Writing Instruction for Struggling Writers and Students with Disabilities

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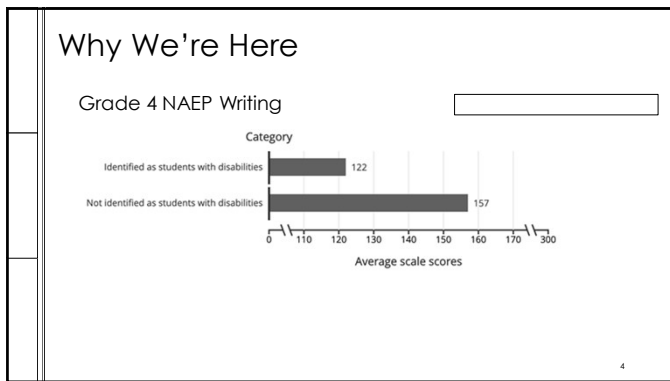Fall Virtual Conference 2020

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Today's Discussion

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Why We're Here

write on grade level
X

- Almost 60% of children cannot read

X writing
- 50% of high school graduates are not prepared for college-level reading

Writing
X
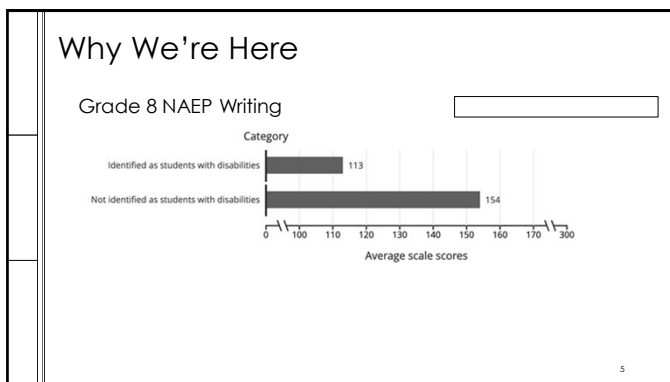- Reading remediation costs businesses $3.1 billion dollars per year

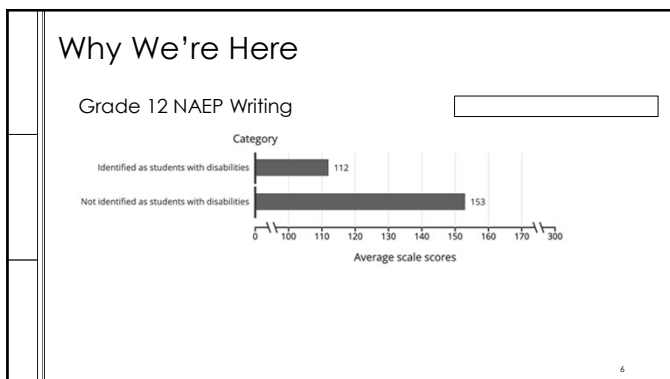(Source: Graham, 2008; National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP] Writing)

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Why We're Here

Grade 4 NAEP Writing

Category

Identified as students with disabilities — 122

Not identified as students with disabilities — 157

Average scale scores

0 110 120 130 140 150 160 170 300

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Why We're Here

Grade 8 NAEP Writing

Category

Identified as students with disabilities — 113

Not identified as students with disabilities — 154

Average scale scores

0 100 110 120 130 140 150 160 170 300

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Why We're Here

Grade 12 NAEP Writing

Category

Identified as students with disabilities — 112

Not identified as students with disabilities — 153

Average scale scores

0 100 110 120 130 140 150 160 170 300

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Overview of our morning session

- A little about me . . .
- What we know about struggling writers and students with disabilities (SWD)
- Best practices for:
  - The writing teacher and his/her classroom
  - Writing instruction
  - Writing assessment
- BREAK (10:30-10:45)
- Evidence-based instruction for handwriting, spelling, sentence writing, and writing fluency

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Overview of our afternoon session

- Evidence-based instruction for the writing process and composing in different genres
- Effective ways to assess and document writing progress
- BREAK (2:15-2:30)
- Application to elementary and secondary case studies (breakout rooms)

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A little about me . . .

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A little about me . . .

SMU

THIRD EDITION

Best Practices in
Writing
Instruction

edited by
Steve Graham
Charles A. MacArthur
Michael Hebert

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Struggling writers and SWD tend to . . .

- have difficulties with transcription (handwriting, spelling, typing)
- view writing as a task of content generation
- spend less time planning, writing, and revising
- revise only for surface level concerns (e.g., neatness, spelling)
- develop negative attitudes about writing
- fail to persist when writing tasks become difficult

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Struggling writers and SWD

- TRANSCRIPTION
  - Tend to write or type slowly
  - More spelling mistakes than peers without disabilities
    - Focus on handwriting and spelling leaves little space left in working memory to focus on writing content, meaning, and organization
    - Cannot write or type quickly enough to record all of their ideas
    - Writing fatigue
    - Produce writing that is illegible or incomplete

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Struggling writers and SWD

- SENTENCE-LEVEL SKILLS
  - Produce shorter, less-developed/complex sentences
  - More grammatical errors than peers without disabilities
  - Focus on sentence writing takes up working memory space
  - Produce less complex and less coherent compositions

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Struggling writers and SWD

- COMPOSITION SKILLS
  - Spend little time planning, even when prompted to do so
  - Writing = content generation
    - Little consideration of audience, goals, or the writing process
  - Revision = editing

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Struggling writers and SWD

- COMPOSITION SKILLS
  - Lack strategic behaviors (for planning, writing, and revising) as well as knowledge of how to carry out those processes
  - Lack ability to self-regulate
  - Lack knowledge of different writing genres and different text structures
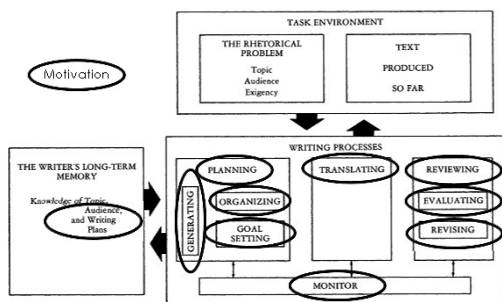
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Struggling writers and SWD

- MOTIVATION
  - Tend not to persist when writing becomes difficult
  - Lack knowledge of why writing is important or meaningful to them
  - Fewer positive beliefs about writing
  - Overconfidence about their own writing abilities
    - May underestimate the effort and persistence needed to complete writing tasks

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Figure 1. Structure of the writing model. (For an explanation of how to read a process model, please see Footnote 11, pages 386-387.)

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What are best practices?

- I first present broader best practices under the assumption that many of you work in general education classrooms that include SWD as well as students not identified with disabilities.
  - Low tech recs (don't have to have special skills, technologies or training to use them)
  - Will impact a diverse group of learners and can be modified to meet individual students' needs
  - Can be used across K-12 and across subjects/content areas

- Sources for my recommendations
  - Meta-analyses
  - Exceptional writing teachers and schools
  - Cognitive models of how novice writers progress to skilled writers

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The Writing Teacher and Classroom

1. **Convey enthusiasm for writing.**
   - Teachers write when their students write.
   - Share teacher's own writing with the class.
   - Show students the teacher considers themselves a writer.

2. **Create a positive classroom atmosphere for writing.**
   - All attempts at writing are respected.
   - Writing is fun!

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The Writing Teacher and Classroom

3. **Set high expectations for students' writing and reinforce their efforts throughout the writing process.**
   - Specific praise
   - Ongoing feedback

4. **Provide frequent, sustained opportunities for students to write EVERY day.**
   - Authentic audiences
   - Authentic purposes

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The Writing Teacher and Classroom

5. **Use writing across the curriculum.**
   - Students should learn that writing is valuable not only in ELA class, but has MANY uses in Math, Science, and Social Studies (not to mention, Art, Music, Photography, etc.)

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The Writing Teacher and Classroom

- Identify AT LEAST one effective practice you can implement in your own classroom or recommend to a teacher you work with <u>next week</u>.

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Writing Instruction

1. **Teach students to carry out the writing process.**
   - Plan, draft, revise, edit, publish, and share
   - Informal writing (e.g., quick writes, journal responses) does not have to involve all of the steps.

2. **Provide explicit instruction.**
   - Modeling
   - Guided practice and scaffolds
   - Independent practice

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Writing Instruction

3. **Identify students who need additional support.**
   - Reteach skills to these students through small group or individual lessons.
   - Provide additional scaffolds.
   - Develop modified writing assignments.

4. **Connect reading and writing.**
   - Use reading materials to show the characteristics of good writing.
   - Point out the ways authors have used specific skills (e.g., argumentation, imagery, organization) and have students emulate

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Writing Instruction

5. Teach strategies for planning, composing, revising, and editing.
- Teach students to self regulate (e.g., set goals, self monitor, give self praise) as they complete the writing process.

6. Explicitly teach students to summarize texts.
- Modeling
- Gradual fading of models of good summaries

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Writing Instruction

7. Encourage collaborative writing.
- Allow students to collaboratively plan, write, revise, and edit.
- Increases motivation for reluctant and struggling writers

8. Set goals for writing.
- Individually tailored for students
- Attainable (not so challenging that students get frustrated)
- Example: Add more ideas, include a specific # of genre elements

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Writing Instruction

9. Allow students to use word processing.
- Reduces constraints of poor handwriting
- Can move, edit, and delete/change text easily
- For maximal benefit, students need to be taught how to type efficiently and use software capabilities (e.g., spell check).

10. Teach students to construct complex sentences.
- Teach strategies for writing different types of sentences.
- Teach students how to combine two or more simple sentences into one more sophisticated sentence.

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Writing Instruction

11. Teach students to generate and organize ideas before writing.
- Brainstorming
- Use graphic organizers, notetaking, a journal with writing ideas/inspiration.

12. Use inquiry activities.
- Have students examine concrete data.
- Students write about what they learned from observing and analyzing.

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Writing Instruction

13. Use process writing.
- Writing for authentic purposes and audiences
- Self-selected topics
- Writing conferences with peers and teacher
- Mini-lessons to target writing skills
- Cycles of the writing process

14. Allow students to study good models of writing.
- Emulate features of well-written texts

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Writing Instruction

15. Use writing as a tool for improving students' content area learning.
- Many of the processes involved in writing (summarizing, paraphrasing, making connections between ideas) are processes that help students learn new information.
- Writing provides an additional exposure to new material.
- Writing helps students self-monitor their learning.

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Writing Instruction

- Identify AT LEAST one effective practice you can implement in your own classroom or recommend to a teacher you work with <u>next week</u>.

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Writing Assessment

1. **Use both formative and summative writing assessments.**
   - Keep writing from all stages in a writing portfolio.

2. **Align the mode of assessment with the form of production with which students are most proficient.**
   - If a student is skilled at word processing, allow them to take writing assessments using a computer.
   - If a student is not skilled at word processing, allow them to use paper and pencil.

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Writing Assessment

3. **Teach students to monitor and assess their own writing.**
   - Provide checklists and rubrics.
   - Ask students to assess their own final drafts before handing them in to you.

4. **Teach students to assess each other's writing.**
   - Need to provide direct instruction in *how* to provide constructive feedback on a peer's writing
   - Need to provide direct instruction in how to listen to and respond to peer feedback on their own writing

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Writing Assessment

5. **Use computer/automated scoring systems when applicable.**
   - Automated essay scoring (AES) software can provide feedback throughout the writing process as well as feedback on final drafts.

If you have enough time to grade all of your students' writing, then you are not assigning enough! (NWP)

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Writing Assessment

- Identify AT LEAST one effective practice you can implement in your own classroom or recommend to a teacher you work with <u>next week</u>.
- Now, you have THREE action items for you to enact next week in your classrooms and schools!

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Summary

- Students, at all grade levels (and in all subject areas), need explicit instruction in how to use new writing genres and new writing skills before they can be expected to use them on their own.
- Writing should be an INTEGRAL and INTEGRATED part of the curriculum, across all subjects and content areas.
- Teaching writing is <u>EVERY</u> teacher's responsibility.

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Questions?

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Break (10:30-10:45)

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Evidence-Based Transcription Instruction for Struggling Writers and SWD

- HANDWRITING
- SPELLING
- SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION
- WRITING FLUENCY

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Handwriting Instruction

- Although we assume handwriting instruction occurs in the early elementary grades, these practices can be modified and used with older students.
- Word processing is an option but should not replace quality handwriting instruction.
  - Word processing should not be an option until students are taught how to type and use features, such as spell check

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Handwriting Instruction

- EXPLICIT and SYSTEMATIC
  - Introduce 2-3 letters at a time that have similar features but are not easily confused or reversed
  - Teacher modeling of how to form each letter
  - Discussion of letter strokes that all letters share
  - Discussion of how letters are different from each other
  - Student guided and independent practice with letter formation
  - This is not just handing a workbook and assigning a few pages from it each day!

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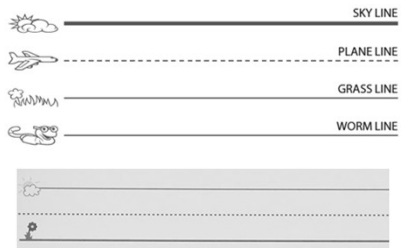## Handwriting Instruction

- VISUAL CUES
  - Dots
  - Numbered arrows

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Handwriting Instruction

- VISUAL CUES

	SKY LINE
	PLANE LINE
	GRASS LINE
	WORM LINE
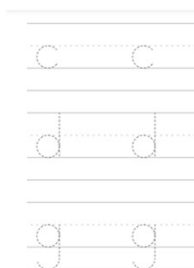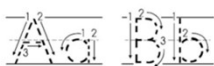
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Handwriting Instruction

- COPY AND COVER
  - Students examine a letter
  - Then, they cover the letter and copy it from memory
  - Check their letter with the properly formed letter and make changes if needed

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Handwriting Instruction

- ALPHABET EXERCISES
  - Songs with missing letters
  - Recall of missing letters from a sequence of letters in alphabetic order
    - What comes next? q, r, s, ___, ____, ____
  - These activities help with students quickly and accurately recalling letters and matching them to their formation

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Handwriting Instruction

- Important considerations:
  - Practice letter formations in isolation and CONNECTED TEXT
    - Write words or sentences that contain known letters for 1–2 minutes to work on fluency
    - Apply to own written compositions
  - Teach students to self evaluate (circle your best three letters, correct any letters that are formed improperly or illegible)

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Spelling Instruction

- EXPLICIT and SYSTEMATIC
  - Instruction in letter-sound correspondences, spelling of word patterns (syllables, morphemes), and spelling of irregular words
    - SWD proceed in the typical developmental progression of spelling skills (sounds, patterns, meanings), but this development may be delayed when compared to same-aged peers
    - Spelling instruction should be driven by assessment (see *Words Their Way* (Bear et al., 2019) for examples)
    - Students should be practicing sounds and patterns they are using but confusing

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Spelling Instruction

- PRACTICE AND SELF-CORRECTION
  - Distribute practice over time.
    - Limit the number of words students learn at once
  - Teach students *how* to study and learn to spell new words and word patterns
    - Word sorts
    - Flashcards
    - Self-tests
  - Teach students self-correction
    - Cover-copy-compare (Look at the word spelled correctly, cover it up, and write the word from memory)

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Spelling Instruction

- Important considerations:
  - Provide immediate error correction
    - Ward off error patterns
    - Some computer programs do this
  - Practice spelling in CONNECTED TEXT
    - Sentence writing and written compositions
    - Supports writing fluency

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Writing Fluency

- When SWD learn accurate and fluent letter formation as well as accurate and fluent spelling, writing fluency improves
  - Need to practice these skills in isolation and in CONNECTED TEXT for this to occur
- But, in addition to handwriting and spelling, many SWD need direct instruction in sentence-level skills to become fluent writers

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Sentence Construction

- EXPLICIT and SYSTEMATIC
  - Instruction in simple and complex sentence types
    - Direct teacher modeling of how to write sentences with complete subjects and predicates
    - Modeling of mechanical skills (capitalization, punctuation, grammar)
    - Guided practice (e.g., peer-supported sentence writing)
    - Independent practice with prompt feedback

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Sentence Construction

- PICTURE-WORD PROMPTS
  - Removes need to generate content
  - Teacher models an example sentence
  - Students write their own sentences
    - Class compares the many different types of sentences they were able to generate
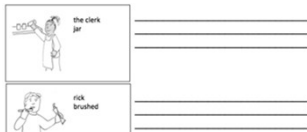
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Sentence Construction

- SENTENCE COMBINING
  - Students learn syntactical choices be combining simple "kernel" sentences into more complex ones
  - Can be provided connector words or cues
  - Can be used to teach parts of speech and grammar in an authentic context
  - Text for kernel sentences can come from students' writing or familiar literature

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Sentence Construction

- SENTENCE COMBINING
  - Example: My dog is brown. My dog is cuddly. (and)
    - My dog is brown and cuddly.
  - Example: Sentence combining can be used to teach grammar skills in an authentic context. Some grammar skills to teach include punctuation, compound sentences, and various types of clauses.
    - Sentence combining can be used to teach grammar skills, such as punctuation, compound sentences, and various types of clauses, in an authentic context.

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Sentence Construction

- Important considerations:
  - Authentic context
    - Avoid workbooks and sentence diagramming
    - Note: Grammar
  - Apply in connected texts and to own writing to develop fluency

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Handwriting, Spelling, and Sentence Construction

- Adaptations:
  - Pencil grips
  - Word processing (spell check and grammar check)
  - Dictation (can be low tech – tape recorder)
  - Speech-to-text
  - Word-prediction software (to help with spelling)
  - Voice-output communication aids (VOCA) to digitize reading of letters and words students produce
  - Word arrays and sentence frames to support sentence construction
- **Students need instruction in *how* to use adaptations/accommodations**

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Writing Fluency

- When SWD learn **accurate and fluent letter formation, accurate and fluent spelling**, and **accurate and fluent sentence writing**, writing fluency improves,
  - AND they can focus on the writing process and the content and meaning of their texts!

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Questions?

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Lunch (12:00-1:00)

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Overview of our afternoon session

- Evidence-based instruction for the writing process and composing in different genres
- Effective ways to assess and document writing progress
- BREAK (2:15-2:30)
- Application to elementary and secondary case studies (breakout rooms)

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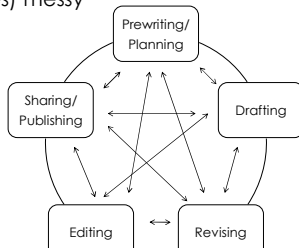## Evidence-Based Composition Instruction for Struggling Writers and SWD

- THE WRITING PROCESS
- WRITING GENRES
- STRATEGY INSTRUCTION
  - Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)

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Teaching the Writing Process

- Although the writing process involves stages or steps, it is not linear; instead the process is recursive and (sometimes) messy

Prewriting/ Planning

Sharing/ Publishing

Drafting

Editing

Revising

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Teaching the Writing Process

The Writing Process: Where are you?

- At any one moment, a classroom of students may be in different stages
- Students may stay in one stage or step of the process for multiple class sessions or days

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Teaching the Writing Process

- EXPLICIT and SYSTEMATIC
  - Instruction in how to proceed through the stages of writing (prewrite/plan, draft, revise, edit, share/publish)
  - Modeling of how to complete each part of the process
  - Reminders that the process takes time and it is not linear

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Teaching the Writing Process

- STRATEGIES
  - Teach students strategies for carrying out parts of the writing process
    - Example: For persuasive writing
    Decide on an exact position
    Examine the reasons for the position
    Form a list of points to explain each reason
    Expose the position in the first sentence
    Note each reason and supporting points
    Drive home the position in the last sentence
    Search for errors and correct them

https://cehs.unl.edu/secd/writing/

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Teaching the Writing Process

- STRATEGIES
  - Example: For story writing
    Setting (Introduction of the main character, locale, time, and plot of the story)
    Purpose (What the main character strives to achieve)
    Action (What is done to achieve the goal)
    Conclusion (The results of the action)
    Emotions (The main character's reactions and feelings about various events in the story)

https://cehs.unl.edu/secd/writing/

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Teaching the Writing Process

- PROCESS WRITING ("WRITER'S WORKSHOP")
  - Teach students to proceed through the stages of the writing process
  - Sustained time for writing
  - Writing for authentic audiences and purposes (choice of topics)
    - Letter writing example
  - Writing conferences (teacher and peer)
  - Mini-lessons to address writing skills

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Teaching the Writing Process

- FEEDBACK
  - Frequent, ongoing (throughout the entire process)
  - Have a focus for each round of feedback so that revision and editing tasks are manageable
    - This is a great time to focus on writing goals and self-monitoring
  - Peers can be <u>taught</u> to provide feedback to each other
  - Computer-based feedback is helpful for students who have difficulty with social interactions
    - Immediate feedback
    - Immediate reinforcement for changes in writing

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Teaching the Writing Process

- WRITING TOPICS
  - Choice = motivation
  - Concrete
    - See Canella-Malone at al. (2015) for procedures to make writing prompts more concrete
  - Students have (or you provide) the background knowledge necessary to respond

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Teaching the Writing Process

- Important considerations:
  - Allow sustained, daily time for writing
  - Students may need to build stamina; work on this daily and increase writing time incrementally
  - Use anchor charts and picture prompts to remind of steps in the process and/or steps in writing strategies
    - Peer video models have also been used

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Teaching Writing Genres

- EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION
  - Text structures associated with different genres (e.g., narrative, persuasive, informational, poetry, letters)
    - Identify the important genre elements and teach those directly
    - Can use strategies and mnemonics for remembering genre elements (SPACE for story writing)
    - Provide prompts, reminders, and checklists to include important genre elements in writing
      - Fade prompts as students become more proficient

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Teaching Writing Genres

- MODELS
  - Models from literature
  - "Real life" models
  - Teacher creates models through shared writing with class
  - Students should have access to models as they write
  - Value (and praise) approximations

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SRSD

- SELF-REGULATED STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT
  - The most-researched writing intervention for struggling writers and SWD
    - In the US and abroad (China, Australia, Portugal, just to name a few)
  - Strong effects on students' writing outcomes (writing quality, length, inclusion of genre elements)
    - Stronger effects than strategy instruction that does not apply principles of SRSD (Gillespie & Graham, 2014)
  - Used to support and facilitate the writing process and composing in different genres

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SRSD

- HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM STRATEGY INSTRUCTION?
  - Explicitly teach and support development of self-regulation with academic strategies
  - Explicitly support the development of attributions for effort; positive attitudes; adaptive beliefs; and self-efficacy for writing
  - Instruction is criterion-based
  - Developed for struggling writers and SWD

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SRSD

- SIX STAGES
  1. Develop Background Knowledge
  - Read examples of the genre, discussing genre-specific vocabulary, genre elements, and choices made by the authors.
  - Introduce writing and self-regulation strategies to be learned.

  (Gillespie Rouse & Kiuhara, 2017)

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SRSD

- SIX STAGES

  2. Discuss It

  - Students' attitudes towards writing and their current writing and self-regulation abilities
  - Benefits of learning the strategies and the importance of effort, perseverance, and positive attributions
  - Contexts in which students can use the strategies
  - Introduce graphic organizer and mnemonic chart
  - Practice taking notes on the graphic organizer while analyzing both good and poor models of writing in the genre
  - Graph number of genre elements from a pre-assessment of students' writing (optional if teachers believe this may cause frustration for their students).

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SRSD

- SIX STAGES

  3. Model It

  - Collaborative composing using the writing strategies
  - Collaboratively graphing of number of elements included in the composition
  - Teacher uses think-alouds, verbalizing self-instructions and self-regulation during the composing process, and students identify self-statements the teacher used.
  - Students write their own self-statements (i.e., things to say to themselves to get started with a writing task, motivate themselves, evaluate their writing, and reinforce themselves when finished).
  - Discuss opportunities and other situations in which students can use the strategies.

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SRSD

- SIX STAGES

  4. Memorize It*

  - Discuss the importance of memorizing each step of the strategies and what each step means
  - Practice memorization of strategies with cue cards, games, and quizzes.

*Memorization of the strategies and mnemonics begins in earlier SRSD stages and is ongoing until students fully commit strategies to memory.

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SRSD

- SIX STAGES

5. Support It

- Gradually fade supports for writing and self-regulation strategies.
- Encourage students to create mnemonic and graphic organizer on their own paper (e.g., at the top or on the back of a writing assignment, on scratch paper) for making notes.
- Continue collaborative writing (teacher and students) as needed.
- Encourage collaborative writing with peers and writing independently (if appropriate).
- Continue supporting maintenance and generalization of the strategies.

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SRSD

- SIX STAGES

6. Independent Performance

- Students successfully use the writing and self-regulation strategies independently.
- Teacher provides booster, or review, sessions if needed.
- Continued discussion of maintenance and generalization of strategies.

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SRSD

- Important Considerations
  - Teaching a writing strategy using SRSD can require:
    - suspending current writing instruction/practices (e.g., Writer's workshop)
    - much repetition and many review lessons
    - individualized instruction

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Written Composition

- Adaptations:
  - Planning software (Kidspiration)
  - Graphic organizers
  - Procedural facilitation
    - Cue cards for steps of the writing process
    - Prompts/questions to consider while composing or while revising
  - Writing checklists for self-evaluation
  - Automated essay scoring (AES) for ongoing and summative feedback
  - Multimodal composition (audio, images, music, hyperlinks)
- **Students need instruction in *how* to use adaptations/accommodations**

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Questions?

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Assessing and Documenting Writing Progress

- CURRICULUM-BASED MEASUREMENT (CBM)
  - Short, timed (3-5 min) responses to writing prompts (can be pictures, words, or story starters)
    - Can choose narrative or expository
    - Make sure students have background knowledge to respond
  - Inexpensive and easy to administer
  - Reliable and valid
  - Published norms for elementary and secondary students
    - Interventioncentral.org

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Assessing and Documenting Writing Progress

- CURRICULUM-BASED MEASUREMENT (CBM)
  - Example prompts:
    - It was the first day of summer vacation...
    - One day my friend and I went to the zoo...
    - My best friend suddenly screamed...
    - I was the first one to smell smoke and...
    - Yesterday was the strangest day...
    - Describe a game you like to play and tell why you like it.
    - Describe your favorite day of the week and tell why you like it.

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Assessing and Documenting Writing Progress

- CURRICULUM-BASED MEASUREMENT (CBM)
  - Teachers score for total words written, number of words spelled correctly, correct/incorrect word sequences
  - Can be given as a screening measure at Tier 1 (Fall, Winter, Spring)
  - Given more frequently for progress monitoring of struggling writers and SWD
    - Sensitive to small changes
    - Performance graphed to set goals and assess progress

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Assessing and Documenting Writing Progress

- PORTFOLIOS
  - Ongoing collection of student writing
  - Qualitative look at writing progress over time
  - All writing pieces do not have to be complete
    - A piece may show a students' planning or an example of a students' editing skills
  - Determine a schedule (e.g., once or twice per grading period) to collect and score a piece of writing from the portfolio using a genre-specific rubric
    - Performance on portfolio assessments should drive subsequent writing instruction and intervention

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10/15/2020

Questions?

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Break (2:15-2:30)

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Case Study Application

- Breakout rooms based on grade level
- Please read the brief case study and then, with your group, compose answers to questions 1-4 at the end of the case.
- Be prepared to discuss your answers, any challenges you encountered during the process, and remaining questions you have when we return at 3:10.

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Case Study Share

- Whole group
  - What did you decide?
  - What did you struggle with?
  - What questions do you still have?

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Questions?

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Summary

- Writing instruction for struggling writers and SWD:
  - Daily
  - Explicit and systematic
    - Teacher modeling
    - Making transparent the "hidden" processes (e.g., think alouds)

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Summary

- Writing instruction for struggling writers and SWD:
  - Informed by data
    - Progress monitoring
    - Norm-referenced, or EOY assessments
    - Evidence-based practices
  - Collaborative effort
    - All teachers
    - All members of the IEP team

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Summary

- Writing instruction for struggling writers and SWD:
  - A focus on motivation and engagement
    - Student choice
    - Authentic audience
    - Support for learning skills (transcription) so that writing composition is more fluent
    - An enthusiastic group of teachers and professionals who enjoy writing and make it fun
    - Ongoing feedback and support throughout the writing process

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Thank you!

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