Teaching Conventions in Context: Using Model Sentences

The following instructional practices for teaching written conventions in context use model sentences to help students learn how conventions are used by authors to clarify and convey meaning in their writing.

Notice

- Display the sentence with the targeted grammatical point.

- Ask: What do you notice?

- Ask (repeatedly, as needed): What else?

- Nudge students in the right direction to focus on the targeted grammatical point. For example:

    - What's working with the text?

    - Where's the good writing?

    - What is the effect?

    - What is the punctuation doing?

    - What changes if we remove it? Use something else?

Imitate

- Look closely at the model sentence. Deconstruct the sentence, identifying its prominent features, including the targeted grammatical point. Provide a sentence pattern or frame as a visual scaffold (especially for struggling writers and ELLs).

- Model your own imitation (use the targeted grammatical point in your own sentence) and connect back to the prominent features.

- Show students how to insert their ideas and experiences and still imitate the grammatical point in their own sentences.

Share

- Share the imitation sentences sparked by the model.

- Listen, clap, praise, but most of all, be sincere—create a positive environment that lets students know you value what they have to say.

Collect

- Have students look at the texts they have already read and see how other authors use the targeted conventions (grammatical points).

- When students find appropriate sentences, have them write them down.

- After sentences are collected, share a few and celebrate the most powerful ones that exemplify the targeted grammatical point(s).

- Display sentences on the wall as models.

Write/Revise

- Imitate a powerful model sentence using the targeted grammatical point in a longer composition.

- Try a freewrite, using the targeted grammatical point.

- Revise a sentence you have already written, adding in the targeted grammatical point.

- Respond to or summarize readings, using the targeted grammatical point.

Break Apart/Combine

- Together with students, demonstrate how to take a model sentence and break the ideas into several simple sentences. Read and reread the sentence, noticing the conventions used by the author.

- Then, provide students with opportunities to combine a set of simple sentences into one sentence that includes the targeted grammatical point. Have them compare their attempts with those of the author(s) and/or the combined sentences of their peers.

REFERENCE: Adapted from Anderson, 2007.