Introduction

Kansas educators are invested in students' growth and development in writing. It is imperative for every teacher to begin with a clear definition of effective writing so that they can more smoothly instruct, guide, and assess student work. Here are components of effective writing that should guide educators:

- Effective writing achieves the writer's purpose. These are goals set by the writer, the teacher, and/or peers.
- Effective writing clearly communicates the writer's intended meaning and organizes the content to provide structure for the intended audience and context.
- Effective writing elicits the intended response from readers.
- Effective writing is key to being productive citizens; it is also a tool that students can leverage for success in their personal and professional lives (Kim & Olson, Nov. 2016).

Without doubt, reading and writing reinforce each other. As literacy expert Timothy Shanahan notes, "about 70% of the variation in reading and writing abilities are shared" (2017). Therefore, reading and writing go hand in hand as complementary skills that students need to master as they mature. While a focus centered on reading instruction is clearly warranted, the use of writing to cement and transfer the learning will yield a greater positive effect than reading alone.

The tenets below will assist Kansas teachers in providing quality writing instruction. Moreover, these tenets will support Kansas students in learning to write clearly, express themselves with intentionality, and communicate effectively with their targeted audience.

1 Writing is an inclusive discipline and should be practiced daily across all curricular areas.

Writing is a specialized skill, encompassing all disciplines. The National Commission on Writing (2003) has advised that schools double the amount of time students currently spend writing.

Students need to write more frequently and more broadly in all classes in order to grow their skills. Growing critical thinking relies upon practicing skills across many disciplines, audiences, and situations. Therefore, what constitutes a quality piece of writing "varies from situation to situation, and from content area to content area . . . The educator is the person in the classroom who knows the most about how to write in their particular subject area. That alone is qualification for teaching writing" (Graham, 2019). To further prove its value, Steve Graham and other researchers note that "writing about [each] content reliably enhances learning" (Graham, et al., 2016). Students can learn as much from writing about their subjects outside of English as they do in English class. There is

increasing evidence that students who are asked to write about what they are learning master the material better – even in number-filled subjects like math and science (Barshay, 2020, March 30).

2 Writing is indelibly linked to comprehension.

Many teachers see reading and writing as two discrete tasks; however, research indicates reading and writing often draw from the same background knowledge. The two tasks are synergistic, as "writing with a reader in mind and reading with the writer in mind strengthens both skills" (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Therefore, teaching only one in the absence of the other will not encourage effective growth in either domain.

Writing is a great way for students to build reading comprehension. Increasing how much students write improves their comprehension of texts (Graham & Hebert, 2010).

Writers and readers use similar strategies, knowledge, and skills to create meaning. Writing about what they have read allows students to determine what is most important in the text. For students, "writing about a text improves comprehension, as it helps students make connections between what they read, know, understand, and think" (Carr, 2002). Moreover, writing enriches students' ideas as they learn to "practice capturing and connecting complex ideas with precision in writing" (Hochman & Wexler, 2017). Allowing students the practice of adding new information to previously learned topics offers them the opportunity to revise, elaborate, and/or connect evidence. Indeed, "writing about a text should enhance comprehension because it provides students with a tool for visibly and permanently recording, connecting, analyzing, personalizing, and manipulating key ideas in text" (Graham & Hebert, 2010). In addition, teaching students how to write strengthens their comprehension, fluency, and word reading skills. It stands to reason that, as Graham and Hebert assert, "increasing how much students write improves how well they read" (Graham & Hebert, 2010).

Writing to learn offers students the ability to read, extract information, and combine the ideas of others. Readers form a mental representation of thoughts written by someone else, writers formulate their own thoughts, organize this and create a written record of using the conventions of spelling and grammar (Graham & Perrin, 2007).

Students writing about subject-specific matter write to gain knowledge and experience to prepare for something new. They also write to reformulate and extend ideas and experiences. Langer and Applebee (1987) claim that "newer and better understandings of textual material are likely to occur when students write about text in extended ways involving analysis, interpretation, or personalization. Yet when students write only to review and consolidate known material and concepts, it does not lead to as much complex reasoning (Langer & Applebee, 1987, p. 136) as does writing that incorporates new knowledge. Therefore, increasing the amount of writing to include examining subject-specific matter will be a boon to student knowledge.

3 Writing instruction must be intentional and explicit.

Just as students do not naturally know how to read, they do not naturally know how to write. We cannot afford to assume that simply because students read, they will pick up writing skills "through a kind of osmosis. Writing is the hardest thing we ask students to do, and the evidence is clear that very few students become good writers on their own" (Hochman & Wexler, 2017).

The majority of K-12 teacher preparation has lacked instruction in how to intentionally teach writing. While teachers are largely good at *assigning* writing, they may not typically *teach* it in a logical, systematic, or recursive progression. The Kansas ELA Writing Standards should be a guideline for teachers to recognize the learning progressions to explicitly teach the standards. Explicit teaching encompasses the gradual release of responsibility (e.g. "*I Do. We Do. You Do*." or "*Me. We. Two. You*") until students can master the skill independently found in the standard.

To help with explicit instruction in writing, students must be exposed to strong mentor texts. Allowing students to "study [mentor texts] gives students opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing" (Graham & Perrin, 2007). Evaluating mentor text as a class allows the teacher to demonstrate specific performance criteria. Students then apply the criterion and decide how and where to incorporate it into their own writing. Using strong "mentor texts . . . help[s] teachers move the whole writer, rather than each individual piece of writing, forward. Writers can imitate the mentor text and find new ways to grow" (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2017). Accordingly, the targeted feedback teachers give students will allow them to move their writing forward and eventually meet performance criteria, increasing the effectiveness of the writing.

Demystifying the act of writing requires it to be explicitly and methodically taught at all grade levels. Ensuring all students have access to high quality instruction within this platform is a key to advancing meaningful communication.

4 Planning and Revision most impact student writing.

Before students produce a final draft, they will go through the recursive processes of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Graham and Harris (2011) state that specific strategy instruction in planning and revising has a positive and strong effect on writing performance. These two, separate steps are the most valuable and deserve the most attention during the writing process.

When writing, students often need to juggle several components at the same time: word choice, spelling, syntax, background information or content knowledge, the audience, and understanding the purpose of why they are writing. Research shows these tasks cognitively overload students (Graham, et al., 2016). This is why it is particularly important for students to develop a clear, written plan before they begin writing. Although some experienced students can compose a paragraph or essay without an outline, most students find it overwhelming. And as content becomes more rigorous, planning is a valuable skill for all students to maintain clear, coherent writing. According to Paul Deane, effective writing teachers recognize that "even skilled writers can be limited by

working-memory capacity so that they cannot handle all aspects of the writing tasks simultaneously" (Deane, P., et al., 2008).

When planning to compose, students identify the main idea or theme of their writing, the points they will make, and the order of them. As they do this work, students discover what further information or clarification they need, making the necessary connections between ideas or claims and relevant details or evidence. Planning helps organize and structure students' thinking. The valuable step of planning ensures students don't have irrelevant information or repetition. Planning before writing, and as needed during the recursive process of writing, allows students to take control of their compositing initiatives (Graham, et al., 2016). Teachers need to help students learn how to choose appropriate planning strategies based on the writing task and understand the value of this step in developing effective writers.

In addition, many teachers still view the revising and editing as one step; however, the revising step always demands "the lion's share" of instructional time. The primary reason that students have difficulty revising is they do not know how to evaluate their own writing (Hillocks, 1986). The most effective approaches to teaching revision involve direct instruction in student evaluation of their writing. Most studies of instruction include strategies for revision that include multiple components. It is important to teach students specific criteria on how to evaluate and revise their own writing (Graham, et al., 2016). Most effective approaches to teaching revision involve instruction in evaluation, and teachers have the strongest opportunity to teach students about good writing when evaluating and revising a student's own writing.

A further note: Without good reading skills, students will struggle with revision of their work. Student writers may read into the text their own intended meaning and fail to see problems with the text as it actually exists. Reading comprehension skills parallel revision skills at all levels of text. It is valuable to integrate reading comprehension instruction with instruction in evaluation and revising. Critical reading is similar in many ways to reading for revision; the main difference is in the purpose: reading to understand versus reading to identify problems and revise (Hillocks, 1986).

5 Feedback is essential to effective writing.

Feedback from both teachers and students is a key part of effective writing instruction. Students need ample feedback about their writing to make improvements in content, organization, and form. "Monitoring student progress throughout the writing process provides useful information for planning instruction and providing timely feedback to students. By regularly assessing student performance–not just students' final written products–teachers learn about student progress on key learning objectives and can tailor their writing instruction accordingly" (Graham, 2019, p. 43).

Formatively, feedback, in general, has been shown to have positive effects on student writing (Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2011). Moreover, feedback on writing needs to be received, understood, and purposely move learning forward (Ferlazzo, 2018). The actionable information from the feedback provided should help the student writer progress toward goals–-first in the short term and

later in the long term (Wiggins, 2012). As feedback specificity increases, so does its capability to perform its information role (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). There is a clear body of evidence which shows that specific, objective feedback that is matched to the performance criterion leads to higher performance than less specific, more subjective feedback (Goodman, Wood, & Hendrickx, 2004; Kopleman,1986).

In particular, verbal feedback and frequent dialogue throughout the writing process will yield a more successful piece of writing and prove to have greater positive effects (Trolia, 2014). Although written feedback from teachers may be generally less effective, teachers should be mindful of how to deliver feedback such that it can be readily received, in a timely and ongoing fashion (Brookhart, 2008). Written feedback may be effective if it is targeted towards performance criterion, is timed appropriately, is focused on the task, subject, and/or self-regulations, and is then used by students.

6 Syntax and usage must be taught as key components to effective writing.

Syntax is the arranging of words and phrases to create meaning, using well-formed sentences. It is word order that makes communication effective and manageable, whereas usage is the way in which words and phrases are actually and customarily used in a language community. This language affects particular contexts, especially with regard to meaning.

Because writing is not a natural activity unlike speaking, syntax instruction is necessary for the intentional positioning of words, phrases and sentences. This instruction should be authentic and flow with the overall writing endeavors of students, and it should be taught in a way that gives students models to follow, along with a great deal of expanding, combining, and creating exercises (Van Cleave, 2020) to boost student confidence. Students need to have many opportunities to generate their own writing and thereby demonstrate their understanding of function. Relegating instruction to worksheets, where students passively and receptively identify what is incorrect, does not qualify as quality syntax instruction. Students must experience the creation of text far more often than correcting pieces of text written by someone else.

Syntax is best taught and best remembered through its function in the sentence more so than through labeling all the parts. If students learn the *function* of the words they write, they will be better able to manipulate their sentences to communicate their message clearly. A thorough understanding of *how* words and phrases function to make meaning in a given piece of prose is warranted so that teachers can better and more precisely assist in developing student writers. Syntax taught as it applies *to* writing has a strong positive effect *on* writing (Myhill et al. as cited in Hudson 296, (Hillocks, 1986). This process of embedding syntax instruction with student-generated text as well as mentor texts yields better writers.

Usage refers to a set of writing conventions that writers adhere to in order to communicate most effectively. Using conventions skillfully confers credibility and professionalism, so students demonstrate that they take the writing task seriously. Mastering usage and conventions impacts the

audience through engaging the reader. While usage can sometimes be contested and change over time, it is incumbent upon teachers to know prevailing conventions and explicitly teach them to students in conjunction with their writing in different contexts (Graham & Perrin, 2007). Students need the flexibility and skills to shift their writing as they engage different audiences and purposes (Wheeler & Swords 2004) as well as time to practice.

The instruction in grammar and usage should never be in isolation as that would be a "deterrent to the improvement of students' speaking and writing," as championed by the National Council of Teachers of English. To improve both, NCTE firmly states that "class time at all levels must be devoted to opportunities for meaningful listening, speaking, reading and writing." (NCTE, 1985).

7 Emerging writers must have a solid development of handwriting, letter formation, and spelling conventions as key foundational skills.

Writing is one of the most complex tasks we ask students to complete. Writing requires students to hold in their working memory their ideas, the vocabulary they want to use to express those ideas, and how to spell it, the appropriate syntax, paragraph structure (if applicable), proper spacing (of letters, words, and paragraphs), as well as how to form the letters, all at the same time as they compose their ideas into coherent thoughts on paper. "Because written composition is complex and demanding, students will be more successful if they have learned the foundational skills so automatically that they no longer have to devote all their attention to transcription" (Graham, Harris, & Fink-Chorzempa, 2002; McCutchen, 1996 as cited in Moats & Tolman, 2019).

Letter formation must be taught explicitly and corrected where it has been previously neglected. Research shows that proper letter formation can increase both the amount and quality of student writing. As Moats and Tolman assert, "It is important to establish correct strokes from the outset of letter formation instruction. If students 'invent' letter formation, they can quickly develop habits that interfere with fluid, left-to-right motions" (2019). "When students automatize correct letter formation early in writing development, their spelling improves and their written compositions are longer and of higher quality" (Berninger & Wolf, 2009; Graham, 1999; Graham, Berninger, Abbott, Abbott, & Whitaker, 1997 as cited in Moats & Tolman, 2019).

Successful writers are taught and guided through development phases. Students begin at the pre-alphabetic stage, where they string letters together and assign meaning without the sound representation in words. Pictures and symbols dominate the writing. Students move to a partial (early) alphabetic stage, where some sounds are represented–mostly beginning and ending consonants–and other random letters are filled in. Students' progress to the full (later) alphabetic stage when they are phonetically accurate and begin incorporating conventional letter sequences

and patterns. Here students increase the number of words that are known automatically, as if by sight. As students enter the consolidated alphabetic stage, they are able to learn and use knowledge of morphemes, root words, and affixes, as well as ending rules for words (Ehri, 1995, 2004).

The Kansas Handwriting Curricular Standards adopted in 2020 outline the progression of handwriting development by grade level. Teachers of emerging writers must evaluate student skills, plan and provide explicit instruction, and give students opportunities to practice with feedback and encouragement to help students attain automaticity with foundational writing skills. Providing students with experiences that involve the visual, kinesthetic, and auditory channels improves results of the independent formation of letters.

The more automatic the foundational skills of writing become, the more a student's working memory is freed up to attend to composing and transcribing ideas.

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