

OFFICE OF INSTRUCTION NEWSLETTER

Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District
January 2022

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Important Dates

January 1	New Year's Day
January 17	Martin Luther King Jr. Day observed
January 24	Benchmark Assessment testing window opens, K-5
January 25	Term 2 closes @ DYH
January 26	Dr. Wornum Cultural Proficiency PD, PreK-5
January 31	NWEA MAP Growth (Reading & Math) testing window opens, K-10

January (20 days)						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Steve Graham on Effective Writing Instruction in a Third-Grade Class



[“Creating a Classroom Vision for Teaching Writing”](#) by Steve Graham in *The Reading Teacher*, September/October 2021 (Vol. 75, #2); Graham can be reached at steve.graham@asu.edu.

In this article "The Reading Teacher", Steve Graham (Arizona State University) says three things are necessary for children to learn how to write well:

- Teachers need a theory of action for writing instruction. Graham believes writing is a social activity and needs to be embedded in and shaped by the classroom and community in which it's enacted.
- The teaching of writing should be guided by the best research evidence, which includes the need for frequent writing, pre-writing and goal-setting, skills and usage instruction, writing on a computer, and lots of feedback and support.
- Teachers need to bring their own knowledge and experience to writing instruction.

“Collectively,” says Graham, “these three ingredients make it possible for teachers to make informed, judicious, and intelligent decisions when conducting a vision for teaching writing.”

He imagines a third-grade teacher who has these elements in place being asked by a parent at back-to-school night how she teaches writing. “Writing is central to everything I do in my classroom,” says the teacher with a smile. “Children will write frequently and for many different purposes:”

- To sharpen their understanding of what they read;
- To extend their thinking about social studies and science;
- To communicate with each other and with students in other classrooms and schools;
- To persuade and argue, gather information, explore the meaning of events, chronicle personal experiences, and create imaginary worlds;
- Students will write about their own experiences and culture and use writing to explore the experiences and cultures of others;
- They will share the writing they create with you, and they will ask you to share things you have written with them.
- I will make sure they know why writing is important.

Steve Graham on Effective Writing Instruction in a Third-Grade Class (Cont.)

The teacher then explains how students will be taught to write:

- Discussing the purpose of each type of writing (informative, persuasive, stories, personal narrative) and its basic features;
- Using these same features in their own writing;
- Learning spelling, handwriting, grammar, and sentence construction so students can do their own best writing;
- Learning to plan, assess, revise, and edit what they write;
- Facilitating the brainwork of invention, speculation, deliberation, reflection, and evaluation;
- Reading each other's papers and giving constructive feedback, in the process developing an understanding of what makes good writing;
- Using reading to reinforce good writing – for example, why authors use specific words or devices like cliffhangers;
- Using writing to reinforce good reading.

The teacher then describes the amount of writing students will do and the support they will get. "My goal," says the teacher, "is to create a positive and enthusiastic writing environment where your children are encouraged to try hard and do their best, feel comfortable taking risks, and work together in a positive manner."

- At least one hour a day will be devoted to writing and writing instruction.
- Students will do additional writing in other subjects and in their homework.
- Students will get clear directions and goals for their writing geared to individual ideas and needs.
- Feedback will be constructive and not overwhelming.
- Students will have time to plan and improve what they write.

The teacher closes by encouraging parents to visit the class during writing time and giving feedback as the year progresses.

Graham believes this teacher has successfully combined vision and action, and quotes the American futurist Arthur Barker on the possibilities that creates:

Vision without action is merely a dream.

Action without vision just passes the time.

Vision with action can change the world."

But one teacher's success is not enough, says Graham. "To make even more dramatic changes in how writing is taught requires a more concerted effort on the part of teachers and administrators working together to develop school- and district-wide visions for teaching writing... Not everyone needs to do exactly the same thing, but it is important that everyone is rowing in the same direction."

Getting Students to Write Argumentative Essays Without Rancor

[“How to Heal a Divided World: Argumentative Writing That Actually Listens to the Other Side”](#)

by Erica Beaton in *The Good Enough Teacher*,
June 2021



“In today’s political climate, discussions can easily turn into verbal combat,” says Erica Beaton in this article on The Good Enough Teacher website. “Unfortunately, the same corrosiveness emerges when we teach argumentative writing to students.” This is especially true if students are taught to present their own point of view and then “shoot down” the arguments on the other side. This hardly prepares students to communicate in civil and productive ways. Beaton suggests an alternative approach for a high-school argumentative writing unit:

- Create an independent reading back channel. “Students need to practice identifying the values, motivations, and fears of others,” says Beaton. “This is an essential component of writing an argument that listens.” They should do a round of “book speed dating” to find titles that provide windows into lives different from their own, and then check in with an elbow partner on what they’re learning.
- Curate important social issues. Beaton suggests using resources like the World Health Organization, the World Bank, Amnesty International, Brookings Institute, 100 People: A World Portrait, and others to create a list of social issues that can serve as a jumping-off point for students. A good question to ask: “What breaks your heart about the world?”
- Humanize the adversary. “Once your students have initiated their research and chosen their stance on the topic, it’s time to consider the other side of the argument,” says Beaton. “If empathy means ‘to lean in with compassion,’ help your students see the person who sits across the divide from them.” Have students think about what type of person might be on the opposing side of the issue, what experiences brought them to their point of view, and what their values might be.
- Provide models of empathetic, civil discourse. One source is Jubilee’s Middle Ground series on YouTube in which different groups with opposing beliefs come together to find common ground. Students will be struck by how civil people in these videos are despite diametrically differing opinions.

Getting Students to Write Argumentative Essays Without Rancor (Cont.)

- Research with “two heads.” Once students understand the “human presence” on the opposing side, says Beaton, they will do their research with a different mindset. They can see “how the message, the audience, and the communicator are perceived by supporters and opponents of their topic.”
- Model how to focus on the values of the other side. Beaton suggests providing a scaffold for this, perhaps the ICEEE anchor chart: Introduce, Cite a quote, Explain what it says, Expose what it means, Evaluate why it matters. The teacher should model for students how the quotes or evidence they’ve found is relevant to the values of the other side, and get them to address what this means for the audience to which their essay is addressed.
- Provide sentence starters. If these are well chosen, they can increase students’ fluency and confidence. Some examples:
 - Many ____ advocates value ____, but most don’t realize that ____.
 - The large majority of people who agree with ____ would not ____ if they knew ____.

These show that the writer is willing to listen to the other side and speak to those concerns.

- Dump the time-honored rebuttal paragraph. Instead, have students: (a) introduce a grey area or complication showing that they see the complexity of the issue; (b) sit side-by-side with opponents and articulate the middle ground (“The other side believes...”) (“This issue especially matters to this group because...”); and (c) choose whether to conclude with divergence (“Although I can now acknowledge ____, I want to move forward because___.”) or declaring an impasse, conceding the legitimacy of the other side’s claim, or an undetermined element, on a particular grey area.

Using these steps, Beaton concludes, “We can shift from ‘winning’ an argument to ‘solving a problem.’ Not only will this make the writing more mature and dynamic, but - with empathy and nuance - our young writers might actually change someone’s mind and help heal this divided world.”



How to Avoid Common Classroom Management Problems

[“7 Classroom Management Mistakes – and the Research on How to Fix Them”](#) by Youki Terada in Edutopia, August 7, 2020



In this article in Edutopia, Youki Terada says that when Steve Jobs was in elementary school, he was bored in school and became (in his own words) “a little terror,” constantly playing pranks in class. Punishments made him defiant and even more disruptive, and the school ended up expelling him. This dynamic is the first of seven that Terada describes, with research-based strategies for avoiding them:

- **Mistake #1: Responding to surface-level behavior and not the underlying cause** – In the case of the young Steve Jobs, the lack of challenging work was the problem. With another student, it might be trauma at home, for another a learning disability that makes classroom assignments extremely challenging. “If teachers can figure out what a student’s goals are,” says Terada, “they can address the misbehavior in a more-productive way.”
- **Mistake #2: Assuming it’s not an academic issue** – One study found that 20 percent of classroom misbehavior stemmed from students not understanding the assignment or finding it too difficult.
- **Mistake #3: Verbally confronting every minor infraction** – The injunction to “sweat the small stuff” can be taken too far, says Terada. Constantly reprimanding students who aren’t paying attention or who are having side conversations can create a “negative reinforcement pattern,” sparking defiance and making the problem worse. Nonverbal tactics such as “the look” or an agreed-upon hand signal can be much more effective.
- **Mistake #4: Using time-out corners** – Sending students away from the group as a punishment “can cause feelings of shame or embarrassment,” says Terada, “undermining your relationship with them and jeopardizing the trust you’ll need for productive learning.” An alternative is a time-out “peace corner” that’s explained as a space where students can calm down, reflect on their emotions, and practice self-regulation. The key is taking the stigma away from the time-out area and encouraging students to sit there anytime they feel the need to pull themselves together.

How to Avoid Common Classroom Management Problems (Cont.)

- **Mistake #5: Writing names on the board and other public shaming** – Some schools post the names of students who've had detentions and low test scores in the halls, and a common classroom practice is tracking behavior with color-coded stickers – red for bad behavior, blue for good. Practices like these, say researchers, fail to deter misbehavior and may make things worse. Far better is dealing with misbehavior in private conversations, after determining the root causes.
- **Mistake #6: Demanding obedience** – “It’s a losing battle to expect compliance from students without putting in the emotional work,” says Terada. “Demand it and many students will simply rebel, test boundaries, or engage in power struggles.” The alternative is building relationships, warmly greeting students at the door, co-creating classroom norms, and working continuously to develop social and emotional skills.
- **Mistake #7: Not checking the biases we all have** – Study after study has shown how implicit bias can lead teachers to give African-American students fewer disciplinary warnings before imposing consequences, as well as expecting less of them academically. “Such perceived unfairness can contribute to a ‘trust gap’ among students of color,” says Terada. Teachers and schools need to track data, he says, looking for patterns, raising educators’ consciousness, and working toward an equitable environment for all students.

