

Guided Writing: Practical Lessons, Powerful Results

Lori D. Oczkus
Heinemann, 2007
ISBN 978-0-325-01071-7
168 pp.

As teachers of English to speakers of other languages, we face the challenge of teaching our students to write, which is a complex task. Anyone who has struggled to help his or her students master mechanical, lexical and content issues will appreciate the new tools that Oczkus has provided in this publication.

This handbook is functional for both the classroom teacher and the teacher educator. Oczkus, a renowned literacy expert and teacher, contends that modeling writing alone is not sufficient to produce effective writers; rather, teachers need to scaffold students through guided writing techniques. This process allows the teacher to demonstrate writing more effectively by taking writers of all ability levels through several steps: identifying examples, modeling, shared writing, guided writing, independent writing, and guided conferring. Oczkus acknowledges the recursive nature of writing (see Flower & Hayes, 1981) by encouraging teachers to be flexible in applying these methods and to choose whichever parts will meet the needs of their students.

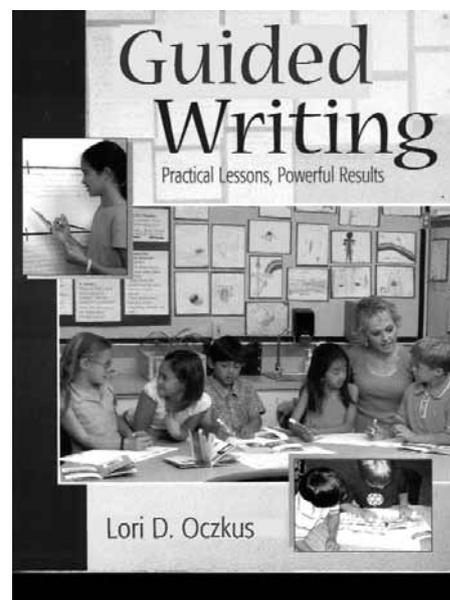
The techniques are functional and fun. Directed mainly toward the elementary aged student, the methods are broad enough in scope to make adaptation for adult learners easy. The first two chapters lay the groundwork for guided writing, defining it as “a bridge between shared writing and independent writing with support to move students forward in their writing development” (p. 3). Here, she elaborates that guided writing is to help scaffold student learning as they move from the basics of writing to independent writing, by utilizing the social nature of writing (Vygotsky, 1978). The

method's techniques are applied to both small and large groupings.

The teacher and peers provide the students with ample modeling, graphic organizers, conferencing and rubrics or grading guides to establish clear criteria, which push the students beyond their current level of writing ability. Chapter 2 focuses on modeling the various techniques and how to use them in the classroom.

Chapters 3 through 7 are rich with examples of guided writing activities for a wide range of ability levels, focusing on the genres of poetry, personal narratives, patterned writing, expository writing, and drama. Real classroom student writing samples and illustrations accompany each genre. Reproducible handouts and rubrics are also provided. The chapters follow the same basic format, describing guided writing methodology as applied to each genre, but they also allow for flexibility so that the teacher can focus on one aspect of writing such as conventions, sentence fluency or whatever area of writing the group may need to practice. Throughout the process, students are encouraged to engage in conversation at key intervals while learning to write. Freeman and Freeman (2001) and Samway (2006) encourage this type of social interaction for English language learners and argue that it is a useful means of improving both oral and written language skills.

Finally, the book includes four appendices to help implement guided writing in the classroom. One appendix teaches how to use a graphic organizer



known as a flap book in each genre presented in the book. Another gives suggestions as to how students can share or publish their work. The other two provide mini-lessons on topics such as elaborating on sentence content and assessment rubrics. Each includes classroom-tested instructions that are ready-made for the reader/teacher.

The book is also practical for the teacher educator. Each chapter clearly demonstrates how to conduct a guided writing activity and ends with a set of discussion questions and suggestions for the classroom that can aid in discussion with pre-service teachers as they develop skills in teaching writing.

Despite the focus on young writers, this book has merit in the ESL classroom and for teacher education courses. The goal of creating well-developed, independent writers is well met, even though the process that the author demonstrates throughout is simply an alteration of the pre-writing, writing, editing, revision, and publishing models that have been proven effective in classrooms for many years (Marshall, 1994). An additional plus is that Oczkus approaches guided writing as the social activity that it was meant to be (Homstad & Thorson, 2000). The tenets of guided writing can be applied easily by anyone who reads the book.

References

- Flower, L. & Hayes, J.R. (1981). A cognitive process theory of writing. *College Composition and Communication*, 32, 365-387.
- Freeman, D. & Freeman, Y. (2001). *Between worlds: Access to second language acquisition*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Homstad, T. & Thorson, H. (2000). Writing and foreign language pedagogy: Theories and implications. In G. Bräuer (Ed.), *Writing across languages* (pp. 3-14). Stamford, CT: Ablex Publishing.
- Marshall, J. (1994). Of what does skill in writing really consist? The political life of the writing process movement. In T. Newkirk & L. Tobin (Eds.), *Taking stock: The writing process movement in the 90s* (pp. 45-56). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press.
- Samway, K.D. (2006). *When English language learners write: Connecting research to practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reviewed by
David R. Byrd
Weber State University
Ogden, Utah



* * * * *

Is there a new book or a piece of software you really enjoy using with students or one that has helped you in your teaching? Consider writing a review for *Perspectives*.

Contact our Reviews Editor, Dr Atta Gebril,
for more information.

AttaG@uaeu.ac.ae

Copyright of Perspectives (TESOL Arabia) is the property of TESOL Arabia and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

Practical Lessons, Powerful Results. Lori D. Oczkus. HEINEMANN Portsmouth, NH. 6 How Does Guided Writing Relate to Six-Trait Writing? 8 Steps in a Scaffolded Writing Lesson 9 Guided Writing in Action 11 Second Graders Write Descriptions 11 Fourth Graders Respond to Literature 15 Discussion Questions 18 Try It in Your Classroom 18. Chapter 2. Using Scaffolded Writing Steps, Cool Tools, and Graphic Organizers. 2 Teacher as writer Ideally, writing teachers are practicing writers. By sharing their writing—particularly when it’s in draft form—teachers model respect for themselves, for their students, and for the act of writing itself. They communicate that they are part of the writing community in the classroom and in the world at large and that they feel safe sharing this part of themselves.