Developing Gifted and Talented Writers

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Why Writing?

• Developed writing talent can serve as a moderator to enhance academic success in other domains.

• Writing talent is becoming increasingly important in knowledge economy work.

• Writing is a domain of interest for some gifted students.

• Seventy-five percent (75%) of U.S. students scored below the proficiency standard on the most recent NAEP writing assessment at both 8th and 12th grade levels.

• Almost half of the students taking the ACT score below the college-readiness level on writing.

• A study in the University of California System found that the ability to compose an extended text was the best predictor of successful coursework during the freshman year.

Characteristics of Writers with High-Potential

• Use of paradox
• Use of parallel structure
• Use of rhythm
• Use of visual imagery
• Melodic combinations
• Figurative language (alliteration)
• Confidence w/ reverse structure
• Original adjectives and adverbs
• Feeling of movement in text
• Insight or wisdom in writing
• Sophisticated syntax/punctuation
• Lyricism in prose writing
• Natural ear for language
• Sense of humor in writing
• Philosophical bent in writing
• Play with words or language
Developing Specific Skills Associated with Writing Talent

Vocabulary Matters

Lexical knowledge and sophistication have long been associated with advanced writing performance.

- **Receptive Lexical Knowledge**
  Ability to understand meaning of words when reading or listening
- **Productive Lexical Knowledge**
  The words available to a person when writing or speaking

**Lexical Diversity** is a linguistic term that refers to the variety of words used in a text.

Lexical Diversity

- Has been positively related to higher holistic writing scores in L1
- Has been positively related to higher holistic writing scores in L2

Lexical Sophistication

- Using words that are not frequently used by others in writing (originality)
- Has been positively related to higher holistic writing scores in L1 and L2

- The development of extensive vocabulary is a fundamental tool to generate a level deep analysis and comprehension in writing.

- A 2008 study found a relationship between students’ vocabulary skills and their final grades in high school English classes.

- A 1993 study found that vocabulary proficiency (lexical diversity and sophistication) accounted for more than 50% of the variance in students' essay scores.

Selecting Students for Advanced Writing Talent Development

a) Above-average verbal ability

b) Interest in writing

c) Commitment to intentional practice

d) Interest in New Media Writing

e) Avoid testing and formal cut-offs
Components of Writing Talent Development Program

Four Levels of Curriculum for Developing Advanced Talents

Writing differentiation for exceptional talent at four broad levels.

1. Curriculum as Course of Study
2. Curriculum as Standards
3. Curriculum as Learning Design
4. Curriculum as Authentic Engagement

What are some ways you could develop talent across the four levels?
Best Practices for Developing Students’ Writing Talents

1. Instructing students on planning, revising, and editing compositions.
   - Help students understand the three primary phases of writing—plan, draft, revise.
   - Teach specific techniques for each of the three phases.

2. Engaging students in prewriting activities.
   - Dedicate time for teaching students how to plan, organize, and imagine
   - Use visual tools (e.g. storyboards, mind maps, flow charts, etc.)

3. Conducting inquiry activities that lead to writing.
   - The best writing includes engaging and interesting content
   - Writing and learning are reciprocal cognitive activities

4. Having students write collaboratively.
   - Collaborative writing teaches communication about writing
   - Collaborative writing emphasizes organization and consistent voice
   - Collaborative writing can make writing both more fun and more challenging

5. Having students read models for writing.
   - Have students read like writers—paying attention to structure not content
   - Focus on ways experts organize, use language, break rules, and surprise us
   - Set up activities where students compare their writing to expert models

6. Using writing for learning content
   - Routinely writing summaries is a verified way to develop writing skills
   - Writing is thinking on paper and good thinking precedes good writing
   - Push students to think deeply and carefully about a topic as they write about it

7. Emphasize details of composition and revision
   - Teach multiple elaboration strategies
   - Teach sentence combining and sentence variety
   - Teach revision for better words
   - Teach grammar and mechanics and point out mistakes before bad habits develop

In the schools that produce the best student writing outcomes, students are spending a minimum of 60 minutes per day writing.

What is one way you could implement some of these ideas to develop talented writers?