

Mary Miele:

Hello. My name is Mary Miele. I am a tutor, a teacher, a parent, and the founder of Evolved Education Company. We are a full service tutoring and advisement company for all of your educational solutions. On this podcast, we'll explore ideas, techniques, and resources that you can use to support your school age child to conquer any learning issue. I'm so glad you're here.

Mary Miele:

Hey, hello everyone. And welcome to the July episode of the Evolved Education podcast. And today I'm so excited to talk about writing instruction with you all, because writing is one of the most important and yet most complex tasks that our students need to do and learn how to do. I was just at a dinner the other day, talking with a fairly high-up worker within the Amazon company. And she was talking about how much writing she does on a daily basis within her work. They actually write up reports on a daily basis. Sometimes they're writing two to three to four and five reports. They have to write emails. They have to be able to share their solutions to different types of problems in writing within their organization. And I think that those of us who are listening right now, the parents who are listening, can understand that our working world is becoming more and more reliant on writing.

Mary Miele:

And therefore the writing instruction that we really understand and give to our kids is going to be very, very important. So today I wanted to provide some literacy and some understanding around two programs that are often available for our students within schools. But I also wanted to make sure that you as parents understood what these programs really are and how they work from two experts who know them well. And also to share that we provide this kind of support within our company directly to families when students need that particular work.

Mary Miele:

So without further ado, I'm going to introduce our two experts to discuss the SRSD Writing Program and the Writer's Revolution Program. And both of these experts have high levels of training within each of these programs and are also parents themselves. So I think that's a really nice introduction at least on a macro level. All right. So let's start with Becky Reback, who I think many of you all know because Becky works within Evolved Education and she's the Head of Tutor Services and Parent Education here. And I will let her introduce herself in the capacity of a Writing Revolution teacher and expert. And then we'll go to Jane thereafter. All right, go ahead, Becky.

Becky Reback:

Hi, Mary. Thanks for having me on. I, as Mary said, work with Evolved Education as the Head of Tutor Services, and I do parent education and consulting as well. My background with Writing Revolution began a long time ago when I just decided as a teacher to take my own course. And then I was a learning specialist at a school, and I implemented it with the students that I pulled out of the classroom to give extra support to. And then I moved to a school called the Gateway School, which is a private special education school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan that used the Writing Revolution with Fidelity within their program. And there, I taught fifth through eighth grade reading and writing. So I taught the Writing Revolution every single day and took another professional development course on it and just got to know it really well through teaching it.

Becky Reback:

And then I became a teacher coach for the Writing Revolution and also reading, because that was my other area of expertise. And I coached teachers and went to their classrooms and helped them plan lessons and gave them feedback on their implementation of the model. And since joining Evolved, I actually took the Writing Revolution course again as a refresher. And then I also just recently took the Leading the Revolution, as the company Writing Revolution calls it, to learn about better ways to support teachers and tutors who are implementing the model and how to lead that across multiple teachers and multiple subjects. So I just recently took that course to deepen my knowledge and understanding of the Writing Revolution model.

Mary Miele:

Wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing all of that wonderful expertise and experience that you have with the Writer's Revolution. All right. So now we have Jane Moskowitz, who is going to talk a little bit about her background as a writing educator. And I know that she has some experience also with Writer's Revolution, but then also, really her dialogue today is going to be to talk about SRSD writing and what that is all about. Jane.

Jane Moskowitz:

Hi, thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here. My name is Jane Moskowitz. I am a trained special educator and general educator. I have a degree in general education and teaching literacy from Bank Street. And I was a head teacher at Steven Gainer School for many years, a school on the Upper West Side that serves students with language-based learning differences. And in 2020, I started my own private educational practice where I support students throughout all the boroughs of New York City and beyond in private and public schools from third through 12th grade. So it's been an exciting transition. While I was at Gainer, I went through the Writing Revolution course twice and Gainer, like Gateway, also uses the Writing Revolution approach with Fidelity. So as when I was a teacher there, that's what I used with my fourth and fifth grade student.

Jane Moskowitz:

So I know the program pretty intimately. It wasn't until I left Gainer in 2020 that I started to explore other approaches, because of my own interest, and became a consultant for several months at thinkSRSD with Leslie Laud, who is basically the SRSD guru in the field. And that's when I really gained tremendous expertise in this particular pedagogy and started to facilitate professional development sessions for teachers in different districts across the Northeast, and now use SRSD pretty much exclusively in my own practice. So I'm excited to talk about it today and think about how we can really do what's best for the students who are sitting in front of us.

Mary Miele:

Amazing. Thank you so much for explaining all of your expertise and just your journey with how you arrived at SRSD writing. So I also have some backgrounds in both methodologies. I'm not as highly trained as either of you are, but I have taken courses within Writers' Revolution, as well as within SRSD. And so I'm familiar with both of these methodologies. So I guess what I want to start off with is just, Becky, if you could explain to everyone, what is the Writer's Revolution and what is it sort of meant to do for students who are using the program?

Becky Reback:

Yeah, so the Writing Revolution is an evidence-based, cross curricular, explicit instruction model. Their goal is that students become better readers, better communicators, and ultimately better critical thinkers through the lens of writing. So in the Writing Revolution, they are using expository texts and teaching students how to write in an expository way, because they believe that's really the way that the world writes. So they believe that if you're picking up a newspaper and reading a newspaper, you should be able to write in the same genre that the newspaper is being read or written. And so their goal is to teach students skills and strategies in order to form their thinking and become critical thinkers and ultimately when you become a critical thinker, you're able to express your words or your thoughts in writing. That's sort of like a high level. Jane, do you have anything you think you would add?

Jane Moskowitz:

For the Writing Revolution?

Becky Reback:

Yeah.

Jane Moskowitz:

Well, I would add that they focus very heavily on sentence level work first as the block for all subsequent writing. So there's a lot of teaching done in isolation in terms of sentence versus fragment, completing sentences, et cetera, et cetera, before moving students on to the paragraph, multi-paragraph composition.

Becky Reback:

Yeah. Thank you.

Jane Moskowitz:

Yes.

Mary Miele:

Yeah. I see a lot of skills within the Writer's Revolution program that we also do within tutoring. So just helping kids to really understand those pieces of language that come together. I think, is right, that's sort of what we're looking at when you see the Writer's Revolution. You'll see a lot of those, they use sentence kernels, which are really just, what is a sentence, it's got to have a subject and a verb and have a complete thought. And so just what's the elementary part of that would just be, she runs or Mary runs. Right. And so then there's other ways to sort of add detail to that particular kernel and you can use different ways to do that. And so students are becoming skilled at being able to systematically organize their language in that particular way, right?

Jane Moskowitz:

Yeah.

Mary Miele:

Okay, great. So great. So just keeping on Writer's Revolution. So what would you say, because a lot of schools right now are using this program, so what would you say are some of the benefits and what

would you say are some of the challenges that you see this program having? So benefits versus challenges?

Becky Reback:

Sure. So I think one benefit of Writing Revolution and it's something that we did at the Gateway School, and I'm sure Steven Gainer did too, is that you can really use it cross-curricular. So you're not just using it in reading and writing as some other writing models you might use. You also learn how to take notes as part of the Writing Revolution program. So you could take your notes in math, in the keywords and phrases that the Writing Revolution is teaching. You also could use it in science where you're writing labs and your hypothesis, and you can use the sentence structure that you're learning in the Writing Revolution to write up science reports or science briefs, and then of course history, but I think in social studies, history work, the writing piece of it is similar to what you might learn in a writing class or might do writing about a book or something like that.

Becky Reback:

But of course it works in a social studies setting as well. So I think a huge benefit is that students are really using it across all areas. And when it's used across all areas, they're really immersed in it more so they're able to master the skills and the strategies that they are learning in the Writing Revolution to use it across the board. So that's one benefit. I would say a drawback of it is they might not move as quickly to a composition level. So they might not move as quickly to a paragraph or multi-paragraph level as maybe SRSD or some other writing programs. But I will say that once you teach a couple of sentence level skills, I just refreshed this when I took the course recently, was their goal is that you actually do bring in the paragraph work relatively early, but it might not be as cohesive as some other programs.

Becky Reback:

So you're really working on those sentence level skills and they want you to master those before you move on. But that's not to say that you can't do a couple sentence level skills, then apply those to a paragraph. But I think that is seen as a drawback that you're really kind of following along this path with the sentence level skills before moving forward to a paragraph level. And I think that can be seen as a drawback because ultimately you're not just writing sentences as you go through school and you get older in education, you're going to be writing one paragraph, then two, then three, then research papers and theses and... Thesis? Thesides? And I think people think we should get to that area a little bit faster.

Mary Miele:

Very good. So let's get into just in terms of SRSD, similar questions. So just first of all, Jane, could you just explain a little bit about what this is? SRSD, what this acronym is, what it is? Yeah.

Jane Moskowitz:

SRSD, it's a mouthful. So SRSD stands for Self-Regulated Strategy Development. Self-Regulated Strategy Development, and that really sort of represents what this pedagogy tries to do at its core, which is to develop self-regulated writers, which I feel is a huge piece missing from the Writing Revolution. And we'll get into my feedback on the Writing Revolution in a little bit. And you tell me when to wrap it up, Mary. So the key tenets of SRSD are developing writers who can take themselves through the entire writing process from start to finish, which is very complex. Idea generation, brainstorming, planning, composition, editing, and revising, and then, last, scoring and goal setting, to really facilitate that agency

as a writer. Okay. Where do I stand? What are my goals? It also really foregrounds the use of what we call exemplars right at the start. That's how we launch SRSD in a classroom or in a private tutoring session.

Jane Moskowitz:

An exemplar is an effectively written paragraph or essay. You start that way. You show your learner what good writing looks like at the outset to take the mystery out of it. It's not a guessing game. It shouldn't be. And I also feel like this is another piece missing from the Writing Revolution. If I'm teaching a class of fifth graders and we're going to ultimately learn how to write an effective paragraph, I'm going to start my class by showing you what an effective paragraph looks like and dissecting those pieces, and then teaching you how to do that. That's a key tenant of SRSD. So SRSD, elevator pitch, is truly an evidence based pedagogy that equips teachers with the right moves to teach writing in their classroom and equips students with the skills and strategies they need to take themselves through the writing process independently. Depending on who you ask, it's either got six to eight different steps or routines that teachers cycle through in their classroom, which I can go through later on.

Jane Moskowitz:

It's based heavily on an "I do, we do, you do" model. So that's a gradual release. I'm going to show you how this is done. We're going to do it together collaboratively. And then I'm going to gradually release my students as appropriate to do these skills and strategies that I'm teaching them on their own, again, moving towards independence. And then one of the other components that SRSD really foregrounds is critical thinking, which I can go into later on, but through the acronym that we use TIDE, which is how we plan all our writing, we really encourage students to thoughtfully select evidence from a text and then use detailed analysis to analyze that evidence and pull it apart to support a claim. So a lot to unpack there, but again, on the whole, the goal is to develop independent self-monitoring writers.

Mary Miele:

Amazing. So same question to you, Jane. So what do you feel are the benefits? I think you did say some of them there, but just, if you could kind of recap benefits and what do you feel are some of the challenges that you see students having within the program?

Jane Moskowitz:

Sure. So first and foremost, what I would say is, as teachers and as administrators, I feel like we often throw these terms out, like best practices and evidence-based. When I was in the classroom, I was just trying to keep my head above water. I accepted what I was told, oh, this is evidence-based. Great. I'm going to use it. But the truth is when you really dig into it, the Writing Revolution is not truly based on evidence. There's not, to my knowledge, a single peer-reviewed journal article that has reviewed this method and said, yes, this works. Whereas with SRSD we've over a hundred peer reviewed journals that have said this works. And if you go onto IES, the Institute for Educational Sciences, and look at what they support, that's the gold standard. It's also SRSD. So as a teacher, I kind of always felt like, why would I be using anything but the thing that is based on evidence?

Jane Moskowitz:

That's the first huge pro. That number one, the evidence tells us this works. There's so many pros about this program, but self-regulation is so key. We know that for learners across the board, no matter what your learning difference is, self-regulation is probably the single most effective skill that we can equip

students with no matter where they are. So checking in with yourself, evaluating your own writing, taking yourself through the writing process and knowing how to do that with the acronyms that we use POW and TIDE, again, can go into all of that later. And then the other thing that I think is a huge benefit of SRSD is like I said, starting by showing where we want students to go. Taking the mystery out of it. It's not a guessing game. We're going to end the year by writing effective paragraphs. That's what this looks like. And let's talk about why this is effective. What makes this an effective topic sentence? What makes this effective evidence, what makes this effective analysis and so forth and so on so that students can incorporate those moves into their own writing.

Jane Moskowitz:

There's so much I love about it, but that's the tip of the iceberg. In terms of challenges? I think the greatest challenge with SRSD is helping teachers understand what SRSD is. There is a book that Leslie and a former colleague of her wrote together, which is great, but I don't think a lot of people know about it. So there's this nice little tidy Writing Revolution book that teachers can buy. And it really helps them understand what the Writing Revolution is all about. In order to understand SRSD, you as a teacher have to do a little bit of digging. So I would say that's the biggest challenge right now, but in terms of challenges in the classroom, when a teacher takes the SRSD PD, I really think it's a very seamless, straightforward pedagogy to implement in the class and in one-on-one sessions.

Mary Miele:

Very cool. Yeah. I mean, listen, I've taken the SRSD writing course, and Leslie knows this, but I have really benefited from the routines and also the acronyms. And I find that I use them in my learning specialist work often. And I think it's just all, in some ways, it just makes sense. And I feel that as a parent at the Gateway School, I feel interestingly enough, they were using Writer's Revolution, but a lot of the same work was being done with regard to that self-regulation and really asking students to make goals. And it is just interesting because I'm not sure if it was part of what Writer's Revolution was necessarily teaching, but I think that when we're asking students to write, so much of it is about the writing process and it is about having a dialogue in your own mind around writing.

Mary Miele:

And it is about going through the routines that SRSD lays out. So isn't it nice to have such a strong, I guess, formality to that? I think what SRSD has done for me, at least, as a learning specialist, is it's really given a formality to a lot of this work that perhaps I was doing before with less formality, if that makes sense. So I don't think, I guess some of it is just to invite parents also, as you said, Jane, some of the challenge to SRSD is just that maybe it's not as understood. And I guess I would just say, don't be shy about reading about it. Don't be shy about teaching your child the routines of SRSD. It's really, I think, a very beautiful model and it can be applied to math. It can be applied to history.

Mary Miele:

I mean, I use it in math a lot where I do show exemplars of how students can explain work. Oftentimes in math, we ask kids to write about math. We say, explain your thinking. It's like this total guess. What does even mean, explain my thinking, most kids will say. And so if we can literally just take the guesswork out of it, I think it's so much more helpful. And I just want to also bring up this notion of working with students with different types of language-based learning disabilities, because I think sometimes I find myself, at least, as a teacher and a tutor and Becky, maybe you can chime in here, but I can't also help, but grab my sentence kernel work with some of my kids and my quick outlines and my

expanded sentences because when I'm teaching into those skills, I find that kids with especially language-based learning disabilities often are without those skills.

Mary Miele:

And they don't, even though they want to understand those bigger paragraphs and the ways in which writing happens, sometimes they just, in their own brains, cannot put together the language in the recipe that we do conventionally, right. So I wonder if there's also, and I think SRSD has added some of this in too in terms of that skill based learning piece. But I wanted just to bring that up as something that I would like to talk about, because I think in tutoring, sometimes what we're doing is we're trying to peel back onion layers and really understand Hmm. Why is this challenging for this student? And what is at the core of what's happening here that's preventing this child from writing?

Mary Miele:

And sometimes I find it can just be a literal skill deficit. They just don't have the skills to write the sentence. They don't have skills to come up with the actual vocabulary words, right. So I wanted just to open that up as another piece of this, as we dialogue. Becky, do you want to talk a little bit about some of that, because I know we have had multiple conversations about various children in this specific area, really trying to figure out how we can possibly remediate and support.

Becky Reback:

Yeah. So I think that one thing Writing Revolution does, and I know about SRSD, I've never taken one of their courses, which I'm actually in the midst of trying to figure out when I can do that, they're letting me know when a new course is coming out. So maybe we can have another conversation after I take their course, but I know Writing Revolution. And I think one thing that Writing Revolution does is like you said, it's very skills based and the content is really the vehicle to teach the skill. So when you're looking at the sentence level, like I said, Writing Revolution's goal is to make students be able to communicate and become critical thinkers. So what you're they're doing, look at thinking about the main idea, right? And so that is using the question words to draw out the most salient information from a text or from a book or whatever, a chapter in a book, or whatever it might be, a piece of information.

Becky Reback:

So we're using the question words to prompt the students to go back and find that information to then be able to turn that into a sentence. And we're teaching the students how to phrase the sentence in a way that makes sense with the way expository writing goes. So we start with the when or the where, right? So we're teaching them some of those language skills that they might be missing by giving them the prompts of the question words to go in and look for only those details, right? Because some kids that have language-based learning disabilities, even kids that don't have language-based learning disabilities have a really difficult time pinpointing the most important information. So by prompting them with the who, the what, the when, the where, the why, sometimes the how, we're really giving them a structure for how to go into a text and pull out the information or how to generate the information in their brains by using those question words.

Becky Reback:

So when I was in a middle school classroom at the Gateway School and kids would start talking and I would say, hold on, wait a minute. We only want the most important details. I would say, give me the who, the what, the when, the where, the why. And then we would form that into a cohesive and

complete sentence. So I think that the skills that are taught really teaches the students how to do the thinking. So that way ultimately you can pull back the support, right. So our goal in Writing Revolution is that they internalize the skills, whether it's the who, the what, the when, the where, the why, using a subordinated conjunction to start a sentence, to make their writing or they're thinking more complex. I mean, there's so many different skills that are being taught in the Writing Revolution, those are just two examples.

Becky Reback:

What we want the kids to do is because they're using this in every single subject across curricular, and you mentioned the math example, they're going to know how to explain their thinking, quote unquote, because they have these sentence structures in their brain and they can use that to generate their ideas. And then ultimately put that into writing. It takes a lot of time. This is not a quick one year kind of thing. We're spending a lot of time in that sentence level on purpose so they can start to modify their thinking or, I'm blanking on the word I want to use, but form their thinking. What's the word I want to use, around...

Mary Miele:

Structure? Yeah.

Becky Reback:

Structure, thank you. Structure their thinking around this way of writing. And so it just sort of comes more natural. So that I think is something that the Writing Revolution does well, because they're kind of giving kids a formula for how to write and in turn, ultimately it'll help them think like that as well. Yes.

Mary Miele:

So I'm excited to hear from Jade on this, but I think it's also interesting, just because I have the SRSD also around in my back of my mind, I feel that to me, it's also, I don't know, I guess it doesn't, to me the instruction piece didn't take as much time for students to kind of understand some of those, what the program is teaching, right. But the skills that Becky's talking about, I think do take time. And I think that that's something that perhaps we can just separate also out in conversation is that the routines and the understanding of exemplars, if a student's learning that way, if they can take an exemplar and just copy it and use it in that format. But anyway, Jane, go ahead and respond to some of what you might want to regarding this particular area.

Jane Moskowitz:

So, a couple of things I would say, it's important to know that SRSD has and continues to focus on that skill level work, but here's the critical difference between SRSD and the Writing Revolution. There's absolutely no use of worksheets. There's no use of isolated skill instruction that is not being embedded and taught through the larger writing process. So what does that mean? Well, we know from research that doing a worksheet on sentences versus fragments has absolutely no support. That students cannot generalize those skills when asked to then apply them in the context of a full and complete writing task. Expanding a sentence, hard to generalize when only done in worksheets in isolation and not in the greater writing task. So with SRSD, some of the skill work can look like the following. We start, I'm the teacher, I'm in a classroom.

Jane Moskowitz:

And we've just read an article on, I don't know, global warming, and I've given the class a prompt, something to do with what we've read. Now we start collaboratively because maybe it's the beginning of the year and they're not ready to write independently yet. So together we go through the brainstorming phase where I, as the teacher and modeling, and also inviting my students to participate, together, we go through the planning phase where we use an acronym called TIDE. Topic, important evidence, detailed analysis, and end. And we build this planner together. And then maybe we pause there. So where are we in the writing process? We're stopped at the planning phase, but we're still in the writing task. We're in the writing process, right? Maybe we pause there and that's where we pause and do some sentence level work based on our planner. Let me give you some sentence starters with subordinating conjunctions or whatever it is.

Jane Moskowitz:

And my students will complete the sentences there. What's great about this is one, it contextualizes it. We're still in the writing task. This is not a separate worksheet, but two, when we go to write our paragraph or our essay, whatever it is, the students can literally use the sentences that we've generated during that sentence practice in their actual composition, right? So it's not an isolated, separate worksheet. It's embedded into the writing task. So then we've planned, we've stopped, we've done our skill work. Then we go back into the writing process. What's next? Composition. Again, we're going to do that together if it's early in the year. Based on our exemplars, what did we decide the key elements of a topic sentence need to look like? We're going to write that together. Do we have any sentences from our sentence work that we can use in our paragraph?

Jane Moskowitz:

This is how it has to look. It has to be contextualized. It has to be concretized because then students otherwise do not internalize these skills. And when asked to do them in context, all of a sudden they have to now generate ideas. They have to think about spelling. They have to think about the mechanics of writing. They have to sequence their ideas, and they have to remember how to complete a sentence with but, because, and so, and what an a positive is, and all of a sudden it all gets jumbled in their brain. So that's the biggest difference.

Jane Moskowitz:

Writing Revolution tends to foreground this isolated practice. Yes, they use content in their worksheets, the battle of blah, blah, blah was important because, finish that sentence. But the key is, it's often not embedded in a larger writing task. And so it misses the point. And that's what I found a lot at Gainer, is that when I asked my students to then actually use these skills in a paragraph and to complete their own single paragraph outline, they were sort of like, oh gosh, now I have to do this all at once. I'm kind of at loss. So that's the biggest differentiator, is really...

Becky Reback:

That's super interesting,

Mary Miele:

Becky [inaudible 00:32:48] for one second.

Becky Reback:

Please. I love it. Yeah. So here's where I disagree. I agree that there is a lot of forefronting with some isolated worksheets, but I disagree with the fact that it's then embedded into the paragraph content. And here's why. So I taught fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. So we did a lot of paragraph and multi-paragraph writing, especially in the seventh and eighth grade, because as I was preparing them for high school, they needed to know, right. So the way that I embedded this into it is actually very similar to what you were saying you do with SRSD. Now we don't have the beautiful acronyms, which I am very into. I love an acronym. So I'm excited to learn more about that. But oftentimes I would base an essay on an article we read or a book that we were reading, right.

Becky Reback:

Because I had reading and writing together. So I had the benefit of them basing all my writing on the books that I was doing. But even if it was from a separate article, we would read through the article and take notes, especially in seventh and eighth grade, take notes on the article. So we're learning those keywords and phrases, which in Writing Revolution is a way to quickly write down notes, but also form thinking, because you're not writing out entire sentences. You're only pulling out the important details to write in the keywords and the phrases and they're using specific symbols that replace words. So that way, it's a shorthand way of writing, which I think everybody needs to learn how to write notes, no matter what profession you want, you're going to have to take notes in some capacity. And so the keywords and phrases is a huge benefit to Writing Revolution.

Becky Reback:

So we would read an article, take notes. And then what we would do is, similar to you, is generate the ideas that we want to have in our paragraphs, whether it's a two paragraph, a three paragraph, six paragraph, whatever it might be, a one paragraph. And we would generate those ideas together. And we would use the outlines that are presented in the Writing Revolution and taught. So we have a single paragraph outline, which is SPO. And then we have a transition outline, which is TO, and then we have multiple paragraph outline, which is MPO. So we would generate the ideas and figure out what order it needs to go in for the reader to understand the information and brainstorm the ideas. And also not only what order does each paragraph, but what order do the ideas in each paragraph need to go.

Becky Reback:

And once we've written in our keywords and phrases, then I actually would do exercises, worksheets, turn and talks, all those types of different strategies to help the kids form their sentences from the information that they've written. And that way, when they did go to write the paragraph, they did have examples of sentences. And of course, I didn't mention this, but I think it's important to mention, that I'm also, in the Writing Revolution, doing the "I do, we do, you do" type of situation, right? So maybe the first paragraph I'm doing as an example, and we're doing it all together. We look at our notes from it. We write it out in the order that we think is important to write it in. We write our topic sentence, and then we're going to write the sentences together. And then the second paragraph, we're kind of all, I'm sorry, I'm modeling how to do that. And then the second paragraph we're doing that same process together, and the third, maybe they're generating their own sentences and they're using...

Jane Moskowitz:

This is what you are doing in your classroom, because you are a good teacher and you understand how effective writing instruction should look like in your classroom. But all these things that you're saying of the "I do, we do you do", and the way that you've beautifully embedded your sentence skill instruction

into the sort of writing as a whole, that's not really explicitly instructed in the Writing Revolution program. That's a Becky Reback beautiful sort of adaptation of what you should be doing. So I think, I do think that is an important distinction to make, right? So left to your own devices, a different teacher who just has the Writing Revolution book or has just taken a course, may not understand that what you've just described is essential to actually moving the needle. It's one thing.

Becky Reback:

I think that what's really essential to any program that's implemented, SRSD, Writing Revolution, Lucy Calkins, whatever it might be. That's another conversation, whatever it might be, I think that having somebody there to support the parents or the tutor or the teacher to teach them the best ways to use whatever model it is you're using is essential because I do find, and I think, and I know that we're kind of speaking to parents here. And so I think parents, if they're not trained teachers, definitely don't understand why they're doing certain skills and strategies and activities. And I think some teachers also don't understand why they're doing some certain skills and strategies and they're not sure why they're teaching certain skills and what the end game is here, right? So I think we can all agree that regardless of what model we're using in our own practices, as a parent in their home, as a teacher in school, having somebody there who's a mentor or who really deeply understands the model is going to make sure that the students are learning best anywhere.

Jane Moskowitz:

So I think Becky brings up such a good point. And Mary, I wonder what you think about this, to piggyback off of that. I wonder if we could come up with a few questions as a parent, if I'm inquiring about the writing program or the writing instruction at your school, what should you be asking? Because I think you hit on so many great points. One is, is there an in-house expert on whatever approach it is that you're using? Actually before that first, what is the approach?

Becky Reback:

What are you using?

Jane Moskowitz:

Is there evidence to support that approach and show me, right? I'm so sick of hearing best practices, evidence-based and I'm sure I'm guilty of throwing that out when I was a teacher in a classroom and my parent orientations, et cetera, et cetera. But as parents, we have to feel empowered to really ask for the proof. Okay, so what are you using? What's the evidence. And then Becky's point is a great one. Who is your in-house expert supporting the teachers as they're teaching. And then the third one that came up in a parent conversation yesterday, when we were talking about writing is, is this, what's the word, continuous. Is this program used continuously?

Becky Reback:

K through eight, K through 12, right. Are you using it everywhere?

Jane Moskowitz:

I was on a call with a parent yesterday and she's like, I don't even think they use the same thing year to year. Oh my gosh.

Becky Reback:

Well...

Jane Moskowitz:

The children are not going to learn how to write. So those are some questions, but Becky and Mary, I'll let you chime in too with other questions that parents should definitely be asking about writing.

Becky Reback:

I would also piggyback on your saying, who is the expert and what is their level of expertise? What's their training in the model, right? Have they taught it one year? Have they taken professional development courses? Have they themselves been mentored by somebody to then in turn impart their wisdom on somebody else? I think that's all really important information. And I think as the Head of Tutor Services at Evolved, I would say eight out of 10 calls that we get is I need a writing tutor.

Jane Moskowitz:

Yep.

Becky Reback:

And this is everywhere, across all grades, whether you're in kindergarten or you're in 12th grade, everyone needs support with writing and thinking, right? So writing is thinking or thinking is writing or the chicken or the egg. I'm not sure which one, but everybody needs support in this, I think, especially given the past two and a half years and there was remote schooling and maybe writing kind of fell to the wayside because you weren't in person. And you couldn't do that as much and you just kind of focused on reading because everyone needs to know how to read and all of that. So I think that coming out of the pandemic, parents are seeing that there's a real deficit in writing for sure. So I think regardless of what you're looking for.

Mary Miele:

Yeah. So for sure, I mean, I think this is fantastic and I guess what I would just add to that is as a parent you know your child best, you just do. You know when something is really confusing for them, you know when you're asked to watch them do their writing homework and you see them being confused, you see them not understanding, you see questions that you have about what they're actually producing. So it's also important to just empower parents to pay attention to those anecdotes and to arrive at your school with them, because this is when the best problem solving occurs. And I would also just want to say that I think research is very important. I'm really always reading it and I'm really curious about it, but I also just want to point out that sometimes certain ideas are funded, some ideas are not. Some ideas, and we can just see evidence of this with Lucy Caulkins and what has happened.

Mary Miele:

Some programs are very well researched, but certain populations are not served within that particular research. And so I think we also have to constantly be aware of research and what that really means is hard for everyone to understand. And that's because it's complex. My father does medical research and some things that are really great ideas and are very helpful, are not funded. They don't have the funds to research it. And so finding funding and doing research is really important. And I want parents just to also understand, because I fought for many years for my child who happened to be dyslexic, to learn

how to read within the writers and readers workshop program. And it was a really difficult journey as a parent to go into a school that was adopting a program that they felt was with integrity.

Mary Miele:

And it's the way we have to do this. It has all the research, we're participating in the research and yet my child was not learning well within that. So I think it's just important, if you're going to be the parent, you're the consumer, right? You're the consumer of the program, of the support. And I think that you just need to be empowered. Don't be afraid of the word evidence-based. Don't be afraid of the word research. It's important to understand it. And it's important to understand how it fits with your child and how your child is learning and what your expectations even are sometimes within their programs, et cetera. It's complicated. It's all, I just want to make sure I present to the families who are listening. So I'm going to give everybody a minute or two just to wrap up and just kind of share if there's just any last minute pieces that you want to share with parents and Jane, I'll give you the floor.

Jane Moskowitz:

Sure. I think Becky hit the nail on the head where I would say the vast majority of my calls too are, "my student is really struggling with writing". And I think we have to wake up and really listen to this. And if you look at the NAEP scores from a couple of years ago, which is basically the nation's report card, something like 23% of students in the United States are considered proficient in writing, which is, I mean, think about that number for a second. That's across the board. So we know something is wrong, right? People can get up here and tell whatever program or pedagogy they want, but something is not working. And we have to wake up and listen as educators, as parents and Mary, I love your point. You just have to be an advocate for your child.

Jane Moskowitz:

And that's what you were saying, right? And as teachers, we have to be advocates for our students. And if your school is telling you to use an approach, whether it's evidence-based or not, and it's not working for the child sitting in front of you, you've got to make a change. So I think that's my last sort of word is something's not working. Let's put our heads together as educators, as administrators, and as parents, and figure out how to teach this absolutely essential set of skills, right? It's not a skill. It's a set of every single skill. Spelling, executive functioning, sequencing, critical thinking, reading comprehension, you name it, it's involved in writing. We have to help our students be successful. And there's still a little bit of a question mark on how do we do that across the board. So I'm excited to continue this conversation.

Mary Miele:

Me too. Me too.

Jane Moskowitz:

And we'll go, we'll go from there.

Mary Miele:

Thanks Jane so much. And Becky.

Becky Reback:

I just have to echo what Jane and you said, I think that at the center of it all is the child and what is going to work best for the child. And picking an approach to writing is not a one size fits all. And sometimes you need to mix and match. As much as I love the Writing Revolution, definitely has deficits. I'm sure there's some deficits in SRsD, right? So I think that just knowing your child and knowing who they are, but also teaching your child who they are and how they learn best. And that metacognitive piece, I think, is going to be critical in order to then learning about how they learn and then using that to advocate for themselves, eventually when it's appropriate for them to do that, and getting in there and really understanding themselves as learners. So that way they can take out the most important parts of any writing program that they're being introduced to.

Becky Reback:

I agree, I think that as a whole, we have a long way to go with teaching anything, but definitely teaching writing. And I'm excited to see what kind of comes next. I think we're lucky to understand two really great models that do teach really great skills. And I'm hopeful that parents walk away with some understanding today from this podcast and also that they have some tools to equip themselves to move forward and approach their child's school about it, and talk to their child about it and hear from their child about what's really difficult for them with writing and how can they help and what skills do they think they need to learn and how do they want to practice? Because ultimately what you want is, yes, it's great to be a functional student in the classroom, but it's also even better to be a functional human in the world and be able to write an appropriate email to your boss, and to a job interview, to a friend who just had a loss. Right. So being able to use that in your life as well, I think is important.

Mary Miele:

It's so fun. I think writers are just amazing. And I always do love to write, my daughter actually just finished the third grade and she was given a writing award for school. And I was so excited about that because I have recently stepped into really defining myself as a writer. And that took me a little bit of time to do, because I think the expectation also, sometimes is, in the writing world at least, is that you either have it, or you don't maybe is sort of the thought process. And I just want to encourage everyone, also, who's listening, I'll end with this. I promise. Is that it's not meant to be easy, perfect, without challenge. In fact, if you're doing writing right, you're always pushing yourself to the next level. So it always is going to be challenging. So I'll leave you with this.

Mary Miele:

I think you need to advocate, I think you need to be curious about your child. I think you need to be an informed parent and consumer of education. You need to ask questions of your school and hold your child's educators accountable for what's happening and really support them too, with their great ideas. And with professional development funds, give them money to go take an SRSD class, give them money to go take a class that's going to help them to be better. Why not? Right.

Mary Miele:

But also really, truly understands that no matter what's happening with your child, it will be probably a 50/50 experience. Meaning it's going to be amazing at times, and it's going to be really challenging at times. And that doesn't mean you're on the wrong path. And when it's challenging, just know there are really educators in the world, Jane, Becky, myself, we are here and we really want to make sure that your journey is going as well as possible. So just also, I'll leave you with that. You're not alone, we're in this exploring with you. And I'm so excited to just be able to offer this kind of a conversation to you all

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and some resources for you. So I just want to also mention that Jane, where can we find you? And could you also give a shout out to Leslie's organization too? And then Becky we'll fly back to us. Go ahead.

Jane Moskowitz:

Sure. So in terms of finding SRSD related resources, I think the best place to go is Leslie Laud's organization, which is thinkSRSD. I believe it's www.thinksrsd.com. There's a lot on that website in terms of what is SRSD, a lot of the research is on there if you're willing to dig through it, free resources. So that is sort of, I would say, the gold standard for all things SRSD. Yeah.

Mary Miele:

Okay, awesome. And Becky, do you want to share any other resources with us?

Becky Reback:

Sure. So the Writing Revolution also has great resources. They're free. You just put your email in and a password and they're free for you to download, and they have book examples and all of that. And then if you're a teacher listening to this, they have blank worksheets that you can insert your own sentence structure or whatever into. And you can find that on the Writing Revolution website, which I think is just theWritingRevolution.com, and you can find Mary and myself at evolvededucation.com and you can reach out to us should you need any support in this area as well.

Mary Miele:

Amazing. Thank you so much, everyone. So just to clarify, the website is evolveded.com or evolvedcompany.com. I know it's so confusing, at least...

Becky Reback:

We'll share notes.

Mary Miele:

Just so our writing, editing is proper here. Haha. Okay. Thank so much. I know, of course. Thank you so much, Jane. And thank you so much, Becky, for having this amazing conversation with us today.

Mary Miele:

I hope you enjoyed this podcast. I wanted to be sure to state that neither Jane nor Becky are official representatives of thinkSRSD or any other SRSD organization or Writers' Revolution. I hope that if you want to learn more about these different ways of teaching writing, that you go directly to the organizations to learn more about them. Thank you so much to Becky and Jane, for sharing your experience with each of these programs, it was so helpful to all of us to learn more about the myriad of ways we can help our students to write well.

Mary Miele:

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