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## Helping Students with Special Needs

by Carla Perez

For language learners and students with special needs, teachers must somehow connect the students' current body of knowledge and the knowledge that they will need to function in the world in which they live. Although many teachers are trained specifically to work with language learners and special needs students, every educator is a potential teacher of English Language Learners (ELLs) or of students with diagnosed learning disabilities (LD). Trained or not, a teacher will inevitably find language learners and at risk students in their classrooms. The daunting task then becomes making grade level content accessible to all students while eliminating the gaps in understanding caused by language limitations.

**Age-Old Problem, Timeless Solution:** American forefather Benjamin Franklin discovered early in his life that if he wanted to impact others he must learn to speak and write well. He discovered that the most effective way of teaching himself to write well was through *imitation*. In his learning process, Franklin selected works of writers whom he admired and wished to emulate. He then selected key words from each chosen text to create an outline. With practice, he was able to reproduce clear and effective articles, which initially sounded like the original author, but eventually took on Franklin's own style and power. Benjamin Franklin became one of the most influential voices of the American Revolutionary period, and his writing endures to this day as testimony to the power of well-spoken and well-written words. *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* is based on Franklin's timeless method of learning and offers today's teacher proven methods of quickly creating essential language connections.

**Why Excellence in Writing?** *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* has its roots in Canada where teachers have long faced the challenge of multiple languages in their classrooms. English, French, dialects of the First Nations, and the languages of countless immigrants fill the Canadian schools. Facing her classroom of bright, eager, language-limited children, elementary teacher Anna Ingham saw the need for a logical, incremental and sequential method of teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. She developed a system which she called *Blended Sound-Sight* for teaching primaries and language learners the foundations of English. This multi-sensory, cross-curricular approach proved very successful with lower grades. Dr. J.B. Webster, Mrs. Ingham's

nephew, believed that a similar system would work with much older students. He finally was able to test his theory...at the university level. Dr. Webster and Mrs. Ingham created a system that could successfully train students in the acquisition and use of language skills from kindergarten through college. Their work earned them respect in the educational community and recognition by the Canadian government. Andrew Pudewa joined the team in 1992 and helped to tailor the writing portion of the program to meet the needs of students in the United States.

English language learners represent the fastest growing population in today's public school system. Some experts predict that this group could represent 50% of the public school population by 2015. Special needs students can now use the same method that Benjamin Franklin used long ago. *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* provides clear and interesting models from which to write. The learner then concentrates on selecting key—important— words to create a usable outline. Students find that once a workable outline is completed, the actual writing flows almost effortlessly. The system provides for both corporate and individualized instruction, and can easily be varied to accommodate various learning styles and abilities. Using simple rubrics or checklists, students can monitor and track their own success, thereby increasing their skill and confidence.

Students gain language proficiency in stages. On the auditory side, they must learn to listen and comprehend before they can learn to compare and contrast, inform and describe, or seek, observe and explore. Eventually the student will be able to analyze and classify. Only at the highest level can students evaluate, infer, justify, persuade, problem solve, synthesize and integrate. It is the skills of this highest level which are needed for mastery in school...and in life. Written language acquisition mirrors verbal language acquisition. Students generally are taught to read before they can write. *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* addresses reading and writing simultaneously. Source texts and key word outlines expand vocabulary and patterns of correct syntax while teaching writing. These elements become part of the student's spoken and written communication through practice and frequent interaction.

*Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* has been successfully used with at risk students, resident language learners, foreign exchange students and with students learning English in several countries around the world. Teachers who have used the program enthusiastically attest to its ease of instruction and proven results. The teacher can contextualize language and apply it to daily life, reduce anxiety and control basic attitudes of students within the learning environment, thereby providing a safe environment.

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