Excelling in Writing

Anita Cornell

University of Mary

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The ability to write well is an important skill for children to learn. Becoming a good writer takes years of practice. Through proper instruction, children will learn to write well and may enjoy expressing themselves through their writing. There are a variety of strategies for teaching writing. To discover the best practices for teaching students to write effectively, the cognitive and social constructivist approaches may be examined.

Research has shown that writing is comprised of more than one component (Santrock, 2011). There are various aspects in the cognitive approaches that are credited with improving the way children write (Santrock, 2011). Planning is one aspect in this approach. Before students begin to write, the teacher should instruct them how to outline and organize their ideas. Within the planning process, the students should be taught how to set goals for each part of the writing which will lead to the deadline of the writing assignment (Santrock, 2011). Planning is an important part of writing because it helps the students think about the main ideas and write in an efficient time frame.

Problem solving is another important aspect in writing according to Santrock (2011). Sentence structure is important in writing, but there is more to writing than structure of sentences and paragraphs. Being a problem solver when writing means having the ability to use language effectively, knowing the object of the writing, understanding the subject matter, and being aware of the audience (Santrock, 2011). Any of these aspects can be difficult for the student, so it vital for the teacher to be prepared to help the student. When the student has mastered these aspects, he or she will be a proficient writer.

Revising is a major aspect of the cognitive approaches (Santrock, 2011). The process of revision involves teachers and other students who are skilled writers. Students will re-write their work multiple times as teachers or other students provide feedback. These revisions may include correcting errors in spelling, grammar, and sentence structure. A student’s first draft should never be the final draft. For a student to become a skilled writer, he or she must be willing to seek the feedback of skilled writers. Students need to learn from this feedback in order to apply it to future writing and to become capable of revising their own writing (Santrock, 2011).

Social constructivist approaches focus on aspects of writing which include a relationship between an author and a reader, interacting with teachers and peers through the writing process, and having the opportunity to work with and gain knowledge from expert writers from the community in the world outside the classroom (Santrock, 2011). In peer collaboration and editing, students learn from each other as they collaborate and write together. In addition to the student’s writing improving as he or she writes, he or she will also learn from editing his or her peer’s writing. Writing conferences between the student and the teacher are important as support roles for enabling students to improve their writing skills. It is also very beneficial for students to increase their knowledge of writing from journalists, authors, and editors who are within the community (Santrock, 2011). It is important for students to be involved in the writing community in order to comprehend what a relationship between an author and a reader is and to realize that their views may be different from other students’ views (Santrock, 2011). When teachers provide students with the opportunity to enhance their knowledge from writing with their peers and with expert writers from the community, the students will gain perspectives and knowledge that they would not gain from writing on their own.

Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2006) have the same components as there are in the cognitive approach with one exception; they added drafting as another important aspect of writing. In this writing process model, after the students prewrite and plan their writing project, they should write without being interrupted and without being concerned about mechanics or correctness. After they have completed their drafted paper, they should proceed with the revising and editing steps, followed by the completed writing project (Higgins et al., 2006). Drafting is important because it permits the students to record their ideas first and then they can revise and publish them.

Students begin to learn to write with their teachers and peers, then as their writing skills improve they move to independent writing. Methods for assisting students to become independent writers are explained by Higgins et al. (2006). The writing workshop is one of those methods, which is composed of four parts: mini-lessons, status of the class reports, writing and conferring time, and group sharing (Higgins et al., 2006). The mini-lessons focus on one specific writing aspect. The status of the class reports are reports by the teacher telling what the individual student has done in the writing workshop. During the writing and conferring time, the students write and confer with their peers and teacher. In the group sharing time, the students share their writing with the class (Higgins et al., 2006). This method incorporates the aspects of the cognitive and social constructivist approaches in which students are working independently, with peers, and with teachers.

Another method that Higgins et al. explains is modes of writing (2006). In this method there are three steps: write-aloud, shared writing, and guided writing. In the write-aloud step, the teacher verbalizes the process of writing for the students from the beginning to the end as he or she writes it and projects it on a screen for the class to see. In the shared writing, the students write with the teacher either in a group or as a class. In the last step, guided writing, the individual students write independently while the teacher gives them prompts and guidance (Higgins et al., 2006). In these modes of writing, the students progress from depending on the teacher as they write to writing independently.

In the cognitive and social constructivist approaches, there are aspects for best practices in writing. Teachers can use the writing workshop and modes of writing to help students develop their writing skills. As students become accomplished writers, they may enjoy expressing themselves through their writing. As teachers use these practices, they may help students to become creative and excellent writers.

References

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