Reading and writing are so integral to educational success, social interaction, and economic opportunities that it is hard to imagine what it would be like to struggle with written language. For students who are deaf, reading and writing present tremendous challenges. Regardless of how effectively the deaf child can communicate about complex issues person to person, reading and writing about these issues require that the child be able to manipulate the surface structure of English. This is a daunting task for children who are not fluent in oral English.

Traditional approaches for teaching writing emphasize student learning of writing skills and rules, frequent practice in mastering techniques, and evaluation methods that promote error-free compositions as the goal of writing instruction (McAnally, Rose, & Quigley, 1998). These approaches have been widely viewed as unsuccessful in helping students who are deaf become motivated writers who can effectively use writing to interact with others, communicate feelings, explore ideas, give and ask for help, direct the behavior of others, provide information, and create imaginative worlds (Schirmer, 2000).

Current approaches to teaching writing are called process writing because they emphasize what individuals think about and do from inception of idea to finished product. Many teachers believe that stressing process over product allows children to develop as writers in much the same way as they develop as speakers and signers.

Writer’s Workshop is a teaching model based on the principles of teaching the writing process. The model can be implemented effectively in small self-contained classrooms with a relatively homogeneous group of students who are deaf or in large heterogeneous general education classrooms with one or a few students who are deaf. It has worked successfully with students who are deaf in kindergarten through high school (Andrews & Gonzalez, 1992; Haydon, Mann, & Fugate, 1995; Johnson, 1992; Kluwin & Kelly, 1992; Sturdivant, 1992).

The following qualities characterize the learning environment of Writer’s Workshop:

- **Audience.** Students know that their writing will reach individuals who are genuinely interested in reading and responding to their in-progress and completed pieces.
- **Time.** Periods are substantial enough for students to engage in sustained effort without interruptions and are important enough to be regularly scheduled within each school week.
- **Stages in the writing process.** Students are taught and encouraged to apply the stages in the writing process that researchers had observed in skilled writers: planning, writing, and revising (see Figure A).

**Guidelines for Implementation**

- Set aside 30 to 45 minutes for each Writer’s Workshop period and don’t allow interruptions. It is better to
have three 35-minute periods each week than five 20-minute periods.

- Use 5- to 10-minute mini-lessons at the opening of each period to provide direct instruction in a skill or concept with which the children have been grappling in their writing. Mini-lessons can cover the stages of the writing process, how to choose a topic, questions to ask and the kinds of comments that are helpful during peer or teacher conferences, techniques for planning, strategies for revising, how to edit, qualities of good writing, and how to decide which pieces to publish. For children who are deaf in general education classrooms, the educational interpreter or classroom teacher of children who are deaf can interpret the presentation.

- Teach the children how to use conferences for helping them make decisions about their writing. Conferences should be directed by the children and should support them in figuring out what to write about, what they already know about the topic and need to find out, what they should change, what the reader might be thinking and wondering, and how to make the idea clearer. In classrooms with hearing children, conferences with children who are deaf who communicate through sign can be facilitated with the assistance of a sign language interpreter or teacher of deaf children who circulates around the class.

- Provide an author’s folder for each child to keep as a portfolio. The folder should contain a list of topic ideas that the child has generated, drafts of writing-in-progress, list of revision suggestions, editing checklist, names and dates of completed pieces, and rules of the Writer’s Workshop class period.

- Keep revision of ideas separate from revision of English sentence structures and mechanics. Because of the difficulty that children who are deaf have with English syntax, their written language is often nongrammatical. The writing of children who are deaf whose native language is ASL often follows the word order of ASL (which is significantly different from English), and English morphemes are either left out or used inappropriately. If the teacher focuses all of the deaf child’s attention on syntax, the child will see writing as a negative and even hopeless activity. But if syntax is placed in the context of editing, the final step of revision, the child can be guided to use English syntax as a model for written language.

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