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Success in Schools: Teachers who are teaching writing well

By Janet Spitzer

When it comes to teaching writing, the teacher must often choose between art and science. However, finding the freedom to express individual style and voice (the realm of the artist) does not negate the necessity of sound grammar and syntax (the realm of the technician). The success of *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* lies in its ability to simultaneously address both. The key factor is the teacher. While some curricula boast that anyone can teach writing, we unapologetically admit that it takes the heart and skill of a true teacher to patiently instruct and faithfully model the writing process to students. Whether they are novices or veterans, we challenge educators to further develop their art. We recognize that with the pressures of time and other necessities, each teacher needs three kinds of support to succeed: an accessible mentor, an involved administrator, and the right materials.

Any person attempting to learn something new knows the value of an easily accessible mentor. A mentor or coach not only answers questions, but has the ability to see individuals' strengths and weaknesses in order to help them succeed. IEW offers teachers access to trained professionals who have taught the program in classrooms to students of varying ages and skill levels. Additionally we have created a chat loop where educators from across the U.S. may pose questions and answer the questions of others as part of a broader community. As schools gain experience, mentoring will be found within the school itself as teachers collaborate with one other, creating a local community.

In addition, instructors need involved administrators. Teachers, like students, need to know how they are doing. For our program to work, the administrator must understand our principles, goals, and procedures. With this knowledge, an engaged administrator creates a climate of accountability and accomplishment. Schools that successfully implement *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* have administrators who can see the “big picture,” while supporting the “brush strokes” of the individual teachers.

Finally, teachers need quality materials, and the quality of the tool should equal the importance of the task. The best materials do not teach writing as an isolated skill but

rather encourage students to apply writing skills to other areas of study. For example, teachers should never be torn between writing and finishing the grammar book. Grammar instruction is complementary to writing instruction. Children learn grammar best when it is immediately employed in their writing, and students learn their other subjects best if they can immediately write about them. Students improve their organization of ideas, voice, word choice and fluency when given a wide palate of “colors” from which to choose from (TWSS word lists). At that point, the best teacher serves as the master artist, making information readily accessible and guiding students as they choose their own colors.

Schools that have successfully implemented TWSS have learned that every instructor—from kindergarten to high school science or history—can take responsibility for teaching writing, can be familiar with the process and can hold the students accountable. Teaching Writing: Structure and Style’s clear, easily learned and easily applied method for teaching writing equips teachers to do just that. Finding the balance between acceptable form and individuality, successful TWSS schools are producing student writers who are technicians...with a flair for the artistic.

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