

# Writing Rules the World,

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My philosophies and beliefs about what the role of a superintendent may be out there a bit but I believe is where the direction should be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, rather than that of a manager who sits in his office and dictates the day from behind closed doors. The superintendent should be a leader of curriculum and instruction and try to delegate issues that are more management issues to secretaries, supervisors and other go to people in the district. Obviously the seriousness of the nature of these things would be examined and be decided on what the term serious is and what the thought of basic management is. A great superintendent will easily be able to differentiate between these thoughts or issues and move on to the curriculum side of leadership

I have been lucky in having a huge opportunity to learn from several other superintendent's that I have had the pleasure and the great fortune to associate with. I have been privy to great discussions, be it in a class or at conferences where discussions were led by great superintendents. One such occasion was a discussion by Dr. Kathy Nogay about curriculum issues which were taking place and Steve Barrett, superintendent of Kirtland Schools in Cleveland jumped in and began to talk about writing and how he has made that the core issue and focus in his district. At that point, the discussion revolved around how writing is of great importance. Steve stated that writing is the key to success for all the cores and ultimately student achievement. That was where I bought into the philosophy of writing first. I have taken that philosophy back to my district and decided to focus more on writing, putting it above reading and math. When students are writing at a high level they are performing at a high level in other subjects. High risk students need to be cared about at the highest level and be instructed to the point where they can concentrate on the most important methodologies of writing. To do this we need to understand the foundation of the puzzle that has been handed to all of us. That foundation is built on a student who steps into our building ready to learn. The unfortunate part is that many of our student's that arrive in the morning have not eaten, slept or have anyone at home to support them in their educational, social, economic and psychological times of need.

At my school, I created AST, Assisting Student's Team. This can best be described as a mentoring team of staff members in the school who can regularly connect with assigned students as issues with these student's arise. It may be an issue at home. It may be an educational issue or some turbulence with another student. If these issues can be eliminated or at least controlled, then my hope of focusing a curriculum that starts with writing first across the curriculum may have a chance to succeed. Here was a great example of how a great teacher who has mastered her classroom and instruction is leading a group of inner-city students in Chicago, (98% poverty) through an exciting writing unit.

This best practice in writing example is by Barbra Morris, a reading consultant and teacher Tina Archuleta as they created a third grade writing project for Tina's students. They read several versions of Cinderella from around the world and allowed the student's to identify similarities and differences between the stories. As they worked through the versions of the stories, she allowed them to do things like creating a crown for each student to wear. As they move through the stories, Tina integrated other cores into her teaching to help create a sense of connection to things like geography and history. Word walls were created as vocabulary was expanded. Brainstorming activities allowed students to create new ideas about the story. Ultimately the children were ready to write their own versions of the story. The activities that precluded the assignment had the student's attention and at that point they dove into their project in an excited fashion.

Through the draft, edit, proofread, revise and publish stages, other mini activities were added to reinforce the writing process and keep the student's excited and on the edge of their seats as they continued through the writing process. The drafts were developed and students took an ownership of their work that at times I don't see in my building. The outcome of this project was fantastic and many of the models of work that were delivered to Tina were excellent and students were proud of their work. Of course the teacher had a great deal to do with the success of this writing project. As we all know, we have teachers that need to be cognizant of what it takes for student's especially special needs students, to become successful writers. If need be even our most veteran teachers need to be aware and willing to adjust in any manner necessary to allow students to be as successful as possible. A teacher who has exceptional ability to connect with students will give themselves a great chance to make an educational impact on that student. Student's ability to write effectively is in the hands of our staff.

Generational poverty attributes to much of the literacy problems within the inner-city. Writing is the key to help break the chain of poverty and give children an opportunity to make an economic impact for their family and the country as a whole. In the book Bridges over Poverty, Payne, Devol & Smith(2009) state that "mentors are those who can use this process to help others-usually one on one-avoid sabotaging themselves by repeating learned but ineffective or destructive, behaviors. Successful mentors are willing to share their own mistakes and how they were resolved. Mentoring is a gift from the heart "(p.84). Mentoring allows for opportunity that may be lacking in a student's life to connect to a caring adult who in turn can lend a guiding hand to improve academics through trust.

Parents, teachers and administrators need to connect to their kids and allow for many Cinderella moments within their curriculum and let students lead the instruction.

There is an opportunity for all students' to write their way to another educational level. The problem is do we have enough caring educators, counselors or cafeteria workers to guide them through each chapter of their book?

### **Bibliography**

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Zemelman, S., Daniels,H. & Hyde, A. (2005) *Best Practice*, (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Heineman