

STEP=UP

Special Teachers and Exceptional Pupils = Urban Promise



Writing Across the Curriculum

Newsletter Features

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Important Dates

October 20, 2009

SPE 448, FA 4-4:50

Partner PD 5-6

November 17, 2009

SPE 448, FA 4-4:50

Partner PD 5-6

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With the increased demand for students to become proficient writers due to the requirements of high stakes testing, teachers have begun to implement writing activities throughout the day. Written expression skills are not exclusively taught during the language arts class anymore. Requiring students to write in all curricular areas not only helps to build vocabulary skills but also helps students understand the content in a more comprehensive way. Having writing skills is also a necessary skill for everyday life as many employers and businesses want to hire employees that have this ability. With the focus of the last STEP=UP newsletter on the writing skills of students with disabilities, the connection of the comprehension of expository text and the ability to write about what was learned seems to be a topic worth looking into.

It is common for students with disabilities to have both reading and writing problems. Many special education teachers focus most of their remedial instruction on reading (receptive language) and writing (expressive language). Using writing across the curriculum can bring about the following results. Students become

more engaged with the subject matter. They tend to understand the information and concepts more deeply, and students can remember ideas longer and apply that learning in new situations (Knipper & Duggan, 2006). The key for *writing to learn*, especially for students with writing difficulties, is explicit teaching and modeling of the kinds of writing (Graham & Harris, 2006).

The ability to write is critical in all subject areas. Teachers can use writing to prompt thinking, to facilitate discussions, to enhance concepts, to assess both formatively and summatively, and for reflection purposes. Fastwrites or quickwrites for two or three minutes helps students organize and state what they are thinking at the moment (and sharing it with peers is a natural extension). Journals, either simple or complex, can also help. Dialogue journals are a great way to increase fluency in writing and work with the class content. Dialogue journals are passed back and forth between the student and a fellow classmate or teacher so that the writing is done in a reciprocal manner. Learning logs are similar in that they are done in class and may not be graded. Learning logs are done in response to a prompt

given in class in relation to an activity or an experience that the student was involved in (Christenbury, 2000). Learning logs provide good spaces where students can wonder about their learning.

Other techniques to encourage student writing include creating word maps, abc lists, and writing about self-interests. For example, they can keep daily logs of what they have done for the day and can create questions regarding their daily activities as a way to practice writing. Different forms of poetry can be another way to incorporate writing into the curriculum. Poetry can emerge from experiences and emotions, and can include key vocabulary or concepts or main ideas connected to topics of study. Having students accompany writing, either at the word or sentence level, with pictures and other non-linguistic formats is a way to get students with significant disabilities involved in the writing process. Requiring students to draw a chain of events, and writing a word or sentence about the event, is another way to encourage writing.

The concept of writing to learn is an important one when it comes to thinking about the literacy tasks for students with disabilities.

Students who exhibit difficulty reading and writing will be able to interact with expository text in a more meaningful way when teachers use writing activities throughout the school day and curriculum area. Teachers need to think carefully about these writing experiences to help prepare students with disabilities for a future that ensures employment and independence in a literate society.

References:

Christenbury, L. (2000). *Making the Journey: Being and Becoming a Teacher of English and Language Arts*. Portsmouth, NJ: Heinemann.

Knipper, K.J. & Duggan, T. (2006). Writing to learn across the curriculum: Tools for comprehension in content area classes. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(5), 462-470.

Graham, S. & Harris, K. (2005). *Writing Better: Effective Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing

Digital Corner

<http://www.writingfix.com>

The Writing Fix website is a website for teachers to use as a resource to encourage frequent and interactive writing activities. This website gives teachers interactive lessons, prompts, and a wealth of resources to use in any classroom. The resources that are posted on this website were created by teachers during professional development opportunities and all are related to writing both expository and narrative essays. The lessons and activities that are shared can be used with many different grade levels and can be adapted and modified to the needs of an individual teacher's classroom. Some of the resources that are shared include: picture and chapter book inspired lessons, poetry lessons, expository writing lessons, exit ticket writing, RAFT writing examples, journal prompts, note-taking strategies, and non-linguistic representations. This website has so many links that lead to excellent, easy to implement ideas that will get your students writing and developing a deeper understanding of content area text.

Research Corner

Knipper, K.J. & Duggan, T. (2006). Writing to learn across the curriculum: Tools for comprehension in content area classes. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(5), 462-470.

Knipper and Duggan present instructional strategies for teachers to develop a writing-to-learn framework to help with the development of content area concepts. The writing-to-learn concept differs from the traditional learning to write process in that a piece of writing is not written as a draft that is revised until it is ready to be published. Instead, the writing-to-learn kinds of writing focus on the student writing of content and concepts. In a writing-to-learn piece of work, students are recalling what they have learned, clarifying information, and questioning the content through learning logs, response journals, dialogue journals, quick writes, or exit slips. In many different kinds of formats, students might predict what they may be reading about, list what they've learned so far, create questions about what they have read, and write about their feelings or opinions. A few other creative strategies that can be used in a writing-to-learn activity are word maps or abc lists about the topic of study. These kinds of simpler forms of writing would be great ways to get students who struggle with complete sentences or paragraphs to become involved in writing about content or expository text. This article provides a wealth of information, strategies, and activities to get students writing across the curriculum.