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# A Revision Strategy: Green Dot – Red Dot

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**Grade Band**: 2-4

**Estimated Lesson Time:** Writing Workshop: Three to five 50-60 minute sessions

**Overview**

The primary objective of this lesson is to teach children a simple and fun revision strategy aptly named Green Dot – Red Dot. The strategy is introduced to students in three ways: (1) the use of mentor texts; (2) the teacher models writing to a prompt; (3) and finally, students experiment on their own and with a partner. This lesson also helps young writers to understand that making changes to their writing and refining their ideas can help readers (audience) understand. Furthermore, it teaches that the process of revision can be fun!

This lesson is embedded in a Mother's Day theme simply because I taught it at the end of second grade during Writer's Workshop to give students another experience in the genre of "writing on demand" (Gere et al.). (These students will be writing for the MEAP in early fall.) The children were motivated to revise and edit and publish the books they wrote in time for Mother's Day. Although all writing does not go to publishing in my class, I wanted them to continue to learn how to take their ideas from initial drafts to publication.

**From Theory to Practice**

Why teach Revision?

- Revision is crucial in my class. I continue to build on the work of others to further understand the value of teaching students to engage in revising their writing, particularly through the feedback of others. Of course, as the teacher and main responder and evaluator of their writing, the process reminds me of the role I play in their learning as writers to revise and see the value of it. Richard Stiggins says,

> Doing the revising for students not only creates time crunches, it tends to negate the purpose for descriptive feedback in the first place. Again, let's think about how this works in the context of writing. If a student clearly does not understand what to do next based on your feedback, you might choose to demonstrate. If this showing includes reworking some aspect of the student's work, you must exercise caution. Is your goal to create a better writer, or to create a better piece of writing? If your goal is to create a better piece of writing, then theoretically, you can dispense with the student and do it yourself. If your goal is to create a better writer, then doing the writing for the student will, in most cases, not work. The person who does the writing and the revising does the learning. (366)

- Lucy Calkins states that revision is a priority, which wasn't always the case.

> When I was a child, no one told me that there is a process that is as fundamental to writing as the scientific method is to science. But since those days, the teaching of writing has been revolutionized. Now, when a school or a district decides to teach writing as a process, this means that revision becomes a priority. (iv)

- The key in teaching students to revise is to show them how to develop a strong vision for their writing. Katie Wood Ray reminds us to use many good examples to engage students as writers, and that the process of teaching revision demands reflection:

> Sometimes I think teachers

> get frustrated with students because they don't seem to know what to do with revision, but I think it's worth asking, "Have I done enough to help my students develop a strong vision for the writing I'd like them to do?" Writers write well, often even in first drafts, when they have a clear vision of the kind of writing they will do. (30)

Coming to understand these statements and apply them to my classroom is the ongoing challenge. In the next section I share a revision strategy that is working for my class and other teachers in my district. The lesson is presented in the general format that we have found useful as classroom teachers.

**Student Objectives**

Students will:

- Listen to and view a mentor text
- Participate in class discussion
- Plan a piece of writing
- Write to a prompt
- Practice revision strategy
- Share writing
- Edit/Teacher Edit
- Publish the piece

**Preparation**

- Copy of a book to read aloud. I chose: *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera B. Williams (Select any text to go with a genre study or writing craft detail you are working on.)
- Type four to six pages of the text to hand out, place on overhead projector or Elmo
- Chart paper, or overhead for teacher modeling purposes
- Writing paper for students
- Red & green pens or markers
- Target: Be Brave and Try It!
- Directions: Place one to three green dots. Place a minimum of one red dot. Place the green dot – Revise the red dot.

**Instruction and Activities**

***Session 1***

Read Aloud: *A Chair For My Mother* by Vera B. Williams. Introduce the idea of revision by asking? What's the *Go* (a place for a green dot)? What does this author do well? Brainstorm a list. Place some of the text on an overhead and ask, "Where would you *Green Dot* Vera?"

- Using green pen, dot the place in the text that the children thought was good. Children may note descriptive language, dialogue, or show-not-tell, depending on what you have been working on in your writing workshop.

Next, ask the children what questions they have for the author. Is there any part of the story (text) that is confusing, or something you want to know more about?

- "Where would you *Red Dot* Vera?" Using a red pen dot the place in the text where it is confusing or where the children want to know more.

End this session by discussing *revision*. I explain that even famous authors start their drafts with ideas or visions for the writing. They write these ideas down; later, they re-read and may think of something to change, or "revise." I encourage students to try revising: read something they have already written and place a green dot on a part they really like, or, "If you are really brave, place a red dot on a spot where you could add more." I then write and place the words: Green Dot - Red Dot Revision on our class Target, above which are the words: "Be Brave and Try It!" We end the workshop by sharing, and I ask a few students to share a place in their writing where there is a *go*, a green dot.

***Session 2***

I begin session two with the text *A Chair for My Mother*. Students retell the events of the story. Next, they read the dedication aloud, "to the memory of my mother, Rebecca Poringer Baker." I tell students that we are going to write a story for our mothers, or grandmothers, or favorite aunts, just in time for Mother's Day. I inform them that since we will be writing from a prompt that we will be practicing the "writing-on-demand" genre.

I show the prompt and give everyone a copy, then model by reading it aloud. As I read each choice I make as a writer, I demonstrate a think-aloud process. For instance after reading, "Write about something special your mother did with you," I say, "My mom and I loved making cookies together." Then I circle that choice on my prompt. I ask them to think about each prompt choice and to circle one that they have an idea for. After a few minutes

I have students turn to their neighbor and share the idea that they will write about. Students who have chosen an idea return to their seats to plan their writing.

The second grade teachers at my school all use a graphic organizer that we call the "quick plan" to jot down their ideas. I sit with the few remaining children until they can verbalize what they will write about, after which I model my quick plan on chart paper as they write. Students are told that they may begin their draft when the plan is done. We reconvene near the end of class for sharing. At this point I share my quick plan for a story and say; "What did I do well? Where would a green dot go? On the first event or, on the heart of the story?" After putting green dots on one to three spots we move to focus on the red. "Where is there a stop? Where would a red dot go? Perhaps the title?" (I had put *Cookies* as my title.)

The class had suggestions for a better title, so choosing one I wrote the revised title in red pen. Finally, we placed a green dot next to the red signaling it was done. The workshop ends after four or five students have shared the green dot the Go on their quick plan. I do not ask for red dots at this time, nor do I let anyone share drafts. The target was met for day two.

***Session 3***

The focus of this lesson will be to write a draft then critique using the green dot – red dot strategy. After reviewing my quick plan, I write a lead on chart paper, continuing to print as I speak aloud while children observe. I send them off to begin their writing, and I work about five more minutes to complete a draft. I make sure to conference with individual students as I move around the room. Near the end of the writing workshop, I tell the students that I will share because I want them to help me revise. I explain that I want to publish it for my mom for Mother's Day, and I ask the students to help me revise my writing with green and red dots. I remind them we always begin with a positive comment. That is the *Go*! By this time the students are comfortable with the strategy, and they make observations that demonstrate they are in the process of understanding revision and are thinking like writers. I promise that they will get time to try it with their writing the following day.

***Session 4***

I begin this session by teaching a little song about green dot revision, and I explain that we will stop writing early so they can have the chance to use the revision strategy with a partner. The students begin writing. After about twenty minutes I partner up the students. Then, using one student as my partner, I demonstrate what it will look like working with their partner. For example, "Madison you have a great dialogue lead, so let's put a green dot there!" I select something else she did well in her writing.

Next I do a think-aloud and say, "It's time to look for something Madison wrote that might be confusing, or find a spot or an idea that I want to know more about. I again model. "Madison, tell me more about when you fell off your bike?" Madison then tells me, "Oh, my knee was bleeding really bad. My mom rushed up and carried me into the house and put on a huge Band-Aid." Meanwhile I place a red dot and begin scribing what Madison said.

I thank her, ask the students if they have questions, and send children off in pairs in EEKK fashion (elbow, elbow, knee, knee) to work. In my class it's worked best to allow them about twenty minutes. The session ends with students celebrating and sharing their green and red dot revision writing.

***Session 5***

We sing the revision strategy song. I encourage them to reread their drafts, looking this time to edit. I move around the room assisting and encouraging as students begin to publish their stories for Mother's Day.

**Student Assessment and Reflections**

The students use an editing checklist and a three-point rubric to assess their draft before turning in the paper for a teacher edit. At that time I too assess the paper using the rubric. After students finish using the draft to publish they turn in the draft, which will be kept in their writing portfolio.

Green Dot – Red Dot revision is being adapted in many ways in our district. Initially some teachers used red and green stickers, but found students more interested in placing the stickers on their foreheads or desks. Our district writing specialist recommends to third through fifth grade teachers and students that they first revise the green dot

areas. She explains that this is like riding a bike downhill. They are good at it making it fun to develop with interesting details and word choice. My experience has been teaching first and second grade and before this technique I could not motivate young writers to revise work. Students using this strategy successfully developed an interest in identifying places in texts that were ripe for revising; therefore, better writing was produced. This school year I plan to teach this revision strategy much earlier in the year when students first have a piece of writing to publish.

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**About the Author**


**Susan Anderson** (sanderson@novi.k12.mi.us) is a fellow of the Eastern Michigan Writing Project (2008). Currently she is a second-grade teacher at Orchard Hills Elementary in Novi, MI. When not teaching, she enjoys reading, writing, attending theater, and traveling. She lives with her husband Larry, and they have a 28-year old son, Elijah, living in Chicago.


## Editors' Note – Correction

In the Spring/Summer 2008 issue of *LAJM*, Marcy Taylor wrote an article, "Changing the Culture of 'Test Prep': Reclaiming Writing Workshop, and she referred to the *Educator's Guide to the ACT Writing Test*. The booklet and complete set of examples that Taylor intended for the article can be found online at: www.act.org/aap/writing/pdf/educator_guide.pdf.