How to teach students to be strong writers using SRSD - with Dr. Karen Harris

Triple R Teaching Podcast #207

Hello, this is Anna Geiger, author of *Reach All Readers* and creator of the Reach All Readers website. In today's episode, I had the pleasure of speaking with Dr. Karen Harris, who's had a long career as a teacher, researcher, and professor. Most significantly, she is the creator of SRSD, which stands for self-regulated strategy development, and it's an approach to teaching writing.

I do apologize in part of this intro, as in this moment, there's some background noise because all my kids are home. Rather than have them hideaway in different parts of the house, I just did this introduction, parts of it, with their screen noise playing. My apologies for that, but this is their screen time, and I'm recording on the weekend. I promise that when you listen to the full episode, there won't be background noise like this.

In this episode, she'll explain how SRSD had its origins with students who had learning difficulties, but it is an evidence-based approach that works with students who struggle with writing and those who don't.

To start this episode, I'd like to give you a little bit of background knowledge in case you're new to SRSD.

SRSD is not a curriculum, it's not a program, it's an approach to teaching writing. It teaches students how to use the writing process and also teaches self-regulation strategies. In other words, how to get yourself started and keep yourself going, which is really important for a complex task like writing.

Teachers can use SRSD no matter what genre they're teaching students to write in, whether that's informative, whether that's persuasive, or narrative. It's just that the tool you give them, the mnemonic, will be different. The mnemonics can get more complex over the grades. This approach can be used in kindergarten through high school. Just the mnemonics and the complexity of what's expected from students will change over time.

So let's say you're teaching first grade students to write in the persuasive genre. You're going to start by teaching them about this genre. You're going to build background knowledge. You might do that by sharing a book. In this episode, Dr. Harris talks about the book, *I Wanna Iguana*, as a way to demonstrate what the persuasive genre is like.

Then you're going to teach students how to write in this genre by providing a mnemonic and a graphic organizer. You can use POW+TREE. So POW, P-O-W, is a reminder to use the writing process. P is pick my idea, and O is organize my notes. I'm going to be writing down the things I'm going to be sharing in my piece, but just in note form. This is done on a graphic organizer and the organizer changes depending on the genre.

Then the W is I'm going to write and say more. In other words, I'm going to use that graphic organizer to write my piece, but I'm going to fill it out with more words.

You'll teach your students to use the TREE mnemonic, which stands for T-topic sentence, R-reasons, three or more, E-ending, and then E-examine. The ending means I just wrap it up, and examine means do I have all the parts?

Now again, there are multiple graphic organizers within the SRSD approach. Tree is just the one that we use early on to teach about persuasive writing. Now after you teach them this mnemonic, you're not going to send them off to go write on their own. You're going to be practicing it with them multiple times. It could be a week or so at least before they take this and do this independently.

Eventually though, they write a piece independently using the mnemonic with lots of support and feedback from the teacher.

As you're doing this, you're also teaching those self-regulation strategies, such as self-talk.

For example, the teacher is modeling the writing process using those mnemonics and she might say, "Hey, what am I doing? I'm going to use POW. All right, so P is pick my idea. We're supposed to write about persuading our parents to get us a pet. I'm going to write that I want my parents to get us a pet gerbil. O - organize my notes. All right, so here's my organizer, my tree. Okay, so topic, all right, I want to get a pet gerbil, so I'm going to write that in note form on my graphic organizer."

Then after you've gone through that, you'll show them how you transfer all that into an actual piece of writing with lots and lots of support.

Another part of self-regulation is setting goals and checking to see if you've met them. A lot of teachers who use SRSD have little mini rockets that they've drawn on paper for students, and the shaft of the rocket is divided into the number of things they want students to check for.

For example, if we're working on POW+TREE, we might have five little spaces drawn into the shaft of the rocket. One is for that topic sentence, three are for the reasons, and the last one is for the ending. When students are checking their writing, they're coloring those little spaces in the rocket when they check to make sure they've added all those parts.

It may take multiple tries, multiple writings, of a persuasive piece before they remember all those parts, but they're going to be setting goals each time, checking how they did, and marking it on this rocket. They're trying to fill up that rocket over time.

There's so much more I could say about SRSD, but I just hope that this gives you a little bit of an understanding of where we're coming from so that this episode makes sense to you. But don't worry, I'm going to flood the show notes with resources if you'd like to try it. Here we go!

Anna Geiger:

Welcome Dr. Harris!

Karen Harris:

Thank you very much, Anna. I'm absolutely delighted to be here.

Anna Geiger:

I'm really excited to talk to you about SRSD and how to help students that are having trouble with writing and all students.

Before we do that, could you talk to us about your history in education and what you're doing now?

Karen Harris:

Sure. I began teaching in 1971. I taught in a coal mining community in West Virginia, and later I taught special education students in Lincoln, Nebraska. The influence of my teaching on SRSD is that it wouldn't be here without those experiences in underserved, low income, really, really difficult situations for families.

I got my doctoral degree at Auburn University. While I was at Auburn, I met Steve Graham, who some of your listeners may not know is also my husband. He was very interested in writing, and I had been working on developing a method of instruction for complex learning. I hadn't actually chosen a topic.

When I met him, he had long hair down to his shoulders, flip-flops, and holes in his blue jeans when he came to teach an undergraduate class I was sitting in on. It's just been a great partnership ever since, 43 years now.

Anna Geiger:

Oh, congratulations.

Karen Harris:

Thank you.

Anna Geiger:

So you have just recently retired from classroom teaching at ASU, but you're still doing work. What are you doing currently?

Karen Harris:

I am a member or consultant on some grants. I am running some of our data that we've had for a while to finally get it written up and hopefully published. I am consulting with others doing SRSD, and somehow I seem to be busier than I planned on.

Anna Geiger:

This always seems to be true.

Karen Harris:

Yes.

Anna Geiger:

In your book, *Writing Better: Effective Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning Difficulties*, that you wrote with Dr. Graham, what students are you thinking of there when you refer to students with learning difficulties, and what makes writing so hard for them?

Karen Harris:

Well, initially, SRSD instruction was first used with students with learning disabilities, and that's what we were designing for. Quickly, what happened is general ed teachers were asking the special ed teachers, "Where in the world did you get this? What are you teaching?"

And so we began working in inclusive classrooms, and that meant working with the whole range of students from higher achieving through students who were struggling in reading and/or writing. Usually, they go together.

It's really any student. Colleagues of ours have worked especially closely with students with EBD and students with ADHD, and it's considered evidence-based now in the areas of LBD, ADHD, and emotional behavior disorders, EB.

Anna Geiger:

What's really special about SRSD is that it started as a way to help students with learning difficulties versus something that works with the general classroom that maybe we can transfer, right?

Karen Harris:

Right, right. We went the other way around, and we realized what was happening in the 1990s. Most of the research that we do today is in inclusive classrooms in highly diverse and/or lower income underserved schools.

Anna Geiger:

Writing is hard for anyone, but especially for children with learning difficulties, what makes it so hard?

Karen Harris:

There are so many factors, Anna, that I can't even list them all here. In several articles, we do list them all, but it's so complex to write. Dr. Deborah McCowen has the most wonderful short video on why writing is so hard. She's at Texas A&M and you can get it free online. Here's just a short rundown.

One, it requires a great deal of metacognition, cognitive self-control, that's kind of what metacognition is in a nutshell. It requires a great deal of planning. It requires a great deal of background knowledge. It requires eye-hand motor coordination to get your writing out. Oh my gosh, I can just go on and on.

Also so many students with learning disabilities or who are struggling… I think the current movement to get rid of the term struggling is inappropriate. It's a call for help. It's not a negative or derogatory term. We're trying to get attention to the help these students need.

It turns out that the amount of failure… Students with LD and other students who are struggling with writing, and often reading and writing, have incredibly negative attitudes about themselves as writers.

One of the things that SRSD does, based on my early experiences when I was teaching it at first, it directly addresses what students at all grades, grade 1 through 12, think in their heads about writing, What they think about themselves as writers. When it's very negative, we talk about is that helping you or hurting you? It's really a great conversation. Then we talk about changing how we think.

Then critically, we talk about making a deal with each other. I promise that I will work really hard to teach you something new, something your teacher hasn't taught you yet. This is not something your teachers probably have had a chance to learn about. But I will work really hard to teach you, and I have students like you who've done really well. You have to agree to work really hard to learn what I teach you and to use what I teach you.

We have that discussion and it goes on throughout instruction. It's not like once and done, but we talk about what their self-talk is like now. We deliberately develop positive and cognitively directive task-based self-talk, and they also use self-reinforcement. "Oh, I really like this comment," and so on. That has been extremely effective in changing the self-efficacy, the attitudes and beliefs about themselves that these writers tend to have.

Anna Geiger:

So SRSD addresses both how to plan and structure your writing as well as beliefs you might have about writing. We'll get into all of them a little bit.

Karen Harris:

SRSD goes from planning to writing in a recursive process. We teach them that the plan is not a set thing; it should evolve as you write and reread. We teach revising and editing as well.

Anna Geiger:

So before we get into the nuts and bolts of SRSD, one thing you start with in this book is the idea of teaching writing strategies. I think the word "strategies" is used in many different settings and maybe we're not all 100% on board with what that means. Could you explain what you mean by "writing strategies" and give some examples too?

Karen Harris:

Sure. One of the best definitions I ever got from a student was a strategy is like when you have a plan for your football game. You have strategies for how you're going to handle the ball, and where you're going to throw, and who you're going to watch. I thought that was excellent. We really ran with that one.

Really that's what a strategy is, it's an organizational structure that helps you develop a plan, follow your plan, and assess your plan.

Only strategies that work should be what we're teaching. They should all be evidence-based, not just popular literature. We're talking always about evidence-based, deep research, with very consistent findings.

Anna Geiger:

So would you say that SRSD is a strategy for teaching those strategies? Does that make sense?

Karen Harris:

Yes, I get asked that question fairly often, and I think that's fair. I call it an instructional method, but that's what most methods are. They're *how* to teach well, which is basically saying the same thing as effective strategies for teaching.

Anna Geiger:

When I read about SRSD, it seems to me that one of the big things it's going for is taking students away from this idea that when I write, I just put things out on paper and then I'm done, versus I think about what I want to do. I make a plan. I do it. I have a structure for how it goes on paper. I know what to do when I think I'm done. Could you walk us through how SRSD works?

Karen Harris:

Well, that was a great synthesis. When you add, in addition to what they're learning about writing, when you add what they're learning about identity, there's a lot of peer work, a lot of collaborative work, and small group work, so there's a lot of social emotional learning. There's a lot of attention to affect, to cognition, to motivation. We get good outcomes on measures of these as well.

I think if you add that in, it's a very good description.

Anna Geiger:

Often in Facebook groups, people will say, "I need help teaching writing," and someone will say, "Try SRSD."

People may not know exactly what that means or how to get started or what that even looks like. Could you maybe break it down for us, like what it might look like in a classroom?

Karen Harris:

Sure, sure. Getting started with SRSD, I know many teachers who've done it on their own. I'm going to mention our book and Linda Mason's book on SRSD instruction, they're very detailed books with everything you need to get started.

But I want to say first that all the profits from my books go to women's and children's shelters or family shelters, so we're not making money on SRSD. We're kind of trying to give it away as best we can.

Getting started, it's great if you can get your hands on *Powerful Writing Strategies for All Students*. You can get it on Amazon, and it's actually less expensive there than the publisher. Linda Mason and colleagues have a book for teaching strategies to adolescents that covers reading and writing. I think those are great ways to start.

I can also highly recommend two organizations that now are devoted to professional development for SRSD. You can do it as an individual, a school, a class, an individual school, a grade level, however you want. They are SRSD Online and ThinkSRSD. A lot of us who have researched and taught SRSD voluntarily advise them. We help them make videos. We talk in some videos, but none of us are making money from that. This is just, again, an attempt to make it more accessible to others. Their websites are wonderful, full of sample materials, full of videos. It's just a wonderful way to really get deeper into SRSD.

And we have a 12-page resource list that I send out to anyone who emails me.

Anna Geiger:

Okay, so a second-grade teacher wants to change the way he or she is teaching writing to be in line with the SRSD approach, how will that look?

Karen Harris:

Okay, well the first thing would be to identify things you're already doing that are working well for your students, because SRSD never asks you to abandon something that's working well for you and your students.

Then as you begin to learn about SRSD, I really encourage students to recognize what parts of SRSD they're already doing. I mean, there are so many great teachers out there, they just haven't had hardly any preparation in how to teach writing effectively. In fact, very few teacher prep programs in this entire country offer a required undergraduate teacher prep course in writing. It's so sad.

First of all, teachers need to recognize I wasn't well-prepared for this, but I'm already doing some of these things. I work hard on attributions that students understand that their effort matters and that no one's born dumb or born not a writer. That's simply not true.

Then I would say to study it. Now as it unfolds in the classroom, be patient with yourself, and be patient with your students. It's very structured, but one of the core principles of SRSD instruction is that teachers have to own it. It has to be differentiated, modified, and adapted to your students, culture, context, school, and curriculum.

That means that it is never scripted. It is a method that you adapt.

Having said that, research is clear that if you drop out pieces of the method, you will lose big parts of the effect. You need to use all the parts. Teachers often want to drop off self-regulation.

SRSD has six general stages of instructions. You can go up and down, back and forth. It's recursive. You start with discuss it. Here you're building academic language, background, and vocabulary. You read a good book. Maybe at second grade you read *I Wanna Iguana*.

You start to break it apart. “How did you know what you were going to read about in this book?”

“The title helps you know,” they'll say that.

“Did anything in the book help us know? Let's read the opening together,” and you understand where I'm going from here.

You break it down and you begin developing the academic knowledge for story writing.

If I'm writing to inform, I break down something like a book about dinosaurs that we just read. You begin developing the language for the parts of a story or the common parts of an argument or persuasion.

The students really love this. They'll go through the book, and they'll raise their hands to point out where is a part.

Then you begin using some poor stories. We include them in our materials, which are either online or in the book, as much as possible. We have a new book in the works, so there'll be more.

Anna Geiger:

Oh, good!

Karen Harris:

Yeah. So then you begin reading some poor ones.

It was a doctoral student, now Dr. Karin Sandmel, who pointed this out to us quite a few years ago. She said, “You know, kids love negative examples, bad examples, and we're not doing that.”

I'm like, “Oh my gosh, we are starting tomorrow!” We include, for instance, for this is how you should get fit... The kids in the lower grades, first grade, second grade, third grade, they get a kick out of, “You should take your cat for a walk. You can walk for a long while.” I mean they're like just breaking up.

Then we make other deliberate mistakes. Another one is, “I woke up in the morning. I went downstairs and the sky was all dark and the moon was out.”

As they're doing this, again their understanding is just increasing and increasing, and they have a negative example to realize, “Oh wait, it doesn't make sense.”

We teach at least five other things besides the writing strategies. We teach vocabulary use. We teach grab the reader. We teach wrap it up right. We teach think about your reader. What would most

influence this reader? What would most persuade them? You write for principals very different than writing for your classmates and so on.

It's not just those strategies, but there are a lot of things we know about good writing that are embedded in SRSD at grade level appropriateness.

Once you've done that, we take the poor ones and we put them in a graphic organizer as they were written. Then we have a blank graphic organizer and the teacher in the class or small groups or peers, whatever is right for you and your students, they revise those. They keep the parts that were good, but if they see a way to make it better, they revise it. They don't put the bad parts on their new graphic organizer. They write new pieces for those parts.

It all starts with this collaboration. Teacher's work so hard to create a welcoming, safe writing environment. This is something that Writers Workshop has always pushed, and something that's actually been pushed since the 80s, and we're totally in line with that.

Then as students are now getting it... They've got the language. They understand how to use their mnemonic. The graphic organizers all work with the mnemonic, which, by the way, children love.

Right now, some people think mnemonics are evil because you shouldn't have to memorize things. Well, I asked a young student, a fourth grader, “What do you guys think about memorizing?” I asked the class, “Memorizing these things. Is this something we should be doing, or not be doing? Do you like it?”

They all looked at me like I'm from outer space or something, and then one little girl kind of raises her hand and she kind of tentatively says, “Well, how can you use them if you can't remember them?”

I'm like, “Oh, thank you. That's perfect.” That's on film.

We do use mnemonics, but they are just a structure.

The students, the voice that we get from students, the fun they have writing, it shows in their writing. Voice comes from thinking about their reader, not from standing there and telling them what voice means, or saying I want to hear your voice. That's not sufficient. You can show voice in other writing and help them get another understanding that way.

Then the students write with the teacher or a small group or peers from new prompts, or when we get to reading and writing, new reading.

Then they share that work, they go over everything together, they get feedback from each other.

One thing that teachers do find demanding is the cognitive affective modeling they need to do during SRSD. Many teachers are used to modeling, but they're not used to cognitive affective modeling.

We have some great work in long division that's not researched yet, but hopefully it will be, but the kids just, wow, it all makes sense now. So they'll say, “Oh, long division, I have to do long division today. Oh my, I don't like long division.”

The students already know this isn't good, and the students are queued up to help her. Hands will start going up right away, like, “Oh, don't say that to yourself,” and it goes on through that.

Okay, let's go back to writing. She’ll go, “All right, I have to write to persuade the principal to let our class have a play, a class play. Okay, what do principals care about?” And they'll start helping her.

This is called interactive modeling. It is not stand and deliver model. It is interactive. Now people vary, teachers vary, with how much interaction you're comfortable with. By the end, the kids are doing it alone.

I don't think there's a right or a wrong on how much interaction, except it shouldn't be too little. The more the kids are helping you, the more they're understanding.

That goes on, and we go through the whole essay or the whole story. That might be done once for some students, and then you may need to pull small groups, individuals, and do it again with them, maybe even a third time with some.

This part is extremely important because they're going to begin to write independently.

We usually write together three times. Some kids only need two. Again, you differentiate here. They move on. Your whole class does not need to be at the same place in the same time, but hopefully every child can be given the time they need to finish learning this.

Then you are giving feedback and helping them to rewrite or rethink.

Then when the teacher feels she or he is ready, the students move to their first independent writing. Now everything is put away. They learn earlier to create their own graphic organizers, not depend on a handout. They create them on scratch paper. They're on their own, and just see how you can do it.

I'll look at it. We'll read it together when you're done, and you know, if there are things to revise, we can revise. You can revise. And so they do that.

Usually it takes two to three independent writings to hit one where it's really got everything. That's fine.

Then they do a couple more independent writings and then they're done.

We have some students who are extremely advanced in some classrooms, and for those students, we take them further. We look at the next grade level's state and common core standards. We'll set different goals and we'll let them keep moving forward.

Anna Geiger:

So first you're teaching a particular genre and so you're experiencing that genre. You're immersing them in that, you're talking about examples, and you talked about showing bad examples and breaking that down and why that's bad and how we could improve it.

Then you're teaching them a mnemonic. We're going to talk about some of those in a little bit, but a specific mnemonic that will help them write in that genre, and then you write a few models together.

Possibly at some point you may have a group of students that are ready to go on their own, but then you may have some you might keep with you at a table. During that session, you're doing another model with them while the other kids are moving on.

I know also that with SRSD, they're setting goals and then they're checking to see if they met their goals. Can we talk about that?

Karen Harris:

Yes, thank you, Anna. This is, I think, one of the core parts of SRSD that makes it very different from other instruction and why SRSD currently gets the largest effect size and most positive outcomes of any writing method according to multiple meta-analyses.

Self-regulation is managing yourself. It's metacognitive or executive functioning. The self-regulation part of SRSD has four cornerstones.

The first is goal setting. Goals make it concrete for students. I have seen well-meaning teachers say we read, and we talked about, and they've done a great discussion about *I Wanna Iguana*. Then they say, "Now you write about the pet you want to have," and kids just sit there. They just read a book written by an adult accomplished writer and they're thinking, "I can't write like that."

So the goal needs to be changed. It needs to be, “Think about some of the things you heard, and what you liked about it, but now write your own story. And for who?” That helps kids a lot. It could be for their parents, for their classmates.

Then you have them go ahead and try to start. You've done everything you can think to do, and they're still not doing well. A couple will start, many will sit there, many will not finish.

All right, so what's different with SRSD? Goal setting makes very clear what your writing needs to do. Your goals will include to use the strategy you're learning, but they also include, think about my reader. That's why you need to know who you're writing for.

If I'm going convince my mom and dad, I know a lot about why. Let me respond to some of that, and the kids do great. A couple of teachers said four kids in our classroom got hamsters last week. They do take it home! They do use it there. There are great stories from that.

They know what they're trying to do. Their goals also include use the good vocabulary, grab the reader, wrap it up.

Let's say they're now independently writing. Now they're going to self-assess, do I have all my parts? We often get papers from young kids where at the bottom they'll write, “I have all my parts.” You'll see them check them off on their planning sheet. They've learned how to do this. And do I need the other things I know about good writing? No, is there a catch the reader in here?

That starts around second grade for most students. A few first graders can get into that. By third grade, it should be something everyone is doing, at least working on doing.

Then you monitor your progress. Self-assessment and monitoring work together. We're considering that one thing. That means for young kids, we use very fun things, like scoops of ice cream on a cone and rockets taking off from a launch pad, with stars underneath that represent the flame, and a moon and stars in the sky.

The rocket is broken down into parts and those are the parts of the genre that mnemonic stands for. They fill in how many they have. The rocket will take the right number. If they're short one, no big deal. They find out, “Oh, what did I miss?” They can revise it, or if they want to move on to a new one, that's fine too.

Then that self-assessment helps them think about next time.

Then we teach self-talk and this is where kids come to us saying, “I hate writing. I'm no good at it. You'll never teach me to write, I was born this way.”

This is where we've had that discussion earlier in SRSD and now they're using their positive self-talk. Every student develops their own positive self-talk which they record. Many teachers in the elementary grades have them posted. Students can use each other's ideas for self-talk, use what they've heard in the classroom, and make up their own.

Then we teach self-reinforcement. Self-reinforcement, not candy or stars, there's nothing wrong with stars, but this is also important because you should know when you're doing well, and you should tell yourself so.

This is where we hear kids saying things like, “I really like this part. This is a great idea.” The young ones will speak aloud while they write, and the teachers have just told them it's fine, but please talk very quietly.

Those are the four cornerstones of self-regulation. When they are not taught, you lose half a standard deviation of growth in your classroom. Now that's really significant. Other students can be a good month or two ahead of students who didn't get the self-regulation components.

Furthermore, as students go on to learn new strategies, and this is important for teachers to keep in mind, it's faster. They already know about good self-talk.

The first time's going to take the longest. It might be the hardest for you and them, but have fun with it. Our teachers do things like chants, guitar songs, and raps with the mnemonics to open class and a lot of our teachers at the elementary grades tell us as soon as I say it's writing time, they stand up and begin chanting, singing, and there are hand motions that we've suggested or teachers have made up.

Some teachers dress like a superhero and tell them they're going to learn to be super writers. We had a fourth grade classroom that was crazy about Power Rangers, so it all became Power Ranger writers. Teachers, I mean, they make a way to really relate to their students. That's what you would expect in the classroom.

Anna Geiger:

There are many different mnemonics in this book. There are quite a few, and you do say there's not an expectation... That using every single one that could be overload and too many to remember. So what would be a good mnemonic for teaching persuasive writing?

Karen Harris:

Well, the mnemonic we use in elementary grades is very different from middle school and high school. When you look at a book with a lot of mnemonics in it, you have to realize that those have to be broken down by grade level.

In elementary school, there are really only three major mnemonics, but you make them more sophisticated across the grades. The one for persuasive writing is called POW+TREE, and POW is a reminder to use the writing process. Pick your ideas. Sometimes that requires pulling apart a prompt. If the prompt is more complex than write a story about an animal you'd like to own. Then O is for organize your notes, keep thinking. W is for write and say more.

The point there is you will plan, you'll organize your notes, and that's where the graphic organizer comes in. But just because you filled in the graphic organizer, you don't stop thinking. This is something we stress a lot. As you continue to plan and as you write, you revise your plan, you revise your text, or you revise your plan and you write more text than you might have.

The TREE stands for topic sentence. What do I want the reader to agree with me about? What do I want to persuade the reader about? By third grade and some second grades, we're also doing a grab the reader in there, and some students make a little note on their mnemonic for a grab.

Once you've given your topic, what you're going to persuade people about, you want to explain that topic a little bit more. You have stated now in the opening that you believe your game is the hardest one to play. For each explanation, like you may have in your notes, it takes a lot of time. Now you say this game is the hardest one I know to play because it takes a lot of my time to finish it. Then you explain that reason. So you've given one reason and it has an explanation. My reason is it's the longest to finish. It takes a lot of time because the game is very hard. Then you give another reason, and that reason might be it makes you use the most tools. Now you explain how many tools, and you give a couple examples of tools. Then the third reason, I don't know, kids come up with great reasons.

This is a real topic. We use topics aimed at grade level and interests at grade levels. Then the last reason has an explanation. Now you do not have to stop at three. And if you're filling in a rocket by these grades, not ice cream cones, then you're going to bust the rocket. You have four reasons. You're going to have more than the minimum components, and we make a big deal out of that on their self graphs.

They also color in their graph for their vocabulary words, their grab the reader, for their clarity that it can be understood easily.

So then the mnemonic is covered. You've done topic, reasons, explanation, and then you need an ending.

The ending is the rapid upright part, and Common Core wants kids to repeat. We teach kids that if they're taking a test, you should say these are my three reasons. Now you know I think this game is the hardest one to play. These are my three reasons, and you just list them. You don't explain anymore.

Then you end with some kind of nice sentence like, I hope you'll try this game. Appeal to the reader. I hope you'll agree with me and try this game. Kids are very good at this.

One thing kids can do throughout the elementary grades is write to persuade or to argue. They have opinions and beliefs. You can transfer this into science and history as well. That's being done quite a bit now. That would be POW+TREE.

Now, by the time kids are in middle school, I'm going to teach a more sophisticated form of persuasion. By high school, I'm going to take that even further.

Anna Geiger:

You talked before about first you immerse them in this genre and talk about it, and then you're doing this practicing with them, that is with a mnemonic, right? Multiple times.

Karen Harris:

From very early on, they learned the mnemonic, and then they use the mnemonic together with the teacher to plan and write, as we talked about with modeling.

Then they use the mnemonic, but they have to create it on scratch paper as they shift forward to writing independently.

Anna Geiger:

In doing that, they're setting goals for their writing and then they're checking to see, did I meet my goals? Then I'm setting goals for my next piece, and it just keeps going.

Karen Harris:

Right. And that's why when they make their mnemonic on scratch paper, they add to it because like we just did POW+TREE. Well, that doesn't include effective vocabulary, grab the reader, and so forth. The kids at the top will usually add some of the other things they want to do, and they mark them off when they do them. Teachers are free to add those on graphic organizers from the beginning. We usually just put them up in the classroom as we're learning.

Anna Geiger:

Really SRSD is an antithesis, if that's the right word, to just assigning writing.

Karen Harris:

Yes, right.

Anna Geiger:

Often I see English books where I'll have a unit on grammar, and then it'll have a writing assignment. The teachers will say to do this activity without the explicit teaching of how to write in this genre, how to use a graphic organizer to plan your writing, or how to make sure you're doing what you intended. So teachers can think of SRSD as a tool to help them improve what they're already doing.

Karen Harris:

Exactly.

Anna Geiger:

And I know it's not a program, so that can be a little hard to wrap your brain around a little bit. But there are, like you mentioned, the book, *Powerful Writing Strategies for All Students,* I've read that one. It does lay it all out, and it has the mnemonics that you can copy, the graphic organizers, so that it's all in there.

This shorter book, *Writing Better*, talks about it as well in a different kind of way.

I know that you've written many things that talk about SRSD. You also shared a really great article with me that I'll make sure to put in the show notes that talked about the history of your development of SRSD, which was very interesting and also of your courtship, I guess we could say of you and your husband, what led to your marriage. That was funny.

I would like to talk really quickly before we close up about peer revision, because that was a focus in the *Writing Better* book. This book is for teachers of kids with learning difficulties. How can kids be good at supporting peers in their writing when they themselves maybe aren't strong writers? How does peer revising work?

Karen Harris:

Peer revising begins in the classroom when students are writing collaboratively with each other or the teacher and doing that quite well. Some teachers wait until they're doing independent writing, but it can work either way. You need to know your students and choose.

By the time they're doing peer feedback, and like you said, there's one strategy in the book, but there are many ways to do peer feedback. If the teacher already has a good way she's taught her students how to help each other with feedback, it can just fit right in there.

But what we have students do in the elementary grades, and the students with learning disabilities do this just fine… The first student reads what they wrote to the student with learning disabilities or the student with learning disabilities reads what they wrote to the other student. You do this in pairs.

Anna Geiger:

Can I interrupt you for just a second? In these partnerships, do both children have learning disabilities? Is that okay?

Karen Harris:

Sometimes. Sometimes both children have it, but really, the teacher sets the partnerships, we do not. I think that's very important when we think about students with learning difficulties or learning disabilities doing peer feedback. The teacher knows who to put with who. We do offer some guidelines in some papers, but mostly we haven't had to be much help with that.

Plus, these are flexible. You do it with one peer once, then you can do it with another peer. It moves around.

The student has that academic knowledge, that background knowledge, and is writing themselves. They also know the characteristics of good writing that we've talked about, good vocabulary, grab the reader. They listen. They also have it on paper, so they follow along, and they take a few minutes.

We structure their feedback with some things to address. The first thing with young kids that we realized we had to do was teach them to give positive feedback first. That just changed everything.

I have these kids on video. I have one student with very severe LD, she's in fourth grade, writing at a kind of kindergarten level, and her reason kids should not go outside in storms was the sticky weather. It'll be cold and might wind might blow, the wind might not blow. Well, you might get sick or you might not. It was just like all over the place. There was no opinion, and she jumped right up to the top part of the class once she learned it. She was great at peer review.

If you've got that knowledge now you're looking for the parts and our students will give positive feedback. “You really caught me with this reason,” or “I really liked how you said this. I was right there agreeing with you,” or whatever they're thinking that they really did like.

Then they'll give feedback for improvement, and they might say you missed a part. That does happen early on in peer review.

Peer review really helps the teacher. While they're working with each other, the teacher may draw a small group of two or three who still need more direct work with the teacher.

They're learning in the peer review from each other, and when hers was read to her by her peer reviewer, she was just glowing. Then it was her turn. She went through, “Well, the things I really like are…” She had some really good ones, and then she said, “Here's some things maybe you could improve,” and she was on target. “Now, I think you could use a better word here than this word. There are better words that your reader might really respond to or might really get,” or something like that.

She did really well. She said, “I think you could wrap up your ending a little more. Remember what we have to have in our ending.” She was great, and that's been true for most students with learning disabilities.

And yes, they can be two students working together with learning disabilities. That kind of pairing we leave to the teachers who know their kids.

Anna Geiger:

Of course they're not natural peer reviewers instantly. How do you train them to do this?

Karen Harris:

Just like we do SRSD as I've described it. We do it together in the classroom. We go through practicing it together, “I'm thinking about giving peer review,” and then the class helps me. “What can I say that I like?”

Some classrooms don't need much to move into peer reviewing, so there's no mnemonic for this that we use. If the teacher thinks, “My gosh, this group of kids are ready to break up into peers and review,” then go for it. If you don't feel like it's necessary to teach it, maybe it's just a short discussion.

These are the things, and you put them on the wall. What did you like best? What do you think could be done better? Any other ideas to help them? Then they're often running.

You listen, you pay attention, you walk around them so that you're picking up any issues, any problems, and then you kind of can sit down and say, “Oh, what if we did this?” Or you could talk to one of the students later, whatever works.

Some of the students need very little support. Others you might do a little more practice with. But I'm going to sit down with you two and let's look at what a student wrote. You can write it yourself so that you can set it up so that it's really helpful and useful.

The ones we've written that are in our books and online, we wrote a lot of the initial ones ourselves, the texts, and then we share student work as well.

Anyways, you can work with them through the four things I'm doing. “How do I start?” They can help you and you can do it very similar to how you've done the modeling part of SRSD instruction.

Anna Geiger:

Something that your husband mentioned in our interview was that it's also good to teach kids that they can take some of the advice, and they can not use some of it. Maybe modeling that too, “I like that idea, and I'm going to use it, but for this one, think I liked the way that I had it.” That's good to notice too.

Karen Harris:

Yes, and they don't have to say that right away. What we tell students is, “You're getting your peer feedback, and what do you say to your peer who spent the time doing it?”

“Thank you. I like your ideas.” Sometimes the student will say, “and I'm going to do this.” And it's also okay to say, “I'm going to really think about this one. I'll make some changes.”

But we didn't teach them to go, “Well, I think I'll do something else.” You need to respect the peer feedback. You don't have to agree with all of it. It's feedback. You decide. I totally am in agreement with Steve.

This carries through high school where the peer feedback is often much more direct and detailed. The final product is up to the writer. You decide where the peer feedback helps you.

Also, by the way, you need to look at your writing again and see if your peer reviewer missed anything. It's a process.

Anna Geiger:

When would you say would be the appropriate time to start with SRSD? Is there a particular grade level?

Karen Harris:

Oh, I love that you asked that. Five years ago, I would have said third grade. I was so wrong. Well, actually, it's closer to 10 years now. We started doing work with first and second graders, and I have to tell you, I don't know why I waited so long. I thought those grade levels would be harder, but they are so

much easier. If you wait until third grade, research shows the majority of students in this country by or during third grade dislike or hate writing. Yeah, it's really clear.

First and second graders don't have that problem. I thought second grade would be challenging. My initial work was reading for writing with Dr. Young-Suk Kim at the University of California, Irvine. We've done multiple studies, as have others now. The second graders are so open to it, and they're so proud of themselves. They're like, "I can't wait to show this to my mom. Look what I did."

At first grade, some kids may still be doing picture writing, but learning the SRSD method allows them to start with a picture and then write out whatever genre they're working in, whatever prompt they're replying to. Our first graders blew us away.

Again, we're not just teaching writing, we taught these kids to read and do close reading and mark up text for what they would need for their writing. The first graders were great at marking up grade level writing models.

This is one of the biggest issues. Again, *I Wanna Iguana* is not a model for what you should do, so we gave them reading at their reading level, and they had learned what they're supposed to look for. They'll either color code or the teachers will prefer not to have markers running around and they'll circle, underline, or star, but there's a code for each thing they're looking for.

Then they made, most of them, some plans and then they wrote.

Some first graders, which is going to happen a lot and you have to work with it, they would write whole sentences in their planning rather than notes. This is actually very hard from kindergarten through around fifth/sixth grade. One of the hardest things that needs the most practice is making good notes because there's this tendency of thinking, "I'm going to forget." They're using a strategy that they think is effective. "I want it all down so I don't forget it."

What you have to help them see is if you take out some words from this sentence and you only use maybe two, three, four, maybe if you have to, would you still remember it? And you do this again.

When we do taking notes, we do a lot of modeling. We do a lot of whole class note taking. Or they do peer note making, not note taking, they do peer note *making*, working on it together. They need a lot of practice in making notes. They're so worried that they're going to forget that they are just driven to write down full sentences.

Actually for some students, if the teacher thinks, "You know what, I'm not going to fight the battle on notes yet. I'm going to wait until the student is more comfortable." Again, here's where teachers have to make decisions. It might be best for this student to move on with more writing and not get too hung up on notes.

Then when they're really comfortable, then introduce, "You know, your notes are taking you so long. The major reason to make short notes is to save you time. It took you 10 minutes to write out your notes in full sentences. You could probably have made your notes with short words and phrases, maybe in four or five minutes," and they get the kids to try it.

I just love what I see teachers doing. And here again is where teachers are so important. I've done a lot of professional development with teachers and then been in their classrooms, as have many of my colleagues, and it's just phenomenal. It's just true that teachers are at the heart of it.

I want to share with you something researchers, *many* researchers, have written and SRSD has proven them wrong. Teachers have proven them wrong.

It is in multiple articles that the top effects will only be gotten by researchers who are controlling the intervention. That is wrong.

Since about 2000, maybe a little before, meta-analyses that have looked at it have consistently shown that teachers get equal to or greater outcomes, effect sizes, than researchers.

Why? Because they're there all day! When they move into reading, they'll go, “Remember how we learned about persuading?”

Anna Geiger:

Yeah, they’re responding directly to the kids in front of them versus…

Karen Harris:

Yeah, “I wonder if we think about what persuading requires if it would help us read this? What should we be reading for?” Oh my gosh, it just… It's boom! It's like the kids just take off and they see that it's generalizable.

The other thing that happens is some teachers I’ve worked with, and some other researchers, are science teachers. I've done some work there and with social studies teachers. They're not asking those teachers to teach the strategies. They're asking them to know about them and prompt their use in their classroom.

Also what we call quick writes, which works at every grade. Linda Mason's one of the leading researchers here. A quick write can be a quick response to text, and you need to know what your teacher wants in the response. You've to pull that apart. It can be a quick summary of the foremost, the things you think are most important you learned today. There' are a lot of ways to do quick writes that can be integrated right into our content area classrooms.

Anna Geiger:

I have an interview coming about quick writes. I haven't interviewed her yet, but I think that will be a part of the series.

Well, I could talk to you all day about this, but I have to go pick up my kids from school. Thank you so much for joining me to talk about this. I know that a lot of teachers are very interested in SRSD, so the more we can share, the better.

I want to share too, you mentioned so much about the power of teachers, that's really where teachers can really get this right is getting in a group of other teachers like a Facebook group where they can share their day-to-day questions, even possibly privately share writing samples and asking what do I do with this? That might be a really good way to get a good start.

Karen Harris:

I agree. And Anna, I'm so excited to have done this with you because I know it will reach a lot of teachers that I can't reach.

Anna Geiger:

Thank you so much for all your work.

Karen Harris:

Thank you. Bye.

Anna Geiger:

You can find the show notes for today's episode at reachallreaders.com/episode 207. Talk to you next time!

Closing:

That's all for this episode of Triple R Teaching. For more educational resources, visit Anna at her home base, reachallreaders.com, and join our teaching community. We look forward to helping you reflect, refine, and recharge on the next episode of Triple R Teaching.