



The Writing Proficiency Project - Spring 2007



Is the Five Paragraph Essay Structure a Good Model for Academic Writing?

Loretta Kane, a doctoral student at UC-Berkeley, has conducted research on the efficacy and impact of teaching writing through formula. Teachers often use prescribed formulas for teaching essay writing in order to provide scaffolding for students or because they believe the structure is a model of good academic writing.

Ms. Kane found that the very formula that acts as a scaffold in the development of their writing may actually be teaching students to sacrifice meaning for structure. Her research found that students taught a formula tended to lack devel-

opment in their essays. In other words, students made claims followed by supporting statements, but did not elaborate, discuss, explain, or illustrate in any way that would make the support successful. She also found problems with coherence as students produce isolated chunks instead of creating an integrated whole. Additionally, students tended to choose lower order rather than higher order claims as they looked for events in a text that could be easily "proven" by finding quotations to support them. Students also had a tendency to retell rather than reason. Lastly, students often appro-

priated teacher's academic language without having a conceptual understanding of what these terms are and how they work in an essay.

These findings raise some interesting questions. Does a formulaic approach impede students' intellectual growth and ability to think critically? Does it promote a misconception of writing and of writers? Kane argues the formulaic approach discourages an understanding of the writer as a thinking, decision-making agent, whose job it is to develop appropriate strategies based on rhetorical concerns, including audience, purpose, and content. (continued on next page....)

9th Grade Process Writing Assessment

The beginning-of-the-year or diagnostic Process Writing Assessment was administered September 11th-25th. 85% of 9th grade English classrooms participated and the average score district-wide was 2.3 on a 4 point rubric. There were 8 collaborative scoring sessions held

at different school sites throughout the district where teachers came together to gain a common understanding of the rubric and "calibrate" their scoring. The **end-of-the-year** or summative assessment will be administered during the window of **May 21st-June 1st**.

Scoring events will take place the week of June 4th. Copies of the assessment, student writing paper, and directions will be delivered to teachers mid-May. We expect to see real growth in student writing. Fabulous instruction has been taking place in 9th grade classes!

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Special points of interest:

- Essential writing types identified for grades 4-9
- End-of-Year 9th grade PWA administration window is: May 21-June 1st
- Summer Professional Development June 18-22
- Pilot of new assessments for 4th and 5th grade next year!

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She believes it also prevents students from getting the practice they need to discover an appropriate organizational strategy, manipulate text, and coordinate multiple dimensions of text in order to think more deeply and to create a more thoughtful and well-developed argument.

If you agree with Kane, then how do you scaffold for students and NOT impede their development in academic writing? Kane suggests that the real process in "process" writing should be cognitive, not procedural. Teachers should spend instructional time helping

student contend with an authentic writer's task - looking at the rhetorical demands for writing, first discovering and generating ideas for content and then balancing the content, audience needs, and writing purpose - rather than trying to force content into a prescribed format. This approach involves a lot of writing and talking, to generate ideas about how to organize a piece. Next, students create their own plan to organize their essays, which is then critiqued by the class. They will rework their plan, write rough drafts to discover their thesis, and go through an-

other round of critique. Finally, students will complete a series of revisions. The point is for the students to "discover" and critique their own organizational patterns, rather than having these patterns imposed on them.

Kane's research poses interesting questions and great food for thought!



Writing from the Start—Professional Development Series for OUSD Elementary Teachers

School teams from 16 elementary schools are attending a monthly workshop to learn instructional strategies for teaching writing. The workshops are sponsored by the Bay Area Writing Project and OUSD's Writing Proficiency Project. The series reviews the "building blocks" for a great writing program and the components of a good writing environment (physical, cognitive and affective). BAWP presenters Rebeca García-

"By reflecting on writing in my classroom, I have some insight into what I am doing well and what I need to change to improve my writing instruction." *teacher participant*

González, Linda Luzar, and Jeanette Bicias share research-proven principles that support a great writing program. Workshops also address differentiated instruction for English language learners, formative assessment, long

term planning, and the teaching of challenging genres. In April, fourth and fifth grade teacher participants will get a sneak preview at the new OUSD writing assessments that will be piloted in participating schools next year.

Elementary Writing: New Assessments for Grades 4 and 5

A fourth and fifth Grade Writing Assessment Pilot is being developed by Bay Area Writing Project teacher-consultants Theresa Sanders, Sonny Kim, and Mary Hurley (also OUSD teachers). The group is led by Rebeca García-González, also a BAWP teacher-consultant. They have been meeting weekly after school since November 2006, with the goal of creating an assessment to eventually replace SCOE. Developed with input from OUSD coaches and teachers, this assessment takes into consideration the OCR context, the needs

of the OUSD student population, and the wide variety of schools in which this assessment will be administered.

Its components are a teacher set of instructions, a student packet, a one-page rubric, a child-friendly version of this rubric, and a set of recommended lessons to be taught prior to the assessment. Both the fourth (response to literature) and fifth grade (research report) lessons and assessments will be based on reading selections from the OCR anthology.

The assessment consists of two six-week cycles closely following the OCR

units taught at mid-year and at the end of the school year. A pre-assessment will be administered in September, followed by assessments in January and May. Grade level teams at piloting schools will meet to score and discuss the samples starting during the fall of 2007. Later, grade level teams from several schools will meet for the community scoring and calibration processes. The pilot will be refined with teacher feedback generated by these meetings, and used by participating schools the following year.

Summer Professional Development Opportunities

Oakland teacher-consultants of the Bay Area Writing Project will host a week-long summer institute on the teaching of writing **June 18th-22nd**. Participants will work in grade-level groups to explore the priority writing type for the grade level they teach: expository and research writing at 6th and 9th grades, persuasive writing at 7th grade, and response to literature at 8th grade. Participants will examine the type of writing, look at student work, learn practical teaching strategies, and reflect on what needs to be taught in order for students to show growth in this type of writing over the course of the school year. We'll take a careful look at the district's new Process Writing Assess-

ments, rubrics, and anchor papers. Participants will begin to develop some units of study and plan the instructional components for next year. (Institute limited to 15 participants per grade level, grades 6-9.)

Writing Proficiency Project Teacher Leader Network will meet August 14th and 15th. ELA teacher-leaders and coaches are invited to attend the Participants will receive leadership training to support collaborative reviewing and evaluating of student writing at their school sites during the course of the school year. This work will support the Process Writing Assessment and writing instruction. We will review integrated prompt design, holis-

tic scoring guides, strategically selected anchor papers, and the nuts and bolts of training a diverse groups of scorers to apply shared standards in a limited time frame. This training will result in leadership practice, improved teaching, and a deeper understanding of the complexity of learning to write.

Stipend: Participants will be paid 8 hours/day: 6 hours class time + 2 hours homework @ \$22.59 rate (roughly \$900.)

To sign up contact Pat Livingston: 879-8601. For more information, contact Amy Brooks Gottesfeld 879-4647.

Middle School Writing Inquiry

Ten middle schools participated in an inquiry cycle around writing instruction. Teachers administered common assessments or assignments and have been meeting to examine the student work and reflect on instructional practices to address common weaknesses evidenced in the students' writing. Many schools chose to pilot the Process Writing Assessment prompts

that will be next year's sixth, seventh, and eighth grade beginning-of-year writing assessments in English classes.

At Cole and Elmhurst Middle Schools, the entire faculty participated in a collaborative analysis of student writing. Reading several papers first to experience the calibration process, teachers at both schools then identified the strengths and challenges faced by student writers. Teachers from all con-

tent areas identified writing as key to understanding in all subject areas and agreed to include writing in their instructional practice. Teachers at both school sites appreciated the collaborative experience and identified this process as both energizing and informative.



10 Essential Ideas about Writing and Writing Instruction

The Writing Proficiency Project Leadership Team believes in the following essential ideas about writing and writing instruction:

1. Writing is a complex activity; more than just a skill or talent, it is a means of inquiry and expression for learning in all grades and disciplines. Writing is the most visible expression of what students know and how well they have learned it. Students write to learn.
2. Writing helps to develop higher order thinking skills: analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and interpreting.
3. Writing is inquiry, problem solving, and discovery. Writing can deepen learning.
4. In the classroom, there should be a balance of on-demand and student-generated writing as well as a balance between direct and process-based instruction.
5. Teachers plan using the gradual release of responsibility model.
6. Second language learners and struggling writers receive differentiated instruction. Second language learners and struggling writers receive frequent, consistent feedback.
7. Writing instruction happens on a daily basis.
8. Students analyze and talk about their own and other students' writing.
9. All students receive a response in guided writing situations.
10. The goal is to foster a love of writing.

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**Writing Proficiency
Project**

We're on the Web
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Timeline

2006-2007 **THIS YEAR**

- 9th grade beginning and end-of-year Process Writing Assessments (PWA) administered.
- Pilot of middle school PWAs, selection of anchor papers.
- Design of grades 4 and 5 writing assessments

2007-2008 **NEXT YEAR**

- PWA administration grades 6-9 with collaborative scoring and teacher inquiry around writing instruction
- Pilot of grades 4 and 5, selection of anchor papers
- Design of grades K-3 writing assessments

Essential Writing Types Selected for Grade-levels 4-9

Six types of writing form the basis of a carefully-sequenced genre progression designed to support students in mastering a range of academic demands as well as to deepen the professional practice of teachers. The Writing Proficiency Project leadership team selected the writing types (also referred to as writing type priorities) based on current research on writing instruction as well as many years of collective teaching experience.

The writing sequence is designed to

- engage early writers;
- respond to the developmental needs at each of the different grades;
- prepare students for state writing assessments;
- provide development in critical think-

ing that is the basis of all writing;

- link writing instruction across all grade levels.

The writing types are outlined below:

Grade 4 - Response to Literature

Grade 5 - Research Report

Grade 6 - Expository: Information

Grade 7 - Persuasive

Grade 8 - Response to Literature

Grade 9 - Expository Essays and Research Reports

Teachers will design writing instruction around the grade-level writing

type focus and other writing types indicated in the standards. Teachers should devote carefully planned instruction to the essential writing type in order to allow for practice and mastery. By assessing students in the same writing type at the beginning of the year and the end of the year, teachers are able to measure growth in a relevant and meaningful fashion.

