

Creating a Strategic Writing Instructional Plan across the Content Areas

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Chapter 1: Definition of Problem

In recent years it has become widely accepted that teaching students to write is the responsibility of teachers in all content areas, not just language arts teachers (Klein & Rose, 2010). In order to meet the writing needs of students, schools have been pushing for literacy across the curriculum, requiring teachers of all disciplines to view themselves as teachers of writing and implement writing instruction in their classrooms. Even with this push for literacy in all subject areas, we see inconsistent funding provided for literacy instruction, often pieced together from national, state, and local funds, which are rarely sustained for significant periods of time (Diallo, 2020). This irregular and often unpredictable funding leads to a constantly shifting writing curriculum and writing programs that are given very little time to prove effective before being cut out of the budget and replaced by another program (Levin et al. 2010). Because of this inconsistency, low test scores, marking students as below proficiency, are prevalent throughout districts across the country, affecting students of all demographics and backgrounds (Boyles, 2010). It is clear that simply buying new programs and telling teachers to assign writing tasks is not resulting in the necessary writing gains, as measured on high stakes summative assessments. With future careers and successful civilian participation in society requiring the ability to write with clarity and relevance, this is a serious deficit that must be addressed (Cena & Mitchell, 1998).

While there are many reasons why students may continue to struggle with writing, despite the assumption that they are learning to write in all classes, one key component is the need for consistent writing instruction and processes across the content areas (Dean, 2005). In order to improve writing performance, students need to learn targeted writing strategies that they can utilize when challenged with a writing task in any subject (Boyles, 2010). This uniformity is

especially important for students in the middle grades, many of whom are still learning how to organize and clearly communicate their thoughts through writing.

The impact of student writing extends far beyond the language arts classroom. Students who struggle with writing in language arts often struggle with writing, reading comprehension, and other classroom tasks across the curriculum. Using strategic writing tools improves students' reading comprehension, a benefit that can be observed and used to improve learning in all content area classes (Collins & Madigan, 2010).

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project was to support teachers in creating a strategic writing instructional plan across the content areas and to provide students with effective writing tools that they can use in all subject areas for a variety of writing prompts.. The project provides teachers with a clear path for writing instruction and provides students with consistent and flexible writing tools that they can utilize for any writing task or assignment. The goal of this project was to improve student writing through the implementation and use of common writing instruction and strategies across the curriculum. In order to improve student writing, it is important that teachers across the content area classes are implementing consistent strategic writing tools and processes that students can pull from for all of their writing needs. This project is broken into two parts.

The first part supports teachers in providing explicit writing instruction in their classes. This includes a professional development component so that teachers can work together, sitewide or in smaller teams, to ensure the uniform implementation of explicit writing instruction across all classes. The second part addresses the need for strategic writing tools that students can use for all of their writing tasks. This part includes strategic writing tools like annotation guides, sentence frames, and key vocabulary terms to support students in their writing development across all subject areas. This strategic writing process will likely contribute to improved reading

comprehension, as well as writing skills, resulting in increased student engagement and performance across all subject areas (Cena & Mitchell, 1998).

Preview Literature

As high stakes testing becomes more challenging, it is important that instruction becomes increasingly rigorous and provides students with ample opportunities to show what they know through writing, independently of support (Troia et al., 2018). However, writing continues to be a challenge for many students, and writing nonfiction texts proves to be especially difficult (Klein & Kirkpatrick, 2010). Considering that students' capacity to read and perform in multiple subject areas is assessed based on their ability to communicate their thinking through writing (Graham & Perin, 2007), it is crucial that students learn how to successfully write responses to open-ended questions. This can be done by teaching students how to write a response to text based questions, through modeling and guiding, aligned with a systematic release of responsibility (Boyles, 2010).

While systematic release of responsibility is key for student performance, in order to reach a level where students can successfully perform independently, they first need appropriate scaffolding. Vygotsky's developmental theory can guide teachers as we aid students until they can perform independently (Vygotsky, 1978). A student's level of independent performance is the best a child can perform independently. In order to improve student performance beyond the current level of independent performance, teachers can structure an activity so that the student can perform at a higher level by providing support. This may include modeling, prompting with oral hints, pairing students, or implementing graphic organizers that help students to organize and identify their thinking. This is called the level of assisted performance, a higher level of performance attained only with help. The zone of proximal development is the area between a

student's level of independent performance and level of assisted performance. When instruction is provided at the higher end of the zone of proximal development, student learning occurs and the level of independent performance increases (Vygotsky, 1978).

Research has shown that providing writing scaffolds during reading contributes to comprehension, builds background knowledge, and helps students connect their thinking about reading to their written responses (Collins & Madigan, 2010). Comprehension and communicating meaning happen together (Collins et al., 2017), so providing students with strategies and opportunities to write about their reading addresses the needs of many students in their zones of proximal development.

Preview Methodology

I reviewed literature and studies that explored how teachers and students successfully improved student writing skills, specifically focusing on strategic writing processes that could be used uniformly across content areas (e.g. Graham & Perin, 2007; Klein & Kirkpatrick, 2010). I discussed the topic of teaching writing with other teachers, including non-language arts teachers. I specifically focused on identifying areas of concern and struggle when it came to writing instruction. I used this information to create a strategic writing plan that all teachers, across content areas, can use to implement writing instruction in their classroom. This ensures consistency for students as they write in multiple content areas.

The first component of the project is the professional development guide that teachers can use with their professional learning communities, grade level teams, or site wide. This guide outlines how teachers can work together, implementing explicit writing instruction across the content areas. This component includes setting clear writing expectations, modeling and guiding

students through the writing process and implementing independent application of writing strategies (Boyles, 2010).

The second component of the project is the compilation of strategic writing tools for students to use, across all subject areas, to guide them in their writing. These tools are specifically curated to guide students in writing responses to a text. These tools include ThinkSheets, key vocabulary terms, and sentence frames. As students become stronger writers, these supports will be strategically removed for independent application of the writing process.

Significance of Project

This project is significant because it addresses the issue of low writing scores and the struggle that many students have with writing, especially when writing in response to a text (Collins et al., 2017). Many students struggle to write in response to open-ended questions, however this skill is required throughout all of education, and well beyond the school-age years, as students enter the workforce (Boyles, 2010).

It is difficult to overstate the importance of writing in our society. We use writing to persuade others, explore who we are, chronicle experiences, and combat loneliness. We write as a tool for learning and to establish connections between ideas. Writing opens up many possibilities for students and adults so that when writing skills are lacking, individuals cannot fully participate in academic or civic life (Graham & Perin, 2007). While in school, weaker writers are less likely to use writing to support and extend their learning and their grades are likely to suffer (Graham & Perin, 2007). Beyond the importance of test scores, writing is considered one of the most important skills graduates need when entering the workforce and employers are more likely to hire, retain, and promote candidates with more developed writing skills (Fischer & Meyers, 2017).

This project aims to create a strategic writing instructional plan that improves students' writing, not only to enhance learning and test scores but also to prepare them for a future that includes written communication. By providing students with strategic, reliable, and flexible writing tools, students are supported in the many purposes they have for writing. Whether writing to improve learning, writing in response to a text, or writing to reflect, the tools outlined in this project will provide students with a variety of structures and processes so that they are free to concentrate on the message they are trying to communicate rather than the cognitive process of writing (Wepner et al. p. 173, 2014).

Summary of Chapter

There is a clear need for improved writing instruction in schools, across the content areas (Graham & Perin, 2007). Language arts teachers are no longer solely responsible for teaching students to write, and writing has become an increasingly important component of all content areas, often used to assess how students comprehend and perform in all subjects (Klein & Rose, 2010). Based on this need, an explicit and systematic way to teach writing was created, along with a set of common strategic writing tools for all content area teachers to implement and utilize with their students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this project is to create a strategic writing instructional plan across the content areas and provide effective writing tools that students can utilize in all subject areas. Before creating this project, I reviewed existing research pertaining to writing instruction and the strategic writing process. There have been many studies conducted on the topic of writing and writing instruction in the classroom. After reviewing the literature, I identified six themes that were relevant to shaping this project. These themes were:

1. The importance and purpose of writing in school
2. Writing instruction across the content areas
3. Explicit writing instruction
4. Scaffolded writing practice
5. Gradual release of responsibility
6. Strategic writing tools

The Importance and Purpose of Writing in School

Writing in schools is broadly divided into three genres: argument, informational/explanatory, and narrative. The Common Core State Standards support instruction in these three genres and hold the position that it is through practice that students become stronger writers in all three genres (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2010) However, the CCSS gives special focus to argument writing, claiming that this style is the most important for college and career readiness. According to the CCSS, when writing arguments:

Students must think critically and deeply, assess the validity of their own thinking, and anticipate counterclaims in opposition to their own assertions... Such capacities are broadly important for the literate, educated person living in the diverse, information-rich environment of the twenty-first century.

Writing, specifically argument writing, not only helps students to become better writers but also supports them in becoming critical thinkers and savvy media-consumers in an ever changing, media-driven world. Experience with evidence-based writing allows students the opportunity to think critically about subject matter and requires them to offer evidence and data to support their claims and ideas (Klein & Rose, 2010).

One of the primary goals of the CCSS, as well as K-12 schooling, is to prepare students for higher education. Writing, specifically argument writing, is a key component to a successful college experience. Universities have an argument culture and when students arrive on campuses without having received adequate training in argument writing, they are unprepared to fully participate in classes and learning (Common Core Standards Initiative Appendix A, 2010). Students must be able to think critically, assess the validity of their own ideas, and address counterclaims with supporting data and evidence. These skills are valuable beyond the college classroom as students move through the world as fully participating members of society (Graham & Perin, 2007).

In addition to increasing critical thinking skills and preparing students for the expectations of higher education institutions, it is also necessary for future employees to acquire adequate writing skills to be successful in the workforce. When considering promotion opportunities, half of all companies report considering an employee's writing skills while two thirds of all salaried positions require at least some writing responsibility (Wolbers, et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important that teachers in K-12 classrooms are providing writing instruction that will adequately prepare students for the demands of the workforce.

Writing Instruction across the Content Areas

It is clear from the literature that writing instruction provides students with many benefits, especially as they transition out of the K-12 school system and into colleges and careers, where writing and critical thinking are crucial qualities to full and productive participation in society (Fischer & Meyers, 2017). However, writing instruction also benefits students while they are in school, specifically in content area classes such as math, science, and social studies. There are three primary reasons why students should be writing in their content area classes. First, it helps to build content knowledge and improves learning, second it allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in subject matter, and finally writing across the content areas improves students' writing skills (Klein & Rose, 2010).

Writing in content area classes is not a new idea. Over the last three decades, content literacy has grown as an increasingly important aspect of learning (Klein & Rose, 2010) and one of the main reasons why teachers assign writing tasks in these classes is so that students can improve their understanding of the subject material they are learning in class. Writing enhances learning, providing students with an opportunity to engage more deeply with new ideas and concepts that they are learning in their classes (Wepner, et al. p. 170, 2014). While writing about material read or presented in class improves the learning of information, using writing to support learning likely depends on how well students write (Graham et al., 2012). Therefore, content area teachers need not only assign writing tasks but must also provide writing instruction in order to reap the full benefits of writing in content area classes.

Writing in the content areas is also commonly used as a way for students to show what they have learned and to demonstrate their knowledge in a subject (Wepner, et al. p. 174, 2014). Writing tasks provide an opportunity for students to show sufficient content knowledge in a more

robust way than other forms of assessment, such as multiple choice tests (Klein & Rose, 2010). These tasks promote ingenuitive thinking with opportunities to support original thought and insight using evidence and data to support claims and ideas (Klein & Rose, 2010).

If our goal as educators is to prepare students for life after K-12 education, another purpose of writing in the content area classes must be improved student writing skills. Writing in a variety of content areas allows students to practice writing for different purposes and audiences (Wepner et al. p. 173, 2014). Writing a hypothesis in science class for an audience of scientific focused individuals looks very different from writing an historically-based script from an ancient civilization that will be presented in a social studies class. This variety builds fluency, competence, and independence (Wepner et al. p. 173, 2014), these are the very qualities we are looking to enhance with writing across the content areas. To support this fluency, competence, and independence, teachers can work together to incorporate writing into all areas of the curriculum. When cross-curricular teachers work together to plan writing instruction as a team, they are more likely to see growth in their students' writing than when they are given top-down instructions to teach writing in their classes (Hertzberg & Roe, 2015). Writing skills are improved when students learn to take what they learn in one class and apply it in different contexts in another class (Wood, 2007).

Explicit Writing Instruction

Studies on teacher effectiveness have consistently demonstrated that teachers have a profound impact on student learning. These studies have shown that teachers who directly and explicitly teach students what they need to know through meaningful interactions and guided student learning are increasingly effective (Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009). Explicit writing instruction refers to the explicit and systematic teaching of writing and strategies, through which

students acquire genre knowledge such as purpose, content, and structure, and learn strategies for planning, revising, and editing texts (De Smedt, et al., 2020).

The purpose of explicit writing instruction is to make the usually invisible, and sometimes elusive, writing process evident so that students have a clear vision of how to approach a writing task. During explicit writing instruction a variety of writing strategies can be taught and modeled so that students become familiar with multiple strategies and can easily incorporate them into their writing process. Providing students with clear writing strategies frees up cognitive ability so that students can focus on the content they want to communicate through their writing, not the cognitive process of writing (Wepner et al. p. 173, 2014). Through explicit instruction students may be taught writing strategies such as planning, summarizing, or citing evidence.

Explicit instruction has been found to be an effective teaching tool and has been regularly found to improve student writing. A meta-analysis of writing interventions found that explicit instruction improved student writing performance, no matter what strategy or topic the explicit instruction covered, the only exception being grammar instruction which was not found to improve student writing performance (Graham et al. 2012).

Scaffolded Writing Practice

Scaffolding during writing instruction is a form of support provided by the teacher for the students in order to bridge the gap between current performance and goal performance (Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009). This scaffolding can take on many forms such as modeling, prompting with oral hints, pairing students, or implementing graphic organizers that help students to organize and identify their thinking. Vygotsky's developmental theory can guide teachers as they aid students until students can perform independently. A student's level of independent

performance is the best a child can perform independently. In order to improve student performance beyond the current level of independent performance, teachers can structure an activity so that the student can perform at a higher level by providing support (Films Media Group, 1994). This is called the level of assisted performance, a higher level of performance attained only with help. The zone of proximal development is the area between a student's level of independent performance and level of assisted performance. When instruction is provided at the higher end of the zone of proximal development, student learning occurs and the level of independent performance increases (Vygotsky, 1978).

Research has shown that providing writing scaffolds during reading contributes to comprehension, builds background knowledge, and helps students connect their thinking about reading to their written responses (Collins & Madigan, 2010). In a meta-analysis on writing instruction, researchers found that providing appropriate scaffolds improved student writing in every study analyzed. Some of the scaffolding included in the studies were instructional arrangements where children worked together, setting clear and specific goals, and providing activities to help students gather and organize ideas (Graham, et al, 2012).

One type of scaffolded writing practice that has been shown to be effective is the use of graphic organizers to help students write about their thoughts as they read and learn (Collins & Madigan, 2009). As discussed earlier, the purpose of writing in content area classes is often to improve learning and deepen understanding of subject material as well as to promote critical thinking supported by data and evidence. Graphic organizers provide support for students as they write about their reading and learning, identifying information to construct new meaning (Collins & Madigan, 2009).

Strategic Release of Responsibility

While scaffolding is a crucial piece to student learning, there must also come a time for a strategic release of responsibility, where students begin to work independently of the scaffolds that they have used to grow in their writing performance. The idea of the gradual release of responsibility is presented in many forms and is frequently recognized with the catchphrase “I do, we do, you do.” The “I do” component consists of the explicit instruction and modeling provided by the teacher, as students are actively learning. The “we do” component involves students writing with scaffolds and support. Finally, the “you do” component is the part of the learning process when students write independently of scaffolds (Webb et al., 2019). Once students have learned and practiced how to use effective writing strategies, the next step is for independent practice, which comes with the gradual release of responsibility.

Initially Pearson and Gallagher (1983) envisioned the gradual release of responsibility as a three step process that would move smoothly from modeling to guided practice, to independent application, however this model has changed over time (Webb et al., 2019). Teachers now move flexibly between the stages, returning to explicit instruction and scaffolding as necessary. While this flexibility is important to meet students’ needs, especially the needs of struggling writers, it should not replace the final transition to independent practice. True mastery means that students can produce grade level writing without the support of sentence frames, a list of steps, or graphic organizers (Boyles, 2010).

The gradual release of responsibility does not necessarily happen in one class period, though sometimes it does. Depending on how familiar students are with the topic being addressed or the writing strategy being learned, it may take a few days or a few weeks to reach independent application of a writing task (Webb et al., 2019). When planning for independent

practice, there are some questions that teachers can ask themselves to help ensure that students are able to perform the task independently. Rupley, Blair and Nichols (2009) outline the following reflective questions:

1. Is the intended practice related to the students' needs?
2. Is the level of the materials appropriate, and are the materials interesting?
3. Is the content of the practice within the students' experiential background?
4. Are different ways of practice provided to meet students' needs and maintain their interest?
5. Is the amount of practice appropriate for the instructional period?
6. Are directions and examples provided to students to ensure understanding (i.e., are they clear)?
7. Is it necessary to vary the type of practice in one class period (e.g., by having students work on two or three different types of materials relating to one aspect of reading), or will one practice activity be sufficient?

Strategic Writing Tools

Similar to strategic writing instruction, in which teachers deliberately and explicitly instruct students on how to write, strategic writing tools aim to clearly provide students with multiple writing tools that they can use for any writing task (Dean, 2017). The goal of providing strategic writing tools is to make the writing process visible, demystifying the thinking behind writing, so that students clearly understand how to write independently (Schwartz, 2016). As discussed earlier, the thinking behind writing is first made visible through explicit instruction, including teaching students strategies like summarizing, planning, and citing evidence. The use of strategic writing tools goes further than this instruction as students begin to write

independently and across content areas. Making connections and becoming a strategic writer means that students must be able to learn a strategy or tool in one class or subject and apply the strategy or tool under different conditions in another class (Wood, 2007).

In order for students to successfully use strategic writing tools, they must have the opportunity to form habits while writing. A writing routine or strategy should be used over and over in a variety of contexts until it becomes a habit (Schwartz, 2016). Strategic writing tools are not a list of strategies to memorize or worksheets and formulas that every student uses every time they write (Dean, 2017), although they may include graphic organizers, sentence frames, and formulas. Strategic writing instruction makes students aware of the strategic tools they use when they write, so that they can quickly and easily pull from these strategies for any writing task. Some possible strategies and tools include: visualization, free writes, debate/discussion, research, mentor texts, highlighting and annotating, outlines, and peer reading (Dean, 2005).

Conclusion

This literature review presented the relevant research as it pertains to creating a strategic writing plan that can be used across all content area classes. This literature addressed the purpose of writing instruction, the need for writing instruction across the content areas, the process of gradual release of responsibility, including explicit instruction, scaffolding, and independent application, and finally the importance of strategic writing tools. Recognizing the crucial role of effective writing instruction is the first step in improving student writing. The research shows that implementation of the strategic writing process will benefit students in all subject areas, stretching beyond impacts on writing. While most teachers across the content areas recognize that they play a role in providing writing instruction, many are not aware how they can use this type of instruction to increase content area knowledge. Collaborating across site teams to create a

strategic writing plan that implements consistent writing tools is one way that teachers can meet the need for writing instruction across content areas. In the next chapter the methodology for how this project was created will be described.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This project was created with the goal of improving student writing skills and assessment scores. The purpose of this project was to create a strategic writing instructional plan across the content areas and provide strategic writing tools that students can utilize in all subject areas for a variety of writing prompts. The school where this project was focused has had writing scores that consistently fall below grade level expectations (California Department of Education Dashboard, 2020). Given the importance of writing, not just for the purpose of improved test scores, but also for participation in daily civic life, this project was created to support both teachers and students in order to improve student writing (Graham & Perin, 2007).

The literature shows that writing across all content area classes improves both student performance in classes and student writing in general (Klein & Rose, 2010). However, many content area teachers struggle with providing effective writing instruction (Graham & Perin, 2007) and often assume that writing skills which are taught in language arts classes will effortlessly be transferred to use in other classes. Many students do not recognize or make this transfer of skills of their own, and this assumption leaves many students struggling to write in content area classes (Klein & Kirkpatrick, 2010). This project provides teachers with the resources necessary to develop a common strategic writing instructional plan in order to support student writing across all subjects. The teacher's guide includes plans to create a comprehensive literacy team and guidance on how teachers can collaborate to create a strategic instructional writing plan, allowing for modifications as needed. This guide also includes instructional guidelines that propose a gradual release method to deliver strategic writing instruction.

Design

There are two parts to the design of this project. The first is the teacher's guide, which includes support in creating and implementing a strategic writing plan that can be used across the

content areas. In creating this component, I relied on studies that analyzed the effectiveness of writing instruction strategies. In developing strategies for effective writing instruction, I reviewed many meta analyses that looked closely at what types of instruction were most influential in improving reading scores (Graham et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007; Koster et al., 2015). I also relied on literature about the process of gradual release to create the teacher's guide. This process begins with teachers providing explicit instruction and modeling how to complete a task. Then teachers and students move on to guided support, where students work with graphic organizers, in pairs, or with other scaffolding that assists them in completing a writing task. Finally, students complete a similar task independently of the previously provided scaffolding (Webb et al., 2019). Because this is a commonly understood and frequently implemented strategy used by teachers, I incorporated this structure into the teacher's guide. This guide is compiled in a binder and is divided into sections for easy reference.

The second part of this project is the compilation of strategic writing tools for students. Similar to the teacher's guide, the student resources are contained in a reproducible packet and are clearly divided into sections. This component was intentionally created with a limited number of resources so as not to overwhelm students as they learn to use the strategic writing tools. If teachers have specific tools that they would like to incorporate into their students' writing practice, these can be added. Also, any resources that a team of teachers determines will not meet the needs of their students can be omitted during the reproducing of resources.

Intended Audience and Setting

This product is designed for middle school teachers, specifically for sixth grade teachers at Landmark Middle School. While the project was utilized in this specific setting, it can be adapted for writing instruction for all grades at the middle school level. The focus of the

instructional writing plan is to create a common writing practice across content areas, therefore the project is targeted for school settings in which students learn from a variety of teachers throughout the day, rather than in one self-contained classroom. However, if a site wanted to streamline writing instruction across classrooms, they may also find the resources helpful.

There are two primary recipients of the project materials, teachers and students. The teacher guide has been designed to support teachers in their writing instruction and to facilitate planning across the content areas. Administrators, reading and writing specialists, academic coaches, and professional development staff may also find these materials useful and may find guidance from the teacher's guide if creating an instructional writing plan is a site wide endeavor.

The student materials are designed to be used by students, and by the end of the year, students should be able to independently refer to these resources and determine how they can best use them to support them in their writing. The strategies in this project have been specifically identified to support struggling writers, or those who write below grade level, however the project includes enough opportunity for differentiation, that it can be used by students of varying abilities.

Instruments

The instruments created in this project include the teacher's guide and the student tools. I created the teacher's guide in two parts: the collaboration piece and the instructional piece. I created and designed these instruments with the guidance of literature analyzing the best strategies for writing instruction.

For the compilation of student writing tools, I used many existing resources. I included a modified traffic light outline from Step Up to Writing. I also included multiple sentence frames and annotation guides using AVID strategies as a resource (LeMaster, 2011).

Procedures and Evaluation of Process

In order to create a project that could be utilized by teachers and students across the content areas, I started with a literature review of the most effective writing instructional strategies. I organized the instructional strategies into four main categories: clearly explaining expectations, explicit instruction and modeling, guided practice, and independent application (Boyles, 2010). I also combed the literature for effective writing tools that students could use in multiple settings, across a variety of content areas and for multiple writing tasks and prompts.

After reviewing the literature and identifying the best practices in writing instruction, I approached my colleagues to determine what areas of writing instruction they felt was most critical to the subjects that they teach as well as where they struggle or would like additional support in writing instruction. As a literacy leader, I collaborated and encouraged others to try new things, but also recognized where I could and could not make a difference (Wepner et al., 2014). Therefore, it was crucial I gained the insight of my colleagues on writing instruction in their subject areas, and asked them if the materials I planned to create would support them in writing instruction and if they believed they could implement these strategies in their classrooms. When there was resistance to any of the proposed strategies, I asked what would be a more effective support for writing instruction.

Once I gathered input from my colleagues I began to create the materials, beginning with the teacher's guide. The teacher's guide has a collaboration piece and an instructional piece. The collaboration piece is designed to guide site teams, departments, or professional learning

communities as they develop a strategic writing instructional plan. Using regular meetings and a collaborative process of creating a shared strategic writing instructional plan allows teachers time to reflect on their own practices while exposing them to other, more expert, writing teachers (Wepner et al., 2014). This is especially helpful in the case of non-language arts content area teachers, who may be less confident in implementing writing instruction in their classes.

The instructional piece includes information on what strategies teams and teachers may choose to implement as part of the instructional plan. For this piece, I focused on the gradual release of responsibility as students begin to write independently of support. Gradual release makes the thinking process evident to students and provides heavy guidance until students are confident to write independently. As teachers provide explicit instruction, they use modeling to verbalize the thinking that goes on during the writing process. This explicit instruction and modeling serves to clarify the writing process for students (Webb et al., 2019). As students learn the strategies and processes that support writing, their cognitive abilities free up, so that instead of focusing on how to write they can focus on the messages they want to communicate (De Smedt et al., 2020). I chose to incorporate the gradual release of responsibility because it has consistently been found to be an effective process (Graham & Perin, 2007; Webb et al., 2019). I found that I could not create a teacher's guide with just the collaborative piece or just the instructional piece; both of these components are critical to an effective and consistent writing strategy that spans across the content areas.

In addition to the teacher's guide, I compiled writing tools that students can utilize in their writing. These include sentence frames, outlines, and annotating tools. This resource has intentionally been kept to a minimum so as not to overwhelm students with too many tools. The curated tools were chosen because of their effectiveness in supporting writing. I made significant

modifications to the resources I used largely because I wanted the tools to be general enough to use in multiple subject areas for a variety of writing tasks and because I wanted them to be simple and streamlined so that students could use them independently with ease.

After these resources were created, I again returned to my colleagues to get their feedback on if and how they could utilize these resources in their classroom. Using this feedback, I made final modifications to the product before implementation.

Once the teacher's guide and student materials were finalized, I held my first team meeting with my grade level team to review the strategic writing plan and student materials with them. While participation in the meetings was voluntary, I tried to get as many sixth grade teachers to join the group, or to share their input via email, as possible. In order to implement this new strategy, I knew I would have to consider the school's culture and help reshape the staff's vision of literacy as one that all teachers are an integral part of. This required me to consider not only what was missing from our literacy instruction, but also whose voices were not being heard, because it is important to honor and foster multiple perspectives (Vogt & Shearer, 2011). At this time, we set up a meeting schedule for every two weeks. We reviewed how to implement the teaching strategies, discussing possible obstacles to writing instruction and brainstorming solutions to these foreseen problems. Meetings will continue regularly (every two weeks) for the remainder of the first semester. These meetings will be used to identify teacher and student struggles as well as to determine how teachers can make the instructional plan work, making modifications as necessary, in their classrooms.

As the school year progresses into the second semester, the meetings will shift to focus on independent student practice of writing skills. Strategic and accelerated intervention is one key element to a comprehensive literacy program (Vogt & Shearer, 2011). Therefore, we will

identify struggling writers and assess how these students write across the content areas, looking for any patterns or particular areas of strength and/or concern. We will also discuss, plan, and implement strategies to support our struggling readers, such as small group instruction, as it is important that assessment not only acts as a tool for evaluation, but also to determine adjustments to formative instruction (Dunsmuir et al., 2015).

Effectiveness of this project will be determined through both formal and informal assessments throughout the school year. Assessment of writing is critical to an effective writing program, and a robust assessment system significantly supports writing instruction (Dunsmuir et al., 2015). Landmark Middle School administers monthly Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs) through the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASPP) website in language arts classrooms. These will be used as common formative assessments to track the progress of student writing. IABs will be analyzed during team department meetings, which are held monthly during designated professional development hours on Wednesdays. Informal assessments will be gathered from all content area classes in the form of quick writes, end of chapter questions, and any other writing tasks assigned in the class. These assessments will be reviewed and analyzed during team meetings to identify trends and patterns across all students and to determine students who need increased support or additional instruction. Differentiating instruction, based on data gathered through formative assessment, to meet student needs is an important component of literacy instruction (Connor, 2019) and must continue to be a central part of the strategic writing instructional plan. Ongoing formative assessment of students and programs are two of the elements proven to support instructional improvement (Vogt & Shearer, 2011), so this is a crucial component of the project, as the goal is to improve student writing. Final assessment of effectiveness of the product will be determined through writing scores on the

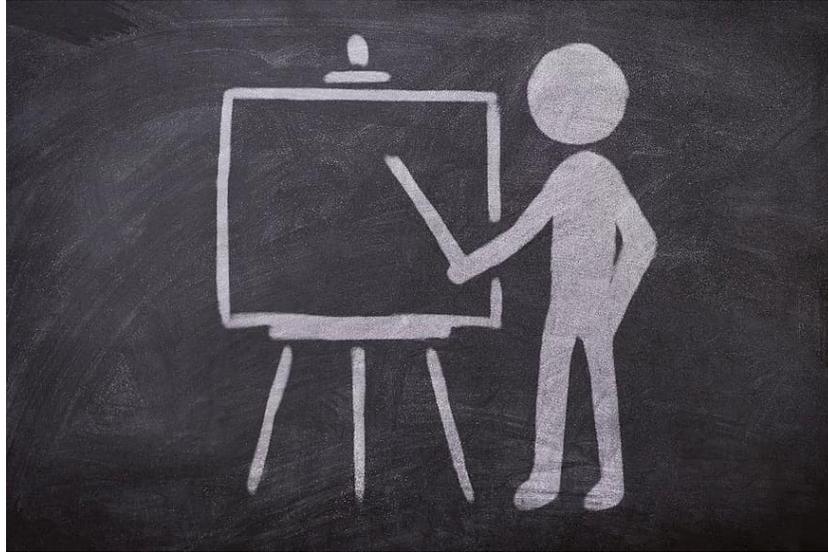
summative state assessment, administered in May. Student writing scores will be compared to scores from the previous year(s) and analyzed for changes.

Summary

The project's purpose was to create a strategic writing instructional plan across the content areas and provide strategic writing tools that students can utilize in all subject areas for a variety of writing prompts. The literature shows that the best way for teachers to increase student literacy is to work together to improve both the infrastructure and instructional strategies used at a school site. This infrastructure change comes through the regular meetings and collaboration of cross content area teachers and the instructional change comes through the implementation of the gradual release of responsibility and use of strategic writing tools.

Chapter 4: Project Presentation

The purpose of this project was to create a strategic writing instructional plan across the content areas and provide effective writing tools that students can utilize in all subject areas for a variety of writing prompts. The project is divided into three sections. Section 1 guides teachers through the process of gradual release during writing instruction. This section is designed to support teachers as they implement the writing instructional plan in their classroom. Section 2 supports teachers in creating a collaborative literacy team that will implement a common writing instructional plan. This section includes suggestions for scheduling meetings and agenda items as well as guidance on analyzing student work. Section 3 consists of a collection of writing tools that students can use to accomplish a variety of writing tasks across all subject area classes. These tools are intended to be reproduced and used by students on a regular basis.



Writing Instruction across the Curriculum

CREATING A STRATEGIC WRITING INSTRUCTIONAL
PLAN ACROSS THE CONTENT AREA CLASSES

Amber Diaz

Dear teachers,

Year after year, many of us struggle with implementing a writing plan that results in significant improvements in the writing of our students. In this guide, you will find suggestions for creating a common strategic instructional writing plan that teachers across your site or grade level can implement as a team. The purpose of creating a unified writing plan for teachers of all subject areas and grades is to provide students with common writing practices and routines that they can easily draw from when they are faced with any writing task in any content area class.

This guide is composed of three parts. The first includes how to implement the gradual release process during writing instruction. This portion is especially designed for non-language arts teachers who may not be familiar with teaching the writing process, but are familiar with gradual release. The second part includes direction for collaborating with teammates across subject areas, ensuring that students are receiving rigorous writing instruction and making progress towards writing goals. The final piece is a collection of writing tools that students can utilize when they are assigned a writing task.

The goal of this guide is twofold. First, I aim to provide teachers with a clear instructional path for providing writing instruction for students. This path is generic enough to be used for a variety of writing tasks and topics, and across all content areas. The second goal is to provide students with a variety of writing strategies that they can pull from to meet their needs as writers. Similar to the first goal, the student tools provided here are generic enough to be used for a variety of writing tasks and topics and across all content areas.

Remember, the writing process is fluid and the purpose of writing should always be about communicating ideas. This guide is meant to provide the flexibility required for students to fully engage in the writing process while still providing structure and support for students learning to

improve their writing as well as guidance for teachers looking to strengthen their writing instruction.

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Section 1

Writing Instruction

In today's college and career environments, the importance of writing cannot be overstated. However many students graduate from high school and college with very weak writing skills and limited confidence in their writing abilities. Studies have shown that when students participate in writing tasks more frequently, receive regular constructive feedback, and receive explicit writing instruction, their confidence in their writing and their writing skills grow (Fischer & Meyers, 2017). This section aims to provide you, the teacher, with a strategic plan for implementing writing instruction in your classroom, no matter what subject you teach. Whether your students eventually work in business, in the sciences, in the arts, or any other number of professions, they will undoubtedly benefit from improved writing skills.

Across education, there is ample research to support the process of gradual release, especially when it comes to writing instruction. In the gradual release model, teachers begin by providing students with explicit instruction, modeling how to complete various steps throughout the writing process. Next students write with guided support, using the scaffolds provided in the third section of this guide. Finally, students will practice independent application, where they write without support. It is also important that students be provided with clear expectations for their writing. This may take the form of a rubric or a checklist, which guides students as they work their way through the writing process.

This section outlines how you, the teacher, can implement the process of gradual release in your own writing instruction. Here I will outline what you may implement for each step of the process. As with the gradual release process in other subject areas, this process does not always happen in a straight line. Many times you may find that you need to go back to an earlier stage, perhaps explicit instruction and modeling or guided practice, multiple times before students are able to perform independently on writing tasks. It is important to continue to provide opportunity for independent practice, but it is also important to provide additional instruction and support when necessary.

Step 1

Providing Clear Expectations

The first step towards improving student writing is setting very clear and explicit expectations for the final product. Whether students are writing a response to a text based question at the end of a chapter in social studies or writing a full research report in science, students need to know exactly what their teacher is expecting to see included in the final product.

Before assigning the writing task, ensure that you have a clear picture of what you expect your students to turn in. This may require writing a rubric, reviewing the standards that you are assessing, and/or dissecting the question or prompt that your students are answering.

Once you have a clear picture of what you expect to see in your students' writing, be sure to clearly communicate these expectations to your students. This may include providing a rubric or checklist, reviewing exemplary samples or dissecting the question or prompt as a class. Giving students these clear expectations means that students, who must already work hard at the writing process, do not have to guess as to what they should include or not include in their writing.

The format through which you provided these expectations will likely vary based on the type of writing task you are assigning to your students. For example, if your students are writing a longer research report, it may make more sense to provide a rubric so that both you and your students can ensure that they include all pieces of the report that you expect them to include. If your students are answering a text-based question at the end of a chapter or reading passage, you may choose to annotate the question so that students clearly understand how to answer all parts of the question. The following pages include examples of how you can annotate questions and create standards based checklists to provide students with clear expectations for their writing.

Annotating a question:

When annotating a question, it is helpful to provide students with a simple key that they can use in many subjects for many different writing tasks. This key and an example is included in the student tools section of this guide, so that students can refer to this strategy for any writing task across the content areas. Once the question is annotated, it serves as a checklist for students to refer back to ensure that they have answered all parts of the questions.

KEY:

*Highlight verbs and question words. *indicates words highlighted in yellow

Underline the directions

Example:

*In what way is the Logan family in a better economic position than their neighbors? *How could that fact affect the Logans' willingness to stand up for themselves against racism? *Supply textual evidence for your answer.

Providing a Checklist

A checklist like this provides students with clear expectations. It is similar to a one-point rubric in that students either demonstrate mastery in the standard or not. It may be helpful to rephrase some of the standards into student-friendly language, depending on the grade and comprehension levels of your students. As students write and revise their work, this checklist ensures that they have demonstrated mastery in all standards that the teacher will be assessing.

Example checklist with standards:

- Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly. (W.6.1.A)
- Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text. (W.6.1.B)
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons. (W.6.1.C)
- Establish and maintain a formal style. (W.6.1.D)
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented. (W.6.1.E)

Example checklist with reworded standards

- State your claim in an introduction. (W.6.1.A)
- Organize your reasons and evidence into three body paragraphs. (W.6.1.A)
- Use relevant evidence that supports your claim and comes from reliable sources. (W.6.1.B)
- Use transition words. (W.6.1.C)
- Use academic language and writing style. (W.6.1.D)
- Include a conclusion that restates your thesis or claim. (W.6.1.E)

Step 2

Explicit Instruction and Modeling

Writing is a complex process, and can be especially challenging for students in the upper elementary and middle grades as they have just begun to move past learning the mechanics of writing and are focusing more on the content of their writing. Many teachers assume that since students in these grades have mastered the lower order writing skills like handwriting, they need very little writing instruction. However, most students still struggle with creating meaningful and coherent content and are just beginning to learn more complicated writing processes like planning, composing, and revising.

The purpose of explicit writing instruction is to make the usually invisible, and sometimes elusive, writing process evident so that students have a clear vision of how to approach a writing task. During explicit writing instruction a variety of writing strategies can be taught and modeled so that students become familiar with multiple strategies and can easily incorporate them into their writing process. Providing students with clear writing strategies frees up cognitive ability so that students can focus on the content they want to communicate through their writing, not the cognitive process of writing.

For the purpose of this guide, I consider the four stages of the writing process to be prewriting and researching, composing, revising, and editing. Each stage should be explicitly taught and modeled multiple times throughout the school year, in every content area class. Teachers should walk students through each step of the writing process, modeling with their own writing piece or with a piece written by the class as a whole. While students learn and practice the writing process, teachers can model this process using a doc cam, whiteboard, or poster paper as students simultaneously work on their own writing. Students should not be copying the teacher's writing during the modeling process; instead, they are looking to the teacher's work as a model of how to work through the process of writing as they complete their own paper.

The following list includes steps that you may choose to model with your students throughout the writing process. Your students do not need to do each and every thing on these lists every time they write, but they should have the opportunity to work through these four steps frequently.

Prewriting and research

- Annotating the writing prompt (included in student tools)
- Brainstorm, cluster, free write, outline (included in student tools)
- Access background knowledge
- Researching skills

Composing

- Moving from prewriting to composing
- Writing complete sentences and paragraphs
- Using sentence frames and word lists (included in student tools)
- Correctly formatting a paragraph or essay

Revising

- Peer review and constructive feedback
- Read aloud to self or others
- Reorganize paragraphs or sentences
- Make big changes to the content or structure of the writing

Editing

- C- correct capitalization
- U- use words correctly
- P- punctuate correctly
- S- spell check

Step 3

Guided Practice and Student Tools

Modeling and explicit teaching should continue throughout the year, especially as students learn new subject material and tackle more challenging writing topics. However, as students become increasingly familiar with the writing process, they are ready to move on to guided practice. In guided practice students may write with the supports included in the Student Tools section of this guide. During this phase, students are writing with the support of scaffolds, allowing them to free up cognitive space to focus on the content of their writing rather than the structure of their writing.

With guided practice, students have a toolbox full of strategies that they can pull from for any writing task. These tools include sentence frames, word lists, and outlines. Providing students with these tools, modeling and teaching how they can be used, and then allowing students to choose when they will use each tool gives students freedom in their writing while still offering support and guidance.

During the guided practice stage, students need both encouragement and corrections. When feedback is provided as immediately as possible, students can quickly correct any misunderstandings before they make the same mistakes over again. This helps students to cement and practice proper writing skills. When feedback is paired with multiple opportunities to complete writing tasks, students have the opportunity to refine and practice their skills (Fischer & Meyers, 2017). While constructive criticism and feedback play an important role during independent application, it is also important that students receive encouragement and corrections during the guided practice stage.

Annotating Questions

Students should be taught how to annotate questions. Many students who appear to understand a concept or a piece of literature struggle to answer writing prompts or questions because they do not fully comprehend the question or prompt that they are responding to. By teaching students to annotate the question, we are providing them with a deeper understanding of the question and help them to focus on information relevant to the writing prompt. A simple key for annotating questions can be found in the Providing Clear Expectations section as well as in Section 3: Student Tools.

Vocabulary terms

Another obstacle for many student writers is understanding challenging vocabulary both in the text and in writing prompts. There are a few tier 2 vocabulary terms that students will see repeatedly when confronted with writing tasks, so it is important that these terms are used regularly and that students understand what they mean. There are also many tier 3 content-specific terms that students must be familiar with in order to be successful writers in a variety of content area classes. Providing students with definitions and examples of how to use and understand these words is a necessary support to improve writing. A form to support students in using and understanding these terms is included in Section 3: Student Tools.

Sentence frames

Sentence frames give students a starting point when they are struggling with how to answer a question or begin a writing task. These frames are some of the most supportive tools included in this guide and should be removed from the students' toolbox with ample time before state testing or other high stakes writing assessments. Once students have internalized these sentence starters, they should be able to write independently of this scaffold. A number of sample sentence starters can be found in Section 3: Student Tools.

Outlines

Outlines serve as a tool to support students in organizing their ideas and thoughts before they begin writing. When students are familiar with a particular outline strategy that they can refer back to for multiple writing tasks, they have a reliable tool to organize their thoughts each time they sit down to write. There is a generic outline provided in Section 3: Student Tools. This tool can be used for any subject area and for any writing task. The amount of information included in the outline can be increased or lessened depending on the needs of the individual student.

Step 4

Independent Application

Providing scaffolding tools is essential for building confident and capable writers, however it is important to note that the scaffolding must be removed as students become stronger writers. This allows for accurate assessment of student writing skills and allows teachers to determine when additional interventions need to be put into place to ensure that students are able to write independently of support. Because additional intervention may be necessary, it is important that independent application of skills is incorporated throughout the school year, but especially towards the spring semester, as many teachers and students prepare for high stakes testing.

During independent application, students should be demonstrating their writing ability based on subjects and skills that they have already mastered. Independent application is not the time to teach new writing styles, genres, or strategies. Learning new skills should always be supported by explicit instruction, modeling, and guided practice. It is also helpful if students have had multiple interactions with the subject materials, through readings, lectures, and discussions, to ensure that they have ample background knowledge on the topic they are writing about.

Independent application can take many different forms. Performance tasks in math class, research reports in science and social studies, essays in language arts, and plays or creative writing in the arts are just a few examples of the different styles of writing that students may be asked to demonstrate. In any of these scenarios, independent application means that students are completing the task independent of all supports. There is no modeling or student tools provided at this stage. It is expected that students have had ample time to learn and practice with the scaffolds, so that they have internalized how to implement the strategies without support. Because this is the ultimate goal, it is important that all of the steps leading up to this release of responsibility have been in place and have been regularly and consistently practiced throughout the school year.

Section 2

Collaboration

In order to most efficiently implement the writing instruction outlined in section 1, it is beneficial for teachers to work together according to a common instructional writing plan. This provides students with a consistent plan when faced with any writing task. If the science teacher, math teacher, language arts teacher, social studies teacher, physical education teacher and enrichment teacher all approach writing instruction with the same format, students are less likely to be confused when completing writing tasks and are more likely to transfer the information that they have learned from one class to another. While each subject has writing styles specific to its discipline, the process through which teachers instruct students on how to write may still remain consistent. All content area teachers can follow the process of gradual release, providing students with a certain level of predictability when they are confronted with a writing task. All content area teachers can also use the student tools to support and scaffold students in their writing during the guided practice phase.

This section of the teacher's guide is designed to help you and your team develop a common writing instructional plan. This common plan will not only help your students become better writers, but will improve their ability to think about and more deeply understand content area topics. As students improve their writing skills, they become more adept at writing about various topics, leading to deeper conversations and a better understanding of the material being read, discussed, and written about in all subject areas.

Meetings and Agenda Items

The following suggested meeting schedule is based on a school year that runs from August or September through May or June, with two meetings scheduled per month. When scheduling your meetings, consider the holiday schedule, including Thanksgiving break, winter break, spring break, etc. so that there is adequate time to meet the literacy team's needs. This schedule is created assuming that high stakes state testing will occur in May. Review your district's or site's testing schedule to ensure that your team has ample time to work through April's meetings prior to testing. This will ensure that students are better prepared for the writing portion of state assessments.

Month	Meeting Number	Suggested Agenda Items
September	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discuss the purpose of strategic literacy instruction ● Review Teacher Guide and student tools ● Address questions and concerns/ brainstorm solutions to proposed concerns
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plan for implementation of writing instruction ● Choose 1-2 student tools to implement as a team
October	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide feedback on writing instruction and student tools, address questions and concerns, brainstorm solutions, share successes ● Establish norms and expectations for sharing student samples ● Establish a schedule for sharing student samples
	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● 1-2 teachers share samples ● Plan for continued implementation of writing instruction ● Choose 1-2 student tools to implement as a team
November	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● 1-2 teachers share samples ● Address questions and concerns/ brainstorm solutions to proposed concerns
	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● 1-2 teachers share samples ● Plan for continued implementation of writing instruction ● Choose 1-2 student tools to implement as a team
December	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● 1-2 teachers share samples ● Address questions and concerns/ brainstorm solutions to

Month	Meeting Number	Suggested Agenda Items
		proposed concerns
	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● 1-2 teachers share samples ● Plan for continued implementation of writing instruction ● Choose 1-2 student tools to implement as a team
January	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● 1-2 teachers share samples ● Plan for systematic release of responsibility ● Address questions and concerns/ brainstorm solutions to proposed concerns
	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● 1-2 teachers share samples ● Plan for systematic release of responsibility ● Address questions and concerns/ brainstorm solutions to proposed concerns
February	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● Everyone share data on student independent practice ● Analyze data for common struggles, identify students struggling across content areas ● Develop a plan for intervention for struggling students, develop a plan to review writing strategies and tools through guided practice with the whole class if necessary
	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● Everyone share data on student independent practice ● Analyze data for common struggles, identify students struggling across content areas ● Develop a plan for intervention for struggling students, develop a plan to review writing strategies and tools through guided practice with the whole class if necessary
March	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● Everyone share data on student independent practice ● Analyze data for common struggles, identify students struggling across content areas ● Continue to plan intervention support for struggling students
	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● Everyone share data on student independent practice ● Analyze data for common struggles, identify students struggling across content areas ● Continue to plan intervention support for struggling students

Month	Meeting Number	Suggested Agenda Items
April	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● Everyone share data on student independent practice ● Analyze data for common struggles, identify students struggling across content areas ● Determine test prep writing strategies and performance task assessment
	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review norms and protocols for sharing ● Everyone share data on results of performance task ● Analyze data for common struggles, identify students struggling across content areas ● Plan for intensive intervention for struggling students
May	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess strengths and weaknesses of this year's instructional writing plan. What worked well, what can be tweaked and improved, what should be eliminated? ● Address questions and concerns/ brainstorm solutions to proposed concerns ● Set up a rough plan for next year's literacy team
	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Meet with a wide variety of teachers across grades and content areas ● Share successes and plans for next year ● Address questions and concerns/ brainstorm solutions to proposed concerns ● Compile a list of teachers interested in participating on next year's literacy team

Norms and Procedures

It is important that teachers understand that once they have signed up to be a part of the literacy team they need to attend the meetings consistently throughout the year and they must be active in utilizing instructional writing strategies and gathering evidence and data to assess the strategies. Participants will also be required to collect evidence of the writing strategies teachers and students are using in class. These can look like lesson plans, student work, assessments, photos or videos of tasks and activities, etc.

Some suggested norms and guidelines for the smooth operation of the literacy team include:

- Follow the protocol for presenting and discussing student work.
- Come to meetings prepared to share student samples and open to discuss new strategies.
- Review the norms and protocols at the beginning of each meeting to ensure clarity and focus of inquiry discussion.
- Ask challenging questions to the presenting teacher, respectfully. Acknowledge that not every strategy works every time with every student.
- Be open to sharing possible solutions and foreseen concerns when discussing intervention strategies.

Protocol for presenting and discussing student work

Step 1: Introduction

Facilitator reviews norms and procedures. Introduce any new or unfamiliar participants.

Step 2: Presentation (10 minutes)

Presenter describes the teaching and learning context.

Presenter shares materials, including student work.

Allow time for participants to examine the work.

Presenter asks one or two focus questions about the work.

Participants remain quiet during step 2. Participants are taking notes.

Step 3: Questions (5 minutes)

Participants ask non-evaluative questions, for example, “what happened after X?”

Facilitator invites participants to rephrase questions that are posed in an evaluative manner. For example,

“Why didn’t you do X?” may be rephrased as “What happened when you did Y?”

There may not be time to answer all participants’ questions.

Step 4: Writing (5 minutes)

Participants and the presenter write about the presentation, including addressing focus questions.

Step 5: Round Robin Discussions (15 minutes)

Round 1: Description

Participants describe what they do or do not see in the work. Example: “This student did not correctly use capital letters here.” Participants may pass if they have nothing to add.

Round 2: Generalization

Participants make generalizations about what they see in the work. Example: “This student uses capitalization erratically.”

Round 3: Recommendation

Participants make recommendations based on previous rounds. Example: “The student should receive direct explicit instruction on how to use capitalization correctly.”

Note: Participants and the facilitator should make an effort to ensure there is a balance of warm and cool comments. Warm comments focus on what works and should be continued. Cool comments indicate what needs improvement. All members should focus on addressing the focus questions.

Step 6: Presenter Reflection (10 minutes)

The presenter reflects on the discussion aloud, to deepen understanding and answer focus questions.

The presenter may also propose solutions, actions, questions, concerns, dilemmas, and correct misunderstandings. Participants remain quiet and take notes.

Step 7: Debrief

Presenter and participants thank one another for their participation and reflect on the effectiveness of the

Protocol and engage in a general discussion of the process.

Facilitator Tip

In order to clarify the difference between description and generalization in step 5, the facilitator may practice this with the participants. The facilitator could start by asking participants to describe a sample piece of work. If a participant says, “It’s poorly written,” the facilitator could point out that this is a generalization. Participants should describe what topic is

being written about, if there is evidence cited, or if a piece of punctuation has been used correctly. If a participant says, “It is sloppy,” they should first describe the size of the letters, the consistency of the writing tool used, or the organization of the paper.

Section 3

Student Tools

This section is a compilation of writing tools that are intended to be used by students for a variety of writing tasks in any subject area. These tools are intended to be reproduced and used consistently throughout the school year, in all subject areas, until students reach the independence practice phase. There are a limited number of tools included here, so that students have many opportunities to interact with each individual tool and are consistently using common tools in all content area classes for a variety of writing purposes.

The goal of the consistent use of these tools is to help students in transferring writing skills from one class and subject area to another. As students realize that they can use one tool, or a small compilation of tools, in a variety of settings, the writing process becomes more manageable and consistent. These tools alleviate students from having to focus their cognitive skills on how to write, so that they can instead focus on the content that they wish to communicate through their writing. Additionally, the more students are exposed to these common tools and practice using them when writing, the more comfortable they will be with using these tools when confronted with a writing task. As they approach the independent practice stage of writing, students will have become so familiar with these tools, that they will successfully and independently write, without needing the scaffolds any longer.

While the student tools included in this guide support most writing tasks, there may be writing assignments that are not adequately addressed with the provided tools. If you, as a teacher, decide to provide your students with additional writing supports or scaffolds, it is suggested that you share these resources with your literacy team, so that your students are exposed to this tool in a variety of settings.

Also included in this section are Teacher Tips, designed to provide support and suggestions for teachers on how to best use the student tools. These tips are included after each student tool and are not intended to be reproduced for student consumption

Annotating Questions

Annotation Key

1. Highlight verbs and question words. *Indicates words highlighted in yellow.
2. Underline directions

Examples:

1. *Cite the author’s main claim and one reason why the author makes the claim. *What evidence does the author provide to support this position? *Use details from the text to support your answer.
2. *Refer to one or more details from the text to *explain both the suspected and the true causes of yellow fever. *Why was Benjamin Rush suspicious of the suspected cause?

After annotating the questions, use your annotations as a checklist. Make sure that you have addressed each verb and question word in your answer. This will ensure that you have answered all parts of the questions.

Example:

1. ~~Cite~~ the author’s main claim and one reason why the author makes the claim. ~~What~~ evidence does the author provide to support this position? ~~Use~~ details from the text to support your answer.

1. The author’s main claim is that fans of pop culture, like celebrities and TV shows, have changed because of the rise of social media and the internet. On page 17, the author states that now fans can, “pull out your phone to see what your favorite star had for breakfast” and instantly connect with celebrities face to face. The author also explains how fans used to have to pay to join fan clubs and hopefully wait to receive a response to fan mail. Because of these differences, fans of the past and fans today have very different experiences.

<u>Verbs</u>				
Analyze	Cite	Describe	Determine	Explain
Highlight	Identify	Indicate	Infer	Make
Refer	State	Support	Use	Write

Question Words

In what way	How	What	Who	Why
-------------	-----	------	-----	-----

Vocabulary Terms

Tier 2 Terms			
WORD	PART OF SPEECH	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
Analyze	Verb	To examine and explain	If we analyze the problem, perhaps we can solve it.
Cite	Verb	To refer to a source when writing or thinking	If you take a quote from a book, you have to cite your source.
Claim	Noun	Statement of something as true	Do you believe his claim that the house is haunted?
Determine	Verb	To conclude after studying or watching	Some scientists have determined the age of dinosaur teeth.
Evaluate	Verb	To study carefully and judge	They need time to evaluate the book before making a recommendation.
Identify	Verb	To figure out what something is	We will identify the most important part of the story.
Infer	Verb	To come to a conclusion based on facts or logical evidence	You won't be given all of the details you need, so you will have to infer.
Indicate	Verb	To state or express briefly	Indicate that you have finished the exam by raising our hand.
Passage	Noun	Part of a written work	In his book, he wrote an emotional passage about the death of his father.
Refer	Verb	To speak of or mention	She referred to his work in her speech.
Reference	Verb	To speak of or mention	The teacher began her speech by referencing the hard work of her students.
State	Verb	To express something clearly in speech or writing.	When defending your point of view, it is important to clearly state your opinion.
Support	Verb	To provide proof or evidence of	What other people say supports his story.

Teacher Tips

Tier 2 vocabulary terms are academic vocabulary that appear in many different contexts across content area studies. The Common Core recommends ongoing and regular practice with academic vocabulary as it helps students to understand and access increasingly difficult levels of text (Achieve the Core).

Tier 3 words are more common in informational texts than literature and are specific to a domain or field of study (Liben, 2013). These words are key to understanding concepts in subject area classes such as science, social studies, and math. Students can use the blank Tier 3 Terms chart to track vocabulary terms that are key to specific content area classes.

Achieve the Core offers a tool that can help you to identify academic language in texts. Simply copy and paste a text, up to 20,000 words, into the text box, select the grade you are teaching, and the Word Finder will highlight all grade-appropriate academic language, providing part of speech, definition, and an example sentence. The Academic Word Finder is accessible at <https://achievethecore.org/academic-word-finder/#new> .

Word Lists and Sentence FramesTransition Words

First	Then	Also	Initially
Next	Finally	In addition	Equally important

Conclusion Starters

As is evident	Clearly	As a result
For these reasons	As you can see	This evidence shows

Citing Evidence

On page ____, the author states, “_____.”

According to the author on page ____, “_____.”

The evidence found on page ____ states, “_____.”

Page ____ states, “_____.”

In paragraph ____ the text states, “_____.”

The author states in paragraph ____, “_____.”

TVC Summary and Simple Summary

Text	Verb	Complete the sentence
Complete the sentence		

- (detail 1) _____

- (detail 2) _____

- (detail 3) _____

- (detail 4) _____

<u>Text Verbs</u>			
describes	argues	states	recommends
explains	claims	illustrates	compares

Teacher Tip

Teachers or students can choose whether they want to use just the TVC summary or the entire simple summary. The TVC summary (Text, Verb, Complete the sentence) is one sentence summarizing the main idea of the text. This step includes naming the text and author, choosing an appropriate verb and completing the one sentence summary. This step can be used alone, or can be combined with four key details from the text, resulting in a one-paragraph summary.

After completing the template, students will rewrite the information into sentence or paragraph form. For example

TVC Summary:

The article “The Rise of Fandoms” by Kristin Lewis describes how fans have changed since the rise of social media.

Simple Summary:

The article “The Rise of Fandoms” by Kristin Lewis describes how fans have changed since the rise of social media. Fans come together to join groups called fandoms, where they share a passion for something or someone. Before social media and the internet, fans could join a fan club (for a fee) and write letters or fan mail to celebrities they admired. Today fans have much more access to celebrities through social media accounts and have more power to spread awareness and increase the number of fans or followers. Sometimes super fans can take things too far by doing things like verbally attacking other celebrities or forming groups at school that exclude others.

Outline

Prompt:

Thesis/ Introduction

- | | |
|---|---|
| ★ | ● |
| ★ | ● |
| ★ | ● |
| ★ | ● |
| ★ | ● |
| ★ | ● |
| ★ | ● |
| ★ | ● |
| ★ | ● |
| ★ | ● |

Conclusion

Teacher Tip

Using the same outline across content areas and for multiple writing tasks provides students with a consistent tool that they can continue to utilize to address multiple writing prompts. When introducing the outline, be sure to model how it can be used effectively to organize thoughts and ideas. Some teachers like to use a highlighting strategy to encourage students to visualize how the outline becomes an essay.

Example:

Outline	
Prompt: How do you demonstrate that you are an honorable knight?	
Thesis/ Introduction: I am an honorable knight. I show that I am a knight when I am with my family, when I am teaching, and when I practice my running.	
☆ Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I am honest because I tell the truth to my family. ● I keep my home organized for all of us. ● I show them respect by listening when they talk.
☆ Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I am outstanding because I do my best work. ● I am respectful because I listen to my students. ● I am noble because I always try to do the right thing for my class.
☆ Running	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I respect my body when I run, like if I have pain I will ease up. ● I am honest about my speed and my time. ● I stay organized so I have time to run.
Conclusion: For these reasons, I am an honorable knight.	

I am an honorable knight. I show that I am honorable with my family, my teaching, and my running.

My family is very important to me and I show the HONOR code when I am with them. I show HONOR code when I am honest with my family. I always tell them the truth because that is how we build trust and that is what families do. I also keep my home organized for my family. Organization is part of the honor code because it helps us to be successful by letting everyone know where everything is so we can find it when we need it. I also show the HONOR code when I respect my family by listening when they talk. I don't interrupt when they are talking to me and I try to be understanding about their problems.

I love teaching, it is one of the best choices I have ever made and it's something I look forward to almost every day. When I am teaching I try to be outstanding because I do my best work. One way I am outstanding is that I am prepared every day and I put a lot of thought into my lessons. I listen to my students when they have questions or problems and this shows respect. It is important to be respectful in a classroom because I want my students to know that I care about them. I am noble as a teacher because I always try to do the right thing for my class. If another class is being loud or disrespectful I will stand up for my class because we are a team.

Another area that I show HONOR is in my passion for running. I love to go running every day, but sometimes it makes my legs or my knees hurt. When this happens I am respectful of my body and cut back on the running if I am in pain. I am competitive when I run, so I like to go faster and further, however I am always honest with myself about my speed and my time. Being honest helps me to improve as a runner and get faster. I also have to stay organized in order to keep up my running routine. Staying organized helps me to have time for running so that I can run every day, even though I am busy with other things.

For these reasons, I am an honorable knight.

Chapter 5: Reflection

With writing identified as a critical skill in both colleges and careers, it is crucial that students receive comprehensive instruction in writing across the curriculum (Fischer & Meyers, 2017). However, students across the country continue to struggle with writing skills as they move through and out of the K-12 education system (Boyles, 2010). This lack of adequate writing skills is cited by college professors and employers alike (Graham & Perin, 2007). In order to better prepare students for the writing demands they will eventually face in both college and careers, teachers need to collaborate to provide consistent strategic writing instruction across the curriculum. The purpose of this project was to support teachers in creating a strategic writing instructional plan across the content areas and to provide students with effective writing tools which they can utilize in all subject areas for a variety of writing prompts.

Lessons Learned From the Process

Section 1: Writing Instruction was created and designed to support teachers in providing writing instruction to students in all content areas. Through the literature review, including reviewing multiple meta-analyses, I found that the process of gradual release consistently proved to be effective (Webb et al., 2019). In addition to gradual release, explicit teaching and ample opportunities for practice were repeatedly found to improve writing skills (Smedt et al., 2019). It was because of this literature that I chose to orient section 1 around the process of gradual release, with a large emphasis on explicit instruction and repeated student writing opportunities.

Through the literature review I also found evidence that students benefit from writing in all subject areas. Because the practice of writing not only improves writing skills, but also deepens understanding of content, implementing an instructional writing plan benefits students in all classes (Klein & Rose, 2010).

I also learned, through trial and error, that not all resources can be made generic enough for all content areas and writing tasks. I wanted to ensure that the student tools were a resource that students could pull from to support them in the writing process for a variety of writing assignments. I had originally planned to include ThinkSheets as one of the student tools, however when creating sample

Thinksheets, I found that they lost their purpose when made too generic. I also did not want to include any resource that was so specific that it would only be useful for a small number of assignments or tasks. While I continue to feel that ThinkSheets are a powerful tool to use in literacy instruction, I ultimately made the decision to pull them out of the Student Tools, because I felt they did not fit with the purpose of the project.

An unexpected challenge I faced, and lesson I learned, was that many of the resources compiled in the student tools must be significantly modified for use with distance learning. The project is designed to be disseminated and used as a hard copy, with reproducibles of the student tools being copied for student consumption. Because of this challenge, I considered altering the project in order to meet the needs of students during distance learning. However, after collaborating with my language arts team, I instead chose to pursue the hard copy format I had originally intended. My colleagues shared their concerns with teaching language arts exclusively through digital methods and expressed the need for students to interact with text through writing on paper. Through these conversations I learned that many teachers, myself included, feel that it is crucial for middle grade students to include paper and pencil writing as part of their writing instruction, even when that instruction is delivered remotely. While we cannot currently provide our students with these student tools in hard copy format, my team and I are instead having students copy the outlines, sentence frames, and other tools into their notebooks as needed.

Recommendations for Implementation

This project will be useful for teachers and teams looking to improve student writing. Section 1: Writing Instruction can be used by individual teachers looking to integrate writing instruction into their curriculum. However it is specifically designed to be used by a team of teachers that has the desire and capability to work as a team to implement common practices for writing instruction. This consistency across the content areas is a key component to student transfer of information from one class to the next (Klein & Rose, 2010). As students see the same writing processes being taught and utilized in different subject areas, and have access to the same student tools in each class, they begin to recognize that the writing strategies they learn in one class can be implemented in another. This team implementation also

increases student opportunity to practice writing skills. This frequent and continuous practice is a key determinant in improving student writing skills (Fischer & Meyers, 2017).

The literacy team that will implement a common strategic writing instructional plan should begin by reviewing the project in its entirety. Following the agenda schedule outlined in section 2, teachers can begin to plan implementation of the strategic writing process and the use of student tools in the classroom. The literacy team members should plan to meet regularly to ensure continuity of instruction and implementation of student tools. As the school year progresses, the literacy team has the opportunity to identify specific areas of need and/or struggling students so that all writing needs can be met.

While the literacy team meets to plan and implement the writing instructional plan, teachers should strategically provide students with the student tools included in the project. Each tool should be explicitly taught and modeled before given to students for free use. It is also recommended that teachers on the literacy team agree on which student tools they will be utilizing at various points throughout the year. If students are taught how to use the tools in each class, they begin to transfer the information from class to class, providing them with more writing strategies to pull from when writing in any subject. As students learn how to use each tool, they should be provided with copies of the tool to place in their “toolbox,” binder, or notebook. As a student’s “toolbox” fills up they will have more tools and resources to choose from to support them in their writing when assigned with any writing task.

This resource is specifically designed for a sixth grade team of teachers and students. Some components are most appropriate for middle grades, while some are generic enough to be utilized across the grade levels. I primarily focused on the needs of middle grade writers when developing this project, however teachers will likely see similar needs in students in both lower and higher grades.

Section 1: Writing Instruction can be used with any grade level, as it does not require specific standards or activities. The gradual release model and explicit instruction that are emphasized in this section are appropriate for all grade levels and can be used with any amount of scaffolding and support, depending on the grade and ability of the student writers. Section 3: Student Tools will likely be too advanced for much younger students and may be too simple for much older students, however these tools

can likely be used with all middle grade students, ranging from third through ninth grade, with some modifications.

Limitations

The initial limitation that I encountered when implementing this project was the challenge of distance learning. The resources created in this guide are designed for use as hard copies, having students write directly onto the tools. The tools are not provided in digital format, so in order to use them during remote learning, students need to copy the outlines, sentence frames, etc. into their notebooks at home. One alternate solution is for teachers to scan the tools, upload them into their teaching platforms, and have students work on them through an extension or app, such as Kami or Doc Hub.

Another limitation is the challenge of gathering a collaborative and cross-disciplined literacy team. With the focus of the project being improving student writing, other content area teachers may be less interested in participating and may not believe there is as much value in implementing strategic writing instruction in their classes as the research suggests (Klein & Rose, 2017). These teachers, like most, may also feel as though they do not have enough instructional time to teach their subject curriculum, let alone implement a writing plan. These limitations may make the collaborative piece more challenging for some literacy teams.

This project is also limited to a relatively small number of student tools, compared to all of the resources that writing teachers may already be using. The amount of student tools provided were intentionally limited so as not to overwhelm students, yet still provide them with an adequate number of tools to choose from. If a teacher feels that there are other tools that have been successful in supporting student writing, they are encouraged to share these tools with their literacy team and implement the tools as part of their instructional writing plan.

Future Directions

I have been implementing the strategic writing plan with my classes this year, and I have a handful of teachers that are interested in collaborating as a literacy team to create and implement the plan

with their own classes. We are currently facing the challenge of distance learning, so collaboration has proven to be more difficult this year than I had anticipated before the closure of school campuses. I have had success in collaborating with my 6th grade language arts team, and as a department we are implementing the tools and strategies outlined in this project.

When teachers and students return to campus, I plan to establish biweekly, in person meetings, where the literacy team can plan to use common strategies and teaching practices, address concerns, and analyze student data. At this time, I will include interested 6th grade math and science teachers in the literacy team. I look forward to returning to campus so that the cross-curricular literacy team can effectively create and implement the strategic writing plan the way it is designed to be implemented.

As my team works together through the implementation of the instructional writing plan, I expect that we will create new student tools to meet the needs of more teachers and students. I also expect to make some adjustments to the resources that are used with the instructional writing plan, as more subject area teachers join the collaboration process. When math teachers begin to implement the instructional writing plan, I expect that there will need to be a lot of thought and consideration into what resources will best meet student writing needs in math classes. This will likely result in the creation of more student tools, which may be specific to subject area classes.

Conclusion

This project has been created with the intention of supporting teachers as they create and implement a common instructional writing plan in their classrooms. The purpose of the common writing plan is to increase student writing skills. Most teachers recognize the importance of writing in subject areas and many teachers assign writing tasks, across the content areas (Klein & Rose, 2010). However many teachers are unaware of why and how students struggle to write. This project aims to support all teachers in the process of teaching writing. Including the collaborative piece adds another layer of support for teachers as they implement more writing into their curriculum.

This project has brought writing to the forefront of my teaching. With the use of this resource, I now have specific and deliberate steps to teaching each piece of writing and I have a collection of tools

that I can provide my students with to support them in the writing process. Using this resource has helped me to clearly focus on the steps I will follow to teach writing as well as the goals of each piece of student writing. This clarifies each writing task for students and the instructional process for me, as a teacher. I believe that the implementation of this project, including the literacy team collaboration, has the potential to support many teachers at my site as we work towards the goal of increasing student writing skills.

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