

Research for Writing Round-Up

Data from the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows that 28% of fourth graders, 31% of eighth graders, and 24% of twelfth graders performed at or above a proficient level of writing achievement at their grade level (Persky, Danne, & Jin, 2003). Resources appear to be needed to assist in the implementation of writing instruction that results in better writing outcomes for students with or without writing difficulties.

Graham & Harris (2002) found that the quality of writing instruction received by students has an impact on writing achievement. Frequent and varied opportunities are needed to engage in and compose meaningful text as well as time devoted to direct instruction in writing skills and strategies (Westby & Costlow, 1991). Furthermore, the state accountability system serves as a stimulus for the development of writing resources for teachers. With the emphasis on improved performance in the area of writing and with many other demands placed upon our schools, the search for products that reflect research recommendations and meet the accountability demands is prevalent.

Students build and acquire competency in two broad areas: writing mechanics and writing process. As students advance in grades, teachers must continue to place emphasis and use reinforcement on the mechanics in addition to process aspects of writing. Gallimore & Tharp (1999) recommend that students be provided with structures, questions, and organizational frameworks that offer support as new concepts are introduced. Studies show that writing processes mature over time rather than students memorizing examples of good writing and creating such compositions immediately. Cazden (1988) noted that writing examples provide the impetus from which students learn. Thus, acquisition of writing skills by students takes time to develop and strategies are continuously presented to students which help students think, participate, and learn to improve their individual writing.

Writing Round-Up leads students from teacher-directed work to independent work using high interest stories. Findings from studies indicate that student interest emerges and results in the interactions of the student with the writing content. Multiple and varied opportunities are present within the student edition of *Writing Round-Up* that engage students to develop the content. Teachers can also construct learning environments that heighten student interest. The way a student feels about subject content can relate to the effort put into the task at hand and the learning outcome advocated Renninger and Hidi (2002). Studies show that students can be supported to feel positively about their writing. A number of studies indicate teachers can assist students in developing an interest to write (Renninger, 1992, 2000; Renninger, Sansone, & Smith, 2004). Group work can result in a favorable effect on the interests of students to learn (Hidi, Weiss, Berndorff, & Nolan, 1998). Research suggests that students have increased motivation to write if the topic is of interest to them (Hidi & McLaren,

1990). The skill pages in *Writing Round-up* apply these research findings while using content that is realistic and an array of topics that hook the varied interests of the students.

Tomlinson (1999) and Hall, Strangman, & Meyer (2003) attest to the positive effects of differentiation. Differentiation is a process through which teachers enhance instruction by matching the characteristics of students to instruction and assessment although the students are accessing the same curriculum.

Writing Round-Up reflects differentiation in several ways. Differentiation in grouping practices is evidenced through the opportunities provided for whole class work, peer group work, and independent practice. Differentiation in product occurs when a student demonstrates what is learned. Differentiation in terms of a student's learning profile and in relation to product are present in *Writing Round-Up* as students are provided opportunities to discuss selections, brainstorm ideas, use visual organizers, and write responses through compositions, fact lists, completion of charts, verbal exchange, etc. Differentiation also occurs according to the interests of students. The subject of each story includes a variety of contexts to appeal to differing levels of interests of students.

Research advocates teachers employ a variety of ways to assess the needs of their students. Stiggins and Conklin (1992) note that classroom assessments must be quality for instruction to be effective. *Writing Round-Up* reflects regular informal means of assessing the students and then using the results to drive future instruction. Activities within the student edition may be used to gather input to gauge the learning and correct any misunderstandings of students.

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of various planning and revising strategies in writing (Graham & Harris, 2005) and Harris & Graham, 1996). Strategies that research found to have favorable results include teacher modeling, cooperative application of the strategy, and independent practice of strategy. *Writing Round-up* supports these findings by utilizing the research recommendations of Guided Practice, Group Practice, and Individual Assessment upon which to base each lesson's format. Helpful Hints is another section placed in the Composition component of each unit that helps a student plan with essential elements in mind. This guiding section substantiates research findings in leading students to plan appropriately prior to writing or to purposefully reflect following a written composition.

Writing Round-Up utilizes lessons designed to help students master the elements of writing (e.g., text and character development), writing skills (e.g., spelling, punctuation), and process strategies (e.g., planning and revising techniques). Lessons also incorporate certain characteristics that form a language common to shared expectations and feedback regarding the quality of writing (e.g., sentence fluency, word choice, voice, organization). Both constitute core components of effective writing instruction noted Fowler (2007).

Research shows that graphic organizers are key to assisting students to improve academic performance. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) cite that when content is illustrated with diagrams, the information can be maintained by students over a period of time. Organizers portray knowledge in a meaningful way which helps bring clarity to ideas as connections are made. Ellis (2001) noted that information is more easily learned and understood with visual organizers. Once students acquire the basic, yet solid foundation of a concept, then future content can be addressed at higher cognitive levels leading students to become more strategic learners. *Writing Round-Up* incorporates a variety of organizers within the various writing units. Graphic organizers and charts encourage students to organize their thoughts prior to composing a story.

Writing Round-Up is organized into fifteen units that include five components to maximize classroom writing timed the last month prior to the Writing TAKS. Each component in a unit builds upon the previous one and takes approximately between 15 to 20 minutes to complete. **Guided Practice** is designed for teachers to use a writing selection to review both the writing process and grammar as students are guided through a mini-lesson. Mentoring Minds' goal is for students to stretch their creativity in writing while sharpening their conventional grammar skills during the guided writing time with the teacher. **Group Practice** provides a follow up and reinforcement of the same skills with students being grouped together to complete an exercise followed by a brief share time. Students take responsibility for their own learning as they become important members of a team striving to teach each other and strengthen the skill sets from the guided practice. An **Individual Assessment** culminates the group practice set. This page may serve as a take-home page that encourages parents to take an active role in the teaching/learning process with their child. This phase also informs parents of the writing expectations to be mastered at the particular grade. A **Challenge** component is included to enhance each student's learning experience. Each practice set ends with a **Composition** planning page. This versatile page can be used in a variety of ways. The main goal of this page is to have students develop their planning skills using the provided prompt. An alternative is to have students extend the activity using the provided lined pages to compose a rough draft, revise, edit, or write a final draft.

Writing Round-Up is designed around the findings from research and the standards from the state. Levels Two and Three *Writing Round-up* was created specifically to cover all the basic writing objectives in second and third grades and Level Four *Writing Round-Up* was designed to cover all of the TEKS presented on the *Fourth Grade Writing TAKS*. Based on research from the previous years' TAKS scores, additional emphasis is placed on developing and reinforcing the areas that are found to be the weakest statewide. Charts are included in this product to highlight the TEKS that are the focus of each practice set.

Mentoring Minds Product Development Team is dedicated to providing educators with quality materials that allow the effective use of classroom time so that teachers and students have the tools they need to be successful. The educational consultants are all former educators who combined their experiences and expertise with the input of teachers present in the classroom and recommendations from research to create the product, *Writing Round-Up*, to develop excellence in the writing skills of today's learners.

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