ABSTRACT
        This newsletter issue concentrates on the topic of
teaching written language skills to mildly handicapped elementary and
secondary students, with emphasis on the communicative function of
writing. The feature article discusses expository writing
instruction, describing essential elements of the expository writing
process and characteristics of good writing programs, including
establishment of a writing environment which allows sustained as well
as frequent writing opportunities. "Think-sheet" instructional
materials focus on specific organizational and thinking skills
associated with each step in the writing process: planning,
organizing, writing a first draft, editing, peer-editing, and
revising. Teachers' responsibilities include modeling/verbalizing the
steps of each skill to help students begin to internalize thinking
strategies. Additional sections of the newsletter describe
instructional materials and software resources useful in teaching
writing skills to mildly handicapped students, a brief review of a
published research study which examined elementary-level classroom
writing practices, and a description of the contents of a
videocassette, "A Natural Curriculum," which emphasizes the teaching
of reading and writing as functional tools. (JW)

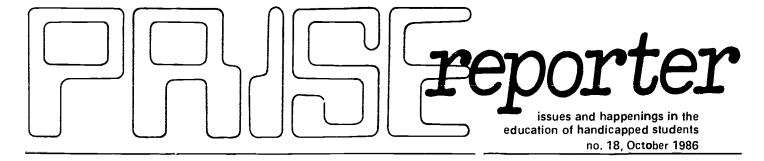[Teaching of Written Language Skills to Mildly Handicapped Students]

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EXPOSITORY WRITING INSTRUCTION
FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

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Communicating through expository writing is an essential literacy goal for special education students, even though it is a difficult, highly complex process. It has been maintained that the acquisition of written language proficiency may contribute substantially to special education students' independence, vocational flexibility, and success in post-secondary programs. Yet achieving writing proficiency remains an elusive goal for many special education students.

There are many factors that contribute to students' writing difficulties, but there are two problems which are unique to exposition. First, to be good expository writers, special education students must see themselves as "informants," writing for an intended audience. They must then be able to organize their papers in accordance with the structures required in expository text. These two tasks are very difficult for many special education writers. For example, when one fifth-grade student named Max was asked to pick a topic that he knew a lot about and write about it for someone who didn't, he wrote: "Bugs bunny, is funny. She walk funny. She makes me laugh." It is evident from Max's composition that he hasn't quite achieved "informant" status. His paper actually conveys very little information about Bugs Bunny (i.e., who Bugs Bunny is, what she looks like, or what Bugs Bunny does to make Max laugh). Furthermore, Max's ideas are associatively strung together rather than being carefully selected and organized based upon the description text structure he has selected.

What are the essential elements of the expository writing process?

It is not surprising that writing, a complex cognitive process, is especially difficult for special education students to master. Writing requires the coordinating and regulating of performance during three overlapping and recursive stages. During prewriting, writers must generate and select a writing topic, decide on a purpose for writing, identify the audience, search for and collect information about the topic, and interrelate the pieces of information into an organizational plan. During drafting, writers translate ideas in the plan into printed sentences, signal relationships among ideas, and flesh out the plan with additional details. During monitoring and revising, writers read the draft to see whether the objectives concerning audience, topic, purpose and structure have been achieved, and apply correction strategies to portions of the text that fail to meet expectations.

Throughout the writing process, writers must attend to two important aspects. First, they must give careful consideration to the audience and anticipate the intended audience's questions as they plan, draft, edit and revise their papers. Unless writers are sensitive to the informational needs of their audience, they will have difficulty selecting appropriate information, and may fail to effectively monitor their papers with these needs in mind. Second, writers must be knowledgeable of the organizational structures found in expository text known as "text structures" (e.g., comparison/contrast, sequence, description, problem/solution). Successful writers know that different text structures answer different types of questions. For example, comparison/contrast text answers such questions as: (1) What is being compared? (2) On what basis are they being compared? (3) How are they alike? and (4) How are they different? An awareness of text structure helps writers determine what to include in reports, and how to signal the answers to these text structure questions through the use of key words and phrases (e.g., "in contrast to," "similarly," "but," "like ").

Given the aforementioned description of the writing process, there are at least two essential components of an effective writing program that underlie the development of writing strategies. First, a writing program must foster students' awareness of the strategies for performing each writing subprocess. Second, a writing program must make clear to students the role of audience and text structure in planning, organizing, drafting, editing, and revising papers.

What features characterize good writing programs?

Before describing a specific expository writing program intended to improve students' control of text structures in the writing process, there are two general instructional conditions that promote writing development. First, after examining the problems found in students' writing, it has been suggested that teachers establish a writing environment where students get more frequent opportunities to practice writing (at least three times per week). The writing program also should allow sustained writing opportunities (i.e., writing that entails more than one-shot, one-paragraph writing).

Second, writing programs should seek to teach children to understand their informant status by emphasizing the communicative function (i.e., purpose and audience) of writing. Purpose can be created by publishing students' writing. In

> This issue addresses the teaching of written language skills to mildly handicapped students. It includes descriptions of a small sampling of the many excellent resources available on this topic at PRISE. If you have a specific request for information related to this topic, you may request a literature search through your PRISE Liaison or call PRISE directly.

addition, rather than writing solely for teachers, students may be asked to select their own topics and write about those selected topics for a real audience, i.e., peers. To further heighten students' sense of audience, writers should collaborate directly with peers, who can react to their papers as peer editors.

There are three benefits resulting from such collaborative arrangements. First, peers' questions develop writers who can sustain their writing and apply their knowledge of readers' questions to the various writing subprocesses. That is, questions that come up repeatedly will be internalized by writers to guide their thinking about their audiences' needs during planning, drafting, and revising. Second, peers' questions reinforce what writers know and don't know, thereby re-affirming the writers' role as informants. Peers typically don't know the answers to the questions they ask (e.g., "What does your turtle eat?") so the writer becomes the expert who knows the topic best. Third, peers help writers regulate text processing by creating a conscious awareness that a particular comprehension problem or question exists. Through peers' questions, writers begin to recognize when their writing is not clear, when something needs to be done, and how it should be corrected.

How can teachers bring audience and text structure into writing?

All of the aforementioned writing components are necessary to develop expository writing skills. However, students must in addition learn specific organizational and thinking strategies for each writing subprocess. In the following part of this article, we will describe a writing program which emphasizes both text structure and audience in the writing process.

An important support that we have developed for the use of teachers and students in implementing the writing program is "think-sheets." Specifically, think-sheets are materials that mimic the mature organizational and thinking strategies in each of six writing subprocesses (e.g., planning, organizing, writing, editing, peer-editing and revising). Each of the think-sheets poses questions that prompt writers to consider certain strategies related to the performance of a specific subprocess. To further assist writers in clearly separating and labeling the writing subprocesses, we have found it helpful to color code the think-sheets and label them "prewriting," "organizing," "writing," "editing," and "revising" (POWER). The specific elements of the think-sheets are described in more detail below.

Planning. The planning think-sheet helps writers focus on audience, purpose, and topic. For audience, students are asked to consider (1) WHO ("Who will read my paper?" and "What will my reader want to know?"). Next, students consider purpose and activate their background knowledge for a topic through such questions as: (2) WHY ("Why am I writing this?") and (3) WHAT ("What do I know about the topic?" and "How can I group/label my facts?").

Organizing. The organizing think-sheet helps writers organize the ideas gathered during planning. Students map their ideas onto a pattern guide or semantic map that contains the questions and key words associated with a specific text structure. For example, in writing a comparison/contrast paper, students fill in the pattern guide with the answers to such questions as: "What is being compared/contrasted?" "On what?" "How are they alike?" "How are they different?"

Writing. Next students write a first draft. We find it helpful to use colored paper (e.g., blue) for first drafts so that it looks decidedly different from the final copy. This helps ensure that students don't treat the first draft as the last draft. When students write their first drafts, they should be told not to worry about spelling or other grammatical problems.

Editing. In the editing stage, writers are asked to be critical of their own writing. First, they look back at their papers and rate the extent to which they answered the text structure questions (e.g., Did I ... "Name two things being compared?" "Tell how two things are alike?" "Tell how two things are different?" "Use key words?" "Make it interesting to the reader?"). This rating scale contains evaluation criteria that matches nearly identically the criteria contained on the organizing think-sheet. This leads students to self-monitor and self-evaluate to determine if they followed their organizational plan. Students rate themselves according to three simple self-rating choices ("yes," "sort of," "no"). Next, the editing think-sheet directs writers to star the parts of their paper they like best, and anticipate readers' questions by putting question marks by the parts that are unclear. Finally, writers are asked to think of two or more questions to ask their peer-editors so that they go to their editors looking for help on specific questions.

Peer-Editing. Writers read their papers to peer editors while the editors listen, following which editors complete an evaluation process that is essentially the same as that performed by the writers. They star the parts they like best and put question marks by the parts that are unclear. Then the peer editors and authors talk about their respective evaluations and brainstorm possible ways to make the papers even better.

Revising. Finally, writers plan revisions. Writers are asked to list revisions that they plan to make, and they are told to make revisions directly on the first draft. Teachers will need to teach students how to revise papers by modeling and how to insert or change the order of information. It is at this point, also, that teachers can help students to monitor their papers for spelling and grammatical accuracy. Next, the authors write the final draft directly on a final-draft form.

What are teachers' responsibilities in the writing program?

The teachers' responsibilities are numerous in a writing program similar to the one described above. First, teachers should model the dialogue and inner thinking that underlies each of the questions guiding performance in each writing subprocess (planning, drafting, editing and revising papers). To model writing strategies, teachers think-aloud or verbalize the steps of a strategy as they show how to implement the strategy in the writing process. This is intended to help students internalize the thinking strategies that underlie the think-sheets, rather than treat the think-sheets as worksheets to be mechanically completed.

Second, teachers should focus on developing special education students' abilities to regulate the writing process. A primary tool for accomplishing this is inner speech, which directs students during the writing process. The writers should be encouraged to internalize the questions that guide thinking in each of the writing subprocesses, such as planning ("What am I to do?" "What do I know about this topic?"); organizing ("What text structure should I use?" "What questions does this text structure ask?" "What key words and phrases should I use?"); drafting ("Translate my plan into writing."); editing and revising ("Evaluate my paper: Did I answer the text structure questions? Did I answer the readers' questions? Is my paper interesting? How can I fix it?"). Teachers should monitor the accuracy of students' thinking by having them think-aloud just as the teachers thought-aloud when they modeled the writing subprocesses. Teachers should step in when the students' dialogue slacks off. This ensures that students master the inner thinking that regulates and directs performance during writing.

In summary, the teaching of expository writing involves the teaching of strategies for performing the writing process as well as enhancing students' awareness of the role of audience and text structure in planning, organizing, writing,

editing and revising their compositions. Throughout the teaching process, the teacher has a critical role as an agent who models the dialogue and inner thinking that directs strategy use in each of the writing subprocesses. The long-term goal is not just the improvement of students' written products, but the improvement of students' understanding of the processes that underlie successful written communication.

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INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

WRITING SERIES is composed of 7 writing texts, 4 practice books, and 1 audiocassette. It is designed for adolescents, second grade reading level, to teach everyday writing skills and provide practice in the writing forms and grammar used by teenagers in daily life. Each text (some with accompanying practice book) may also be purchased individually. Teacher's guides are complimentary. The **SERIES** contains the following texts:

Writing for a Reason #1 — teaches the writing of sentences, notes and directions.

Writing for a Reason #2 — deals with paragraph usage in answering invitations, writing personal and business letters, and completing job applications.

Writing for a Reason #3 — expands the writing of paragraphs to include a topic sentence, information sentences and a closing sentence, and introduces the use of action words and picture words.

Writing for a Reason #4 — concentrates on the writing of narrative and descriptive paragraphs, comparison and persuasion compositions, and book reports.

Writing for a Reason #5 — teaches students to listen, take notes in outline form, and write announcements and news articles. This must be used with the audiotape which provides the necessary oral stimuli.

Grammar for Sentences #1 — explains the simple sentence, its grammar and punctuation.

Grammar for Sentences #2 — explains the compound and complex sentences, their grammar and punctuation.

Quercus Corporation, 2405 Castro Valley Blvd., Castro Valley, CA 94546. 1985. Complete set of 11 books, 7 guides and 1 audiotape. $36.30.

YOU'RE THE AUTHOR! FROM FIRST DRAFT TO BOOK is a set of activity cards for teaching the essentials of good writing to students, grade level 4-9. The cards lead the pupils, individually or in groups, through the process of writing a book, from the initial act of thinking about a topic to the publication of the final product. Each card is self-explanatory, and companion worksheets reinforce the skills explained.

The cards in the first section include prewriting activities, such as choosing a topic, a target audience and a format. For fiction, students choose a story idea, develop their characters,

use dialogue and create setting, mood and viewpoint. For nonfiction, they learn how to do research, interview, outline and take notes. The next section covers writing a first draft from the student's outline or story plan, choosing a title, revising, editing and proofreading. The final section teaches the assembling of the student's book, including book design, illustrating, printing and binding.

Sunburst Communications, Pleasantville, NY 10570. 1985. $49.00. 73 activity cards, 26 worksheets, 1 student record sheet, 1 teacher's guide.

SOFTWARE

The following software programs have been found to be useful in teaching writing skills to mildly handicapped students. These titles are available for preview at the Regional Resources Center in King of Prussia.

Bank Street Storybook, Mindscape, Inc. 1984. Requires Apple II (64K) or Commodore 64 or IBM PC/PCJr. and a joystick, AppleMouse or Koala Pad. Students can create pictures, color and animate them, and add words anywhere on the screen to create "pages" of a story. The story appears on the monitor as turning pages of a book or it can be printed. Appropriate for grade levels 3 and up.

Flying High. Minnesota Educational Software. 1984. Requires Apple II (64K). A self-instructional package that teaches secondary level students (grade 5 reading level) how to write syntactically mature sentences. Lessons and tests on joining and combining of sentences, and correction of fragments and run-ons are presented within a story framework.

Kermit's Electronic Storymaker. Simon & Schuster. 1985. Requires an Apple II (64K), joystick optional. A reading and writing program for those with minimal or no reading skills. Children select from a series of Muppet main characters, actions, settings and vehicles. A grammatically correct sentence is formed from these choices; animation and sound effects can be added. Sentences are combined to build a story that can be saved on disk or printed.

Story Maker. Scholastic. 1985. Requires an Apple II (64K) and a Koala Pad, joystick or AppleMouse. A writing tool that provides libraries of pictures that can be combined or modified to create story scenes, rebuses or illustrations for text. A simple word processor permits a variety of print typefaces, text can be placed anywhere on the screen. Screens can be combined to produce reports and stories that can be stored and printed. Appropriate for elementary through junior high grades.

Study Skills. C.C. Publications. 1984. Requires an Apple II (64K). A tutorial that covers all aspects of researching and writing a paper that are appropriate for use with students of all grades, reading at 4th grade level. Skills cover such areas as topic classification and development, the use of traditional information resources, and notetaking and writing an introduction, conclusion and bibliography for a report. Lessons include remediation and skill practice on disk and in workbook exercises.

Talking Text Writer. Scholastic. 1986. Requires an Apple II (128K) and an Echo or Cricket Speech Synthesizer. A word processor that allows students to hear each letter and/or word they write and to hear stories or other writing samples read back whenever needed. Language experience lessons, bilingual exercises and other independent writing skill activities can be stored by the teacher for student use. Text can be stored, edited and printed. Appropriate for all levels.

Study Examines Classroom Writing Practices

The purpose of this study was to investigate the writing experiences in which elementary teachers and children engage throughout the day, and to examine the influence of teachers' perceptions of writing instruction and textbook guidelines. Twelve "average" students from grades 1, 3 and 5, and six teachers were randomly selected from "typical" middle-class neighborhood schools. A three-part survey form was distributed on which teachers rated 42 writing tasks on a frequency-of-use scale. Trained observers gathered and recorded data on classroom behavior of teachers and target students.

Because of the powerful influence that textbooks exert over classroom instruction, writing activities in current language arts textbooks were analyzed as part of the study. It was found that language arts texts continue to stress the mechanics of grammar, punctuation and spelling even though experiments in formal grammar instruction during the last 50 years have resulted in no improvement in the quality of student writing. Teachers in the survey indicated a lack of preparation in the teaching of writing and appeared uninformed about the importance of prewriting and revision processes. Teachers' comments focused on errors in mechanics and lacked a concern for the ideas that students expressed. This correlates with the findings that language arts textbooks stress mechanics and grammar with little attention given to the process of writing for the purpose of communicating a message.

Bridge, C. A., & Hiebert, E. H. **A Comparison of Classroom Writing Practices, Teachers' Perceptions of their Writing Instruction, and Textbook Recommendations on Writing Practices.** *The Elementary School Journal,* 1985, 86(2), pp. 155-172.

The 28 minute videocassette, **A Natural Curriculum,** features Dr. Jerome Harste, Professor of Education at Indiana University. Dr. Harste states that language is a "functional tool" and is part of all human experience. In order to facilitate the learning of language, one needs to experience a "language rich environment." According to Dr. Harste, reading and writing should be more than phonics, word recognition, spelling, punctuation and grammar. The "natural curriculum," as he calls it, must use what children bring to the classroom in terms of language and experiences. In addition, it allows reading, writing, and oral language to be taught together, rather than as three fragments of the school curriculum.

Carolyn Burke, Professor of Reading at Indiana University, introduces two activities that emphasize the thrust of the natural curriculum which is "to have school reading and writing look like real life reading and writing." Both activities take place during parents' day, at which time mothers and fathers must take part in the classroom reading and writing lessons. The first activity shown is an exchange of written dialogue between parent and child. One parent commented that she uses this technique at home and seems to know more about her son's school activities than when she depended only on verbal communication. The second activity demonstrated is a strategy lesson. Students and their parents are given a pack of recipe cards, each of which contains one step necessary in the preparation of peanut butter fudge. Working together, parents and children organize the cards and take turns reading each direction and completing it. According to Burke, the activity provides a meaningful social contact where reading and writing are shared in a real life experience.

Finally, in an interview with Dr. Harste, Dr. Kenneth Goodman of the University of Arizona supports the concept of a natural curriculum by stating that "literacy becomes a natural extension of a child's language learning" and that teachers should provide natural, functional ideas to get children to read and write. He goes so far as to say that the "best way to learn to read is to read, and the best way to learn to write is to write."

½" VHS Videocassette/28 minutes/1 teacher's guide/$200.00

Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 70 Court St., Portsmouth, NH 03801. 1985.

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