

Writing Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners K-8

By Susan Lenski and Frances Verbruggen

Why this book?

This book was specifically written for educators-- ELL teachers and classroom teachers K-8 -- who are interested in supporting the writing development of English Language Learners (ELLs).

The Saanich district ELL teachers chose this book for Professional Book Club because we wanted to learn more about teaching writing to ELLs. We spend a lot of our teaching time developing ELLs' oral skills (speaking and listening) and reading skills and although we spend significant time on developing writing skills many of our ELLs lag behind their classmates in writing.

This book is divided into seven chapters

- Chapter 1: English Language Learners and Writing Research
- Chapter 2: From Theory to Practice: Writing with English Language Learners
- Chapter 3: Facilitating Writing Fluency
- Chapter 4: Teaching Narrative Writing
- Chapter 5: Academic Writing Genres: Description, Exposition and Persuasion
- Chapter 6: How Language Works
- Chapter 7: Assessing Writing

Drawbacks

The research drawn from is American - understandably as the authors are American - and the writing assessment standards referred to are US, not Canadian. Nonetheless, the latter are interesting to refer to and compare with our own provincial standards for ELLs.

Interesting Takeaways

- **Build empathy for ELLs**
 - Writing is difficult for ELLs. They need more opportunities to write across the curriculum
 - Explicit instruction in handwriting and spelling, grammar and organization
 - How easily ELLs learn to write depends on oral language proficiency (1st language); reading skills (first language); English reading proficiency and writing instruction in English
- **Explicit instruction is vital to ELLs Writing Success**
 - ELLs have gaps - vocabulary and knowledge of English language structures
- **Frontload language**
 - Teach academic vocabulary words (brick) and the connecting words (mortar) the words and phrases that determine the relationship between and among the 'brick' words
- **Spend a significant time on Pre-Writing Activities**

- Reading; brainstorming; discussing and planning
- **Provide language scaffolding**
 - Grammar and sentence structures
- **Use Editing checklists** (pages 155 and 156)
 - allow ELLs to participate more fully
- **'Publishing' is important**
 - can allow ELLs to better express themselves and practise key vocabulary
- **Build writing fluency** by
 - Practising handwriting/directionality of English
 - 'Signing in' - (pg 55) writing their names as students enter the classroom
 - 'Writing the room' -(pg 55) labelling the classroom - time to write words and sentences displayed in the classroom
 - 'Sharing the pen' - (pg 56) writing together
 - Teaching sight words
 - Storytelling - (pg 58) stories from home
 - Translating stories to English - from home language
 - Journal writing
 - Response cards (pg 64) Helpful questions to guide ELLs
 - Circles of Writing - (pg 67)
 - Using informal writing to develop formal writing
- **Teach Genres (many not part of ELLs knowledge/culture) -- Narrative, Description; Exposition and Persuasion**
 - Good organizers and useful lists of transition words
- **Teach grammar explicitly**