

## **BIG WRITING AND BEYOND!**

*Patricia Ferreira, Teaching Principal, London Advent Christian Academy, London, ON*

I was privileged to have spent almost the last decade of my professional career in the U.K, namely London, England. It was there that I was able to explore the “art of teaching and instruction” as well as studying and completing an M.A. in Education, Gender and International Development. There were many fantastic and innovative programs that were implemented in the three very different types of schools where I was employed. However, the most exciting and fruitful was a Literacy based incentive called “Big Writing.”

Big Writing is a teaching approach created in 2004 by Education Specialist, Ros Wilson. “Ros Wilson has introduced a new teaching methodology for raising standards in writing rapidly and effectively. The method is based on fast, fun and lively teaching of the ‘writing voice’ through oracy. It gives pupils confidence and the understanding to develop control of a higher level writing voice without requiring the understanding of technical knowledge of syntax and grammatical analysis. This is important as not all primary aged children are ready for the level of technical knowledge and understanding required to access higher order language in this way. . . . The approach has also been found to be a huge motivator for boys who are quickly found to become 'excited writers.' It is also highly successful for bilingual pupils, because of its clarity and structure.”<sup>1</sup>

I have seen students who began the academic year at different ability levels with limited phonetics and basic alphabet knowledge finish the year writing whole stories with well-developed characters and themes. When Big Writing is used as a compliment to the literacy teaching sequence, it gives students opportunities to rehearse and apply their learning of other text types and keeps them engaged and excited about literacy. There are a variety of different variables that are put into making Big Writing a special and unique experience within the curriculum. Big Writing happens twice a week, one hour split into two 30 minute sessions. If introduced at the junior level, it is two 45 minute sessions. Each session should be fast, fun and lively.

Atmosphere is another key component and there are three changes that occur during Big Writing time slots. Firstly, lighting is dimmed and overhead fluorescent lights are turned off. Teachers may want to use Christmas lights to create an inviting atmosphere. Secondly, a large aromatic candle is placed at the front of the classroom to provide a central focus to pause and reflect. Lastly, music is vital; ideally it should be classical music played very softly so that it can only be heard if the classroom is silent. “These three environmental changes create an almost ‘electric’ silence that the children love.”<sup>2</sup>

The four elements of Big Writing in the classroom are:

VCOP. V: Vocabulary selecting exciting, challenging, different words and phrases to be used in their writing.

C: Connectives – Children are taught to use a range of words and phrases which connect and extend ideas.

O: Story and sentence openers which are interesting and excite the reader.

P: Punctuation. Different kinds of punctuation which adds to the story and helps the story evolve.

Each of these elements also has levels which extend the writing, and students are taught to self-evaluate and improve their compositions based on the big writing “pyramids.” For the early years, each element has a super hero attached to it and all are trying to fight the evil “Sergeant Sabotage” who tries to sabotage pieces of writing by making it boring or incorrect.

The enthusiasm and thirst for writing is tremendous and the academic impact is encouraging and infectious! I have now begun to implement this at my small school in London, Ontario and hope to create a Big Writing curriculum for the next academic year to supplement the Pathways program. If you are interested, please email me at [pferreira@adventistontario.org](mailto:pferreira@adventistontario.org).

<sup>1</sup>Michael Hale, “‘Big Writing’ Policy for Improving Standards in Writing.” St. Luke’s Church of England Primary School, p. 2.

Downloaded from [http://www.thecolehouse.org.uk/documents/big\\_writing\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.thecolehouse.org.uk/documents/big_writing_booklet.pdf) April 20, 2010.

<sup>2</sup>ibid, p. 7.