



Writing instruction that works: proven methods for middle and high school classrooms, by Arthur N. Applebee

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reflection contextualized in related theory and literature. This approach presents the text as one that caters to the needs of a varied audience: instructional designers and teachers will gather innovative ideas and “how-to” guidelines (particularly from the online text *Flows of Reading*), and researchers will see how theories are translated into daily teaching practice and ponder over the interplay or tension between theories, pedagogical design and classroom realities.

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Writing instruction that works: proven methods for middle and high school classrooms, by Arthur N. Applebee and Judith A. Langer, with Kristen Campbell Wilcox, Marc Nachowitz, Michael P. Mastroianni, and Christine Dawson, New York, Teachers College Press, 2013, xiv + 216 pp., US\$34.95 (paperback), ISBN 13: 9780807754368

This volume lets us know where writing instruction in secondary schools in the United States has been, where it is now, and where it might be headed. The picture may still not be of a glass half full, but at least the glass is starting to fill. Even better, the report suggests we have some good ideas about how to keep filling; US educators know some best practices and they are being implemented in a number of schools around the country. Other countries are also increasing attention to the teaching of writing and instituting new practices, and readers from those countries may find value in seeing what progress the United States is making.

For over three decades, Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer have been documenting the changing practices of teaching writing in US secondary education. The current volume (with Kristen Campbell Wilcox, Marc Nachowitz, Michael P. Mastroianni, and Christine Dawson each contributing a chapter) presents the most comprehensive study since Applebee's initial study of writing practices (1981) and its contexts (1984). (Other more limited studies based only on NAEP data include Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1986, 1990, 1994.) The data come from the National Study of Writing Instruction (NSWI), sponsored by the National Writing Project, The College Board, and the Spencer Foundation, also incorporating data from the writing component of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This genealogy makes this study as an authoritative picture of the current state of writing instruction in the United States as we

are likely to have in the foreseeable future. Some data from this study have already been made public in article form (Applebee & Langer, 2009, 2011), but this volume adds further detail and covers some topics that are not previously reported. However, the book does something more. Over the same time as Applebee and Langer have been documenting practices of the teaching of writing, there has developed a robust literature on best practices (with research summarized in numerous handbooks and metastudies done by Hillocks, 1986, and Graham & Perrin, 2007). Furthermore, the NSWI had a qualitative component documenting practices of teaching and supporting writing assignments in the schools. From that qualitative data, this volume selects several examples in each chapter to show how best practices have been implemented and what they look like in real classrooms. These numerous descriptive examples together with a set of questions for reflection and discussion that end most chapters make this book also useful as a faculty development tool for teachers in all subject areas. While the examples are all from US classrooms, the practices and issues are potentially applicable in many other contexts, as are the discussion questions, so that this book can be used to foster discussion about the teaching of writing within different school systems internationally.

The overall news, presented in the second chapter based on a national survey and studies of six middle and high schools representing typical practice, is that there have been large changes in the teaching of writing over the past 30 years implemented widely and that students are being asked to write more than in the past. On the other hand, students do little extended writing (more than two pages) and the total amount of writing is still not large. Further writing tasks are largely driven by high-stakes assessment rather than broader pedagogic goals.

Chapters three through six then examine the practices implemented in the core subject areas of English language arts, social studies/history, mathematics, and science, based on a sample of 20 schools with a reputation for excellence in the teaching of writing. These schools represent five states with a range of approaches to curriculum and assessment. The practices described here will be familiar and recognizable as exemplary to anyone familiar with developments in writing pedagogy over the recent decades. The presentation's value is to document that these methods are in fact being implemented creatively within schools and to make them available as models and discussion for faculty and others considering ways to improve instruction at their schools (particularly as supplemented by "Reflect and Discuss" activities at the end of Chapters two through nine). Furthermore, Chapters two through nine find these best practices in each area aligned with the Common Core Standards, when implemented through a more creative integration into a pedagogically informed curriculum rather than through a direct and explicit teaching of the standards. The Common Core Standards are a US initiative whereby the separate states (now 45 out of 50) have voluntarily (with federal incentives) adopted shared sets of standards for primary and secondary education. Standards have been written for English Language Arts & Literacy in other subjects. Standards for Mathematics have also been written, with standards for Social Studies and Sciences still being drafted.

Chapter seven, however, finds that even the best instruction in writing has only partially integrated technology fully into writing practices, even though in higher education and the workplace almost all writing is born digitally, circulates digitally, and participates in various digital interactive forums. Students are comfortable with technology, regularly access information from the Internet, and use word-processing software at home. In school, however, they still often write by hand, either because of a lack of equipment or to prepare for high-stakes exams that are to be handwritten. Furthermore, while presentational software is used for lessons and more rarely for student presentations,

there is little use of technology to help students develop thinking, interaction, or collaboration. Nonetheless, the case studies do provide a few examples of how all aspects of technology have been integrated into classrooms. With respect to technology, in general, though, practice seems to fall behind best practice as well as below the expectations of the Common Core Standards.

Chapter eight with respect to English language learners' writing instruction reports a somewhat more optimistic picture of integration of language learning into a wider range of language arts experiences. Furthermore, English language learners are assigned an equivalent amount of writing to first language writers; however, an overweighting of attention to language correctness and greater concern for meeting assessments serve to limit the complexity and challenge of writing experiences, even in the exemplary case study schools. Meeting the expectations of the Common Core Standards for integration of language instruction into a fully challenging curriculum will present a challenge. Chapter nine, however, finds that exemplary schools in high poverty areas are able to create fully integrated and challenging writing experiences equivalent to schools serving more socio-economically privileged populations. Strong school cultures of excellence, supported by the principal on down, were important in maintaining these best practices and addressing the Common Core Standards in creative ways, integrated in a pedagogically rich curriculum.

The final chapter draws together the lessons of the study under five major themes, briefly: writing is an integral part of knowledge in all subjects; school or department team initiatives can improve writing in all disciplines; new technologies offer opportunities that should be embraced; extended writing should be emphasized more on assessments; and the Common Core Standards offer opportunities that should be taken up. This study recognizes the place and inevitability of the standards and associated assessments, at the same time as recognizing they are two-edged swords. If standards are implemented from a restrictive perspective, which rewards formulaic responses, they can narrow curriculum and limit opportunities to learn writing; if supportive of a rich and broad curriculum, which integrates writing into all subject areas, the Common Core Standards and the related assessments can provide positive challenges and opportunities to improve writing instruction.

The book does pull in several directions: as a research report on the state of writing instruction, as a set of curricular recommendations, and as a practical textbook for faculty and curriculum development groups. This tension is not necessarily a bad thing, though it sometimes can be jarring for a reader. The title *Writing Instruction that Works* announces that this will be a practical book, but the early chapters read like a research report, and almost all the chapters begin and end with research findings. But tagged on to the end of most chapters are sets of recommendations for "Future Directions". Even more jarring are the "Reflect and Discuss" activities that form a second tag to all but the first and last chapters. Furthermore, the case materials in the middle of the chapters, although initially cast as ethnographic data, actually serve as models for effective implementation. Yet this trioka of impulses does work together, for the readers of this volume are likely to wear several hats as teachers, curriculum leaders, and readers of research, so that the volume not only sets forth the promising but imperfect situation in writing instruction but also provides directions and then practical implementations. For teachers in various subject areas or concerned with particular problems, the research and policy recommendations serve as warrants for curricular transformation, for which the practical materials provide grist.

This volume offers a major tool in the project of improving writing instruction to prepare students for higher education and work in an information and knowledge society. The kinds of critical and analytical learning students will address in post-secondary education depend on students being able to develop and argue ideas coherently and at length in writing, within the reasoning and evidence of all subject areas. Furthermore, this writing is increasingly realized through technology and fostered within technologically mediated interaction. The workplace as well is saturated with digitally produced and circulated communication, and one's ability to carry out complex tasks and advance in a career more often than not requires high levels of writing skills, pursued in flexible, creative ways that far exceed the formulaic expectations of much schooling. Active, participatory citizenship too, in the age of the Internet, calls on articulate expression and argumentation. We have quite a ways still to go, and this book by letting us know where we are, what we might do, and how to go about doing it will help us get there.

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