to live longer than lions in the wild. When a new male takes over a lion pride, it may kill the cubs fathered by another lion.
- Humpback whales are a migratory species. A number of ocean mammals migrate, though all have different geographic patterns. Recent technology has made the study of ocean life far easier and more rewarding.
- Though it may not necessary to be an expert in grammar, ability to speak and write correctly helps most business people succeed. Any business executive must know to craft graceful sentences, and create reports, emails, or memos in which spelling and punctuation are flawless. People in the business world are unforgiving of errors in business correspondence.