

Center for Urban Education Research Base

Writing about what you learn increases learning of that content

Core Element	Connections Structure	Basis in Research	Relevant Research
Students write to communicate what's important using a variety of formats.	Students write to explain what they learn, including learning logs. Students synthesize learning from different sources. Students write non-fiction texts in a variety of formats, including poems about the math, science, and social studies they learn. Students have "scaffolds" that organize writing with a clear focus and support.	Writing shapes thinking and leads to increased learning. Frequent guided writing develops writing competencies.	National Academy of Education, Commission on Reading, 1995. Langer and Applebee, 1987. Whatton-McDonald, Pressley, and Hampston, 1988. Langer, 2001.

The following research supports the emphasis on writing as a process that increases learning:

As confirmed by Becoming a Nation of Readers (National Academy of Education, Commission on Reading, 1995), research has established a powerful relationship between the opportunity to write and the ability to read. Learning logs help students reflect what they have learned. The goal is not to repeat what the book or teacher said. Rather, the student is expected to connect new material with previously learned material.

Langer and Applebee further stated in How Writing Shapes Thinking: A Study of Teaching and Learning (1987) that there is clear evidence that activities involving writing (any of the many sorts of writing we studied) lead to better learning. Beyond that we learned that writing is not writing; different kinds of writing activities lead students to focus on different kinds of information, to think about that information in different ways, and in turn to take quantitatively and qualitatively different kinds of knowledge away from their writing experiences (p. 135).

In a later study, Langer (2000) examined related research that stated:

At the elementary level, a number of studies have examined curriculum and instruction in classrooms where students have made unusual progress in reading and writing achievement, in contrast with classrooms where achievement is more typical. Whatton-McDonald, Pressley, and Hampston (1988), for example, studied 9 first-grade teachers in New York State who differed in their effectiveness in promoting literacy. In the most effective classrooms, there was a high level of engagement in challenging literacy activities, a web of interconnections among tasks (so that writing, for example, was often related to what was being read), and skills were taught explicitly but in connection with real reading and writing activities (840).

J. A. Langer, "Beating the Odds: Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well", American Educational Research Journal, Winter 2001, 38(4), p. 837-880.