

 **AUDIO**  
4:59 min

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## A Schoolwide Approach to Writing Instruction

Newport Elementary School, California  
May 2012

**Topic** TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BE EFFECTIVE WRITERS

**Practice** WRITING PROCESS

- Highlights**
- » The approach to writing instruction changed because students were not scoring well on state writing tests.
  - » The school began committing to 45 minutes per day for writing; twice a week the whole school has writing at the same time.
  - » During this time, the principal goes into classrooms and shares effective writing instruction with other teachers.
  - » The principal sees other teachers implementing the strategies that were shared in previous weeks.

**About the Site** Newport Elementary School  
Newport Beach, California

### Demographics

- » 81% White
- » 10% Hispanic
- » 4% Asian
- » 3% Black
- » 1% Native American


- » 17% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- » 6% English Language Learners
- » 17% Special Education


Newport Elementary School helps students become effective writers through a whole-school approach to writing instruction in which the principal is actively engaged. Teachers at Newport:


- » Hold Writer’s Workshop at the same time across the school;
- » Teach spelling using patterns and individualized word lists based on student writing;
- » Use mentor texts to illustrate the features of effective writing, including well-constructed sentences; and
- » Celebrate student writing in hallway displays and monthly assemblies.


## Full Transcript




**Amy Nagy:**  **00:05** I’m Amy Nagy. I’m the principal at Newport Elementary School in Newport Beach, California.


**Mary Widtmann:**  **00:10** My name is Mary Widtmann. I teach fourth grade at Newport Elementary School in Newport Beach, California.


**Nagy**  **00:17** In 2004, Newport Elementary School’s approach to writing changed. We knew that we needed to do something different because of our students not scoring very well on our state tests. So we started to focus on writing instruction. In about 2007 we decided that we were going to commit to 45 minutes of writing every single day, giving children more of an opportunity to write and carving out time during the day.


 **00:42** It was difficult for me as the principal to support teachers and students with writing being scattered throughout the day. So this year, which is 2011-12, we decided to implement an all-school writing time. Every Tuesday and Thursday from 10:40 to 11:25, our whole

school is committed to writing. By doing it this way, now I'm able to go into the classrooms and support instruction; our special education staff, our intervention staff, everybody is able to support the writing.


 **01:16** When I'm in the classroom, I have the opportunity to see the different types of things that are happening within each classroom. And then in order to get the word out, I am sharing what I am seeing. So I bring my cell phone in, I take pictures of the students writing, and then I might send out a little email to the staff saying, "This is what I saw during writing time today," along with a little picture. We talk about it at our staff meetings. Everyone is writing and we're sharing all the good things that are happening throughout the classrooms.


 **01:46** When teachers talk about the writing workshop, they talk about the strategies that they use; they talk about the process that they're using as well as the craft that they're teaching. They're all talking about the rubric in the same way. They're talking about what does focus in their writing look like, what does organization in a student's writing look like.


**Widtmann**  **02:08** In my classroom, the principal's vision of writing across all grade levels every day has really gotten me excited about writing and has helped me push that enthusiasm into my students. When I'm in my writing workshop, during that time the principal comes into our classrooms and observes what we're doing. She walks around the room, talks with the students, shares their reading or their writing, shares their successes, conferences with them, helps guide them. So she comes in and instead of just being a supervisor where she's observing us, she actually just dives right into it and joins in and just helps everybody move along.

**Nagy**  **02:50** In one of my fifth/sixth-grade classrooms, I went in and observed the teacher working with the students specifically with responding to literature. And she was helping her students revise by going in and specifically pulling details from the text. So I shared that information with the staff. And then, in a following visit, I went into a fourth-grade classroom, and the teacher was working with the students

and responding to literature. And they were at the revision stage, and so she took what she had learned through the email about pulling specifically from the text to support their opinion, and she was doing that with her fourth graders.

**Widtmann**  **03:35** When the principal, Amy, came into my classroom, she observed the lesson I was teaching and realized it was the same lesson that was being taught in the fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms. So not only had she shared the strategy that I was trying, but she was able to just jump in and help my students out and started working one on one with some of my students to also help them revise their response to literature and pull out those specific details from the text.

 **04:03** As a fourth-grade teacher getting my students ready for the state writing test, I think the biggest difference that I can see is, in the past, it was all up to the fourth-grade teacher. We would get our students, and it was up to us to not only get them writing and get the fluency going on writing, but then on the top of that we had to teach the genres that they were preparing for the test for. Now when our students come into fourth grade, they are writers. We have had them since kindergarten writing, and they know how to write, they know how to organize, they know the writing process, and then we're just fine tuning what they have to do.

**Nagy**  **04:40** The focus on helping our teachers become experts in writing, their enthusiasm has grown, their students' enthusiasm has grown, and as a result of it, we've got great writers.

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