

Sunday, August 31, 2008

## Teacher Resources

Write Reflections&#8482;: Do you Want your Students to Learn to Write for a Change?

Why do students experience the slightest bit of difficulty when they write? Students talk, communicate, even send "text" messages to one another. Students like to interact and associate. (In fact, many of the classroom management techniques favored by control-minded teachers seek to quell this natural urge.) Sidebar For example: Turn a district's worth of Fourth Grade students loose with E-mail accounts, and they will create so many messages that they "lock up" the mail server. But, let teachers get involved in the writing process, and student excitement, creativity and self-expression grinds to a sluggish halt.

This sorry situation seems to be the "fault" of writing instruction, and this

"hard reality" seem to result from ineffective teaching strategies. These ineffective strategies stem from an "I teach writing like I learned to write" approach&hellip; rather than an incapacity or lack of writing skills of our students.

But, is this "writing disconnect" the result of a lack of capacity of our teachers? Sidebar Of course, blaming teachers is the natural inclination of the "test our students with high-stakes writing tests every four years to see if our teachers are performing (and earning their pay)" crowd.

Of course, the "test-em experts" fail to notice that limited, or no funding is allocated for writing instruction, and that teachers' school day schedules are littered with non-essential activities (such as coaching students for the high-stakes test) that diminish the time that students have available for learning to write. Teach Reading First: Teach Writing only if we are Lucky to have a Class of Good Readers Do teachers enroll in many "writing how-to" classes in college?

Answer: The typical teacher enrolls in about as many writing classes as the typical physician takes in nutrition and exercise. (Just as a physician's course load focuses on medication and surgery, teachers' coursework focuses upon reading and math.)

Writing is relegated to one "leg" of a Language Arts "stool"&hellip;"a three-legged stool with five legs"&hellip; grammar, punctuation, spelling, reading and writing.

And, it is precisely because of the focus upon grammar, punctuation and spelling that our students learn (come to believe) that they "cannot write." It's a Good Thing that Schools Don't Teach Children to Talk If schools began early enough in the lives of our students, and if teachers used the grammar, punctuation and spelling - "catch and correct every error" approach to "teach" students to speak; we would be a nation of stutterers, and sigh-language communicators.

The problem, also noticed in foreign language instruction, is the focus upon finding and eradicating errors. Sidebar There is parsimony, a tactical elegance, to attacking errors. Errors, since fewer in number than accurate and competent responses; are easier and less work to track.

Finding errors (managing exceptions, eliminating defects, building a uniform product) also fits nicely into our Nineteenth Century Factory Model of education, i.e., quality control, reject defective products, model.

However, a focus upon errors, especially when errors are punished and deprecated; limits learning.

The issue is that "would-be writing teachers" confuse two distinct types of learning: 1.) memory and recall and 2.) performance and skill learning.

This means that unconscious processes associated with the integration of learning modalities and other processes associated with habit development must be integrated before writing performance can be perfected.

And performance is perfected through practice, relaxed attention, and fun. There is also a role for mental rehearsal in skill development.

Punishment and criticism compromise learning and represent the exact opposite from what accelerates practice (and transforms performance) into academic knowledge, trustworthy habits and outcome-based skill sets.

It is the punishment and criticism that is found by sniffing out errors and by "driving a stake through the heart of repetition and practice" that sabotages learning. And, it is persistent punishment and callous criticism that would prevent many children from learning to talk if school were their sole source for learning this skill.

Fortunately, children learn to talk before they reach school age. Unfortunately, once children arrive at school, many teachers focus inordinate effort and attention upon getting them to "stop talking" and "be quiet!"

See: Application and Performance: The "Flip Side" of Planning

Why Write Reflections&#8482;? Write Reflections&#8482; is a success-based curriculum for teaching writing skills, i.e., writing habits and writing performance.

Write Reflections&#8482; is Application and Performance (AnP) based learning that is&hellip; Systematic Sequential

Standards-Based

Success-Based The main features of Write Reflections&#8482; include: Reasonable target performance standards for

students' writing practice

Realistic improvement goals based upon mastery of prerequisite writing skills

Real-world timeframes set to developmental capacities and prior skill learning This means that the teachers who use the Write Reflections program show students exactly what to do, guide students to doable writing success, and appreciate the writing outcomes that students produce.

In short, writing becomes fun and enjoyable for both students and teachers, and

writing success prompts (no pun intended) further creative successes. Components of the Write Reflections

Curriculum The Write Reflections Curriculum contains Comprehensive lesson plans

Web and Mind Map Organizers

Editing Sheets

Samples for Each Grade Level

Step-by-Step Instructions

Assessments

Grading Rubrics

Prompts The Write Reflections program also includes instructions on how content-area teachers can use 15 different writing genres for instruction. These include: Autobiography

Biography

Cause and Effect

Compare/ Contrast

Descriptive Writing

Essay Writing

How-To

Information Writing Summary

Letters

Narrative

Oral Presentation

Persuasive Writing

Problem-Solving

Response to Literature Sidebar The Write Reflections model of focusing upon writing in all content-area subjects parallels Classroom Toolkit's philosophy of writing instruction.

It is every teacher's job to teach writing, in the same way that it is every teacher's job to teach related math.

Writing and math should be part of every lesson, both writing and math examples and

explorations should be relevant and fun. Summary Write Reflections is a writing curriculum that works.

Classroom Toolkit ordinarily avoids recommending products that are this expensive because we focus upon free and inexpensive resources for teachers.

However, it took Melinda Micalec, the developer of this program, seven years to build this curriculum. (And saving a teacher seven years of development and testing effort should be worth a lot to teachers who can afford the up front cost.)

But, though prices are steep for individual teachers, costs are competitive and

reasonable (in fact probably under priced) for a campus site licenses.

So, convince colleagues, chairpersons and school district purchasers to license this product.

Expenditures for a Write Reflections site license can pay

dividends in increased student writing scores, and a pilot program on your campus will probably result in other

campuses within the school district adopting the program once the improvement in student writing test scores

becomes apparent. Sidebar Although high-stakes test scores are essentially irrelevant for real learning, citing test score

improvement is often the (cynical) way to obtain funding for crucial products. Schools waste much more money on

useless initiatives and worthless "grabbing at straws magic solutions." So, a wise investment in the Write

Reflections product should be an easy sell.

Or, convince the local Parent-Teachers Association/Organization (PTA/PTO) to

assume the cost of this curriculum.

Parents want their children to write well. The task of convincing parents to support an effective program such as Write

Reflections should be an easy one.