



Blueprint for Exceptional Writing: Differential Strategies for Teaching Expressive Writing

“Special needs/at-risk students improved by a factor of 11 when taught using the Blueprint for Exceptional Writing (BEW) intervention.”

What is Blueprint for Exceptional Writing?

The Blueprint for Exceptional Writing model was developed 18 years ago by Dr. Jennifer Fontenot. This model was designed to teach expressive writing skills to her at-risk students (including English language learners and students with special needs) as well as her general education students. After many success stories using the model in the classroom, Dr. Fontenot and Dr. Karen Carney incorporated these strategies into a teacher-friendly professional development book. This differential teaching model employs verbal interactive methods and multi-sensory learning opportunities, in addition to standardized practice to guide students in becoming successful writers, speakers, listeners, and readers. By helping students master the writing process and motivating students to think, plan, and then write interesting and meaningful essays, Blueprint for Exceptional Writing is a model that any teacher can use in the classroom.

What the U.S. Department of Education and Research Has to Say about Writing

According to the National Assessment of Educational Performance (2002), proficiency in writing has shown little improvement since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. In fact,

a national writing test conducted in 2003 underscored the inability of schools to meet the federal mandates and effectively prepare students at a “proficient” level in writing (Figure 1). This test showed 72% of fourth-graders and 69% of eight-graders were below writing proficiency, clearly demonstrating the need for schools to improve their academic programs and infrastructure for teaching writing.

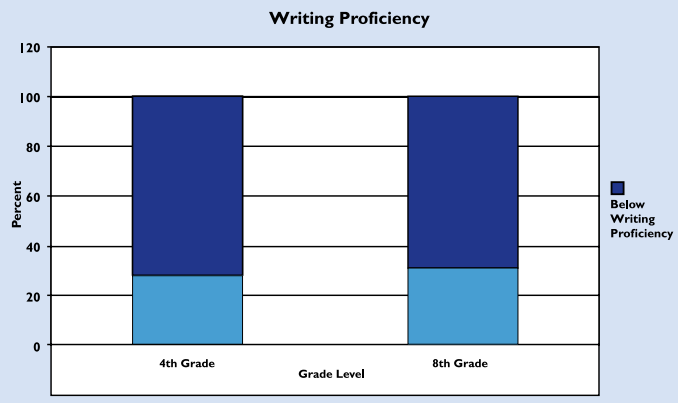


Figure 1
(Persky, Daane, & Jin, 2003).

Figure 2 shows the writing improvement for fourth- and eighth-graders between 1998 and 2003. While these results show improvement, students and their schools have not made sufficient gains to eventually meet the upcoming standards of proficient achievement in 2014 as set forth by the U.S. Department of Education and the No Child Left Behind Act. Additional student test results will be reported for year 2008 at some point in the future.

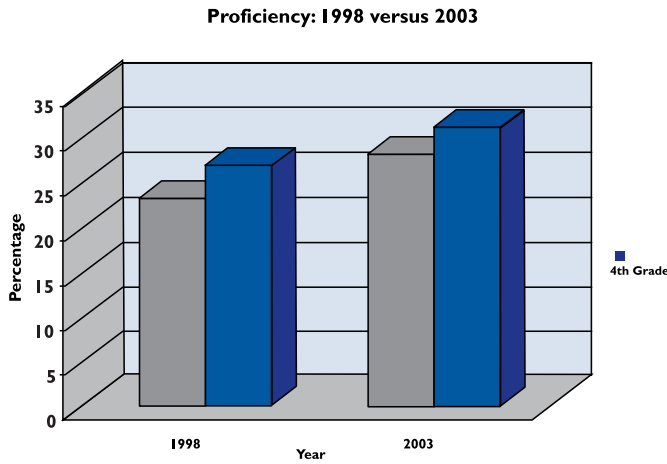


Figure 2

How does the Blueprint for Exceptional Writing Model Help Teachers and Students? The Research Investigation

The research to support the Blueprint for Exceptional Writing model (BEW) began in winter 2006. This research offers evidence of the model's overall effectiveness in raising writing competency and proficiency scores for all students.

In order to assure teachers and administrators that the BEW model is valid, the authors submitted the study plan to Eastern Michigan University and approval for proceeding was granted. The goal of this study was to test the BEW model as compared with a frequently-used process-writing methodology (PW). The ultimate goal of this effort was to ensure that elementary and middle school teachers across the United States will be presented with a high-quality framework for improving the writing competence of both at-risk and general education students.

The four-month study followed three sixth-grade classrooms in each of two different schools. One school used BEW and the other PW. The BEW school included 3 teachers who were trained and taught writing with BEW. The sample from this school consisted of 65 students. The PW school included 3 teachers who were trained and taught writing with PW. The sample from this school consisted of 68 students. Students from each school were classified as being either *General Education* or *Special Needs/At-Risk* based on standard agreed upon criteria. Each school followed the same basic writing curriculum to be completed by each student: three writing assignments consisting of a personal narrative, a persuasive essay and a research paper. Teacher fidelity was insured with both groups — BEW and PW — by weekly teacher monitoring of completed writing assignments. All teachers submitted a weekly log outlining their student writing selection progress as well.

Student writing proficiency was measured using the Written Expression subtest of the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Second Edition (WIAT-II). The WIAT-II was selected because it measures student writing proficiency on a nationally-normed basis. This norm-referenced test is widely and successfully used to measure individual student achievement, to assist in clinical diagnosis of learning challenges and to support curriculum planning.

The WIAT-II testing occurred at the beginning and end of the four-month study period to measure improvement in writing proficiency. An independent evaluator scored both the pre- and post-test writing samples for both the BEW and PW test groups. Students were assessed in writing competence based on their change in test scores due to the interventions: either BEW or PW. For each student, a difference was calculated between the student's test scores before and after the intervention. This difference was the *improvement* in test scores due to the intervention for each student. These improvement scores were averaged for each student group (Special Needs/At-Risk or Gen Education) by intervention type (BEW or PW). Table 1 shows these average improvements in test scores.

Average Improvement in Test Scores		
	Intervention Type	
Student Type	BEW	PW
Special Needs	12.38	.76
General Education	11.48	5.67

Table 1

The average improvements in test scores were then statistically analyzed using a 2-way *Analysis of Variance* to address two research questions:

- 1) Was one teaching intervention (BEW or PW) more effective than the other?
- 2) How did the Special Needs/At-Risk and the General Education groups respond to each intervention?

Figure 3 displays the results of the WIAT-II testing showing that students who were taught using the BEW intervention demonstrated significant learning gains at the conclusion of the study. Specifically, General Education students improved by a factor of 2 when the BEW

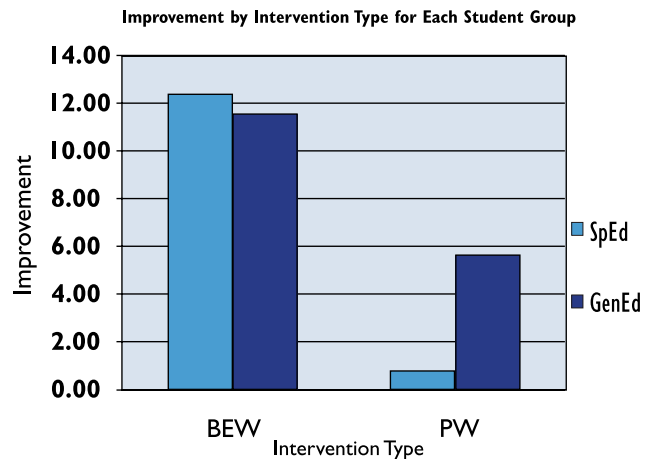


Figure 3

intervention was used compared with those students taught using the PW intervention. Special needs/at-risk students improved by a factor of 11 when taught using the BEW intervention compared with the PW intervention. These improvements were shown to be statistically significant by the Analysis of Variance.

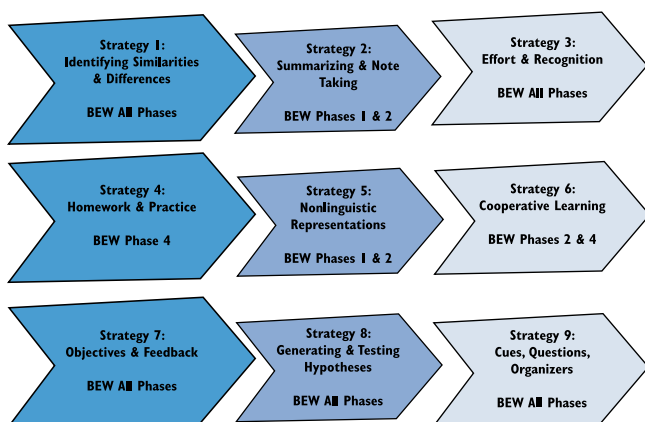
The Research Results

Based on study findings, BEW proved to be successful in improving the writing proficiency of all students, particularly at-risk students (including English language learners and students with special needs). Its emphasis on teaching expressive writing skills provides teachers with the verbal interactive methods and multi-sensory learning opportunities, to guide students in becoming successful writers, speakers, listeners, and readers. Teachers using the BEW model liked its straight-forward teaching strategies. In addition, all students were able to comprehend these strategies, and apply them immediately to their own writing selections. Teachers commented on the positive attitudes students displayed when using these strategies to write. On average students who were taught the Blueprint for Exceptional Writing model demonstrated significant learning gains during the study period. Results indicate that the model is successful in raising writing competency and proficiency scores for all students.

How Blueprint for Exceptional Writing Supports the Effective Strategies for Classroom Instruction and the Six Principles of Accommodation for Diverse Learners

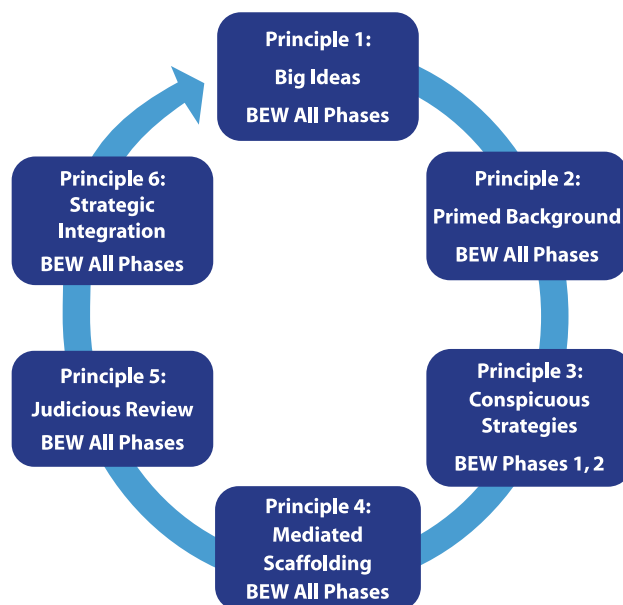
In 2004, Robert Marzano identified nine strategies that were found to improve student learning (*Classroom Instruction that Works*, 2004). When developing the Blueprint for Exceptional Writing model, the authors aligned each principle of Marzano's work to their own framework. When compared with BEW, we find that every principle shown to be effective by the Nine Effective Strategies for Classroom Instruction is present in the BEW model. The following diagram details this alignment.

Blueprint Model and the Nine Effective Strategies for Classroom Instruction



In 1998, Edward Kame'enui and Douglas Carnine, leading researchers in the field of education for diverse learners, identified six effective principles to guide classroom instruction known as the *Six Principles of Accommodation for Diverse Learners*. According to their research these principles effectively accommodate diverse learners and accelerate student learning. In fact, the combined effect on student learning when all six of these strategies are used is a very powerful tool that can nearly close the gap between diverse learners and general education students (Kame'enui & Carnine, 2002). These principles have become widely accepted as valid practices for teaching diverse learners across the United States and are incorporated in the differential teaching model of Blueprint for Exceptional Writing. The diagram below highlights the relationship between these principles and the BEW model.

Blueprint Model and the Six Accommodations for Diverse Learners



“Based on study findings, Blueprint for Exceptional Writing model proved to be successful in improving the writing proficiency of all students, particularly at-risk students (including English language learners and students with special needs).”



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