



Lecture Transcript

Session 5: Teaching Writing as a Process

Dr. Jeanne R. Paratore: I'd like to begin by discussing the differences between the types of writing that go on in classrooms. I want you to think about teaching writing in response to reading, as different from teaching writing as a process. When we ask children to describe a character, or when we ask them to write a summary of a story they've just read, or when we ask them to create a timeline, or any of those activities that relate to reading, those aren't writing tasks that undergo writing process. Those aren't tasks that children revisit, to revise, to edit, and make better. Those are important writing opportunities, but they're different from those writing opportunities when children engage in the full process of writing. That process being an opportunity to plan, an opportunity to draft, an opportunity, or perhaps many opportunities to revise, and edit. For our purposes today, we're going to focus on teaching writing as a process. What many talk about as the craft of writing. How do we engage children in the craft of writing?

Dr. Paratore (VO/Interview): I think it's important for teachers to understand and to help children to understand that these two types of writing are very different. And they take different instructional approaches in the classroom.

Dr. Paratore: Writers begin with planning. But particularly, in the case of emergent writing, planning is really critical. For very young writers, and especially for children who are acquiring English as a second language, the opportunity to plan, to rehearse, to share what they're going to write before they write it, can be a critical step in the writing process. Now, the drafting stage, then, is that time when children get their ideas down on paper for the first time. And typically, when we ask children to draft, we emphasize that what's important in the draft is their focus on ideas. We don't worry so much about the conventions of language during drafting. We want them, rather, to think about the content, the message, the ideas they're trying to convey. Go ahead, Cruz.

Cruz Sanabria: You just want them to write down their ideas, even if it's not structured properly?

Dr. Paratore: Exactly.

Cruz Sanabria: Just whatever comes out of their thinking?

Dr. Paratore: Exactly. Especially the first draft. We want

We want them to really think about the content. Now, some of the organization of thought can go on during the planning phase. I can think as I plan that, Gee, I want to tell a story, and I want to make sure I tell about a setting, a problem, a solution, and a consequence. The planning stage can help children do some organization. They draft it. During revision they might reorganize, add some details, change some details; but it's in the editing phase where we really clean it up.

Cruz Sanabria: Create some structure?

Dr. Paratore: I'm probably creating structure in both the drafting and the revising phases. In the editing phase, I'm polishing the conventions of language, if you will.

Cruz Sanabria: Got it. Thank you.

Dr. Paratore: OK? Go ahead, Jodi.

Jodi Wollner: When you speak about editing, when we sit down with, let's say, a first grader, and we talk about the point where we're ready to publish, I won't go over every single spelling and grammatical error. And with that child, I will pull out perhaps one or two things. But I tell them that I am their publisher; I am their editor. And when I go and I type up their story, I will put it in the form of conventional English. And I just wanted to ask for clarification on that, because the way that it's sounding to me is that they're going and cleaning it up themselves.

Dr. Paratore: OK. One of the primary points I want to make is that, during revision I focus on content, during editing I focus on form. That's critical. Now, I have a policy, and this is not, I mean.... So much of what I say to you during these workshops there's a strong research base behind, and much of it ends up to be a teacher's preference. My teaching preference is not to display work that has not been brought to standard, what I would call standard, English. Because I'm teaching children that publication means polishing and bringing it to standard. Now, my typical practice is to require them to edit anything that they're capable of editing. And they will get my help, receive my help or the help of someone else, for anything that they're not capable of doing on their own.

Jodi Wollner: Right.

Dr. Paratore: OK?

Jodi Wollner: Back to the planning process. When you talk about having them map out the setting, the character, the problem, the solution, are you referring to topics that you are giving them? Or are you referring to stories that they are generating from their own experiences?

Dr. Paratore: OK, topic choice and child-initiated topics are plain and simply of critical importance. I mean, Don Graves taught us in the early 1980s, that when teachers initiated topics, we essentially robbed from children the motivation to write. That, if I'm never choosing

never choosing my own topic, why would I want to write? Child-initiated topics is of critical importance. That does not mean that teachers never assign a topic. In a balanced writing program, there will be some time, little, I hope, when I assign topics. And most of the time will be student initiation of topic. Kristin.

Kristin Stoetzel: My kindergartners this year, they wanted to write creative stories. And it was difficult for me, when they wrote creative stories, because I couldn't assess their understanding of story structure. Those stories tended to go a little off the tangent, you know? And I'm just wondering what your opinion is, and how to strike a balance, between letting them do their creative writing, but also teaching them the structure of writing.

Dr. Paratore: There are a couple of things to say. And at the start, I need to say to you, there is not one right way to do this. But, we're talking about teaching children to write multiple genres. If they're writing a story, as a kindergarten child that story might have a beginning, middle, and end. Or, as they move on through the grades, a setting, problem, solution, and consequence. If they're not writing a story, then different text structures work. And so we need to sort out, and help them sort out, what they're writing. And we need to help them think about what they're writing, as part of the plan. Now, so, we know these are the writing processes that we need to help children develop. And then there are classroom practices that help us develop those processes. And we'll talk about these throughout the afternoon. But, for right now, I'll simply name them. Effective teachers begin with a mini lesson on a particular lesson; they provide children lots and lots of time to write. And one of the things that seems to be critical about this is daily time to write. Children need to know that every single day they're going to have a chance to write, because that's part of the rehearsal they go through in writing. Teacher/student conferences help teachers provide feedback to students about their writing. And then having time to share sends the message to children that writing is the process of sharing information, and there is someone who is interested in that information you're sharing.