CHAPTER 8

Writing to Learn

PURPOSE

The purpose of this chapter is to develop an understanding that writing facilitates learning by helping students explore, clarify, and think deeply about the ideas and concepts they encounter in reading, viewing and listening.

UNDERLYING CONCEPTS

1. Reading and writing are intertwined and share common cognitive and sociocultural characteristics.

2. Exploratory writing allows students to draft ideas and concepts that may be pursued before or after writing.

3. Strategies for implementing exploratory writing include unsent letters, biopoems, admit slips, exit slips, and written dialogues.

4. When students engage in essay writing, they become immersed in the content and are able to think more deeply about the subject they are exploring and clarifying.

5. Journal writing helps students generate ideas, create a record of thoughts and feelings in response to what they are reading, and explore their own lives and concerns in relation to classroom topics.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

1. Students will gain an appreciation of the importance of emphasizing writing to learn in the content areas.

2. Students will understand why it is important to teach reading and writing together.

3. Students will learn how to create occasions for students to write to read and to read to write.

4. Students will demonstrate their understanding of exploratory writing, sketching and journal activities to connect reading and writing.

5. Students will learn how to write essay questions and how to evaluate essay writing assignments.
ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Prereading

1. Using the graphic organizer at the beginning of the chapter, explain how the content of the chapter relates to the chapter title.

2. Have the students recall writing assignments. List them on the board. Next to each assignment, have the students characterize the type of learning they think the assignment fostered. (e.g., Did the assignment foster factual learning? Personal reactions? Extended learning? Organizational skills?)

3. Have the students respond to the following quotation from the textbook: “Put simply in the whole range of academic course work, Canadian students do not write frequently enough, and the reading and writing tasks they are given do not require them to think deeply enough.” Use students’ response to the quotation as a springboard for discussion on assignments.

4. Have the students respond to the following quotation from the textbook: “Teachers of every discipline share in the responsibility of showing students how to think and write as scientists, historians, mathematicians, and literacy critics do.” Use student responses as a springboard for discussion on the roles and responsibilities of content area teachers in the 21st century. Discuss also the role of creating visuals in the lives of professionals.

5. Selected true – false statements and/or multiple choice test questions might be used as a pre-assessment.

6. Selected true – false statements might be used as a springboard for discussion and to determine student prior knowledge.

During Reading

7. Have the students compose unsent letters to parents regarding the role of writing in a specific content area classroom. Students may read the letters aloud.

8. Have the students use the guidelines in the textbook to compose biopoems about favorite teachers. Students may share by reading the poems aloud.

9. In order for the students to get a sense of what dialogue writing might look like, divide the class in half. Have one half of the class write a beginning dialogue about the role of content area teachers in using literacy learning techniques. Each student then passes the dialogue to a partner who continues the written conversation. After two minutes, pass the dialogue to the original writer and continue. At the end of a set period of time (e.g., 15 minutes), partners may read the dialogues aloud in the form of a reader’s theatre script.

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After Reading

10. Model how to brainstorm and cluster words by printing the word, “literacy,” in the centre of an overhead transparency as the students volunteer word associations. Divide the class into small groups. Give each group an overhead and marker. Provide each group with a word (or allow students to select a word), and have the students practice brainstorming and clustering using the overhead to record their work. Next, have each group share its overhead.

11. Read aloud a children’s book to the class. Have the students respond to the book in a reader response journal format. Encourage sketching as well. Entries may be shared in small groups.

12. Have students bring content area textbooks to class. Have each student select a unit of study in the textbook. After previewing the unit, each student should write a set of journal entry prompts that correspond with important information in the text. Small group sharing can take place.

13. Suggest that students visit a classroom in which the teacher uses some form of journal writing. Interview the teacher regarding the types of information he/she learns about students by reading their journals. Have the students share their findings with the class.

14. Provide the students with controversial editorial cartoons or newspaper photographs. Have the students write double entry journal reactions. Entries may be shared in small groups.

15. After reading this chapter, have the students write a learning log entry in which they respond to the following prompt: “Why emphasize writing to learn in the content areas?”

16. Using content area textbooks, have the preservice teachers rewrite essay questions in a RAFT format.

17. Have the students respond to the following quotation from the textbook: “Overemphasis on error detection often telegraphs to students that correctness rather than the discovery and communication of meaning is what writing is all about.” Use the students’ responses as a springboard for discussion on grading essays.
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SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

True/False Test Items

___ 8.1 Reading does not affect a student's writing ability.
Answer: F

___ 8.2 Although students often engage in some form of writing in content area classrooms, few teachers use writing to its fullest potential as a tool for learning.
Answer: T

___ 8.3 All content area teachers do not have to utilize writing because writing varies from content area to content area.
Answer: F

___ 8.4 Writing is thinking on paper.
Answer: T

___ 8.5 Reading and writing and representing are all acts of composing.
Answer: T

___ 8.6 Good readers are often good writers and good writers are often good readers.
Answer: T

___ 8.7 Exploratory writing and sketching helps students collect what they know and connect it to what they are reading.
Answer: T

___ 8.8 When writing biopoems and unsent letters specific audiences and frameworks need to be followed.
Answer: F

___ 8.9 Admit slips and exit slips work best when they are not anonymous because the teacher can address specific concerns with individual students.
Answer: F

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___ 8.10 Admit slips encourage students to summarize, synthesize, and evaluate while exit slips evoke reactive comments.

Answer: F

___ 8.11 Journal writing is a relatively new record keeping process.

Answer: F

___ 8.12 Academic journals or learning logs create a context for learning in which students interact with information personally as they explore and clarify ideas and concepts under study.

Answer: T

___ 8.13 Drawing and sketching might be part of the academic journal.

Answer: T

___ 8.14 Journal entries should be evaluated both on content and mechanics.

Answer: F

___ 8.15 Two different writers write about their learning in a double-entry journal.

Answer: F

___ 8.16 The writing in learning logs should be in the students' own language and words about what they are learning.

Answer: T

___ 8.17 Most journal activities require thinking but do not demand a finished product.

Answer: T

___ 8.18 Essay writing and journal writing are similar in that they both are informal and content related.

Answer: F

___ 8.19 Formative evaluation of essay writing takes place during the postwriting stage, usually after students have shared their finished products with one another.

Answer: F

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8.20 Reading and writing, two processes both rooted in language, are intertwined and share common cognitive and sociocultural characteristics.

Answer: T

Multiple Choice

8.1 Which of the following is not a reason to incorporate writing in content area classrooms?
   a. writing improves retelling
   b. writing facilitates learning
   c. writing improves thinking
   d. writing is related to reading

Answer: a

8.2 Which of the following is least developed in a classroom that incorporates reading and writing together?
   a. exploration of concepts
   b. development of editing skills
   c. clarification of meaning
   d. elaboration of learning

Answer: b

8.3 Which of the following activities is not a characteristic of both reading and writing?
   a. schema activation
   b. revision and rethinking
   c. decoding
   d. purpose setting

Answer: c

8.4 Writing and sketching after reading promotes all but one of the following:
   a. retention of important information
   b. greater comprehension
   c. prediction skills
   d. thinking

Answer: c
8.5 Which of the following instructional strategies does not promote exploratory writing?
   a. biopoems
   b. RAFT
   c. dialogues
   d. unsent letters

Answer: b

8.6 Which of the following is not considered journal writing?
   a. dialogues
   b. double entry journals
   c. learning logs
   d. response journals

Answer: a

8.7 _________ are collected by the teacher and read aloud as a way to begin class discussions.
   a. RAFTs
   b. exit slips
   c. admit slips
   d. learning logs

Answer: c

8.8 Which format is not considered an academic journal?
   a. response journals
   b. double entry journals
   c. learning logs
   d. diaries

Answer: d

8.9 _________ allow students to "make notes" while reading and reflecting about text.
   a. response journals
   b. double entry journals
   c. learning logs
   d. essays

Answer: c
8.10 Which of the following is not considered a characteristic of essays?
   a. immersion in the content
   b. initial exploration of a subject
   c. formal and finished product
   d. analysis and synthesis of ideas

Answer: b

8.11 Essays have been shown to be effective writing-to-learn tools when:
   a. content synthesis becomes the primary motive for writing
   b. form and organization become the primary motive for writing
   c. writing involves reading a single text source
   d. students do not follow the writing process

Answer: a

8.12 RAFT is an acronym that stands for:
   a. reread, assessment, fieldnotes, and text
   b. rewrite, academic, freewrite, and teach
   c. role, audience, form, and topic
   d. rehearse, assignment, format, and test

Answer: c

8.13 __________ is organized around the principle that a written composition is judged on how successfully it communicates a message, rather than on the strengths and weaknesses of its individual features.
   a. rubric evaluation
   b. formative evaluation
   c. summative evaluation
   d. holistic scoring

Answer: d

8.14 Which of the following is not a characteristic of primary trait scoring?
   a. logical and coherent set of ideas
   b. convincing position statement
   c. aimed at an audience of teachers
   d. accurate content

Answer: c
8.15 Teaching writing as a process will result in all of the following except:
   a. fewer papers
   b. more active student response
   c. more feedback for writers
   d. less time on task

Answer: a

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Essay questions include a mixture of questions designed (1) to help students apply and synthesize ideas, and (2) to help students clarify and understand ideas.

8.1 Why connect reading and writing and sketching in instructional contexts? Explain.

8.2 How is exploratory writing associated with reading or viewing text? Discuss.

8.3 Choose two exploratory instructional strategies. Explain what each is, the purpose, and how you will incorporate into your content area class.

8.4 Choose one type of academic journal you plan to incorporate into your teaching. Be specific and discuss what, how, when, and why.

8.5 Compare and contrast essay writing and exploratory writing. Discuss which writing you will incorporate in your content area class. Also discuss how and why.

8.6 What are the characteristics of a good writing prompt? Create one prompt to teach a theme or concept in your content area. Explain each part of the prompt in relation to each characteristic.

8.7 Create a rubric to evaluate a lesson in your content area. Discuss the key elements of the rubric.

Chapter 8
VOCABULARY AND KEY TERMS

academic journals
admit slips
audience
biopoems
brainstorming
clustering
dialogue journals
dialogues
double-entry journals

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essay writing
exit slips
exploratory writing
formative evaluation
holistic scoring
learning logs
primary trait scoring
RAFT
response journals
rhetorical context
rubric
summative evaluation
unsent letters
writing as a process