

Book review

Design principles for teaching effective writing

Fidalgo, R., Harris, K., & Braaksma, M. (Eds.) (2017). *Design Principles for Teaching Effective Writing*. Leiden, Boston: Brill | ISBN: 9789004270473

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The present book addresses strategy-focused instruction in writing. This type of instruction proposes a global package of content and components, which together have shown effects in improving writing competence in children. Strategy instruction has been proven to be one of the most effective teaching practices for improving writing skills, as well as writing to learn in different content domains. The book starts with an introduction by the editors about the importance of strategy-focused instruction to promote writing in the school context, both as a content and as a learning tool.

This book has a total of 12 chapters, divided in four sections. The first section includes an introduction and three chapters that approach writing instruction from different perspectives. The second section presents well-validated intervention programs for learning to write. This section includes two chapters presenting two specific instructional programs that can be used with full-range students in classrooms, across different educational contexts. The third part is composed of three chapters that address instructional programs focused on writing-to-learn. Finally, the fourth section includes the conclusion, as well as three chapters that discuss the strategy-instruction models presented in the previous sections.

1. Book contents

The chapters feature a detailed analysis of effective strategy-focused instructional programs. Such analysis is of the utmost importance to enhance the quality of future writing research as it addresses how to design and conduct effective interventions (Graham & Harris, 2014). Researchers and teachers may then tailor their own instructional practices in line with the main principles of these programs, as well as address regional and local needs.



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1.1 Part I: Strategy teaching for learning-to-write and for writing-to-learn

This section comprises three chapters. In the first chapter, Graham and Harris present a meta-analysis of the major meta-analyses of writing interventions done with children from Grade 1 to 12. With this meta-analysis, the authors suggest three primary sources to identify effective writing practices. First, the writing experiences and recommendations provided by professional writers. Second, the recommendations of those who teach writing and of those who observe and study writing teachers. Third, the use of the scientific method to systematically test the effectiveness of specific instructional approaches. The meta-analysis presented in this chapter focused on 20 existing meta-analyses that included true- and quasi-experiments testing the effectiveness of one or more writing practices, including typically developing students and/or struggling writers. Authors utilized the following outcome measures: writing quality, content learning, and reading comprehension. Most of the studies were conducted in English speaking countries. Overall, with this meta-analysis, Graham and Harris show that through the teaching of strategies for planning, revising, and editing, students can improve their writing skills. Also, the development of writing quality appeared to benefit from the improvement of handwriting and typing skills, as well as spelling and sentence construction skills.

In the second chapter, Robledo-Ramón and García present four strategy-focused interventions that proved to be effective in writing instruction among populations of students in international contexts: Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model (SRSD), the Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing Model (CSIW), Strategy Content Learning (SCL), and the Social Cognitive Model of Sequential Skill Acquisition (SCMSSA). The authors compare these four models by presenting a review of the fundamental principles, and analyse the theoretical frameworks, instructional designs, intervention techniques and strategies employed. Also, for each model, authors present two studies that showed its effectiveness and detail the characteristics of the intervention programme, evaluation, and major results.

Finally, in the third chapter, Foxworth and Mason present an introductory framework of the strategy-focused instruction on writing-to-learn. In this chapter, authors describe the SRSD model, highlighting the four procedures that are effective for teaching students to self-regulate their learning behaviours (viz., goal setting, self-monitoring, self-instruction, and self-reinforcement). Additionally, the authors mention two approaches – Quick Writes and RAFTS (Role, Audience, Format, Topics) – that are effective in writing instruction across diverse contents. Importantly, the authors describe the instructional approach and materials for Quick Writers, while the materials for RAFTS are available on an online chapter. Authors present some examples of different textual genres, for which teacher can use these brief activities.

1.2 Part II: Learning-to-write

The second section features two chapters. The first chapter, written by Fidalgo and Torrance, is devoted to the Cognitive Self-Regulation Instruction (CSRI). This chapter is complemented by an online chapter that provides a complete description of the lessons and supporting materials for this model. The authors present a theoretical and an empirical framework for this model, describing the various stages, aims, and instructional sequences that constitute the model and support the development of higher-level writing skills. The authors also present some strategies and mnemonics, like VOWELS, POD, LEA, and IDC, that can help students while writing. Each component of the model is described in detail, with reference to some strategies that teachers can use to support the development of writing skills. In the final part of this chapter, the authors present some investigations with middle-school Spanish students, with results showing the effectiveness of the CSRI as well as of some of its components.

The second chapter of this section, written by Harris and Graham, focuses on the Self-Regulated Strategy Development model (SRSD). Like the previous chapter, the authors present the theoretical contributions of this instructional program. They include a detailed description of the stages and components of SRSD, along with its main characteristics. The authors also mention some fictions, misrepresentations, and errors that are stated about SRSD model (e.g., SRSD is teacher-centered and is a cold and uncaring instruction approach). Some issues about this model that need to be addressed in future research are also pointed out in this chapter (e.g., test the effectiveness of this model as part of comprehensive writing programs).

1.3 Part III: Writing-to-Learn

This section comprises three chapters devoted to the use of writing as a tool to improve learning. In the first chapter, Mason presents an approach that intends to improve reading and writing by fostering learning. This author presents effective instruction and procedures that aim to develop an effective instructional sequence for teaching reading comprehension to support writing-to-learn activities. Mason proposes the use of the SRSD model for approaches combining reading comprehension and writing strategy, such as the TWA (Think before reading, think While reading, think After reading) and the PLANS (Pick goals, List goals, And, write Notes, Sequence notes), respectively. The components of this sequenced explicit instruction are presented in detail, along with the contents of the lessons for each approach and some research that supports this approach.

In the second chapter, Martínez, Mateos, and Martín analyse effective instructional sequences aimed to improve content-learning through an integration of reading and writing, with 11-12 years old students. The authors describe the three phases of instruction (viz., instructor modelling, group work, and individual work) that constitute the Strategies for Writing Syntheses to Learn (SWSL). In each phase,

students had to do a synthesis task, with increasing level of students' control over the tasks as they progress from the modelling phase to the individual work. Authors describe, in detail, each of the steps of this program, presenting the sessions and their contents that must be implemented to achieve the goals. As in other chapters, the authors review some studies supporting the effectiveness of this program to improve the use of reading and writing as learning tools.

Finally, in the third chapter, Rosário and colleagues present the role of self-regulated learning (SRL) in the learning process of different academic levels. The authors present three intervention programs that were designed for students from elementary to higher education. This chapter is supplemented by an E-chapter, where the theoretical concepts are applied to educational settings. The authors describe the PLEE (Plan – Execution – Evaluation) model, which is the theoretical background to these intervention programs. In SRL, each activity should be planned, executed, and then evaluated. Each one of these phases is taught explicitly. SRL uses written texts to teach self-regulation strategies, supporting students to improve declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge about these strategies.

1.4 Part IV: Concluding chapters

In this final section, three chapters are dedicated to a thorough discussion and reflections of the contents of this book. In the first chapter, MacArthur reflects on the characteristics that make strategy instruction effective and how it can be extended. Since strategy instruction in writing cannot be seen as a single instructional technique, but rather as a complex intervention with several components, this chapter starts with a presentation of the principles and elements that are common to all models previously presented. Also, MacArthur analyses and discusses the theories and the approaches that constitute the theoretical background underlying the principles and elements of strategy instruction. The author advances some opportunities to integrate reading, writing, and learning in future research and notices that research should extend strategy instruction into secondary school, college students, and adult learning.

In the second chapter, Murphy and colleagues examine the key components of the writing interventions presented in this book. These authors focus on two dimensions. The first dimension relates to the study design, outcome metrics and measures, and application of the interventions. Authors compare these aspects along the diverse studies mentioned across the chapters. The second dimension addressed by authors is the theoretical and instructional frameworks of each instructional model, as well as the implicit implementation practices of those interventions. By discussing these two dimensions, Murphy and colleagues indicate several elements that could be the key for the effectiveness of this kind of intervention. Also, these authors present some lingering questions that could be addressed in future research.

Finally, in the third chapter of this section, Rijlaarsdam and colleagues present a reporting system for research about interventions. Throughout this chapter, authors

provide many examples of the application of this system, using the interventions presented in the previous chapters. This reporting system comprises three levels. In the first level, researchers should include the design principles that define the intervention implemented. The second level should include the learning activities, that is, the operationalization of the principles described previously. The third level corresponds to the instructional design, which includes all the activities, techniques, and materials that are used to promote learning.

2. Conclusion

This book presents a comprehensive description of four intervention models that have shown to be effective in reading and writing instruction (viz., Self-Regulated Strategy Development Model, Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing Model, Strategy Content Learning, and Social Cognitive Model of Sequential Skill Acquisition). The models presented apply to both typically-developing and struggling writers, across different educational contexts. Some chapters are complemented with E-chapters, where readers can find additional materials to get a better understanding about the theoretical framework, the instructional design, and the implementation of these models for teaching writing. The authors provide an overview of the key principles that should constitute the basis for developing effective programs, to foster the writing skills that will enhance learning. Overall, a particular strength is the promotion of the use of evidence-based practices in classrooms. This book can help teachers to promote writing in their classrooms, while also advancing instructional research.

References

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