How to Adapt Effective Writing Instruction

From Secondary to Post-Secondary Institutions

Using Graham and Perin's (2007)

Writing Next Study

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Abstract

The importance of direct explicit instruction in secondary schools has been shown to improve student learning outcomes across the curriculum. The question then becomes one of whether adapting direct explicit instruction in post-secondary institutions would have the same impact on student grades. Graham and Perin (2007) identified eleven elements of effective writing strategies in their meta-analysis of writing instruction. This paper seeks to determine how the difference in the two writing environments, secondary and post-secondary, would affect their implementation. It will also look at the differences between the two groups of students, who are very close in age but very far apart in terms of expectations, to see how those different expectations affect the students' ability to acquire and use Graham and Perin's (2007) writing strategies

Introduction

In terms of time, the gap between a high school student and a first-year university student is a very small one. One day, students are high school seniors and, two months later, they enter post-secondary education. Along with the change of scenery, students find that the expectations at university are very different from what they are used to in high school (Carroll, 2002). While those expectations change in most aspects of the students' lives, the changes in the expectations of written work are particularly challenging. The first challenge that the first-year student faces is in understanding that written assignments at the university level generally demand that students analyze topics rather than simply reporting on them. This expectation of greater depth in the investigation of topics might be more manageable if it was not for the second challenge. The second, and more difficult, challenge for first-year college/university students is the move from the high school writing environment, in which writing situations are differentiated by audience or purpose but not discourse, to the university environment, where every discipline is its own discourse community.

In first-year classrooms, students have to understand not only the conventions of academic writing in general (Haar, 2006) but also how that writing differs depending on the discipline. Students will write differently in history than they do in engineering or computer science courses. What is 'correct' in one discipline will not necessarily be correct in another discipline. Students who left high school believing that the difference between one subject and another lies in the content now have to contend with an environment in which the rules of writing and thinking change with every new classroom. The result, according to Thaiss and Zawacki (2006), is that, though many faculty members seem to believe that 'good writing [is]

good writing', "what was deemed good writing in one discipline was not good writing in another discipline" (p. 83).

In investigating the effectiveness of Graham and Perin's (2007) findings for use in first-year instruction, it became clear that this difference in the writing environment had an impact on the ability of instructors to provide explicit instruction in the strategies. Because the first-year environment emphasizes the importance of domain-specific writing formats, instructors would need to adapt each of Graham and Perin's (2007) elements to the specific domains of each discourse. However, the writing environment of first-year students is also one where there is considerable time pressure. Therefore, it may be necessary for university's to decide whether they will devote more time to domain specific writing, with faculty members accepting that it is unreasonable to expect that students will arrive with full knowledge of the range of discourses that exist in university, or whether they can develop a general discourse for first-year students.

This paper will analyze the eleven elements of effective writing strategies that Graham and Perin (2007) identify in their meta-analysis of writing instruction to determine how the difference in the two writing environments would affect their implementation. It will also look at the differences between the two groups of students, who are very close in age but very far apart in terms of expectations, to see how those different expectations affect the students' ability to acquire and use Graham and Perin's (2007) writing strategies. Graham and Perin (2007) came up with a list of eleven strategies to help adolescents become more efficient writers. The eleven elements were chosen by "summarizing the results of a large-scale review of research into the effects of specific types of writing instruction on adolescents' writing proficiency" (Graham & Perin, 2007, p. 4).

Graham and Perin's (2007) Elements of Effective Writing for Adolescents

Graham and Perin (2007) in their meta-analysis, *Writing Next,* set out "to provide guidance for improving writing instruction for adolescents, a topic that has previously not received enough attention from researchers or educators" (p. 3). They did this by identifying "11 elements of writing instruction that were found to be effective for helping adolescents learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning" (p.4). These research-based principles were developed for use with students in grades 4-12:

1) Writing Strategies, which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions.

2) Summarization, which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize text.

3) Collaborative writing, which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions.

4) Specific product goals, which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete.

5) Word Processing, which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments.

6) Sentence combining, which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences.

7) Prewriting, which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition.

8) Inquiry activities, which engages students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task.

9) Process writing approach, which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing.

10) Study of models, which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing.

11) Writing for content learning, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material. (p.4-5)

Graham and Perin (2007) were careful to point out that these eleven elements did not make up a full writing curriculum. It was their opinion that these elements "could be combined in flexible ways to strengthen adolescents' literacy development" (p. 5). The authors' expectations were that classroom teachers would use these research-based writing strategies, which had proven to be effective for improving writing quality, in their classrooms to help them improve writing instruction for adolescents. It was their intent that the report would serve as a starting point for teachers "to think about how to improve writing instruction for all young people" (p. 3).

In this evaluation of the applicability of Graham and Perin's (2007) findings for first-year writing instruction, I am going to focus, primarily, on the first four strategies identified by Graham and Perin (2007). These are Direct Strategy Instruction, Summarization Instruction, Collaborative Writing, and Setting Specific Product Goals. There are a number of reasons to

focus specifically on these four: first, and perhaps most significantly, they have the largest effect sizes (over 0.70); second, the lack of research into the discrete elements of the writing process for college students makes the comparison difficult; and, third, it appears that some of the elements (6 through11) could be understood as sub-categories of the first four.

Word-processing is not being categorized or discussed in detail because it is distinct from the other elements. The research available for post secondary writers suggests that word processing does not improve student writing but merely facilitates editing. Harris' (1985) study of college students found that students made fewer revisions when using word processing than when using pen and paper. She also discovered that students made more format changes than revision changes. The students indicated that the word processor made composing less painful since it was "easier, faster, and neater" (p. 330), and it caught spelling errors. Harris (1985) concluded that the word processor could be used effectively to facilitate revision, but there was no evidence to indicate that students would revise more or be more effective revisers when they used a word processor. The students in Harris' (1985) study appeared to use the word processor for superficial spelling and grammar revisions rather than more conceptual restructuring of their texts.

High School Writing Instruction

In examining writing in high school, Applebee (1984) characterized high school writing assignments as:

> being typically first-and-final draft, completed in class and requiring a page or less of writing. Topics for these assignments are usually constructed to test previous learning of information or skills, hence the students' task is to get the answer 'right' rather than to convince, inform, or entertain a naïve audience (p. 184).

Applebee (1984) found that 95% of the writing assignments suggested by a typical high school composition textbook were designed to test previous knowledge. He further discovered that the "types of writing that students do in high school years narrow rather sharply around summarizing and analyzing tasks" (p. 184). Due to these limited uses of writing, Applebee (1984) concluded that writing was more likely to be assessed than taught, that teachers were more concerned with product rather than process.

Hillocks (2006) in an attempt to update the research completed by Applebee (1981) sought to determine if the teaching of high school writing had undergone any changes since it was last studied. When Applebee (1981) observed high school classrooms he found that high school students were spending only 3% of their school time on writing pieces of paragraph length or longer. Even when students were asked to write an essay, the essays were treated as tasks. The tasks for the students were ones of repeating information that had already been organized by the teacher or the textbooks. The most common type of writing asked of the students was analysis. Thus Applebee (1981) concluded that the teaching of writing was little more than the making of assignments.

When Hillocks (2006) conducted his writing research he discovered that students in high school were now writing substantial pieces more than 3% of their time, which was the time frame that Applebee (1981) had discovered in his study. Despite the evidence that more writing was taking place in high school classrooms, Hillocks (2006) found that there was still a great deal of similarity in the way that writing was being taught twenty years later. Students were still required to do more superficial writing such as fill in the blanks and answer short answer questions. In addition, Hillocks (2006) learned that most high school students were being taught how to write by adhering to a writing structure known as the five paragraph model. Carroll

(2002) discovered that many students entering university felt they had mastered the 'one size fits all' five paragraph essay in high school and were surprised to discover that this model was not an acceptable way to write academic essays. Sommers and Saltz (2004) quoted a first-year student who said, "what worked in high school isn't working anymore" (p. 125).

According to the Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum (2000), high school writing should enable students to explore, shape, and clarify their thoughts, and to communicate them to others. By using effective writing strategies, students will learn to discover and refine ideas and to compose and revise with increasing confidence and skill. The guide stresses the need for students to know and apply processes and strategies in developing skills. This procedural knowledge includes knowledge and skilled use of the six language arts (read, write, listen, speak, view and represent) as well as related processes, including processes of inquiry, interaction, revision and editing, reflection, and metacognition.

The Manitoba English Language Arts Curriculum (2000), emphasizes the following goals and outcomes that students should be aware of, and use in their writing: an awareness of different genres; an awareness of audience; an awareness of writing for a purpose; an ability to experiment with language; an ability to generate ideas before writing; an ability to create original texts; an ability to produce multiple drafts; an ability to edit; an ability to revise; an awareness of organizational structures; and finally, an ability to edit for grammatical structure.

First-Year Writing Instruction

One of the principal challenges facing first-year university students is mastering the academic essay. Many first-year students struggle when making the transition from high school writing to university writing, despite having achieved success as high school writers (Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews, & Nordstrom, 2009). The writing that is expected from

students in high school is fundamentally different than the kinds of writing expected of students once they enter university. In university, faculty have different expectations regarding structure and argument than are usually found in high school (Freedman & Pringle, 1980). However, for most first-year students, "the primary purpose for writing in a compulsory writing course is completing the tasks necessary to get the needed grades, the credits toward graduation" (Beaufort, 2007, p. 38). Some students see these courses as "writing to produce writing" (Dias, 2000); rather than opportunities to use writing to engage with the subject matter in a more in-depth way.

Writing is a complex cognitive and social activity…that develops over a lifetime (Beaufort, 2007), and yet students are expected to master all that they need to learn to be successful writers in all disciplines in a twelve week first-year writing course. First-year students have to make a rapid adjustment to a learning environment that provides more autonomy than high school, but requires more individual responsibility (Brinkworth et al, 2009). In addition, as Fulkerson (2005) reported, there is no consensus on "whether to assign topics, how to assign topics, and what types of topics to assign; over the role of readings and textbooks; over peer-response groups; over how teachers should grade and/or respond to writing" (p. 655).

Differences between the Expectations in High School and College/University

The acquisition of a firm foundation in writing strategies during elementary and secondary schooling might be expected to help students once they enter university or college. However, that seems not to be the case. The differences between the writing situations in high school and those in university or college are significant enough that preparation for one may not result in preparation for the other. High school students "in general are accustomed to writing reports (recall or summary of information in source texts) or advocacy (opinion) essays"

(Beaufort, 2007, p. 25). Beaufort (2007) further states that, as high school students make the transition to academic writing in universities, they often have trouble developing the more analytical writing style that is required. Students have to develop the ability to analyze, compare, synthesize, and evaluate various forms of data (Freedman & Pringle, 1980). Freedman and Pringle (1980) concluded that critical thinking skills and writing skills must co-exist if students are to be successful writers.

Acker and Halasek (2008) looked at the differences between what high school teachers look for in an essay and what college teachers look for. They quoted Hjortshhoj (2001) who found:

> high school and college writing teachers do not so much look for or respond to different elements of writing as much as they *emphasize* different elements. High school teachers' responses were informed by what Hjortshoj (2001) describes as following 'some basic principles.' For example, 'All good writing should have a thesis, clearly stated in the introduction. Following paragraphs should each present a point that supports the thesis, and the essay should end with a logical conclusion. Writing throughout the essay should be clear, concise, and correct.' In contrast, the college teachers' responses were informed by an understanding of 'good writing as having features [that] … vary from one situation to another. These variations depend, for example, on the subject of the writing, its purpose, and the reader's expectations. As a consequence, the features of good writing in a literature course will differ greatly from the features of good writing in business or astronomy, and what seems clear to one audience might not be clear to another. (Hjortshhoj, 2001, as cited in Acker & Halasek, p. 7, 2008)

Carroll (2002) says that academic writing means that students are not rewarded for writing narratives or personal opinion pieces like they are in high schools. Instead students are expected to learn how to write like 'academics', which means that the student has "to respond to and incorporate into their own text the work of others, construct an analysis or argument, make assertions and explicitly develop them" (p. 64). She goes on to say that "these complex literacy tasks require students to read challenging texts, locate and interpret relevant sources, apply appropriate knowledge and concepts, and ultimately produce coherent, edited written work" (p. 64).

Lindblom-Ylanne & Pihlajamdki (2003) contend that the "aim of teaching academic writing to students is to develop expertise in the skills of writing, as well as to deepen understanding of their own academic field" (p. 18). To that end, academic writing instruction should not focus on 'knowledge-telling' but more on 'knowledge-transforming' where writing enhances more the transformation of knowledge (Bereiter & Scardamelia, 1987). The act of transforming knowledge involves a problem-solving process in which writers re-think and develop their ideas and thoughts.

The Most Effective Writing Strategies from Graham and Perin's Principal Findings for Adolescent Writers Compared to First-Year Writing Instruction

The following four elements, writing strategies, summarization, collaborative writing, and setting specific product goals (Graham and Perin, 2007), will now be discussed in detail, comparing the way they are used in secondary schools to their possible use in post-secondary education. Because the difference between the two environments has, as discussed above, a profound effect on the nature of writing instruction, each strategy will be discussed in the

respective contexts of high school context environment and the first-year university/college writing environment.

1. **Writing Strategies which involve teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions.** (Sub-groups of writing strategies include: sentence-combining, no. 6, prewriting, no.7, and inquiry activities, no.8).

Adolescents and writing strategies

Graham and Perin (2007) determined that teaching adolescents strategies for planning, revising and editing their compositions had a large effect (effect size = 0.82) on the quality of their writing. Strategy instruction involves explicitly and systematically teaching the steps necessary for planning, revising, and editing with the goal of teaching students how to use these strategies independently. The authors found that teaching strategy instruction was especially beneficial for adolescents who were having trouble writing (p. 15).

Graham, MacArthur and Fitzgerald (2007) say that "a basic goal in helping developing writers become good planners is to create a writing environment in which planning is valued" (p. 123). They further explain that students have to understand why planning is important, how it will benefit the writer, and when to use it. In order for students to comprehend these points, teachers have to explicitly teach how to plan and have to impress upon their students that planning takes place both before, and during, writing.

A part of planning is prewriting which includes having students gather information about a topic before they begin writing. Some of the activities associated with prewriting are: reading about the topic, brainstorming, discussing the topic with peers, listening to a tape, interviewing an expert, or completing an outline (Graham et al, 2007). To make prewriting activities more

effective, Graham et al (2007), say that teachers have to explain the purpose of prewriting, describe what students are to do, and even model the process.

Planning also involves the use of inquiry activities which teach students how to "compare and contrast cases to develop inferences about similarities and differences, explain how evidence supports or does not support a claim, collect and evaluate evidence, and imagine a situation from a perspective other than one's own" (Graham et al, 2007, p. 126).

Sentence-combining involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences. Soiferman, Boyd, and Straw, (2010) in their study of grade 4 – 12 teachers, found that teachers did not teach sentence-combining as a stand-alone strategy in their classrooms. Saddler also found (2007) said that "although sentence-combining exercises have proven effective in increasing the syntactical fluency of writers, they represent only one component within a writing program" (p. 177). He further found that as a "curriculum supplement, sentence-combining provides direct, mindful practice in manipulating and rewriting basic phrases or clauses into more syntactically mature or varied forms" (p. 166). Sentence-combining has been shown to improve adolescent students' writing, but it appears from the research that it is not taught separately and needs to be incorporated into the writing process and taught as a writing strategy.

Graham et al. (2007) found that students have to be explicitly taught how to plan. This includes teaching them prewriting and inquiry strategies, with the goal of teaching them how to use the procedures independently. The authors say that "this process of explicitly teaching a strategy moves from the teacher showing students how to apply it to scaffolding students' use of the strategy until they can do it correctly on their own" (p. 128). However, the authors state that it is not enough to teach students the strategies necessary to learn how to plan; students must

have the will to write the paper and the motivation to put in the effort for writing strategies to be effective.

In secondary schools teachers have to explicitly teach writing strategies for planning, revising, and editing; research has shown that these elements have a strong impact on the quality of students' writing. The decision of what to teach in secondary schools is taken out of the teachers' hands because they have to follow a curriculum that covers the 'what' of instruction (i.e., what students will read, what aspects of grammar they should learn, and which forms of writing they will produce) but it also includes scope and sequence charts for each grade, lesson plans, and covers what planners and teachers expect students to learn (Burroughs and Smagorinsky, 2009).

First-year students and writing strategies

In post-secondary institutions, there is no set curriculum for writing instruction and the same classes within a discipline will often have different goals and outcomes (Hansen, 2006). In making the transition from high school writing to first-year university or college writing, students also need to learn how to write different forms of essays than they wrote in high school (Carroll, 2002). Instead of mostly narratives and expository prose which they wrote in high school (Applebee, 1981), first-year students are now required to write academic essays that require critical analysis papers that are longer and more complex than what they had to write in high school (Carroll, 2002).

More importantly, perhaps, every time students enter a new discipline, they become 'novice' writers again because each discipline is subject to its own rules (Downs & Wardle, 2007). The differences "encompass not only subject matter, but different ways of thinking, different social purposes, and values in the discourse communities, different genres, different

kinds of rhetorical issues, and even, different writing processes between disciplines" (Beaufort, 2007, p. 140). Beaufort (2007) goes on to say that in order for writers to be successful in different genres and discourse communities, they need to learn the appropriate writing strategies for each discipline, but also to understand the difference and learn the methods to write in each discipline. Applebee (1981) also found that "language is used differently in the various academic disciplines: vocabularies are specialized, forms of argument and organization are conventionalized, and the typical modes of discourse vary" (p. 100).

For first-year students, "generating ideas and planning take on many different forms as students move into different methods of research and data collection" (Carroll, 2002, p. 74). Carroll (2002) further states that "students usually do not have time to seek peer review and write multiple drafts unless a course is structured to encourage a more extended writing process for challenging writing tasks. Editing is often last minute and frequently haphazard" (p. 74). However, as students progress through their years at university, they come to understand that more difficult writing projects require more sophisticated strategies for gathering information, planning, organizing, and meeting the expectations of readers (Carroll, 2002).

In addition, the distinction between revising and editing is not as clear cut as it once might have been. Revising might include writing new sections of text or even beginning again with a new text, while editing involves spelling, grammar, word-usage, and other local concerns (Haar, 2006). In university courses, where students are expected to write differently than they did in high school, revision needs to be explicitly taught. Graham et al., (2007) found that college students only spend about a quarter of their writing time planning and reviewing what they write.

Carroll (2002) found that first-year students struggle not only with understanding the expectation of their professors, but they also need assistance in understanding the assignments, in

learning what the guidelines are for performance, in being provided with models to study, in receiving specific feedback on their writing assignments, and in getting opportunities to improve their writing after receiving feedback. Faculty, in all disciplines, expect first-year students to be able to write in the various discourse communities. Many faculty members, "however, assume that a generic form of writing could or should be mastered in first-year English courses and complain bitterly when students who have already completed their composition requirements still can't write*"* (Carroll, 2002, p. 60). Further, the author found that first-year students expected more explicit instruction from their instructors since they often do not understand what is expected of them when completing assignments.

Differences between Adolescents and First-Year Students in Learning Writing Strategies

In high school, writing instruction is guided by a structured curriculum. That is not the case in first-year where writing instruction is left to the individual instructor. There is no shared foundation among disciplines on which to begin teaching first-year students. The difference between the writing and reasoning conventions of different disciplines means that it is difficult for students to apply the writing strategies of one discipline to writing assignments in another discipline. In addition, because each discipline uses its own vocabulary and argument style, students may not even recognize that the skills they acquire in one discipline can be transferred to another. It may be useful for first-year students to receive instruction in writing strategies but, given the lack of shared foundation among the disciplines, it is hard to see how that might be achieved.

Another difference between adolescents and first-year students is that writing in universities and colleges are often produced under tight time constraints (Carroll, 2002). Carroll

(2002) goes on to say that most student writing is completed close to the due date that the professors have set as the deadline; often only completed a day or two before, or even the night before. This does not allow first-year students to concentrate on strategy or writing process. High schools students do not operate under the same time deadlines as first-year students, and their writing assignments are shorter (Applebee, 1981) than that expected at the university level. Applebee (1981) further states that high school instructional writing contexts include many tasks such as: writing drafts, receiving feedback from teachers and peers, revising, editing, and re-working the final product. Applebee (1981) observed that class time is allotted in high schools to write and collaborate with peers but that is not the case with university classes where time is of the essence. First-year students would benefit from planning, revising, and editing but it appears that they just do not have the time. (Beaufort, 2007).

2. Summarization involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize text. (Sub-group of summarization includes: writing for content learning, no.11).

Graham and Perin (2007) found that students can learn to write better summaries from either a 'rule-governed or more intuitive approach' (p. 16). Teaching adolescents how to summarize text had a consistent, strong, positive effect (0.82) on their ability to write good summaries. The strong effect size indicated that the learners in the studies strongly benefited from learning how to summarize information in writing (Graham et al, 2007).

Adolescents and summarization strategies

Summary writing can provide the teacher with a tool for reviewing previous learning or for preparing students for new tasks (MacArthur, Graham & Fitzgerald, 2006). When summarizing, students must consider text-based information somewhat differently than the way they would when they answer study questions. Two types of plans are necessary: a plan for

combining and a plan for integrating information from the text in a succinct way (MacArthur et al., 2006). Studies of summarizing have revealed that, although students order information paragraph-by-paragraph, leading them to search for relationships between ideas, this task can result in a superficial understanding of content (MacArthur et al., 2006). MacArthur, Graham and Fitzgerald (2006) further state that "rather than evaluation or analysis of ideas, summaries begin with highly distilled descriptions of events and ideas discussed in a reading passage that then introduce more specific information" (p. 239). Summarizing tasks often lead students to write down information in a linear fashion as the information occurs in a reading passage which can lead to only short term retention of those ideas (MacArthur et al., 2006).

Students in high school are taught how to summarize text by getting them to restate the main ideas of a text or passage; this allows students to get a general idea of what the passage is about or what facts are being presented (Applebee, 1981). Applebee (1981) characterized summarization in high schools as an exercise where students rely on narrative sequence for their structure and organization; with the summaries typically describing steps in a process or procedure. Applebee (1981) found that summarization accounted for just over "a fifth of the writing in the social sciences, and nearly half of the science classes" (p. 39).

MacArthur et al. (2006) describe summarization as a way for students to learn information in a more active, rather than passive, way. When students summarize a text, they put the ideas into their own language which fosters greater understanding because the act of writing allows students to manipulate the information. "If writing is to be thought of as an important tool for learning and thinking, then the school community may need to discuss purposes beyond the obvious one of communication" (Soiferman et al., 2010, p. 11). Soiferman et al. (2010) go on to say that "students who are taught to write effective summaries and practice

that skill frequently exercise increased reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Practicing these skills can lead to better understanding of how authors put together ideas which can only lead to improved writing" (p.11).

First-year students and summarization

Friend (2000) listed four defining features of a summary written for content area courses. These include: 1) it is short; 2) it tells what is most important; 3) it is written in 'your own words'; and, 4) it states the information 'you need to study'. The author believes that college students can be taught to "think about the passage and relate ideas to one another to construct a summary rather than select sentences from the passage" (p. 320). One of the "most common strategies college students use to study is to underline parts of a text and read the text over and over" (Ruddell & Boyle, 1989). Friend (2000) says that many first-year students view learning as something that will happen to them if they reread faithfully. Ruddell and Boyle (1989) found that re-reading is limiting in its effectiveness; re-reading will strengthen individual ideas but it is not very effective at creating connections among ideas. The lack of connections limits how much information can be recalled and also limits the ways the learner can remember the information so that it can be applied to new situations. Re-reading leads to rehearsal of information which, in turn, leads to rote learning which limits the amount of material that can be remembered when it is time to write the test or compose the essay.

For most first-year students, learning how to write a proper summary for their content area courses can prove too daunting a task to tackle (Friend, 2000). Friend (2000) found that first-year students often find summarization a mystery. She goes on to say that, too often, first-year students are left to learn summarization through a discovery approach rather than through direct instruction and guided practice. First-year students face a number of challenges: they are

bombarded with new information; they need to master a vocabulary that is content-specific; and they are immersed in a learning environment that is not user-friendly. Teachers of content area classes do not typically teach their students how to write in the new discipline so students are left to learn on their own (Downs & Wardle, 2007). As a result, students feel overwhelmed and unprepared for the writing tasks that are assigned to them. Summarizing unfamiliar text without either prior knowledge instruction or direct instruction on what is important can lead to students writing down everything in the chapter. They do not have the expertise to know what is important and what is not important (Friend, 2000).

Differences between Adolescents and First-Year Students Regarding Summarization

Students in high school are taught summarization in their content areas. They are taught various strategies (e.g., graphic organizers) as a way to organize the material in the text. Students are also taught to look for the main ideas in paragraphs, and to find supporting details. Summarization techniques involve teaching students how to restate the text in as few words as possible or in a new way. High school students learn how to summarize as a way of studying the content of their subjects (Applebee, 1981).

Summarization would be helpful to first-year students in a number of ways. They could use summarization strategies as a way to learn and they could use summarization strategies to write academic papers (Friend, 2000). However, summarization at the first-year level requires explicit instruction to move students from the skills they had used in high schools to the ones that will be more appropriate for the university environment. Summarizing in high school often leads students to a focus on the whole text in more comprehensive but superficial ways whereas summarizing in first-year courses is more analytical which leads students to focus on selective

parts of the text, reasoning more deeply about less information (Langer & Applebee, 1987). First-year students must know how to summarize so that the ideas of a passage are related to one another, weighed, and condensed; it is a process of synthesis not selection (Friend, 2000). Friend (2000) further states that using summarization techniques as a study strategy helps students make connections as they group ideas into associated concepts. It is the grouping that extends cognitive capacity (Friend, 2000).

3. Collaborative writing which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions. (Sub-group of collaborative writing includes: process writing approach, no.8).

Studies of collaboration compared students working alone with students working collaboratively. Students working collaboratively with one another, on one or more aspects of their writing, had a strong (0.75) positive impact on the quality of their writing. Graham and Perin (2007) found that "collaborative arrangements in which students help each other with one or more aspects of their writing have a strong positive impact on quality" (p. 16).

Process writing, with an emphasis on how the paper is written, lends itself to a more socially oriented product (Lindblom-Ylanne & Pihlajamdki, 2003) which benefits from collaborative learning among peers. Lindblom-Ylanne and Pihlajamdki (2003) contend that, in product-oriented writing instruction, students tend to focus on their own written products to the exclusion of others, while process-oriented instruction offers many opportunities for collaborative work and social support during the writing process.

Adolescents and collaborative writing

Peer response groups are one way that students can practice collaborative writing in secondary schools (National Writing Project, 2006). In peer response, the teacher first models

how to comment on a piece of writing then asks students to read and review one another's work in pairs or small groups. The students give feedback and suggestions for revision. Students are also encouraged to read their papers out loud to peers because this helps them learn to listen for wordiness, awkward construction, and omissions (National Writing Project, 2006).

Yarrow and Topping (2001), in their study of collaborative writing, grouped children in pairs so that one member of the group was a higher-achieving writer and the other was a struggling writer. The higher-achieving writer acted as the helper for the struggling writer. The teacher developed a flowchart that explained the steps of writing, such as ideas, draft, read, edit, best copy, and evaluate. There was also a flowchart indicating the roles that each person in the collaborative team could assume in each writing session.

MacArthur, Schwartz, and Graham (1991) studied students who used collaboration to edit and revise each other's papers. The teacher first instructed each pair of students and modeled ways to carry out peer editing. One student in each pair was the editor and the other student was the author. The author read aloud a piece of their own writing and the editor listened to it. The editor then read the selection alone and made notes about what revisions were needed. When the discussion was over, the author made the necessary revisions.

Teachers can also act as collaborators with their students (Prior, 2006) by taking on the role of co-author. It is the teacher who often decides what to write, what deadlines to set, what style and topic will be used, and what structure the writing process will take (Prior, 2006). The teacher might also offer specific words and phrases (Prior, 2006). Ulichny and Watson-Gegeo (1989) reported that in their collaborative role, teachers follow a pattern similar to the one observed by Prior (2006): first they read the student's text; second, they employ a find and fix routine, in which the teacher finds errors and the students fix them; and third, they identify

recommendations for the next paper. MacArthur et al. (2006), also found that collaboration among peers used a more fix-it-up approach to writing, where pairs of students, or a student and teacher, read the paper, made suggestions about things to change and then allowed the writer to 'fix it up'. There were no studies reported by Graham and Perin (2007) that talked about students actually working together on a piece of writing where the focus was on improving the quality of the ideas represented in the text through a shared discussion. In the reports, discussed in this paper, the author still worked alone and only collaborated at the end of the process. It would seem that, in this type of scenario, the second person is more of an editor than a collaborator.

First-year students and collaborative writing

Most writing in first-year courses is completed in solitary confinement (Couture, 1986; Haworth, Turner & Whiteley, 2004; Yancey, 2004). Haworth, Turner and Whiteley (2004) believe that more has to be done in first-year courses to allow students to work in pairs and small groups on extended writing projects. The benefit of students working together is that peers can act as guides, mentors, and even assessors for each other's writing, creating a safe environment for experimentation and consolidation (Haworth et al., 2004). Students can also benefit from collaboration with their professors who can provide scaffolding that will allow them to produce work that is more complex than they would have been able to produce on their own (Carroll, 2002).

Lindblom-Ylanne and Pihlajamdki (2003), found that the first-year students, in their study, wrote their papers individually and then shared them with peers and teachers. This seems to be the norm for university level students. If any collaboration is to be undertaken, the individual still works alone first and then collaborates on the revising and editing phase.

Nevertheless, students in the study found that the revision suggestions they received from their peers improved the quality of their final product.

Syh-Jong (2007) examined students' construction of science knowledge through talk and writing activities performed in a collaborative learning group. He found that "writing and speaking in a collaborative group required students either to defend their own view or accept others' views whenever confronting science concept understandings" (p. 78). The author further discovered that students were motivated to make sure that other students understood what they were saying in terms of concepts; these students also used the ideas of other students to help them clarify, verify, elaborate, or modify their own thinking. Students who shared information, and talked through their thinking process become more active learners and took more ownership of their ideas. In addition, sharing helped them modify or discard previously held concepts when they were confronted with other viewpoints. Talking and writing in a collaborative group led these students to construct knowledge for themselves.

The construction of knowledge is a necessary part of concept understanding. Students who are presented with a body of knowledge as if it were proven fact or truth think that learning consists of memorizing facts (Syh-Jong, 2007). Syh-Jong (2007) recommended that college faculty move away from straight lecture to a more collaborative model where students are engaged in discovering the concepts for themselves through interaction with the instructor and fellow students.

Differences between Adolescents and First-Year Students in Collaborative Writing

First-year students still work, for the most part individually. However, if their first-year course is structured as a process-writing course, and the instructor allows time for discussion with peers, then collaboration is possible. However, as Lindblom-Ylanne and Pihlajamdki

(2003) discovered, most first-year students do not feel comfortable sharing unfinished drafts with their peers. The students further reported that it takes a great deal of courage to share their own ideas.

In the studies reviewed by Graham & Perin (2007), adolescents also wrote individually and used collaboration mainly for editing and revising, just as the first-year students did. The students in secondary schools did not share writing duties, nor did they craft papers together. Nelson (2008) does not regard this form of writing as collaboration. For Nelson (2008), true collaboration can only take place "among people who contribute to the writing as the text is being produced" (p. 440). Nelson (2008) only identifies situations in which writers share responsibility and credit for the text as co-authorship. None of the studies reported here had secondary or post-secondary students assuming a co-author role in their writing.

4. Specific Product Goals which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete. It includes identifying the purpose of the assignment (e.g., to persuade) as well as characteristics of the final product. (Sub-group of specific product goals includes: the study of models. no. 10, Graham & Perin, 2007, effective writing strategies).

Specific goals in the studies reviewed by Graham and Perin (2007) included: 1) adding more ideas to a paper when revising, or establishing a goal to write a specific kind of paper; and, 2) assigning goals for specific structural elements in a composition. When compared with situations in which students were simply given a general overall goal, these relatively specific goals resulted in a positive effect on the writing (the effect size was 0.70). Setting specific product goals provides students with objectives and allows them to focus on particular aspects of their writing.

Adolescents and setting specific product goals

Bruning and Horn (2000) believe that: 1) teachers should make students aware of the thinking and social functions of writing; 2) teachers should discuss students' beliefs about writing; and, 3) teachers should teach writing strategies that students can successfully implement as they write. Further, teachers can build interest in writing by helping to foster interest in different topics, and help students establish authentic goals and contexts for writing. In addition, Bruning and Horn (2000) suggest that teachers help students to set goals and monitor their progress, and offer comments at all critical junctures of the writing process. The writing tasks should be as complex as possible, within the students' instructional levels. Bruning and Horn (2000) also found that children need to control as much of the writing process as possible.

Controlling the writing process means that writers have to be able to create writing goals (Flower & Hayes, 1981). Flower and Hayes (1981) say that most writers' goals are generated, developed, and revised by the same processes that generate and organize new ideas. It is the ability to set goals that can differentiate a good writer from a struggling writer. Flower and Hayes (1981) further state that writing goals fall into two categories: process goals and content goals. They define process goals as instructions people give themselves about how to carry out the process of writing. Content goals specify all the things the writer wants to say to an audience.

It is difficult to measure exactly how adolescents approach goal-setting in their writing tasks as none of the studies reviewed by Graham and Perin (2007) talked about how adolescents set goals or what kinds of writing goals they set. The studies speak to the importance of setting goals before writing can begin, and how having a goal improves writing, but nowhere do they address the question of how adolescents actually set goals. Indeed, in Graham and Perin's

(2007) meta-analysis "setting product goals involves assigning students specific, teachable goals for the writing they are to complete" (p. 17). These goals, are therefore, extrinsic not intrinsic.

First-year students and setting specific product goals

Like adolescent writing projects, most first-year essays are teacher-directed with assignments and goals spelled out on the course syllabus. However, since first-year students are novices in their new discourse fields, it is difficult for them to learn the expected characteristics of the final product unless their instructor gives them some guidance as to how to write in each discipline. Hansen (2006) says that college students move from discipline to discipline and they often "become confused by unarticulated differences between how to think and write in [different courses]" (p. 1). He further states that students become frustrated when different kinds of writing, with different formats, goals, and assumptions, exist even within a single discipline. Further, Hillocks (1986) found that even if instructors provide models for their students to follow, the use of models to improve first-year students' writing was inconclusive. He also found that, in most studies, researchers were unable to make a connection between the uses of models and improved writing quality. It does not appear that students are able to generate their own goals through the study of models.

Instructors have to help students by setting clear goals for writing assignments (Hansen, 2006) and providing a structure they can use to produce an academic essay. The instructors can also help by explaining the requirements regarding the content of the paper and the format expected. Hansen (2006) reasons that the more students understand the purpose, the format, and the audience of the paper, the better their final document will be. To be effective, writing goals need to be discussed, either on the course syllabus or in class discussions, before the students actually start writing.

The purpose of a writing assignment for first-year students is to get a good mark (Beaufort, 2007) so most first-year students do not look for a purpose much beyond that one. However, extrinsic goals (marks) can become intrinsic goals when students learn why they are completing an assignment. The 'why' allows students to identify the goals that will improve the paper and the improved paper will lead, in most cases, to a better mark. This use of extrinsic goals (marks) to guide students in their development of intrinsic goals should be an aspect of first-year instruction.

Differences between adolescents and first-year students setting specific product goals

There is not much difference in the way that the two groups of students acquire specific product goals. The goals are usually set from the outside by the instructor (extrinsic). For first-year students, it appears that the goals have to come from outside because the students are novices in the new discourse communities and are not sure what it is that their instructors expect from them (Carroll, 2002). Instructors have to clearly articulate what the goals of the course are. Only when a student is able to match the goals of the instructor with the paper they write will they do well in the course (Carroll, 2002).

Adolescents have the same problem as first-year students. The teacher has to articulate their goals for the assignments otherwise the student does not know what to do or how to do it (Applebee, 1981). As previously discussed, there were no studies reviewed by Graham and Perin (2007) that indicate if adolescents even understand what it means to set goals for their own writing. If they do set goals, they are most likely goals such as 'complete assignment on time', or 'write down what the teacher told us' (Applebee, 1981). These extrinsic goals do not lead to an understanding of 'why' they are completing the assignment.

Conclusion

This discussion has focussed on the four elements of writing instruction that Graham and Perin (2007) identified as having the largest effect sizes on improving student writing: direct strategy instruction, summarization instruction, collaborative writing, and setting specific product goals. The one factor that is common through all four elements is the need for direct, explicit instruction. Indeed, Graham and Perin (2007) reiterate that excellent instruction in writing not only emphasizes correctness of forms and conventions, but also instils in writers the command of a wide variety of forms, genres, styles, and tones, and the ability to adapt to different contexts and purposes.

One of the major stumbling blocks to incorporating universal writing strategies in first-year courses, like those identified by Graham and Perin (2007) is that first-year courses are not all the same. While it is true that all courses require 'academic writing' of some kind, we need to ask which academic writing; what content, what genre, for what activity, context, and audience (Downs & Wardle, 2007). Students in first-year often have difficulties adapting to the new writing demands that are made on them in the different disciplines that they are asked to write in. As has been mentioned in this paper, learning how to write an academic essay is complex because there are so many factors that define exactly what an academic essay is. Students have to enter discourse communities that come complete with their own content-specific vocabularies, their own writing structures, and the varied demands of the instructors who teach in the disciplines. It would be easy to say that the eleven elements identified by Graham and Perin (2007) as being effective to improve adolescent writing skills could also increase first-year students writing ability. If only it were that straightforward.

A major difference is the writing environments that first-year students find themselves in compared to the secondary environments. In secondary schools, the curriculum guides the teacher in planning writing activities and the activities are more or less compatible with each other, even across the disciplines. Applebee (1981) also found that "broad discourse purposes or uses of language are common in the various high school subjects" (p. 150).

In post-secondary institutions there is no set curriculum and the same classes within a discipline will often have different goals and outcomes (Hansen, 2006). An essential difference between first-year and secondary school is that writing in secondary schools does not to the same degree differentiate between domains. Students in first-year are expected to learn specific domain protocols in each class they attend because the university is not a single writing environment. First-year students move from class to class, and from discipline to discipline thus making it difficult to master the different protocols in each class (Hansen, 2006). As well, first-year instructors are forced to define academic discourse for themselves before they can teach it. Many first-year composition teachers are unfamiliar with the various discourses in other disciplines so are unable to teach the "specialized discourses used to mediate other activities within disciplinary systems across the university" (Downs & Wardle, 2007, p. 556).

When faculty from different disciplines were interviewed by Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) they expressed the view that 'good writing was good writing'. However, upon closer examination and through interviews the authors discovered that "what was deemed good writing in one discipline was not good writing in another discipline" (p. 83). The instructors realized that what needed to happen in their courses was to share with their students what was expected in that discipline in terms of writing. Some classes wanted a thesis statement in the introduction, while other faculties saw that as "giving away the conclusion before they had presented reasoned

evidence in support of their argument" (p. 84). A problem arises, for students because the same terms (audiences, thesis, documentation style, sources, organization, grammar, and mechanics) are used from "course to course, discipline to discipline" (p.87), but the terms have their own unique definitions dependent on the discipline they are being used in (discipline-specific criteria). This can be very confusing for the novice writer who understandably thinks that 'evidence' in one discipline is 'evidence' in another discipline (p. 87). It is this "'insider' talk which covers a wide range of inferred connotations that leads to confusion among first-year writers, and makes teaching writing across the disciplines problematic" (p. 88).

The eleven elements of Graham and Perin (2007) discussed in this paper are worthwhile teaching to first-year students but the university environment makes that almost impossible. First-year professors teach large numbers of students each term and the type of explicit classroom instruction needed to incorporate the elements is not realistic. These writing strategies would be easier to incorporate in second year when the class sizes are more manageable. Perhaps it is too much to ask first-year students to try to incorporate specialized discourse writing in their first-year. Is it worth the time that it would take to indoctrinate first-year students into domain specific discourse communities if they do not intend to take more classes, in that area, in the future? In closing, "if students are to become good writers, we need to help them become strategic, knowledgeable, and motivated writers … (Graham et al, 2007, p. 5).

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