

Writing, "Skills," ELLs, and a Comment on the (Bogus) STEM Crisis

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WHAT WRITING DOES: More writing does not lead to better writing. But writing can make you smarter (evidence from Ann Landers), when the problem is difficult

Langer & Applebee (1987): 9th graders read hard and easy social studies passages.
"topic knowledge" test, five days later:

	Control	Read only	Compr Q	Summary	Essay
Easy	4.7	7.6	7.8	6.4	7.4
Hard	4.7	3.7	9.2	6.3	11.8

Essay required writers to "reformulate and extend" material from the passage.

Essay writers learn the most, but only with hard passage: Note that controls do better than "read only" with hard passage!

"If content is familiar and relationships well-understood, writing may have no major effect at all."

The composing process: strategies for solving problems, making yourself smarter.

COMPONENTS OF THE COMPOSING PROCESS

Inspiration is the result of writing, not the cause (Boice)

I. Revision: "Novelists have, on the average, about the same IQs as the cosmetic consultants at Bloomingdale's department store. Our power is patience. We have discovered that writing allows even a stupid person to seem halfway intelligent, if only that person will write the same thought over and over again, improving it just a little bit each time. It is a lot like inflating a blimp with a bicycle pump. Anybody can do it. All it takes is time" (Vonnegut).

II. Flexible Planning:

- a. Have a plan: " ... experienced writers refuse to leave on a trip with a map. The map may be in the head or on paper, but the writer needs a sense of direction" (Murray)
- b. Be willing to change it: "For all the planning, writers are surprised at what they write" (Murray)

III. Rereading: "I rise at first light and I start by rereading and editing everything I have written to the point I left off" (Hemingway,)

IV. Delay Editing: "Tony" had a concern with form "that actually inhibited the development of ideas. In none of his writing sessions did he ever write more than two sentences before he began to edit" (Perl) Also: Draft may not be the final version.

"Treat grammar as a matter of very late editorial correcting: never think about while you are writing. Pretend you have an editor who will fix everything for you, then don't hire yourself for this job until the very end" (Elbow, 1973, p. 137).

V. Incubation: "Composition is not enhanced by grim determination" (Frank Smith)

Moments of insight are preceded by hard work (preparation)

Problem-solving often requires "an interval free from conscious thought" to allow the free working of the subconscious mind (Wallas, 1926, p. 95).

Tolle (1999): "All true artists, whether they know it or not, create from a place of no-mind, from inner stillness ... Even the great scientists have reported that their creative breakthroughs came a a time of mental quietude" (p. 20).

VI: Daily Regular Writing:

Robert Boice: Professors who do daily writing versus binge writing: more writing and more ideas

Rosellen Brown: writing "is a job, not a hobby ... you have to sit down and work, to schedule your time and stick to it

Stephen King: don't "wait for the Muse. Your job is to make sure the muse knows where you are going to be every day from nine 'till noon or seven 'till three."

Madeleine L'Engle: "Inspiration usually comes during work, rather than before it"
Regular writing vs bingeing:

Woody Allen: "If you work only three to four hours per day, you become quite productive. It's the steadiness that counts" (Murray, 1990, p. 46).

Why DRW helps: incubation between sessions, warming up

Flaubert: "I have the peculiarity of a camel - I find it difficult to stop once I get started and hard to start after I've been resting" (Murray)

What about skills?

Phonemic Awareness (PA)

1. Krashen 2001: Only 6 studies 11 comparisons deal with relationship of PA training & reading comprehension: Obvious success only in one study (n=15)
2. Many children with low or no PA go on to read quite well
3. PA develops without training: comparison groups in training studies
4. The result of reading?

Intensive Systematic Phonics

1. Three possibilities: Intensive systematic, basic, and no phonics
2. Against Intensive Systematic Phonics:
 - a. complexity, exceptions
 - b. impact limited to decoding tests (Krashen, 2009).

Vocabulary

1. Read and test studies: acquisition with only one exposure
2. Size/complexity argument
3. Competence without instruction
4. Reading more efficient in terms of words gained per minute (Beniko Mason)
5. Nobody will continue doing self-study, few with large vocabularies did it.

Text Structure

Story Grammar: setting, beginning, simple reaction, goal, attempt, outcome, ending.

Expository prose: e.g. comparison/contrast; enumeration; sequence; problem/solution.

Assumption: conscious knowledge of text structure will help students understand, produce texts.

Research

- Better than nothing: Spiegel and Fitzgerald (1986) for story grammar instruction
- Better than traditional instruction. Comparisons did reading task plus comprehension questions
- Authentic reading and writing better than direct instruction of structure of science tests (Purcell-Gates et al, 2007): "for second and third graders, growth in the ability to comprehend and write science informational

texts and procedural texts is not enhanced by the explicit teaching of linguistic features specific to those genres as implemented in this study" (p. 41).

Hypothesis: text structure absorbed/acquired through reading.

- Global competitiveness: we need to keep up with the rest of the world

BUT: US now ranks second in the world (out of 133 countries) in "global competitiveness," outranked only by Switzerland (World Competitiveness Report, World Economic Forum).

- STEM (Science, Technical, Engineering, & Mathematics) shortage

BUT: No shortage of STEM-trained professionals in the US. There is a surplus.

US ranks at or near the top of the world on all categories related to STEM education and availability of expertise: 5th out of 133 countries in "availability of scientists & engineers," 2nd in "quality of scientific research institutions," 1st in "university-industry research collaboration."

The US ranks 6th in "capacity for innovation," and 3rd in the number of patents for new inventions (per capita).