

August 13, 2019

TEPS Abstract

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TCRWP Summer Institute on the Teaching of Writing, August 5-9, 2019

I am grateful to Dr. Hicks and the TEPS Committee for providing me the opportunity to attend the Summer Institute on the Teaching of Writing, part of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project.

This was a rigorous and intensive week presenting best practices for teaching writing within the writer's workshop framework and the Units of Study we use in our elementary schools. The sessions across each day mirrored the structure of an authentic writer's workshop, with the focus on the developmental needs of students in the grades 3-5 band. We worked and learned about teaching writing in large groups, small groups, and in one-to-one conferences, working with some of the authors of our Units of Study and current TCRWP staff developers. Each afternoon, we had the opportunity to choose an elective session that best suited our individual needs and goals. Additionally, each day opened or closed with an inspiring keynote speaker.

This conference was of particular value to me because my shift from teaching first grade for many years to teaching fourth grade left me feeling uncertain that I truly understood what level of writing skills I should expect from beginning fourth graders, and where I should strive to lead them to by the end of the year. I left this conference feeling confident in my knowledge of what to teach and how to lift the level of my students' writing in a developmentally appropriate way for their age and experience.

Across five days of sessions, I gained new insights into conferencing with students and balancing those conferences with small group instruction. I learned how to hold an "Essay Bootcamp" to introduce the concept of an essay to fourth graders and took part in some deep discussions about where grammar fits into all of this. I was challenged to engage in writer's workshop as a student, working on my own pieces of writing across genres, and I collected the titles of a few new mentor texts that will fit the fourth-grade units of study very well. However, the most helpful understanding I gained was about how the arc of the writing process should be distributed across a unit, and how important it is to be very explicit in teaching children what should be happening in each step of the writing process. Key in this is that most of a writer's time should be spent in revision, making the 'big ticket' renovations that get the writing to clearly reflect the heart of the writer's intent.

I certainly have been given a lot to consider as I plan for teaching writing in the coming school year, and I truly appreciate the learning opportunity that was made possible through the TEPS program.