Helping Beginning Writers Find Success

An Evidence-Based Approach
This talk

Typically developing students and struggling writers

Evidence-based

Recent research

Practical
Children can struggle with writing for many reasons...

- Learning disability
- Developmental language disorder
- ADHD
- Emotional and behavioral disorder
- Interrupted formal education
- Unknown reasons
Also... writing can be hard.
What skills do beginning writers need to succeed?

Writing

Discourse language

Handwriting

Spelling

Writing

How can we teach writing effectively in classes where students have a wide range of skill levels?
What is a strategy?

First, I’ll write the **topic**
Then the **setting**
Beginning
Middle
End
My **feeling**
Can we teach a writing strategy to children in Grade 1?
Experiment

Thanks to the London District Catholic School Board

9 teachers, 120 students

Is strategy instruction effective for Grade 1 students?

...for low, medium and high achieving writers?

“Stories About Me”
Stories about me

First, I’ll write the topic
Then the setting
Beginning
Middle
End
My feeling
Making strategy instruction child-friendly

Using a picture book to teach about writing.

Icons help beginning readers
A story has a topic
And a setting—where and when
A story has a beginning
And a middle
And an end
A story has a feeling too my friend

A rhyme to remember the strategy

A fun way to practice the strategy
A fun way to pick topics

Kids coach the teacher
Read-alouds stimulate ideas for writing

Practicing the strategy by coaching a peer
Yellow thought bubbles remind kids how to **cope** with problems.

Green thought bubbles remind kids to **reinforce** themselves for good writing behaviours.
Concrete materials help kids **set** goals for their learning.

Concrete materials help kids to **self-monitor** (check) their writing.
Before and after

A Time I Went to a Party

I went to my BaBY Brdo. I we fll. My BaBY Brdo was fun. I like my BaBY Brdo.

A Time I Played Outside

I was five jirs old and i was somer. First play in the pool. Next I slip sleep wis my flor. Some body spaked my tenh i wac the pool. Last i swim in the pool. I felt happy.
Evidence based classroom resources for strategy instruction

**Developing Strategic Young Writers through Genre Instruction**

*Resources for Grades K–2*

Zoi A. Philippakos
Charles A. MacArthur

**POWERFUL Writing Strategies for All Students**

Karen R. Harris
Steve Graham
Linda H. Mason
Barbara Friedlander
Teach handwriting to the point of fluency

Printing or cursive
80 experiments in K-12

Result: gains in...
- fluency
- text length
- text quality

Santangelo & Graham, 2015; Alves et al, 2016
Teach spelling to the point of fluency

53 studies in Kindergarten to Grade 12

Explicit, systematic more effective

High transfer to writing

Medium maintenance over time

Graham & Santangelo, 2014
Summary: Teaching to a varied class

• Teach the skills that feed writing development

• Explicit

• Systematic

• Further issue: How to teach each of these effectively

1 Ahmed et al., (2014); Bieringer & Chanquoy (2019); Schatschneider (2017); Joel, Griffith & Gough (19
What can parents do to help?

Rogers & Graham, 2020;
Parents make a difference

Especially for younger children

But research is limited in quality and indirect

De la Rie et al., 2017; Reese et al., 2010; Van Steensel et al., 2012
Focus on the story

Help your child learn to print

Arrimada, Torrance & Fidalgo, 2018; Haney & Hill, 2004
Help your child learn to spell

One technique...
• Child says word, stretching it out
• Listens for sounds
• Print letters for sounds

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=up91XKEXFsM

Arrimada, Torrance & Fidalgo, 2018; Haney & Hill, 2004
Start where your child is, go at their pace.
What’s next?

Beyond the classroom
Future of writing education

Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read Inquiry

Evidence-based whole class teaching

Early assessment

Early intervention
Response to intervention

Mason et al., 2019; McMaster, et al., 2012.
Conclusion
Challenges are numerous, but solutions are versatile.

For example, teaching writing strategies is effective for:

- Typically developing kids (Tracy et al., 2009)
- Kids with low and high income (Salas et al., 2020)
- Kids with learning disabilities (Graham et al., 2003)
- Struggling writers (Harris et al., 1999)
- Kids with ADHD (Reid et al., 2006)
- Kids with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (Lane et al., 2008)
- Kids who are English Language Learners (Cuenca-Carlino et al., 2018)
- Kids with autism spectrum disorders (Asaro-Sadler et al., 2014)
Effects sizes are medium to large

Parents and volunteers can significantly help beginning writers

...especially with training

Comacho & Alves 2017; Reese et al., 2010; Rogers & Graham, 2020.
Be optimistic!

We can't do it
Thanks to my research team!

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