Chapter 1

Writing Strategically

AN INTRODUCTION TO GENRE-BASED STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

"Let's talk about writing." Mr. Tragas is a third-grade teacher with whom we worked during our professional development work. He had been a teacher for 3 years, but this was his first year teaching third grade. Mr. Tragas's class of 25 young minds represented a range of writing abilities and instructional needs. Some of his students could write multiple paragraphs, others could complete a paragraph, and a few struggled at the sentence level. This last group of students also met with the special education teacher for additional (Tier 3) support in reading. Mr. Tragas shared with us that he did not feel as comfortable teaching writing as he did teaching reading. He also stated that he was not satisfied with the writing materials he pulled together from online teachers' sites or from books he had purchased himself, and that finding time for planning was difficult in an already demanding day. Mr. Tragas was able to meet with another colleague, but by the time they finished planning for math and reading, there was rarely time left to plan writing.

Mr. Tragas's classroom, instructional day, and challenges may echo yours. Classrooms often resemble mosaics of writing abilities, like Mr. Tragas's classroom. This pattern of students' writing performance can also be observed on a national scale. According to the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report (Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003), the overall writing performance of fourth graders was low; only 28% of fourth graders performed at or above the proficient level, and 58% performed at the basic level. The same picture emerged with eighth graders: 31% of eighth graders performed at or above the proficient level, and 54% performed at the basic level. Fourth grade was not included in more recent NAEP writing assessments, but the performance of eighth-grade students has not changed much (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). These national results and Mr. Tragas's classroom feedback point to the need for attention to writing and writing instruction. Writing is an important component of literacy—but

unfortunately a neglected one (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003).

To meet the call for improved writing instruction, we designed this book to support grades 3–5 teachers in planning and delivering writing instruction that addresses the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and that develops self-regulated, strategic writers. The book includes three chapters with detailed lessons and materials for teaching writing in narrative, persuasive, and informative genres, as specified in the Standards. Equally important, the lessons follow a consistent instructional sequence based on strategy instruction, which is an evidence-based approach with extensive research support (Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony, & Stevens, 1991; Graham, McKeown, Kiuhara, & Harris, 2012). Students learn strategies for planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing that are integrated with knowledge of genres.

A strategy is a conscious, cognitive process for completing complex tasks. For instance, good writers have strategies for planning their thoughts and for developing ideas. Some strategies that writers use to generate ideas include brainstorming ideas, asking questions, conducting an online search, reading additional sources, or asking others for information. People also use strategies in everyday life. For example, when meeting people at a party many of us use strategies to remember names. Some individuals may repeat the name of the person they meet several times, or they may make associations between the name and something memorable about the name or the person. In this book, students learn strategies to complete writing tasks and to manage their effort and motivation. Overall, the goal of this book is not only to assist preservice and inservice teachers in learning about and using genre-based strategy instruction, but to also support them in strategically designing their own writing lessons.

TEACHERS' CHALLENGES

Teachers can have strong, direct effects on students' literacy growth and motivation (Pressley, Mohan, Raphael, & Fingeret, 2007). However, teachers are also learners who face challenges in their profession. One of those challenges relates to teachers' preparation to teach writing. In nationwide surveys, teachers report that they have not been adequately prepared to teach writing. For example, two out of three teachers in grades 4–6 reported being ill-prepared to teach writing (Gilbert & Graham, 2010). Researchers have developed a solid base of knowledge about evidence-based practices for writing instruction, but those findings may not always find their way to classroom settings. Teachers are in need of professional development in writing instruction.

A second challenge is the limited time allotted to teach and plan for writing instruction. The Gilbert and Graham national survey (2010) found that fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade teachers taught writing, on average, only an hour and a quarter weekly, or just 15 minutes a day. Decisions about time may not always be under teachers' control, as many schools have specific time blocks for literacy. Even when individual teachers have the independence to allocate time among reading and writing lessons, the pressure for improved reading results often pushes writing to the side.

In our professional development work, we have witnessed an additional challenge that teachers face: collaboration with colleagues. Finding time to meet during the week to plan for writing instruction is challenging for teachers. In their professional learning communities (PLCs) and grade-level meetings, teachers often work on reviewing student data and planning for reading and math and may not have time to outline their instructional plan for writing. When they do discuss writing, they may share students' work and describe what they plan to teach; however, the instructional content and methods may not always be clear or consistent.

Another challenge that we saw teachers face was making instructional changes to address writing as a subject based on new policy guidelines. In particular, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI, 2010) has brought increased attention to writing and set specific and challenging expectations about writing outcomes. However, the standards are silent about the instructional methods needed to achieve those expectations.

This book cannot address all of these challenges. However, it can support teachers in learning and implementing writing instruction that addresses the Standards. Additionally, the book is based on strong research evidence and is designed to support a wide range of students' abilities. Furthermore, the book aims to assist teachers in collaborating with colleagues to improve instruction and increase their professional knowledge.

THE CCSS FOR WRITING

Policy affects instruction, and the CCSS (CCSSI, 2010), with their guidelines for reading and writing, are already having an impact on how writing is taught in U.S. classrooms. The K–5 Anchor Standards for Writing (see Figure 1.1) address the types of writing that students should produce, the writing processes they should follow, and the importance of writing about the texts that students read.

First, the CCSS call for students to write narratives, persuasive, and informative/explanatory texts, including multiple genres within each category. *Genres* are types of writing designed for particular purposes and audiences with conventions for organization, content, and style (Hyon, 1996). Students need experiences writing in multiple genres because the writing demands in school, college, and the workplace are varied. Learning about multiple genres helps students learn what experienced writers know: that the organization and style of a paper is largely determined by its audience and purpose. This book directly addresses the challenges associated with genre-based writing. First, the lessons support instruction in multiple genres. In addition, the lessons support students as they learn to analyze writing tasks for topic, audience, and purpose in order to choose an appropriate organizational form.

Further, the CCSS include clear expectations about the use of the writing process, stating that by the end of grade 5, students should be able to apply the process to plan, draft, revise, and edit. Students need to learn strategies for engaging independently in each of these processes. Knowledge about genres must be integrated with strategies because proficient writers use knowledge about the organization of genres to generate

Text Types and Purposes
• Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. • Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. • Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
Production and Distribution of Writing
• Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. • Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. • Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
Research to Build and Present Knowledge
• Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. • Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism. • Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

FIGURE 1.1. Common Core Anchor Standards for Writing in K–5 (CCSSI, 2010, p. 18).

and organize content and also to evaluate their writing. This book explicitly discusses the ways in which the writing process is used across different genres.

Also, the CCSS call for integration of reading and writing instruction and for teaching students to become critical thinkers. For example, the Standards call for students to read text in order to use textual information in their own writing. Writing from sources is especially demanding as it requires the application of both reading comprehension and writing skills. The instructional approach in this book addresses these new demands across the lessons. We integrate reading and writing by using read-alouds and mentor texts to develop students' genre knowledge. In addition, in the informative lessons (compare–contrast), students learn strategies for taking notes on main ideas while reading and using those notes to write.

Overall, the CCSS call for students to be strategic, knowledgeable, and resourceful in using the writing process, determining the writing purpose, and writing for a specific audience. For students to be strategic, instruction should be, too.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESEARCH ON WRITING INSTRUCTION

The CCSS set expectations for learning outcomes. However, they do not provide information about the instructional approaches that teachers should use to achieve those academic goals. For that, we turn to research on effective writing instruction, and in particular, to a number of reviews that have summarized findings on effective writing instruction (e.g., Graham, McKeown, et al., 2012; Graham & Perin, 2007).

A recently published practice guide (Graham, Bollinger, et al., 2012) provides evidence-based recommendations for writing instruction (see Figure 1.2) drawing on solid research studies. A panel of experts, convened by the U.S. Department of Education, reviewed the research and developed the following recommendations.

- **Provide daily time for writing.** The guide recommends allotting 1 hour a day to writing instruction and practice. However, it acknowledges the challenges in planning enough writing time and suggests meeting this goal by including writing across content areas.

- **Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes.** This recommendation includes two parts that echo the CCSS guidelines for teaching students to write in multiple genres and to master strategies for planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing. Extensive research supports the value of strategy instruction in writing, especially when combined with self-regulation strategies. The practice guide (Graham, Bollinger, et al., 2012) gave its strongest research rating to this recommendation. Also, a recent review of writing instruction in the elementary grades (Graham, McKeown, et al., 2012) found large effect sizes for strategy instruction, adding self-regulation components to strategies, and teaching text structure (organization)—all part of teaching multiple genres and strategies.

Strategy instruction has been found to support students across a range of ability and grade levels and in individual and classroom instruction, and the effects are increased when self-regulation strategies are included (Graham, 2006; Graham, McKeown, et al., 2012; MacArthur & Philippakos, 2013).

The Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model (Graham & Harris, 2005; Graham, McKeown, et al., 2012) was found to be particularly effective. The SRSD model has been studied extensively as a way to teach strategies for planning based on text structure and somewhat less often to teach strategies for revising. Instruction addresses the development of students' background knowledge (e.g., of text structure) and includes explicit explanation and think-aloud modeling of cognitive strategies. In addition, SRSD provides memorization routines, guided practice, and support for independent practice. Critically, throughout instruction, students also are taught strategies for self-regulation, including approaches for goal setting, self-evaluation, focusing attention, coping with

1. Provide daily time for students to write.
2. Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes.
   a. Teach students the writing process.
   b. Teach students to write for a variety of purposes.
3. Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing.
4. Create an engaged community of writers.

FIGURE 1.2. Recommendations for effective writing instruction. Based on Graham, Bollinger, et al. (2012).

problems, and self-reinforcement. Overall, it is an approach that has been found to increase students' writing quality, use of genre elements, writing length, and ability to self-regulate their performance.

- **Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing.** Writers are expected to record their ideas using correct spelling and punctuation and appropriate grammar. Limited fluency in handwriting or typing and problems with spelling can place high demands on working memory and interfere with writing quality (Coker, 2007). Students should be taught how to construct sentences and how to reach fluency in handwriting and typing. Instruction in handwriting, spelling, and sentence construction at appropriate ages contributes to an overall improvement in writing quality. The lessons in this book do not address such instruction directly; however, editing lessons include instruction to address common writing problems.

- **Create an engaged community of writers.** Collaboration among writers can take place during all stages of the writing process, and it can have positive effects on students' writing. Research has shown the positive effects of peer collaboration on writing (Graham, McKeown, et al., 2012), and peer review has also shown positive effects when students are provided with adequate training on evaluation and giving feedback (Cho & MacArthur, 2011; MacArthur, 2012). The practice guide suggests that students should be given opportunities to collaborate throughout the writing process, including peer review. The instructional approach in this book offers regular opportunities for collaboration during planning, drafting, and revising. In particular, it includes extensive collaborative work to help students learn evaluation criteria in preparation for peer review (Philippakos, 2012).

GENRE-BASED STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

The CCSS (CCSSI, 2010) state that students should be able to write for three main text types and purposes; that they should engage in strategies for planning and revising; and that they should be able to write based on their reading. The practice guide (Graham, Bollinger, et al., 2012) provides evidence-based practices for teaching students to use strategies for planning, drafting, evaluating, and revising and to write in different genres. The instructional approach in this book addresses the CCSS and uses the recommended evidence-based practices described in the practice guide.

The CCSS clearly state that students in grades 3–5 should be able to write for three broad purposes: to narrate, to persuade, and to inform. In addition, they should learn multiple subgenres within each overall purpose. The approach in this book addresses these specific expectations in three units that teach students how to write fictional stories, how to write opinion essays, and how to write compare–contrast papers. We selected three representative genres and have provided all materials and lessons to support teachers' writing instruction. In addition, we have suggested ways to extend these lessons to related genres. For example, after the lessons on fictional stories, teachers could work on personal narratives, mysteries, or fables. Or after the lessons on opinion

essays, teachers could work on book reviews in which students support their opinions about books. Guidelines about how to develop new lessons are provided in Chapter 7.

Teaching students to engage in the writing process is also central to both the Standards and the practice guide. The three instructional chapters of this book provide explicit and systematic instruction in the processes of planning, drafting, evaluating, revising, and editing. The instructional approach we use is based on successful models for cognitive strategy instruction, including SRSD (Graham & Harris, 2005) and the work of Englert and colleagues (Englert, Raphael, Anderson, Anthony, & Stevens, 1991), who integrated planning and revising strategies by basing them both on text structure.

In our approach, students learn how to plan by analyzing the written task, by considering the elements of the genre, and by using graphic organizers that reflect the genre elements. Then they learn how to evaluate and revise their writing by applying genre-specific criteria drawn from those same elements. For example, when writing an opinion essay, students plan by brainstorming and developing ideas *in favor of* and *against* their opinion. Next they organize those ideas using a graphic organizer structured as a genre-specific outline. The graphic organizer for an opinion text includes three parts: a *Beginning* with the *topic* and the *opinion*, a *Middle* with *reasons* and *evidence*, and an *End* with a *restatement* of the position and a *message* to the reader. Finally, they evaluate their work using a rubric with criteria based on the elements, such as "Does the *Beginning* introduce the *topic* and say why it is important?"

Furthermore, our approach strongly emphasizes the importance of learning evaluation criteria and self-evaluation. We draw on research of peer review practices (for a review, see MacArthur, 2012) and our own research (Cho & MacArthur, 2011; Philippakos, 2012) on the effects of learning to give feedback. Instruction in genre-specific evaluation criteria begins in the first lesson in each genre with evaluation of strong and weak papers. In addition, evaluation is modeled by teachers and practiced by students throughout the lessons. Extensive practice in applying evaluation criteria is provided in preparation for peer review.

In addition, the CCSS state that students should be able to write about what they read. In our approach, integration of reading and writing begins by introducing each genre and its elements during read-alouds of mentor texts. Research shows that learning text structure, an important aspect of genre, can improve reading comprehension as well as writing (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

Unfortunately, there is limited research on teaching elementary students to write using sources, although a few studies have found positive effects of structured note taking on reading comprehension (Graham & Hebert, 2011). The lessons in this book begin with writing from general background knowledge without any sources. The narrative writing lessons and the lessons on opinion essays draw on students' common knowledge. For informative writing, we introduce a strategy for taking notes from reading and using those notes as a basis for writing. This process is challenging but critical for informative writing in the content areas.

Finally, although the CCSS do not mention the components of motivation and self-regulation, the recommendations in the writing practice guide indicate that students should be able to (1) engage in problem solving, (2) manage writing tasks, and (3) regulate

their writing processes. The lessons in this book provide specific strategies to support and promote students' self-regulation, progress monitoring, motivation, and reflection abilities. Overall, we offer preservice and inservice teachers specific lessons and materials needed to deliver and design high-quality writing lessons.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Writing is challenging for writers of all ages; it is also challenging to teach. Teachers should be supported in their writing instruction in order to prepare students who are college and career ready. In our professional development work, we often tell teachers that the purpose of writing instruction is not only to develop effective writers and readers, but also to teach students the analytical skills necessary to write and read with a purpose. The evidence-based approach described in this book provides explicit guidance for teaching different genres, applying the writing process across genres, supporting students' self-regulation capacities, and developing effective learners.

In Chapter 2 we discuss the principles and instructional components of this approach. In Chapter 3 we share a *strategy for teaching strategies*, which is a blueprint for designing lessons based on this instructional approach. In addition, drawing from what we learned during our professional collaboration with teachers, we share some practical advice for managing common issues. Finally, we provide information about the organization of the lessons. Detailed lesson plans for narrative, persuasive, and compare–contrast writing are presented in Chapters 4–6, respectively. Chapter 7 provides a discussion of how teachers can apply the instructional approach in designing their own lessons. Finally, the Appendix includes a Study Guide for reading this book, which can be used independently or in small groups for professional development. We hope that the clarity of this approach and the inclusion of all materials for teaching your lessons will provide the resources you need as you help your students *become strategic writers!*

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370 Seventh Avenue, Suite 1200
New York, NY 10001
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