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Exploring Effective Teaching Writing Strategies for United States Secondary Public High
School Classrooms: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This literature review sought to explore the most current and effective teaching writing strategies that can be applied to secondary public high school classrooms in the United States. The purpose of this research was to address the pertinent writing issues that exist in public secondary schools that have been exhibited through low writing test scores. The study identified a lack of national, state, and local research in the United States. However, writing studies in other countries provided some data-driven solutions that may be successful in the United States. The findings included encouraging students to engage in self-regulated strategy development, motivating teachers to honestly assess and adjust their own instruction, establishing the importance of correctly responding to students' needs, creating relevant instruction, staying up to date on current practices, and having student-centered learning be a key goal of writing instruction. The scholarly research analyzed in the literature review showed successful applications of these findings, and teachers should use them to improve how they teach writing.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Writing is an integrally necessary skill for high school students' success in all their classes, as well as their personal and post-graduation lives. Writing has always been essential to education. Writing is central to education because it is a central means by which ideas are passed down from one person to another. Without writing, a person has no voice, and thus is disenfranchised from society including the workplace, social environments, and society at large. In an analysis of the urgent need to revise the teaching of writing, Graham et al. (2016) stated that writing is fundamental to students for to be used as versatile skills in all aspects of life. In a study that recommended teaching strategies for struggling writers, Dunn (2021) reported that writing is an essential part of daily life that includes emailing, accessing transportation, using social media, ordering food, and searching for information. While more affluent families may provide their children with a private school education and tutors, students who attend public secondary schools in the U.S. are limited in their choices for writing education. At both national and state levels, writing test scores have been consistently low and are decreasing. Dunn (2021) analyzed the 2021 U.S. National Assessment of Educational Progress for Writing scores and found that 75% of students could not write at a basic level. Public schools serve as the final support system for students before they become adults who may no longer have support systems and routines in their lives. Teaching writing at the secondary level by both English Language Arts (ELA) and non-ELA teachers is difficult due to many factors. The students who need the most support are struggling writers. This literature review will analyze various challenges that

public secondary school teachers face and will provide actionable solutions to raise the awareness of teachers' personal instruction regarding how to best help typically achieving and struggling writers. This research may also help teachers gain a nuanced understanding of the teaching writing process that they can attempt to apply to their classes.

This honors thesis is written by a teacher candidate who is currently student teaching and aspires to teach high school English. Therefore, the teaching writing strategies are analyzed from the perspective of someone who is just beginning to teach and has a unique perspective of student populations in 2025. The conclusions made at the end focus on student centered learning and an emphasis on accommodation and differentiation, which is a deviation from the traditional belief that all students learn to write the same. The literature consistently focused on student-centered learning because high quality writing outcomes were seen when writing teachers emphasized giving students agency in their learning. Other commonalities from the literature included providing high quality and relevant instruction and knowing the students' true educational needs.

Chapter 2

Methods

A basic research question was established: what are the ways to teach writing well to secondary school students? This research question was increasingly refined as research went on. The Penn State EBSCO database and the Penn State ProQuest databases were used to search for the characterization of struggling writers. The same databases were used to find effective teaching strategies for writing published in peer reviewed scholarly journals. Studies were filtered from the last five years of scholarly publications. Non-scholarly data was collected as evidence of low high school student test scores on national and state tests. This data was used to support the urgency of finding needed effective strategies as well as to investigate the demographic categories of United States public secondary schools (e.g., English Learner [EL] students, socioeconomic status). Effective teaching writing strategies were first filtered to be from research done on public United States secondary classes. The purpose of this initial search filter was an assumption that the most effective strategies would be created by teachers across the United States. Google Scholar was used to research specific terms and to expand existing findings. The articles found on Google Scholar were sometimes searched on the Penn State database if they were not publicly available. Some articles were requested through Penn State to be delivered online through the Interlibrary Loan (ILLiad). While many studies were found on effective strategies to teach struggling elementary writers, there were fewer studies discovered on effective strategies to teach struggling secondary writers. The initial assumption that the United States would be the authority on writing teaching strategies was changed to consider that other countries might have stronger strategies and outcomes. Next, the search terms were expanded to include international studies on teaching EL students. This was done to add to the

evidence of effective case studies of teaching EL students in U.S. public high schools. The literature review will address the characterization of struggling writers, issues with teaching writing, solutions from United States and international studies, a discussion on scholar-proven strategies and their realistic applications, and a conclusion.

Chapter 3

Characterization of Struggling Writers

Older Foundational Sources that Characterize Struggling Writers

Foundational researchers specialized in the characterization of struggling writers and paved the way for solutions to improve writing at the secondary level. The most notable researcher in the beginning was Arthur Applebee, who conducted longitudinal studies with large sample sizes, and who was at the forefront of understanding why students struggle to write well. Writing is difficult to test, and struggling writers are difficult to teach in a way that improves their writing. Applebee et al.'s 2011 study tested writing over 30 years on a national level and revealed commonalities of struggling writers that had not been previously identified.

Moderately New Sources that Characterize Struggling Writers

Graham, Harris, and their co-researchers (2016) created clear guidelines from their findings on how a large number of students can be tested on writing, identified clear flaws of teaching and testing writing, and created actionable solutions. While it is difficult to characterize struggling writers across all the varied aspects of writing, Harris et al. (2006) uses a definition

based on scoring on writing assessments. The writing assessments that have been analyzed by researchers included both qualitative and quantitative data. Other subjects such as mathematics lend themselves to be graded on more quantitative scales.

When scored on a quantitative scale, writing is still taught as a subject consisting of many complex elements. These included combinations of writing, reading, revising, group work, and feedback. The various approaches to effective writing teaching were categorized by Yin Ling Cheung in the 2016 journal of *English Language Teaching Today* to include three approaches: controlled, process, and genre approaches. Cheung (2016) outlined the complexity of teaching students to write competently, stating that, historically, writing has been taught these three approaches. First, the controlled approach was used in classrooms centered on repetition, imitation, and finally formation (Cheung, 2016). Second, the process approach began to value students' ideas as the determinant for which form a piece of writing would take (Cheung, 2016). Third, the genre approach used model texts to allow students to have guided practice, mastery of language, and guided practice (Cheung, 2016). Along with the major impacts on instruction that these three different approaches had, Cheung stated the high volume of tasks that students needed to master to be proficient in writing. Cheung described them as: students must master paraphrasing and quoting, have a high lexical variety, discern when to use a passive or active voice, interpret knowledge, and synthesize it into writing through generating, organizing, and formulating ideas into sentences, revising, and creating finished products (Cheung, 2016). Cheung (2016) claimed that the implementation of writing approaches properly required teachers to "adopt a writing pedagogy that explicitly trains students in the kinds of thinking processes that are conducive to good writing" (Cheung, 2016, p.179). There are a multitude of skills that

teachers need their students to know to write well. These skills are tested in a variety of ways, often in the form of text analysis culminating in an essay, or multiple-choice questions.

To quantify the achievement level of struggling high school writers in public schools, Harris et al.'s (2006) foundational study is referenced by researchers analyzing student literacy to define a struggling writer: “a struggling writer was defined as a child who scored at or below the 25th percentile on a norm-referenced test of writing performance” (p. 296). At the time of this publication, this is the quantified definition that was widely accepted to be used for the wide variety of writers that exist in the United States.

Newest Sources that Characterize Struggling Writers

Research from the last five years builds on the evidence from foundational and older scholarship as well as being the most relevant for educators to use as guidance when teaching in 2025. Dunn (2021) further defined struggling writers as having difficulty composing prose that is longer and for academic tasks and having trouble focusing on a task and storing key information in their memory (e.g. how to spell words or comprehend text). Struggling writers lack in areas of writing length, organization, strategy application, and their use of terminology and vocabulary (Dunn, 2021). In addition, struggling writers lack independence and need the help of a peer, teacher, or parent to help identify mistakes in their work and to improve their writing skills (Dunn, 2021). Struggling writers may have a combination of these factors affecting their writing abilities. It is the responsibility of their teachers to identify these struggling students.

Chapter 4

Factors that Negatively Affect Writing Proficiency

Older Research on Factors that Affect Writing Proficiency

There are many factors that affect writing proficiency that are out of students' and teachers' control. The inequitable access to high quality education that these students face entraps them in a cycle of lacking access to high quality instructional materials, as well as to well trained teachers.

Older studies serve as the foundation for recent research that often reflects the same factors that exist in American society and serve as evidence for why struggling writers in 2025 still face the same issues they faced in the past. Smedley et al. (2001) found that minority students have continuously been receiving unequal education. Schools in central cities and rural areas were highly underfunded compared to their suburban neighbors (Smedley et al., 2001). Harris et al. (2006) highlighted a substantial achievement gap between the students researchers categorized as "poor," "African American," and "Hispanic" compared to "White" and "Asian" students. The lack of funding in poor urban districts led to low school funding and resource allocation (Smedley et al., 2001). This culminated in a deficit of books, low-quality books being used, larger class sizes, underqualified and inexperienced teachers, and low-quality curriculums (Smedley et al., 2001). Struggling writers in these districts were being failed by systems meant to help them. Minority students' performance was significantly lower than that of their White counterparts, and with an increase in immigration and student enrollment, the achievement gap has continued to widen (Smedley et al., 2001). While the student population was nationally increasing, per-pupil expenditures were decreasing (Smedley et al., 2001). A portion of this

growing student body is English Language Learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, populations who require more attention and accommodation in the classroom (Smedley et al., 2001). Graham and Harris (2005) identified students with disabilities as groups of students who had problems with writing. Disabilities that were identified included behavioral, attention-deficit, and hyperactivity disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities, and difficulties with speech and language (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Newer Research on Factors that Affect Writing Proficiency

Newer research defines factors that affect writing proficiency with current terminology and understanding of what hinders writing proficiency. Factors listed by Dunn (2021) included (1) dysgraphia, memory mechanisms that cause students to fail to successfully govern arm and hand movement, (2) problems with executive functioning systems, which affect their abilities of inhibitory control, planning, and working memory, and (3) cognitive flexibility. Regardless of children being from impoverished backgrounds, if English is not their first language, or if they have a disability, public schools and their teachers are their greatest support to help them be successful writers and students.

Chapter 5

Flaws of Teaching and Testing Writing

Older Sources on the Flaws of Teaching and Testing Writing

A major reason why students persistently struggle with writing pertains to factors that are out of their control, and the systems that further lack to support them. Smedley et al. (2001) analyzed the inequality of teaching and schooling across the United States at the levels of public schools, districts, states, and national levels. Their findings revealed that impoverished student communities have high teacher turnover, inexperienced and underqualified teachers, and large class sizes, all which led to a lack of individualized instruction. Smedley et al. (2001) found that since the late 1980s, schools hired an increased number of unqualified teachers. When no teachers were available, teachers were hired on emergency credentials (Smedley et al., 2001). This situation aligns with the results of Applebee and Langer's 2011 longitudinal study of writing instruction in middle and high schools from 1980 to 2011. That study revealed that teachers had students write only a few sentences for assignments (a page or less of writing was commonly expected), little class time was given for writing instruction, and teachers looked over an assignment for an average of three minutes (Applebee & Langers, 2011). Applebee and Langer (2011) also found that high school teachers expected their students to write at least one paragraph or more for only 20% of their class assignments.

Smedley et al. (2001) concluded that teacher effectiveness determined differences in student achievement; students assigned to effective teachers scored 50 percentile points higher

over three years compared to students being assigned to ineffective teachers three years in a row.

Smedley et al. (2001) also found that student test scores across 900 Texas school districts increased by 40% when teachers performed higher on state certification exams, had more experience, and held master's degrees. Impoverished school districts' teaching strategies encompass low rigor strategies in their curriculum, due to lack of funding and outdated materials (Smedley et al., 2001). There was a focus on rote, basic skills, instead of problem solving, or thoughtful examination of tests and ideas that are serious and writing assignments do not require frequent and extended writing. Students were not capable of being high achievers on new standards and assessments (Smedley et al., 2001).

Newer Sources on the Flaws of Teaching and Testing Writing

More recent research also supports that there is poor teaching of writing occurring in United States public schools. Johnston's (2020) survey reported on teacher's perception of writing built on evidence that both elementary and secondary teachers typically allocated less than an hour a day to teach writing.

Flaws in Writing Across the Curriculum

Writing across the curriculum is an area of non-English writing that is crucial to high school writing and acquisition of important knowledge for post high school outcomes. To support the fact that writing across the curriculum is underdeveloped, Johnston's (2020) survey revealed that only 28% of non-ELA teachers claimed that they strongly agreed that they knew what good writing instruction looked like. When quantifying writing in non-ELA classrooms,

Applebee and Langer's (2011) study found that over a nine-week grading period, students completed an average of 5.5 pages of writing for English, and an average of 8.9 pages for English, science, and social science/history combined. Drew et al. (2017) found that only 15% of respondents were able to provide a complete response explaining their answer on a science NAEP test question. Drew et al.'s (2017) research used Hodges et al.'s (2016) claim that writing instruction research is neglected in high school education by reporting that science teachers regard writing as separate from and not integral to science content. Further revealing how the abundance of poor writing instruction in non-ELA classrooms, Drew et al. (2017) claimed that within science writing, summary writing is restricted writing because the teacher controls a lot of the form and function of student writing accomplished in class. Another point that Drew et al. (2017) stated is that science writing is discipline specific and is non-transferable to other disciplines. Showing how writing is not only non-transferable to other disciplines, but partially irrelevant post-graduation, Graham et al.'s (2023) metacognitive analysis set out to address the concern that adolescents do not attain the writing competency in school to be successful in school, their personal lives, and the workplace. Their study revealed the critical need for high school teachers to implement effective practices in their classroom. Graham et al. (2023) emphasized this need at the secondary level because instructional effects of teaching on students can decrease over the span of an academic year, especially since younger students gain knowledge more than older students over an academic year (Graham et al., 2023). Applebee and Langer (2011) also found that high school teachers expected their students to write at least one paragraph or more for only 20% of their class assignments. Johnston (2020) reported that both elementary and secondary teachers typically allocate less than an hour a day to writing

instruction. Applebee and Langer (2011) stated that only 47.8% of high school English teachers had high-stakes tests in their classrooms.

LaFave et al. (2023) revealed a lack of tests being relevant to students as another failure of NAEP testing. Surveyed grade-12 high school students reported feeling that the NAEP testing was irrelevant to them, thus resulting in a lack of motivation to try hard on the tests (LaFave et al., 2023). This low level of motivation could potentially account for students scoring lower than their true achievement levels (LaFave et al., 2023). LaFave et al. analyzed how a NAEP questionnaire asked students if they like a certain subject, and if they believe a subject is useful. The researchers also asked them to compare their abilities to those of their classmates. The questionnaire did not directly ask about how motivated students were to complete the assessments (LaFave et al., 2023). This questionable method illustrates the lack of relevance that the testing design had for students by not factoring motivation into the creation of the testing. The low stakes nature of the NAEP, given that it does not impact a grade-12 student's grades and academic standard is another factor in their lack of motivation to put effort into taking the NAEP tests (LaFave et al., 2023). LaFave et al. (2023) found that 35% of grade-12 students agreed that it was important to do well on the NAEP, compared to 86% of grade-4 and 59% of grade-8 students who agreed that it was important. LaFave et al. also discovered that 42% of grade-12 students reported trying less.

The combination of low-quality teaching writing and testing of writing, factors outside of students control, and other factors that the literature may not account for should not limit educators from doing everything in their power to provide high quality instruction for typically achieving and struggling writers.

Teachers' Self-Efficacy and its Various Effects on Teaching Writing

Teachers' self-efficacy impacts how they impart their perceptions of the delivery of their instruction. A false estimation of self-efficacy can be detrimental to teaching. Johnston (2020) surveyed high school teachers to better understand secondary teachers' self-reported sense of their preparedness and self-efficacy to teach writing in various subjects. Johnston's (2020) study revealed that high school English Language Arts (ELA) teachers have a high, but not 100% level of confidence in their ability to teach writing. Johnston (2020) surveyed 3,744 teachers on a four-point Likert scale. The findings showed that, out of the ELA teachers who were surveyed, 93% reported somewhat or strongly agreeing that they knew what good writing instruction was, while only 64% reported that they strongly did so (Johnston, 2020). Johnston (2020) also found that 75% of ELA teachers somewhat or strongly agreed that they had access to high quality instructional materials for teaching writing. In a related study, a part of which surveyed teacher's self-reported efficacy to teach writing, Poch et al.'s (2020) survey found that teachers are overconfident in their abilities to teach writing, yet believe their own self-efficacy is not enough to affect change in the writing skills of students who have family/home circumstances outside their control. When the researchers asked teachers about their writing orientation beliefs, 97% of teachers stated that explicit writing instruction was important, and 64% stated that the natural approach to learning was important (Poch et al., 2020). Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of their ability to teach writing differed from the way they implement the strategies they believed in using in their classrooms (Poch et al., 2020).

The researchers also established that surveyed teachers negated their own theoretical frameworks and produced low-quality writing instruction for students that needed it the most (Poch et al., 2020). Teachers were asked how often, from never to several times a day, did they

implement writing process activities in their classroom such as planning and revision strategies, having students share writing with and help peers, and teaching spelling, grammar, and punctuation. (Poch et al., 2020). Poch et al.'s (2020) survey revealed that teachers used the same writing instruction activities for struggling and average achieving students for different amounts of time. Teachers were asked how often they used certain writing activities with students, categorized as never, several times a year, monthly, weekly, several times a week, daily, and several times a day (Poch et al., 2020). The teachers reported that they never used certain writing activities to teach struggling writers more often than they reported never using certain writing activities to teach average writers. (Poch et al., 2020). These results show that certain writing activities such as planning and revision strategies were never used to teach struggling writers (Poch et al., 2020). Teachers reported that they used twice as many certain activities daily to help average writers as much as they reported using certain other activities daily for struggling writers (Poch et al., 2020). This study clearly showed how not all teachers have the same approach towards all students.

Another factor in teaching writing that has been influencing teachers' perceptions is the belief that students learn best from self-reported styles. Teachers and students alike believed that there are various teaching styles that allow different students to learn best. According to an analysis of the continuing prevalence of the learning style hypothesis by Dinsmore et al. in 2022, teachers are still using the concept as a major heuristic for their teaching. The learning style hypothesis has been proven wrong based on a lack of scientific evidence (Dinsmore et al., 2022). Researchers specifically focused on the meshing hypothesis which states that students were identified as either "visual, aural, or kinesthetic learners" and were "meshed" with instruction that fit their style (Dinsmore et al., 2022, p. 418). The researchers then listed studies that failed

when the meshing approach was used, and their results were that “students learned worse” (Dinsmore et al., 2022, p. 419). Teachers thought that they were doing their best for the styles that students self-reported, but they were actually denying students high-quality learning grounded in researched and effective pedagogy. The researchers discussed how the learning style hypothesis was still recently prevalent in classrooms and the importance of interpreting and acting on what students reported about their learning with educated and data driven responses (Dinsmore et al., 2022).

Useful Takeaways from Teachers’ Perceptions of Their Teaching

The two aforementioned studies show the harm of neglecting students' needs and giving too much power to students’ wants. Teachers must be open to new understandings of the teaching process, self-assess and adjust their practices, listen to student needs, and be constantly flexible.

Furthermore, these findings indicate a need for writing instruction interventions, as well as the need for more research for teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices. Teachers may be overconfident in their abilities to teach writing, and they need to honestly assess their teaching pedagogies. Teachers can learn from this study and be mindful to create instruction for their students’ needs. The study by Poch et al. led teachers to criticize their own teaching, which is an action that takes courage and accountability. Hopefully, the teachers in the study were able to change their plans to focus more on the needs of struggling writers. Teachers have many responsibilities, and the tracking of their instruction is not an easy task. While the initial process may be difficult, having data driven instruction will be beneficial to all the students in the

classroom, not just the typically achieving and advanced writers. The study by Dinsmore et al. showed the harm of wrongly interpreting students' wants. Just because a student states they want to learn a certain way should not categorize them into one of three static groups of learners and instruction that is unsubstantiated by proper instructional practices.

Regardless of these complex challenges to teaching writing, student performance, and testing, teachers must persevere. Students are the future and writing well is paramount to learning and adult life. There is an overwhelming amount of research that shows how struggling writers can be helped.

Chapter 6

Case Studies of Effective Strategies for Teaching Writing at the Secondary English Level

Potential Unreliability with Found Strategies

There is a scant amount of research done on finding effective teaching writing strategies that improve the writing of secondary students, especially in United States public high schools. The evidence of successful teaching writing strategies from case studies and meta-analyses in this literature review from both the United States and other countries may not be applicable to all classrooms and contexts. The longevity of teaching writing strategies taught, and the possibility of their application to other struggling secondary writers is unknown. Application of these studies to different classroom environments in 2025 is unknown. However, these studies will hopefully be useful to teacher candidates and experienced teachers to improve their own perceptions of teaching and their teaching practices. The hope is that the recency of the studies lends them to be used to teach writers that exist in the classroom currently.

Case Studies and Meta- Analyses of Instructional Strategies

Ting Sun, Chuang Wang, and Yi Wang conducted a systematic review of 22 primary studies published over the last decade to understand if the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) teaching approach had an effect on writing outcomes. The studies that were analyzed were conducted in the United States and in countries throughout the world. This strategy was

defined as being a “criterion-based teaching approach incorporating explicit and systematic instruction of writing strategies, knowledge or skills, and self-regulation procedures into writing” (Sun et al., 2022, p. 2497). The SRSD approach centers the writing process onto the writer to control the writing process combined with behavior regulation and evaluation of outcomes. Researchers further defined this approach as having four theoretical foundations: “cognitive-behavioral intervention model (Meichenbaum, 1977), social origins of self-control (Vygotsky, 1978), learning strategy model (Deshlar et al., 1981), and development of self-control, metacognition, and the critical components of strategies instruction (Brown et al., 1981)” (Sun et al., 2022, p. 2499). Sun et al.’s (2022) study utilized these theoretical frameworks to better understand how students can achieve the goal of writing in English well. These theoretical frameworks also reinforce that the student begins to view writing as a “process-oriented activity” (Sun et al., 2022, p. 2499). The researchers found that students began to approach writing as a process when they worked towards "linguistic proficiency" and "cognitive and affective competence" (Sun et al., 2022, p. 2499). A teacher leading a student to self-regulate linguistic, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of their learning in a classroom is a complex task. The types of writing that the implementation of SRSD caused statistically significant effects on persuasive, expository, and narrative writings, both standardized and unstandardized measures, and showed no difference between interventions that were short or long. Therefore, there is a vast amount of writing instruction that teachers can use SRSD for. The studies that were identified as secondary were calculated to have a 0.684 significantly significant effect on writing and studies identified as tertiary education had an even higher effect size of 0.848 as significantly different from zero. High school teachers should utilize SRSD instruction to guide their instruction and to give agency to older learners.

A similar meta-analysis by Hebert et al. (2013) examined multiple writing activities to determine which were most effective for improving students' reading comprehension. Theories on how writing influences the learning of students was also explored (Hebert et al., 2013). Hebert et al. (2013) stated that high quality writing instruction structures the thinking process in terms of semantics and syntactics. Second, by comparing one's writing to others, writers had the ability to adapt their own work and make inferences, and even detect contradictions (Hebert et al., 2013). Writing also requires the construction of relationships among multiple ideas (Hebert et al., 2013). Students that were taught to metacognitively think about their writing are more likely to apply the concept to organizing their ideas, building conceptual frameworks, and synthesizing knowledge (Hebert et al., 2013). Hebert et al. (2013) also found evidence that writing activities about a text such as summary writing, note taking, and answering written questions improved reading comprehension (Hebert et al., 2013). Hebert et al. (2013) concluded that teachers should use combinations of writing tasks including answering, written summaries, note taking, and extended writing in order to enhance their students' comprehension of texts.

Sidky's (2019) study of 40 students, aged 16 to 17 in a governmental language school in Giza applied Vygotsky's sociocultural model in their English A level writing classes. The students first wrote in a specified genre (Sidky, 2019). Then, a model of writing in that genre was presented with the capable other strategy: working with a peer or adult that provides necessary assistance until "the experience is internalized" (Sidky, 2019, p. 964). Next, they wrote while using vocabulary and resources introduced to them (Sidky, 2019). After that, they self-corrected their writing using the model and criteria (Sidky, 2019). Students then received teacher suggestions in a workshop forum followed by a peer correction session (Sidky, 2019). Finally, the teacher corrected the students' writing (Sidky, 2019). Assignments included writing an

argumentative essay in the problem-solving genre; choosing and writing about an environmental problem, a persuasive essay, and autobiographical writing (Sidky, 2019). Students' writing improved tremendously from pre-to-post-tests, and from the first to the third drafts. Improvements were seen in all areas of genre, register, discourse, grammar, and graphic features (Sidky, 2019).

From a magnet high school creative writing class of 27 students, Rubin (2023) explored methods that teachers can use to make writing simultaneously a process, and students experiencing the vitality, and even joy of being present with others. Students journaled, and the writing-as-becoming approach was used to encourage attentiveness, curiosity, responsibility, and capability (Rubin, 2023). Students were told not to interpret urges of defining what they were writing but instead to focus on patterns and insights and to follow individual energies (Rubin, 2023). Another factor was seeing writing as making, a human-centered writing process, which led students to see how aligning themselves with a human who was a maker showed them that writing does not have to be a conscious, linear process (Rubin, 2023). Finally, students were shown writing as producing or traversing boundaries (Rubin, 2023). The class created visual representations of “writing territories” with string, ribbons, sketches, and collages to notice patterns in their writing energies over time, to see what their borders in writing are, and what lies beyond them (Rubin, 2023, p. 57).

Olson et al. (2017) led a two-year replication of the Pathway Project, which used cognitive strategies in text-based analytical writing to examine its effectiveness for secondary schools with Latino English learners. There is a need for these kinds of interventions because, according to a referenced study in the paper, by 2020, one in four students in United States public K-12 public schools will be Latino (Olson et al., 2017). Olson et al. (2017) claimed that

Latino students struggle to be proficient in writing. The Pathway Project is an annual training for secondary teachers, spanning 46 hours and includes cognitive strategies in reading and writing instruction, student revision of draft essays, and ongoing support from teachers who already received the training (Olson et al., 2017). In the study, 95 teachers from 16 middle and high schools participated (Olson et al., 2017). Out of the total, 49 teachers received the Pathway training, and the other 46 were the control (Olson et al., 2017). In the final step of the study, only one class was selected to be the focal class for each group. The researchers found that the Pathway training could close the achievement gap for English learners. The researchers also discovered that White, Latino, and Asian students in the Pathway Project group had significant gains from the pretest to posttest, with Latino students having the highest gains by percentage. Another finding was that students in the Pathway group had higher chances of passing the California High School Exit Exam. The strategy that 24 teachers reported to be most efficient in increasing literacy skills was color coding essays- both the students' papers and model/anchor papers (Olson et al., 2017). Newell et al. (2019) observed lessons in a grade-11 English language arts classroom to determine how to engage students in good argumentative writing. This case study showed an example of a teacher who participated in the Argumentative Writing Project (AWP). The AWP is implemented in the summer before each academic year. In the project, teachers engaged in a three-week summer workshop on teaching argumentative writing (Newell et al., 2019). The researchers implemented this project in 61 classrooms across Ohio in both urban and suburban schools. The English teacher who was observed shifted her augmentative epistemologies to teach argumentative writing that used literature in her grade-11 class. This approach was based on Newell et al.'s 2015 work, which discussed argumentation as learning (Newell et al., 2019). This approach moves away from starting with giving students a thesis and

then having them collect evidence, but by first allowing open dialogue with classmates and exploration and then creating a thesis. The findings showed that the teacher changed her definition of good argumentative writing based on conversations with other teachers, the conversations with students in her classrooms, and the professional development presented by the researchers. Newell et al. found that her definition changed from a structural to ideational epistemology upon seeing the value of students approaching and defining knowledge from different perspectives and relating it to meaning in their own lives.

Taken altogether, United States students struggle with writing proficiency due to factors out of their control. These issues provide a challenge that is both pertinent and understudied but nonetheless surmountable for United States public schools. For these reasons, both for individual students and the education system as a whole, educators should be aware of the teaching writing strategies to serve the most vulnerable students in their classrooms and advance the efficacy of the United States education system.

Chapter 7

Effective Writing Teaching Strategies for English Learner Students

Imminence of Seeking Non-U.S. Strategies to Teach English Learner Students

English Language Learner (ELL) students (also referred to as English Learners [ELs]) are becoming more prevalent as secondary education learners in the United States, and this population will continue to grow as evidenced by the changing demographic makeup of the United States. Researchers Kim and Lopez established in their 2022 study that English Learners (EL) accounted for 10% of K-12 learners in the United States as of 2021. The 2021 National Center for Education Statistics data that Kim and Lopez worked with further revealed that the total number of ELL students was around 4.5 million. Out of all those students in the United States, the NCES report stated that secondary EL students were seen in “10.5 percent of 6th-graders, 9.0 percent of 8th-graders, and 6.1 percent of 12th-graders” (NCES). The number of high school ELLs in 2025 is unknown. An NCES study from 2015 found a total of 774,500 EL students enrolled in public high schools in the United States. Findings from that same study revealed that those EL students were present across 62 percent of districts in public schools. Regardless of the older data in these reports, EL students are present across every region of the United States. The 2025 NCES report identified hundreds of thousands of EL students in all four community types researchers defined as city, suburban, town, and rural. The report also identified hundreds of thousands of EL students in the Northeast, Southeast, Central, and Western United States. Perfectly predicting what kind of learners will be in the United States is impossible. The most current data suggests that English Language learners are widespread in

public schools and will continue to matriculate through secondary education schools. Teachers must be equipped with effective instruction on teaching writing to meet the needs of every student.

Case Studies of Effective Strategies to Teach EL Students in the United States

Educators worldwide should collaborate to consider research proven methods to best teach students that will make up the collective future of humanity. This section will focus on addressing how international research on learning English reveals what motivates students, effective teaching methods, and other unique findings with applications to the United States.

Researchers Kim and Lopez (2022) created an assessment tool for an exploratory study of three ESL teachers and 62 EL students in a secondary tool to promote performance on formative assessment practices. The researchers stated the crucial need for their study was that English learners account for 10% of K-12 learners in the United States as of 2021 and that these learners are entitled as any other learner to "appropriate instructional services and language support in developing their English language proficiency" (Kim & Lopez, 2022, p. 1). The study involved a technology-based tool intended for assessment accessible to ELL students and teachers that allowed both to interact with clear standards and formative assessment of learning. Students were involved in every step of the process: taking initial self-assessment, using the online tool, engaging in the self-assessment post activity, and receiving as well as "feedback during and after the activities" (Kim & Lopez, 2022, p. 16). Students were able to take "an agentive role in understanding learning goals, reflecting on their performance, and feedback" (Kim & Lopez, 2022, p. 16). The most successful teacher out of the three was able to provide

actionable feedback during lessons that students could interpret to adapt their performance with specific improvements. Researchers stated that teachers need to be in tune with individualized student needs by “develop[ing] “a present-to-future perspective, in which the concern is not solely with the actual level of performance but with anticipating future possibilities” for realizing the intent of formative assessment” (Kim & Lopez, 2022, p. 2). This tool promoted and yielded high performance by EL students on formative assessments, a teaching that is used daily in United States secondary classrooms.

Chapter 8

Effective Writing Teaching Strategies from Sources Outside of the United States

Motivation of ELLs in Countries Outside of the United States to Learn English

A study by Fitriani et al. (2019) of 37 grade-10 Indonesian students tested how the “Here and Now” strategy could improve how students wrote in English in a descriptive text format. The Indonesian public high school had majors of accounting, office administration, agricultural processing techniques, computer and network major and electrical technique. While the majors were technical, the pre-test was to write a paragraph in 75 minutes on the theme “my best friend.” Students were then given six treatments of the Here and Now Strategy and then the same prompt as a post test. Researchers decided to test for descriptive text which they defined as:

a kind of [text] which is used to describe the real object (person, place, and things). It will help the reader more [clearly understand] about the real object. The descriptive text consists of identification and description. Identification is a process of how to [identify an object the writer] wants to describe. Then, the description is a process on how to describe the object. Descriptive text is a sort of text used by every writer or person to explain a thing, individual, animal, location or incident to a reader or listener (Fitriani et al., 2019, p. 633).

The pre-test revealed that students lacked proper English grammar use, had poor vocabulary knowledge, and struggled to put their ideas into writing in the English language. Researchers decided to use the “here and now” strategy to “enhance self-reflection by asking the students to write a report at the time the action is (present tense) on an experience they have (it happened

here and now)” (Fitriani et al., 2019, p. 633). Another reason to utilize this method was that it was cited to have a “beneficial impact on student achievement, behaviour, student engagement and academic achievement” (Fitriani et al., 2019, p. 633). Six 90-minute treatments of the “here and now instruction over the course of a month led to a very successful posttest with students showing improved understanding of writing a descriptive text: students showed improvements in each researcher identified component of “content, organization, language use, vocabulary and mechanic[s]” (Fitriani et al., 2019, p. 634) demonstrating how this combination of individualized learning and motivation lead to a high quality writing.

In a study by Meyer et al. (2022) done with hundreds of German secondary students, researchers investigated how the associations between the personality trait of openness to experience leads to high academic achievement in language. Researchers combined the trait of openness to experience “with intrinsic value as a motivational construct more proximal to behaviour” (Meyer et al., 2022, p. 113). Their method was to assess the achievement of “two large-scale longitudinal data sets (N = 1994; M = 16.8 years; 51% female; and N = 2722; M = 17.34 years; 58% female) of German-speaking students in upper secondary education” (Meyer et al., 2022, p. 113). Researchers assessed student achievement of student report card grades in the areas: reading and listening with standardized testing and writing competencies with essay assignments (Meyer et al., 2022). Researchers concluded after thorough analysis of a vast sample size that students' achievement can be increased in learning English as a foreign language by promotion of openness to experience and intrinsic value (Meyer et al., 2022). Using the trait activation theory, researchers found a correlation between intrinsic value and language achievement across “different achievement indicators and different language subskills” such as

the trait of openness influencing high achievement in English (Meyer et al., 2022, p. 114).

Researchers emphasized the importance of individual differences.

Fitriani et al.'s (2019) and Meyer et al.'s (2022) studies show relatedness in the way they value individual differences. The “Here and Now” method showed immense improvements for the lowest achieving students. This was proven by students progressing at such a high level that the number of students in the lowest achieving category of the data significantly decreased. The German student study emphasized the “interplay between openness to experience, intrinsic value, and language achievement” and the “importance of individual differences and their interplay in language learning” (Meyer et al., 2022, p. 128). Meyer et al. (2022) concluded that students had different magnitudes of being able to change the level of the openness personality traits and intrinsic value in relation to language achievement. Their goal was not to make all students the same learner but to prepare them to be strong English speakers. Both studies met students at their level and advanced their achievement by combining instruction with motivation.

Another study that focused on how motivation promotes learning was done in 2023 by Chan and Chiu, where researchers used a reading curriculum to teach disadvantaged students in China. Researchers used a concept called the six C's of motivation: “choice, challenge, control, collaboration, construction meaning, and consequences” and implemented them in for disadvantaged students in the Reading Dreams Foundation charity through “core reading lessons, library, and afterschool activities” (Chan & Chiu, 2023, p. 159). The researchers made connections between a low level of reading in rural areas, the need for more diversified reading programs, and the need for educators to “inspire students to exhibit a love of reading” (Chan & Chiu, 2023, p. 159). Researchers focused on China's five-year plan implementation which has

been emphasizing science and technology development to help the charity develop high quality reading programs.

Effective English Learning Strategies Identified by Research Outside the U.S.

A 2018 study done in Malaysia by Dipima Buragohain focused on creation of classroom assessments to improve the writing proficiency of ELL students. Buragohain focused on three parameters to focus the investigation: “Innovative classroom assessment strategies for ELLs • RO2: Learner interactivity and engagement in these classroom assessments • RO3: Impact of these classroom assessments on the ESL writing proficiency in particular and the overall English language learning process and learner proficiency in general” (Buragohain, 2019, p. 243).

Buragohain created a classroom action research study on a class of engineering undergraduate students in Malaysia. These students were first given a language aptitude test on the concepts of tenses, irregular verbs, synonyms and antonyms, common errors, and complete sentences as well as an expectations questionnaire on students’ concerns on basic language skills, usability of language, and the relevance of the English language. Both tests reported a “lack of grammar proficiency” (Buragohain, 2019, p. 246). As well as the three parameters, the following instruction was created for the students:

personal blog as well as a page on a multimedia learning website covering various assessments on the concepts of comprehension, technical communication, synonyms-antonyms, common errors, cohesion, transitional words, sentence fragments, summary writing, paraphrasing and tenses. The assessment strategies contain new and interactive learning tools such as crosswords, multiple choice questions (MCQs), puzzles, quizzes,

poster presentations, film/documentary screening and discussion, audio-visual presentations, and debate topics (Buragohain, 2019, p. 246).

Buragohain developed an extremely robust and targeted instruction that combined very specific concepts with modern and engaging learning tools. The instruction was innovative and broke down the challenges that students reported when struggling to learn through the English language.

These instructional tools were evaluated by the students themselves, by peers, and by the teacher. The highly innovative approach that used the researchers' three parameters of innovation, interaction, and impact led to very high success. First, the study showed increased student interactivity through English being the commonality between the student and teacher. The assessments led to students and teachers interacting more through the English language and strengthening bonds between everyone and creating an "interactive learning environment" (Buragohain, 2019, p. 247). Second, researchers reported an "increased relevance of technology-integrated assessments" because learning became more accessible and allowed for constant feedback loops and the overall "process of understanding, analysing, and performing better on the assessed concept" (Buragohain, 2019, p. 248). Third, there was increased self-motivation in students through students working through "self-directed assessments" (Buragohain, 2019, p. 248). Feeling the ability to have agency in their own work, students became "self-managing, self-monitoring, and self-modifying" (Buragohain, 2019, p. 248) leading them to notice and overcome personal errors in their class and the grammar that they identified as needing the most help. The students succeeded in their class, and they demonstrated stronger writing proficiency. Fourth, increased student engagement was observed through more active student participation and was "self-directed and self-evaluated" (Buragohain, 2019, p. 248) in individual and group

learning. Students approached problems with critical thinking by following instructions, understanding the problem on their own, using critical analysis, and providing appropriate answers. The increase in engagement was a benefit to students because it “helped students gain self-confidence, analytical skills, and communicative skill building, especially in a culturally diverse classroom” (Buragohain, 2019, p. 248). Fifth, team building practices increased during group peer review sessions. The culturally diverse nature of the classroom led to diverse and shared classroom experiences due to common communication issues. Finally, the study showed an “increased cultural awareness and compassion” (Buragohain, 2019, p. 248). The population of the class was diverse, described as students originating from “different socio-cultural habits and practices” (Buragohain, 2019, p. 248). These six successes went beyond highly improved writing proficiency and extended into improving self-motivation, confidence, and teamwork. Teachers often spend years mastering how to teach so many skills at once. Buragohain’s accurate understanding of students’ needs led to the creation of effective instruction.

The final project demonstrated an ideal outcome of teaching ELL students with newly designed instruction. Students chose to embrace their differences, and a majority of them chose the topic “Languages and Cultures” for group projects for a presentation. Students chose to present mostly on how they increased their knowledge of “appreciation of the concepts of cultural diversity and cultural identity” (Buragohain, 2019, p. 248). This choice by the students exhibited how the students personally related to and engaged with the instruction. Students felt valued and respected by their peers and teacher from creating such a well thought out and accessible program to learn English as a second language. The instructions and tools used in this study are highly targeted and properly address concerns reported by students.

Using International Findings as Solutions for United States Secondary Schools

Researching how writing is taught well at the secondary level in the United States is difficult and uncommon, and international scholars have provided researched solutions. Teaching English at the secondary level is often more challenging outside the United States because a classroom can have most or all the students who are ELLs. As identified above, there are issues with teaching English in public United States high school. For example, many teachers provide instruction to students based on a student self-reported style of learning. This theory has been proven false but continues to be used (Dinsmore et al., 2022). Buragohain's (2019) study exemplified the height of addressing students' needs by creating instruction founded on research and modern tools and proven by its effectiveness in the classroom. Buragohain did not categorize students into groups but created instruction that allowed all students to have access to high quality learning materials that were relevant to them. Poch et al (2020) and LaFave et al. (2023) both explored how teachers' self-efficacy can be inconsistent with the instruction students actually need. The methods, beliefs, and attitudes about teaching writing in the United States are in many ways difficult to change. While all teachers have issues with their instruction, using international sources can lead to new perspectives based on teachers' varying beliefs on how they evaluate their own instruction. The criteria to identify struggling writers used by Poch et al. and other researchers and the solutions created by United States research for those students are different from strategies used in other countries. By learning from various countries' findings, teachers can identify and help struggling writers more efficiently and increase writing proficiency.

Chapter 9

Discussion

The literature on secondary writing instruction has revealed that struggling learners are neglected in public high school English classrooms and writing instruction needs to change urgently. The research on high school literacy indicates that students are currently scoring poorly on national low-stakes tests and many issues exist with teaching writing. Both ELA and non-ELA teachers must immediately implement evidence-based strategies to transform their writing instruction to be data driven and relevant and for high school learners. Teachers must prepare their students to be successful writers in all their classes and teach skills they can use post-graduation. Teachers that are self-aware of their own instruction and educated by data driven effective strategies have the ability to teach every student in their classroom.

The effective strategies that are identified in the literature have the commonality of being supported by research-proven practices and are made relevant and accessible for students. An example is Sidky's (2019) classroom instruction intervention using a Vygotsky inspired sociocultural experiment centered on a more capable other. The instructional approach led to high writing outcomes due to the emphasis on students' social interactions in groups and with teacher feedback (Sidky, 2019). The students first wrote in a specified genre and then proceeded to observe a capable other modeling writing in the same genre (Sidky, 2019). Next, students learned and used vocabulary and resources, then worked on self-correcting their writing using a model and criteria (Sidky, 2019). The teacher in the study then provided feedback through suggestions in a workshop forum followed by a peer correction session, and finally students

received correction instructions again from the teacher (Sidky, 2019). The writing process involved high-quality models and had many modes of instruction for students to interact with as well as well as in the context of working independently, in groups, and with the teacher.

A 2018 Malaysian study done by Buragohain created instruction that focused on innovation, interaction, and impact. The instruction was targeted and relevant to students with many forms of accessible modern technology used. The results yielded student centered learning listed as “self-directed assessments”, “self-managing”, “self-monitoring”, “self-modifying”, students demonstrated strong writing proficiency, used critical thinking, and their confidence improved (Buragohain, 2018, p. 248). This study again exhibited the importance of combining researched teaching writing strategies with a component of relevance to students. To further describe how writing needs to be taught as a process, two studies are very relevant. First, a magnet high school creative writing study done by Rubin (2023) on the writing-as-becoming approach and a Malaysian secondary school study by Fitriani et al. (2019) focusing on the here and now strategy. They both improved writing outcomes by using human centered design in order to enhance and encourage a personal connection to writing for both academics and realistic applications in life.

These teaching strategies are tethered by having a student-centered classroom. The studies that proved to be highly successful exhibited teachers using a research-informed response to student feedback on writing instruction. Teachers who misinterpreted their students’ needs and wants were often faulted by outdated approaches, misvaluing which students needed the most scaffolding, being overly confident in their instruction, and not creating relevant content for students. Conversely, teachers who were highly successful in creating instruction on writing made highly relevant and accessible content, provided real time feedback, and were able to

correctly identify and target struggling writers. An often-underused strategy to assess how well writing is taught is for teachers to reflect on their own efficacy in an honest way. More teachers need to take extrospective surveys of their own teaching to reduce the flaws in their teaching. Teachers may do this through filming themselves, analyzing their grades, attending professional development, and having others look at their lesson plans. The paramount goal should be an honest review of how one teaches and what needs to be improved.

This review of literature has shown that regardless of students in United States public high schools struggling with writing proficiency, being affected by factors out of their control, and lacking effective curriculums, actionable solutions exist for students. These issues provide a challenge that is both pertinent and understudied, but nonetheless surmountable for United States public high schools. For these reasons, both for individual students and the education system, educators should be aware of the teaching strategies that best serve the most vulnerable students in their classrooms and advance the efficacy of the United States education system. We as teachers around the world need to share what we have learned that works best for students to help teach our collective future. Each and every child that we teach deserves the best education and we are a key part in their learning.

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