



Quick Tip Tuesday: Planning for writing instruction

February 15th, 2011

“Writing is hard work,” says Mark Overmeyer in his book *When Writing Workshop Isn’t Working*. To make teaching writing easier, Mark answers the tough questions about writing workshop: How can I help students who don’t know what to write about? How can I help my students organize their writing? How do I manage writing conferences? And how do I plan for writing instruction. For this week’s Quick Tip, we pulled a section from Mark’s book where he talks about planning writing instruction for a school year.

Planning for a year

If certain units of study are going to be followed through the course of a year based on state, district, or school guidelines, setting deadlines for these units of study can be helpful when planning instruction.

For example, for many years when I taught fifth and sixth graders, my teammates and I ended the year with a unit that required students to create their own magazine. This project required students to use all of the writing strategies they had been working on all year, and the open-ended assignment allowed for maximum choice while still providing a tool for determining how much students had grown in the year. The magazine became a sort of community celebration as it continued over the years, and families looked forward to seeing what their students would create during this project. Since the magazine took approximately five weeks to complete, and it was one form of summative assessment, we placed it at the end of the school year. We worked backward from there, fitting in units that included research, narrative, memoir, and technical writing.

As we planned for the year, we noticed when we could fit writing in across the curriculum. For example, we could do a research unit closely connected to social studies topics. Students had a choice of what they wanted to research, but we connected it to our American history standards. Technical writing in the form of lab reports could happen in science class. Writing did not have to exist just in the domain of language arts, so if there were days when we would have to shorten our language arts block, we could plan accordingly and make sure to have writing happen in science or social studies. Writing in other content areas is not only a good idea in terms of planning and scheduling, but I think it is also good for students. Many of my reluctant writers in the past have loved science, and they were more than willing to write in the context of their favorite subject. They may have reluctantly completed a memoir, but then enthusiastically explained their thinking in science class.

Planning for a year is an excellent way to think backwards: once my teammates and I decided which type of writing would occur in each month, we could begin gathering our resources and

planning for instruction. We knew what types of writing we would need to cover in order for students to be successful in each unit.

Though we knew we would have to adapt our ideas according to student need, having the plan created a strong scope and sequence that covered the requirements of our district curriculum. Organizing for the year ensured that we would give students ample opportunity to demonstrate their growth in writing.