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Traditional and Digital Writing

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Traditional and Digital Writing

Celia and her classmates are authoring a procedural text that describes how to play safely on the playground to share with kindergarteners at their school. Celia is currently working to take notes during writer's workshop surrounded by markers, paper, and a stapler. Meanwhile, her classmate, Tonia, is taking photographs to embed into her procedural text using Adobe Spark. After she finishes taking photographs that demonstrate playing safely on the playground, she plans to type captions describing the photographs, and record audio that explains the procedures. Both children are actively engaged in meaningful writing practices that support children's development as writers. Classroom instruction can, and should, support both traditional and digital writing.

In order to become proficient writers in the 21st century, children must be able to use traditional writing approaches, as well as digital tools, like iPads, tablets, and Chromebooks. Therefore, teachers must be able to integrate digital technology into their writing instruction in meaningful ways. It is critical that teachers first understand and practice the basic tenets of effective writing instruction. Teachers also need to understand the use of available digital tools and how to incorporate these tools into their existing instruction. The purpose of this article is to describe key tenets of high-quality writing instruction and to give examples of digital technology that can be effectively incorporated into writing programs.

High Quality Writing Instruction

Research suggests seven tenets of high-quality writing instruction that support children's development as writers (Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, & Harris, 2012), which are described below.

Captures Interest and Motivation through Authentic Reasons for Writing

Effective writing teachers design instruction that considers their students' needs and interests (Hall & Axelrod, 2014), because they understand that motivation and academic achievement in writing are strongly correlated (Graham, Berninger, & Fan, 2007; Piazza & Siebert, 2008). Therefore, high-quality writing instruction is based upon the beliefs that children's writing improves when they are interested in what they are writing about and when they write for an authentic audience.

Modeling and Scaffolding through Mini-Lessons and Group Writing

Effective writing teachers provide strategy instruction for improving writing (Graham, Harris, & MacArthur, 2006; Graham, Harris, & Chambers, 2016) that is implemented by providing appropriate scaffolding (Bodrova & Leong, 1998) and modeling (Burns & Casbergue, 1992; McGee & Purcell-Gates, 1997). Further, effective teachers of writing believe that children learn about written language by being immersed in text (Chapman, 1996).

Time for Independent Writing

　　Effective writing teachers make independent writing time for children a priority every day (Graham & Harris, 2016). Graham and colleagues (2012) argue that daily instructional time for writing helps children learn the skills and strategies to be effective writers and gain confidence in their writing abilities.

Adult and Peer Feedback through Conferencing

　　Effective writing teachers ensure that all writers get feedback on their writing, both from adults and peers (Graham & Harris, 2016). One effective approach for adults to provide feedback is through conferencing, which often occurs while children are writing and "teachers circulate among them and guide the writing, depending on the issues with which a student is struggling" (Lipson, Mosenthal, & Daniels, & Woodside-Jiron, 2000, p. 211). Conferencing often leads to children gaining insight into possibilities for revision (Fitzgerald & Stamm, 1990).

Time for Revision

　　When students revise their writing the organization of the writing, content of the writing, and use of writing mechanics improves (Matsumura, G., Patthey-Chavez, G., Valdez, R., & Garnier, H., 2002). Effective writing teachers provide opportunities for children to go through the writing process and allow time and support for the revision of writing.

A Variety of Sharing Opportunities

　　Effective teachers of writing know that when young children are encouraged to share their writing, there are many benefits. First, when young children share what they have written, their work naturally has an authentic purpose and audience (McCarrier, Pinnell, & Fountas, 2000). Further, sharing can build children's confidence in their ability to read, write, and speak (Lensmire, 1992; McCallister, 2008). Sharing also establishes a sense of community, and assists students in negotiating their social worlds at school and at home (Cazden, 1985; Dyson, 1993).

Praise and Recognition

　　Effective teachers of writing give authentic and specific praise for children's writing. In order to do this, teachers focus on what skills children are currently using in their writing, what knowledge they have about the writing process, and what writing skills students are ready to work on next. When the successful qualities of children's writing are recognized and acknowledged, children are motivated to continue improving their writing (Simic, 1993).

Instructional Practices that Support Digital and Traditional Writing

　　In the following sections, we will give specific ideas for incorporating the seven key tenets of high-quality writing instruction (described earlier) in relation to specific standards. In each section, possibilities for technology integration are included.

Oklahoma Standard 1.3.W.3 Students will express an opinion in writing about a topic and provide a reason to support the opinion.

Authentic Reasons for Writing. One way to present opinion writing in an authentic way is to invite students to read letters to the editor from the local newspaper. They could be asked to talk about issues in their community (within school or their neighborhood at large) that are controversial and worthy of exploring. Once children get excited about real and interesting topics, their writing will begin to flourish.

Modeling and Scaffolding through Mini-Lessons and Group Writing. To model opinion writing, it is helpful to first write a group opinion piece on a topic that appeals to the whole class. After determining the group topic through an active class discussion, the teacher can demonstrate listing powerful reasons and prioritizing these reasons in an order that will make the greatest impact on the reader. In addition, the teacher can demonstrate starting the class opinion piece with an exciting hook and close with a powerful ending. Finally, teachers can model the importance of being reasonable when stating support for their opinions, in order to be more convincing to their reader. This can be modeled by reading opinion pieces together from different points of view and discussing which ones are more convincing and why.

Time for Independent Writing. After children have read many effective opinion pieces from various points of view and participated in opinion piece writing as a group, they are ready to begin writing on their own. Graphic organizers are helpful for children in the prewriting stage of opinion writing. For this genre, the organizer may have a line for children to write their topic and their point of view, along with space for multiple reasons supporting their argument. The graphic organizer can serve as a helpful reminder as children work on their pieces over multiple days.

A Variety of Sharing Opportunities. Children enjoy sharing opinion pieces with adults and peers because they are able to explain their intense feelings about a topic. It is important to give children a variety of revising and sharing opportunities during the writing process to extend the authentic purpose of their writing – to communicate and share with others.

Integrating Digital Tools. As children start to write their opinion piece about the topic of their choice, they might begin by creating digital sticky notes using a digital platform like www.Padlet.com. Children can use Padlet to organize the ideas they plan to include to support their opinion. Each sticky note could include supporting evidence for the opinion. In addition to written text, Padlet allows children to insert web links, images, photographs, and videos. Therefore, as children conduct research to support their opinions, they can collect and organize multiple types of digital resources, in addition to text, using their Padlet notes. Further, these notes can be rearranged throughout the writing process in a way that facilitates the writer's organization of ideas. Padlet also allows children to easily share their notes with one another and their teacher in order to facilitate collaboration and provide teachers with an easy way of providing feedback.

As children move from pre-writing to drafting their opinion piece, they can use their notes on Padlet with text, images, photographs, and audio to create a multimedia project that can be shared with an authentic audience locally or more globally. One platform that can be used to create this type of project is www.nearpod.com. Using www.nearpod.com allows writers to upload a PowerPoint presentation or create slides, which can be thought of as "pages". Further,

the author can insert images to communicate their ideas, add links to web-based content, and an audio recording tool that can be used to record the writer reading their stories.

Therefore, the use of www.nearpod.com, allows kids to voice their own narrations and practice their own reading fluency by providing an authentic reason for re-reading. Additionally, www.nearpod.com allows the author to insert polls, quizzes, open-ended questions, etc. within the text that might serve as an interesting way to acquire information from and engage their readers. For example, if children are writing an opinion piece about supporting clean water legislation, the children might begin their text with a poll to "hook" the reader like, "Do you ever think about where your tap water comes from?" In this example, the writer engages by creating an interesting first sentence that takes advantage of the polling feature of the platform. Finally, the project can easily be shared via a link that is generated by the site. Thus, using a digital platform that can be distributed or posted electronically makes it possible for writers to share their ideas, and receive feedback from a broad audience outside of the walls of the classroom or school.

Oklahoma Writing Standard 1.6.W.2 Students will organize information found during group or individual research, using graphic organizers or other aids with guidance and support.

Authentic Reasons for Writing. In order for children to write effective informational pieces, they must first become experts on an authentic topic. Children often have many current areas of expertise including athletics (e.g., riding a bike, soccer, swimming), special talents (e.g., singing, juggling, tumbling), and hobbies (e.g., Pokemon Go, hiking, caring for pets). In addition, given accessible resources (e.g., books, videos, websites), children can become experts on many new topics of interest (e.g., dolphins, mountain climbing, film making). Children are likely to write more facts and fill their pieces with more voice and expression when they are allowed to choose a topic that they are excited and knowledgeable about.

Modeling and Scaffolding through Mini-Lessons and Group Writing. It is helpful to introduce the word "expert" and the definition of this word when teaching informational writing. When children understand the uniqueness of the knowledge they possess and the importance of sharing information with others, their motivation will rise. Teachers can demonstrate informational writing by choosing a topic that they know a lot about and that children will be excited to learn about. For example, if a teacher has been on an exciting adventure such as skydiving, she can share facts about this experience to pique children's interest. After crafting a model text, the teacher can invite the class to vote on a topic for a group text. As teachers and students take time to look through resources in small groups, take notes, and write their findings together, they will learn the steps of writing informational text in a non-threatening environment.

Time for Writing. In addition to writing informational texts about topics of interest, teachers can include opportunities throughout the day for children to record information about class projects. For example, during morning gatherings, children can help record attendance and special activities for that day. During Science, children can record predictions and findings from class experiments.

Praise and Recognition. Raising children's awareness about the power of informational writing and the multiple functions of this genre in everyday life helps foster a community of writers. By acknowledging each other as experts and sharing their knowledge with teachers and peers, children recognize the importance of recording information. In addition to sharing information, children learn new facts and build their vocabularies by engaging in dialogue and listening to their friends share their informational writing.

Possibilities for Technology Integration. After children determine their topic for writing, they might start by creating a digital graphic organizer known as a web or cluster that organizes ideas by connecting them into groups. Two examples of digital platforms that can be used to create a web are https://Popplet.com or https://bubbl.us. Children can use one of these platforms to create a digital web to organize the ideas that they plan to research about their topic. If the children are researching an animal, they might create a web that organizes the topics that they plan to include: what the animal eats, where the animal lives, etc. The children can research these topics using many sources, including the Internet.

There are a number of search engines, like Ask Kids and KidRex that are designed for children's use that filter out adult content. In some instances, there are specific websites that contain useful information. For example, if children are researching an animal of their choice, the National Geographic Kids website contains useful photographs and information. Then, as children research their topic they can organize and record the information on their digital web. Many digital webbing tools, like Popplet and bubbl.us, allow the creator to include text, photographs, videos, and drawings. Therefore, children can capture what they read and view on the Internet, but can also write text and include photos from the traditional print resources that they use.

As children prepare to publish their informational report, Voice Thread (https://voicethread.com) might be considered as a platform for their writing. Voice Thread is an online platform that allows users to upload a presentation (e.g. PowerPoint) that includes images and text. Then, the author can record audio for their presentation within Voice Thread. The unique affordance of Voice Thread is that readers can leave comments, via text, audio, or video throughout the presentation. This provides an authentic audience for the child's writing and allows for an avenue to provide feedback. However, a constraint of this platform is that there is small fee for educators to utilize the site.

Oklahoma Writing Standard 1.3.W.1 Students will begin to write narratives incorporating characters, plot (i.e. beginning, middle, and end), and a basic setting (i.e. time, place) with guidance and support.

Authentic Reasons for Writing. A powerful entry point for young writers is writing about personal experiences. When children write about their own life events, they are able to craft their stories with a beginning, middle, and end by simply retelling their experience. In addition, writing about personal experiences allows young writers to insert sensory details and feelings that would only be known or felt by the author of the story. Sharing personal narratives with classmates is an authentic reason for writing when these pieces are used to build community within the classroom.

Modeling and Scaffolding through Mini-Lessons and Group Writing. To demonstrate effective narrative writing, it is important for teachers to write in this genre in front of their students. As teachers model writing about their own personal moments or use their imagination to create stories, students begin to view their teachers as authors. They also observe the audience's reaction when their teacher is writing and begin to understand what story elements make a narrative engaging.

In addition to teachers' modeled narratives, children's literature is a powerful resource in demonstrating effective techniques for narrative writing. For example, *Charlotte's Web* demonstrates one way to hook the reader by beginning with the question, "Where's Papa going with that ax?". Donald Crews' book, *Shortcut*, demonstrates how an author can zoom in on a topic, because this book tells the story of a specific event.

Time for Independent Writing. When children are ready to begin their own narratives, graphic organizers can be very helpful in guiding the prewriting process. Organizers that encourage children to plan the different parts of their stories (e.g., beginning, middle, end) before writing assist in story development and organization. Organizers that encourage children to think about their senses in relation to the story or to describe their characters help children add important details to narratives. Additionally, children can bring photographs to spark ideas for writing about real or imagined events.

A Variety of Sharing Opportunities. Many teachers begin the year with personal narratives, because they allow children to explore their own cultures and traditions, empathize with other children's experiences, and reveal differences and similarities among classmates. As children write and share their narratives, they build early bonds of trust through sing and listening about personal experiences. These bonds will last throughout the year in their writing community.

Possibilities for Technology Integration. During the pre-writing stage, it is helpful for children to think through the major events that will occur in their narrative, including the beginning, middle, and end of story. Therefore, it can be useful for children to create a timeline of events for their story. Online platforms, like www.tikitoki.com and the timeline creator on www.readwritethink.org can be useful for this purpose. Timeglider.com is another online platform that can be used to create a digital timeline and includes the ability to write some events with larger text than other events. This might be useful for planning the main events and supporting details that will be included in the narrative. By creating the timeline digitally, instead of using paper and pencil, children can: (a) insert images and/or photographs into the timeline, (b) easily edit the timeline to include more details and events, and (c) share the timeline with others for collaboration and feedback.

Selecting or creating photographs and/or images that help to tell the story might be another possibility for meaningful integration of digital technology. Children might take photographs to add to their story, use pre-existing photographs from their families, use stock images and/or photographs available on their digital tool or from the Internet (e.g. a site like Pexels), or create digital drawings using tools like Doodle Buddy or Drawing Pad.

Conclusion

In 21st century classrooms, it is imperative that children have daily opportunities to write using both digital and paper-based tools. In Celia and Tonia's classroom, their teacher provides various avenues for students to engage in writing and she guides her students in selecting the best mode for their specific projects. Effective writing teachers, like Celia's and Tonia's, consider key tenets of high-quality writing instruction before deciding which tools will best meet their instructional goals. Further, to meet specific learning standards, they consider integrating technology within the framework of highly effective writing practices.

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