



PROUD KIDS, POWERFUL WRITING INSTRUCTION

Tales from T.A.L.E.S.

Ted Kesler can't help but beam when he talks to his graduate students about the teaching and learning taking place at The Active Learning Elementary School (T.A.L.E.S) in Queens, New York. When he and Principal **Robert Groff** took NCTE staff on a tour this fall, we got a sense of what it is that's making him so happy. Take a walk with us through these vibrant classrooms where writing reigns supreme and teachers from PreK to college are learning together.

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This Week in Pre-K 108



ROBERT GROFF, PRINCIPAL

The Active Learning Elementary School, P.S. 244, was founded in 2008 in Flushing, Queens, serving 450 students in PreK through 3rd grade. We believe that there is a strong connection between health and wellness, curriculum tailored to student needs, and high academic achievement.

Our writing curriculum exemplifies this philosophy. All grade teams develop flexible curriculum, in consultation with Ted, that is constantly revised to meet the needs of our student population. In writing workshop, we emphasize teacher-to-student and student-to-student feedback through conferring, meeting students where they are individually.

FANNY ROMAN, KINDERGARTEN

In the beginning of the year, I spend a lot of time teaching my students routines and expectations of writing workshop. In interactive writing, we practice skills of encoding. Soon, they know how to use tools and materials of writing and how to work independently and in small groups throughout the day, such as during choice time and literacy centers.

In our pattern books unit, I move my students from drawing to writing. I introduce mentor texts to support and model the many styles of pattern book. I begin with a class-labeled pattern book and then support them in writing pattern books individually. Students work independently and in small groups to write a simple book about the playground. They use the Word Wall and other classroom resources to help them write new words.

Even though the first couple of weeks can be absolutely challenging, it's so rewarding to see students become self-sufficient writers and see them sharing their stories with their peers. There's no better feeling than to see how proud they are about their writing!



HAERAN CHUN, 1ST GRADE

My goal is to teach my first graders all the necessary academic skills while guiding them toward independence as they engage in the writing process. Through mini-lessons and conferences, I teach them specific strategies, but they make the decisions and choices about when and where in their writing pieces to try them out. Additionally, I create a learning environment in which a writer is never done. As a result, my students are able to use charts, flow maps, and writing center materials independently to think about what next steps to work on. I make all writing materials, from paper choices to checklists to mentor texts, readily accessible. Materials are labeled with picture clues so that all students, including English language learners, can navigate the writing center independently.



YVONNE MOSS, 2ND GRADE

Writing quickly becomes my second graders' favorite time of day. My students are encouraged to select topics that are important to them. We study mentor texts in order to identify great craft moves in each genre. Students plan their pieces using Thinking Maps and sharing with their writing partners. Partners work together throughout the process, often providing ideas, suggestions, or just moral support. Partners are motivated to revise in order to help their readers visualize and understand. They refine and clarify by using precise words and vivid images. My students have discovered that we sometimes miss our own errors, so we peer-edit to have "fresh eyes" look over our writing and provide feedback. Writing partners also evaluate each other's work, giving a "compliment," something the writer did well, and a "caution," something the writer needs to pay more attention to. After making final edits, using "an editor's eye," my students love to create a published book with words and illustrations. Celebrating their hard work, my second graders see themselves as true authors!



MEAGHAN REILLY, SPECIAL EDUCATION, GRADES 2/3

In my class of second and third graders with special needs, two effective practices to support writing are integrating structures for writing throughout the day and enabling language acquisition through multiple modes of learning.

The daily unpacking routine is displayed in a flow map, which is also used to plan stories. Children sketch story plans, adding details that are color-coded according to craft. Dialogue is added in blue speech bubbles, while emotion is added with strong words in orange, or with simple expressive emojis for students who have a harder time expressing initial thoughts with words. They can then match their emojis to an individualized chart in their desks.

An example of our multimodal learning: During a read-aloud of *Emma's Poem*, author Linda Glaser portrays Emma Lazarus asking what Lady Liberty might say as she sees ships of immigrants entering the harbor. In place of turn and talk, I have students stand up (see photo), one pretending to be Lady Liberty delivering a welcome message to their partner, a new immigrant to NYC. Our published writing pieces also incorporate lessons around illustrations and how pictures can often take the place of words to convey meaning.



RITA ESPOSITO, 3RD GRADE

In third grade, our use of Thinking Maps is a natural way to differentiate our lessons for all students. Thinking Maps help students plan and draft their writing. Students elaborate and add more details; then, during revising and editing stages, students use checklists both independently and with a partner to make sure that their writing is ready to publish. After publishing, students provide each other with feedback and set personalized goals based on that feedback.



TED KESLER, PRESERVICE GRADUATE STUDENTS

In my work at T.A.L.E.S., I support teachers with planning and implementing research-based practices. We continuously evaluate and revise our thinking to provide culturally sustaining pedagogy for a large population of emergent bilingual students. I demonstrate and coach teachers with whole-class, small-group, and one-on-one instruction. I emphasize using mentor texts and making learning visible to children.

But I get more from the school community than they get from me! In my graduate courses in language and literacy, I share examples of pedagogy from the school, I guide my graduate students to plan and implement strong lesson plans based on this pedagogy, and I teach them to rely on authentic, high-quality children's literature. I take them through the writing process as they compose their own personal stories, poems, and essays. We also place student teachers who are so fortunate to receive such stellar examples of early childhood communities. In both settings, I rely on NCTE resources to guide and support my practice.

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