Composing and Decomposing: Understanding the Complexities of Writing Processes with Play-Doh and other Visual Representations.

LRA, San Diego, 2012

Susan D. Martin and Sherry Dismuke
Boise State University
smartin@boisestate.edu
dismuke.sherry@gmail.com

Description:
In preparation for activity, teachers will have read about the stages of process writing and filled in a writing process graphic organizer with their notes. We have used Chapter One from the text, *Teaching Writing*, by Gail Tompkins successfully.

In class/approximately one hour:
1. We first give teachers a package of Play-Doh and ask each to compose a pencil holder that needs to be functional. They create their pencil holders.
2. We ask teachers to smash these products and compose another version. We ask them to do this again.
3. They choose one version and construction a “rough draft” product. They share their products with each other. We encourage noticing elements that they like and may want to add to their own pencil holders.
4. Then a series of instructor-given prompts helps them to revise and edit. Prompts may ask them to add a visual artistic element such as *texture* to their product. Additionally, they may be asked to add one additional element to their object and/or to remove one.
5. Teachers create their final products and display them on their desks/tables.
6. The class does a gallery walk viewing all the final pieces.
7. We unpack their composing experiences in a group discussion that focuses both on processes and implications for doing this activity with children.
8. The Play-Doh composition activity serves as a preliminary task to further decomposition of process writing. Drawing on course readings and using their individual graphic organizers, teachers meet in small groups to discuss what processes and tasks writers use in stages of planning, drafting, revision, editing, and presentation, as well as implications for instruction. Additionally, the groups are jig-sawed so, each group will create a class chart for one stage of process writing with the implications for instruction noted.
9. These jointly constructed charts are put on the wall. A group discussion occurs in which the instructor and teachers further decompose issues of writing processes, such as recursiveness, self-regulation, and strategies. These charts are kept up throughout the course. The joint-construction of the chart is then linked to a video-clip for the accompanying CD for *Teaching Writing* (Tompkins, 2012) with elementary students discussing their process charts.
**Goals and Purposes of This Activity:**

This activity engages teachers in decomposition (Grossman et al., 2009) of writing processes. Teachers develop knowledge of and engage in writing/composition processes of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publication, while at the same time they are immersed in models and modeling of classroom practices. Opportunities for development of both conceptual understandings and instructional tools (Grossman et al, 2000) thus arise regarding complex writing processes important to writing instruction, as well as to experience practice-focused pedagogies (Ball & Forzani, 2009; Hatch & Grossman, 2009; Lampert, 2009) linked to future practice.

**Special Features**

We were inspired to promote candidate understandings of both subject matter and instructional practices through jointly and individually composed visual representations (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001).

This activity prepares teachers to help students achieve knowledge and skills suggested by the *Common Core Anchor Standards for Writing*: Production and Distribution of Writing # 4 & 5.

Our on-going research, comparing teachers who engaged in this activity through participation in a writing methods course and teachers who did not, suggest that teachers who had taken the class explicitly taught all stages of the writing processes. Across four classroom observations of each teacher, teachers who took the course enacted 90% of all writing process approach elements, compared to only 56% of the elements for teachers who did not take the class.

**Samples of Handouts for Candidates/Teachers**

Writing processes graphic organizer for teachers to fill out while reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing process/task</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Drafting</th>
<th>Revision</th>
<th>Editing</th>
<th>Publication/Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>