

A Case Study on Quantitatively and Qualitatively Increasing Student Output by Using Available Word Processing Applications to Teach Reluctant Elementary School-Age Writers

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Abstract : Background: Between 2010 and 2017, teachers in a suburban public school district struggled to get students to consistently produce adequate writing samples as measured by the Pennsylvania state writing rubric for measuring focus, content, organization, style, and conventions. A common thread in all of the data was the need to develop stamina in the student writers. Method: All of the teachers used the traditional writing process model (prewrite, draft, revise, edit, final copy) during writing instruction. One teacher taught the writing process using word processing and incentivizing with publication instead of the traditional pencil/paper/grading method. Students did not have instruction in typing/keyboarding. The teacher submitted resulting student work to real-life contests, magazines, and publishers. Results: Students in the test group increased both the quantity and quality of their writing over a seven month period as measured by the Pennsylvania state writing rubric. Reluctant writers, as well as students with autism spectrum disorder, benefited from this approach. This outcome was repeated consistently over a five-year period. Interpretation: Removing the burden of pencil and paper allowed students to participate in the writing process more fully. Writing with pencil and paper is physically tiring. Students are discouraged when they submit a draft and are instructed to use the Add, Remove, Move, Substitute (ARMS) method to revise their papers. Each successive version becomes shorter. Allowing students to type their papers frees them to quickly and easily make changes. The result is longer writing pieces in shorter time frames, allowing the teacher to spend more time working on individual needs. With this additional time, the teacher can concentrate on teaching focus, content, organization, style, conventions, and audience. S/he also has a larger body of works from which to work on whole group instruction such as developing effective leads. The teacher submitted the resulting student work to contests, magazines, and publishers. Although time-consuming, the submission process was an invaluable lesson for teaching about audience and tone. All students in the test sample had work accepted for publication. Students became highly motivated to succeed when their work was accepted for publication. This motivation applied to special needs students, regular education students, and gifted students.

Keywords : elementary-age students, reluctant writers, teaching strategies, writing process

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