

**Melissa Drakeford**  
**Math, English Language Development, and Computer Arts Teacher**  
**Luther Burbank Middle School**

## Teaching for Mastery

### **Research Question:**

The question I have been investigating is: How does my students' ability to self-edit improve when I use their own writing samples to provide whole class guided editing using Power Point and an LCD projector? The question has altered over the course of the research into: How can I best use technology to improve my students' ability to find and correct mistakes in grammar and improve writing content? How can I teach my students to “master” the basic grammatical and writing concepts we have been focusing on?

### **Context for Research:**

I have been experimenting with Power Point all year in both my language classes and my math class. I have found it to be a very powerful tool. It allows me to provide very direct visual support to my students in a clear and engaging manner.

At some point, I began experimenting with using my students' own writing to coach them through the editing process. Prior to this, I had used student models provided with the High Point curriculum. I used hard copies and transparencies to show them how to add more detail and to find mistakes in grammar. I also had my students exchange papers and peer edit.

I found that the student models provided with the textbook did not tend to include the same kinds of mistakes that my students were making. So, while I thought it was useful to show them some of the changes a teacher would recommend, the student models did not really meet their needs. Moreover, since most of my students are beginning English language learners they were all making the same kinds of mistakes and did not necessarily spot the errors in their partners work—peer editing was not proving very successful in catching their errors either. My students were not making very many changes from their rough drafts to their final drafts.

I started using my students' own writing samples when I discussed the revision process during major writing projects. I found that I concentrated on a few basic areas: capitalization, verb conjugation, and articles. I would choose a few samples from student work and then type them into my computer. With Power Point and an LCD projector I was able to project their work onto the screen for the whole class to see while keeping it relatively anonymous (some of my students felt compelled to announce their authorship.) I then made my own suggested changes using a different colored font.

### **Findings:**

By analyzing student writing samples before and after editing and also after whole class instruction using their own samples I have found that this teaching technique is very useful but by no means sufficient to teach my students to find and correct their errors. They made the most strides in adding detail to their writing but continue to struggle with complex structures such as verb conjugation.

I also found that the most significant benefit of this strategy was that it forced me to really focus on my students' writing and to notice exactly what concepts and grammatical forms they were not understanding. This allowed me to see trends in the class as well as individual student needs. I was then able to focus my lesson planning very specifically on my students' needs.

I altered the scope of my original research question and began experimenting with other ways to increase my students' ability to find and correct errors. I am still in the process of analyzing the results of these further experiments.

### **Policy Implications:**

The policy implications of this research are clear. First, having access to technology such as the internet, a computer with Power Point, and an LCD projector can allow a teacher to really focus on individual student needs in a very powerful way. The biggest implication, however, is that teachers need to have the freedom and flexibility to assess their students and alter the curriculum to meet students' needs. I had such freedom and was able to reteach and focus my lessons on those concepts my students had not yet mastered. I would not

have had this freedom if I was required to stick to a rigid curriculum pacing guide or was not allowed to use other resources other than the district adopted materials.

**Next Steps:**

I am fortunate in being able to be very flexible in designing lessons to suit my students' needs. It would be interesting to look throughout the District and the state to see how many teachers still have this freedom. State standards and pacing guides are designed to improve student learning, but many of our teachers are being required to move on to new standards long before their students have mastered those already taught. I would like to see how many teachers in the district feel they are teaching for "exposure" rather than "mastery".