Coherent Writing Reflection and Data Comparison

My ESL students have been challenged to produce clear and coherent writing on a particular topic, even when the topic is on their own preferred choice. Discussing the topic proves to be more comfortable for them, as students can change their wording as they speak. But when it comes to writing, the students get confused and frustrated. Some of them shared that they need at least one hour time at home to write 10-12 simple sentences. I have also had students writing completely out of topic, saying they didn’t understand the assignment, even though the assignment is explained in their syllabus. Furthermore, my ESL students have had a hard time with the sentence structure (subject-verb) and the use of subject-verb agreement. On their first test, they were pressed by the time, and this resulted in lower grades on their writing part.

I decided to ease their job but not underscore the importance of creating good and coherent writing. I came up with the idea of using a visual- a graphic organizer and work step by step toward producing good writing. I started doing this activity in class, beginning with a picture description. After discussing the picture as a whole class, I moved to the topic sentence, three details, and a conclusion. The graphic organizer I used represented a house with a roof, three stories, and a solid foundation. We discussed each particular house part (roof, floor, foundation) and how this part contributes to the solidity of the whole building. Once this discussion was over, my students had the “aha”-moment and understood the importance of each paragraph part – the beginning, the body, and the ending. They were able to make analogy and see the connection between the sound house structure from their graphic organizer and their ideas and thoughts when writing their paragraph. Transferring their visualization (the graphic organizer) to a mental picture (what they were about to write) and later to graphic expression (actual writing) was quite a process. I lead my students slowly and pushed them softly starting with complete modeling “ I do”, to “we do” to “you do”. On their second test, my students were more relaxed and confident in their writing. I used the same graphic organizer, and most of them but one produced good and cohesive writing.

I have also noticed that using this writing strategy helped my students improve their capitalization, punctuation, and reduce the amount of the run-on sentences. Dissecting and discussing the paragraph structure, looking closer into each of its parts helped my students understand the purpose of writing – how each part (beginning, body, and ending) contributes to producing cohesive and clear writing.

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| Test1 Writing Part | Students | Test 2 Writing Part | Students | Growth |
| A | 1 | A | 7 | +6 |
| B | 6 | B | 1 | - 5 |
| C | 1 | C | 1 | 0 |
| D | 3 | D | 1 | - 2 |
| F | 0 |  | 0 |  |

I will continue using diverse graphic organizers in my ESL classes, not only in my writing classes, but also in reading for better student comprehension.