

**Writing Assessment
Training & Professional Development**

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Context:

In June of each year since 2011, teachers from around the state meet in Lansing for a three-day conference on best practices in writing instruction. The conference is attended by nearly one thousand educators grades k-12 and is an opportunity for professional development that teachers take seriously. A lot of research has been done in the last number of years about the best practices of writing instruction and writing is taught in a much different way than it was twenty, or even ten, years ago. Teachers are now focusing writing instruction in a workshop-model. Student-centered instruction is the name most broadly given to this practice.

Each year, I have presented at this conference and have noticed a shift in the participants as time has gone on. First, teachers just wanted to come and learn about the new methods of teaching. They didn't know what a 'minilesson' was or how to engage students in a writing conference. We spent the bulk of our first years just practicing those methods. Next, teachers would come and would want to know how to adapt and change lessons to meet individual student needs and they wanted to ensure that things like grammar and bibliography are still taught. Now, teachers are ready for the next step. Teachers are now thinking about assessing writing in meaningful ways beyond student conferences and final rubrics. They are considering that it is important to formatively assess and have students peer-review in addition to providing grades at the end of a writing unit. This June, a partner and I will instruct teachers on Writing Assessment. This presentation will be open to teachers who teach grades 3 through 8 and will have a huge emphasis on the importance of ongoing assessment and the usefulness of that.

Needs analysis:

Many teachers in their first years of teaching in a writing workshop are busy with planning the lessons the materials prescribe, preparing a writing model of their own, and grading student writing that they are not

maximizing their resources in terms of assessing writing. Teaching teachers to be more deliberate with the assessments they do, and teaching them to use resources to complete some of those assessments can make a big difference in their teaching lives. The course described below has the goal of bridging the gap between teachers' current understanding of standard writing assessments (using rubrics, conferring with students) to broaden their knowledge to a variety of methods that can be used to assess student writing both formatively and summatively.

Proposed learning objectives:

- Participants will be able to use a learning progression as the backbone of all assessment tools.
- Participants will be able to use assess student work in a variety of ways, both formative and summative.
- Participants will be able to use formative assessments to plan my instruction.
- Participants will be able to generate and then use a learning progression to teach my students to assess themselves.

Target Audience:

The target audience is teachers who teach writing in grades three through grade eight. It is intended that the teachers come in with a general understanding of the methods of teaching in a workshop setting and know general terms and practices of workshop instruction (i.e. minilesson, rubric, formative assessment, mentor text, sharing, writing conference)

Format: Three half-day sessions

Methods and strategies:

Adults, and teachers especially, learn best when they are active. By incorporating a number of active training strategies as well as opportunities for the participants to reflect on their understanding, the participants will gain new knowledge that will be applicable to them in their own classrooms.

Anticipated type and sequence of activities:

Day 1

Opening Exercise: Human Scavenger Hunt

Find someone who: has heard of Lucy Calkins before, enjoys reading aloud to one's class, read the book *Wonder*, writes in front of one's class, loves his document camera, has heard of the organization Book Love Foundation, downloaded a MAISA Writing Unit, carried home a stack of papers and not graded a single one before going back to school, skim-read student work instead of really reading it, has become a better teacher of writing in the last five years

Share Learning Objectives and Course Outline

Jigsaw activity - Understanding your grade level is a part of a whole continuum

Using MAISA Learning Progression - - Divide and work with a partner, look at one assigned chunk of the continuum.

Move to join with a jigsaw group that has all parts of the continuum. Discuss: What are the big moves between each grade level? Notice and note them together.

Post group learning on side wall of room.

Simulation:

Look at a student sample essay in the light of this continuum and name the grade level the work reflects.

Host a healthy discussion of where that paper goes and why.

Name the grade for a second student sample.

Brain-Friendly Lectureburst:

The value of doing a norming session with your school (unifying teaching, clarifying what is taught where, becoming more comfortable yourself with speaking academically about student work)

Reflection:

One minute paper - What are you noticing that this progression be used to do? How might it be useful in your classroom practice?

(Anticipated response: It is the backbone of rubrics, of conferring, of knowing next steps for writers...)

Day 2

Opening activity: Rotating Trio Exchange

“What advice would you give a first year teacher about grading writing using a learning progression?”, “How do you currently manage all the papers you need to grade?”, or “What is a reason you enjoy teaching?”, “How do you know if a student has learned something?”

Share learning objectives and daily outline.

Brain-Friendly Lectureburst:

Why use formative assessment (knowing where your kids are and what they need to learn next, how can you find out where they are, how can you keep track, how do you know what it is you want to keep track of?)

Information Search

Provide participants with a text set of formative assessments that shows many different examples of teacher tools of formative assessment (video of teacher explaining jot lot, progression, clipboard and conferencing tool, and hard copies of sample tickets out the door, student self-facing rubrics, etc).

Teachers answer questions for each one:

What is the big idea behind this tool?

Would this tool be useful to me and how?

For what other situations or classrooms might this tool be useful?

Other comments or noticings

Share into a small group

Brain-Friendly Lectureburst:

Zoom in on what is important in a unit (refer back to learning progression from day 1 and consider - how do you narrow it down so you're not trying to do everything? Focusing on what the big 'bends in the road' are ...)

Task Force Project:

Look at unit at your grade level - name the big skills of that unit. Pick out a few things you want to track and you will use - come up with a design plan for the tools from the Information Search for what you will use to formatively assess students (write your examples for your continuum, jot lot - what days am I going to collect on the sticky notes and what will I ask them to say?, conferring record - what are some skills I want to be attentive to? Write your cheat sheet / list of what you'll look for and put it in on conferring chart)

Share Task Force Projects in group area

Reflection tool: Post a new learning to the digital media space provided (todaysmeet.com)

Day 3

Opening Activity: Ten Thousand Dollar Pyramid

Review of learning from days 1 and 2 by doing the following:

Participants are partnered up and asked to stand. One faces the screen, the other faces away.

Once everyone is situated, on the screen is displayed a short list of terms that have previously been defined.

The partner facing the screen tries to quickly elicit the words from the partner by describing each term in the context of the course. As soon as the partner says the first term, move on to the next.

The goal is to be the first partnership to make it through the whole list of terms.

Celebrate accordingly when the list is complete.

Partners then trade places for the next short list of terms to review.

Share learning objectives and daily outline.

Writing task: Two minute list:

Why do we assess and why should students assess themselves?

(expected responses: Assessing someone else makes you assess your own work more carefully.

Students need to know where they are, where they are going - internalizing the process. Peer

work - teacher is not the only expert in the room. Use the resource of one another.)

Group Inquiry:

1. Distribute article: Why students should self assess/peer conference and the effectiveness of peer feedback
2. Ask participants to read the article and mark their thinking along the margins. Allow partnerships to process thinking once reading is finished.
3. Reconvene and field participant questions.

Observation: Video of Students conferring to demonstrate possibilities.

Action Learning:

With a partner or small group, create list, then a continuum of student behaviors necessary for peer conferences.

Reconvene and build a joint list.

Role play:

In small groups, act out the different stages of the peer-conference continuum. *These will be filmed for teachers to then use in their classrooms.

Reflection and applying the learning:

Craft teaching points and the lesson sequence to lead students at your grade level to move to the higher levels of peer-conference continuum.

Concluding the Training Session:

Create a Closing Circle to invite participants to share what they learned during our workshop, the experiences they appreciated and their future intentions.

Celebrate learning by eating chocolate.

Media use:

Slideshow as a backdrop of the big ideas being covered in each section of the learning.

Speakers to play soft music while participants are working in partnerships or small groups.

Video clips of formative assessments, student peer-conference.

Document camera to model writing and thinking during lecturebursts.

Anticipated transfer of learning:

At the conclusion of the training session, participants will have a number of resources that they can bring back to their classrooms with them. They will have created some thinking continuums, some lesson plans, and a few videos that can be used with instruction. By helping participants to process at the end of each day and by inviting their participation in creating the resources of the conference, they will transfer the learning back to their own instructional classrooms.