“A writer’s brain is like a magician’s hat. If you’re going to get anything out of it, you have to put something in first”

(Louis L’Amour, 1908-1988)

What strategies would you teach students to support writing difficulties? Almost all pre-service teachers (n=150) in their final year of a teaching degree (2007) responded with:

- Modelled writing
- Shared writing
- Guided Writing
- Independent writing
- Make a class book
- Journal writing
- Language experience
- Text innovation
- Have-a-go-pad
- Show examples of different genres.

Some included:
- explicit instruction in handwriting.
- use writing frameworks.
- teach editing skills.
- teach grammar, punctuation and spelling.

What is a strategy?

Definition: Purposeful and effortful procedure or plan for accomplishing a desired outcome. (Wong & Berninger, 2005)

One reason, though obviously not true of all teachers nor in all classrooms, is that whole language and the process approach often place such an emphasis on the student’s natural development of writing abilities within authentic contexts that many students – including those who struggle with writing within these classrooms – do not get instruction in writing and self-regulation strategies that is as explicit as they need. (Harris & Graham, 1996; Graham & Harris, 2005, p. 10).

Writing about your feelings is a cathartic act that can lower blood pressure, reduce depression and boost the immune system (Smyth, 1998; Swedlow, 1999).

...and many of these people are teachers and may forget how hard it can be.
The transmission of thoughts onto paper calls for a delicate and highly complex process of neurodevelopmental integration that synchronizes: attention, spatial and sequential production, language ability, higher-order cognition and motor skills (Levine, 1998). Discuss the impact of each function on writing development.

And why is writing difficult?

Imagine you were required to write 5,000 word paper on the following topic:

**higher order cognition and motor skills** (Levine, 1998).

Discuss the impact of each function on writing development.

List the different skills you would have to employ to complete these tasks.

Take home paper, closed book exam, when is it due?

And these are but a few of the obvious...

- Attend to the task
- Generate some ideas, formulate a plan from a myriad of possibilities and hold it in memory
- Commit and stick to a theme
- Find the right words including topic specific vocabulary (i.e., neurodevelopmental)
- Put these words into cohesive order
- Pick up a pen / sit in front of the keyboard (...fingers poised)
- Write/type the words ensuring you spell them correctly
- Attend to grammar and other conventions
- Hold the theme of what you are writing about for the next 4,999 words
- Edit, proofread, revise...submit.

Did I forget to mention referencing?

Writing does not need to be taught.

Writing is the mirror image of reading.

Writing is merely a motor act.

And...because of the myths

**MYTH**

- Written expression is the ‘final frontier’ of human communication, emerging after comprehension, speech, and then reading (Joseph, 1992). Writing is a culturally derived system of communication.
- Preschool children across the world start letters at the bottom and proceed in a right to left direction; until they receive instruction in letter formation for their particular written language (Berninger, 2002).
- Compared to Language by Ear, Language by Mouth and Language by Eye, the developmental process for Language Hand (writing) can take up to 20 years. Levine (1996) describes six stages.

- The visual-spatial analysis requirements for letter production are more complex than the visual-spatial requirements for letter recognition in reading words or for letter selection on a computer keyboard (Berninger & Winn, 2006).
- Handwriting is not just a motor skill. Letter production requires a precise, complete visual-motor program called ‘kinetic melody’ (Luria, 1980) for planning and producing each sequentially ordered component stroke.

Handwritten and spoken and written language are not the same

Writing: an immense neurological juggling act

- grammar and syntax
- sentence construction
- spelling
- vocabulary
- handwriting
- visual spatial organisation
- planning

Writing is a particular form of expressive language that requires the co-ordination of multiple jointly working brain structures for successful completion (Feifer & De Fina, 2002).
Processes that underpin writing

Effective Strategies

The continuum of human ability

Below Average

Above Average

Developmental Functions
(Levine, 2003) (see Schools Attuned)

Neurological

Attention
Memory
Language
Spatial Ordering
Sequential Ordering
Motor
Higher Order Thinking
Social Thinking

ADHD & LD.

Environmental

Below Average

Above Average

Phonological-orthographic memory - Memory for sound-symbol associations.
Visualisation - Memory for appearances of letters, letter patterns and words.
Retrieval of words - Precise naming and retrieval of specific vocabulary.
Semantic memory - Recall of ideas and facts.
Passage memory - Serial flow of ideas from what was written earlier in the passage to what will follow.
Recall of rules - Retrieval and rapid application of the mechanics of writing (e.g., capitalisation, punctuation, grammar and spelling).
Motor memory - Recall of letter formations / location of keys on keyboard.

What’s hard for Dane now?

• Reading multi-syllabic words
Urethra = “you-ret-her” Semimembranosus?
• Comprehending written and spoken text
• Spelling spontaneously

• Using punctuation correctly!
• Remembering sequence of information when teaching
• Managing the anxiety of being a perfectionist
• Time management

Common writing difficulties

Skills that underpin writing

Teacher knowledge

Effective Strategies must be taught explicitly

(See: www.allkindsofminds.org Impact of Neurodevelopmental Dysfunction on Writing)
How to Help Your Students Write Well: An Interview with Steven Graham Brown (2007)

“The ‘once and done’ model doesn't work for these kids...we found in some of the control groups, the teacher presented it once to the class and the kids didn't get it. Kids with learning disabilities need extra help or scaffolding. You need to go over it and be sure they understand." "Be systematic and explicit. Give a model, talk about it, show it, and do it. Tell them exactly what you want."

Read the full interview on www.ldonline.com
http://ldonline.org/article/12991

Paul 6 years: “at risk”

• Identified in PP as having very poor fine motor skills
• Particularly weak in PP at drawing and early writing
• Referred to OT did not attend.

• Entering Year 1, Paul was considered developmentally below his peers and displayed highly immature behaviour.

This is Paul’s first writing entry for Year 1

Note: Structure “Here is…”

Here is Dad. Here is Declan.

This is Ben’s first writing entry for Year 1. He sits near Paul and is one of the most able students. Note: Structure “Here is…”

Is handwriting that important?

• Motor difficulties impair compositional fluency so automaticity is compromised.

• Automatic letter writing is the single best predictor of length and quality of written composition in the middle primary years (Graham, et al, 1997)

• Poor handwriting is also the result of poor letter representation in memory...and training in handwriting fluency improved word recognition in reading. Teaching strengthens the connection between writing letters and decoding letters in at-risk writers (Berninger & Winn, 1997).

So, what does this mean in terms of instruction?

Berninger (2005) argues that:

• A primary motor disorder usually leads to handwriting disorder, however if normal preschool motor, then the child may develop dysgraphia (non-motor) (Berninger, 2005).

(Paul has an identified primary motor disorder)

• Direct instruction in handwriting is critical and this should include visual cues and verbal mediation.
Early intervention program

- Paul’s teacher is philosophically opposed to underachievement.
- She teaches handwriting 20 mins 4/5 and writing 40 mins 5/5 days = over 4.5 hours per week.
- All writing tasks are based on oral language activities, developmentally sequenced and highly structured.
- All aspects of writing are taught from the beginning of Year 1.

Explicit and timely instruction that is carefully sequenced and structured.

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Excerpt: Writing Overview (Perks, 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MECHANICS</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See sequence in handout</td>
<td>Copy shapes (e., circles, zig zags) then lower case letters</td>
<td>Upper case letters second, then revise lower case.</td>
<td>Rateach both upper and lower case based on need. Practice is ongoing throughout Year 1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>Folded (4.5cms)</td>
<td>Lines (4.5cms)</td>
<td>Dotted 1/2s (0.5cm/1cm dotted lines)</td>
<td>Dotted 1/3s (0.5cm/1cm dotted lines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>Crayon</td>
<td>Pencil</td>
<td>Pencil</td>
<td>Pencil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You have a copy of this.

---

All writing tasks are structured and planned. This planning sheet was completed before the description.

---

This is Paul three terms later

Note: Recount

---
This is Ben three terms later

Note: Recount

On Saturday I went to the Learning Rec Centre with my family and I. When I came to the Rec Centre there lots of chairs and people from then he was waving he came up to me and gave me a present said "thank you"! Then we dived in the pool cause it was time to eat were taking cupcakes, teacups, and cheeses. Soon it was time to go home. It was the best party.

The same program was replicated by a beginning teacher at a new school.

Why writing is difficult

Processes that underpin writing

Teacher knowledge

Effective Strategies

Common observable behaviours and empirically based strategies

1. Anorexic writing
2. ‘Run on’ sentences

An example of anorexic writing
...meet Ruby

Note: Ruby’s perception that good writing is about ‘filling a page’. She is more concerned about physical effort than conveying ideas.

Rules for writing a story
Ruby, 10 years
After viewing the stimulus picture Ruby took ten minutes to write this:

The sky was gray on a holiday. My sister in the car. The car broke down. The car was white. I began to wait to be rescued. It was a holiday.

Knowledge-telling
- A list of topic related ideas, “retrieved from memory” (De La Paz, 1997, p. 167) or the stimulus provided, rather than planned, reflective writing (Graham & Harris, 2005).

- Like Snoopy, Ruby has no idea where her story is headed.
- She generates ideas on the basis of what she sees, rather than ‘crafting’ a narrative.
- Revision means a simple substitution or addition.

Ruby has great difficulty with the mental operations that underlie generating content and revising effectively.

Conspicuous Strategies
- "You tell me, and I forget; you teach me, and I remember; you involve me, and I learn" - Benjamin Franklin

Conspicuous Strategies make cognitive processes explicit

Self-Regulatory Strategies
- What: Strategies to support planning, generating, organising and revising by teaching writing structure explicitly.
- Goal: For learners to independently apply procedures to monitor and manage their own writing.
- Theory: Cognitive-Behaviour-Modification
- Process: from conscious to unconscious application.
- Research: Strongest effect size (0.82) Graham & Perin (2007)

Stages in Acquiring and Managing Use of a Strategy

(Harris & Graham, 1996)
- Stage 1: Develop background knowledge
- Stage 2: Discuss It
- Stage 3: Model It
- Stage 4: Memorise It
- Stage 5: Support It
- Stage 6: Independent Performance

COPS (a proofreading guide)
- CAPITALISATION
- OVERVIEW
- PUNCTUATION/paragraphs
- SENTENCES/SPELLING

PWRR (a proofreading guide)
- BEGINNING
- MIDDLE
- END

TREE DARE, SCAN
- POWER (Englert, 1992)
- STOP (De La Paz & Graham, 1996)

PLAN
- (Graham et al, 1992)

REVIEW
- (Baranski, 2003)

PLANS
- See Harris & Graham (2005) for a detailed review of all these prompts.
Self Regulatory Strategy: The Story Grammar Strategy

1. Think of a story that you would like to share with others.
2. Let your mind be free.
   - Who, When, Where
   - What happens when the main character does or tries to do it?
   - What happens with other characters?
   - How does the story end?
   - How does the main character feel, how do other characters feel?
4. Make notes of your story ideas for each part.
5. Write your story – use good parts, add, elaborate, or revise as you write or afterwards, so it makes sense.

(Harris & Graham, 1996, p.49)

How I wrote the story about the Bad Puppy

What is it I have to do? Write a story about the picture.

What do I see? A sign that says ‘Bad Puppy’ and a picture of a dog who is not in his kennel. The dog has lots of teeth and a red collar. He is smiling. There is a letter but I cannot read the words. It might be a list. There are some birds drinking out of the puppy’s bowl.

Now, I need to look carefully at my story reminder and follow the steps.

W-W-W-What2-How2

W -Who is the main character? The puppy; who else is in the story? I’ll have to make that up, the birds and the puppy’s family. The puppy belongs to a little girl called Jessica. I will call the puppy Rascal because he is naughty.

W – When does the story take place? Okay, I think I’ll look at the picture. It doesn’t really tell, so I will make it after school.

W – Where? It looks like my Aunt’s house. She lives in the country, so my story will take place in a small country town called Waroona.

Now I need What=2. What does the puppy do? I think the puppy does lots of naughty things like chewing shoes, chasing cats, jumping on the furniture and running away. I think Jessica loves Rascal but her mum makes a list of the bad things he does. Jessica’s mum wants to take him back to the pet shop.

Good, I am nearly finished with my planning. The last thing I need is How =2.

H – How does the story end? Jessica’s mum decides one day that she has had enough of all the bad things the puppy does and she writes a list. When Jessica gets home from school her mum tells her that she is taking the puppy back to the shop. Jessica feels very sad. When Jessica’s mum takes the puppy back the pet shop owner says “but all puppies are naughty”. Jessica’s mum decides to take Rascal to puppy school. Jessica is happy again.

Now it is time to write my story.

The Bad Puppy

This is the story about Jessica and Rascal her naughty puppy. That sounds good. Look at the story reminder and see what the next part is. Jessica came home from school one day but Rascal was not waiting for her at the gate. Okay, now I have to say what happens next. As Jessica walked home alone she heard her mum shouting at Rascal, “You are a bad puppy, look at my favourite shoes. They are wretched. I have had enough. I am taking you back to the pet shop.” Now I have to say how Jessica feels.

“But he’s only a puppy,” Jessica cried. She was worried what would happen to Rascal. I have to end the story now. Jessica’s mum rang up the pet shop and read out a long list of all the naughty things Rascal had done but the man said that all puppies can be naughty. Mum decided to take Rascal to puppy school and Jessica was happy.
While much longer, Ruby's story uses simple language. To develop her language use, a new strategy is introduced that focuses on detail, action and elaboration.

**Going from spoken to scaffolded written language for narratives**

**Recommendations of meta analysis: Teaching Expressive Writing to Students with Learning Disabilities**

“Providing feedback about the quality of work, missing pieces, and the strength of their work. Feedback from a teacher or peer helps students develop writing style.

Increasing evidence also suggests the importance of teaching skills such as spelling and punctuation in conjunction with skills such as organization, text structure, and revision techniques” (Gersten & Baker, 1999).

To develop Laura's background knowledge, before writing...

- Laura
- Ruby

**Chart for Action Words (Verbs)**

- Action words tell what people, things, or animals do, they are DOING words
- He lifted the heavy box.
- The book fell on the floor.
- The horse galloped down the road.

**Chart for Describing Words (Adjectives)**

- Describing words tell more about people, things, or animals.
- Describing words help to PAINT A PICTURE. Describing words may tell about: colour, shape, how many, size, feelings, sounds, taste, etc.
- The three, colourful toothbrushes are mine.
- She was a nervous person.
- The pretty flower was red.
- I like hot salty chips.

**Chart for Action Helpers (Adverbs)**

- Action helpers are words that go along with action words. They help tell more about the action. They tell how the action is done.
- The dog ran away quickly.
- She smiled happily.
- The book fell on the floor.
- The horse galloped down the road.

**Making the writing process work: Strategies for composition and self-regulation** (Harris & Graham, 1996, p. 69)

**Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High School**

- Meta-analysis
- 11 significant strategies...some with a greater effect size than others
- 0.82 (large) to 0.25 (small)

Download the 206 page report at http://www.all4ed.org/publications/WritingNext/WritingNext.pdf

To develop Ruby's language use, a new strategy is introduced that focuses on detail, action and elaboration.
11/3/2010

Megan, 10 Years

Note the use of run on ‘ands’.

…and her motivation for writing.

‘Run on’ sentences are common and sentence structure can be taught in a number of ways.

1. See the lesson from SRA Programs Reasoning and Writing (1995) or Language for Writing (2006) MHEonline.com
2. See How to Write a Paragraph (a Hawker Brownlow Publication)
3. Teach the formula for writing a simple and complex sentence: C + I + P = simple sentence.

1. How to correct run ons
   1. Everybody, pencils down. Find part B.
      I’ll read the instructions: Fix up the run-on sentences in this paragraph. Not all the sentences are run-ons.
   2. I’ll read the first sentence: Don found a lost dog and the dog had a collar around its neck.
      Everybody, is that a run on sentence? (Signal) Yes.
      So we’ll find where the first sentence should end by finding the subject and the predicate. The subject is Don. Everybody, what words tell more about Don? (Signal) Found a lost dog. That’s the predicate, and that’s where the sentence should end. Put a full stop after dog….
      (Direct Instruction Program: Reasoning and Writing, Lesson 42, p. 134).

Emma Grade 2-3 (7-7.5years)

Does not like writing.
Writing is sometimes poorly constructed, lacking in depth and agrammatical.
Speech is tangential at times.
Spelling can be variable.

November Writing sample for Lorraine

Simple short sentences, variable grammar, some spelling errors but within appropriate range for age.

Sentence Formula

Step 1
Define a simple sentence
CIP = Capital letter + Idea + Punctuation

Example: Emma went to the shops to buy a cold drink.

Write three simple sentences about what you did at recess.
Write four simple sentences describing your favourite character in the story.
Sentence Formula

**Step 2**
Define a complex sentence.
CIP = Capital letter + Idea + Joiner + Idea + Punctuation

Words such as **and, but, so, because, instead** are **joiners**. Don’t allow students to overuse ‘and’.

**Example:** Emma went to the shops to buy a cold drink and a newspaper for her mum.

Write 1 simple sentence + 1 complex sentence with 1 joiner + 1 simple sentence + 1 simple sentence with 1 joiner about what you did at recess.

---

November Home program

2 simple + 1 complex (1J) + 1 simple + 1 complex (1J) + complex (2J)

"Yesterday I got a present. It was from my best friend. It was a box bag and it was handmade."

---

March Home program

Parent assisted with spelling, but no help with structure was given.

---

Sentence Formula

Now it’s your turn!
This is a complex sentence.
CIP = Capital letter + Idea + Joiner + Idea + Punctuation

Words such as **and, but, so, because, instead** are **joiners**.

**Example:** I wasn’t allowed to go to David Jones yesterday because my husband thinks I have too many pairs of shoes.

Write a recount comprising of: 1 simple sentence + 1 complex sentence with 3 joiners + 1 simple sentence + 1 complex sentence with 1 joiner about the film "For the Birds".

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Teaching Persuasive Writing?
This is a great resource.

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There is a very poor trickle down of research to teachers...arguably those who potentially make the most difference in children’s lives.

We must apply the principles of best practice in writing instruction to work smarter in the classroom.