

MODES, GENRES, AND FORMATS. OH MY!

Ruth Culham

At a workshop recently, a fourth-grade teacher told me that she delivered a focus lesson on how to write an introduction, using a mentor text her whole class loved. Unfortunately, she could tell by the students' faces that they just weren't getting it. She asked them what was wrong, because she knew they had worked with introductions in third grade and, as such, should have been familiar with the concept. Nonetheless, the teacher revised her lesson on the spot—as good teachers do—by simplifying it. About 10 minutes into it, a student raised her hand and said, “Oh, you are talking about *leads*. Yes, we learned all about those last year.”

Because misunderstandings like that happen all the time in writing classrooms, I'd like to discuss the value of teachers and students using a shared vocabulary and the value of deeper conversation and thinking about planning writing. The focus of my research, practice, and professional publishing over the years has been on the traits of writing—ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions—which gives teachers a common, research-based language with which to assess and teach writing. It's been gratifying to see how that common set of terms has helped teachers build knowledge about the craft of writing and develop lessons that teach increasingly complex skills in each trait. It's a winning model that has been proven effective in numerous studies—most recently and notably, a five-year study by the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (Coe, Hanita, Nishioka, & Smiley, 2011).

I've seen firsthand the advantages of using a common language to teach kids *how* to write, and

in that spirit, my latest focus has been on using a common language to teach them *what* to write, too. In my work with teachers, I've found that there is great confusion about the meanings and everyday use of modes, genres, and formats. As a result, teachers often use those terms interchangeably and, in the process, wind up in a predicament similar to the fourth-grade teacher's—stalled out by semantics!

Writing is communication at a refined, complex level of thinking. A common language to describe it helps teachers and students dig in and figure out what the writing task is, how to tackle it, and how to measure its success. We need to understand the pedagogical vocabulary our profession uses and apply it with consistency and specificity to get the results we want: continued growth and achievement in writing.

Let's take some time now to explore modes, genres, and formats and to establish a common language to understand them. I'd like to be clear, however, that what follows is simply my current thinking about these terms and their impact in the writing classroom. I know many of my colleagues have written extensively about genre—particularly for reading—and I urge you to read more and study this area further if what I've written here piques your curiosity.

Modes: The Purposes for Writing

Rhetorical modes are the types of writing that establish the purposes for which we write: narrative,

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"Writing is communication at a refined, complex level of thinking."

informative/explanatory, and opinion/argument. I'm using the Common Core State Standards terminology (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) as we proceed because it's what we're talking and thinking about so much these days. Whether you and your schools choose the traditional terms (narrative, exposition, persuasive) or the language of the Common Core (narrative, informative/

Imagine, for instance, that a student tells you he or she wants to write a piece about baseball. "Great, baseball! Sounds interesting. Let's talk more about it," you might respond, and you'd likely follow with a series of questions moving forward in a focused, purposeful way: "What do you want to write about baseball? Do you want to tell a story about it? Provide information or an explanation about it? Or do you want to persuade readers that it is better than another sport?" Zeroing in on a mode, the purpose of the piece, is a key decision point for the writing. It leads the student to sort out how the idea will develop, what type of organization will work, what voice is appropriate, what sort of language and vocabulary should be used, and how the sentences should flow, and finally to clean up the writing by applying conventions—the traits. Modes and traits are two sides of the writing coin: *how* and *what*.

Although it's important for the writer to have a dominant mode in mind when he or she writes, weaving in other modes at carefully timed and placed moments can bring the piece to life. Let's say the writer of the baseball piece chooses to explain or provide information about baseball—in other words, chooses the informative/explanatory mode. Here are a couple of mode-mixing ideas that might make the piece more interesting:

- Add an anecdote about a key figure in baseball history (narrative)
■ Provide his or her view on why baseball is called "America's favorite pastime" (opinion/argument)

In fact, the best pieces of writing often mix modes. This is tricky for students to understand. We tend to want to

"Mentor texts are an excellent way to show students how favorite authors make the mixed-mode move."

put pieces in the writing box and label them: narrative, informative/explanatory, opinion/argument. In fact, we should show and discuss model texts that have a dominant mode but are strengthened by the use of other modes. Mentor texts are an excellent way to show students how favorite authors make the mixed-mode move.

Here's a passage from 90 Miles to Hanzou by Enrique Flores-Galbis (2010) that illustrates this concept. It's a narrative that chronicles the true, heart-breaking story of a young boy and his brother who are exiled from their Cuban homeland to Miami during Operation Pedro Pan in 1961.

My mother hasn't told me everything because she thinks I'm too young to understand and she doesn't want to scare me. [informative/explanatory] But I'm not too young to know that it's not her fault, and that she doesn't really want to send us away to a strange country all alone, and I'm not too young to feel terrible about it. (p. 32) [opinion/argument]

I'm not suggesting that we read every text and analyze it line by line for the mode. Far from it. I'm simply saying that the best-written texts are often a blend of modes, and student writers need to understand and practice that.

Think About Modes

Keep the dominant mode in mind as you share picture books, chapter books, and everyday texts with your students,

understand what writing looks like in that genre. It often takes some discussion and thought for students to narrow in on genre, but this is where writing conferences with teachers or peers can help.

Let's revisit the baseball example again through the lens of genre. The student chooses to write about baseball. Questions are posed to help the writer zero in on the mode for the writing: narrative, informative/explanatory, or opinion/argument. The writer chooses informative/explanatory. Got it. Now, the writer can think his or her way into a genre. Here is how the conversation might go:

Teacher: So, you've decided to research and write an informative/explanatory piece about baseball. Where will you go next with this idea? What are you interested in finding out about baseball that you could write about and share with others that makes you an authority on the subject?

Student: I love everything about baseball, but I've always wondered about the uniforms and cleats. I see old movies, and the players look a lot different than they do now—these old uniforms look uncomfortable and hot. Could I write about that?

Teacher: Terrific. You are zeroing in on historical information about the game of baseball and how the uniforms have evolved. Where will you go or who will you talk to in order to gather the information you need?

Bingo. Thanks to this conference, the student is able to take a broad topic (baseball), sort out the mode (informative/explanatory), and then zero in on the

Genres: The Categories for Writing

The terms mode and genre are often confused in the writing teacher's lexicon. Think of the mode as the umbrella (the overall purpose of the writing) and the genre as the ribs (the specific categories within that mode).

Genre means the type of writing associated with a specific form, content, and style. For example, literature has four main genres—poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction—all of which have subcategories. Fiction includes familiar genres such as realistic fiction, historical, fantasy, mystery, humor, science fiction, tall tale, and so on. Nonfiction includes genres like biography, autobiography, diary, memoir, how-to/instructions, historical nonfiction, journal, and essay.

In my experience, genre is a word often associated with reading; mode is more often associated with writing. However, mode and genre work together as powerful allies in reading and writing. It's possible and even likely, for instance, for students to read a memoir and then try writing a memoir (narrative); to read a brochure and write a brochure (informative/explanatory); or to read a review and write a review (opinion/argument).

The mode by itself can be a target too broad for writers to hit with accuracy. "Write an informative/explanatory text" is an overwhelming task and tends to produce writing that is superficial and unclear. "Write a how-to text" is a much easier task—especially if good models of how-to texts have been shared and analyzed for content and form so students

Box containing detailed lists of traits for Narrative Writing, Informative/Explanatory Writing, and Opinion/Argument Writing, including purpose and what the writer typically does.

genre (historical nonfiction), which is much more likely to lead to a successful piece of writing. Once the writer has gathered the needed information, which paper do you think will be easier for him or her to write well: a paper on baseball or a paper on how baseball uniforms have changed over time? Indeed, focusing the topic this way gives writers a leg up to get started and proceed with confidence.

Think About Genres

There are many fiction and nonfiction genres and only three modes. Sit with colleagues and take a long, hard look at how the modes and genres reveal themselves in your writing curriculum in English language arts and across the curriculum. Students in every grade should write in all the modes, but grade should write in all the modes, but it would be impossible for them to also write in every genre. So, why not make a list of genres that are most important and developmentally appropriate, align them to literature and content studies, and parse them out across the grades? That way, students stretch and grow rather than repeat what they've already learned in the past. If first graders write fairy tales, for instance, then second and third graders should try a fable or tall tale. Or, if fifth graders take on biography, then sixth graders could try autobiography.

Format: The Structure for Writing

There is little agreement "out there" about where genre stops and format

begins. If you Google "genre," for instance, you find dozens of sites that list genres, as I have explained them in this article, but you also find examples of what I prefer to call format: the actual organizational structure of the writing. Extending the metaphor: If the overall mode is the umbrella and the genre the ribs that structure it, then the formats are the multicolored and textured fabrics that create uniquely styled umbrellas. In the spirit of keeping language simple, here is how I address format in relationship to modes and genres.

Mode	Purpose for Writing	Category for Writing
Narrative	To tell a story	Realistic, historical, fantasy, mystery, humor, science fiction, tall tale, and so on
Informative/Opinion/argument	To explain and provide information To construct an argument using reason and logic	Common classes of the Dewey Decimal System, such as technology, arts, and geography, or categories such as biography, autobiography, diary, memoir, journal, and essay
Fiction		
Nonfiction		

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Format
Writing Tasks
Essays, speeches, letters, e-mails, speeches, forms, brochures, blog posts, and many others

The writer has many options for the format of a piece of writing. Some formal formats require extended time to write, such as essays and stories, and some informal ones can be written more quickly, such as driving directions, text messages, and simple forms.

Although schools have always done a terrific job teaching traditional formats such as stories, essays, and letters, they need to consider formats that students actually see in today's world: blog posts, advertisements, reviews, Web pages, and so on. There are literally hundreds of formats to consider for any writing task.

Returning to the baseball example one last time, recall that our writer has determined the mode (informative/explanatory) and the genre (historical nonfiction). Now, he or she must determine the format. This is the fun part!

The first format that may come to mind for the student's piece is an essay. But why limit him or her to an essay on the history of baseball uniforms and how they have changed over time? Why not also consider museum display copy for a retrospective show on baseball uniforms? Or a dialogue between two baseball players suiting up for the old-timers' game and comparing uniforms over time? Or directions on how to put on an older uniform and protective gear versus a newer uniform and gear? These format options allow the student to stick with the mode and the genre while potentially piquing his or

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her interest in the topic and how he or she can communicate it to the audience. Each format requires the same amount of research and understanding of the topic as an essay, but the end results will look quite different. Unfamiliar formats have to be taught and models provided, just like

familiar ones. Models are easy to locate, however, when you are on the hunt for them. The sidebar lists some of my favorite formats, in no particular order.

Think About Format

At a meeting with colleagues to discuss how modes and genres are distributed across the grades, include a discussion about formats. I believe format is something that should be determined by the writer with the guidance and support of the teacher. Students should always have a say in their choices of topic, mode, and genre—but it's the format that can really hook them because there are so many creative options.

Ask yourselves what formats are already embedded into your curriculum. Then create a bigger list to share with students, and grow it over time as all of you come up with new ideas. Try not to lock into formats from grade to grade; instead, always allow students to choose. Of course, it doesn't hurt to post to a blog for more than one year in row, but writing blog posts every year instead of trying a new format may inhibit students' ability to express their vision of what the work could become.

Wrap-Up

The value of using a common language in classrooms, in teachers' rooms, and across schools cannot be stated strongly enough. As writing

teachers, words are the tools of our trade. We use them to create understanding and help students develop as writers. When we switch up terms on them, it confuses them. It's as simple as that.

We must accept the fact that vocabulary matters if we are to move forward in writing instruction. That same fourth-grade teacher I mentioned at the beginning of this article commented that in the future, she would let students know that although she was using the term *introduction*, the terms *lead*, *grabber*, and *beginning* also mean basically the same thing. Establishing a shared term that students connect to prior learning will allow her to deepen students' understanding of a key concept. It makes it possible for each student writer to advance, regardless of his or her background experiences. Whether it's traits, modes, genres, or formats under discussion, we should never let our teaching vocabulary impede learning. It's fixable at our end, and for years to come, students will benefit.

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STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN LITERACY TASKS

Seth A. Parsons ■ Jacquelynn A. Malloy ■ Allison Ward Parsons ■ Sarah Cohen Burrowbridge

Teachers would prefer a classroom of students who are engaged—actively and thoughtfully participating in literacy instruction. But what is it about instructional tasks that make them engaging or disengaging?

In a 2013 Gallup poll, 70% of United States respondents reported that they are disengaged at work, which Gallup estimated to cost between \$450 billion and \$550 billion in lost productivity each year. This finding is ironic because U.S. workers are thought to “work” much more than people in other countries (Prescott, 2004). This same plague of disengagement exists in our classrooms. Teachers are constantly pressed for time, and all precious instructional minutes must be productive. As adults, we recall disengaged moments in the classroom when we were students: *The teacher is at the front of the class lecturing while you and your friend pass notes. A boy nearby doodles while his buddy pokes his shoulder.* These memories are abundant. The teacher worked diligently to plan instruction and carefully presented the material, but disengaged students did not absorb the lesson's content.

Now, let's take a look at what could be—and what is happening in some classrooms across the U.S. You enter a classroom where students are learning about the Boston Massacre in an integrated literacy-social studies unit. The class is split into two groups examining primary source artistic depictions of the Massacre. Each group is collaboratively crafting a written account of what happened: “No, look, those soldiers were brutally attacking the colonists. That needs to be in our account,” says one student. “Make sure you write about the blood and guts,” says another to his group's designated writer. On the other side of the room, students are buzzing about their artistic rendering: “Those colonists started it—look right here, they are throwing rocks

at the British soldiers! The soldiers had to protect themselves,” exclaims a student. The teacher then reconvenes the class to share their depictions of the Boston Tea Party. As planned, an in-class debate ensues. In fact, it extends into lunch, where students argue over who instigated the Boston Massacre. This is the sound of students engaged in an interdisciplinary task: the joyful sound of meaningful learning.

Engaging students in academic work can be challenging, though. Teachers must address curriculum in ways that encourage students to participate with interest and thoughtfulness. The daily dilemma of engaging students in necessary content is further complicated when they differ in ability level, cultural background, and interests. In this article, we first describe what engagement is, its importance for literacy teachers and researchers, and its direct relationship to the tasks teachers assign students. We then describe our study of student engagement, in which we sought to better understand how academic tasks engage or disengage students.

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What Is Engagement?

Engagement has most recently been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, consisting of affective, behavioral, and cognitive components (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Malloy, Parsons, & Parsons, 2013; Parsons, Nuland, & Parsons, 2014; Shernoff, 2013). Affective engagement emphasizes interest, enjoyment, and enthusiasm. Behavioral engagement relates to effortful participation. Cognitive engagement encompasses strategic behavior, persistence, and metacognition. In addition, engagement is currently conceptualized as a dynamic, malleable construct (Shernoff, 2013). Over the course of a lesson, students do not remain engaged or disengaged; instead, students' engagement fluctuates across and within lessons (Fredricks et al., 2004). To illustrate, we borrow from the related construct of self-regulated learning. Winne and Perry (2000) discuss self-regulation as an *aptitude* and as an *event*. Self-regulation as an aptitude is a stagnant quality. However, self-regulation can also be conceptualized as an event, where it is dynamic, fluctuating throughout the course of instruction. This view is parallel to the construct of engagement: It can be conceptualized as an aptitude, where students are generally

engaged in academic work, but it can also be viewed as an event, varying throughout the school day.

Why Is Engagement Important?

Engagement is a vital component of classroom instruction because it is explicitly associated with reading achievement (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). For example, Skinner and Pitzer (2012) explained that engagement is "a robust predictor of students' learning, grades, achievement test scores, retention, and graduation" (p. 21). They continue, "Engagement is the direct (and only) pathway to cumulative learning, long-term achievement, and eventual academic success" (pp. 23–24). In their analysis of Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, for example, Brozo, Shiel, and Topping (2008) identified reading engagement as one of the most powerful factors affecting students' reading achievement. PISA researchers described engagement as the "student characteristic [that] has the largest correlation with achievement in reading literacy" (p. 124; Kirsch et al., 2003). These international data as well as U.S. data (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997) have shown that reading engagement could compensate for—and even overcome—low socioeconomic status and family educational backgrounds. Moreover, research on exemplary reading teachers has determined that high levels of engagement distinguish higher performing classrooms from lower performing classrooms (Pressley & Allington, 2015).

Tasks and Engagement

Fredricks and McColskey (2012) explain that students are "engaged in something (i.e., task, activity, and relationship), and their engagement cannot be separated from their environment. This

"High levels of engagement distinguish higher performing classrooms from lower performing classrooms."

means that engagement is malleable and is responsive to variations in the context that schools can target in interventions" (p. 765). Researchers have presented the tasks that students complete as the central feature of classroom instruction (Doyle, 1983; Parsons & Scales, 2013; Perry, Turner, & Meyer, 2006). Doyle presented the task as the fundamental unit of analysis in the classroom because students acquire the knowledge that is necessary to complete the task: "Students will learn what a task leads them to do; that is, they will acquire information and operations that are necessary to accomplish the tasks they encounter" (p. 162). Blumenfeld, Mergendoller, and Swarthout (1987) expressed concern about the preponderance of simple tasks in schools: "We may be creating workers desirous of doing the least possible in an individualist fashion" (p. 144). Subsequent research has demonstrated that particular aspects of tasks are associated with student engagement: authenticity, collaboration, choice, appropriate challenge, and sustained learning.

Authentic tasks are assignments that mimic activities completed outside of school settings (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2006). Authentic tasks have real purpose and, therefore, encourage student engagement (Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, & Igo, 2011; Guthrie, 2015). For example,

Pause and Ponder

- When considering your instruction, what tasks do you offer that provide students with ACCESS to engagement: authenticity, collaboration, challenge, student-directedness, and sustainability?
- In what ways can you design instructional tasks so that you are free to circulate and provide scaffolding and support to students?

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Pearson, Raphael, Benson, and Madda (2007) stated,

The argument underlying the promotion of authenticity is that too many school tasks are unauthentic, unrealistic, and, by implication, not useful for engaging in real-world literacy activities; that is, instead of teaching kids how to "do school," we should be teaching them how to "do life." (p. 36)

Collaborative activities where students are given *choices* are motivating for students (Guthrie, 2015). In a meta-analysis of scientifically based research, Guthrie and Humenick (2004) found collaboration and choice as two of only four components of classroom instruction to have significant empirical support for motivating students to read. Perry, Phillips, and Dowler's (2004) research demonstrates the benefits of collaboration: "Our observations indicate that children not only enjoy working together in supportive contexts but their collaborations enhance their understanding, confidence, and regulation of learning" (p. 1873). Related to choice, Paris, Wasik, and Turner (1991) noted the importance of encouraging students to choose instructional goals and decide how to meet them.

In addition, engaging academic tasks are appropriately *challenging*: neither too difficult nor too easy. Pressley and Allington (2015) explained, "The data are overwhelming that tasks a little bit beyond the learner's current competence level are motivating. Tasks that are a little bit challenging cause students to work hard and feel good about what they are doing" (p. 395). The final component of academic tasks that has strong empirical support for student engagement is *sustained learning* (Guthrie, 2015). Barron and Darling-Hammond (2008) argued that tasks sustained over time are beneficial for student engagement:

As students become engaged as producers of complex products and organizers of long-term projects, they begin to recognize within themselves capacities that lead them to identify as authors, designers, critical consumers, and analysts. These identities, or possible selves, in turn can lead to development of learning goals that support continued engagement. (pp. 68–69)

Our Perspective

The research reported here is grounded in self-determination theory, which suggests there are three needs that guide human behavior: relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2002). In the classroom, *relatedness* refers to the degree to which students feel connected to others, or their sense of belongingness. Students who perceive themselves as *competent* feel they will be successful in completing academic tasks, and *autonomy* suggests a sense of control over one's actions (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Meeting these three needs influences the degree to which students engage in classroom tasks (Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Our Study

The setting for our research was a sixth-grade classroom in a Title I elementary school. The students in this classroom reflected the general demographics of the school, which served a significant number of English learners (76%) and students from lower socioeconomic status families (83% receiving free or reduced lunch). Study participants included six students and one

teacher, Sarah, who served as a co-researcher and is the fourth author of this article. Sarah selected student participants based on their representation of three performance levels: two low-, two average-, and two high-performing students.

We used classroom observations to document the tasks assigned to students and to document students' behavioral engagement. We used postobservation interviews with students to document their affective and cognitive engagement. We then used a rubric to rate the academic tasks, classifying them as closed, moderately open, or open (see Appendix A). We used rating scales to rate students' behavioral, affective, and cognitive engagement (see Appendix B). Full details of the methods used in our research can be found in Malloy et al. (2013). In the present article, we highlight the 10 tasks that produced the highest student engagement and the 10 tasks that produced the lowest student engagement to further investigate student engagement in literacy tasks.

So What Makes a Literacy Task Engaging?

The task rubric measures the degrees to which activities are authentic, collaborative, challenging, student-directed, and sustained. These components have been identified in the literature as essential to enhancing engagement (Gambrell et al., 2011; Guthrie, 2015; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Pressley & Allington, 2015). Therefore, it was unsurprising

"Activities [that] are authentic, collaborative, challenging, student-directed, and sustained... have been identified in the literature as essential to enhancing engagement."

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Table 1 10 Most Engaging Tasks

1. TASK 10.2: Read handout independently and underline the most important information. (16 min)
2. TASK 2.2: "At the end of the week, we talked about how each group will get a cake to demonstrate—without words—the Coastal Plain." Students talk to their groups about how they will show this region on a cake. (30 min)
3. TASK 3.4: "I'm going to list the vocabulary words. Your job is to write a paragraph using all of those words. One that makes sense...that shows me you know what they mean." (20 min)
4. TASK 17.1: Complete agree/disagree handout, which was discussed with group members, then discussed as a whole class. Asks students if they agree or disagree with particular statements. (40 min)
5. TASK 11.3: Read through lines of the Declaration of Independence in groups (some groups with teacher) to figure out the meaning of the archaically worded phrases, then determine why those phrases were used in an argument with the British. (20 min)
6. TASK 12.2: Teacher begins a shared writing activity. As a group, students write a news article. Teacher does the writing; students brainstorm what to write, with teacher's questioning and guidance. (17 min)
7. TASK 4.1: Complete graphic organizer about the Sioux tribe while viewing a video and discussing the tribe. (26 min)
8. TASK 8.2: Write a play in groups about explorers. Must include motivations, obstacles, and accomplishments. Perform the play the next day. (30 min)
9. TASK 6.2: Present Native American group project. (time varied)
10. TASK 3.2: "Dig up" artifacts of different cultures (grade levels): pails of sand with items buried. Students have to decide which culture (grade level) the "artifact" came from. Students work in three groups; must record their artifacts and the culture. Groups then share their findings. (11 min)

Table 2 10 Least Engaging Tasks

1. TASK 24.3: Complete a worksheet on the American Revolution. (13 min)
2. TASK 8.1: Students talk through worksheet as a whole class. (8 min)
3. TASK 23.2: Play "Jeopardy": Students are divided into teams. A student from each team goes to the front of the classroom. The students remaining at their seats can "steal" incorrect answers by writing down the correct answer. (14 min)
4. TASK 21.2: Read paragraphs about the two political parties, underlining the most important words. (7 min)
5. TASK 22.1: Students call out states and teacher labels them on the map. (9 min)
6. TASK 7.1: Regular teacher out of classroom. Substitute asks students to review definitions in social studies notebook. Substitute has students come up and read definitions to the rest of the class. (9 min)
7. TASK 22.2: Predict which states left and which states stayed in the Union, and explain why. Whole-class discussion. (10 min)
8. TASK 24.2: Students complete the colonial worksheet in groups. (7 min)
9. TASK 21.3: "OK, we're going to read over it." As an adaptation in response to student difficulty with text, teacher reads the paragraph about Federalists aloud, talking through it. (6 min)
10. TASK 6.1: Students finalize their Native American group presentation. (3 min)

that 7 of the 10 most engaging tasks were moderately open or open (see Table 1) and 9 of the 10 least engaging tasks were closed (see Table 2). A review of the tasks listed in Tables 1 and 2 indicates that the most engaging tasks included authenticity, collaboration, and choice. Conversely, students

viewed the least engaging tasks as too difficult or too reliant on worksheets, and a majority of these tasks occurred as whole-class activities.

Nonetheless, there were anomalies, such as three tasks that were rated as closed but appeared in the list of most engaging tasks. One such task involved

viewing a video with a teacher-led discussion (Task 4.1). In this activity, Sarah provided interesting asides regarding the Sioux tribe, and students were given a graphic organizer to arrange important information. In reviewing their comments regarding this task, students noted the video's appeal—the average-performing student observed that she put herself in the role of the tribal women, and high- and low-performing students noted that the graphic organizer was useful for consolidating learning.

In another activity, students independently read a handout and underlined the most important information (Task 10.2). The high- and average-performing students commented that they strategically chose the important information (cognitive engagement) and maintained their attention to the task (behavioral engagement). The low-performing student, on the other hand, was in a teacher-led group focused on gleaning important information from the passage. In this closed task, students who were already strategic in determining the important elements of the text were provided with practice that encouraged metacognition, while Sarah supported the low-performing student's successful task completion.

In the third of the engaging closed tasks (Task 17.1), students were asked to complete an agree/disagree handout, which was discussed in groups and then shared as a whole class. Student comments indicated that this task provided elements of choice (agree or disagree) and the promise of follow-up opportunities to debate their choices. The opportunities for informed discussion—taking a stance and then defending it—were appealing, as these students were cognitively and affectively engaged as they exchanged ideas. The low-performing student was provided

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multiple levels of support during individual response, group discussion, and teacher-supported class discussion.

One open task was included in the list of least engaging tasks. Task 6.1 was brief (three minutes) and involved final group preparations for class presentations of their Native American tribe research. In this task, the high-performing student was prepared and ready to go but bored with the wait. The average- and low-performing students were concerned with their upcoming oral presentations and reported little thinking and worried affect. However, the actual presentation (Task 6.2) was ranked the ninth most engaging task.

Elements of Tasks That Engaged Students

In reviewing the 10 most engaging tasks, students often mentioned opportunities for collaboration and appropriate support for completing tasks.

Collaboration. Students collaborated in groups to unlock the meanings of archaically worded phrases, to write a news article, to create a play based on explorers they researched, and to present information about Native American tribes. These tasks also provided opportunities for choice, creativity, and student-directedness—elements that also increased the tasks' openness.

Sarah knows that group selection leads to collaboration's success or failure, so she considered a number of factors when placing students in collaborative teams. For example, she heterogeneously placed students so there were a variety of learning levels in each group. Students' level of interest in the topic was also considered. A low-performing student who loves the topic can be a huge asset to any group. Additionally, Sarah determined the skills that were of particular importance to the planned

task. When a project had an artistic component, she ensured that each group contained a class artist. Finally, she balanced student personalities to ensure a mix of students in each group. In sum, she holistically considered each learner to create successful collaboration.

Appropriate Support. A second prominent element of engaging tasks was Sarah's differentiated support, which was possible because she knew her students well. For example, when she assigned students a difficult text to read, she provided small-group scaffolding for some and individual practice in determining importance for others (Task 10.2). Sarah also served as a facilitator, circulating among groups to provide questions and guidance as they collaborated. In this way, she was able to positively influence student engagement, blending her knowledge of students' needs with new information gleaned from students' conversations. She used this time to clear up misconceptions and ask challenging questions.

Sarah recognized that students need explicit guidance to successfully work in collaborative groups. She taught students how to share responsibility and how to encourage struggling teammates. She also used group times to gently home in on behavioral challenges; for example, she would sit with a group and help them navigate a personality conflict. This is a role that requires a great deal of teacher responsiveness—that is, knowing when to intervene in a discussion in a manner that leads students to

work through the content while building knowledge and critical thinking skills.

Sarah also offered support through graphic organizers that helped students retain information presented in videos and PowerPoint presentations. Students reported engagement in her interesting comments about the historical contexts and figures. By providing students with an infrastructure to organize, synthesize, and consolidate knowledge, Sarah was able to scaffold students in constructing models of content that encouraged them to discuss, expand, and critique what they were learning. Preplanning and organizing one's thinking before starting are skills that all students must develop. Therefore, Sarah offered a variety of ways for students to organize their thinking. For example, she conducted a minilesson on using a web to organize and synthesize learning one day, and she taught students how to use an outline another day. Students require extended guided practice for each strategy and must learn to select the organizational method that works best for them. In this manner, students build an arsenal of strategies for use in their future collaborative and independent projects.

Elements of Tasks That Were Not Engaging

Unsurprisingly, students reported disengagement when tasks were difficult or confusing. In particular, a mismatch between text complexity and student ability was often mentioned as interfering with engagement. In Task 21.2,

“In reviewing the 10 most engaging tasks, students often mentioned opportunities for collaboration and appropriate support for completing tasks.”

“Students were not engaged in tasks that required little involvement.”

for example, the high-performing student noted that the text did not support comprehension and that it was uninteresting. The low-performing student commented that the text was too difficult to understand and sought the teacher's help. Similar comments were recorded regarding the texts used in Tasks 24.2 and 21.3. Avoiding this engagement obstacle requires a clear understanding of student abilities and interests as well as a willingness to gather a variety of text sources to teach content. In preparing a topical unit of study, a text set that includes a variety of reading levels, as well as digital and online resources, can be invaluable in providing access to content for a diverse student population.

Students were not engaged in tasks that required little involvement. Task 22.1, for example, asked students to name states as the teacher labeled them on a map. Students who knew states' names participated, but otherwise, students could disengage and wait for the states to be labeled. Tasks that required filling out worksheets (Tasks 8.1, 7.1, and 24.2) were rated as low-engagement; some students commented about needing to think very little, while others noted that these tasks were repetitious. Low-involvement, worksheet-type tasks fail to engage students because they violate students' need for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Finding the right answer, when seemingly done just to please the teacher, presents little enticement for

students to think, and new learning is unlikely to occur.

Interestingly, an open task designed to engage students, a *Jeopardy!*-style game (Task 23.2), was among the least engaging tasks. Although Sarah considered the aspect of competition to be intrinsically engaging, students disagreed, commenting that the competitive game led them to focus on the performance-oriented aspect of winning or losing, second-guessing each other's answers and relying on more knowledgeable students to lead. When the stakes seemed high, the low-performing student felt out of his depth, and the high- and average-performing students focused on strategies for gaining points rather than deepening their understanding.

Lessons Learned

To design literacy tasks that engage students, we suggest including content-laden visual and printed texts and offering tasks that invite student interest and collaboration. These activities accent all three types of engagement: behavioral, cognitive, and affective. Sarah started many of her social studies lessons with PowerPoint presentations, which provided content reference points, before expanding into other forms of content delivery. She often used primary source documents in her PowerPoint presentations to encourage student observation, conversation, and engagement. For example, in one lesson, she shared two portraits of George Washington. In the

first, Washington was regally depicted in a red velvet cloak. In the second, he was somberly dressed in a black jacket. With the goal of demonstrating how period paintings depicted political goals, she had students note their observations about the pictures. Next, she engaged students with a Think-Pair-Share activity in which students independently wrote why they thought each artist portrayed Washington in the chosen clothing. Time for independent thought helped Sarah's reflective students prepare to enter collaborative discussion with something specific to share, thus encouraging better participation. Students next discussed their observations with partners and then the class.

We often observed Sarah using visuals to unify her lessons. They served as an equalizer in a class that had huge discrepancies in students' language and literacy levels. The use of paintings, maps, and pictures invited all students to access the material. She rarely chose to just give students information; instead, she worked to build their knowledge. In another example, after students looked at an illustration of slaves picking cotton, she showed a graph depicting the increase in slave labor with the introduction of the cotton gin. Sarah encouraged students to draw conclusions about the graph based on the primary source picture of slaves picking the cotton. Again, even her most struggling students were able to share that the machine separated cotton more quickly than people could

“To design literacy tasks that engage students, we suggest including content-laden visual and printed texts and offering tasks that invite student interest and collaboration.”

and that, therefore, cotton needed to be picked more quickly to keep up with production.

In PowerPoint presentations of this type, affective engagement is enhanced by the excitement and energy that the students feel when the lesson is introduced. The visuals maintained students' attention while Sarah added informational tidbits that improved lesson interest. By offering multiple levels of challenge, Sarah enhanced behavioral and cognitive engagement. Struggling students with very little background knowledge could look at the pictures and participate through simple observations such as "[Washington] is wearing a red coat." At the same time, students were pushed to deepen their critical thinking skills and to explore challenging questions whose answers required expanding background knowledge with new knowledge.

When these activities included differentiated support for students at varying levels of need, either by providing well-designed organizers or direct teacher facilitation, cognitive engagement increased. Engaging tasks were also those that encouraged student choice of either the topic or the manner of presentation in activities, such as group presentations. Tasks that invited students to create plays, write news articles, or produce artistic renderings of famous people, for example, appealed to their sense of creativity, providing a real audience for their work. Sarah invited the entire school to her students' project presentations. Students exhibited pride when they shared their work and answered visitors' questions. Students enjoyed opportunities to show off their successes, thereby increasing enthusiasm and engagement in future projects.

Aspects of task design that should be avoided include those that are considered to be "hoop-jumps"—worksheets

"Students accepted thinking challenges where there was topic interest or support for completing them but disengaged when the task seemed difficult or confusing."

and low-thinking activities, such as the call-out activity for labeling states (Task 22.1). These activities have little sense of purpose for students and are easy to disengage from. When thinking is not adequately included in task design, it is tempting for students to opt out. Students accepted thinking challenges where there was topic interest or support for completing them but disengaged when the task seemed difficult or confusing. In light of this finding, task complexity requires careful consideration and clear instruction. In addition, teachers must notice students' confusion or frustration and check in with them early in the task to make sure they understand, providing support where it is needed or restructuring the task to increase engagement and productivity (Parsons, 2012).

Conclusions

This research involved a yearlong study of students' engagement in literacy tasks in one sixth-grade classroom. For the purposes of this research, engagement was conceptualized as a multidimensional construct including *behavioral* engagement (time on task), *cognitive* engagement (strategic effort), and *affective* engagement (interest in the topic or task). We observed literacy instruction in the classroom each week across the school year for a total of 26 observations, documenting (a) the tasks students were assigned and (b) focal students' behavioral engagement in the tasks. After each observation, focal students were interviewed to document their affective and cognitive engagement in the tasks. The

"openness" of each task (Parsons, 2008, 2012) was rated for authenticity, collaboration, challenge, choice, and sustained learning, and a cumulative engagement score was calculated for each student for each task.

In this article, we took a nuanced look at the 10 tasks in which students were most engaged and the 10 tasks in which students were least engaged. We identified these tasks and asked, "What was going on in these activities that made them so engaging or so disengaging?" We found distinct differences between the most and least engaging activities. For example, collaboration and teacher support seemed to be aspects of academic work that were particularly engaging for students. Alternately, tasks that were too difficult or that lacked opportunities to cognitively connect in meaningful ways were not engaging. This analysis of the 10 most engaging and 10 least engaging tasks from one teacher's integrated literacy-social studies instruction over the course of a school year provides confirmation of those elements of engagement that are highlighted in the literature (Gambrell et al., 2011; Guthrie, 2015; Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Pressley & Allington, 2015).

This research underscores the importance of task design, noting that both open and closed tasks can be engaging. Closed tasks that are interesting can appeal to students where thinking is enhanced through the use of details that enlarge students' understanding of a topic or that provide well-structured

TAKE ACTION!

1. Review three literacy tasks that you recently presented to your students. Consider ways to restructure them to increase their engaging elements based on the findings of this study.
2. When presenting content to students through multimodal displays, think of interesting elements of the content that you can use to connect with students or that provide interesting asides to help to fill out the context of the content.
3. Consider ways that you can incorporate graphic organizers to help students arrange and unify complex information.
4. Give careful attention to the interest and complexity of texts you require students to read. Using a well-constructed content-related text set composed of trade books, websites, and easier or harder basal texts allows you to vary the complexity of the texts provided for learning as well as multimodal options for understanding. This is important for filling in background information for both struggling learners and learners who come from differing cultural or linguistic backgrounds.

support. Similarly, not all open tasks were engaging, particularly where the task emphasized competition. The teacher's knowledge of students' abilities and backgrounds is crucial in selecting interesting and appropriately challenging materials, in creating productive collaborative groups, and in supporting students to successfully complete tasks. In layering tasks across an instructional lesson, both closed and open tasks have a place in providing content and practice in using strategies and deepening knowledge through collaboration and creation of products for real audiences. Teachers who attend to engaging elements while designing tasks provide their students with meaningful work

that leads them to greater understandings of new and challenging content.

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Appendix A

Rubric for Rating Openness of Tasks

Date:

Describe the task and its product:

Authenticity (adapted from Duke et al., 2006)

- 1 – The task is limited to tasks that are completed primarily in school.
- 2 – The task mimics outside-of-school tasks but has features of school-based activities.
- 3 – The task closely replicates tasks completed in day-to-day lives outside of school.

Collaboration

- 1 – Students work alone on the task.
- 2 – Students collaborate minimally in the task.
- 3 – Students collaborate throughout the task.

Challenge

- 1 – The task requires letter- or word-level writing.
- 2 – The task requires sentence-level writing.
- 3 – The task requires paragraph-level writing.

Student-Directed

- 1 – Students have no input on the task.
- 2 – Students have input, but their choices have minimal influence on the task.
- 3 – Students have input into many substantial aspects of the task.

Sustained

- 1 – The task takes place in one sitting.
- 2 – The task takes place over one or two days.
- 3 – The task spans three or more days.

Note. Adapted from Parsons (2008). *Scoring:* Total scores of 15–12 indicate an open task, 11–9 a moderately open task, and 9–5 a closed task (Parsons, 2012).

Appendix B

Engagement Rating Scales

Rating	Behavioral	Affective	Cognitive
1	Clearly not engaged	Not interested in topic or task and/or low efficacy	No awareness of thinking
2	Difficult to tell	Some interest in topic or task, few details regarding interest	Surface-level thinking or awareness of challenge
3	Engaged	Reports efficacy in topics or task and/or many details regarding interest	Focusing on the content or the task
4	Highly engaged	Enthusiastic or curious about topic or task	Thinking beyond the content or task, making connections, and/or using strategies to complete the task

Note. Adapted from Lutz, Guthrie, and Davis (2006); piloted and revised.

DOES DISCIPLINARY LITERACY HAVE A PLACE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?

Cynthia Shanahan ■ Timothy Shanahan

ew issues are hotter now than disciplinary literacy. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) established disciplinary reading goals for grades 6–12, and most of the research on that topic has been done at those grades, too. That means elementary teachers can breathe a sigh of relief, right? Not really. There might not be specific disciplinary goals set for the young'uns, but elementary teachers still have an important role to play if their students are to eventually reach college- and career-readiness.

What Is Disciplinary Literacy?

Disciplinary literacy refers to the idea that we should teach the specialized ways of reading, understanding, and thinking used in each academic discipline, such as science, history, or literature. Each field has its own ways of using text to create and communicate meaning. Accordingly, as children advance through school, literacy instruction should shift from

general literacy strategies to the more specific or specialized ones from each discipline.

That makes sense for several reasons. Disciplines are cultures of practice, and each has its own norms for how knowledge should be created, shared, and evaluated. Take, for example, the differences separating history, science, and literature.

When historians create historical accounts, they rely on documents from the period under study (primary documents) and on what others have written about the event (secondary documents). Because their study is limited to existing sources and there can be disagreements among these sources, historians expect their interpretations to be contested as new documents come to light or alternative perspectives are weighed

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differently. In contrast, scientists don't usually rely so much on existing data as on the creation of new data through systematic observation and experimentation. This allows them to place greater trust in their interpretations. The issue for them is whether their methods were truly appropriate and systematic. Finally, literature doesn't depend on such formal analyses of data, but on the transformation of human experience through language and literary technique. Literary evaluations tend towards the aesthetic and consider issues such as authenticity.

These differences in how knowledge is created and evaluated have implications for how reading and writing are used. Thus, historians treat historical accounts—even narratives—as formal arguments, evaluating the text's claims and evidence (Lee, 2005), seeking to corroborate evidence across sources (Wineburg, 1991). They also read with an eye to the perspectives that may have been admitted. Since historical accounts are *always* contestable, historians read everything critically. Scientists read critically too, but they do it differently. Uncovering author bias isn't as central to the reading of experiments as is an analysis of the adequacy of a study's methods and instrumentation. And to bring this full circle, literary critics are much more likely to evaluate an author's craft considering the language choices, use of metaphors, or how emotions are characterized. It follows that teachers can help students understand their history, science, and literature texts by teaching them how to apply these disciplinary lenses to their own reading. That insight is the crux of disciplinary literacy: We should teach students the way reading in various fields differs rather than only expecting students to apply the same general lens across everything they read.

Disciplinary literacy matters because general reading skills can only take

students so far. Students can learn to use general reading strategies (i.e., summarization, questioning, visualization) and those can improve their comprehension of content texts, but not to the same extent that more disciplinary approaches would (e.g., De La Paz, 2005; Reisman, 2012). Although most of the research has been conducted in grades 6–12, there is some research that seems to have implications for the elementary grades (VanSledright, 2002; Cervetti, Barber, Dorph, Pearson, & Goldschmidt, 2012).

For example, general summaries tend to look pretty similar across different texts, which means such summaries tend to neglect the nuanced information central to discipline-appropriate understanding. The issue has to do with *what kind of information is important in this discipline*. It's not enough, for instance, to inventory the names and dates from a history text; a good historical summary would include the relevant social, political, or economic causes and consequences. Similarly, literary summaries need to do more than capture plot elements; they need to include characters' emotional responses and motivations. Research reveals that students tend not to understand these nuances unless they're explicitly taught (Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish, et al., 1996). One-size-fits-all reading strategies may help struggling readers as they help such readers to think while reading. However, college- and career-readiness requires more than that.

What Should Elementary Teachers be Doing?

The CCSS standards specify that students must read informational text, not just literature, and they indicate that 50% of elementary school reading should be devoted to such texts. Initially, informational texts tend not to distinguish the disciplines. There just

“Disciplinary literacy matters because general reading skills can only take students so far.”

aren't big differences between the science texts and social studies texts used in the primary grades. There aren't big distinctions across these texts in the nature of their vocabulary or grammar, the use of graphics, the organization or structure of the information, the visibility of the author, and so on. By middle school, those disciplinary differences will become evident. However, the shift doesn't take place as abruptly as that. It is not uncommon to find upper elementary texts that exhibit some of these differences. The heavy emphasis on informational text will increase the likelihood that students will confront these differences earlier, and as such, the informational text demands serve as a precursor to the disciplinary reading to follow. Students who mainly read stories in the elementary grades obviously will not be prepared for middle school and high school work; the same can be said for students who read informational texts as if they were stories. So, elementary teachers can teach students to read informational text, distinguishing the differences among them and between informational texts and literature.

The informational texts used in the elementary grades should represent a wide range of text types (e.g., biography, scientific explanation, letter, or speech), modalities (e.g., picture, map, graph/chart or prose—online or on paper), and purposes (e.g., to explain/inform, entertain, or argue). And through such texts,

elementary teachers can begin to prepare students for disciplinary reading by helping them distinguish among the texts. Each kind of text has different features. A map, for example, may have an inset and a key, or a biography may be chronological and include pictures. Studying the key features of various texts is highlighted in the Common Core Standards. One of the second-grade informational text standards (RI.2.5) calls for students to “know and use various text features...to locate key facts or information in a text efficiently,” and another (RI.2.7) asks students to “explain how specific images [in a diagram showing how a machine works] contribute to and clarify a text.” A newspaper article about a scientific finding is written in a different style from the scientific article from which it is derived, and a second-grade standard (RI.2.9) asks students to “compare and contrast the most important points presented by two texts on the same topic.”

Another way to prepare students for disciplinary reading is to introduce and guide the reading of multiple texts on the same topic, much the way experts in history, science, or English think about and evaluate what they read across sources. The CCSS require that students learn to compare and contrast ideas in texts. Students might need to make general comparisons of different text types, features, or content of texts,

“Elementary teachers can teach vocabulary... from science, social studies, or even mathematics texts.”

“Another way to prepare students for disciplinary reading is to introduce and guide the reading of multiple texts on the same topic.”

both informational and literary. For example, a second-grade informational text standard (RI.2.3) calls for students to “describe the connection between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in text.” And a fourth grade literature standard (RL.4.6) asks students to “compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.” One way to address this standard might be to have students read such narrations side-by-side. Another way might be to change the point of view in a story from one to the other and consider the effect those changes have on the reader.

Additionally, elementary teachers can teach vocabulary not only from stories but also from science, social studies, or even mathematics texts. In literature, the standards call for students to “determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., *Herculean*)” (RL.4.4). Different words come up in different subjects, of course, but different *types* of vocabulary should be expected, too. For example, technical words in science often are built from Greek and Latin roots and combining forms. This often means that scientific names not only reveal what a word means but also its relationship to other words (e.g., *annual*, *perennial*). Scientists use such words because it helps other scientists anywhere in the world figure out the words’ meanings and relationships.

History, in contrast, uses terminology that may be ideological in nature. Historical terms like the Middle Ages, Dark Ages, Civil War, and War Between the States do more than name events; they convey a political position on the events. It is not enough that students learn the meanings of such words. Students need to understand how and why such words are used in the various disciplines; these distinctions between science and social studies can be taught as soon as they become evident in the texts being read. Likewise, students should learn the kinds of words to which they should pay special attention during reading. For example, character motivations are particularly important in literature, so words that describe emotions will carry a lot of weight during such reading. And, the disciplines also differ in how precise their definitions are. It might be okay to paraphrase a definition in literature or social studies, but in mathematics, definitions are exact; changing an *a* or a *the* can alter the meaning in an important way. Elementary students can be made aware of these characteristics, too, ensuring that they will be more prepared for disciplinary literacy.

In summary, elementary teachers can do quite a lot to prepare their students for disciplinary literacy. We have mentioned just a few: ensuring that students read and understand the often nuanced differences among a wide range of text types, helping students make sense of information and ideas across multiple texts, and teaching vocabulary in every subject area in a way that helps students

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understand the specialized nature of discipline-specific words.

Closing Thoughts

Our field sometimes argues about how early disciplinary literacy should be introduced. On one side, it could be said that, even though there is no cognitive reason for any delay—young children can start to think like scientists—there just isn't much reason to promote such ideas early on, since texts don't offer much opportunity for engaging in such thinking.

The other side of this argument says not to wait. Even young children can understand that two people may explain an event in different ways because of their different perspectives. Or they can make observations and inferences regarding a picture or artifact from the past. That means, when texts do begin to differentiate, students will already have some of the habits of mind needed to interpret them in sophisticated ways. Elementary teachers would be wise to study not just the informational and literary text reading standards for their grade

levels, but to also cast an eye to the disciplinary standards for the upper grades. For example, a grades 6–8 history/social studies standard calls for students to “analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.” Middle schoolers, thus, might read the “Gettysburg Address” and a historian's take on that speech. Elementary teachers can prepare the ground, albeit with easier “texts,” such as having students compare a picture with a description of it. What do these texts reveal? And what do they hide?

The disciplines pose specialized and unique literacy demands. Through such activities, teachers can help ensure that students will be ready to negotiate these gateways to college and career success. It is never too early.

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Linear or Recursive? Do Our Models of the Writing Process Reflect the Ways We Actually Write?

Walk into any Language Arts classroom, and it is rare that you won't see a graphic depiction of The Writing Process. These representations are usually linear, starting with something called Prewriting and moving, from left-to-right and step-by-step, toward something at the end that is referred to as Publishing. The specific terminology along the way may vary from place to place, but the whole thing suggests that writing occurs in a linear series of discreet steps, much like the manufacture of an automobile.

This conception of the Writing Process does give the teacher a framework for showing students how to go about writing, and it gives the students, I think, a conceptual understanding that writing does evolve over time. I have had some success using it. (Certainly more success than I had in the days when I simply assigned writing and graded it when it came in.) Students thought about their writing before they wrote, they composed drafts for me to comment on, and they revised those drafts, largely by correcting errors I pointed out. It was an efficient system that gave students time to change a piece of writing over time, and it gave me three

checkpoints that I could put in the gradebook.

I adopted The Writing Process approach because I thought that real writers wrote that way. Donald Murray and Robert Graves told me so. Or, that's what I came away believing from my Writing Project Summer Institute. The writing I did during that institute energized me and inspired me to share the thrill of writing with my students. So I took The Writing Process into my classroom, and my students did do a lot more writing than they had ever done before.

The trouble is, I don't usually write that way. My process of writing varies depending on the kind of writing I am doing, my purpose for writing it, and my intended audience. When I am writing nonfiction for a specific audience—as I am doing right now—I get some general ideas down on paper, often making a web, then I start typing. I type quickly, expanding on the ideas in my web, leaving some ideas half-developed to move on to others, then going back to those earlier sections as my thinking develops further. I do a lot of cutting-and-pasting in the midst of the draft-

ing, moving things around, exploring possible ways the writing might assume a form, playing with my voice as that form begins to emerge. This may sound similar to *The Writing Process*, but it certainly isn't linear, at least not to my mind. It is more circular, recursive. The boundaries between pre-writing, drafting, and revising become blurred; the steps fall out of order. And that's just when I write nonfiction.

When I write fiction, I generally try not to revise along the way. I can too easily get stuck on making one perfect paragraph and never allow the story to go anywhere. So I save the revising for later. "Let the story take you where it wants to go" is the best advice I've received from other writers of fiction. But then that's not true for all kinds of fiction. I like to write mysteries, and when I tackle them I prefer to plan out scene sequences beforehand. I have to figure the solution to the mystery soon after I invent the problem so I know where I'm going.

But nonfiction, fiction (and poetry) are merely the tips of the icebergs for me. Most of the writing I do is expressive—writing that's done just for me—and I do that with a favorite pen, longhand. This is writing I do without any purpose other than to discover what I think and feel. I have no particular form in mind, no product, no destination. Mostly this writing doesn't go anywhere beyond my journal or my writer's notebook.

Maybe one time out of twenty-five I will discover a direction, a way I want to elaborate and shape the writing with an audience in mind.

It is, however, easier to teach my students a linear process than to teach the various ways I approach my own writing. As a writer, I am generally not restricted by time. As a teacher, though, I may have forty-five minutes a day, or ninety minutes every other day, to work with my students—not just on writing, but on everything. And then, of course, something has to be assessed every few weeks, so if I want my students to "move along" and I need to have something by which I can "measure their progress." *The Writing Process* serves a purpose. And it works best when I can specify the product I want at the end. An essay. A short story. A research paper. It's cleaner that way, and my students are used to it. I can answer questions like "How long does it have to be?" or "How many drafts do we have to do?"

The problem with that, however, is that we are not teaching the writer, we are teaching the product. We show them scaffolding for a narrow range of forms: the personal narrative, the literary analysis paper, the research paper, the lab report, the five-paragraph essay. (Some) students (may) learn how to write each one of those, but when they leave school the scaffold goes away. And what happens when the product they must craft hasn't been encoun-

tered before, or a situation presents itself that doesn't allow for an assembly-line approach?

So, after many years of trying it this way and that, I have left behind The Writing Process to embrace a writing workshop approach. In a workshop, I don't exactly teach my students what to do; I wade into the writing with them. I do show them writing moves—how changing the diction changes the tone, for instance, or how I re-read my journals to find that kernel of truth that I want to carry forward—but mostly I want them to discover the tools of a writer for themselves. We do a lot of writing in class, and much of it is not directed by me. I create opportunities for them to write things they care about. I move around, talking to the writers, asking them about what they are working on, and showing them various ways they might go about it. I want them to feel the same thrill of discovery and accomplishment that I felt when I came out of that Summer Institute.

The strategies I use weren't invented by me. I learned them from Penny Kittle, Nancy Atwell, Lucy Caulkins, Tom Romano, and Tom Newkirk. I've learned from thinking about how I go about writing and by watching what my colleagues are doing. I've learned by remaining active in my local Writing Project site. Lately, I've been re-reading Murray and Graves and discovering that this approach to being a writing

teacher is what they were talking about all along. I just couldn't know that until I did some writing myself.

You're not going to find much I've written by Googling my name. (The first thing you'll find is a car salesman in Oklahoma; look a little further and you might discover my two blog pages and a handful of articles in journals like this.) But I write, almost every day, and I have fun doing it. That's what makes me a writer. That's why I want to share what I do with my students. That's why, after thirty-seven years, I'm still in this game. I'm developing arthritis in my thumbs, and I'm concerned that one day I won't be able to maneuver that favorite pen. But I'll discover something else, another way to approach the writing. That's what I've always done. That's what the writing has taught me.

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