
**KNOWING WHAT TO TEACH: USING AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION**

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The articles in this Reading and Writing Quarterly anthology provide methods about authentic assessment for use by writers with a learning disability. This article provides the reader with suggestions on how to interleave data collected from authentic student writing samples into classroom instructional planning and implementations. Practical hands-on ideas for teachers of students with learning disabilities and/or low achievers are shared. Examples of student performance authentication resources include effective teaching components, concept maps, webs, and mnemonic devices.

Historically, despite years of special education, persons with learning disabilities have difficulty with writing throughout adulthood (Bruick 1987; Dalke, 1988; Fitzgerald, Schuele, & Roberts, 1992). Writing skills are critical for life success. Writing skills are essential in school, are required in most careers, and can be a vehicle for sharing emotions (Lesiak, 1992). Various studies have confirmed the difficulty persons with learning disabilities encounter as they attempt to communicate with minimal writing skills (Houck & Billingsley, 1989).

The articles in this Reading and Writing Quarterly anthology provide methods of authentic assessment for use by writers with a learning disability. The special education field documents a need to strengthen the connection between assessment and instructional planning (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hamlett, 1994). This article provides the conceptual framework by supplying the reader with suggestions on interleaving methods discussed by the authors into classroom instructional planning and implementation. The suggestions employ Jochum's recommended development of student portfolios, and highlight a curriculum-based matrix to collect data for teaching strategies and measure the needs required by students. Hansen's teacher portfolio is used as a guide to enhance student instruction by collecting data through teacher reflection found in teacher journal writings. A curriculum-based measurement for teachers to reflect on their instruction techniques is presented. Ammer's peer evaluation model provides a means to experiment with nontraditional methods of classroom instruction by building metacognition and strategies to help students become better writers. Finally, Montgomery provides ideas for enhancing oral and written linguistic competence. Examples of student performance authentication resources, including effective teaching components, concept maps, webs, and mnemonic ideas, are discussed.

**STUDENT WRITING PORTFOLIOS AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL**

As Jochum, Curran, and Reetz (1998) clearly state, assessment must become a tool in the hands of the special educator. The tool should be used to establish a baseline of student abilities and then measure areas for further student writing skills. Jochum et al. recommend the primary...
assessment be the student portfolio. The portfolio is an exceptional source of formative evaluation that can provide an inside view of student performance versus effective teaching methods and strategies. Jochum et al. advocate that the student be involved in self-assessment and empowerment, deciding what work is retained in his or her own portfolio. Teachers are encouraged to document the types of writing selections a student chooses, and to record the instructional techniques introduced while the student worked on the selection. As an example, a student might select several writing samples that begin with illustrative materials, such as concept maps and brainstorm webs. The educator can then build a strategy for future endeavors. These techniques should be used to guide the student while providing generalized techniques to support other forms of written expression.

But an unmotivated student could neglect to choose any work composed during a 2-week writing series using the established writing process. The teacher can interpret the avoidance as an area needing more extensive instruction. If selections only include unfinished products, a suggested instructional technique would include breaking the writing process down into smaller, easily achievable steps.

Instructors are beginning to appreciate anecdotal portfolio collections of student abilities. The teachers are supplementing standardized testing and teacher-made criterion tests with curriculum-based measures or journal keeping. Curriculum-based measures are simple to administer and score. The information provided has direct significance to the learning needs of the child.

A simplified form of teacher-recorded curriculum-based measurement can be used to monitor the development of student writing skills. By using the Curriculum-Based Measurement of Common Writing Errors (Figure 1), teachers can assess areas requiring further assistance. These areas have been selected based on historical data provided by special needs students learning to be successful writers.

The Curriculum-Based Measurement of Common Writing Errors can be used to assess any writing sample. Assessment of each sample is made by paragraph. The numbers of errors related to grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and word choice are recorded. Finally, the total number of words in the paragraph is identified. As the number of words in the paragraph increases, success in error reduction becomes evident.

Curriculum-Based Measurement of Common Writing Errors is a quantitative way to assess the basic skills common to writing. It is an excellent data collection tool for individualized education program (IEP) evaluations. At first, the reader may wonder why students should be encouraged to count errors. Teachers can program students for success by directly teaching the skills that are continually missed. And, as the form is put into use, accentuation of the positive is achieved as the student improves.

A baseline score should be established at the beginning of the school year. As various basic writing skills (i.e., grammar, sentence structure, punctuation) are taught, teachers are encouraged to assess progress. Self-esteem is enhanced as students see their scores continually improve. The author recently worked with a student who had recorded over 10 errors in each of the 5
categories during the first week of school. By mid-year the writing samples the student chose for their portfolio indicated only 1-2 errors per writing collection! Additionally, the student's work samples included many descriptive paragraphs with a noticeable degree of critical thinking and creative thought processes interwoven.

TEACHER PORTFOLIOS AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL

Hansen provides the reader with data to employ reflective teacher portfolios. She suggests that teacher candidates use Kenfield's (1994) guidelines for portfolio assembly. These include formal writing samples, anecdotal writings, class samples, student-established goals, and student reflections. Hansen provides reflective comments from the teacher candidates regarding experiences using the portfolio technique. The candidates' documented writings were encouraged by using fifth-grade pen pals, and documenting their personal experiences related to the teacher-training practicum class.

Several students provided testimonials on the importance of rereading personal portfolio journals as a guideline to show growth as a teacher. Hanson recommends that teachers set aside a minimum 15-min period each week to produce a portfolio. Teacher candidates are encouraged to document the writing assignments produced by the students they work with during the week and measure achieved successes. By engaging in reflective journal writing, the teacher candidates learn by creating personal samples and (at the same time) document usable teaching techniques.

To improve personal teaching skills and enhance instruction for the students with learning disabilities, teachers must ensure that validated research instructional techniques are met. The Curriculumbased Measurement of Teacher Reflections of Student Writing (Figure 2) can be used to meet this goal. Teachers can use section one on the form to reflect on the written practices and student improvements. Section two provides 10 recommendations for writing instructions for students with learning disabilities suggested by Graham and Harris (1988). These include:

- Allocate time for writing instruction.
- Expose students to a broad range of writing tasks.
- Create a social climate conducive to writing development.
- Integrate writing with other academic subjects.
- Aid students in developing the processes of effective writing.
- Automatize skills for getting writing on paper.
- Help students develop explicit knowledge about writing characteristics.
- Help students develop abilities for sophisticated composing processes.
- Assist students in developing goals for improving their written products.
- Avoid practices that do not improve students writing performances. (pp. 513-520)

Daily use of Graham and Harris's 10 instructional recommendations by educators (with notation of which of the suggestions have recently been incorporated into classroom activities) is a positive method for monitoring personal teaching styles. After 4 weeks of instruction and reflection scoring, the teacher should notice areas not being fulfilled and make an effort to modify instructional practices to include all 10 suggestions.
Writing instructions for students with learning disabilities can be a long and tedious process. Many students with learning disabilities have difficulty reading, and see writing as an extension of the frustrations they feel. Effective teachers break writing instruction into achievable parts and program the students for success by providing positive opportunities for self-editing and reconstruction. At the conclusion of this article, the author provides several specific teaching suggestions to assist teachers as they separate writing into achievable components.

Ammer provides an excellent solution to the editing dilemma: the use of peer evaluation. Teachers can use Ammer's Peer Assessment of Writing Checklist in addition to the Curriculum-Based Measurement of Common Writing Errors (Figure 1) to review progress and concentrate on areas in need of further instruction. Ammer's checklist provides detailed definitions of content, structure, style of writing, word usage, presentation, and mechanics of writing and spelling. Teachers are encouraged to use peer suggestions of instructional focus areas. Additionally, if the students are at the upper elementary or secondary level, the teacher may desire a peer to complete an additional Curriculum-Based Measurement of Teacher Reflections of Student Writing. Scores from this form can provide ideas for instructional practices. The peer evaluation model by Ammer allows for a "buddy system" approach that is often seen as fun for students. Peer editing also provides students with metacognition enhancement by encouraging a vocal and written shared experience.

INTEGRATING ORAL AND WRITTEN LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

The act of teaching students to write can be difficult. Traditionally, students have been expected to explain with verbal words before moving to writing activities. During a prewriting stage, educators use various organizational tools to help the student imagine ideas about potential topics and verbalize the ideas prior to "putting pen to paper." Students are asked to describe, compare, associate, analyze, apply, and argue various topics. Montgomery recommends the simultaneous use of both aspects of the dichotomy to teach linguistic competence. She provides three intervention techniques: dictation, mind maps and organizers, and paraphrasing. These strategies encourage the student to express ideas to others, both verbally and in written form. Occasionally, a peer or adult will take dictation, help organize information, or paraphrase back to the student. Each intervention provides a compliment of oral and written linguistic skills.

Linguistic competence can be tracked simply using Montgomery's Figures 1 and 2. As readers implement these interventions in the classrooms, the forms are quite useful for the preintervention baseline and the postintervention comparisons.

PERFORMANCE AUTHENTICATION RESOURCES

There are numerous writing resources available to teachers. However, instructors working with students with learning disabilities need to carefully assess the types of instruction strategies they use. By definition, children with learning disabilities have difficulty learning, yet all children can learn even if the disability is within the area of written expression.
It is crucial for educators of students with learning disabilities to use strategy instruction. Reid and Stone (1991) reported that students with learning disabilities often fail to adopt a strategic method for learning. Students with learning disabilities need to be taught successful writing strategies (Ellis, Deshler, Lenz, Schumaker, & Clark, 1989; Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, & Alley, 1989). An effective teacher will provide numerous practice opportunities to master a strategy (Scanlon, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1996). Teachers must teach students how to generalize strategy use (Day & Elksnin, 1994), because students often are unaware of the strategies that should be employed (Palincsar, David, Winn, & Stevens, 1991). Additionally, there does not appear to be any one strategy for use across writing domains (Swanson, 1989).

Writing is an especially challenging task. A teacher may favor one instructional strategy over another. However, the student ultimately decides which technique works best. Over the past decade, research measuring the needs of students with learning disabilities continually focuses on three approaches. These include (a) use of effective teaching components, (b) concept maps or webs, and (c) mnemonics devices.

**Effective Teaching Components**

The use of various research-based effective teaching components can assist with the development of writing skills (Gersten & Woodward, 1992).

Advanced organizers can be used to cue the learner. Words such as first, second, or next can provide students an outline to understand how writing events are organized (Forster & Doyle, 1989). Combined with instruction about the use of sequential steps, organizing and cueing ideas help students with learning disabilities develop transitioning skills. Advanced organizers can be used as motivational tools to point out relevance to students (Lenz, 1983).

A "critical aspect of the advance organizer is that it provides basic information or activates the students' background knowledge" (Vaughn, Boss, & Schumm, 1997, p. 141). Vaughn et al. provided many suggestions for using advanced organizers. For example, to assist students with organization of ideas for an upcoming writing lesson, frameworks such as presenting an outline or relating the content to a previous lesson may be used.

Small-group instruction is another efficient method to help students with learning disabilities (Polloway, Cronin, & Patton, 1986). The groups can be self-guided (cooperative and peer learning) or teacher directed. Teachers are always encouraged to facilitate the discussion by promoting opportunities for active participation using teacher questions and frequent student responses. These teacher activities provide immediate specific feedback to the learning sequence (Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986).

Good and Brophy (1994) recommended that a good rule of thumb is to maintain small numbers within each group when using group instruction for students needing lots of support. If writing groups are formed based on skill level, it is recommended that a low performer (students needing the most help) be paired with a middle performer, and middle performers be paired with high performers. This configuration will limit the frustration that often occurs when a student with high writing abilities works with someone with much lesser skills.
Teacher-directed instruction includes (a) modeling new information, (b) asking questions to promote higher order thinking skills, (c) providing feedback, (d) generating relevant practice opportunities, and (e) modifying instruction (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1992). Teachers should establish a link between new information and information previously taught. Throughout the instructional process, the teacher must furnish suitable examples and nonexamples of the new data.

Self-evaluation should be encouraged. Pardes and Rich (1996) offered an excellent preparatory self-assessment on writing with a self-evaluation form of completed writing to be used at the college level. This format may be modified for upper elementary and secondary students. Self-monitoring and self-evaluation are critical skills for students to learn while becoming independent writers (Brown, 1980).

**Concept Maps**

Illustrative material in the form of visual displays enhances comprehension and expands learning potential (Davis & McPherson, 1989; Flood & Lapp, 1988). Creating concept maps helps students to organize and represent information for a variety of purposes. Rivera and Smith (1988) recommended using visual models to teach any topic that could be conceptually difficult.

Children's literature can be a marvelous springboard into writing. Bromley (1990) has documented a comprehensive set of examples for students to create story maps using children's books. Creating a web from what students have read or heard can be a simplistic task. Bulgren, Schumaker, and Deshler (1988) recommended constructing concept diagrams by selecting key words from a story, then creating a diagram using the word's definition and the characteristics usually present, including examples and nonexamples.

Another form of concept mapping, clustering, is a powerful prewriting tool (First, MacMillan, & Levy, 1995). Instead of a traditional brainstorm using lists, Rico and Claggett (1980) recommended that students be taught to cluster by beginning with an important word, circling it, then drawing a line to related words or ideas. The result is a web of potential writing options. Color-coded clusters can be implemented to further build on the various options (see First et al., 1995, for specific color-coding instructions).

**Mnemonics**

"Mnemonics are memory-triggering devices that help us remember and retrieve information by forming associations that do not exist naturally in the content" (Vaughn, Boss, & Schumm, 1997, p. 501). Several favorite writing mnemonics are used often with students of all ages. For example, have the student hold out a hand. Each finger of the hand is associated with one of the "basic 5 W" concepts for writing a story: who, what, when, where, and why. Or ask the student to imagine the outline for future writing as a hamburger. The top of the bun is a topic sentence. The hamburger, pickle, and catsup are supporting details for the topic, and the bottom of the bun is the closing sentence. Although the creators of these two mnemonics are unknown, students of all ages have remembered basic concepts from the "5W" and the "hamburger" mnemonic.
Researchers at the Kansas Institute for Research have spent numerous hours creating and fine tuning fabulous mnemonics associated with various strategies (Ellis, Deshler, Lenz, Schumaker, & Clark, 1991; Ellis et al., 1989). For example, the Writer and Cops strategies are:

- Write on every other line.
- Read the paper for meaning appearance.
- Interrogate yourself using the COPS questions.
- Capitalization (Did I capitalize the first word and proper nouns?).
- Overall appearance (Did I make any errors [e.g., handwriting]?).
- Punctuation (Did I correctly use punctuation [e.g., commas]?).
- Spelling (Did I spell the words correctly?).
- Take the paper to someone for help.
- Execute a final copy.
- Reread your paper.

These strategies provide a manageable error monitoring strategy (Hammill & Bartel, 1990; Levy & Rosenberg, 1990). The student can memorize the mnemonic, then revise and correct writing mistakes (Schumaker et al., 1981). The original study conducted by Schumaker and colleagues (1981) reported that students with learning disabilities "demonstrated immediate improvement following instruction in their first practice lessons" (p. 181).

Some students with learning disabilities enjoy using mnemonics because they view them as writing tricks. The critical goal is for the teacher to describe the purpose, model, and verbally rehearse the mnemonic strategy with the students. Once the students have sufficient rehearsal, each can perceive how the "tricks" work when generalized across subject matter curriculum.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Writing is a process. Ellis (1994) applied the generic format of executive strategy to the context of writing. He suggested that students prepare during the prewriting process by thinking ahead, then continue to focus on the production, editing, and revision processes. "Effective writers engage in these behaviors recursively throughout the whole writing process in a sort of start, stop, start again process" (p. 220).

The writing process can be significantly improved if educators impart knowledge of effective teaching components with their selection of teaching strategies and student self-monitoring activities. Students can be trained to use authentic assessments to self-monitor personal writing abilities. Each can be shown how to use the techniques described in this article and those in this anthology. As the students learn to understand the writing process, they will learn to evaluate their own creativity and to develop the skills and self-confidence required to be a literate, adult writer. After building on these practical ideas, instructors of students with learning disabilities can successfully assist with the development of good writing skills.

FIGURE 1 Curriculum-based measurement of common writing errors.

| Student name | Grade: |
Directions: This form can be used to measure the writing abilities of students at various levels of development. Assessment of each writing sample is made by paragraph. If the sample contains only three or less sentences, use the same technique. As the number of words in the paragraph increase (last box), the goal becomes error reduction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of work</th>
<th>date</th>
<th>number of grammar errors</th>
<th>number of sentence structure errors</th>
<th>number of punctuation errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of work</th>
<th>date</th>
<th>number of word choice errors</th>
<th>number of words in paragraph errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

FIGURE 2 Curriculum based measurement of teacher reflections of student writing.

Teacher name

Grade level:

Directions: To improve teaching skills and to enhance instruction for students with learning disabilities, teachers can use this form to ensure the writing instruction meets validated research instructional techniques. Teachers should use the top section of the form to reflect on the writing teaching practices used and student improvements. The bottom section provides recommendations for writing instructions for students with learning disabilities. Teachers are to assess whether the writing instruction includes all 10 parts, score entries accordingly and note the area(s) not included in instruction this week. Teachers should also set a goal to include future writing lessons.

Section one

Reflect on the writing teaching practices and student improvements you have experienced this week.

Section two
Read daily reflections and check off the numbers (1 thru 10) associated with the Graham and Harris list matching the type of instruction currently used in your classroom. Take particular note of the areas not completed and attempt to modify instructional practices to include Graham and Harris's suggestions.

Reflecting upon the contents in section one, place a checkmark next to all of the writing instruction recommendations you implemented this week.

1. Allocate time for writing instruction.
2. Expose students to a broad range of writing tasks.
3. Create a social climate conducive to writing development.
4. Integrate writing with other academic subjects.
5. Aid students in developing the processes central to effective writing.
6. Automatize skills for getting writing on paper.
7. Help students develop explicit knowledge about the characteristics of writing.
8. Help students develop skills and abilities to carry out more sophisticated composing processes.
9. Assist students in developing goals for improving written products.
10. Avoid instructional practices that do not improve students writing performances.

(Graham & Harris, 1988, Exceptional Children, 54, 513-520)

Take note of the areas you did not focus on this week and set a personal goal to include these areas in your writing instruction.

My writing instruction goal for this week is:

Goal:

REFERENCES


Gersten, R., & Woodward, J. (1992). The quest to translate research into classroom practice: Strategies for assisting classroom teachers' work with "at risk" students and students with disabilities. In D. Carnine & E. Kameenui (Eds.), Higher cognitive functioning for all students (pp. 201-218). Austin, TX: PRO-ED.


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