**The Challenge of the CCSS for Teachers of Writing: Developing Five Kinds of Knowledge through Five Kinds of Composing**

The good news about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for teachers of writing: The CCSS emphasize writing convincing arguments about issues that matter, clear and comprehensive informational texts that can do meaningful work in the world, and compelling narratives that foster an understanding of oneself, others, and the world rather than the “formulaic writing and . . . thinking” rewarded by so many current standards and standards-based assessments (Hillocks, 2002, p. 200).

The bad news: Traditional approaches to the teaching of writings aren’t enough to meet these new standards.

The problem in a nutshell: Traditional instruction does not develop all of the kinds of knowledge writers need -- in large measure because the focus of instruction is on the composing of particular assignments rather than on developing robust conceptual and strategic knowledge that transfers to new composing situations.

Our solution: Teachers of writing should seek to develop the five kinds of knowledge writers need by regularly engaging their students in five kinds of composing that expert writers use.

The Five Kinds of Knowledge Writers Need

If our students are to meet or even exceed the CCSS, they need far more than the knowledge of formulas. We think that Hillocks (1986b) provides a useful framework for understanding just what more is involved.

According to Hillocks (1986), writers need to have knowledge of both form and substance. Nothing new here—yet. What Hillocks adds to the mix is a distinction long made in cognitive psychology: the difference between declarative and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge is knowledge of *what*, a kind of knowledge that can be articulated. Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, is, knowledge of *how*, a kind of knowledge that has to be performed. If you put it all together, you have a two-by two matrix that we have elsewhere called the inquiry square (cf. Fredricksen, Wilhelm, & Smith, 2012; Smith, Wilhelm, & Fredricksen, 2012 ; Wilhelm, Smith, & Fredricksen, 2012) Writers must have all four kinds of knowledge described by that square if they are going to write effectively: declarative knowledge of form, declarative knowledge of substance, procedural knowledge of form, procedural knowledge of substance. Bur writing does not occur in a vacuum. Writing is motivated by a purpose and situated in both an immediate context and a wider context (Hillocks, 1995) and those contexts have dramatic effects on what and how one writes. Knowledge of purpose and context, then, is the fifth kind of knowledge writers need.

Taking a Closer Look

For efficiency’s sake, we’ll start with knowledge of purpose and context, the last of the five kinds of knowledge we addressed above. In schools students characteristically write to fulfill an assignment that has no true personal or social significance, and they write for a single audience, their teacher, who is playing the role of evaluator (cite). But in the real world writers have to be mindful of purposes and what it means to write for, and get work done with different audiences. In this article, for example, we have to be mindful that we are describing what is necessary to help students become expert writers, and that we are writing for educational leaders rather than English/language Arts teachers, the group for whom we typically write. But the immediate situation is only one element of the context, for the immediate situation is always nested in a wider environment, “namely that of the culture (and possibly cultures) and its institutions” (Hillocks, 1995, p. 85). For example, we had to be mindful of the politics of the standards movement as we planned and wrote this article. According to the Standards document, students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language have to do much the same thing. Career and college-ready students, they argue, have to “adapt their communication in relation to audience, task, purpose, and discipline” (p. 7)

Let’s turn now to the inquiry square. Declarative knowledge of form means knowing the formal characteristics of the writing one intends to produce. At the sentence level declarative knowledge includes such things as knowing the names of the components of a sentence (e.g., subject and predicate), punctuation rules, and so on. This kind if knowledge is characteristically developed by the decontextualized study of traditional school grammar, a practice that persists despite the unequivocal conclusion of research that it does not help students write better or more correctly and may in fact, harm them, a point brought home by all three of the comprehensive reviews of composition studies done in the last 50 years (Braddock, Lloyd­-Jones, and Schoer, 1963; Hillocks, 1986a; Graham & Perrine, 2007). At the whole-text level it means knowing such things as the required components of a particular assignment or the features of the genre one is writing. This kind of knowledge is often addressed through the examination of models or the teaching of formulas that Hillocks (2002) critiques.

Declarative knowledge of substance means having knowledge of the content that will be included in a piece or writing. Declarative knowledge of substance is the focus of most literature-based curricula and virtually all of the writing instruction students tend to receive in other disciplines. The idea that informs this kind of teaching is that if students have a deep understanding of what they are writing about, be it the literary text they just read, the historical event they just studied, the experiment they just performed, or the problem they just solved, then they can write about it.

Procedural knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge of how to put declarative knowledge into practice. Procedural knowledge of form on the sentence level means being able to produce complete and correct sentences of various sorts, being able to use parallel constructions for clarity and rhetorical appeal, and so on. Procedural knowledge of form at the whole-text level means being able to produce the writing called for by a particular kind of text structure (or particular writing formula), for example, an attention-getting sentence at the beginning of an introduction.

Procedural knowledge of substance means knowing how to get the stuff about which one is going to write. It includes such things as being able to generate data through interviews, or to use a data base to identify authoritative sources to use in crafting a public policy argument and then being able to select the most compelling evidence from those sources.

As we’ve noted, common practice in schools emphasizes developing declarative knowledge. But the CCSS emphasize procedural knowledge (and so does current cognitive science). Take a look at the verbs that introduce the anchor standards for writing: write, write, write, produce, develop, use, conduct, gather, draw, write. If the CCSS emphasized declarative knowledge, the anchor standards would instead be introduced with verbs like recognize, identify, and define.

It’s clear that traditional approaches fail to develop expert writers, and that these approaches will also fall short of preparing students for success on the CCSS. So what to do? Our answer is that teachers and schools need to focus on the five kinds of composing.

The Five Kinds of Composing

In our experience, most of the composing the students are asked to do in school is responding to a particular writing prompt. In contrast, we believe that the five kinds of knowledge can best be developed through engagement in five kinds of composing: composing to practice, composing to plan, first-draft composing, final-draft composing, and composing to transfer – the kinds of composing expert writers engage in.

Perhaps the most significant difference between our instructional emphasis here and that which typifies the teaching of writing in schools is our emphasis on composing to practice. In our experience, most composition instruction, at least in classrooms that aren’t writing workshops, begins with an assignment. As we noted above, the instruction that follows characteristically seeks to develop declarative knowledge of form (through the assignment itself or a rubric, the study of models, or the study of traditional school grammar) or declarative knowledge of substance (through the reading and discussion of a text).

We advocate instead that instruction should begin by giving students extended practice in miniature so that they can develop the procedural knowledge they will need. Writing, we think, is similar to most other human activities. If you’re going become expert at it, you need to practice. *The New York Times Magazine* (Dubner & Levitt, 2006)reported that studies of expertise, which include investigations of such different activities as “soccer, golf, surgery, piano playing, Scrabble, writing, chess, software design, stock picking and darts” (par. 7) make

a rather startling assertion: the trait we commonly call talent is highly overrated. Or, put another way, expert performers — whether in memory or surgery, ballet or computer programming — are nearly always made, not born. And yes, practice does make perfect. (par. 8)

So, for example, in helping students meet the first anchor writing standard (Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence), we think that teachers need to give students lots and lots of practice in developing claims that are both defensible and controversial, in finding evidence that the audience for which they are writing would at least provisionally accept, in articulating the general principles that connect the evidence and the claim, and in anticipating and responding to objections their audience is likely to offer.

A second kind of composing is composing to plan. In many schools, composing to plan is done through brainstorming. We worry about the extent to which brainstorming has become the dominant mode of prewriting that students are asked to do because it presumes that students already know all that they need to know in order to write. Making effective use of what one already knows is certainly crucially important. In our view, however, composing to plan involves unearthing both the new and the known. If we want to prepare our students for college, we have to help them develop procedural knowledge of substance. We have to teach them how to get the stuff about which to write, for examine, by helping compose criteria for the selection of evidence in the texts they are reading, by composing effective interview questions or survey, and by designing experiments or studies.

# Instruction in first-draft composing is designedto help students overcome the fear of the blank page, a problem that plagues even profession writers.American journalist Gene Fowler characterizes that fear in a very memorable fashion: “Writing is easy: All you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.” Many students are stymied by composing their first words. So we have to give them lots and lots of practice getting started. We have to help them overcome their hesitation and procrastination. If we’re to do so, we have to provide more than a couple of opportunities to do so each quarter.

Once students have completed their drafts, we want to give them the instruction in polishing and publishing their work, what we call final-draft composing. We need to teach them what they can accomplish through revision so that they understand that while revision means

making sentence-level corrections, it also means making substantive additions and deletions and restructuring.

Finally, we believe that teachers must give students extensive opportunities to compose to transfer. In fact, as we’ve argued elsewhere (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006, 2010), we believe the issue of transfer is perhaps the single most important issue we need to address as teachers. We need always to think about how what we do today prepares students for their next class, their other subjects, their composing outside school, and their educational futures. Too often, we think, teachers subscribe to what Perkins and Salomon (1988) call the Little Bo Peep view of transfer; that is, if we “leave them alone” our students will come to a new task and automatically transfer relevant knowledge and skills. Instead Perkins and Salomon argue that if we want students to apply what they learn in new contexts that differ from the ones in which they initially learned the material, we have to give them conscious control over what they have learned. They call this *high-road transfer*. We think of it this way, “If you can name it, then you can move it.” As a consequence, we think it’s crucially important for teachers to give students the opportunity to reflect on what they wrote and to articulate the procedural knowledge they employed so that they develop robust knowledge that they can employ in their subsequent writing.

Effective writing curricula, we believe, must regularly engage students in all five kinds of composing. But we want to stress that we don’t see them as suggesting a rigid sequence. We’re not saying first you practice then you plan, then you draft, then you polish, then you work on transfer. Writing is a more iterative and recursive process. But we are saying that students must be regularly engaged in all five kinds of composing in service of crafting the convincing arguments, clear and comprehensive information texts, and compelling narratives that the CCSS call for.

We also want to stress that although we’re pleased with the neatness of building our instruction on 5 kinds of writing and 5 kinds of composing, our lists do not have a one-to-one correspondence. Composing to practice can be directed at procedural knowledge of form or procedural knowledge of substance or both. Composing to practice may be directed to developing procedural understandings that are useful across contexts or it may be directed toward addressing particular aspects of the immediate situation or wider environment. Composing to plan could include practice in finding or generating data that would be useful across contexts or it could include planning for purpose and a specific context. Both first-draft and final draft composing require all five kinds of knowledge working in concert. And if students are to transfer what they’ve learned we have to help them develop an articulated understanding of all five kinds of knowledge.

In summary, if students are to meet the CCSS writing standards, they need to develop all five kinds of knowledge. We think the best way of ensuring that that will happen is by engaging them in all five kinds of composing. We hope that the distinctions we make here help you look hard at your curriculum and your instruction to make sure that you’re helping students develop all the knowledge that they need and that you’re providing sufficient practice in all of the kinds of composing they’ll need to do. We believe that the CCSS and assessments designed to measure them call for much much more than the formulaic writing and thinking that too often characterize schools’ efforts to meet existing state standards. We believe instead that the CCSS provide an incentive for taking a hard look at our practice as we work to develop the deep and transferable knowledge about writing that our students need – in college, in their careers, and in their lives as democratic citizens.

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