

Why **EmPOWER**?

A Teacher's Perspective

Grade 6, English and Social Studies



As federal and state standards now insist that writing become as standardized as possible, providing students with a set of transferable skills to apply to writing across the curriculum is as crucial as ever. These skills need to apply to all students, not just students that struggle. History, science, and math teachers alike are just as responsible for writing instruction in their content areas as English teachers are; standardized tests no longer limit the assessment of writing to English/Language Arts. The ability to write paves the way for students' futures. The SAT now has a mandatory writing section, and all colleges require a writing sample. Therefore, teaching writing in all classrooms is critical if students are to be successful beyond grade 12.

EmPOWER is great for teaching and streamlining expository writing instruction. It is not a curriculum or a pre-packaged program; it is teaching method that provides students with skill sets that are useable across their curriculum. Like me, many teachers in my EmPOWER training admitted that they had previously been inventing their writing instruction. Learning the theory and necessary structures needed to teach writing in the EmPOWER training came as relief to all of us. Few (if any) colleges of education offer courses in writing pedagogy. As a teacher with degrees in History, Music, and English as well as certification in teaching English and History, I had no idea how to teach my students to write. EmPOWER filled in the gaps, allowing me to coordinate my teaching across content areas.

EmPOWER has changed my classroom and changed my instructional practice drastically. Providing "differentiated instruction" takes significantly less work for me. My goal is to have all of my students work independently (at the level at which they can) to convey what they know and understand about my curriculum content. With the structure and flexibility that EmPOWER provides, I no longer have to create different writing assignments for students with varied abilities. Now, I cover the same content with everyone. I give all of my students the same assignment, knowing that one student may only be able to show what he knows within a single paragraph, while another may develop an entire essay. I have all of them use the same four-part rubric and hold all of them responsible for evaluating and re-working their papers using a common skill set. Teaching is so much easier! Most importantly, I can cover a lot more content now that I spend less time clarifying what I want students to do and modifying every assignment. As I give my students power over their own writing, I empower them as writers and create a truly inclusive classroom.

Since beginning to use EmPOWER to teach English and Geography, I have come to believe that less is more when it comes to teaching writing. Providing students with instruction in *how* to write and spending instructional time teaching students the skills necessary to attack, plan, and complete a piece of writing is far more valuable than inundating them with multiple writing assignments. With the framework of EmPOWER, students talk more about what they are doing and why, and I talk less. I just guide their process, walking them through the same sequence of steps, prompting the same internal dialogue, and having them use the same set of strategies each time. As a result, students feel the freedom to make individual choices about how they will use those strategies to plan and organize their ideas, craft their texts, and make thoughtful revisions that go beyond finding spelling mistakes. As they gain control of their writing, they become more and more creative. Their unique voices begin to flourish, and so does the quality of their writing.