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WRITTEN EXPRESSION

IN

LEARNING DISABLED ADOLESCENTS

by

Karen Ragan

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CHAPTER I
Introduction

There is no question that being able to express one's thoughts in writing is a very important skill. Although written expression is considered as a significant area of deficit in the learning disabled, very little research has been done in this area. As learning disabled adolescents enter their middle and secondary school years, they are required to do more and more expressive writing. Secondary students are required to be able to gather information, analyze it, and structure it into a meaningful form. Attention needs to be given to why learning disabled students have problems with written expression and the best approaches and strategies teachers can use to improve their students' expressive writing skills.

In normal language development, experience forms the foundation. Traditionally, learning disabled students have had less exposure to a variety of experiences or have learned less from them, and therefore their foundation for language development is weak. In the hierarchy of language development, listening, speaking, reading, and writing follow experience (Alley & Deshler, 1979). Each stage supports the next, and although each need not be perfected before
entering the next stage, the greater the language mastery at each level, the better the support for additional learning (Waldron, 1987). Since learning disabled students were weak in cognitive integration at a young age, their initial language system for developing reading and writing skills lacked the necessary support for success.

Since the 1970's, research has changed from the study of the final product to a study of the writing process. The new research states that we write to learn because it's a way of elaborating on information and integrating new information with prior knowledge. New instructional techniques should focus on writing to demonstrate learning rather than developing it (Bender, Forness, & Kavalee, 1988). Based on the research for this paper, most programs for teaching written expression to learning disabled adolescents advocate a multi-stage model for writing instruction, which includes a prewriting stage of generating ideas and goals, drafting or experimental stage, and the revising stage where one moves from global to more specific revisions. This model, which represents writing as a cognitive process, provides a framework for constructing and testing efficient writing strategies (Hill, Reynolds, 1988).
Purpose of the Study

This paper reviewed the current research on why learning disabled adolescents have failed in written expression and reported the latest and most effective strategies being used to teach written expression to learning disabled adolescents. Attention is also given to the assessment of written language. The practical implications of the research are related to the secondary classroom. A process approach to teaching expressive writing is discussed in terms of why it is important and how it is used. Two other models of instruction are proposed: a holistic model and linguistic model. Supplementary commercial programs were reviewed.

Scope and Limitations

Although written expression requires skills in the three areas of handwriting, spelling, and composition, only the area of composition was reviewed and reported in this paper. Literature since 1980 was reviewed with emphasis on the assessment of written language, why learning disabled adolescents have failed in written expression, key factors in selecting or designing a
writing program for learning disabled adolescents, and expressive writing strategies for learning disabled students in the secondary classroom.

Definitions

For ease of understanding, the following definitions are provided.

Learning Disability:
A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, written or spoken, which may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations and is not a direct result of other handicapping conditions (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1985).

Hierarchy of Language Development:
The stages in the normal development of language; experience as the foundation, followed by listening, speaking, reading, and written expression (Alley & Deshler, 1979).

Written Expression:
The ability to communicate one's ideas using written symbols (Stein, 1984).

Task Analysis:
A method where large skills are broken down and sequenced into a series of subskills in which the subskills are then sequenced from easiest to most difficult or in the natural order in which they must be performed (Heward & Orlansky, 1984).

Metacognition:
Deliberate thought or control over one's own actions to achieve a goal; includes awareness of
what the task entails and self-monitoring of one's performance (Reid, 1988).

Syntax:
Focuses on the mechanics and details of the grammatical structure of the written word; the arrangement of word forms to show their mutual relations in the sentence according to established usage (Semel & Wiig, 1984).

Language:
A systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings (Reed, 1986).

Prewriting:
The planning stage of writing which includes the purpose, finding and narrowing the topic, establishing an audience, collecting information, and developing a plan (Reid, 1988).

Drafting:
The first written edition of your paper in which the mechanics of writing are ignored and concentration on content is emphasized (Reid, 1988).

Revising (Editing):
The final stage of writing in which one moves from a more global revision of content to specific revisions of mechanics and grammar (Reid, 1988).

Holistic:
The focus of instruction is to combine reading and writing instruction in which the teaching and learning is put in a meaningful context to the student (Marling-Dudley & Rhodes, 1988).

Linguistic:
An approach to teaching written expression by improving the students' total language ability with a very systematic approach to teaching grammar and paragraph writing (Waldron, 1987).
Summary

Until recently, research in the area of written expression in learning disabled adolescents has been very limited. Since secondary students are required to express themselves in writing more and more, written expression for learning disabled students becomes an important skill that they need to learn, improve upon, and master with competency. The purpose of this paper was to review current literature in order to gain a base of knowledge on why learning disabled adolescents have failed in written expression and the latest and most effective strategies being used to teach written expression to secondary learning disabled students. Key definitions were also provided.

CHAPTER II
Written Language Research

As early as 1973, Myklebust found common deficiencies in the linguistic output of reading disabled students. Their writing was evaluated on total words used, number of sentences written, syntactical competence, and the ability to use abstractions. Deficiencies were noted in all of these areas. Deshler (1979) concluded that learning disabled students could
detect only one-third of the errors they made in their writing and suggested that learning disabled students be taught strategies to deal with their writing deficiencies. In 1979, Hermreck compared compositions of learning disabled and non-learning disabled students. He discovered differences in word totals between the two groups of students. Non-learning disabled students wrote an average of 42% more words in their compositions as compared to their handicapped peers. Wiig and Semel (1980) concluded that pre-adolescents with language disabilities had difficulties which interfered with their writing performance. They noted deficiencies in semantics (narrow word meanings, restricted variety of words), syntax (limited use of complex sentences), and memory (word retrieval). Research by Poplin, Gray, Larsen, Banikowski, and Mehring (1980), using the Test of Written Language (TOWL), reported that learning disabled students had greater deficits in grammar and spelling as compared to those reflecting ideas (Polloway, Patton, Cohen, 1981). These and other research findings led to a greater interest and concern in the teaching of written expression to learning disabled students.
Any instructional plan needs to be preceded by assessment of the student. Assessment of written expression could be accomplished by two methods: published tests, both achievement and diagnostic, and informal assessment. The learning disabled teacher needed to evaluate the skills necessary for successfully meeting the demands of the secondary curriculum. In formal assessment, these skills could be divided into three categories: (1) attitude toward writing, (2) ability to generate and deal with ideas on the content, and (3) ability to deal with the mechanical aspects of written expression (Alley & Deshler, 1979). Achievement tests such as the California Achievement Tests (1985) and the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (1986) could be used as the first step in the assessment process. Since they test writing skills in isolation, one must do further testing. The following diagnostic tests were recommended: the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress, the Test of Adolescent Language-2, and the Test of Written Language-2. The Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (1972) had the students identify errors in written paragraphs and select the revision that corrects the errors. The Test of Adolescent Language-2 (1987) required the students to write their
own sentences. The Test of Written Language -2 (1988), used most frequently for assessing learning disabled adolescents, had both a contrived and creative writing format (Mercer & Mercer, 1989).

Highly recommended to supplement formal testing were informal assessments of student writing. Teachers collected a variety of samples of students' writing and analyzed them on the basis of fluency, vocabulary, structure, and content. There were several published error analysis charts or checklists that could be used for evaluation.

Failure With Written Expression

According to Lovitt (1989), there were several reasons why learning disabled students had failed to learn to write. First, task-analysis as a strategy for teaching learning disabled students, was not suited for teaching students to write. Although learning disabled students may have had ample drill in the elements of writing, they had never been allowed to write. Also, learning disabled students lacked the necessary metacognitive skills; they didn't have the mental checklists that better writers had. Because of this, learning disabled students tended to use less complex sentence structure, fewer types of words in their
writing, and were weak in both the mechanical and more abstract or cognitive aspects of composition.

Written expression, the highest level of language achievement, required the application of conceptual and organizational skills from concrete to abstract. It really demanded more of a psychological rather than mechanical commitment to achieve excellence (Falloway, Patton, Cohen, 1981). Due to the high demands of being an effective writer and the fact that writing had been overlooked as an important curricula demand, there are many poor writers in society today. The same could be said for special education curriculum. The focus of teaching had been concentrated more on reading and mathematics, while writing had been virtually ignored. Special education curricula needed to be developed so that these students could communicate effectively through the use of written language.

Considerations in Designing Writing Programs

Teachers needed to value writing as a unique and powerful way for learning and accept the premise that writing is a learned skill (Lovitt, 1989). Teachers also needed to be sensitive to any negative feelings and attitudes toward writing that they or their students might have. Improving attitudes towards writing should
be our number one priority. Besides attitudes, teachers needed to be concerned with generating ideas and not just the mechanics of writing. In order to enhance the knowledge from which they write, it was necessary that learning disabled students be exposed to a broad range of experiences. The more writing the students were allowed to do, the better their writing skills became. Learning disabled students needed some basic instruction on syntax, but drills on rules should be avoided. Expression, at this time, was more important than mechanics. Giving non-graded writing assignments helped the student practice his/her expressive writing skills. Without the added pressure of receiving a grade, the student could concentrate more on writing as a communicative process rather than the mechanics of writing.

According to Smith & Polloway (1982), there were five basic principles related to written expression. They were:

1. Writing should be viewed as a product of thinking; confused thoughts resulted in disorganized writing.
2. Writers should always understand the purpose of their writing and the audience they're addressing.
3. The basic desire of a writer was to convey an idea or message.

4. The development of writing skills hinged on the development of oral language, so teachers must provide their students with many speaking and listening experiences.

5. Improvement in writing could only come with frequent practice in writing and regular feedback. (p. 360)

These principles needed to be incorporated in a writing program for learning disabled adolescents.

When designing a writing program, learning disabled teachers needed to emphasize the more meaningful aspects of writing and de-emphasize the more mechanical aspects until a later date. In this way students would build confidence in their ability to write. The meaningful aspects included development of writing as a process, generation of ideas, and the desire to communicate through writing. There were consistent findings in literature that told us that the formal, traditional, rule-based grammar instruction did not improve the ability to write (Cohen, Patton, & Falloway, 1981). This was especially significant for learning disabled students. Literature also told us that learning disabled students do poorly on the contrived portions of writing tests. This fact led learning disabled teachers
to develop writing programs in which the student would be involved in more natural writing activities, such as journals, messages, letters, and less use of worksheet pages where they were asked to correct mechanical errors. An effective writing program included meaningful experiences, feedback from the teacher, and strategies on how to proofread and correct their own written compositions.

A review of research reported by Barenbaum, Newcomer, & Nodine (1988) cautioned teachers of the learning disabled and other exceptional children. The fact was that most research on writing had been conducted on normally achieving children. Strategies used with normally achieving children must still be subjected to validation studies. A review of articles did show the importance of the process model as the basis for instruction and further research. Writing was viewed as an activity involving planning, drafting, and revising. These three stages occurred or reoccurred throughout the composing period. In a process model, the teacher's role was characterized as active, directive, facilitative, and supportive. The teacher guided the student through the stages and encouraged the student to monitor his/her own writing. Interaction occurred while the writing was in progress with the expectation of multidrafted written compositions. The
learner had many opportunities to write and was given a variety of topics which were sometimes self-selected. They viewed writing as a tool for self-expression in which the first draft was not a finished product.

Although the process model, along with the expected teachers' and learners' roles, was suggested as the basis of a writing program, there were several unresolved issues and unexplored implications that remained to be answered. The first question revolved around the mechanics of writing. Most authors suggested that teachers give the mechanics of writing a low priority, but they did not address the issue of mechanics from the learners' perspective. A second issue concerned the advised use of peer conferencing in which students read one another's writing and commented on it. This brought up the obvious problems exceptional children had with this activity. The exceptional children needed to be taught reading skills, inferential thinking skills, and the acceptable social behavior necessary to perform the task of peer conferencing. Third, it was suggested that teachers were encouraged to use free writing, sometimes called journal writing, in the process model. In this writing, students expressed themselves freely with no real concerns for planning as expected in the process model. The fourth question pertained to how the teacher interacted with students.
based on what the teacher conceptualized as good writing. The teacher might have exerted undue influence on the students' writing.

Barenbaum, Newcomer, and Nodine (1988) concluded by stating that the advice and methods of the process model may not be wrong, but that some of the suggestions for implementing the model might be contradictory to the exceptional education teacher who was planning a writing program.

There were several areas that required additional study before exceptional education teachers completely accept all premises of the process model. The obvious need for research done with handicapped learners was a priority. Extended research in special education classrooms was required. It may be inappropriate to use all of the recommendations for instruction based on theory or research with normal-achieving students.

Specific areas of concern were with the problems of fluency, functions of writing, and instruction from the perspective of the teacher's role and the student's role.

The authors stated that very little was known about how to increase the volume of writing exceptional children produce and how that was related to the mechanical demands of writing. It was also suggested that children should receive instruction in various
types of writing, along with form and audience selection. Research data was also needed to provide teachers with the types of writing that would be easier for exceptional children to learn. Data that provided insight into effective strategies that aided the generalization of the writing process from one task or environment to another was deemed necessary. Lastly, the authors asserted that research was necessary to decide how efficiently exceptional students internalize different instructional strategies (Barenbaum, Newcomer, & Nodine, 1988).

Teachers were encouraged to use the process model and its strategies that seemed appropriate for their students. There was very little solid information about handicapped students' writing skills and until research was completed in exceptional education classrooms, teachers were urged to have their students write.

An Instructional Model Overview

In planning an instructional model for teaching writing to learning disabled adolescents, writing needed to be viewed as a way of informing, entertaining, and persuading others and not as an exercise to develop grammatical skills. A successful instructional writing model for learning disabled adolescents emphasized
writing as a communicative process that had a purpose, a real audience, and was based on the view that composing is a problem-solving process. In order to achieve success, the learning disabled students would need coaching and instruction of their teachers (MacArthur & Schwartz, 1990).

There were four key elements required to put this writing theory into practice (MacArthur & Schwartz, 1990). They were:

1. Time: frequent and regularly.
2. Ownership: students chose their own topics and decided what revisions they would make. The teacher coached and guided, but the ideas were the students.
3. Response: students received frequent and regular feedback. They learned what works and what didn't work.
4. Instruction: teachers modeled the writing process.

Since learning disabled adolescents had not mastered the earlier stages of language development, they were likely to become very frustrated and anxious when they were expected to complete complex writing assignments. Since writing was primarily a psychological act and a mechanical skill, writing
instruction began with attitude and moved on to skill. Tape recorders could be used for those who were reluctant to write. Freewriting journals could also be used to relieve writing anxiety (Alley & Deshler, 1979). (See Appendix A for further ideas.)

Learning disabled students tended to be passive learners and that was why the process approach to writing was highly recommended for them. They would be actively involved in writing in this model. This model consisted of three major parts: (1) prewriting stage, (2) drafting or writing stage, and (3) revising stage.

During the prewriting stage, the teacher worked to develop a positive, non-threatening atmosphere in which the students were stimulated to write. Teachers needed to stimulate their students in the hopes that the students' motivation would come from within and they would have the desire to communicate through written expression. If the students were unmotivated, their writing would be minimal. Motivating learning disabled students was crucial due to their many earlier failures. In order to successfully motivate the learning disabled adolescent, the learning disabilities teacher wanted to capitalize on individual student interests (Polloway, Patton, Cohen, 1981). A few non-graded assignments along with bulletin boards or posters with helpful writing hints could accomplish this.
Included in this planning stage, the student selected a topic of his/her own choice, knew the purpose of the assignment, and the intended audience. The student knew that their best writing would come from their own life experiences and chose a topic within an area in which they were familiar. A list of possible audiences could be posted in the room which might include peers, teachers, parents, relatives, heroes, TV personalities, and government officials.

The purpose of a writing assignment must be clear to the student. Two general purposes were identified: expressive and utilitarian. Expressive writing, or creative writing, was used to communicate one's personal experiences and thoughts in an original way. Utilitarian writing, or functional writing, was used to convey information in a structured format. Examples of utilitarian writing were letters and reports. Students needed to understand the specific task, audience, and develop a framework to complete a utilitarian assignment. If learning disabled students understood the purpose of the writing assignment, they would be more attentive to the requirements of the assignment, how to achieve the goals of the assignment, and become more actively involved in it (Polloway, Patton, Cohen, 1981). Learning disabled students tended to be more successful with short, specific assignments with clear-cut
purposes. According to Polloway, Patton, & Cohen (1981), students were encouraged to ask themselves these types of questions:

What interested me most about this topic?
What information did I know about this topic?
What else did I need to learn about it?
How could it best be organized?
What were my personal opinions about the subject?
How could I convey my personal feelings in writing?

(p. 8)

For utilitarian writing, students should consider these questions:

What was my objective in this task?
Who am I writing for? What did they know about this topic?
What did they want to know?
How could I make sure I convey the necessary correct information?
Do I need to do research on the topic?
How could I arrange and organize my writing to be most effective in meeting the objective? (p. 8)

Generating content also was done in the prewriting stage. This was sometimes referred to as input. Teachers needed to provide experiences for students which they could draw upon for their writing ideas.
These experiences might have included field trips, school events or activities, radio and TV programs, interests, or visual stimuli. Students could foster their own ideas by using other language domains such as talking about their experiences, listening to others, or reading interesting stories or novels. Stimulation from these kinds of experiences provided the basis for beginning writing instruction.

Students were taught that writing is based on an inquiry method and students should be engaged in an internal dialogue. It was necessary to question themselves in order to produce content. The students needed to show and not just tell. In order to generate this type of writing, the learning disabled adolescent should ask themselves the following types of questions (Butler & Wallach, 1982):

- **ACTION**: What happened?
- **ACTOR-AGENT**: Who did it?
- **SCENE**: Where did it happen?
- **MEANS**: How was it done:
- **PURPOSE**: Why? (pp. 106-107)

At this point, the teacher was borrowing a reading strategy, activating background, and applying it to written expression. Brainstorming with the teacher, a peer, or a group of students helped generate ideas or word lists that could be used with the student's topic.
The focus was on developing content rather than on drills and exercises. These orienting activities were metacognitive in nature and were important in developing schema.

Now that content had been generated, the student would need assistance in organizing the content. The teacher should model clustering, circling groups of ideas that lead to paragraphs. Mapping, a graphic representation of supportive ideas, was another good alternative for paragraph organization. The center of the map contained the key word or concept, which was contained in a geometric figure (circle or square), and emanating from it were connecting links drawn in the form of lines. The supportive ideas were then written on these lines (Reid, 1988).

Englert and Mariage (1991) reported that advanced organizers and dialogue between student and teacher were used as strategies for developing text structure. Teachers provided advanced organizers for the various types of writing that were assigned, such as narrative story frames, comparison/contrast forms, or explanation organization forms. The use of these forms led to better organized writing. The graphic organizer served as a scaffold that supported the student's thinking and allowed him/her to move beyond what he/she could do without support. The teacher modeled and thought aloud
as the writing progressed. The teacher served as a
guide and always involved the students in the dialogue,
eventually relinquishing control of the writing
strategies and self-talk to the students. Initially,
the monologue of the teacher gave way to a collaborative
dialogue in which the student assumed the responsibility
of the process.

Research suggested that instruction that focused on
text structure, strategies, an emphasis on writing, and
peer collaboration resulted in significant improvements
in students' writing performance (Englert & Mariage,
1991). They also reported that the teachers who were
effective in promoting transfer of skills were those who
prompted students to use cognitive strategies, fostered
metacognition, transferred control to students for
activating and monitoring writing strategies, and used
text structure in a flexible way to activate thinking
rather than to control thinking.

The student's first edition of the written
assignment was the drafting stage. It was done in a
short amount of time with emphasis on content and
ignoring the mechanics. One method of generating more
content during the writing stage was to employ the use
of oral instructions as recommended by Kraetsch (1981).
Kraetsch recommended instructions in the form of probes
given orally by the teacher. The students were told to
write as many words and ideas as they could and not to concentrate on spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Students wrote more words and longer sentences using this technique. Allowing them to write and to write more often without the fear of being penalized for mechanical errors in their writing resulted in vocabulary expansion. One of the key concerns with learning disabled students was not only to generate content, but to increase the size of the student's vocabulary and frequency of its use.

Revision was a complex cognitive process that drew on a student's knowledge of specific writing skills, metacognitive knowledge, and self-regulatory skills (MacArthur, Graham, & Schwartz, 1991). The cognitive process included three general steps. First, the writer needed to identify a problem or a discrepancy between what was intended and what was written. Second, it was necessary for the writer to diagnose the problem by deciding on what needed to be changed and selecting a strategy for changing it. Finally, the writer needed to make the change. It was important that the learning disabled adolescent realized that adding information or details is a part of the revision process; that revising included strategies such as re-organization, improving beginnings and endings of paragraphs, and deleting irrelevant details.
During the revision stage, the teacher acted as a guide or facilitator. The student needed to realize that this stage, sometimes called the editing stage, would take more time than the previous stage. The teacher used a method called conference questioning to aid the student in seeing or hearing errors he/she may have made. Since learning disabled students had poor reading proficiency, the teacher asked appropriate questions when conferencing with the student which led the student to locate errors. Auditory feedback was proposed as an effective revising strategy for learning disabled adolescents. Listening to one's writing enabled the learning disabled adolescent to identify more errors than when he/she read it to themselves. Auditory input was effective in correcting punctuation, grammar, and syntax (Espin & Sindelar, 1988).

Proofreading was an important skill that learning disabled adolescents needed to be taught. The quality of their writing depended on how successfully they could proofread and edit their work. Many learning disabled students considered this stage as a very negative rather than positive process. The teacher modeled proofreading techniques and pointed out its advantages to the finished product. The students learned the basic steps necessary to revise their writing. The questions listed, as suggested by
Dankowski (1966) and Burns (1980), provided a guideline that students could follow for proofreading their compositions (Polloway, Patton, & Cohen, 1981):

1. Did each sentence make sense?
2. Was every word spelled correctly?
3. Were all punctuation marks used correctly?
   Were any needed marks omitted?
4. Were all words capitalized that should be?
5. Had I used descriptive words and phrases to express my ideas?
6. Were any of the points I made vague and in need of clarification?
7. Were there more specific, precise ways to say anything in my paper?
8. Overall, was the paper organized in a clear way to make the reader's job an easy one?
9. Have I met the objectives I set for the paper?
10. Have I chosen a good title (when applicable)?

(p. 11)

Since the entire proofreading process could be overwhelming to a learning disabled student, one or two aspects of the process were selected for a given assignment. More of the proofreading guides were added as the students become skilled at the earlier ones.

Another revision strategy was to establish writing response groups. The students were grouped and a
cooperative nature was established. These groups were instructed in a strategy called PQP. After an author read his/her work aloud to the group, each person in the group responded in the following way: (1) PRAISE: name a strength, (2) QUESTION: what didn't you understand, and (3) POLISH: a suggestion for improvement (Billingsley, 1988). Research by Karagianes, Pascarella, and Pflaum (1980) showed that peer editing groups had very positive results. Essays which were edited by teachers and peers were compared and the results of the evaluations revealed that those papers which were peer edited had a significantly higher writing proficiency than those whose essays were edited by teachers.

Teachers demonstrated revision strategies that accomplished writers use. Among them were writing on every other line and on one side of the paper, crossing out, using a caret to insert words, writing in margins, and drawing arrows. Proofreading symbols were put in the margins of the students' papers and the students were responsible for locating the errors and making the necessary corrections (Vallecorsa, Ledford, & Parnell, 1991).

All stages of writing were modeled by the teacher, performed in a risk-free environment with frequent feedback, and the author taking ownership of his/her writing by ultimately deciding for himself/herself what
their final product would look like. In evaluating the final product, teachers avoided excessive corrections. One of the major objectives of the special education teacher was to provide opportunities for expressive writing since it could be a valuable vehicle for the student to express thoughts and ideas that he/she ordinarily wouldn't do. Teachers showed appreciation for their ideas—what they wrote and not how they wrote.

Although there was not necessarily one best method for teaching learning disabled adolescents written expression, an eclectic model could be chosen but should be systematic, teacher-directed, individualized, and flexible. There was definitely a need to build appropriate skills without stifling the students' interest in using writing as a means of communication. Research with non-handicapped students revealed two basic approaches. One, the teach/write approach which was the traditional approach that emphasized instruction in skills and mechanics and later concerned itself with the ideas being expressed. Second, the write/teach approach which was first concerned with the ideas being expressed and later the mechanics. The write/teach approach seemed to have more widespread support for mildly handicapped students (Falloway, Patton, & Cohen, 1981).

According to Graham (1982), a writing program for
mildly handicapped students should be founded on the following principles and conditions:

1. Students should be exposed to a broad range of writing tasks. Literature suggested that assignments should be appropriate to age and skill level, interesting, aimed at an authentic audience, designed to serve a real purpose, and carefully planned.

2. Strategies for reducing the number of cognitive demands inherent in the act of writing should be an integral part of a remedial composition program. Suggestions included using prewriting, writing, and post-writing stages, sentence combining and sequencing, and learning the basic structure of letters, outlines, and reports.

3. Writing errors should not be overemphasized. Communication should be the main purpose and only the most frequent and flagrant errors should be treated. Pinpoint only one or two types of errors.

4. The composition program should be both pleasant and encouraging. The success of the program depended on student interest, motivation, and appreciation of their efforts.

5. The composition program was planned, monitored, and modified on the basis of assessment.
information. A variety of standardized and informal procedures were used. (pp. 6-10)

Based on these considerations, specific writing strategies were recommended for all three phases of the process model.

Written Expression Strategies

Generating ideas for expression through writing was only part of the task for the student. Translating the content into a well-organized, clearly articulated passage was the craft of writing. Skills considered important to this end were structuring paragraphs, developing vocabulary, building sentences, writing questions, monitoring written expression, summarizing, and notetaking. An exposure to good writing was an effective way to develop these skills. Students were asked to read interesting material at his/her independent reading level for exposure to good writing. The mechanics of writing were explained as needed and when the student was aware of its importance to written expression. The following activities were recommended for developing the craft of writing for learning disabled adolescents (Mercer & Mercer, 1989).

Fluency: (quantity and sentence length)
1. The student was given a scrambled sentence and asked
1. Listed words that were associated with an activity or topic on the board.

2. Placed new words in a box and the student who drew out the word must begin a story using the word. As each student drew a new word, he/she added to the composition of the story.

3. The students were given a paragraph in which the teacher had underlined certain words. The students needed to supply a new one with a similar meaning.


5. Acquainted the students with the use of a thesaurus.

**Structure Development**

1. Gave the students sentences that lacked punctuation and capitalization to correct.
2. Gave the students sentences with blank spaces in which they provided the correct tense of the verb.
3. The student read a sentence and was then asked to change the sentence so it meant the opposite.
4. The student was asked to change a sentence into a question.
5. COPS was an acronym a student could use to monitor the structure of his/her writing.
   C = Capitalization
   O = Overall appearance
   P = Punctuation
   S = Spelling
6. TOWER was an acronym for monitoring essays or themes.
   T = Think
   O = Order ideas
   W = Write
   E = Edit
   R = Rewrite (pp. 474-476)

Captioning Cartoons

Students were given a strip of cartoons with the dialogue missing. They filled in the dialogue. After it was completed, cut up the strip and have another student put it back into the correct order. This was effective in teaching sequencing and order (McKenzie & Roit, 1988).
**Cooperative Writing**

Groups of two to four students were given a story starter sentence by the teacher. Each student added on a sentence. Two different groups may be given the same story starter. In this way, students were exposed to a variety of styles and ideas.

**Learning Logs**

This was a specialized journal in which the student wrote a complete sentence or two every day about what he/she learned in a specific class.

**Dialogue Journals**

Learning disabled adolescents became frustrated by the strict requirements of grammar and spelling in most writing programs. Dialogue journals could be a motivating and instructional activity. It involved two writers (teacher and student) in a written conversation over a sustained period of time (Gaustad & Messenheimer-Young, 1991). The dialogue journals were done in a bound notebook two or three times a week. The topics were chosen by the student who was free to write about anything they chose. The teacher read and responded to the student's writing in a personal way trying to extend the dialogue with other thoughts or questions. The teacher refrained from correcting the quality of anything the student had written. The teacher functioned as an experienced writing model whose replies
could be made so as to use correct forms and spellings that the student had errored in. This strategy focused on content rather than mechanics. The students became more willing to write. Dialogue journals also served as a vehicle for the teacher to help with personal or academic problems being experienced by the student.

**Statement-Pie Strategy**

This strategy was used to help the student formulate a paragraph.

- **Statement** = the topic sentence
- **P** = proofs
- **I** = information about the topic
- **E** = examples

**Summaries**

Summaries enhanced learning of content material as well as provided another form of written expression that the classroom teacher could use. This was a particularly good skill that adolescents needed to acquire. (Appendix B gives the specific steps in teaching summarization.)

**Notetaking**

The development of notetaking cannot be learned through sporadic practice or isolated drills. A totally involved, systematic program was needed to learn this skill. Students must have much practice and repetition to master notetaking. Students must first be trained in
listening, thinking, and determining main ideas and supportive details. The teacher selected an organizational structure that best meets the students' needs. The teacher explained the system, demonstrated its use, and closely monitored the students' performance. To use it successfully, students practiced the procedure to the point of making it a habit.

Some general notetaking procedures for learning disabled adolescents were (1) writing the material in their own vocabulary, (2) using a consistent format, with a variety of personalized abbreviations or symbols, and (3) labeling notes by topics, time or referent. To help learning disabled adolescents master notetaking skills in a classroom setting, teachers provided students with a mimeographed list of three or four major points to be covered that day on a sheet with ample room for development of the point. Time was allotted at the end of the period to compare and discuss the notes.

Next, the teacher provided an outline of the lesson with several blank areas that the student needed to fill in as the teacher gave the lesson for that day. Lastly, the teacher gave a carefully prepared lecture with clear verbal clues and had the students take notes. Beginning with a very structured format and progressing to an independent format helped in the generalization of the notetaking skill (Alley & Deshler, 1979). (Appendices C
Holistic Approach

The holistic approach placed teaching and learning in a meaningful context. Humans didn't learn in isolated, contrived settings. Teachers who used this approach believed that the past practice of drill and repetition was meaningless and focused on the child's weaknesses. They believed that writing can't be broken down into fragmented parts and that children learned holistically unless interfered with by adults (Marling-Dudley & Rhodes, 1988).

The focus of instruction in the holistic approach was to combine reading and writing instruction. The students were totally immersed in writing and reading that was important to them and in an environment free of anxiety. A writing center was set up in the room which was well supplied with pens, pencils, markers, paper, and a word processor. The writing assignments were correlated with their reading assignments. If the student was an adolescent, assignments were correlated with any content area reading. Fluency was developed by frequent use of a free writing strategy in which the student wrote on any topic for five to ten minutes. The student was instructed to write continuously for that
time and to be concerned about content and not structure. Teachers also had their students do daily journal writing and responded to them. Students initiated reasons for writing and followed through on those activities, such as greeting cards, invitations to parties, and letters. The goal of this writing program was to have the gradual transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the student.

The whole-language approach deserved serious consideration for learning disabled adolescents. It was receiving more attention along with more research to evaluate its effectiveness. It could be an effective approach because it addresses areas of significance to the child. Probably the greatest threat to whole-language success lies in its deceptive simplicity (Leigh, 1980). It needed to be implemented by a highly proficient, organized, and motivated teacher. The teacher must seriously accept his/her responsibility and importance to this type of writing program.

Linguistic Model

Many learning disabled students did not read or write well because of weak receptive and expressive verbal language skills (Waldron, 1987). They were also hindered by a low retention level of non-related facts,
such as grammatical elements and low motivation for written expression because of previous failures. Therefore, a writing curriculum needed to address three key areas: (1) improvement of the students' total language ability, (2) use of a systematic approach to teaching grammar and paragraph writing so that few elements required memorization, and (3) provision of an "umbrella" system to cohesively relate all concepts (Waldron, 1987).

These three aspects could best be met in a modified linguistic model. The linguistic approach reinforced earlier language stages and improved spoken and written language simultaneously. The principles behind the curriculum provided for modeling written or verbal statements, followed by the creation of paragraphs based on verbal conversations, and the extension of these paragraphs to the construction of written essays. The teacher provided for the students good verbal models of sentences or brief conversations which the student repeated, then wrote down, and lastly, changed key words and topics. The student was gradually led from the security of the spoken conversation to the written format.

The key to teaching grammar in the linguistic model was not to have students define or memorize any grammatical terms or rules, but to internalize grammar
in a natural context by teacher verbalization. The teacher used model sentences to demonstrate basic sentence-writing structure. He/she first stated it, followed by writing it. The students were then asked to change key words and add descriptive and colorful words to these sentences. The student was introduced to paragraph writing by listening to verbal models of a brief conversation discussing one topic. The student was asked to identify the introductory sentence, facts supporting it, and a concluding sentence. Next, with the help of the teacher, the student gave a verbal example of a conversation paragraph. The teacher guided the student through this exercise. This might be difficult for many learning disabled students because of their deficits in verbal expression. Students then worked in pairs creating their own verbal paragraphs. Following this step, the students wrote down the verbal paragraphs they had formulated. Finally, the teacher gave the students written introductory sentences and the students completed the paragraphs.

In order to progress to essay writing, the student must realize that the format of the essay was identical to that of the paragraph. It was critical at this point that the teacher created a brief outline format so that the students could see the structure. The teacher and the students continued the verbal model by orally
discussing the outline and topic provided. This showed that an essay was really a well-conducted discussion that had been written down. Next, the students were given another topic and worked in pairs in discussing the facts and examples they wanted to include in their essay outline (Waldron, 1987).

The benefit of this curriculum was that it no longer separated spoken and written language but supported the learning of one by the reinforcement of the other. Writing sentences, paragraphs, and essays became a logical extension of speaking well.

Commercial and Computer Software Programs

There were many commercial programs that either supplemented or incorporated a process approach to teaching written expression to learning disabled adolescents.

The following materials were recommended by Mercer & Mercer (1989):

- Learning Strategies Curriculum (University of Kansas)
- Lessons for Better Writing (Curriculum Associates)
- Paragraphing Kit (Curriculum Associates)
- Paragraphs that Work (Carmody & Horton)
- The Writing Program (Modern Curriculum Press)
The advantages of using a computer as a word processor were that it provided the student with more efficient use of time, avoidance of the physical re-copying of the entire assignment, ease of correcting errors, and more time spent on content. It did seem to make writing a less painful experience. Its drawbacks were that the students may not understand the reasons for corrections and revisions, the reading required to operate the program may be too difficult, and there may not be enough computers available in the classroom. There was no clear proof that written expression of learning disabled adolescents was improved by the use of a word processor (Candler & Keefe, 1989). Some recent research studies did show that the use of word processing by learning disabled students showed their writing could improve and that text production did increase (Messerer & Lerner, 1989).

Messerer and Lerner (1989) reviewed and recommended three processing programs for learning disabled
adolescents.

FrEd Writer: could be used on Apple II series of computers. A special feature called a "prompt" permitted teachers to send a note to the student that appeared on the screen for instruction and feedback to students.

Bankstreet Writer III (Scholastic): could be used on Apple or IBM computers. It had a feature called "frozen text" which allowed the teacher to give feedback without affecting the student's work. It also included an on-board thesaurus and spelling checker—two problems common to learning disabled writers.

Talking Text Writer (Scholastic): This program had a special feature called synthesized speech which was used to "read along" with the student. This had the possibility of enhancing the writing process for learning disabled adolescents. Students were able to hear errors in their writing.

Write, P.L.E.A.S.E.: is an audio-visual program which incorporated metacognitive techniques as an element of the writing process. Metacognitive awareness was necessary for adolescents to write coherent essays, but many learning disabled students had weak metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive procedures consisted of techniques and rules that allowed students to learn how to learn through independent problem
solving and eventually generalization of these skills to
other environments. This was generally known as the
learning strategies approach which consisted of steps
that produced systematic self-instruction and also
allowed the student to activate prior knowledge about
cognitive strategies that could be applied to solving a

The P.L.E.A.S.E. strategy, developed by Welch and
Link (1989), was developed to assist students in
planning and writing compositions. A first-letter
mnemonic was used to facilitate recall and the strategy
was incorporated into a video-assisted instructional
program accompanied by teacher support materials
entitled Write, P.L.E.A.S.E. The video medium is
familiar to adolescents and exposed the students to
another mode of instruction. The content of the video
masked the academic overtones of the writing process and
could be reviewed by the students as often as necessary.

The program utilized an informal assessment of
writing samples for use by the teacher and student. It
actively involved the students in the learning process.
The assessment stressed content versus the mechanics of
writing. Write, P.L.E.A.S.E. included a total of seven
video segments. The first segment, twenty minutes in
length, pointed out the need for acquiring writing
skills through an analogy of building a house and an
analogy of making a sandwich. The next six segments, eight minutes in length, introduced each step of the P.L.E.A.S.E. strategy through high-interest scenarios in non-academic settings. They were modeled, demonstrated, and reviewed.

Field experiences with this first-letter mnemonic and video program had resulted in gains in written expression skills of adolescents with learning disabilities and non-learning disabled students (Welch & Jensen, 1990). They became more proficient in paragraph structure and metacognitive prewriting planning. The program was also well received by mainstream staff members which, in the future, could lead to more collaboration between the specialists and content area teachers.

Summary

Writing was viewed as a learned skill which needed to be taught as a cognitive process involving the teacher as a guide and model. The writing program was motivating and relevant to the student and included assignments that had a purpose and intended audience. Development of written expression needed to be seen as a process involving prewriting, drafting, and revising stages. Improvement in writing could only be
accomplished with frequent practice and regular corrective feedback from the teacher. Careful attention needed to be paid to how the writing program was presented and the way in which the teacher responded to the students' writing. A variety of strategies were recommended to achieve these goals.

CHAPTER III

Summary and Conclusions

Writing is the most sophisticated form of language and depends almost entirely on three other forms—talking, listening, and reading, but involves skills such as motor skills, spelling, and syntactical composition that sets it apart. Until recently it has generally been ignored in the academic program of the learning disabled adolescent. It has been talked about but not taught. Some of the failure experienced in the area of written expression can be attributed to the attitude of teachers who were not trained in it and lacked the background to teach it. Children learn what they spend time doing and thus time must be set aside for regular and frequent writing.

To write clearly, competently, and imaginatively
the writer must think clearly, competently, and imaginatively. Think/write, write/think--these processes cannot be separated. When a student has learned to write better, he/she had also learned to think better. "Writing is a little like playing the piano, talent is always involved, but so is practice for only through practice is talent honed, refined, and finished (Silverman, Zigmond, Zimmerman, & Vallecorsa, 1981)."

Literature and research advocate a multi-stage model for writing instruction with a focus on strategies for gathering, analyzing, and structuring information. The traditional approach to teaching grammar as the focus for written expression is least effective if not detrimental. A model of prewriting, drafting, and revising stages provides a framework for constructing and using effective and efficient strategies while representing writing as a cognitive process. More time should be allocated to creative writing and students' writing should be rewarded with praise and not red-penned corrections.

Recommendations

When one is planning a writing instructional program for learning disabled adolescents, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Students should be introduced to the idea that
writing is a process involving prewriting, drafting, and revising stages and that all stages should be modeled by the teacher.

2. Teachers need to relieve writing anxiety by involving the students in free writing or journal writing.

3. Students need to use scratch paper for their initial drafts; thus giving them the idea that this is not a final copy.

4. While emphasizing the writing process, discourage concern for mechanics until revision. Give positive reinforcement as students begin to understand and use a process approach.

5. Teachers should be a model by talking about their own writing problems, how they solve them, and show examples of how their final copy came about through many drafts.

6. Conferencing with the student is important to guide the student through the cognitive process of drafting their compositions.

7. Allow students to collaboratively write and edit with a partner.

8. Communication should be the main purpose for writing; along with informing, entertaining, and persuading others.
Box 12.14 Overcoming Writing Anxiety

1. Use free writing (Elbow, 1976). Have children write continually for a given period of time. Start with two minutes and build to ten as confidence increases and anxiety decreases. The rules to start children writing are simple but inflexible:
   a. Write continually for the time allotted.
   b. Do not consider neatness or mechanics.
   c. Write about anything within socially acceptable limits.
   d. Write page fillers, such as, "I don't know what to write," or repeat what has been written.

2. Be positive. Do not mark any errors until children are comfortable with writing. Consistently and frequently mark and discuss only what they are doing well, with special stress on content. Once children are consistently writing, teachers can gradually work on mechanics by tackling one targeted weakness at a time.

3. Emphasize the writing process. Discourage concern for mechanics until revision. Give positive reinforcement as children begin to understand and use a process approach.

4. Write on all subject areas. Make writing an integral part of the classroom environment. For example, have children:
   a. Write and solve story problems.
   b. Map the relationships between the various countries during World War II.
   c. Write a short research report on air pollution.

5. Use collaboration. Allow children to write with a partner. Pair children with different, but not too discrepant, abilities (e.g., a good with an average writer or an average with a poor writer) to enable them to learn from each other.

6. Make writing fun:
   a. Assign riddles, jokes, and comic strips.
   b. Cut pieces of paper into different shapes matched to topics (e.g., a tree, circle, or triangle) when working with younger children.

7. Share children's published writing. Show students drafts done by normally achieving children. Use a book with numerous writing samples (e.g., Harste et al., 1981; Temple, Nathan, & Burris, 1983), and emphasize that the work was sufficiently valued, even with "errors," to be published. Also point out that all children, not just LD children, go through the same writing process with misspelled words and lack of neatness.

8. Be a model. Talk about your own writing problems and ways of coping. Bring in samples of your writing and show how they evolved through many drafts.

9. Use scratch paper. Have children write on paper that gives the message, "This is only a working draft and neatness does not count," such as computer paper, scraps of paper, and the backs of discarded forms.

10. Use dictation. Initially have children dictate to someone. Try role playing boss and secretary. Then transcribe the dictation, and gradually move children toward writing for themselves.

11. Use developmental activities. Pay special attention to pre-writing activities. Sometimes four or five of them are necessary to get a reluctant writer ready to put something on paper.
Box 13.3 Summarizing Rules

1. **Make sure you understand the text.** Ask yourself, "What was this text about?" "What did the writer say?" Try to say the general theme to yourself.

2. **Look back.** Reread the text to make sure you understand the theme. Also read to make sure that you really understand what the important parts of the text are. Star important points.

3. **Collapse Lists.** If you see a list of things, try to think of a word or phrase name for the whole list. For example, if you saw a list like, "eyes, ears, neck, arms, and legs," you could say "body parts." Or, if you saw a list like, "ice skating, skiing, and sledding," you could say "winter sports."

4. **Use topic sentences.** Often authors write a sentence that summarizes a whole paragraph. It is called a topic sentence. If the author gives you one, you can use it in your summary (in paraphrased form). Unfortunately, not all paragraphs contain topic sentences. That means you may have to make one up for yourself.

5. **Get rid of unnecessary detail.** Some text information can be repeated in a passage. . . . (The) same thing can be said in a number of different ways, all in one passage. Other text information can be unimportant or trivial. Since summaries are meant to be short, get rid of repetitions or trivial information.

6. **Collapse paragraphs.** Paragraphs are often related to one another. Some paragraphs explain one or more other paragraphs. Some paragraphs just expand on the information presented in other paragraphs. Some paragraphs are more necessary than other paragraphs. Decide which paragraphs should be kept or eliminated, and which might be joined together.

7. **Rethink.** Reread a paragraph of the text. Try to say the theme of that paragraph to yourself. Is there a topic sentence? Have you underlined it? Or is the topic sentence missing? If it is missing, have you written one in the margin?

8. **Check and double-check.** Did you leave in any lists? Make sure you don’t list anything out in the summary. Did you repeat yourself? Make sure you didn’t. Did you skip anything? Is all the important information in the summary?

**A Final Suggestion**

**Polish the summary.** When a lot of information is reduced from an original passage, the resulting concentrated information often sounds very unnatural. Fix this problem and create a more natural-sounding summary. Adjustments may include but are not limited to: paraphrasing, the insertion of connecting words like "and" or "because," and the insertion of introductory or closing statements. Paraphrasing is especially useful here for two reasons: one, because it improves your ability to remember the material, and two, it avoids using the author’s words, otherwise known as plagiarism.

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B. Reid (1988)
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