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Best Practices in Implementing a Process Approach to Teaching Writing

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The teaching practices associated with the process approach to writing instruction from kindergarten to 12th grade have been delineated more in the practical applications literature than in the research literature due to the changing definitions of what the process entails and the uneven application of the approach across research studies. An overall finding of research on the process approach is that all the stages must be fully implemented if students are to build a repertoire of writing strategies. Students need structure and sequence and do not benefit from a pick-and-choose approach to teaching writing. In a smorgasbord approach, only some of the instructional components of the process approach are applied, such as when a teacher employs rubrics in grading but does not involve students in understanding and/or creating the features of the rubrics. In a piecemeal approach, process writing instruction is implemented unevenly across time or grade, as when, for example, an 11th-grade student has only literature but not writing instruction, a sixth-grade student experiences the entire writing process, a fourth-grade student only completes skills-and-drills worksheets, and a third-grade student never works in peer writing groups. Such uneven applications confound the methodological issues in studying the process approach; however, most of the research does support the use of the process approach as being more effective than other approaches in terms of improving writing attitudes and products (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006).

Implementation of best practices in teaching the process approach involves adopting a comprehensive, holistic instructional model, including understanding the limitations of the approach, its theoretical underpinnings, and the supporting research literature. For example, teachers of the process approach do not just have good lessons, one-shot hot topics to gain attention, and a set of how-to's. They understand the process itself, usually by having experienced it themselves as writers who share their writing with an audience, which is the premise of the professional development model designed by the National Writing Project (*www.writingproject.org*). Reading teachers recognize Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) as a way for adults to model reading. Similarly, writing teachers who use the process approach involve themselves in writing along with their students in Sustained Silent Writing (SSW). Just as reading teachers use think-alouds to model decoding, fluency, expression, and comprehension during guided reading lessons, writing teachers intentionally model all the parts of the composing process.

With a clear understanding of the research and the theoretical bases for the writing process, we can have not only good stand-alone lessons, but also ones integrated into an instructional approach. Without such bases for our decisions about lessons, we may find that we unwittingly undo one lesson in our expectations for another—as implied in the mandate "Be creative! Make no errors!" We can unintentionally present a puzzling, shifting philosophy for our students in how we teach. For example, in writing lessons, we may stress process, process, process, while in literature teaching, we emphasize right answer, right answer, right answer. Over time, and with an understanding of reader response theory, theories of composing, and principles of writing across the curriculum, teachers can integrate an overall teaching philosophy with specific methods of writing instruction and end up with a repertoire of best practices for a comprehensive writing program.

Although many theories undergird the teaching of writing, some varying by grade level, two important basic concepts need to be understood in developing lessons that are integrated, sequenced, and scaffolded: (1) Writing is a cognitive task and, as such, is also developmental; and (2) writing is a social act and, thus, moves from egocentrism to larger audiences. As a guru of writing theory, James Moffett (1981), says, "For me no discussion of language, rhetoric, and composition is meaningful except in this context, for there is no speech without a speaker in some relations to a spoken-to or spoken-about" (p. 142). If their teachers implement a process-oriented instructional model, students will participate in a community of writers intellectually and emotionally. Over the course of schooling, they will move from an audience of self to teachers, peers, authentic public audiences, and, eventually, fictional audiences. "This continuum," says Moffett, "is formed simply by increasing the distance, in all senses, between the speaker and audience. The audience is, first, the speaker himself, then another person standing before him, then someone in another time and place but having some personal relation to the speaker, then, lastly, an unknown mass extended over time and space" (pp. 142–143).

As students move along the continuum of audiences, they practice a broad range of strategies that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Goldstein & Carr, 1996) collectively refer to as "process oriented instruction" (p. 1). These include the decisions writers make about audience and topic during prewriting, composing rough drafts, sharing their writing to gather response, and revising and editing.

In developing her theory of composing processes of 12th graders, Janet Emig (1971) noted that writing is the only literacy process that involves the hand (we use tools to write), the eye (writing leaves a public artifact), and the brain (we search prior knowledge, use both long- and short-term memory, deal with writing blocks, organize, problem-solve, etc.) We would add that composing also uses the heart. As Friere (2000) says, "All learning is both cognitive and emotional." For process-oriented teachers, this means that writing instruction must essentially deal with it all: addressing emotions surrounding writing, such as those that accompany writer's block; building confidence and motivation in writers; teaching micro-level (enabling) skills such as handwriting, desktop publishing, spelling, and sentence construction and macro-level skills such as organization, cohesion, audience, and genre. The goal in process approach instruction is for most of these cognitive and psychological skills to become automatized for writers, so that they do not have to start from scratch with each new writing event.

For purposes of this chapter, our understanding of the process approach is that it is a recursive rather than linear process of creating a text (that may be shared with an audience in oral readings or written publications) from prewriting to publication. In the process approach, not every prewriting activity will lead to a final draft, but students' understanding of the movement from first idea to finished product is an essential feature.

Other chapters in this book address in depth various aspects of composing relevant to the process approach. This chapter will describe six major lesson foci in that approach: (1) dealing with the emotions surrounding writing, (2) developing students' understanding of the writing process, (3) modeling and teaching self-regulation processes, (4) training and monitoring peer response partners and groups, (5) guiding writing development through targeted strategy instruction that addresses ideas and content, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions (commonly referred to as the "Six Traits" or as the "features of writing"), and (6) developing a writing vocabulary. These components must be taught and monitored so that they become internalized by writers.

GUIDELINES AND EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES USING PROCESS APPROACH INSTRUCTION

In the following sections, we describe these six foundational areas that the process approach entails, no matter at what grade level it is applied, while commenting on the key ideas that need to be addressed in instruction. We do not want to imply that best practices in teaching the process approach in elementary school be dropped in middle or high school, or that elementary students cannot accomplish some of the writing tasks usually assigned to middle or high school students. The six areas of best practices that we recommend need to be introduced and reinforced throughout the grades and adapted to particular age groups.

Address the Emotional Issues Surrounding Writing

The impact of emotions on writing has been written about extensively (Boice, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Maisel, 1999; Rose, 1985). Because skills and emotions are intertwined, some of the stress that fosters negative attitudes is reduced when students are provided adequate instruction and time to compose in class. Students compose more text when they are members of a positive, nonthreatening social climate in which they write frequently. Being part of a writing community means that students experience uninterrupted time for individual practice. When writing is given time and presence in the curriculum, students will improve at it.

In the elementary grades, students need to write every day, not only in various subject areas, but also in blocks of time set aside for mini-lessons that address specific features of writing and the writing process. This time provides students with the opportunity to write and practice the skills and strategies the teacher has taught, not just hear or read about them. In middle and high school, the writing community is usually based in a language arts or English class, but much of the practice of writing can occur in the disciplines. (Suggestions for writing across the curriculum are offered in Newell, Koukis, & Boster, Chapter 4, this volume.)

Tragically, many students who enjoy writing in the early elementary grades end up hating or avoiding writing by the time they enter the upper elementary grades or middle school. When individuals do not understand either the process for accomplishing a task or the end result of a specific endeavor, they can become frustrated. Lessons designed specifically to address the emotional issues and barriers surrounding writing help minimize this confusion. Across grade levels, four major factors contribute to students' unrealistic expectations and negative perceptions of themselves as writers: (1) failure to understand and apply appropriate strategies when composing text, (2) a flawed understanding of the writing process, (3) confusion about what the assignment is asking them to do (e.g., inability to deconstruct a prompt), and (4) unfamiliarity with the features of the assigned genre. All of these can be specifically addressed in targeted lessons.

When faced with a writing assignment, many students experience writer's block. Students' stress levels are greatly reduced or alleviated when teachers provide guidelines for starting and completing the assignment. With writing-on-demand tasks, such as state assessments, teachers can provide explicit instructions, practice in unlocking writing prompts, and strategies for planning. Teachers can share drafts as the students write throughout the process and showcase good images and phrases as well as whole pieces of writing. When teachers have students share best lines while students are still drafting and revising, the writers who are recognized receive an emotional boost and others often gain ideas that they can adapt to their own writing. At the end of the assignment, teachers can celebrate students' accomplishments through class publications, bulletin boards, montages, mobiles, collections, author's chair, PTA meetings, and hall displays. Moffett (1981) says that the "three things to do with final versions of writing are post, print, and perform" (p. 25). Dialogues and monologues are obvious genres to be performed, but a Readers' Theater can also be created using excerpts from the writing of many students, especially narrative or expressive writing. Moffett also advises that postwriting activities "should give writing as satisfactory a recompense as possible and at the same time provide further feedback, from a larger or different audience, about the effects of what one has written" (p. 26).

Disruptive emotions also arise when a writer has a history of fear of the blank page and recollections of how long it takes and how difficult it is to generate texts or of how bad it feels to get a failing grade on a writing assignment. Such past experiences inhibit students who define themselves as bad writers. Teachers can instruct them on how to deal with negative emotions, such as how to conquer the IC or internal critic (Boice, 1985). One creative teacher we know had his students externalize their ICs in posters. A memorable one depicted a wild-eyed monster with bleeding talons (nails punched through the poster board) that clutched essays! Teachers can also teach students what to do when they are stuck and offer strategies for how to acknowledge and control avoidance behaviors they have allowed to interfere with their focus and engagement when composing.

Best practices in teaching the process approach include assessing and attending to the positive and negative emotions surrounding writing. Validated instruments can be helpful for a writer in determining his or her feelings about writing. The Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS) (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1997/1998) applies to children, while the Measure of Writing Apprehension (Daly & Miller, 1975) applies to young adults and adults. A more extensive self-assessment addresses blocking in teachers and has sections that can be adapted for students (Boice, 1990). These assessments can be used by teachers to (1) identify apprehensive students; (2) aggregate scores from a class as a pre- and posttest measure to evaluate the impact of teaching; and (3) give to students for self-evaluation so they can develop their own plans for dealing with procrastination, lack of productivity, and negative emotions.

Develop Students' Understanding of the Writing Process

Equally important to fostering a climate conducive to writing and sharing is ensuring that all students understand the complexity of the writing process. Many students hold a naive view that professional authors complete their published pieces after composing one draft and doing some minor revisions. Others believe that writing is a gift from a muse that only a few special people receive. Although students report that they understand that the writing process involves generating ideas, organizing, drafting, and revising, many persist in believing that as they refine their craft, they will eventually be able to compose final drafts the first time.

Teachers must demystify the writing process for students by teaching them that, regardless of how skilled they become, all writers will perform just like professional writers: they will utilize a process, adapted to their needs, to develop their manuscripts; they will go through several stages of revision; they will seek the responses of others; they will edit for errors at the manuscript level; and they will eventually realize that writing is never perfect and always open to revision. As the French poet Valery said, "A poem is never complete; it is just abandoned." If teachers have experienced writing in their graduate classes or participated in professional development institutes such as the National Writing Project, they will have their own messy first drafts, redrafts, inserts, peer comments, mark-ups, and final drafts to share with students as examples of intentional actions to improve their writing.

Today, writers of all ages are familiar with technology. By middle school, students are adept at hand–eye coordination and can easily grasp the more advanced editing/revising capabilities of word processing programs, such as tracking revisions, strike-throughs, adding comments, changing margins and fonts, bypassing default settings, inserting graphics, etc. This is the time to make good use of desktop publishing to assemble class books and to ask students to create their own digital stories that incorporate text, music, and pictures. (See Karchmer-Klein, Chapter 11, this volume.)

Model and Teach Self-Regulation Strategies

Successful writing requires active and deliberate self-regulation of the writing process (Hayes & Flowers, 1986; Langer & Applebee, 1987). Self-regulation in writing, the counterpart of metacognition in reading, involves monitoring one's comprehension when writing as well as applying specific strategies to complete an assignment. Zimmerman and Risemberg (1997) define self-regulation as "self-initiated thoughts, feelings, and actions that writers use to attain various literary goals, including improving their writing skills as well as enhancing the quality of the text they create" (p. 76).

Students of all ages will respond to lessons that provide specific strategies for reflection and self-evaluation. For example, good readers understand the importance of activating schemas by skimming the text and thinking about what they already know concerning the reading topic. Similarly, prior to composing, good writers activate schemas by employing some form of prewriting and reflection. Students need a framework or a sequence of steps to accomplish demanding assignments. George Hillocks (1986) points out that writers require such specific instruction (he calls these "inquiry strategies" for learning "procedural knowledge") to develop content and tools for creating different kinds of discourse. Additionally, by providing guidelines, teachers can prompt self-evaluation and reward self-reflections about one's final piece on the evaluation rubric.

Train and Monitor Peer Partners and Peer Response Groups

The literature on the process approach is based on the idea that writing is a social activity and is best learned in a community. Researchers have examined the connection between the writing process and the social contexts within which writing occurs (Gere & Abbott, 1985). They attribute the effectiveness of the writing process to an essential practice—the interaction of writers with teachers and peers during conferences and small-group work. In his review of research on effective strategies for teaching writing, Hillocks (1986) determined that writing practice alone does not improve writing; rather, having writing *responded to using specific criteria for response* improves writing.

Teachers have implemented peer groups in settings across the curriculum as a way to encourage students to write and revise. Most agree that using peer groups supports the process approach by providing social benefits. These include a nonthreatening audience, immediate feedback, experience of a wide range of writing abilities, reduced writing apprehension, development of positive attitudes about writing, increased motivation to revise, increased quantity of writing, more teacher time for individual attention, and development of cooperation and interpersonal skills. The social aspects fostered in a writing community have effects extending beyond writing products. Moreover, positive effects on writing products are also pronounced when peer groups are used.

Students are highly interested in the social aspects of school, suggesting that teachers should take advantage of the benefits of peer groups and the variety of audiences that writers can reach. Issues of audience were raised in the 1980s by researchers who viewed writing as social and interactive. Developmentalists such as Barry Kroll (1978) showed us how the sense of audience for writers expands from the self to an identified "other" (often the teacher) and eventually to an audience in a situated context beyond the school. An interesting aspect of Kroll's study was how 12-year-olds attacked the problem of audience. Students were instructed to explain the rules of a game to a peer audience and then to play the game to see if the audience had understood the rules. Even when the students giving the rules learned that their audience could not play the game according to those rules, they were at a loss as to how to revise their explanations. Just as often happens when we speak to foreigners whose language we do not know, the children said the same rules louder and more slowly!

A common practice in implementing a writing workshop in the elementary grades is to introduce children to sharing their writing for response with peer partners, which are sometimes expanded by upper elementary to peer groups. By middle school, students can benefit from a sophisticated use of peer groups that can provide feedback in many areas. Some teachers prefer to distinguish between editing groups and response groups, but both need to be trained. By high school, students can be expected to share in peer groups, electronically or face to face, outside of class time.

We use a role-playing exercise to demonstrate the various personalities that arise in peer groups (the defensive author, the picky grammarian, the off-topic respondent, etc.). Then we introduce the rules for conducting an effective writing group and practice them in a modeling activity. Finally, the rules are applied to papers that students write and share with their classmates. These rules have been outlined by various experts over the years (e.g., Macrorie, 1984). The basics are: (1) the students sit facing each other with copies of one student's paper; (2) that student reads his or her piece of writing *without apology or introduction to influence response*; (3) responses begin on the writer's right and continue around the circle; (4) first responses are positive ("I like this section . . . ") or neutral ("Here, it seems like you are saying . . . "); (5) second responses can be more pointed or offer suggestions ("I need more information about . . . "); (6) throughout this process of response, the writer does not comment, explain, cheer, sigh, or groan, so as not to influence the response. Alan Glatthorn (1994) provides guidelines for how peers can respond chronologically as they read a classmate's paper ("So far I think you have said . . . "; "At this point I hope you are going to . . . "; "I'd like to hear more about . . . "; "The main feeling I am left with is . . . "). We have found his suggestions appropriate when students respond to a peer's writing using an audiotape as well as when they write their comments on peers' papers or use the comment tool in a word processing program.

By high school, with instruction, students evolve from writing for authentic audiences to writing for fictional audiences, while attending to the rhetorical choices that pertain to various types of audiences. They understand that a writer takes on a persona and that the persona can be very different from the real-life author. Literature teaching and writing are neatly coupled by high school, when readers understand that literary writers have an "implied reader" (Iser, 1974) in mind. The students get it: Writers can influence their readers, guide them to understand what they want them to understand, manipulate the direction of readers' thoughts and emotions, and perhaps transport them to the center of the writing and persuade them to experience it in the way the writer intended.

Guide Writing Development through Targeted Strategy Instruction

At every grade level, teachers must incorporate strategy instruction. Direct instruction is targeted at identified weaknesses evident in student writing in order to improve writing performance. As mentioned, research on feedback from peers and teachers shows that it improves overall writing performance (Hillocks, 1986).

The rationale behind explicit strategy instruction is that it purposely gives students the opportunity to learn to do independently what experts do when completing a task. A strategy is composed of a series of steps that, when followed, lead most learners to succeed in a given task. Good writers employ strategies for *schema activation* (thinking about personal experiences and knowledge that relate to the prompt, text features, and audience and engaging in prewriting to generate and organize ideas) and for *self-regulation* (monitoring text production, analyzing and assessing the quality of the developing text, and modifying and/or changing strategies as needed to complete the writing assignment successfully). (Planning strategies are addressed in Graham & Harris, Chapter 6, this volume.)

Strategy instruction is best introduced during group mini-lessons based on examples from students' writing and then reinforced in individual conferences. Lesson topics range from local concerns (transcription, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions) to global ones (ideas and content, organization, voice). Balanced instruction ensures that the texts students compose have sentences that are grammatically correct as well as unified around a topic (as in expository writing) or central emotion (as in expressive writing). Focus correction areas (FCAs) are a sound strategy for incrementally introducing controls and constraints in writing so that immature writers are not overwhelmed during the early stages of drafting or in the later stages of revision. Collins (1997), who developed and refined this specific form of feedback, describes FCAs as follows:

> *Focus correcting is a selective approach to correcting student writing.* When teachers focus correct, they select one, two, or three critical problem areas and correct only for those areas. Teachers can select any area for focus correction, from capitalization to the use of details. They can select areas for an individual, a group, or the whole class. (p. 1)

By limiting the number and type of FCAs, students spend more time during revision improving the content of the paper and concentrating on the substance of the writing rather than exclusively on such local concerns as punctuation and usage that might not, at that juncture, improve the quality of the text. When teaching students to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing that they have composed, an analytic scale is more appropriate. One such common analytic scale is the primary-trait assessment rubric (also referred to as Six Traits) developed by Spandel and Stiggins (1997). This rubric focuses on six traits of writing: ideas and content, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. These writing traits are discussed in the following section.

Ideas and Content

The character Forrester in the film *Finding Forrester* (Mark, Connery, Tollefson, & Van Sant, 2000) admonished his pupil: "Write first with the heart, then rewrite with the head." For strategy instruction, this means that students must overcome their emotional blocks and focus first on fluency, rather than control, so that they learn to hone and revise from abundance. If there is not substantial text for writers to practice the strategies they learn, they are reluctant to give up anything on the page. If a teacher has assigned 100 words, students will produce 100 words and usually stop there.

It is not enough simply to have students create plans for their writing, such as the outline commonly assigned by teachers. (We have been guilty of writing the entire paper and then creating the required outline!) Mini-lessons must be presented that model how to move from the basic plan and translate the ideas to text. Teachers can offer students a variety of prewriting strategies such as perception exercises, heuristics, journaling, free writing, brainstorming, and graphic organizers that help move a plan to a document. If they have been instructed in such, by late elementary school students should know how to unlock a writing prompt or deconstruct an assignment and begin their task.

By middle school, more lessons should be inductive—that is, students are given data and asked to create generalizations from that data, rather than to locate examples of generalizations that teachers provide (deductive lessons). In Hillocks's (1986) meta-analysis of 20 years of research on teaching writing, this "inquiry approach" was found to be the most effective of six instructional foci for improving writing because it centers students' attention on strategies for transforming raw data while they examine data sets. By high school, if they have had practice in this inquiry approach, students do not need to be assigned topics. As Moffett (1981) states, "many in the profession still don't acknowledge ideas except when the writing is about books or teacher-made topics, whereas we should know that writing about books and teacher topics does not guarantee thought or hold a monopoly on thought" (p. 4). He further suggests that most students have not had enough practice in classifying experiences and creating abstractions because they "are unwittingly encouraged to borrow their generalizations from old slogans, wise saws, reference books, and teachers' essay questions, instead of having to forge them from their own experience" (p. 143). Students will respond favorably when they have choices to learn new modes and genres to expand their repertoire. Middle and high school students especially benefit from multigenre writing assignments that are less restrictive and allow for creativity (Romano, 2000).

Organization

After students have completed some of the prewriting exercises described above, they usually have an overall idea of the content they want to express. These early writings we sometimes call *zero drafts* because they precede a first draft. They are early evidence of thinking on paper. Students can then plan a general pattern of organization, a sequence of ideas, for writing their first draft. If this stage is not taught, struggling writers will generate texts that consist of listing loosely connected ideas. We call this *tickertape writing* because the ideas seem random. If the ideas are unified (all on one topic) but not coherent (related to each other), we call it the *Scotch tape approach* to organization, in which the writer summarizes this idea by someone and that idea by someone else but never takes the risk to analyze or synthesize the ideas and come up with a thesis. This happens frequently in high school writing when students are asked to write in academic formats about topics they are novices in understanding. How hard it is to write a paper on *Hamlet* for a teacher who already knows all the great interpretations! To write about books, explains Moffett (1981), is "a narrow notion of exposition. Abstracting about someone else's already high abstraction, whether it be a book or a teacher's essay question, means that certain essential issues of choice about selecting and treating material and creating classes [classifications] are never permitted to come up for the student" (p. 147). Students resort to producing writing that is what Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) refer to as *knowledge telling* rather than meaning construction. According to these researchers, knowledge telling is when the reader can clearly see that the author has engaged in little or no planning, the text seems to have been quickly drafted, and little or no revision or reflection is evident.

Many students have found the acronym CRAFT (Strong, 2006) a useful strategy to help plan their writing. CRAFT is an acronym for: C, context for the writer, what knowledge base he or she will use, from personal experience to formal documents; R, role of the writer, the stance the writer will take when composing text (the writer may entertain, be critical, show humor, etc.); A, the audience for whom one writes (writers must know who their audience is in order to anticipate its needs); F for format; and T for topic. Strong suggests that CRAFT is also a useful guide for teachers in designing writing assignments, but it is not a straitjacket.

Voice

The term *voice* refers to an author's unique style and personality as reflected in his or her writing. Voice carries the presence of the writer to the page through choices in tone, vocabulary, syntax, and expression. Elementary students can easily grasp the extremes of voice—the formal policeman, the hip teenager, the recalcitrant child. Ken Macrorie (1984) calls moving back and forth in extremes an *alternating current*. He refers to the rhetorical shift as changing from *kitchen language* to *elevated language*. Students in the upper grades can identify and employ markers of many voices by manipulating style: What words would a shy little boy use? What words would a confident athlete use?

Students of all ages can imitate the voices of professional writers, from Dr. Seuss to Shakespeare to Biblical text. For instance, we have had high school students express an Edgar Allen Poe content—such as the eerie setting of Poe's *Masque of the Red Death* delivered by Poe in elongated, highly modified, complex sentences with many multisyllabic words—using the voice of Ernest Hemingway, with his characteristic short, staccato, matter-of-fact sentences and one-syllable words. They get it: Voice and style are intertwined.

Word Choice

Students need to know the words that suit the content and the purposes of their writing. Good readers who are poor writers are unable to report information from text using original language, suggesting that these students have a problem with vocabulary. Writing samples from good readers who are poor writers illustrate a lack of strong nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Vocabulary is one area (as compared to spelling) that we know is best taught in context, and extensive reading can often solve this writing problem. Most of us know that vocabulary is fun to teach, especially when words are changed in a passage for effect. In teaching Theodore Roethke's poem "My Papa's Waltz," for example, changing the words *shirt* to *vest*, *Papa* to *Father*, and *Mother's countenance* to *Mama's face* completely alters the impression the reader has of the parents in the poem. We highly recommend poetry, where words are at a premium, as a good medium to teach the connotations and denotations of words, and the impact of word choice on meaning and tone. As Moffett (1968), states, "all writing expresses ideas, regardless of mode, and the higher abstractions teachers look for in familiar essay form derive in stages from lower abstractions formulated more personally and fictionally at first" (p. 4). In other words, you do not learn exposition by writing exposition all of the time. The language expertise a writer embraces in narrative, poetry, personal, and expressive writing can come to the service of composing many types of writing. Students progress by writing across genres "that allow language experiences to build on and reinforce each other in significant ways" (Moffett, 1968, p. 5).

Word choice is a fun revising activity that can be experienced in whole-class lessons with students working with their own writing. Ask students to list sense words on charts, then see if they can add one sense to their writing (touch, or texture, is often left out). If they have boring nouns, ask them to replace generics with specifics (*flowers* become *dahlias*, *friends* becomes *Bonnie and Maggie*, *book* becomes *Essays of E. B. White*). Next, ask them to use a dash after a noun group and follow it with a series of specific items in the group (*We enjoyed many fruits at the picnic—apples, oranges, black cherries, and pears*; or *I rode my bike through a maze of streets—Bellefontaine, Agnes, Benton Boulevard*). Again, students get it: The writing comes alive when you "put the reader there" (Macrorie, 1984).

Sentence Fluency

Sentence fluency refers to the use and variety of different syntax and sentence structures. Writers of all ages can become overwhelmed and sidetracked by their inability to manipulate grammar to create the effects they desire, so teachers need to address selected grammatical concepts directly and strategically. In using the process approach, the question is not *whether* to teach grammar, but *when*. We recommend that direct instruction in elementary school be based on structures that all students need to master, drawing examples from children's literature and dictated stories. In middle and high school, we suggest direct teaching of grammatical structures after a draft is produced, as part of revision. The teacher should pull out common errors from students' drafts and develop a mini-lesson around them, rather than turning to the next lesson in the grammar book. (Most grammar books we have seen are best used as references rather than lesson sequences.) We have often heard students exclaim, "But our teacher last year never taught us prepositions!" when we well know that she did! It just did not take, most likely because the need for using prepositions had not yet arisen in the students' writing.

We have excellent foundational research on how students grow syntactically (Hunt, 1977; Loban, 1976; Mellon, 1969; O'Hare, 1973). The need for understanding grammar and punctuation arises as writers take on new syntactical structures. They can then experience in their own writing how changing punctuation changes meaning. By around age 12, students' written language outstrips their spoken language, in that they use structures—such as periodic rather than cumulative sentences, introductory clauses and phrases, passive voice, appositives, etc.—in written text that are not common in their oral language. They go beyond the concept introduced in elementary school instruction (as in dictated stories) that "writing is speech written down." For example, according to Walter Loban's landmark study (1976), at around age 9, children begin to relate particular concepts to general ideas, using such connectors as *meanwhile*, *unless*, and *even if*. About 50% of children at this age begin to use the subordinating connector *although* correctly. They also begin to use the present participle active ("Having dieted for a week, I dove into the candy bar") and the gerund (verb turned into an *–ing* noun) as the object of a preposition ("In writing this story, I learned about myself").

As writers mature, they consolidate what they once expressed as single simple sentences (a main clause and its attachments) into embedded sentences, such as these examples provided by Kellogg Hunt (1977): A typical fourth grader writes, "Aluminum is a metal and it is abundant. It has many uses and it comes from bauxite"; while a typical eighth grader takes the predicate adjective *abundant* and turns it into a prenominative adjective in *abundant metal*, as well as coordinating three predicates, writing, "Aluminum is an abundant metal, has many uses, and comes from bauxite." The eighth grader uses more embedding, putting the main ideas from two sentences into one sentence.

It is important that teachers understand syntactic development and recognize the evidence of growth, knowing that as the student takes on the next structure, he or she will make mistakes, such as not punctuating correctly. If the attempt to use a new, more sophisticated structure is not honored by teachers, then students will write simple, correctly punctuated sentences to be safe.

Frank O'Hare's research on the effects of instruction in sentence combining was conducted with middle school children (1973). He found that, with systematic instruction based on what we know about how syntax develops, students produced in 1 year the structures that are usually expected in 4 years. We recommend that teachers use sentences taken from student writing for sentence-combining activities. Teachers can sneak in sentence-combining activities even when it is not designated writing time. For example, a good way to review events from an earlier class is to present kernel sentences that contain the main actions and events and ask students to combine them. The following were taken from a demonstration lesson on sentence combining given by a teacher in the Capital Area Writing Project, a National Writing Project professional development site at North Carolina State University: "Judy started the lesson. The lesson was complex. The research was sophisticated. Judy's sentences were complex. Sherri asked a question. The question was simple. Her sentences were simple. Judy answered her question. The answer was long. The answer was complex. The sentences were complex. Suzanne made a statement. The statement was humorous. The statement was witty. The statement was emotional." (You get the idea.)

Participants had a lot of fun summarizing the presentation while using various syntactic structures. (Saddler, Chapter 8, this volume, discusses ideas for teaching sentence construction skills.)

Many books on the market include CD-ROMs along with innovative ideas and visuals for teaching grammar, but we still believe that the best lessons are based on sentences derived from students' writing. They can practice creating structures that stretch them but are still within their reach. Instead of modeling a Herman Melville sentence, with its typical use of the present participle, they can model a Joey Smith sentence, from the boy who sits next to them in third period.

Conventions

Conventions are the mechanical aspects of writing, such as spelling, punctuation, usage, and paragraph indentation, that reveal the semantics of the writing. Demonstrating the dramatic effect that punctuation can have on meaning is the purpose of a familiar exercise where students are asked to punctuate the following sentence to illustrate two interpretations of who is "nothing," the woman or the man: "Woman without her man is nothing." Struggling writers must be shown how to read their own writing to determine coherence as well as detect errors in conventions. When asked to read aloud a piece they have composed, students commonly correct their mistakes. Therefore, teachers should not correct their students' mistakes, but rather point out the general location with a check mark in the margin and have students identify and correct the errors. After all, who needs the practice? Explaining/teaching the error and the correction to another student in the class is an effective way to solidify learning for the writer who now understands his or her error.

It is more helpful for students if they personalize the names of the different types of errors they tend to make and use these names as part of their composing vocabulary. For example, Macrorie (1984) labels beginning too many sentences with "There are . . . " and "It is . . . "—so that the subject slot is reduced to a general pronoun and the verb is a dull state-of-being verb—with the terms *There-ache* and *It-ache*. He believes (and we found this to be true in our own teaching) that students' awareness in detecting mistakes is increased when they have language that makes sense to describe the errors. A composing vocabulary develops and expands as writers need language to describe their writing.

Develop a Composing Vocabulary

Beginning in the elementary grades, students need a language to talk about their writing. An effective plan is to teach a composing vocabulary by starting with the parts of speech and the names of structures that are emerging in student writing (*simple sentence*, *cumulative sentence*, *sentences beginning with modifying phrases*, etc.). This approach is inductive, starting with the examples in students' papers and going to the label. Most textbooks are organized deductively; that is, they give the generalization (the definition of a term or the rule) and then ask students to find examples.

Beyond the basic parts of speech, the composing vocabulary includes terms used in the process approach to describe emotional issues surrounding writing (e.g., *getting stuck*, *writer's block*), what happens during the process (e.g., *shaping*, *looping*, *cooking*), and the features present in the products that students create (*active verbs*, *sense images*, *sentence variety*, *narrative examples*). For example, we use the term *prevision* for creating the rough draft so that students grasp the term *revision* as a second look at their writing, rather than as writing over in ink. The *re–* prefix also explains the word *research* as more than one look at data.

We directly teach the verb *own* in the context of writing groups. Each writer reads aloud his or her writing to gather responses and advice, but, ultimately, the writer "owns" the writing and can take the suggestions or not. Given this freedom, writers learn that they do not have to yield to every suggestion, even if the authority (often the teacher) seems to demand it. As writers review the responses they have received in their peer groups or mini-lessons, they must feel free to make their own revision decisions. Suggestions help create more options for the writer, but they do not need to dictate his or her actions. This is a learning moment for the teacher, who must realize that it is a more important lesson for students to feel like they own their writing than for them to incorporate the changes the teacher wants them to. Students participate in revising mini-lessons and in writing groups to expand their repertoire. If they choose not to incorporate into the final composition a particular revision technique—such as using a generic noun with a dash followed by specific nouns—we ask them to staple their practice sentences to the back of the assignment as "an artifact of revision," evidence that the writer can use the strategy but for this piece chose not to.

Other terms and phrases appropriate for a composing vocabulary are *fear of the blank page*; *focus correction area* (FCA) (Collins, 1997); *gotcha' moment* (when the writing captures the writers and they enter a *state of flow*; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990); *honoring the process* (Maisel, 1999); *hook*; *key concept*; *sloppy copy*; *voice*; *story grammar*; *hushing the mind* (Maisel, 1999); *I-Itis* (using the first person too much); exploding *the "Wow" moment* (in narrative, the climax of the story; Starkweather, Poole, & Horne, 2000); *tickertape writing*; *Scotch tape ap-*

proach; *zero draft*; *knowledge telling* (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987); *alternating current*, *kitchen language*, and *putting the reader there* (Macrorie, 1984). When students do not consider their audience, they may be creating *writer-based prose* rather than *reader-based prose* (Elbow, 1981). Our students like the term *zoom in* for when the reader needs details and the term *panoramic view* when they need to get "out of the weeds" and make a point. They use *getting off track* when a piece lacks unity. They understand the concept of *show, don't tell* as a way to use elaboration to make a point. When a student goes beyond listing and naming, the teacher can compliment him or her for *taking the opportunity to elaborate.* If the writer demonstrates accurate conventions, he or she can be praised for *providing courtesies for the reader.* When a student overcomes an internal critic, teachers can note that he or she has *conquered the IC*, and when writers tell the reader so much that the reader gets lost or bogged down, they may be reminded, "Assume your reader has a mind" (Macrorie, 1984).

By middle school, a composing vocabulary should encompass more than parts of speech or stages of the writing process, especially to make abstract terms accessible to writers. For many students, the term *coherence* may be baffling; but the phrase "words speaking to each other" (Macrorie, 1984) is not. Ask students to examine writing—their own and their classmates'—for examples of words speaking to each other. In doing this with a piece of student writing about living in the country, for example, the students in one of our classes found these words that conjured up the country: *slop*, *chicken fence*, *Betty June*, *Miss Effie Jean Frontaberger*, *Oak Ridge Road.* We also discovered that within that same text, the writer used the word *street*, which spoke to city living, not country living. He used the Latinate word *washcloth*, not the more appropriate Anglo-Saxon word *washrag.* Students had *a-ha moments* in examining these two sentences: "Every kid and widow in town congregated at our house. Even the preacher came rushing to the action." The word *preacher* conjured up a different image than would the word *minister*, and the subtle connection between the verb *congregated* and the noun *preacher* created a cohesive tie. They also noticed who was home during the day in this sleepy town: little children, widows, and the preacher. This concept of coherence in writing is highly tied to *tone* and *voice*—other terms that can be introduced.

Coherence and *unity* are difficult concepts for some students to grasp, and it is easier to recognize and honor their occurrence in writing than it is to teach them directly. We have used the visual of a jar of marbles to distinguish concepts that are commonly confused: *Unity* describes the marbles—they are all agates, for example—whereas *coherence* describes marbles glued together. When one writer declared that she had finally "glued the marbles together" in her writing, all the students shared a common understanding of what she had accomplished as a writer.

When a writer joins two senses to create an image, the teacher can use this as an example of *synesthesia*—the synthesis of senses ("loud color," "soft view of the sea," "musty feel of old crepe"). One of us (Pritchard) still remembers a seventh grader she taught in New Orleans who came rushing in declaring he had created a synesthetic image when he wrote "The blues singer had a velvet voice." A high school student was proud of the way he used *collocation* in his paper to create unity. He had been taught this composing term to refer to how words that occur in a similar linguistic environment can "speak to each other." In writing about a play, for example, one would expect such terms as *act*, *role*, and *scene*. If used strategically, such collocated words can bind together a paper to create unity. The most memorable composing vocabulary for students is drawn from examples in their writing. Once you have collected examples from students' writing, you have the centerpieces of your lesson. Students will get it: You learn to make choices within a repertoire at your fingertips, and you are able to describe your choices using an understandable composing vocabulary.

These six lesson foci that we have discussed for process approach teaching need to be introduced in the elementary grades and reinforced with increasing sophistication throughout middle and high school. They form the basics of writing instruction, but other aspects, such as grading, are also important. (MacArthur, Chapter 7, this volume, is devoted to evaluation of writing.) It also does not mean that the six areas of suggestions in the above list only need to be covered once. If the activities suggested above do not begin in the elementary grades, however, the task of teaching writing as a developmental and sociocultural process is much harder in the middle grades and beyond. For example, this book includes a chapter devoted to the important area of writing across the curriculum (Newell, Koukis, & Boster, Chapter 4, this volume). The foundation for using writing as a learning tool needs to be laid in the elementary grades, but in middle school, where the common philosophy is the integrated curriculum, the powers of writing to learn can be exploited. We know that most middle school students in this generation are experts at multitasking, as is evident by observing them listening to music while watching TV, talking on the phone, instant messaging, and doing their homework! Teachers need to take advantage of this predilection by tying writing to other learning activities. Further, by the middle grades, students should be writing in the modes that they are reading. Moffett (1981) advises that student productions should be examined "side by side with analogous professional writing" (p. 7). If students are reading how-to manuals, they should create how-to manuals; if they are reading poetry, essays, narratives, diaries, logs, memoirs, proverbs, autobiographies; and so on, they also should be composing them.

CONCLUSION

A careful analysis of research studies identified throughout this chapter and this book strongly indicates that implementing best practices in writing process approach instruction results in improved student writing. This chapter summarizes some of the evidence-based practices in teaching the process approach while providing examples. Writing is such a complex task that it cannot be taught once and for all—that is, we are all apprentices in learning to write and in writing to learn. No one is consummately a good writer, for we all have the potential to change and improve. As we practice, we will make mistakes that should be acknowledged as signs of growth. When students learn more complex sentence structure, such as moving from simple subject–verb sentences to compound-complex ones, the by-product is error. When they feel they have mastered one genre, they can become novices in a new one. As teachers, we must be mindful of how writers grow and scaffold our lessons so that writers have practice in the emerging areas that are challenging them.

A significant component of sound writing process approach instruction is individual teacher-designed lessons that have powerful effects on emotions and motivation to write or on one aspect of a written product (such as grammatical correctness), even though some of these lessons cannot be directly tied to improved writing performance overall. Such innovative and enjoyable practices are an essential part of teaching writing and should not be discounted. A teacher's intuition is often a strong indicator of what works with certain populations, whether or not research has validated the instruction.

With limited time, however, a teacher must be selective in what he or she offers. We know from research that pedagogical strategies are not equal, and simply writing or enjoying writing does not in itself lead to improved writing (Hillocks, 1986). It is important for teachers to be selective and cognizant of what the purpose of the lesson is and how it builds a foundation for developing writers, rather than merely to offer gimmicks and games. Furthermore, some research suggests that it may be the absence, rather than the presence, of some practices in teaching writing that leads to improved performance. For example, allocating Fridays for spelling tests may be less valuable than presenting mini-lessons, or consider the time a student spends in identifying errors on a worksheet as time lost to holding a conference with that student about the grammatical errors in his working draft. We all must be open to letting go of some writing activities that are no more than time fillers, knowing that time is a precious commodity in the writing classroom.

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