Common Issues with Teaching Conventions

- No clearly-defined curriculum
- Individual teachers making isolated decisions about what, when, and how to teach
- Too many needs
- Home usage in contrast/conflict with school usage
- Children learn and forget or learn and use only with prompting (not internalized)

Understanding Conventions

- There are different kinds of conventions to teach
  - Letter formation and placement
  - Spelling (with different approaches for high frequency words and others)
  - Punctuation and capitalization
  - Grammar and usage
- We need to teach these in different ways
  - Direct, explicit instruction
  - Embedded and/or implicit instruction
  - Inquiry/discovery
  - Isolated practice and purposeful retrieval practice
  - Holding students accountable in their independent work

Deciding What to Teach

- In the Writing Workshop model, curricular decision-making power is in the hands of the schools and districts who understand the needs of the children they serve (rather than a publishing company who can’t)
- With this power comes a great responsibility to assess those needs and make a comprehensive plan to meet them.
- This should result in consistent content across grades and responsible articulation through grades.
Creating a Continuum

Teachers within and across grades work together to determine what to expect when:

- Letter formation, handwriting, script
- Spelling:
  - Automatic recall
  - Usage of strategies and tools for unknown words
  - Proper capitalization
- Grammar
- Punctuation

Gradual Release of Responsibility

To: Show and explain
With: Guide, coach, and support
By: Hold students accountable

Deciding How to Teach

- Direct, explicit instruction
- Embedded and/or implicit instruction
- Inquiry/discovery
- Isolated practice
- Retrieval practice
- Accountability in independent writing
Direct, Explicit Instruction

- Teach the correct skill
  - High frequency words
  - Parts of speech
  - Punctuation
  - Standard grammar
- Identify challenges with spelling or grammar
  - Learning commonly misspelled or confused words
  - Learning common errors of usage

Embedded and/or Implicit Instruction

- Word Wall
- Noticing usage in shared reading texts (or in read aloud where appropriate)
- Pointing out convention usage in shared/interactive writing texts

Approaches to the Primary Grade

Word Wall

- High frequency words (30-100-150)
- Onsets and rimes, using high frequency words as a base
- Indicate which words help with spelling other words
- May indicate parts of speech or have a separate place to collect these
- Spelling patterns vs. word families
- Content area word walls can address the vocabulary specific to that content
Spelling Patterns vs. Word Families

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Approaches to the Upper Grade Word Wall

- We should be past all the “most frequently used words” list. Instead consider your most frequently misspelled words.
- Looking at the building blocks of words in action (roots and affixes, and their meanings) goes a long way to building vocabulary.
- You may want a separate place (or color) for confusing homonyms.
- Content area word walls can address the vocabulary specific to that content.
- In the upper grades, students can be taught to manage the word wall(s).
- Punctuation wall? Synonym/Antonym walls?

Inquiry and Discovery

- Identify area of readiness, need or curiosity.
- Collect, or have students collect, examples of the target language convention.
  - Spelling
  - Grammar
  - Punctuation
- Explore and name features or “job” of the convention.
- Chart student definition of the rule of usage.
Isolated Practice

- Cloze
- Guided self and peer editing of writing, looking specifically for recently taught conventions

Retrieval Practice

- Traditional tests' purpose is to assess whether a convention is learned or not
- Retrieval tests' purpose is to support recall and, eventually, internalization of learning
- Test soon after learning, and at repeated intervals over time
- Response to errors is crucial— they must be seen as information to guide further study and practice and not as failure to learn

Accountability in Independent Writing

- Everything up to now should lead to independent usage
- There should be several steps in the transfer from the very first explicit teaching of a convention to the expectation of independence
- A recently taught convention may be an editing strategy, then a drafting strategy, then a look-out strategy, then finally an internalized skill
Usage in the Writing Process

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Supporting Independence

- Co-create charts that reflect current study
  - Use student friendly wording
  - Charts should actively reflect new learning
  - Charts are for the students if they are not using them, remove or replace them.
- Create cumulative revision and editing checklists
  - Focus on fewer concepts per year
  - Focus on them deeply and hold students accountable
- Hold students accountable in varied ways
- Leave room for student choice, even with conventions

Next Steps...

- What is one way your understanding of teaching written conventions was clarified such that your methods will be different in the coming year?
- What is one area in which you would like more support or knowledge?
- Was there anything today that stands out as particularly helpful or transformative to your understanding?