



PARENT ORIENTATION KIT

What does inquiry-based workshop teaching in
reading, writing, and math look like in grades K-8?

The Partnership for Inquiry Learning is a program of the Butler University College of Education. The Partnership provides ongoing and in-depth professional development to teachers in grades preK-8 with emphasis on workshop teaching in reading, writing, and math.

Learn more at www.partnershipforinquirylearning.org.

Why writing workshop?

We believe writing workshop is the instructional framework that best supports *all* students. Through rigorous teaching, students learn to write with clear vision and skillful intention, positioning them well for lifelong academic and workplace success. Here's why:

Writing workshop engages students in meaningful work.

A key element of writing workshop is *choice* in writing topics. Students are not prescribed topics; they are taught to mine topics from their own experiences. They write about things that move them, whether that's baseball, grandma's death, Styrofoam waste in the cafeteria, a new Labrador puppy or another topic. Because their texts are driven by a desire to convey meaning to readers, students are deeply engaged in crafting the most articulate text they can achieve. Choice of writing topic increases the volume of writing students do. The more a student has to say about a subject, the more opportunities there are to teach him/her how to write about it *well*.

Writing workshop focuses on "real world" texts

In writing workshop, students read texts in their "real world" formats: books, magazines, literary journals, comics, blogs, websites and more. These varied texts give students a vision for what *they* can write. They learn to distinguish between genres in these publications. *How is a feature article different from an essay? How are they similar?* And as they produce texts, students constantly research and examine published examples, considering: *What have I seen that's like what I'm trying to make? Where have I seen an author effectively do what I'm trying to do?*

Writing workshop elevates writing as a content area

Writing across the curriculum to support our learning lives is different than writing to communicate original ideas. Both are valuable



and necessary skills. When writing is *only* done inside other subjects—writing up scientific findings or responding to essay questions in history or literature, for example—no time is devoted to teaching concepts and strategies that improve the writing. Lessons in voice, genre, style, structure and craft get pushed out of the way. In writing workshop, these lessons are front and center. Students are not only putting words on paper but also learning how to make informed decisions and use intentional strategies that make the written texts as effective as possible.

Writing workshop values diverse lives and experiences

Workshop teaching does not assume that all students have the same or similar sets of experiences; rather, it values the differences in language, interests, abilities and experiences that make each of us unique. Workshop teachers build a community of writers around this central tenet. The writers in these communities are both independent and interdependent—they learn on their own, from their teachers *and* from their classmates.



Writing workshop increases confidence in writing ability

Students develop a sense of craft in writing workshop. They read like writers to see what strategies other authors employ to effectively convey meaning and emotion, shape and organize material, make texts lively and compelling. As thoughtful, deliberate researchers, students then apply this knowledge across texts, genres and subject matter. Because workshop teaching focuses on improving each writer's breadth and depth of understanding of craft, students acquire the tools necessary to improve *not only* the project in hand *but also* future writing endeavors.

Writing workshop enables individualized instruction

Workshop structure provides substantial time for whole group, small group and one-on-one instruction to students *daily*. Teachers plan strategic curriculum specific to the students in the room, moving students towards appropriate whole-group goals (standards) while simultaneously responding to individual needs. Much like an athletic coach considers, *What does this player need to know for this Saturday's game in order to play the best she can at this stage of her development*, workshop teachers strategically plan what to teach the whole class and what to teach each individual writer to enable him to produce the best text he can in each genre studied throughout the year. In writing workshop, *all* students can be successful—including the most advanced and most challenged students, two extremes often ill-served by other curriculums that teach to the median.

Writing workshop mirrors the work of “real writers”

Writing workshop is a highly structured research-based curriculum that engages students in a complex, multi-layered process that resembles the work of professional authors. Other curriculums may move students through a process (pre-write, draft, revise, edit and publish) to achieve a desired product, but writing workshop goes further, engaging students in activities that include cultivating a writerly life—

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exploring, collecting, reading, talking, contemplating, co-authoring and questioning. Like professional writers, students in writing workshop know that “making something” takes substantial time and thought. The writing process is not a rigid formula. Students, like professional authors, learn to manage their writing projects through these complex and sometimes “slippery” stages.

Writing workshop uses conventions for audience

In writing workshop, students have audiences beyond the classroom teacher and see how their writing affects others. They learn to use grammar and spelling conventions that enhance and clarify meaning in the texts they write. They learn to identify and choose punctuation, line breaks, diction and other conventions appropriate to the audience to ensure that texts are read as the writer intends. In this way writers learn that their words—and how they present those words—have the power to inform, persuade, move, entertain, challenge and profoundly impact readers.

Writing workshop improves student achievement

The goal of writing workshop is deep, lasting learning. To test whether or not our teaching meets that goal, the Indiana Partnership for Young Writers developed a proprietary assessment tool, *The IPYW Narrative Writing Continuum*, to measure student performance over time. This tool *complements* other quantitative measures of student achievement, such as I-STEP+, and aligns with rigorous national Core Curriculum standards in language arts.

Schools that demonstrate significant growth on the *Continuum* also have high I-STEP+ English/language arts pass rates. Data also reveals a strong correlation between professional development in workshop teaching and student achievement in writing/language arts.

5



Things Writing Workshop Teachers Want Parents to Know

by Libby Duggan

Perfect spelling is not the goal of writing. Young writers should include words in their writing that they don't know how to spell—that's how they grow their vocabularies. If we send the message that every word needs to be spelled perfectly, students will feel that they must rely on someone else to produce "good" writing. If your child asks you to spell a word, give him strategies to try his best guess at the spelling instead. You might ask questions such as:

- What sounds do you hear when you say the word

slowly? Stretch it out and get all the sounds that you hear onto your paper.

- Have you seen the word on something you've read before? Locate it and copy it.
- Can you think of other words that look or sound like what you're trying to say? How are those words spelled?
- Have you tried writing it a couple of different ways? Which one looks best to you?

In time your child will become familiar with more words and spelling patterns and will grow to correctly spell words that were once too difficult for him.

We learn to write by looking at what other writers have done. If you are helping your child on a particular type of writing, the first step might be to



help her find some things that are like what she's trying to create. For example, when adults are asked to write a job resume, they often look at examples of resumes that belong to others in their field, to get a vision for what a "good" resume looks like. The same is true for any genre of writing at any age.

We write best when we choose our own topic and write about things that matter to us. Writing is easier and more enjoyable for both the writer and his readers when the subject is important to the author. Children may choose to write about the same



The beach A very big wave was so strong. I was running for shore. I got not down. I got water in my nose.

subject across genres, and this should be encouraged. If you have a child who likes dinosaurs, for instance, he may want to write a personal narrative about the time he went to a dinosaur exhibit at a museum, a feature article about Triceratops and a poem that uses dinosaur as a metaphor for something old or outgrown. Many authors return to the same subject over and over again because it is meaningful to them.

Writing is a collaborative process that involves talking. One of the best ways to help someone with a piece of writing is to talk to her about what she is doing. Answering questions often helps writers clarify their goals and flesh out what they want to say about the topic. You can ask your child questions such as:

- What are you working on as a writer? What is going well for you? What are you struggling with?
- What do you want readers to know after they have read this piece of writing? What do you want readers to feel as they read?
- What is the most important thing in this piece of writing? How do other writers show readers what is most important?

Sometimes writers need help hearing themselves think, so to

speak, so you might also ask, “What are you trying to say?” And then repeat back to your child in your own words what you have heard him say. You might respond with, “So if I understand correctly, it sounds like you’re saying...Is that what you’d want a reader to know?”

Sharing our writing is an important part of the process.

Children need many opportunities to share their writing in a public way. This makes their work important and meaningful.

“Publishing” a piece of writing doesn’t *only* mean seeing it in a formal book or magazine. Simply *sharing* it is valuable, too. If your child has written a story about a grandparent, for example, you can help him share it with that grandparent, perhaps by reading it

aloud or even wrapping it up and presenting a copy of the story as a gift. Making your child’s writing visible to others—and hearing how much the writing affects others—can help your child become more motivated to write.

Libby Duggan has worked in elementary education for two decades, including 10 years as a primary grade classroom teacher. She is now program manager and workshop coach for the Partnership for Inquiry Learning.

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5 reasons to “make books” in pre-K

a guide for teachers to share with parents

Parents often ask, “Why are the children making books in preschool? How can they make books if they can't read and write yet?”

Research tells us that young children *can* read and write—they are already understanding and using important skills that mature readers and writers do. When we teach them to make books, we use what they already know *and* add to that knowledge, helping them establish strong foundations for long term academic success. There are multiple reasons for teaching writing in this way at this age:

1. Picture books are familiar—and fun

Children are surrounded by picture books in preschool. They might also see picture books at home and other places where they spend a lot of time.

In school, teachers and volunteers read picture books aloud to the whole class, and sometimes in small groups, and sometimes one-on-one with an individual child. We look at picture books together and talk about what each of us sees, what it reminds us of in our own lives, or questions we have about it. We encourage children to look at picture books on their own, and we work to keep a wide variety of picture books available. In short, picture books are a significant part of every single day.

Because students see and hear picture books so often, they can easily imagine what it means to make one. They understand the goal. This is an important concept for them to know as they grow and attempt other kinds of writing: successful writers study texts that are like what they wish to make.

Children also *enjoy* making picture books, and even though that alone is not a reason to do it in class, nurturing that love for reading and writing certainly helps support learning for years to come.

2. Picture books are varied and complex

Don't be fooled by the length of picture books. They actually contain complex concepts about writing. Picture books come in all genres: they can tell true stories, be pure fantasy, demonstrate how to do something, explain something, explore history, or showcase poems. They achieve this with a combination of words and images, helping us see many different ways we can communicate ideas to others.

By studying and making picture books, children come to deeper understandings about genres and their purposes as well as *how* authors make decisions about genre and purpose.



3. Making picture books supports composition

The word *compose* means to order or arrange parts to form a whole, especially in an artistic way. The definition implies that ordering and arranging are done in an *intentional* way, not accidentally, perhaps to achieve a desired effect. When children compose picture books, they think and make choices about purpose, genre, audience, ideas, organization, word selection, sentence length, tone, appearance, white space, and other “craft strategies.”

It is possible, of course, to compose lots of complex ideas on a single piece of paper, too—as certainly many works of visual art do—but often when students are asked to do so, a teacher or other adult then reduces their complex ideas to a single sentence and writes it on the bottom of the page. This teaching strategy actually destroys all the elements of the composition. It does not nurture students’ abilities to “elaborate” or expand meaning; it unintentionally hurts it.

Instead, by inviting students to compose across multiple pages, we help them imagine how to expand an idea or ideas.

4. Making picture books helps students read like writers

Being writers changes how children read. In the same way that people who cook notice things about the food they eat that non-cooks don’t think about—or a musician notices things about a musical performance that non-musicians don’t—writers notice and think about more than just a book’s meaning. Writers notice *how* a text is written—how an author approached a challenge or produced a desired effect on readers, for example. This is how writers learn new strategies and become effective at choosing among them when creating books, or any texts, of their own.

5. Making picture books builds stamina

Good writing takes time. Not only do writers need to sit down and work for long stretches of time, they also must learn to come back to the same piece of writing many times to revise and make it better. Developing an idea over multiple

pages allows preschoolers the practice they need to build stamina for these writing habits.

We see children who struggle at first to create more than a single page become writers who are eager to grow their ideas across many pages of a book. Occasionally, preschoolers will even return to the same book on a different day, wanting to add more or change something. These students are building the stamina they need for future scholarly tasks.

In short, we believe that making books—each child doing the best a 3-, 4-, or 5-year-old can to approximate words and images on each page—makes the best use of children’s existing knowledge of text and language while also supporting further development that will serve them well into their futures as readers and writers.

You may see your child’s stamina for writing grow throughout the school year, hear your child talk about why he chose a particular topic or style or composition strategy, or hear your child identify herself as a reader and writer even before she is reading and writing in ways that society recognizes. Those are all excellent milestones. We will help you spot these and other emerging skills throughout the year.

Content adapted from *Already Ready* (Katie Wood Ray & Matt Glover, 2008, Heinemann) and *About the Authors* (Katie Wood Ray & Lisa Cleveland, 2004, Heinemann)



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5 Things to know about teaching and learning math

by Jessica Miller



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jessica is a member of the Partnership's Math Thought Community and Teacher Research Group. She graduated from Butler University in 2008 and is currently pursuing a Master's Degree from Ball State.

Parents, students, friends—and sometimes even colleagues who are less familiar with balanced math—often ask me why we are teaching math in a new way. I ask them in return, “Do you understand the math you learned in school? Or did you simply memorize the formulas that led to the right answers?”

Teaching evolves just as every profession does. As we learn more about how students learn, we refine our practices. As the demands placed on graduates in higher education and the workforce change, what we do in the classroom changes, too. We balance what we know about teaching and learning with the needs of an ever-changing world.

One of my goals as a teacher is to help students think and solve problems like professional mathematicians. The following five truths about math provide a foundation for my teaching:

1 Conceptual understanding helps students learn and use algorithms. One of the first things parents and other observers notice about math workshop is the reduced emphasis on traditional algorithms, or formulas. It isn't that we've banned traditional algorithms from the classroom. Students do learn and use them—but not until they're able to understand what the formula means and why it works. We build toward a procedure by experiencing many different problem solving strategies first. This way, students often arrive at the traditional algorithm on their own, as they think about how to describe what they did to get an answer.

2 Fact speed does matter, but it isn't everything. As children, lots of us memorized math facts and raced to answer them correctly on worksheets. Of course, the more quickly students can solve basic facts, the more quickly they can complete other, more sophisticated problems. But, again, we don't want to teach memorization without understanding. Our goal is fact fluency. Fluency with math means that we are accurate, efficient, and flexible when solving problems.



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Students should have many opportunities to use different strategies to solve facts so they build the understanding that leads to speed. The more they practice using their strategies, the more fluent (accurate, efficient, and flexible), they will be. Speed will develop naturally with continued practice.

3

Efficiency is important. As students discover and invent strategies for solving problems, they are not always working in the most efficient way. That doesn't mean that their strategies are wrong. Efficient strategies develop with time and plenty of practice. Using the term "efficient" in teaching is important, as we must support students in finding strategies that use their time and brain-power wisely. We do this by scaffolding instruction to help students identify, develop, and refine more efficient strategies. Students build from the strategies they love and are comfortable with to strategies that are efficient and promote a productive use of their time.

4

Math isn't a grade-specific checklist. Mathematics isn't just a set of individual skills to check off at each grade level; rather, our goal is to move students forward when they are ready. When we treat our own grade level as an isolated study, we take away the opportunity for our students to make mathematical connections. I have had students tell me that they can't use negative numbers because that isn't something that they do in their grade. "That's more of a middle school thing," they say. If students are ready for content that includes negative numbers, let them have it!

5

Flexible mathematicians is the goal. Students are successful in mathematics when they are able to think flexibly about numbers and work with numbers. The mathematics our students will encounter throughout their lives will not be as clean and organized as the problems in a textbook or workbook. We need to give students an opportunity to work with messy math. That may mean getting them comfortable with not knowing the "real" answer, or understanding that there's more than one way to solve a problem. The process of learning mathematics is not linear and is not identical for all students. We strive to foster students' inquisitiveness and build on what they know. We want them to love math!

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4 Things to Know about Reading

by Libby Duggan

Parents often ask me what they can do at home to support and encourage reading. I find myself repeating four main ideas, things that reading workshop teachers know that every parent, grandparent, babysitter, school volunteer, policymaker — well, everyone — should know, too.



1. We use multiple strategies to figure out difficult words.

As adult readers, we use many strategies to decipher words that are unfamiliar to us, but because reading is second nature to us -- like breathing, perhaps -- we may not even be aware of the thinking we do. As a result, we often get caught in the trap of telling young children to "sound it out" when they encounter a new word. Instead, we want children to have a "toolbox" of many strategies for comprehension. In addition to encouraging kids to sound out a word, you can demonstrate other ways of determining a word's meaning, things seasoned readers do almost subconsciously when they read, such as:

- Look at the pictures. Do they help?
- Look for familiar roots or small words within the word you're trying to identify.
- Based on what you know from the text and pictures, think of words that would make sense and/or sound right in the sentence. Do the letters of any words you thought of seem to match what you see on the page?
- Skip the word you don't know and read to the end of the sentence. Then come back to the word. How does what you know now help you decipher the word?

2. We read best when we're interested in what we're reading.

This is why it is important for children to have a *choice* about what they read. Think about your own reading life, for example. Imagine being told that you have to read a science fiction novel if your preference is biographies. Your reading of the science fiction novel would be very different than your reading of a book about the life of a famous actor. Teachers, parents and caregivers can help children become better readers by helping them find books and magazines that tap into their interests.

3. Reading is a social experience.

When children are young and haven't developed the ability to read on their own, we read aloud to them and talk about the pictures and stories. But once children become independent readers, we often encourage them to read quietly alone. Older children and adults can enjoy hearing a story aloud, too (why else would audio books still exist?), and all readers need time to talk about what they are reading to develop deeper understandings of it. Adults and children can participate in discussions about books together, as if having your own cross-generational book club. Book discussions at home among children are great, too, just like in the classroom.

4. Seeing readers and books inspires reading.

Like all of us, children tend to take on the habits of those around them, so seeing adults and other children reading is important. There are many things you can do as a reading role model for children, including:

- Take frequent trips to the neighborhood library to check out books for yourself and your child.
- Talk about books that you are reading (or newspaper and magazine articles) with your child and other adults. Let children see that reading and talking about texts is part of your lifestyle.
- Read during your leisure time. Make an intentional effort to swap some family "screen time" (television, computers) for book time.
- Make a place for books and other reading material in your home. If books and reading material are out of sight, they will be out of mind as well.

Libby Duggan is program manager and workshop coach for the Partnership for Inquiry Learning. For more information and resources, visit www.partnershipforinquirylearning.org.