



# Practices of teaching writing: an introduction to the special issue

Steve Graham<sup>1</sup> · Gustaf B. Skar<sup>2</sup> · April Camping<sup>3</sup>

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While many children begin writing before they start formal education and writing and learning to write occurs both inside and outside of schools (Bazerman et al., 2018), a primary goal of schooling is to help students master writing. This is particularly critical because writing is such a valuable and versatile tool.

Although writing began its journey as a means for recording quantity of goods in ancient Mesopotamia (Robinson, 2022), its uses have multiplied greatly across the millennia (Wyse, 2017). It is used for such mundane tasks as telling who we are (one's signature) as well as more profound tasks of telling who we were (funerary inscriptions). Writing provides a useful means for communicating with others and sharing information across space and time. It serves a diverse array of purposes including artistic, political, spiritual, and personal functions. Respectively, these purposes are illustrated when writing is used to create imaginary worlds, political documents like the Declaration of Independence, capturing spiritual experiences in a journal, and writing about one's experiences to better understand them. In school, writing is particularly useful as writing about subject-matter material or text makes such information more comprehensible and memorable (Graham et al., 2015). Writing has become so important to everyday life, that students who do not learn to write well are not able to fully draw on its power to facilitate and extend learning, making it less likely they will realize their educational, occupational, personal, or civic potential.

Despite the value of writing, many teachers worldwide indicate they lack knowledge of how to teach it effectively (Graham & Rijlaarsdam, 2016). This is unfortunate. If students are to take advantage of the power of writing, teachers must have access to effective teaching tools and we must have a better sense of how writing is taught. A useful approach for accomplishing these objectives is by conducting

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✉ Steve Graham  
steve.graham@asu.edu

<sup>1</sup> Arizona State University, Tempe, USA

<sup>2</sup> Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway

<sup>3</sup> SRSD Online, College Station, Phoenix, AZ, USA

research to determine what instructional practices are effective in improving writing and to determine how the teaching of writing proceeds in schools. This Special Issue of *Reading & Writing* does just that. It includes intervention studies from across the globe (Belgium, China, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, and the United States) that examined the effectiveness of specific writing instructional procedures. It also included a study from the United States exploring how middle and high school teachers taught writing during the third school year of the COVID-19 pandemic. As you can see below, the studies covered a broad range of topics including implicit and explicit methods for teaching writing, writing as a tool for learning, restructuring writing instruction, second-language writing, and formative assessment.

The lead paper in this Special Issue was by Skar and colleagues. It examined the veracity of the writing is caught approach to teaching writing by engaging first grade students in Norway in two years of writing for interesting and functional purposes. The writing is caught approach assumes that writing is acquired naturally as students write for real purposes. Unfortunately, students in the writing is caught treatment condition did not make greater writing gains than students in the control condition (business-as-usual), raising questions about the assumptions underlying this theoretical approach to teaching writing.

The second paper by Vandermeulen and colleagues enacted an intervention where Grade 10 students in Sweden compared how they wrote a synthesis of source materials with models of how to do so. It was assumed that such comparisons would extend students' learning on how to create such synthesis effectively. Receiving this type of feedback, with and without the opportunities to observe additional models of such syntheses, had a positive impact on writing a such text.

Landriew and associates examined the impact of explicit writing instruction and collaborative writing on the argumentative writing performance and self-efficacy of Grade 11 and 12 students in Belgium. They further explored the effects of alternating between individual and collaborative writing throughout the writing process. They found that the combination of explicit and collaborative writing enhanced argumentative writing and self-efficacy, but alternating between individual and collaborative writing was not more effective than simply collaborating throughout the whole writing process.

In an intervention study by Bower and van der Veen, a dialogic writing intervention was tested with Grades 5 and 6 students in the Netherlands. Students in the treatment condition learned how to write, talk about their writing with peers, and then rewrite. The write, talk, and rewrite condition improved the quality of students' argumentative text in comparison to control students, but these improvements did not necessarily transfer to a second genre.

In an intervention study conducted in Portugal, Rocha and colleagues examined if Grade 3 students' writing performance was enhanced when Self-Regulated Strategy Development was combined with either systematic teaching of attentional processes or the teaching of transcription skills. The two SRSD groups evidenced higher scores than a wait-list control group on planning, producing complete texts, and executive functioning. The combination of SRSD and teaching transcription skills had a positive effect on handwriting and spelling, whereas combining SRSD and attention training enhanced academic performance.

In a study conducted in the United States, Aitken and Halkowski applied a single-case design with four adolescents (two students with a learning disability and two students who were multilingual writers) to determine if teaching them how to set writing goals resulted in improved writing. They established a functional relationship between goal instruction and students' improvements in the quality and number of functional elements in students' persuasive writing.

In a writing-to-learn study with Grades 4 and 5 students with disabilities in the United States, Kihara and associates applied the Practice-Based Professional Development model to teach teachers to use a Self-Regulated Strategy Development approach for asking content-focused open-ended questioning strategies, which included both argument writing and foundational mathematical knowledge, when teaching students about fractions. In this single-case multiple-baseline design, teachers use of questioning strategies increased when teaching fractions. Improvements in the quality of mathematical persuasive writing also improved in association with this increase in questioning strategies.

In a study conducted with university students in China, Li and Hebert examined students' reception and reflection on the online peer feedback for text revision they received in an English as a second language writing course. Participating students sought online peer feedback asynchronously using an instant messaging platform (QQ), completed a revision worksheet that involved coding and reflecting on this feedback, and revised their papers. The feedback students received led to revisions that produced meaningful improvements in their text. They further found that the primary focus of peer feedback was content, and students generally followed peer feedback (but ignored peer feedback when they disagreed with it). Students further asked peers for clarification when they felt the provided feedback was unclear or confusing.

Kennedy and Shiel examined the implementation of the writing component of the *Write to Read (W2R)* literacy intervention. This was enacted in eight socio-economically disadvantaged elementary-level urban schools in Ireland. Through onsite professional development, the writing component of this program sought to build teachers' capacity to design and implement a writing workshop framework infused with research-informed practices for writing. Teachers were generally successful in implementing this writing workshop approach, and they allocated more time to writing instruction as a result.

In a study conducted in the United States, Graham and colleagues examined if there were differences in the in-class, online, and hybrid (in-class and on-line) writing instruction provided by middle and high school teachers during the third school year of the COVID-19 pandemic. There was only one statistically detectable difference between in-class, online, and hybrid writing lessons. In hybrid lessons, digital written products were created more often than they were during in-class lessons. More importantly, teachers devoted little time to teaching writing during in-calls, online, or hybrid lessons, as writing and writing instruction did not occur in close to one-third of all lessons. Further, teachers typically included only one writing activity in a lesson.

In the final paper in the Special Issue, Wengelin and associates examined the success with which Swedish children 10 to 13 years of age, with and without reading and spelling challenges, detected and corrected spelling miscues, the degree of hesi-

tation within words when doing so, and how these processes impacted written text. They found that children experiencing difficulties with decoding were less adept at detecting and correcting spelling miscues than peers without such difficulties. While students with decoding challenges displayed a slightly higher tendency to experience disruptions in words, such dysfluencies did not appear to impact the quality of students' text.

In closing, we hope you enjoyed reading these 10 excellent studies as much as we did. We also hope they serve as a springboard to new research on teaching writing and improved instruction in the classroom.

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