

A SYFR PARTNER: The Writer's Express

by Richard Erdmann, CEO and Founder, Syfr Corporation

As Syfr investigated information about brain research and incorporated it into our professional development programs, it became clear that repetition and practice was a very necessary part of the development of new skills, habits and knowledge but that not all repetition and practice achieves the same results. The fact that short, frequent practice is far more effective than long but infrequent practice is one example. We wondered if many commercially available programs did a good job of incorporating this relatively new research into their program designs. Our first discovery came in an unlikely place, teaching writing.

The Writers' Express (www.wex.org) has developed an approach to teaching and learning writing that is pedagogically aligned with the research on cognitive development. The company has been working with another of our partners, the College Board, and has achieved very impressive results. It breaks down writing into a very specific sequence of skills and the practices are focused on one skill at a time. They use writing as a gateway into reading. They coach teachers to use very targeted feedback and develop models for effective teaching.

A school case study is documented below: The students at South Bronx Preparatory (SBP) face a particularly difficult set of challenges. Death rates from drugs, homicide, AIDS and diabetes are four times the city average; almost twenty percent of children suffer from a learning disability; and more than half the adult population lacks a high school degree. SBP has historically ranked lowest in its district on the citywide exams of mathematics and language arts. The Writer's Express was chosen to pilot an intensive program with 75 SBP students and their teachers. In comparison to the other 10 middle schools in its district, SBP's 6th graders went from the lowest to the highest ranking in the New York City ELA exam. To put these results in perspective: the same period of time led to no gains in SBP's rankings in any of the other subjects assessed. They work with districts from Boston to San Francisco and products are available for grades 3 through grade 12.

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