Central Collaborators:

- Michelle Bennett
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- Milann Davies
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- Jane Gill
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OVERVIEW: What we did

Our action plan evolved over several sessions of collaboration, from a vague "something to do with better communication…can we just say #Communication?!?" to the following:

<div align="center">

**Modeling written tasks and skills to improve
student written output and confidence as writers**

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Our focused statement came from what English teachers felt they needed to benefit their classrooms, previous experiences with modeling, and our chapter-by-chapter exploration of Kelly Gallagher's *Write Like This*.

We shared many points of agreement with Gallagher, starting with his assertion in Chapter One that "the need to write cealry and quickly *has never been more important* than in today's highly competitive, technology-driven, global economy" (his emphasis). The text is organized by writing purpose – Inform and Explain, Evaluate and Judge, Inquire and Explore, etc. – to support Gallagher's two central premises:

1. Introduce young writers to real-world discourses
2. Provide students with extensive teacher and real-world models

As English teachers, we found we could support such assertions, and welcomed the opportunity to further implement them in our classrooms.

In each collaboration session, we focused on two chapters and the purposes, skills and sample exercises laid out in each. Our central exercise was to model writing skills for our students, but we also attempted many of the exercises in the text, and reflected on their usefulness to our central plan of action. This was particularly useful to the classroom practices of newer teachers.

We started each meeting with discussion around questions that helped us to get to know one another and our teaching styles, and also benefit the greater discussion around what is working in our English teaching practice that others may want to consider. These questions included:

- What are characteristics of learner-centred classrooms?
- What feedback is most effective, and how do we make it timely and efficient?
- What is a recent exercise that engaged the widest range of students in their interests and abilities?
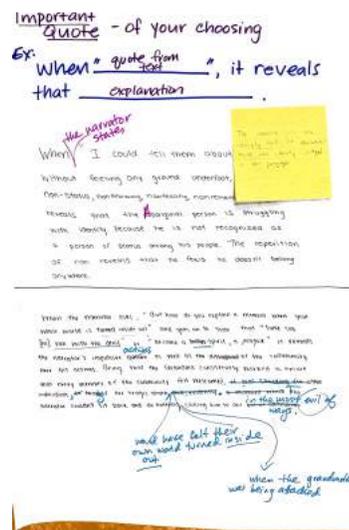
IN THE CLASSROOM: SUPPORTING IMAGES

Creative Writing 12

Students were asked to consider their language and point of view. As a warm up activity, students sat back to back. One student had to describe a simple object that they held in their hands out of view from their partner. They could only use strategically chosen describing words to attempt to have their partner draw a facsimile of the object. When finished, students turned around and compared the object to the drawing. This activity was a great warm up to have the students come to understand the power of their words and how you have to be strategic in your word choice in order for the reader/listener to truly understand what you are trying to communicate. As a follow up to apply their understanding of word choice and point of view, students were given a writing assignment to describe the same building from two different points of view. Students were active in their learning and understanding.
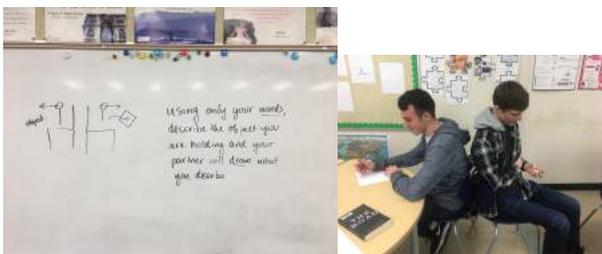

English 12

Students were working towards understanding the function of literary devices in a story read in class. In groups, they worked to fill in the blanks of a thesis statement created by the teacher. Then they collaborated to support the thesis with evidence from the story. The teacher came around and shared feedback in real-time, both verbally and on the sheet. Work was passed to the next group, who added to and corrected the previous group's contribution. Then another group gave feedback, before the sheet was passed back to the original creators for their consideration.

English 10

Following an examination of various forms of new media, students were tasked with creating a personal blog that shared a topic they are passionate about. Every Friday, the teacher wrote a blog alongside the students on an area of his own interest – Fantasy Football – projecting his work onto the screen as the students drafted their own entries on iPads.

English 10 Core

These tasks were a major step on the English 10 Core class's journey from summarising to arguing. We spent several classes writing and revising theme statements that slowly transitioned out of a summary of the setting of *Zootopia* into a claim about its purpose. They were built using frameworks and many modelled examples from the teacher. The students' foldables for *Zootopia* show their progression in taking their argument and providing evidence from a variety of texts, again shown using frameworks, models, and constant revision. Upon reflecting, students noted that the constant modelling and emphasis on revision helped them write some of their best paragraphs ever, and were able to communicate the importance of each step in the process.

English 9 Pre IB
A skill that was reinforced over the course of the entire year was the use of sophisticated thesis statement to communicate an argument. In January, students designed debate topics around the question, "Can technology go too far?" We used an exercise from *Write Like This* to defend a list of 5 technologies. The teacher chose a technology that few students viewed as threatening, and crafted a thesis statement on the board. Students compiled a "Thesis Statement Checklist" collaboratively, then wrote their own statements. The teacher gave immediate verbal feedback, and student polished their statements before writing an in-class argumentative piece.
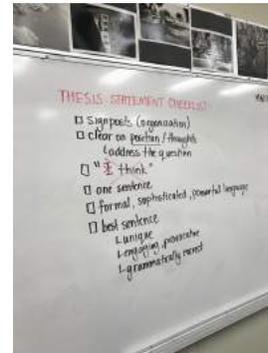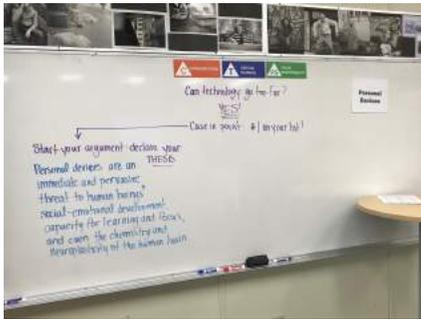
IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

As we worked through *Write Like This*, we planned how students would reflect on their learning and give us feedback on the writing process we developed with them this year. We decided to do a reflection activity using the same two questions so that we could compile student responses and determine how impactful modeling and other strategies were on their learning and confidence as writers.

The two questions that students answered individually were:
1. How have you improved as a writer this year?
2. What did we do in this course that helped you improve?

To facilitate student responses to the first question, we provided the following list:

Hooks	Introductions	Thesis Statements	Clarity
Topic sentences	Conclusions	Supporting my arguments	Personal style and voice
Staying on topic	Organizing ideas	Quotation integration	Word choice
Planning my ideas	Good flow	Thoughtful revisions	Thesaurus use
Creativity	Using transition words	Using literary devices	Editing grammar

For the second question, we wanted to see how the students responded without prompting. When we met during our final collaboration session, we each highlighted what stood out from our students' feedback (please see Appendix for individual teachers' compilations of student feedback).

Michelle's English 9's:
- ✓ Most mentioned modeling, but said something like "what the teacher did on the board"
- ✓ Teacher feedback
- ✓ I'm starting to think more deeply about what I'm writing
- ✓ Picking out big ideas from the text – then have own ideas to write

Kyle's English 10's:
- ✓ Encouraging feedback → as a result of the teacher's positive language, students looked forward to trying skills again next time
- ✓ Modeling = "doing assignments along with us"
- ✓ Students were glad he didn't use previous students' samples – they aspired to more by seeing his modeling
- ✓ They loved hidden images task from *Write Like This* – helped with editing, made me realize I can't just look at it once

Tyler's 12's:
- ✓ Modeling made them less anxious
- ✓ Now I know more about providing evidence
- ✓ Feedback and modeling shows teacher is aware of effort = empathy
- ✓ Using highlighters to indicate the skill that was modeled and applied in writing this week
- ✓ Feedback form in rubric style

Daniel's Comm 12's:
- ✓ Pre-writing tasks
- ✓ Appreciated back-to-basics modeling
- ✓ Graphic organizers

Milann's 9's:
- ✓ Modeled skills more than specific text types, and the kids appreciated the development in specific areas that they could apply to other subjects
- ✓ Planning and skills lists to consult
- ✓ Metacognitive annotation of skills on formative tasks

Breanna's Eng 10 Pre-IB's:
- ✓ some kids misunderstood the question…ways to improve in future
- ✓ explicit teaching of hooks

Jane's Eng 9's:
- ✓ Also appreciated the further English supports they have → sentence stems, sentence patterns (top 5) instead of just feedback to use more sentence variety

NEXT YEAR'S ACTION PLAN: TO BE CONTINUED…

One element of feedback that almost all students gave us was that they value our feedback on their writing. We want to expand our exploration of how we as a department can support our growing writers by considering our feedback, which comes in a variety of forms: written, verbal, letter grades, etc.

The greatest area of interest lays in applying Standards-Based Grading to our junior English courses. We want to work to give students room for practice and failure in a way that contributes to their growth and self-awareness. By examining current literature surrounding SBG, figuring out features of MyEd and standardizing our application of feedback – what does "Approaching Expectations" even look like at various grade levels? – we think we will be able to further contribute to the skills and confidence of REMSS's writers.

APPENDIX: INDIVIDUAL TEACHERS' COMPILATIONS OF STUDENT FEEDBACK

ENGLISH 12:

On the left	On the right
How have you improved as a writer this year? Brainstorming / planning before writing Moving beyond the five paragraph essay – building on all writing skills Using more examples from the text Focus on ideas not summarizing Descriptive writing Pushing past writers block/forming ideas quickly You don't need to work from start to finish, it's ok to work backwards Writing dialogue Organizing Integrating quotes Finding evidence Creative writing Thesis statements Starting paragraphs Engaging the audience Using closing statements Planning essays Clarity Essay writing Word choice Producing more text Thesis statements Using both texts throughout a synthesis (conceptual vs text based organization)	What did we do in this course that helped you improve? Dice story (being given an idea for a story and then writing about it) Explicit instructions on how to use evidence Feedback on essays Debates – confidence / public speaking Focus on synthesis writing Breaking down sample texts Having feedback rubric on top of response sheet Seeing the rubric Modeling on the projector Breaking down examples / process Modeling Practice / in-class writing Helpful tips on the board (sexi/pee) Showing the process Explicitly teaching organization techniques Specific instruction Dice story (coming up with creative solutions) The debates Examples of teacher writing

Improved	Why
How to add insight/analysis/detail	PEE method
Faster thinker and writer with structure	Teacher doing step by step
Vocabulary	Showing examples
Sentence variety	Practice
Integrate quotations	Peer to peer communication
Clearer writing/precise	Analyzing poems (fishbowl)
Introductions	
Topic sentences	
Thesis statements	

ENGLISH 10:

How have I improved?	What did we do in class that helped me improve?
✓ Essay Structure ✓ Thesis Statements ✓ Supporting arguments ✓ Providing evidence ✓ Editing and proof reading essays ✓ Thoughtful revisions ✓ Now know the full structure of an essay ✓ Using Imagery ✓ Literary devices ✓ Formatting and using quotations	✓ Feedback on work (x5) ✓ Shown examples ✓ Blog for research and voice/style ✓ Encouragement on feedback ✓ Doing assignments along with us (x5) ✓ Material that is relevant ✓ Revision checklist (x4) ✓ Children of Men activity (x2) ✓ Editing exercise (x6) ✓ "My critical thoughts improved by spending time on that specific topic and actually taking that step deeper into my thought process." ✓ Time to revise and opportunity to improve ✓ Introduced literary devices I had never learned before ✓ Debates for strong topic sentences ✓ Pre-writing exercise ✓ Using a variety of media ✓ Class discussion

ENGLISH 9:

Improved	Why
Sentence structure/sentence patterns Hooks Insight Vocabulary Better connecting words Detail Punctuation Topic sentence More ideas/creativity/analysis of information and putting it in our own words Organization of ideas Better paragraph structure	Examples on the board/modeling by teacher Feedback both positive and negative Sentence combining/sentence patterns Brainstorming ideas as a class PEE method Practice Reading Doing different formats Marking the text and finding big ideas

ENGLISH 9 PRE-IB: What did we do in this course that helped you improve?

HUM 9 Section 2:
- Teacher feedback
- Pre-planning and feedback on thesis statements
- Sticky notes practice for quotation integration
- Numerous in class writes
- Planning sheets
- Transition words sheet
- Modeling signposts in thesis statements
- Modeling topic sentences
- One-on-one help and feedback

HUM 9 Section 1:
- Exploring visual texts
- Performance tasks around reading before writing analysis
- Class discussion
- Colour marking texts
- Modeling and practicing thesis statements
- Debate
- In-class writing
- Planning outline
- Charts in which to gather devices
- Rewrites