

Writing Better: What Teachers Can Do Today To Enhance Their Students' Writing

Webinar Transcript

[Slide 1 - Hello! Welcome to the webinar. We will begin at 3pm EST.]: Amy Peterson: Alright, well let's go ahead and get started on the webinar today. This is Amy Peterson and I am here from the National Center on Intensive Intervention. Nick, can we go ahead and flip to the first slide?

[Slide 2 – NCII & CEC's Division for Research]: Alright, so we are really excited. This webinar as Nick mentioned—as we were just starting out—this webinar is cohosted by the National Center on Intensive Intervention and the Division for Research for the Council for Exceptional Children. And we're excited to work with them on this webinar and the previous Webinar that we did recently with Doctor's Kristen McMaster and Doctor Erica Lembke that focused on writing and data-based instruction in writing.

And so, this webinar today; we were going to focus on instructional practices and evidence-based practices in writing. So go ahead and flip to the next slide Nick.

[Slide 3 – Webinar Format & Questions]: So just to give a little bit of information as we start. You'll see on your control panel that there is an opportunity to ask questions. So you will just go ahead and fill out any questions. If there are questions related to the content we'll go ahead and hold those until then end and then address them with Steve our presenter at the end of the webinar. If there are technical questions or issues we'll try and get to those as quickly as possible during and throughout the webinar as we go.

You'll see also in your control panel that there is an opportunity for handouts to download the Power Point slide deck that we'll be using today. If you are struggling with that as well. We also; I also included a link to where those are posted on the NCII website. So you can access those from the website if that's an easier method to download if you're having any problems with the handouts in the handout panel. So, we'll go ahead and flip to the next slide.

[Slide 4 – Presenter]: So, I just wanted to start off by introducing our presenter and then I'll turn it right over to him and then we'll get started with the content. So, the webinar today is presented by Doctor Steve Graham who is the Warner Professor in the Division of Leadership and Innovation in Teachers College at Arizona State University. And I'll go ahead and turn this over to Steve to start us off on the content of the webinar.

[Slide 5 – Writing Better: What Teachers Can Do Today to Enhance Their Students' Writing]: Steve Graham: Hi what I want to talk about today are effective practices for teaching writing and I'd like to approach this in two ways. On the one hand, I'll talk about what's effective for all kids. You can think of that as kind of Tier One instruction. But as we go

through and talk about that, I'll also point out things that have been particularly effective at Tier Two and Tier Three as well.

Everything that I'll share with you today has support from scientific research and it has been demonstrated in multiple studies. So, there is some reason to have some confidence in it. The disclaimer that I always give at the start of any kind of presentation is that you want to think of these as potentially effective in your classroom and with your students. Just because it worked in a research study doesn't mean it's the same situation in your classroom or with your students. But we do have some evidence that it has worked before and it has been effective in terms of improving for the most part what I'm going to talk about today. They are things that improve overall writing quality. Next slide please.

[Slide 6 – Promoting Young Children's Writing]: One way of kind of thinking about presenting evidenced-based practices is not to think about it in this kind of individual and discrete instructional elements. But, to think more broadly about what they have to say about a full writing program. And I think that there are five words that describe what evidenced-based practices tell us about an effective and full writing program.

First, students have to write and that's kind of the baseline level. Second, as they write we need to look for effective ways of supporting them. Third, we need to think about what critical skills students need to acquire and we need to teach so that they are effective writers and can become skilled writers. Fourth, we need to connect writing as a tool for supporting learning and reading. And then finally, we need to create a classroom environment in which students can thrive.

And so, I'll talk about procedures that have a scientific basis for each of these as we move forward. Next slide please.

[Slide 7 – Write]: So in terms of thinking about writing. One of the things that I often do when I meet with administrators is I say to them that we need to double the amount of time that students write. And I say that kind of jokingly. Because quite honestly, we don't know how much students need to write. What I can tell you is that if we increase how much students write by forty-five minutes a week of what they're currently writing we see a twelve percentile point jump in the quality of what they write.

And what I don't have here is that we see about a ten to twelve percent; percentile jump in the reading comprehension on norm reference tests. That's the best kind of thing. It's where you do something with your kids and not only is there improvement in their writing but, there is an improvement in the quality of their writing. Now the one disclaimer or kicker here in terms of writing is that all of this research has been done with kids that don't struggle with writing. So, we're not as certain that writing in and of itself will increase how well students write if they experience difficulties with this complex skill.

But I would—you know—say that as a kind of baseline. It's kind of like playing a sport. If you're not in there playing basketball then what's the purpose of all the exercise? It's the same thing with writing. The real skill here, the real kind of joy or love is actually being involved in the process of writing. Next slide please.

[Slide 8 – Action Steps]: So in terms of thinking about action steps for this. I think one good recommendation and this comes out of the What Works Clearinghouse guide for writing. It is that what that group recommended is that students spend sixty minutes a day either writing or receiving writing instruction. And again, I have to be really frank about this because I was the chair of that committee. This is a recommendation based upon expert opinion.

But I think it's a fairly good one. If we don't provide writing instruction and we don't involve kids in writing it's not very likely that they'll improve. Now that doesn't mean that all of the writing has to take place in a single classroom. It could be across classrooms and it could include writing outside of school. And that goes to the second point on this slide here.

It is that we want to make writing an integral part of content instruction. Students should write in Social Studies, Science, Math and other content areas. And in the best of all possible worlds, teachers in those classrooms are also teaching writing as well. Not just you. Next slide please.

[Slide 9 – Action Steps Continued.]: Another thing that's very important in terms of increasing or having students write is that we want to make sure that they understand the purposes for different kinds of writing. Now of course with Common Core state standards they; we have three kinds of writing that they're emphasizing. Narration, informative writing and persuasive writing in various forms. But it's not enough that students do those kinds of writing but we really need to make sure that they do those for real purposes and real audiences.

That helps them understand why that particular kind of writing is important and what the purposes are. It's less likely that kids are going to acquire that if we simply just have them do this kind of exercise to improve their writing in those three areas or other areas as well. Next slide please.

[Slide 10 – Write 2]: A second aspect in terms of thinking about writing and some of you will recognize what these critical points stand for. It is that we would like the students to have extended opportunities for writing. So what do I mean by that? That means that we don't have all of our writing opportunities be something that is completed in fifteen or twenty minutes. But there are some activities that kids are engaged in like writing reports, writing more extended stories, writing more informational text for particular purposes that cut across multiple days and in some instances maybe multiple weeks.

As I mentioned before, we want kids to write for real audiences. We want them to engage in cycles of planning, translating or scribing and evaluating and reviewing their compositions. So that their compositions or writings are more than just simply sitting down and throwing their ideas out on paper. It's planful, it's reflective, it's evaluative and it's changeable. We also want to ensure that students take personal responsibility and ownership of their writing.

So, one way of doing this for example is like when you're giving feedback or you're conferencing with students. Instead of saying you need to change this. It really relates to asking a question about you know; what were you trying to here? Is this going to be clear to the person reading this? So that the student retains the ownership of the composition and they're involved in terms of making decisions about what revisions they make.

It's something that we'll talk about in a little bit. It's creating a supportive writing environment. But, when you add all of these things together, many of you will recognize this is a process approach to writing. Now what you don't see there and this is the case for how process approach is often put into play. It's that you don't see systematic, explicit instruction in terms of writing skills. What happens in the process approach to writing is that that instruction is delivered when it is needed which is the basic idea behind that.

So when we look at this approach, we get about a sixteen percentile jump. If you have a kid who is at the fiftieth percentile point. Over about a year's time we would expect them to jump sixteen percentile points versus kids who receive some other kind of other writing instruction. That's not bad. And this works for both kids with special needs and those without. Next slide please.

[Slide 11 – Support – Clear Writing Goals]: The second point that I made after “write” is that we need to look for ways of supporting writers. And I have to say that the amount of time that one is going to spend. This is probably the easiest thing that you could do. When I teach a class at the college level and I have a paper assigned. You can bet that I'm going to get some questions.

And so, one of the first questions that I am asked almost always is how long, how many references, etcetera. Now, that actually really smart on the part of the students in my class. Because, almost all writing assignments are relatively ill defined. And so what my students are doing is they are trying to force me into a means ends analysis by giving them more information about what my expectations for that written product are.

And so when we tell students what we want—which really doesn't take that much time—we're more likely to get it. So in terms of writing quality when we do this, we jump twenty-eight percentile points. Which is pretty incredible when you think about how much time this takes. This works with both kids who don't have writing difficulties and those that do.

So let me give two concrete examples of this. So, for many kids when they revise their composition what we typically see is what I call the lethargic approach to revising. They clean up a word here and there. They try to correct the spelling error over here. They look to see if maybe they can move something small over here. They try to correct punctuation and capitalization. But there's not much in terms of substantive revisions.

So, think about kids with special needs. Often they don't write a lot of text and when they revise they use this lethargic approach to revising. So, a simple goal might be to revising your paper to include three new ideas. That introduces substantive revisions into the process. And kids are always successful in my experience doing this.

Another example on the revision end is that we can ask them to make a modification for example, in the story when they revise. So, we can ask them add a character. We can ask them to set it in a different time. This doesn't work always though as well as the first example that I gave you. So for example in a study that we did, we had two kids who were asked to add another character. And those two basically said at the end of the paper and by the way, there was another character named John. Or something of that nature.

Another example of goals would be; if we're working on persuasive writing. Kids often don't consider the other side of the issue. So, we may say to them up front that you need to have three reasons to support your proposition or what you believe. And you have to try to refute [Indiscernible] on the other side. Next slide please.

[Slide 12 – Support – Peers Working Together to Compose]: So another way that we can support writers; both writers with and without disabilities is involving them in working together to plan, draft or revise their compositions. So this is around process. Having kids work together through this process. And this also has a very strong effect in terms of writing quality. There is a thirty-one percentile jump.

Now, I want to be really frank about this. I'm not talking about you take two kids and you say okay you guys plan a composition together. Or you two guys revise a composition together. In all of the studies that were done, students were given a structure for how to plan and how to revise. And there was some practice given in terms of putting that schema in place in the classroom.

But, the nice thing about students working together is it can make writing more fun. It can also have the added advantage that peers learn from each other. The one caution that I would make here is that you have to be careful about kind of who you assign to work with other students. Some kids in my experience are kind of natural teachers. They work really well with each other and others want to take over the whole process.

And if you have two kids working together and one is a weaker writing and one is a stronger writer who wants to take over the whole process. You may not get the positive results that we're talking about here for that weaker writer. Next slide please.

[Slide 13 – Support – Pre-Writing Activities]: Another way of supporting students as they write in addition to setting goals, in addition to having kids work together. It's a pretty straightforward kind of activity that teaches use often. And that is to engage students in activities in advance of writing that help them organize and gain information. You know, one of the most obvious ones is reading information for something that you're writing that provide you with some of the gist or ideas for what you're going to say in your composition.

But, also things like graphic organizers that help you get your ideas out on paper in a simple form initially. And even in some instances help you organize those. So as an example, if a student is writing a story. You might have a graphic organizer that asks them who the main characters are. When and where the story takes place, what the main character wants to do, what happens in the story, how does everybody feel and how does it end?

And what that does is that it helps them generate ideas in advance and it helps them to organize their ideas for their composition as well. The next slide please.

[Slide 14 – Support - Assessment]: Another thing that is very important. In the previous program [webinar] that was done on curriculum based assessments and I touched on this, but, it's very important that we give student feedback. Not only on their compositions but their progress as writers. And there are several different types of feedback that I think are important.

If adults or students give feedback to a child or a youngster. What we typically see is about a twenty-nine percentile point jump in overall quality. Which works for both kids with and without writing difficulty. And so in this case with peer feedback, it is very similar to what we were talking about here before. We teach them a process for doing that.

For example, it may be very simple. Such as you look through someone's paper and any place where it's unclear you place a question mark by it. Any place where more information might be useful you put a carrot by it. And then you work with them on how to give that feedback. Always start by saying a couple of things that you like about the paper and then treat that as a conversation.

Where I would say on the places where there are question marks, can you tell me more here or I didn't understand this part so, it's more like a conversation. In terms of self-assessment, basically what we're doing is that we're teaching kids—and teaching is the important thing here—how to assess their own papers using a particular assessment procedure. So for example, if you think about that story grammar strategy that I mentioned before.

Thinking of the characters, when and where does the story take place etcetera? One of the things that we've done with kids with special needs and kids without is we taught them to assess their stories to make sure that all of those basic elements are in there. So the who, when, and where are basically the setting. And then what the main character wants to do, what happens you know, that involves an episode or more than one episode.

But, you can teach kids to assess whether they have those basics parts or persuasive writing. You can teach them to assess whether they have a clear reason. That they; excuse me, a clear premise or belief. Whether they have a specific reason that support that. Whether they elaborated on each of those reasons. So, we can teach kids to do that and when we do it increases the likelihood that those elements which are critical to clear writing appear in their compositions. Next slide please.

[Slide 15 – Support – Word Processing]: Another thing that's—you know this one is not going to come as a surprise to anybody—but another way of supporting both kids who find writing challenging and those who don't is to use digital tools. And so, I thinking on the one that's here that is the most common. When we have kids both with special needs and without. When we have them use word processing over a three month to a year period what we find when we compare those to kids that are simply writing by hand. We find an eighteen percentile jump in their compositions even when we take the word processor away.

And so why would something like word processing be helpful? Well one, it's easy to move stuff. So you get in the habit of making revisions as you write and it's easier to make them later. And once we get into the process of doing this it is more likely that we'll do it when we write by hand as well.

Now I do want to give one warning here on word processing—and this applies to something I'll say in a little bit anyway in terms of writing by hand—so, kids need to be able to type about twenty to twenty-five words a minute to be able to take full advantage of digital tools like word processing. If they type slower than that—and their handwriting is faster—then they'll probably do

better with handwriting. So one of the things that's very important is that we make sure that they know how to use the digital tools that we use with them and that they're fluent in terms of producing text or at least reasonable fluent. Next slide please.

[Slide 16 – Teach – Writing Strategies]: Okay so I want to switch gears here. So you know we talked about it's important for kids to write. It's important that we support them as they write and we gave some examples of that. It's also extremely important that we teach them the skills, knowledge and strategies that they need to be effective writers. Now one of the areas that we know most about in teaching both kids with and without disabilities is that if we teach kids strategies for planning.

And I gave an example of one a little while ago in terms of the W, W, W: The who, when and where, what happens you know, etcetera. If we teach strategies for either planning, revising or editing we see a positive jump in the overall quality of student's writing. This can involve generalized strategies like brainstorming, or semantic webbing or involve genre based strategies like the one example I just gave to persuasive story writing.

Let me get another example for this. For very young kids, second and third grade. We often teach a strategy called tree. Which is before you start writing you develop your topic idea or sentence for what you believe. Then you brainstorm; that's the T part, the topic sentence. And then the R is that you generate possible reasons. And you decide on at least three or more that you're going to make the case for in your text.

If it's at the third grade level when we use tree then each of those reasons you generate some possible explanations, evidence or examples. And then the last part, the final E would be that you think about how you're going to end this. So that you summarize the most important points in your persuasive or opinion essay. Next slide please.

[Slide 17 – Action Steps]: In terms of teaching. Some action steps is that we want to make sure that we teach strategies for both planning, revising and editing. As I said before, not just a single process. The best teaching strategy is a gradual release model. Where we present the strategy to the students, we talk with them about it, we model how to do it with them helping us and then they do it together and they do it independently with our help until they can do it by themselves.

So the goal in terms of the gradual release model is independent use by the students. Once students start to learn the different strategies, we also need to help them think about which ones to use and where and how they might need to modify those. Because we want them to be flexible in when they use particular strategies. And that they can think through how to use what they know in a flexible and adaptive manner so that they can meet the challenges of new writing assignments. Next step please; or next slide please.

[Slide 18]: These are just some examples of a couple of strategies. Some very simple ones that I've already mentioned TREE—but, this is the second grade version here. And then there's another one very simple for kindergarten to third grade. Using your sentences; senses. Next slide please.

[Slide 19]: And then this is one that we use for about fourth through seventh grade. It's called STOP. And basically, it's a strategy for persuasive writing. And what we ask kids to do is

before they start writing especially on a controversial topic. We ask them to suspend judgement. And we ask them either as a class, small group or individual to generate as many ideas on each side of the argument as they can.

When they take a side—usually I don't think that they suspend judgement on the first side—so they usually take the side that they were already leaning toward. And then with all of that information that they have generated we ask them to organize their ideas. By going through and let's say they take the side of; you know they take a particular side. Then they star the points or the reasons that will best support their idea on one side and then they choose what they plan to refute.

And then the last part of this plan guide is that they have this kind of general plan to start with. Now what we want them to do is to keep planning as they go. And you'll see the DARE part at the end of this slide. So as they finish their composition we have them self-check to see if they've developed their topics and sort of what they believe. They've added supportive ideas which so their reasons. They've rejected arguments on the other side. And they end with a conclusion. Next slide please.

[Slide 20 – Teach – Transcription Skills]: Also it's very important for all kids that we teach handwriting, spelling and I would add keyboarding here as well. So you'll see it says a twenty-one percentile point jump. That's not a twenty-one percentile point jump for handwriting and spelling. When we teach these skills, there's a twenty-one percentile point jump in the [Indiscernible] writing if children are in the first to third grade. And this applies to kids with and without transcription difficulty in terms of acquiring these skills.

So basically a way of thinking about this. Is that until handwriting, spelling and keyboarding become more fluent and automatic they interfere with other writing processes. As an example, all of us have experienced a situation when we're writing and ideas are coming really quickly and we can't get them down fast enough. Basically, our mind is faster than our hand and we lose some of those ideas. And so, think about a first grade kid who finds handwriting difficult often their handwriting speed is ten words per minute. That's a real challenge for getting your ideas down. And so once we reasonable master these skills it frees up cognitive resources for other writing activities and it doesn't interfere. And I'll say one other reason why it's important to do this—what we found in terms of summarizing writing studies over time is that kids that have poor handwriting, make spelling mistakes or grammar errors in their writing people form judgements about the quality of what they say. And those have pretty stark effects on the ratings that teachers give the quality of student's writing. Next slide please.

[Slide 21 – Teach – Sentence Construction Skills]: Also we want to be sure to teach sentence construction. Now you know this is a really funny one, it's not really a part of Common Core and I don't quite understand it, because if you watch most people write I would say about ninety percent of their cognitive effort is at the sentence level.

They have an idea. They're trying to think about the right vessel or you know syntactic structure to present it in or sentence to present it in and picking the right words. So there's a lot of our cognitive effort goes on at this. And so, we're never going to become automatic at doing this because it's a thinking skill. But we want to become more fluent at doing this.

So when we teach kids combine smaller sentences into more complex ones. For example, the dog is big. The dog is brown. I model how to combine that into the dog is big and brown or the brown dog is big. Then what happens is as we do that kind of work student's; the quality of what they write increases.

Because, this is less of an interfering effect in writing. And guess what, I didn't write this here. But, there is also an improvement on reading fluency. And I should have said this on the text construction; excuse me the text transcription skills, handwriting and spelling. When we teach spelling there is also evidence that when writing gets better, reading fluency gets better and reading comprehension gets better. Next slide please.

[Slide 22 – What Should We Do About Grammar?]: Okay so, you know this is the bad boy of writing instruction; grammar. When we've done a meta-analysis taking a look at traditional grammar instruction which typically involves defining what an adjective is for example. And then practicing putting adjectives into blank spaces in a sentence or picking an adjective out of three suggestions. We don't find that that has any affect either on grammar or improving overall quality of text.

What we do know is that if we help students develop their own definitions by providing examples and non-examples. For an example with an adjective I might bring up a person and we might generate some describing words for that person. I might bring up a place and we would do that. And a thing and we'd do that. And then I help students come up with a definition for adjectives based on those. And then have them generate some examples and non-examples.

That's our first step in terms of grammar. Then I have to demonstration how to apply that skill. So I might have a current sentence like the dog is big; excuse me, the dog bit the mailman. And then we might think of some adjectives or describing words for the dog and for the mailman. And we might revise our sentence together and then have students practice those same skills together and then use them in context.

Now, I say this is what I think would be a good model for doing it. But we really don't have evidence that that works. But we do know that the conditional way of giving a definition and decontextualized practice does not. Next slide please.

[Slide 23 – Teach – Writing Knowledge]: Another thing that's very important in terms of teaching is to teach writing knowledge. And basically what this means is we want to make sure that students are familiar with the basic structure of different types of text. And our starting point for doing this kind of teaching—and this works for kids with and without special needs—our starting point for this is what kids read.

We want them to find for example the who, what, and where in stories. What the character's goals are. What the actions are. By doing that we help them solidify their knowledge of basic structures of stories. The same thing works for persuasive essays and informative essays. When we do that, you get about a twenty percentile jump in writing quality. Next slide please.

[Slide 24 – Connect – Reading & Learning]: Okay, so this is our fourth point or the fourth point that I wanted to make. So its write, support, teach and connect. So here is the really good news I think for writing and for learning in general. When we use writing to support students

understanding with what is read, we get an eighteen percentile jump in student's comprehension and remembrance of text material. So, we're moving away on this one from quality to what happens in Reading comprehension. Next slide please.

[Slide 25 – Note-taking: Concept Maps (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002)]: So this would be one example of when we have kids take notes. We use concept maps and we teach them to do that. One of the things that happens; note taking or concept maps forces kids when they look at the materials that they've read to make decisions about what's important. Asks them how to organize that information. They have to rework it in their own words or handle it. And that increases comprehension in the learning of that text material. Next slide please.

[Slide 26 – Macro Rules for Summarizing (Weisberg & Balajthy, 1990)]: This would be another example when we have to summarize. Obviously we have to make decisions about what's the most important information. What's not important or not as important? How we can bring that information together and how we can present it as a more concise form. Which means we have to combine ideas as well as to weight them. So it's not surprising that when we summarize material that we get a jump in terms of comprehension performance. Next slide please.

[Slide 27 – Create a Pleasant Writing Environment]: Okay, the fifth point that I want to make and this will leave us with a little bit of time for questions. Which I wanted to be sure that we had about twenty minutes to do. Is that we talked about writing, we talked about supporting writers as they write. We talked about the need to teach and we've talked about making the connection between writing and reading and writing and/or learning in the content in the classroom.

However I think it's particularly important that we create a pleasant writing environment in which students can take risks. And their work as a writing is appreciated and writing is valued. While I have to be really frank on this, all of the other things that we talked about we saw you know a percentile jump. So where does the data for this recommendation come from? So one of the things that we did is that we looked at studies on really effective literacy teachers. Teachers whose kids made about two years gains for every year in terms of writing and reading.

And one of the things that we noticed was that they were very consistent in applying the first four principles that I talked about. But they also did a lot of work at creating an environment in which kids could succeed and be successful. So let's take a look at what some of those things were. Next slide please.

[Slide 28 – Some Action Steps]: So one of the things that these really phenomenal teachers did was that they acted as writers within their classrooms. So they wrote. It wasn't that they always wrote in the classroom. But they wrote and they shared their writing with their kids. And they asked for feedback on it.

And so they became an active member within the community. And one who also had to take risks and one who was willing to take feedback from kids. Another thing that's a little more tricky is that we want to give students choices some of the time. Now the reason I say not all of

the time is it's not as clear what the effects of writing in choice are. But what a choice does is it can lead to greater motivation to write.

And so let me give a really simple example of this. You know sometimes we'll give an assignment and a student will say; you know they'll ask us to tweak it a little bit. And if we say yes to that; if it's a reasonable tweak and it means that they're still doing; you know within the ballpark of what we want. They are likely to be more motivated and more effortful in terms of doing that assignment.

One of my favorite examples of this is Robert Bensley who was one of Dorothy Parker's friends. When they were at Oxford University they were given an assignment to write about the British and American Trade Fisheries Act which sounds boring. So what he did is that he wrote about it from the point of view of the fish. So he found a way to make it more interesting to him and more motivating.

I think it's also really important that we look as much as possible to praise student's efforts and accomplishments. I actually would say that praise is more powerful in some ways than constructive feedback. Or at least as equally effective in terms of doing this. So when we give feedback, I would also recommend that we also start with something that we like. And you know sometimes its effort that we're praising and sometimes it's accomplishments in the student's composition.

As often as possible, we would like for kids to write for real purposes with a real audience. We also want to publish student's writing. And that means for little kids it's on the board and in the hallways. But with older students that can be in anthologies or it can be in competitions. And we want to extend the community beyond the classroom as to who our audience is and sometimes writing back and forth.

And then finally, we'll want to set realistic but challenging goals for our students. You know basically what these really phenomenal teachers did was that they were always pushing the envelope out a little. And notice that I say a little. Not so much that the students weren't going to be able to do the work. But they didn't settle.

They basically made it clear to their kids that they expected that they would all be great writers. And their job was to keep pushing them in that direction in a reasonable manner. Next slide. That may be the last one but let's see.

[Slide 29 – Celebrating Student's Writing]: Oh so, this is an example of two ways to celebrate a student's writing. I'm sorry, I forgot that there was another slide. One way is a star; one example is the star of the day. Each student celebrated on their special day. They're seated in the front of the class and they answer interview questions. And then each student is asked to compose one sentence about the star and that's displayed and combined on a bulletin board.

Or the author's chair which I'm sure that most of you are already familiar with. We have a special chair and the student reads his or her work or it could be their plans for the work. And the teacher models positive feedback such as I really like or I could really picture etcetera. So, I would like to open it up for questions. And I think the way that this will work is that Amy will come back and she'll relay questions to me.

Amy Peterson: Yep, you are correct. So a couple of questions and feel free audience to continue adding your questions.

[Slide 30 – Questions]: And I'll try and keep up as much as I can. But a couple of the questions that have come in so far. One of the ones was just kind of a specificity question. When you were talking about the clear goal setting and the specific instructions for kind of written assignments earlier on there was a question kind of about whether you had a specific name for that approach? And we just missed it. Something similar to thesaurus or something along those lines.

Steve Graham: Well

Amy Peterson: Was there a specific name for that approach?

Steve Graham: Yeah so, no; that's my own made up name.

Amy Peterson: Oh, okay.

Steve Graham: So in terms of; in terms of taking a look at revising what students do. So this isn't actually really good news that I'm going to say here, but up until about the point of high school when left to their own designs, so to speak. When we ask kids to revise to make their papers better or just a general thing like that. We don't really see much in the way of improvement in overall composition until student's start hitting the ninth, tenth or eleventh grade.

However, as young as primary grades when we teach students a strategy that focuses their attention not just on the mechanics of writing but also on the substance. Then we see also improvements of quality. And so when I was talking about the lethargic approach to writing or revising. That's basically where you know you're going in and you're not really doing much to the composition in terms of substance. We're feeling around with words, spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

And you know quite honestly, when we interview kids; both kids with special needs and those without. Anywhere from one third or two thirds of what the kids say about what revising is that it involves that kind of lethargic approach. So, some kids define revising as doing just that. Cleaning up errors or changing a word up here or there.

Amy Peterson: Great, thank you so much. So the second question was based on someone's experience in instruction in writing. So they noted that one of the things that they noticed is that when they've provided a detailed rubrics, or excerpts or peer examples or what the expected outcome might be from a prior class or other students. They've seen some; and obviously with some caveats. But that they are just copying or regurgitating the assignment that the other student did.

But they say that there was some success in expository writing or that those students showed some improvements there. But they were just wondering whether or not there was any kind of research backing or any research related kind of; of that model approach or providing models or rubrics?

Steve Graham: Yes and so I didn't include every possible evidence-based practice in this. I wanted to give examples. But one of the things that you know it's really; it's typically the oldest tool books or two of the oldest tools in kind of you know our tool belt as English teachers per se. It dates back thousands of years and you're continuously giving feedback and the other one is using model essays. And so I think in research, I think the model essays have underestimated what students can do.

So what typically is happening in research is we will give students a; what we might think of as a model informative text or model persuasive text and we will give them an assignment. And then we will say you want to try and emulate this kind of text. And so, we leave it to kids and their research studies to go in and kind of figure out what the author is doing. I actually think that a more effective way of doing this now, that's been effective—so it gets about a ten percentile point jump—but I think a more effective way is that we read that composition as a model text together with kids. And then we talk about what really makes it a really good composition with the idea that we kind of pinpoint in terms of goals. Things that students will try in their own compositions. And I would say that that is a good strategy more generally than when we read with kids. We think about reading than when we read with kids as an author eye.

So we are trying to look to see what authors did that really made this part of the text interesting to us and then we try it out in our own writing. That's basically what that model text idea is about and where I think we can make it better. The other part of this question is about the use of particular scales and etcetera to evaluate student's writing. I didn't mention this but in the other teacher feedback section. A lot of that work there involved the use of scales or rubrics to evaluate writing and that had a positive effect on student's writing.

Amy Peterson: Great, thank you. And so then we had a question about; so then at what point do you switch from teaching handwriting and spelling on to teaching students how to use technology? Such as dictation software or spell check? And particularly for students that might have fine motor challenges or phonological challenges that are now starting to get into those middle grades of fifth and sixth grades?

Steve Graham: Well this is kind of.

Amy Peterson: Are there any recommendations there?

Steve Graham: Well yeah, this is actually one that I have more experience with and I like. My daughter found both handwriting and spelling to be a real challenge. She couldn't spell a word like "Here" correctly in fourth grade. And watching her write an "H" was agony. I mean literally it was like she drew every letter in the most awkward way possible.

So we actually made the transition to word processing in about the second grade. Now on challenge with that is that keyboards that most schools have or that you buy are for adult hands. And so we had to look for keyboards that were for kids hands. The other thing that we're going to see more and more than we see it now with older kids say with learning disabilities. It's the use of text; you know speech to text synthesis.

It's a little harder to do with younger kids because they have high squeaky voices. And so that kind of ninety or ninety-five percent you know error free rate that Dragon Naturally Speaking or

IBM Gold talk about, you don't see that with young kids. Or at least in my experience you don't typically see that with young kids. But for kids who you know want to kind of get it right as they move into middle school and high school and have trouble with motor skills or have trouble with handwriting or other things, speech to text can be a very useful tool with one caveat.

You really don't want writing to become extemporaneous thought. So the best way to kind of approach speech to text is to plan in advance what you're going to say. So in the nineteen sixties there were some studies of some experts dictators. People that you see as dictaphones at work. Sixty percent of their composing time was actually planning before they actually dictated into the dictaphone.

Amy Peterson: Cool, that was; you learn something new every day. I had no idea about that so that was really interesting. So we had a question about, kind of recommendations around the idea. How do you help teachers around; that deal with direct instruction or grammar? Instruction in grammar is really essential to English-Language Arts instruction and curriculum especially at the secondary level and high school? Are there any kinds of strategies for talking with other folks about some of the items that you talked about and the research that you shared?

Steve Graham: Well the reason that I'm laughing about this is that people have very strong feelings about this. I teach a Writing Research Seminar now that involves people from across different disciplines. So more than half of the students are Doctoral students in English. And they're; they're not fans for the most part, not all of the students that I get in the class, but many of them are not fans of let's say explicit or direct instruction. And so I think one of the things that's very important and I'll say this in two ways. Is that I do think it's important. I've seen plenty of instances both in the research literature and also in just my—in the personal work that we do with kids—where it makes a difference particularly for some kids who find writing challenging and in many instances for all kids.

A lot of writing takes place in your head and you can't see what good writers do. And that's why its things like modeling and practicing and strategies etcetera can be very helpful for all kids. But I think the proof in the pudding in terms of you know our colleagues who might not have the same viewpoint that I do; is that you demonstrate. You know you show examples of what happens when you do this. I also think, you know I said two things about this. That's one with our colleagues we share. And second, students need to see their progress. You know one of the things that; especially for kids that struggle with writing. Early on you know when we asked them you know how good they are at writing. They overestimate their capabilities, they're too confident. But over time you start hearing things like you know I'm not very good, I hate writing or I can't do this.

And so, nothing works as well as success and being able to see that success in concrete terms. So remember before I was talking about we have kids assess their own writing? Well we have them graph their progress; their own progress so that they can see how well they're doing over time. And we conference with them we talk about two things. Effort and the use of the things that they've been taught and the role of improving their writing over time.

And I'll tell you, I think it leads to more effective writers and writers who like to engage in the process more often. So I know that I took that opportunity to talk a lot; a little bit more than what the question was.

Amy Peterson: No, I think all of that information was really great and gets at some of the points that other people have made too. So then there were some questions about resources for; when you were talking about sentence combining and creating complex sentences. Are there any specific resources that you can share or recommendations around kind of resources around sentence combining or creating complex sentences? And then there was also a question about; noting that in how do these work and how do these colleagues; do the effect size for sentence combining was really the size around size point one five? Are there any thoughts kind of around those findings or anything to share around that?

Steve Graham: Okay, so let me deal with the resources. I am crazy right now about a startup that's out of New York City called Quill. And so, they have stuff online that they give away to teachers for free. Both in terms of grammar instruction which I less familiar with what they do on their grammar instruction, but they also have what I kind of think is the quintessential sentence combining tools that exist today.

So what they've basically done is they've thought through you know different kinds of complex sentences that kids need to learn to produce. You know so, that may range from simple, to compound, to complex and there's a variety of these. Then what they've done is that they've taking those compound, complex or simple sentences and broke them up into component parts. So for instance they kernel sentences or smaller sentences and then basically they crowd source them out to see how people put them together in various ways.

And there are a couple of reasons for doing this. Then with all of those let's say you know; let's go with the dog is big, the dog is black, something simple. They end up with a list of various ways that people typically combine these. Of course they may combine them in ways that didn't show up in the crowd sourcing. And then they go through and the pick; they make human judgments about say what they think are the best three ways of combining them; these sentences.

And so, their program is set up so that they give students practice working on bringing those two adjectives together big and brown. And when a student produces a response they give hints that basically directs you towards one of their three solutions. Now think about what that means if you're a teacher. Because the hardest thing in sentence combining is that you have to decide what it is that you're going to work on, what skill.

Then you have to have examples to work from. So you have to kind of round those up. And then it's really hard to get that kind of immediate feedback to kid's right on the spot. So I am in love with Quill and their sentence combining programs. And I; I just want to be clear. I have no connection with them other than I've given them some advice on their program to them over time.

But I have no financial connections and I am always a little leery about mentioning a specific program. But I am crazy about Quill. It also; they have connections with schools for a small

amount. But I also think that they give stuff away to teachers for free. So, that would be my primary recommendation.

In terms of what I think the second part of this question was. The effect size for sentence combining is; was a half of standard deviation or point five zero. That's a very; that's an effect size that you would like. I would call that, dancing on top of the Empire State Building. So when we teach kids to combine sentences together the quality of their writing improves.

And as I said before, their reading fluency improves. And probably their reading and fluency improves is because they become more; they recognize different syntactic structures that exist in sentences more quickly and that facilitates comprehension. But I think the primary thing is that they; kids in terms of sentence combining become more facile in terms of their use of different kinds of sentences.

Now I will be frank about this. Sentence combining doesn't deal with one issue. One very important issue in terms of constructing sentences is that when we construct a sentence we are constructing that sentence for a particular purpose. So the practice that I was talking about is with somebody else's sentences. And that's why it's always useful to go back and recreate on text that you've already created to apply that skill within context so that we're putting in place in terms of our own goals. So that was a very long response but I hope that I got both of those questions.

Amy Peterson: Thank you. For everyone that was interested in the Quill that Steve was mentioning, I've just posted the link. And thank you to the folks for tracking that down. Some folks are chatting into the question pod about that. So I put the link up there to that website that he was talking about so you can explore it a little bit further.

Steve Graham: It really.

Amy Peterson: We do have a couple of other questions about.

Steve Graham: Well

Amy Peterson: Go ahead Steve.

Steve Graham: Well let me make one other comment. So on the strategy instruction part because I think that's very important. I want to give a shout out to SRSD. They have an online course for the Self-Regulated Strategy Development approach to strategy instruction. I didn't say this in my presentation but that tends to get the largest oomph in terms of improving writing quality.

Now, I do have to be very clear. My wife is a developer for SRSD. Karen Harris who is a colleague of mine. So even though I don't have a connection to SRSD online I do have a connection to my wife. But I think their course work is great and if you e-mail me a Steve dot Graham at ASU dot EDU you know I'll probably pass the e-mail along to you and she can send you some other resources that are free online. So I'm sorry but I wanted to get that plug in on that as well.

Amy Peterson: Great, another question about resources. It was around any resources or suggestions around teaching peer feedback or self-assessment when you were talking about that. Are there any kind of tips to point people to?

Steve Graham: Well so you know, there aren't programs per se that I know of for doing that. And so you know, I'll tell you what the structure is that we use and it's been successful in a number of research studies on peer feedback. What we'll do is we'll have a framework where we will have four things that students give each other feedback on. Anywhere from two to four things.

So like the question mark that I mentioned for any place that unclear or any place that could use additional detail. And what we do is we practice with students you know, looking for those things in compositions that have already been written. We then practice how you give feedback. So we; we have the structure, we practice about how to find those kinds of issues within a student's paper. We practice giving the feedback to other students and then we put it in play by pairing kids up and switching the pairs around relatively consistently.

Now there are some online programs that you could look at. And I'm not going to remember the links to this that are digital. Where you can have it set up where a student puts something in play. And what happens is you might have three or four people who give feedback on that. So a place to look on this; so there is some place that I'm going to mention.

It's CAST; "C" "A" "S" "T" which is Massachusetts, it's the Universal Design Group. And they've developed a number of writing products that I think are worth taking a look at. Writer's Key is one of those.

Amy Peterson: And it's just about a little after four. So I want to be cognizant of the time that people have. Any last questions please type those in. And I do have a question form some folks. There is a little bit of detail so I'm going to send it to you after the Webinar Steve. I've got her e-mail address. But I just want to make sure that I capture it correctly and I couldn't get it over the speaker.

But, thank you so; first of all I want to say thank you so much for Steve Graham for taking the time today to present to us and to share these resources and information. I am also just posting the link here in the chat for everyone to the SRDS website that Steve was mentioning as well. And then Nick, if you want to just flip over to the next slide?

[Slide 31 – Connect to NCII]: I wanted to point you guys to the NCII website if you're not familiar with it. This is where we're going to post the Webinar after the event. We will have it archived there and you can come back to it at any point to listen or share it with colleagues if they weren't able to attend. That will be under that resources tab that you see across the green bar. At the top there is a section for Webinars and I've shared the link for that.

We try to get it up as soon as possible. It might take us a day or so to clean it up and just get it posted. But we should have it up there shortly. We will also post it on our You Tube channel. And you can see that down there too. It's the National Center on Intensive Intervention. Follow us on Twitter if you have Twitter. And join our newsletter so that we can stay connected with you all.

This has been a great event and a lot of great questions. There has also been a lot of great participation.

[Slide 31 – Connect to CECs DR]: And so I also wanted to share some information for CECs Division for Research. They also have a great website where they keep up to day information and announcements. They're on Twitter and Facebook and you can connect with them there to learn more as well. So definitely dig in a little bit deeper with CEC.

And for those that haven't; who weren't able to attend the first Webinar that I referenced earlier, that again is posted on the NCII website. So you can go back and listen to that. That one about Data-Based Instructional Decisions in Writing and Assessment in Writing if you're interested in that topic and didn't get a chance to attend.

But again, thank you so much for taking the time on a busy Thursday afternoon. And thank you again Steve for your great presentation and all the great content and information about writing instruction.

Steve Graham: Thanks for inviting me to share.