



Getting to the

Teacher
Resource CD
included

Level

K

Core of Writing

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Essential Lessons
for Every
Kindergarten
Student

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The Importance of Writing

In recent years, many school districts and teachers referred to writing as the “Neglected R” and viewed reading as the path to literacy success. Today, as research has revealed more information about the fundamental connection between reading success and writing competency, we are realizing that the road to literacy is a two-way street (Graham and Hebert, 2010). While working as literacy consultants, we encountered numerous, capable teachers struggling with the complexity of implementing rigorous writing instruction. We wrote this book to enable all teachers to implement a successful writing program with a high degree of teaching competency. The success enjoyed by many of the teachers using the materials in this book has relieved frustrations, rejuvenated careers, and rekindled enthusiasm for teaching.

This book was written to fulfill two major objectives. The first objective involves motivating teachers to value and incorporate writing instruction as an essential element of literacy development. It should help them implement best practices and simplify the planning of writing instruction. New writing standards have been applied by education leaders at every level. Ultimately, the responsibility for implementing these standards is placed on the classroom teacher. Historically, the lack of emphasis on writing instruction in teacher education programs has left teachers feeling woefully unprepared to teach primary students to write, particularly at a level which meets the expectations of the standards for writing. The burden of this responsibility and feelings of inadequacy have left both experienced and novice teachers feeling empty-handed and unprepared.

Since 2010, most states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which are designed to provide teachers and parents with a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn. Since the CCSS are newly adopted, many teachers have not received professional development to become familiar with the standards nor have they received resources for their instruction, particularly in the area of writing. Therefore, the second objective of this book is to assist teachers in becoming familiar with these standards for writing and provide resources to support the implementation of these standards in their classrooms. *Getting to the Core of Writing* provides lessons outlining four key areas of writing: Text Types and Purposes, Production and Distribution of Writing, Research, and Range of Writing. It offers suggestions to meet those standards in instruction during Writer’s Workshop. It also addresses how speaking and listening standards are easily practiced by engaging students in an interactive lesson format.

It is no secret that students become better writers by writing every day. This book contains the foundational structure and best practices that will guide teachers as they establish a daily Writer’s Workshop that includes consistent, structured instruction to engage students in the writing process. Beyond that, a flexible pacing guide is provided to aid in planning writing instruction.

It is our hope that this book provides teachers with all the tools needed to inspire and equip young writers in today’s classrooms.

—Richard, Jan, and Vickie

Traits of Quality Writing

The traits of quality writing continue to gain recognition as the language of successful writers. Educators at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, now Education Northwest, searched for an accurate, reliable method of measuring student writing performance. Six attributes of good writing were identified in *Seeing With New Eyes* (Spandel 2005). These characteristics are used to inform and guide writing instruction.

- **Ideas** are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, and the main theme.
- **Sentence Fluency** is the rhythm and flow of the language, the sound of word patterns, and the way in which the writing plays to the ear, not just to the eye.
- **Organization** is the internal structure, the thread of central meaning, and the logical and sometimes intriguing pattern of ideas within a piece of writing.
- **Word Choice** is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that moves and enlightens the reader.
- **Voice** is the heart and soul, the magic, and the wit, along with the feeling and conviction of the individual writer that emerge through the words.
- **Conventions** are how the writer uses mechanical correctness in the piece—spelling, paragraphing, grammar and usage, punctuation, and capitalization.

Knowing and understanding the traits of quality writing supports teachers, students, and parents in thinking about writing and understanding what makes for writing success. Even in the early grades, students can communicate and recognize the characteristics of quality writing. The works of Ruth Culham (2008) and Vicki Spandel (2008) emphasize the value and benefits of using these traits to provide a common language—“a writer’s vocabulary for thinking, speaking, and working like writers” (Spandel 2008, 7)—to enrich instruction and assessment in primary classrooms.

The value and importance of using this trait language in writing instruction is well supported by research (Gentry 2006). It is particularly important when working with students in the early grades to provide instructional tools to support students’ different learning styles. In *Getting to the Core of Writing*, the traits are personified through student-friendly characters. Each of the characters represent a different writing trait, and collectively they are referred to as the Traits Team (traitsteam.pdf). Students are introduced to the individual team members through mini-lessons. The Traits Team becomes a valuable tool for a Writer’s Workshop experience. A more detailed description and poster of each Traits Team member is provided in the introduction to each trait section.

The Reading and Writing Connection

For years, researchers have acknowledged the reciprocal nature of the reading and writing process. For example, researchers have reported that beginning reading and writing are intricately connected and develop hand-in-hand in five early phases (Ehri 1997; Gentry 2006). Researchers such as P. David Pearson suggest that rather than teach and assess bits and pieces of reading skills and writing skills, teachers should provide deep and broad exposure to these processes, “in their more global, not their more atomistic aspect.” As Richard Gentry (2006) writes, “Early writers use knowledge about sounds, letters, syllables, words, word parts like onsets and rimes, and phonics patterns, so early writing advances reading. But we haven’t taken full advantage of it. Too often early reading and writing are not connected; they are treated separately.”

Getting to the Core of Writing approaches Writer’s Workshop from this global perspective, honoring the links between reading and writing and connecting them to the Common Core State Standards. Taken from this approach, Writer’s Workshop will be an orchestra in concert—not the screeching sounds of the orchestra tuning up in bits and pieces.

When beginning readers and writers advance from nonreaders to independent, automatic, fluid readers in kindergarten through second grade, there is evidence that reading and writing develop in tandem. This is illustrated in the *Phases of Writing* chart (pages 8–9) and is adapted from a developmental monitoring process called Tracking Five Phases of Code Breaking (Gentry 2006, 2010). Beginners in a particular phase approach word reading and word writing with similar understandings and strategies. The sub-skills and cross connections of reading, writing, and spelling

strengthen naturally as students explore and become engaged in both reading and writing processes at each successive phase. There are five phases of writing development that can be observed in students as they practice writing. At each of these phases, reading and writing brain circuitry is intricately connected, and the student’s responses while writing, reading, and spelling mirror each other and fit the patterns observable in the phase. Thinking about development globally rather than taking an atomistic view of isolated skills instruction will give teachers a unified perspective for monitoring progress and targeting instruction as they work with beginning writers and readers (Gentry 2006).



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