

Everyone is a Writer

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“Writing to Learn” by Robert Marzano is a fantastic article on writing. This is something that we talk a lot about at school and in fact Steve Barrett, former superintendent of Kirtland Local Schools just east of Cleveland preaches writing first. I for one have embraced this methodology. As focus over the last ten years has been on reading and math, writing has been left in a place where it has less importance. The science and social studies people would tell us that we really don’t know what being left out means. Marzano (2012) states that “Writing to Learn” focuses on deepening understanding and improving retention of content” (pg. 82). Writing, if given its proper place, can be used across curriculums to connect cores in a way where all cores can benefit and play off each other in an exciting, passionate way. Writing is a major part to all learning done by our student’s where information is gathered “encoded” in an exclusive fashion so all students can better understand and personalize their learning. Marzano talks about five phases of understanding that can help to improve a student’s writing and comprehension.

Phase one is the record stage. Here is where teachers ask students to record what they have learned(an objective) from something like a video clip and summarize it in their own words. Along with this they may add a graphic if they like that will give them a visual representation of what they have just observed. A student then may have a better chance to remember the information from the video when asked on a test.

Phase two is the compare stage. In this stage students are divided into two’s and are asked to compare the information that they have just recorded. As this occurs, the teacher moves around the room making themselves available to answer any questions that may evolve from this pair share. Confusion can be cleared up and then move into phase three which is the revision stage. After considerations from group members and possibly the teacher, a revision to the original objective can be made. Other media’s may be observed within this original objective down the road and a polishing of that objective can be a continual, learning cycle.

Phase four is the combination phase. At this point the student combines the knowledge that they have learned about the objective through analyzing the information they collected through the first three phases of Marzano’s phases of understanding. This may include joining cycles of learning that has occurred as the objective has been attacked with differentiated teaching techniques.

Lastly a review phase is created where this objective is revisited through generalizations as student’s produce lovely learning which is enhanced through each stage. Through exit slips or group reviews, the teacher can determine if the objective has been learned successfully or a re-teach has to occur. When these phases are proven successful and knowledge has been acquired through this synthesis then you are ready for an assessment.

Marzano believes this five phase strategy can help students become better writers and retain information in a personal fashion. I like the idea but the implementation of the phases of understanding may be a hard sell to teachers. Time is a factor and it seems that this methodology burns up class time.

Marzano, R. (2012). Writing to Learn, Educational Leadership, 69, 82-83.