

Research-Based Support for Schoolwide's Writing Fundamentals Program

Because writing matters for success in the school, the community, and the workplace, Schoolwide, Inc.'s Writing Fundamentals Program has a central mission to improve student writing and learning by increasing the tools teachers can use to teach writing. Writing Fundamentals, created by Schoolwide, Inc., is a teaching resource that will help educators raise the quality of their students' writing. Writing Fundamentals is made up of a ready-to-use writing curriculum, along with the most essential books from Schoolwide, Inc.'s writing craft and genre studies set, as well as additional texts which match the strategies taught. The hands-on lessons and accompanying reproducibles, along with the actual texts, provide teachers with the instructional support to teach genre studies and to explore the qualities of good writing with their student writers, from prewriting to revising and publication.

Writing Process Approach

The process approach for teaching writing was developed in the latter part of the twentieth century, primarily from the work of Donald Graves (1983), Donald Murray (1984), Nancie Atwell (1987), and Lucy Calkins (1983, 1986, 1994). Subsequent research in the United States and in New Zealand provides further support for the importance of this methodology in improving the quality of writing content, mechanics, and students' view of themselves as capable writers (Elley, Barham, Lamb, & Wylie, 1979; Smith & Elley, 1997; and Hillocks, 1986). One of the major findings from the research on the teaching of writing through the process approach is that student achievement is higher than when instructed through a traditional method (Parson, 1985; Holdzkom, et al., 1982; Hillocks, 1984, 1986; Wesdorp, 1983; Amiran, 1982; Keech & Thomas, 1979; ERIC Clearinghouse, 1984). Moreover, research has shown that emphasizing writing improvement and writing to improve learning in all subject areas is crucial to the success of schools with high achievement, high minority enrollment, and high poverty levels (Reeves, D., 2004).

The ultimate goal of the Writing Workshop is to "change how writers compose by helping them employ more sophisticated composing processes" (Graham, 2006; see also Graham & Harris, 1996). The

The current literature reveals that most researchers assert that writing and the writing process are best understood as complex phenomena that include not only procedural strategies for going through the writing process to generate text but also a multitude of other strategies to develop specific schemata. These include strategies to help writers understand the context for writing, to tap general background knowledge and reading ability, to sharpen cognitive processes for problem solving, to create emotional dispositions and attitudes about writing, to develop micro-level skills such as spelling, transcription, and sentence construction, as well as macro-level understanding about organization, conventions, cohesion, audience, genre, and topic . . .

Pritchard & Honeycutt,
"The Process Approach to Writing
Instruction: Examining Its Effectiveness"
(2006)

writing workshop process approach is advocated across grade levels in order to induce more sustained and thoughtful writing behavior. The development of more effective writing pedagogies is attained in a writing workshop by carefully structuring the workshop environment as a pleasant, supportive, and collaborative space. It is designed so that writing assignments serve a real purpose; it is a place where students share their work with each other; where choice and ownership are emphasized; and it is an environment in which a predictable classroom routine is established where students are encouraged to plan, revise, and edit their papers (Graham, 2006). The process approach to writing is recognized in educational theory and practice. What is most prevalent in writing process research is how it has not only altered how writing is taught but the age at which writing instruction is introduced (Berninger & Winn, 2006). Furthermore, research has shown early and continued experience with different genres provides a foundation of knowledge about those genres from which children draw upon when reading, writing, and discussing literature (Pappas, 1991). Research conducted by Duke and Kays (1998) found exposure to, and meaningful opportunities with, multiple literacy experiences in their earliest schooling experience provided students with greater literacy knowledge and dexterity within those genres. Data from research indicates that a few rereadings of a particular book can support children's use of genre characteristics, and continued exposure most likely contributes to even greater facility with those elements in their literacy lives (Donovan & Smolkin, 2006).

Notably, the process approach for the teaching of writing is explicitly mentioned in multiple states' standards and in national organizations that support education and teachers. The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association "validated the writing process approach in 1992 when they defined Content Standard 5 for the English Language Arts, K-12, stating: *Students are expected to use writing process elements strategically* (De La Paz, 1999). In January 2002, the federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation (NCLB) was signed into law with the intent to close the educational achievement gaps between students. A requisite of NCLB is that each state in the United States must create their own academic standards for what children in grades pre-K-12 should know in mathematics and literacy. Students' progress in these subjects is now monitored by standardized tests. In 2002-03, tests were required in three grade spans: grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12. Recently, starting with the 2005-06 school year, these tests are administered annually in grades 3 through 8. In response to that initiative, many departments of education across the country have begun designing comprehensive approaches to balanced literacy and defining clear and principled approaches to literacy instruction from Kindergarten to twelfth grade.

The Department of Education's approach to literacy learning works to incorporate researched-based reading and writing methodologies with best practices informed by effective classroom instruction. It is with this in mind that Schoolwide, Inc., introduces the Writing Fundamentals Program.

The Writing Fundamentals Program

Learning to write is often an intimidating and frustrating process for students and teachers who fear their lack of experience or skill will be a hindrance to success. Many teachers who teach writing are not writers themselves, and they may struggle with the process approach to writing. Stickland and Strickland (2002) report that the “teaching of writing in American schools is still stuck in a traditional mode focused on the alignment of a completed theme or essay with what is considered standard, edited English. This traditional method of teaching writing focuses on the product—the finished piece, the composition, fixated with the format of the essay and research paper, and obsessed with the polite usage and correct style” (p. 79). The gap between process approach to writing and the more traditional approach needs to be filled with powerful instructional materials designed to aid teachers and students in moving forward with writing practice and application. The Writing Fundamentals Program was designed to provide support materials, including the touchstone or mentor texts—a key to the instructional parameters of the process approach. It is the goal of Schoolwide, through the Writing Fundamentals Program, to build that vital bridge between research on best practice and implementation in the classroom.

Knowing that writing is a complex, recursive process, experts have described and outlined the writing process in stages that reflect the true nature of the act of writing (Graves, 1983, 1994; Calkins, 1991; Harwayne, 2000; Murray, 1993; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; and Atwell, 1985, 1999). Writing Fundamentals provides students with multiple opportunities for learning (and practicing) writing strategies through a wide variety of instruction in each unit of study. In fact, direct instruction of strategies and guided practice are an important part of the Writing Fundamentals Program (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Cramer, 2001; Honeycutt & Pritchard, 2005; Poindexter & Oliver, 1998–99).

Teachers are provided with mini-lessons to implement and sustain units of study, and are given modeling suggestions for effective instruction and to increase student engagement. The lessons in each unit support a structured environment and routine that is conducive to student writing improvement. The structure of the process approach used in the Writing Fundamentals Program is: Immersion; Generating Ideas; Collecting (more information); Selecting (an idea); Drafting; Revising; Editing; Publishing; Evaluation (including a performance rubric and student self-reflection).

Schoolwide recognizes that knowledge about writing is only complete with an understanding of the complexity of the procedural actions in which writers engage as they produce texts. Such understanding is two-fold. First, facility with writing includes the development, through extended practice over years, of a repertoire of routines, skills, strategies, and practices for generating, revising, and editing different kinds of texts. Second, writing skills must grow in concert with the development of reflective abilities and meta-awareness about writing and that living a “writerly life,” the goal of the Writing Fundamentals Program, is as much as possible, instructionally geared toward making sense within the literacy curriculum so that students have ample room to grow as individuals and writers (NCTE, 2004).

Mini-Lessons & Modeling

By providing teachers with mini-lessons to implement and sustain units of study, Writing Fundamentals helps teachers create a structured environment and routine in their classroom that is conducive to student writing improvement. Throughout the mini-lessons in all the units of study, teachers model for students how to: read like writers, use a variety of writing strategies, and interact with touchstone or mentor texts (e.g., Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 1986; Cramer, 2001; Honeycutt & Pritchard, 2005; Poindexter & Oliver, 1998–99). Modeling, with sample language to support instruction, is a foundational part of Writing Fundamentals. Because the lessons have been developed with effective instruction that encourages deeper study of the writing processes, students can learn about a structured writing process broken into manageable pieces through highly scaffolded writing lessons, thus reducing the stress of text production. The predictable and recursive (and reflective) components of the Writing Fundamentals writing process mirror the structure of the units from pre-writing generation of ideas through publication and meta-cognition of the work undertaken. The mini-lessons for each unit prompt student thinking and learning about writing and provide plentiful practice through the writing process and over time.

The purpose of cognitive-oriented approaches to writing instruction... (e.g., see modified cognitive-oriented model of Hayes, 1996) is to change how writers’ compose by helping them employ more sophisticated composing processes... to induce more sustained and thoughtful writing behavior by carefully structuring the environment (as is done in the process writing approach) so that it is pleasant, supportive, and collaborative; so that writing assignments serve a real purpose; so that students share their work with each other; so that choice and ownership are emphasized; and so that a predictable classroom routine is established where students are encouraged to plan, revise, and edit their papers.

Graham (2006); see also Graham & Harris (1996).

Teacher Talk & Teacher Walk

The Writing Fundamentals Program recognizes that not every teacher is an expert in every genre (nor are teachers familiar with every children’s literature author), so the developers have created important introductory materials to support instruction in every unit of study. The “Immersion” section of each study introduces the teacher to the genre through definitions, helpful preparation for teaching, charts with features of the genre, suggested read-alouds (to support the initial study of a genre during Immersion), and appendices to create a strong foundation for learning about a genre. Author studies are similarly supported through materials for Immersion—with information about the featured author and connections between the works being studied in that unit.

Writing Fundamentals believes that when teachers have authentic voices, their students have them, too (Graves, 1993, p. 3). When utilizing Writing Fundamentals, teachers demonstrate their thinking process as they model good writing to students. By thinking aloud as they consider the different writing strategies suggested, teachers model the critical thinking skills necessary for students to succeed in all areas of their learning lives.

Collaboration & Conferring

A collaborative environment in which students can learn—working together in partnerships, small groups, and with teacher-guided practice—is another mainstay of Writing Fundamentals. In fact, in most of the Writing Fundamentals mini-lessons, time is set aside for students to talk with one another about their work, to talk in general about their interests (which may lead to self-selected topics for writing), and to engage in discussions with the whole group. Writing Fundamentals values the fact that writers often converse in order to rehearse the language and content that will go into what they write. Conversation during the Writing Workshop provides an impetus or occasion for writing. Writing Fundamentals knows it is helpful for writers to discuss with peers what they have done, partly to get ideas from their peers, and to a certain extent to see what they, the writers, say when they try to explain their thinking.

Teacher knowledge of genre is undoubtedly a variable of great importance when considering how best to support children’s growing control of genres for reading and writing.

Donovan & Smolkin (2006).

Writing conferences are also believed to be very helpful uses of talk in the writing process. Therefore, conference questions, wherein student writers respond to inquiries about their work, provides teachers an opportunity to make suggestions or re-orient what the writer is doing through conferring with students individually or in small groups. Conference questions are offered in every mini-lesson to further the possibility for talking with one-on-one with students.

State Standards, Seminal Research, & Writing Fundamentals

It is important to note that the process approach for the teaching of writing is explicitly mentioned in multiple states' standards and in nationally recognized organizations that support education and teachers. The authors of Writing Fundamentals have investigated seminal research, multiple state standards, and completed a comparison and analysis of these standards to ensure the Writing Fundamentals units of study are in compliance with our customers' needs educationally, instructionally, and philosophically across the nation. Our selection of genre studies and author studies is expansive and based on genres (and other suggested writing requirements) that appear in multiple states' standards. This wide-ranging program offers a variety of genre studies and author studies for each level to ensure that each Schoolwide customer is able to teach her or his students about multiple genres and introduce them to multiple authors and their styles in order to help them grow as writers.

Peer Review Process

In 2005, Schoolwide, Inc. submitted its lessons, teacher's guides, and educational philosophies for review in 21 different states, consisting of 52 schools. The process for this peer review was as follows:

- Field-testing of lessons in 52 schools;
- Distribution of surveys;
- Tracking reviews via phone calls and e-mails;
- Retrieval of data from 21 states;
- Notation and categorization of affirmations, suggestions, and questions; and
- Dissemination and research of peer review.

The results of this nationwide review affirmed our course direction to which we made the following modifications:

- Increase in the number of Units of Study from 4 to 10;
- Inclusion of assessments and evaluations for teachers and students;
- Inclusion of a minimum of 10 books with each unit;
- Inclusion of a comprehensive teacher's guide; and
- Inclusion of graphic organizers in each lesson.

Beginning in 2006, Schoolwide assembled a team of experienced teachers, advisors, and writers to develop our current Units of Study, which include the modifications suggested during the peer review. In addition, our development team consulted multiple states' standards as well as the most important research and professional texts in the field to ensure alignment with writing standards across the nation.



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