

Application and Reflection on E-QYP

Steps to Writing an Article

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Lesson Plan

Name of Activity: Steps to Writing an Article

Age of Targeted Participants: 15 - 24

Domain of Development: Cognitive Development

Area of Development Addressed: Language Skills

Goal(s)/Purpose for Activity: The goal of this activity is to increase written communication skills by guiding the participant through the writing process as they create a 500-600-word article which can be submitted to be published in the *Mockingbird Times*.

Type: Individually, One-on-One

Time: 2 + hours for Steps 1-3, 2+hours for Steps 4-6

Materials: “Steps to Writing an Article” worksheet (See Appendix A); Computer or laptop with access to the internet

Overview:

Participants in The Mockingbird Society often look for different ways to become involved and have their voice heard. The importance of youth voice is emphasized in several Positive Youth Development theories (Lerner et al., 2011; Saito & Sullivan, 2011). While Mockingbird activities often emphasize public speaking, there are also opportunities for written communication as a means to lift up youth voice. As an example, over 10,000 copies of each edition of the *Mockingbird Times* are distributed across the nation. Young people who submit articles are able to share part of their story and have their voice heard. Writing a news article is not a common task for most Mockingbird participants; therefore, guidance and support should be provided to help them learn. Improving written communication skills can be a part of adolescent cognitive development (Kearney,2014).

This activity is designed to help Engagement Specialists support their participants through the writing process including deciding on a topic, conducting research, determining the important points for the article and writing and editing the article. It should not be expected that the entire process be done in one sitting.

Instructions:

Note this activity is best done over several meetings and may span several weeks.

Preparation

1. At least two months before the article submission deadline, identify a participant who has shown interest in writing for the *Mockingbird Times*. Schedule a 1-2-hour block of time to meet, during which time the first three steps should be completed. Ask the participant to begin thinking of the topic they want to write about.

Step 1: Find a Topic

1. Begin the meeting by thanking them for their time. Give them the “Steps to Writing an Article” Worksheet (See Appendix A). Ask them if they know what they would like to write about. If yes and the topic is appropriate move on to step 2. If not guide the participant through a brainstorm, with some of the following questions. (You can also have them read past *Mockingbird Times* articles for inspiration <http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org/index.php/what-we-do/mockingbird-times>).
 - a. What do they think needs to change in the foster care/homeless system?
 - b. Is there a legislative or policy issue that they think more people should know about?
 - c. What barriers have they faced to having a safe and stable home?
 - d. What has helped them be successful?

- e. What do they wish foster parents, other foster youth or service providers knew?
- f. If around Youth Advocacy Day or the Youth Leadership Summit, why are these events important?

Step 2: Research the Topic

1. Have them use their favorite browser to search for a news article or report related to their topic. Alternatively, is there someone they could interview for information? What questions could they ask this person?

*Common sources for information and data on Foster and Homeless Youth and Young Adults

- Department of Social and Health Services <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/>
- Office of Homeless Youth <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/office-of-youth-homelessness/>
- Partners for Our Children <http://www.partnersforourchildren.org/>
- Point in Time Count <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/annual-point-time-count/>
- Casey Family Programs <https://www.casey.org/resources-main/>

2. Print the article(s). Provide a highlighter and have them read the article, writing down three important points, interesting facts, or quotes. TIP: Remind them to write down the source of the information, so they can reference it in their writing.

Step 3: Decide on the Angle

1. Discuss with them what main points they want to include in the article. To help them with this it may be helpful to have a conversation about why they wanted to write about this topic. What was their personal experience with the topic? How can they connect what they have just learned with their personal experience?

*See Appendix B for an example of a completed worksheet for Steps 1-3.

Step 4: Write the Rough Draft

1. Review the guidelines for article submissions.
 - a. Must be between 500-600 words
 - b. No profanity, glorified violence, or sexuality
 - c. No racist, homophobic, sexist or other discriminatory works
 - d. No names of people or agencies without their consent
2. Review that the 5 W's (who, what, where, when, why, and how) should be included in the article.
3. Review the standard parts of an article. Have them read the example article. TIP: Remind them, that they do not have to follow this format, but that it can be a good starting point.
4. If the participant needs more guidance on news article structure, they can review this resource:

<http://schools.peelschools.org/sec/lornepark/SiteCollectionDocuments/EQAO/OSSLT%20StED-Writing%20A%20News%20Report.pdf>

*See Appendix C for an example of a working rough draft.

*This is a good breaking point in the process. Depending on the participant, assign them to work on the rough draft on their own time, making sure to give them a deadline. Schedule a follow-up meeting.

Step 5. Revise and Edit

1. Meet with the participant and go over the edits. Asking questions for clarifications and giving reasoning for the edits. Reflect on the main takeaways that were communicated in

the writing and make sure they align with the participant's desired takeaways. TIP: If time allows, ask for others (staff or participants) to make comments or edits as well.

Step 6: Give Your Work a Title and Submit

1. Make sure the participant has chosen a title before uploading to SharePoint. Assistance may be needed to come up with a catchy and creative title.

Bonus Step

1. Ask the participant if they have an idea of a photo that could go well with the article.
2. Go and take the picture together and upload to SharePoint.

Ending the Activity:

Congratulate the participant on completing an article! Inform them when the next edition of the *Mockingbird Times* will be published. Let them know the Network Coordinator will make the final decision of which articles are published and may make some final edits. If they are not staff, make sure to have them fill out the required forms and double check the address they would like the stipend to be mailed.

This is also a good time to talk to them about the article writing process. What did they learn? What went well? What would they do differently next time?

Reflections

Why did you pick/create the focus activity? What were the goals for the activity? Why were those your goals? Why would this activity help you to meet those goals?

I have worked with many participants who have often mentioned the desire to write an article for the *Mockingbird Times* but lacked the knowledge and experience to write a quality article. One of Mockingbird's program goals is that "youth learn effective communication skills with a focus on writing and public speaking" (The Mockingbird Society, n.d., p. 3). We have

many activities to help participants learn and grow in their public speaking; but lack activities to support their development in their written communication skills. Using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, I wanted to provide more scaffolding for participants to help them reach a higher level of development (Hauser-Cram, Nugent, Thies & Travers, 2014).

Therefore, the goal for this activity was to provide structure and guidance in the writing process. The idea was to include information and resources to help the participant pick a topic, conduct research, decide on important points, and write the article. In providing this support, or scaffolding, the participant would learn the necessary steps to writing a quality article. To understand the level of scaffolding needed, it is important to gauge the participant's current level of writing and research skills. Some participants may need help reading, spelling, or typing, while others may need support in conducting online research. By providing appropriate scaffolding, the next time participants want to write an article they will have more knowledge of the steps to do so. This activity meets the goals by setting out a step-by-step process for the participants and includes external resources for Engagement Specialists to utilize depending on the development level of the participant.

How does the activity meet the developmental needs of the target age group?

According to Kearney (2014), "older teens enjoy demonstrating the knowledge they have acquired" (p. 129). Writing an article for the *Mockingbird Times* and seeing it published would allow participants to show their knowledge to others. Furthermore, older teens begin to have a "broad concern for society as a whole" and should be provided with opportunities to explore new ideas (Kearney, 2014, p.122). Participants are encouraged to write about something they are interested in, giving them the opportunity to research and understand more about a given topic. Since Mockingbird is an advocacy organization, the articles typically focus on legislative or

policy changes that participant think need to happen, which may or may not have any effect on the author. This shows their concern for their community and the well-being of others and allows for basic civic engagement through community education. Kearney (2014) mentions several times that older teens should be provided with opportunities for civic engagement.

Was the E-QYP content relevant and useful for structuring and shaping the activity? Why or why not?

The E-QYP content was relevant and useful for structuring the activity. In reviewing the E-QYP content it was wonderful to see how many of Mockingbird's current activities align well with the cognitive development characteristics and supports needed to promote further development. The information about the characteristics of older teens and the role that youth development leaders can take were clear and concise. Also, the suggested activities made it easy to connect the developmental needs and youth worker roles effectively. In fact, one suggested activity in the cognitive development area that addressed language skills was to "supervise a teen-run newsletter featuring articles they initiate and write" (Kearney, 2014, p. 129).

How did you assess whether the activity was successful?

I assessed whether the activity was successful by evaluating the ease at which each step was completed. If the participant struggled on completing a step, then I knew I had not provided enough scaffolding for them to complete the step. For instance, the participant who completed the activity did not necessarily struggle with the first three steps of the activity but had difficulty with the fourth step of writing the rough draft. After some time, I realized that for this participant an additional step of creating a more formalized outline would have been useful. We created an outline, which helped the participant further organize their thoughts and guide their writing.

I also assessed whether the activity was successful with how the participant used the worksheet. For example, Step 2: Research the Topic was designed for the participant to find 1 or 2 news articles to read through to gather information; however, this assumed that the topic had easily accessible and recently published news articles.

Did the activity you designed serve the purpose you had intended? Why or why not? If not, why not?

The activity I designed served as a starting point in providing more support for participants in their writing process. The activity guided the participant through the basic steps of the writing process in a clear and organized manner. Even so, as mentioned above, for some participants even more scaffolding may be needed. In designing the activity, I thought of my older participant staff, who have higher levels of education and writing experience. The participant who completed the activity, is currently in a GED program with no high school credits at the age of 16. With this in mind, for the activity to fully serve the purpose I had intended there needed to be more external resources and available modifications for Engagement Specialists to utilize for their participants. Alternatively, separate activities could be designed for the very wide range of writing levels.

Was the children's engagement and actions during the activity consistent with the E-QYP content? If so, how?

The participant's engagement was consistent with the E-QYP content. Older teens want to share information they have learned, are increasingly concerned about society, and need opportunities to be civically involved (Kearney, 2014). From the beginning the participant was looking forward in educating the community about Crisis Residential Centers (CRCs). They began only having their own personal experience of utilizing CRCs and as they learned of the

broader need for safe housing for those under 18, became increasingly excited with sharing this information. They even mentioned that increasing access to CRCs and HOPE beds should be an advocacy priority for Mockingbird and was happy when they learned it was an advocacy issue last year.

What more did you wish you had known or had available to you?

There are several items I wish I had known in designing and implementing this activity. First, I wish I had known the current writing level of the participant. In middle childhood, physical development has a bi-directional interaction with social interactions meaning that larger and taller children often are perceived as older and shorter and smaller children are perceived as younger (Hauser-Cram et al., 2014). I could imagine that the same trend continues into adolescence. I believe this concept may have been at play as I assumed the basic level of writing skills for this participant based on their age. Age does not determine development level, although it is often used as a reference (Hauser-Cram et al., 2014). In addition, I wish I had more knowledge about scaffolding strategies for writing. I referenced online teaching resources in the creation of this activity; however, I found it difficult to find a good balance between providing an appropriate amount of support without making it seem too elementary. Finally, I think it would be useful to know the ‘typical’ writing levels for different grade levels.

What recommendation(s) would you make to change or modify the activity to make it more successful?

To improve this activity, I would first provide more external resources for Engagement Specialists to utilize depending on the development level of their participant. Since we work with such a wide variety of young people in age (13-24) and in cognitive development level (those with no high school experience to those with their college diploma), it is important to

modify the activity for the individual. Again, it may be ideal to create several versions of the activity for the varied writing levels. The Engagement Specialist should assess the current development level and provide appropriate scaffolding to reach the participant's Zone of Proximal Development.

One aspect that I think would be crucial to include in an improved version of the activity would be a step for outlining the article, which could include a graphic organizer. I also think it might be helpful to include a section for participants to write what they already know about a topic (from personal experience, talking to others, or from the news) and then also have a section for them to write questions they have or information they want to learn before writing the article. This could help guide them when they are conducting their research. When doing this activity with my participant, I asked these questions and it was helpful in the process.

Are there any tips for adjusting the activity according to the size of the group, the ages of the youth, and other characteristics that may be relevant to the activity?

The activity was designed to be done in a one-on-one setting; however, it could be utilized in a larger group. If it were done in a larger group, I would suggest participants be asked to choose from a list of topics that have been screened for the availability of related news articles and reliable resources from the internet (frequently government or non-profit organization websites).

If the activity is done individually, a tip would be to ask the participant to self-asses their writing level when scheduling the meeting, so that the facilitator can be prepared to provide appropriate levels of support. Also, if the participant has identified their topic prior to the initial meeting, performing a quick search of available articles and information resources would be helpful. The participant should be allowed to find the resources on their own; however, having

knowledge of the information available will help the facilitator guide the participant to those resources. Finally, this process is not meant to be done in one sitting so adjusting for the attention span of the participant is crucial.

References

- Hauser-Cram, P., Nugent, J.K., Thies, K.M., Travers, J.F. (2014). *Development of children and adolescents*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Kearney, W.B. (2014). *Equipping quality youth development professionals: Improving child and youth program experiences*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse.
- Lerner, R. M., Lerner, J. V., Lewin-Bizan, S., Bowers, E.P., Boyd, M., Mueller, M., Schmid, K., Napolitano, C. (2011). Positive youth development: Processes, programs, and problematics. *Journal of Youth Development*, 6(3), 40 – 64.
- Saito, R.N., & Sullivan, T.K. (2011). The many faces, features, and outcomes of youth engagement. *Journal of Youth Development*, 6(3), 109-125.
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Appendix A
Steps to Writing an Article Worksheet

Mockingbird Times

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Steps to Writing an Article

Step 1: Find a Topic

You should write about a topic that you are **interested** in and that is **relevant** to the work that The Mockingbird Society does.

Step 2: Research the Topic

Find 1-2 information sources (articles or people) to help you become an informed writer.

Source #1: _____

Main Point, Interesting Information, Quote or Data:

- a.
- b.
- c.

Source 2: _____

Main Point, Interesting Information, Quote or Data:

- a.
- b.
- c.

Step 3: Decide on the Angle

Based on your experience and/or opinion and the research decide what are the 1-3 main points you want to tell the reader about.

Point #1:

Point #2:

Point #3:

Step 4. Write the Rough Draft

Time to write! Articles should be between 500 – 600 words.

Think about the following items:

- Who is involved?
- What is happened?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- How did it happen?

Guidelines

- No profanity, glorified violence or sexuality
- No racist, homophobic, sexist or other discriminatory works accepted
- No names of people or agencies without their consent

What are some typical parts of an article?

Introduction Hook the audience. What are you writing about? Why is it important?

Body All the information you have gathered

Connection Personal story that ties to the topic

Conclusion The Takeaway – What do you want the reader to walk away with? Is there something that needs to happen or change? What action can the reader take?

Note – Articles can follow other formats and styles

➤ Look at the [Example Article](#)

Step 5. Revise and Edit

Have a friend, teacher, or your Engagement Specialist look over your article and give feedback.

- ✓ Is the spelling and grammar correct?
- ✓ Does the article have good flow?
- ✓ Are points clear and concise?
- ✓ Did they get the main points you wanted to get across?

Step 6. Give Your Work a Title and Submit

The title should inform the readers about the article subject.

When you are done make sure to get it to your Engagement Specialist!

Bonus Step:

Is there a photo that would go well with the article? Take one and submit with the article! Cell phone photos are perfect!

***Mockingbird Times* January 2017 Edition**
Placements for Teens in Foster Care by Tatyanna Brown

Introduction

Washington state has a foster care placement crisis, with nearly 9,000 youth in the system and only around 5,000 licensed foster homes, according to Treehouse. This is an issue that greatly affects the permanency, safety, support, and shelter of teens placed in the foster care system. When people think of adopting or fostering youth, they're generally more inclined towards babies and young children. And who can blame them? Babies are generally cuter and easier to mold. But if we are short by nearly 4,000 licensed foster homes, and people are more likely to foster babies and young children, what happens to teens and other difficult-to-place youth in foster care?

Body

Youth entrusted to foster care after being abused and/or neglected by their parents often end up bouncing between hotels, group facilities, and other emergency placements when there is a shortage of licensed foster homes. Recent reports from DSHS show that 75% of the children placed in hotels last year in Washington state were age 12 and older. Youth can also end up in group facilities for severe mental health problems or juvenile delinquency, not because they need to be there, but because there are no regular foster homes available.

Ideally, when the foster care system is working, a young person is placed in one placement where they stay permanently until they age out or reunify with family. When there is a shortage of foster homes, youth can end up moving frequently. Between 2012-2014 in Washington state, youth with three or more moves in their first year of care rose from 15% to 19%, per a recent DSHS report, though the federal standard states no more than 14% should experience that many moves. With each move, a young person's behavior can get worse, often making it harder for them to find a foster family or group home willing to work with them. Studies show that youth in foster care that don't start out with behavior problems are much more likely to develop them when they are moved around.

What's worse is what can happen to youth in care upon aging out. Transitioning into adulthood is a difficult metamorphosis for any person, one that is made increasingly more difficult when youth exit care without supportive and trusted adults. When youth are shuffled between homes, trusting and attaching to anyone becomes difficult. According to Treehouse, less than half of youth in care graduate high school, less than one percent gain a bachelor's degree, and one-third of alumni of care live under the poverty line. Instability increases alumni's susceptibility of entering the criminal justice system, having unintended pregnancies, abusing drugs, and being unemployed, all things that cost taxpayer money.

Connection

I entered foster care at fifteen. My experience was that of constant moves because the only placements available were temporary. There was no point getting comfortable in a placement because I knew I wouldn't be there for long. The only familiarity I felt was the constant dread of never knowing when my time would be up in a certain home or school. My next home was often in a different town or city, making my education disjointed. Even though statistically speaking, I shouldn't have experienced much success, I graduated high school and was accepted to a university. I didn't know a lot about the adult world and with no one to turn to, things crumbled my sophomore year. It was a perfect storm of circumstances, some completely out of my control, and regardless of how hard I worked, I couldn't stop it all from unraveling. I went from a college student to a homeless person. Looking back, if I had a trusted and supportive adult in my life, maybe things would have been different.

Conclusion

Lack of placements for teens in foster care is an issue that needs to be addressed and there are ways you can help. If you have young people in your life, remember to be supportive in times of transition and understand the positive, lasting impact you can make by just being there. You can support or volunteer with organizations like Treehouse. You can help in a major way by becoming a foster parent, especially a foster parent for older youth in care. For more information, visit www.dshs.wa.gov/CA/fos/becoming-a-fosterparent. Change takes time. You may not be able to change the whole world, but we can change the world for one foster youth.

Appendix B
Completed Worksheet

Mockingbird Times

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Steps to Writing an Article

Step 1: Find a Topic

You should write about a topic that you are interested in and that is relevant to the work that The Mockingbird Society does.

CRC's

Step 2: Research the Topic

Find 1-2 information sources (articles or people) to help you become an informed writer.

Source #1: washington state dshs

Main Point, Interesting Information, Quote or Data:

- Short term, semi-secured/secured facilities for runaway youth/adolescents in conflict. Youth 12-17
- 116 crc beds in Washington state.
- total number of homeless unaccompanied youth 1073 (dept. commerce point in time ct.)

Source 2: _____

Main Point, Interesting Information, Quote or Data:

- 11 counties out of 39 have crc beds in WA
-
-

Step 3: Decide on the Angle

Based on your experience and/or opinion and the research decide what are the 1-3 main points you want to tell the reader about.

Point #1: what a crc is/how much they're needed

Point #2: we doubled number of hope beds in 2016 good start.

Point #3: how they can help, donating to local youth programs, talking to legislators about fundings, referring.

Appendix C Working Rough Draft

Washington State has a lack in CRC beds.

What is a CRC? According to Washington State DSHS, Crisis Residential Centers (CRCs) are short-term, semi-secure or secure facilities for runaway youth and adolescents in conflict with their families. CRCs provide resources for emergency, temporary residence, assessment, and referrals to services for youth ages 12-17. CRC's are used for housing foster and homeless youth, providing them a safe stable household for a short period of time.

CRC's are critical to sheltering at risk youth and foster children. The CRC's are critical to the of the youths mental and educational stability. There are about 1073 homeless unaccompanied youth in Washington State, According to the deputy point in time act. According to Parent Map Article there are about 10,000 foster youth in Washington State.

There are currently 116 CRC beds in Washington State. Only 11 out of 39 counties have CRC beds in Washington. The counties that don't have CRC's are often moved to a different county. Having to move out of county often alters the attendance in their educational process, as well as jobs.

I have been in foster care for about 4 years and I have had many personal experiences with CRC placements and what they're like. Many CRCs have other residence there and not everyone gets along. Moving out of county is frustrating, only because I was not familiar with the area and didn't know anyone there. Having to move constantly also messed up my high school credits and it was a lot harder to find a job due to unstable living.