

NK.NOTES: Lucy Calkins' School Writing Program Presentation, NCTE 2003

Calkins' schoolwide program is based on teaching according to our best beliefs, creating "communities of care based on writing and reading."

- Calkins works with 50% of NYC schools to provide strategies for professional development and teaching of writing strategies
- 1) Strategies are clear, doable and able to replicate
- 2) Program is conservative enough to address the staffs' fears
- 3) Program is accountable—standards based and produces evidence we trust

Elementary Reading-Writing Curriculum Characteristics

- Curriculum comes from kid-watching to determine each child's next step
- Classroom is highly structured and predictable
- Teachers use teachable moments
- Units pool best thinking in reading-writing research to date
- Shows the power of assessment-based curriculum
- Teaching and learning are individual
- Ongoing structures that last across the year raise the quality of instruction
- Teacher collaboration is good to mentor new teachers and to improve the entire system
 - *Weakness* could be "teaching by mentioning," not ongoing scaffolding over time. Teacher could become a ping pong ball bouncing all over the room.
 - *Weakness* could be units don't fit all kids in every room of the school
- Calkins sees curriculum as a marriage of both these curricular views:

Structure: one hour each day of reading-writing workshop with 10 minute mini lessons providing direct, explicit instruction

Mini-lesson: Structure is set; could be called cookie cutter (the downside of large-scale reform). Teachers must have a predictable plan to follow and assess over time.

Ten Actions Teacher Takes During One-Hour Reading-Writing Workshop

1. Mini lesson starts the period with a connection to yesterday's lesson
2. Teacher makes direct statement of that day's lesson.
3. Teacher states how this day's lesson connects to yesterday.
4. Teaching Demo – 3-4 minutes
5. Kids Practice – 2-3 minutes – practice with a partner and talk it through
6. Summary: "Today I taught you...."
7. Post this lesson's learning on a chart with previous lessons
8. Students go back to their writing and use the taught techniques/strategies as they write
9. Teachers move through the room doing small group strategy lessons and individual conferences.
10. Workshop ends with a Teaching Share: Writers talk about what you did and what you learned, most always connected to the day's mini lesson.

- Teachers in the system get together on a day in June to play the *Units of Study* for the following year. Writing types (genres) change with Units of Study.
- Units of Study are published on the *Curricular Calendar*, which teachers adjust and tweak as the year progresses.
- Units are supported by *Staff Development* through the year. Example: in December, NYC schools study non-narrative writing, nonfiction text as a staff.
- Teachers, by grade, decide the Curricular Calendar, curricular planning, and professional development, focusing on shared goals.

Units of Study

- Teachers look at what works, what doesn't using Touchstone Texts (What do you notice?)
Kids don't notice organizational structure, they notice "decoration"
- Teach narrative, non-narrative writing structure
Narrative — Zoom in on moments (vignette)
 - Chronological order
 - Character going through an event sequence
 - *Take something that happened to you and make a movie in your mind
 - Start with action or dialogue
 - Find the heart of the story and stretch it out to an event-by-event sequence
 - Include flashbacks
 - Teachers then take a piece that does not do all this and write more about certain snapshots

Sept. – Oct. – Nov. Narrative — Middle School: personal narrative (Tell a small story in a meaningful way)

Anecdote — 6 th	Each level has to “sound different so they will do it”
Vignette — 7 th	You must do the above or personal narrative will drop
Memoir — 8 th	by wayside

Nov - Dec. Nonfiction, Non-narrative

Nonfiction picture books — 6th
Articles — 7th
Response essay (five paragraph) — 8th

Non-narrative — Write about something significant (being an only child, firstborn)

- Personal issues
- Literary essays
- Author studies

Dec. – Jan. Essay

Essay: Stories make ideas real, so carry story with you into the essay.

Writing to know on the page, writing like writers do

Teaching the essay teaches writers that stories in their lives do matter

There is power in being able to write your own stories

— Writing to Persuade	Introduction to Essay writing — 6 th
— Personal Essay	Crafting the Essay — 7 th
— Writing about Literature	Polishing the Essay — 8 th
— Literary Essays	

- Writing is about VOICE – our identity – our position in the world
“I think differently about the world because I read this.”
- Writing is an act of discovery
Example: Seeing a homeless man while out with mother; writer does not know what she thinks about it, so she *writes to discover what she thinks*.
Tell story behind homeless man; compares mom’s life to man’s life
Examining how she thinks and feels as she is coming to know her own idea
Writer takes a position different from that of her parents
Be explicit: say this is what students are learning

Calkins says building a schoolwide writing curriculum is a process of change and anticipating predictable steps. Where it starts is unpredictable. The process usually begins with a school leader, but can also begin in a single classroom.

1) School leader needs to formulate his/her vision of teaching

- Writing can take different paths to one goal:
 - writing across the curriculum
 - emphasis on teachers writing and using writing all the time
 - teach how to do writing workshop and teach writing as a curricular area
 - school can connect with an outside provider
- Teacher/School Leader must be the keeper of values
 - Leader needs to clarify value system
 - Leader is an inspirational person who rallies teachers round their sense of mission

2) Strong professional development across grades and including people of power in the community is important

- Teach writing workshop well; little “tastes” do not work
- Doesn’t urge a school system to try doing this unless a strong support system is in place
- Do school visits: “You cannot create what you cannot imagine”
- Summer Institutes: Onsite professional development with demonstrations of teaching and classroom work
- In NYC, with 1000 students, 30 days of staff development in reading-writing per year
 - Lab sites are in 1, 3, 5th grade classes
 - Teachers of 1-2, 3-4, 5-6 participate in demos, processing, and coaching
- Calkins says that in a school of 500 students, professional development could be 5-10 days annually – suggests one reading-writing coach per building meet on Fridays to learn the model

Demonstration of 30-Minute Staff Development Model

Conferring in Writing Workshop

- Study Group first studies the 5-minute conference model
- Student composes a piece of writing, which is rated for Ideas and Conventions
- No teacher criticism is made of the piece; instead, specific praise for what writer did, focused on the writing, not the person
- The conference is explicit teaching done with a positive tone
- Time your conferences to see if you could do more conferences per hour
- Recommended book: *Conferencing Young Authors*, Tommy Tommison, Christopher Gordon Publishers

Summer Institutes

- Teachers spend one week going through the writing process so teacher knows what she/he is asking of students
- Institute is done with teachers at your school. In NYC, proposal was taken to administration, invitations were sent to teachers to attend, classes held 9 am – 2 pm daily
- Participants were given Writers Notebook at beginning of institute; invited to an October Reunion to which participants brought someone who had not attended the summer institute

Teacher Leadership Groups

- Group of teachers from each school in your district
- Group meets twice monthly for three hours after school to study specific topics
- Learning is taken back to classroom to try to arrive at new thinking
- Group develops ideas together:
 - develop writing workshop curriculum
 - conferring
 - reading-writing connections

Study Groups

- groups of teachers in individual schools of the district
- teachers share what was learned in leadership groups

Saturday Workshops

- place to share and learn new ideas
- creates opportunities to come together and think

Writing Celebrations, 3-4 per year, grade by grade

- parents are invited
- use Post-Its to comment on strengths in writing

Calkins has worked four years to implement reading-writing workshop curriculum in K-4 schools in NYC

- Core group began four years ago, and two years ago they went system-wide
- Now, 95% of staff is on board with NO basals, NO teacher-assigned topics
- “No Lone Rangers” in a schoolwide curriculum of reading-writing workshop
- In 2003-2004, working on Balanced Literacy Curriculum

All must share common beliefs to effect systemic change

- Communicate clearly the priority of reading-writing workshop
- Plan in grade level groups, in late May, early June, for next term
- In classroom, establish classroom libraries to nurture reading and writing; set up meeting areas to conference; provide for smooth transitions; focused lessons; positive parent communication; posting of developmentally appropriate writing

Focused Professional Development

- Grade level conferences
- Study groups
- Develop curriculum binders with strings of mini-lessons for special needs and mainstream students (this year, all teachers have a curriculum binder in NYC schools Lucy works with)
- Yearlong curriculum of reading-writing, mini-lessons, content and resources
- Calendar Days
- Summer Institutes
- School-based lab demos by grade: teachers practice and get feedback from staff developer
- Inter-visitation in STAR classrooms for teachers to see how other teachers do it
- Principal must be a strong presence as the curricular leader
 - Uses class walk-throughs to coach.
 - Expectations, strengths, needs are shared with classroom teacher;
 - Management structures and room environment are evaluated;
 - Observations focus on reading-writing instruction
 - Principal facilitates school study group to work with teachers directly
 - Principal puts new and experienced teachers together in teams to learn from each other
 - Works with teachers doing well to suggest they allow classroom visits
 - Works with struggling teachers to ask what they need and to provide it
- Literacy Coaches in K-1, 2-4 classes
- Leadership Group pulls in five teachers per school per year

For schoolwide reading-writing curriculum to work, we must clearly articulate the vision and provide support for teachers so that they also want to shoulder the vision.

Learning Walk-Throughs -- most important piece

- Decide purpose of walk-through let teacher know this focus ahead of time (i.e., looking for how independent student writers are)
- Develop eyes to see, looking for patterns in a classroom that lead to possible trouble
- Look for individual vs. several-classroom patterns
 - Example is to suggest student need not ask for permission to copy a writing piece, use a stapler, etc.
 - No fuss bathroom pass: have students place their Daily Planner on desk when they need to use bathroom; they go to bathroom, I date/initial page; student picks up planner on return to room.
- Coach/support teachers: “Let kids talk more” if teacher is asking too many questions of writers
Provide this support right at the moment you are in classroom
- Learn both from what is happening and what is not happening in the classroom, giving specific compliments on what is positive, and specific suggestions for improvements
- Chemistry between teacher and students is important, and it does not happen just by luck
 - Teacher must be accountable for establishing this chemistry: find a way to work with, accept every student, every teacher (for principal)
- Principal and teachers are a team in establishing and sustaining schoolwide curriculum. The teacher-principal relationship cannot be an adversarial one.

How to Accomplish the Schoolwide Curriculum

- 1) Establish the vision of a school-wide reading-writing curriculum
- 2) Support a small group of teachers pursuing the vision
- 3) Group must continue to enlarge until at least 50% of staff are doing what you want; THEN talk about consistency of instruction—research shows kids benefit from consistent instruction
 - Takes longer than a year to even know if the “new” program works
 - Kids need more time, too, to adjust to the “new”
 - Developing consistency of practice:
 - Principal interviews teacher about what the teacher does, but all too often, teachers tell principal what we “hope” to do, not what is actually happening;
 - Establish bottom lines and send out to public:
 - Take a book home every night; read 1 hour daily;
 - Write for 1 hour daily, all writing on own topics; publish at least once monthly
- 4) Demands a major change in how principal works with teachers, meeting monthly with staff in study group, doing same things staff does – principal’s major goal is curriculum
 - Principal learns content: minilessons, conferencing, how to level books
 - Principal goes into classrooms one-third of school time to dissolve misconceptions and resistance; “Watch how I do this”
 - Principal creates foundation of knowledge
 - Principal spends three hours weekly checking classroom environment when nobody is in the room; checking when students are present to see if mini-lesson is presented at beginning of period; ask a child for a tour of writer’s notebook, asking to see what is being worked on now; noting confusions from classroom to classroom about revision and editing, researching with several student writers to see what the real problem is before suggesting a solution
 - All teachers support each other
 - Principal focuses faculty meetings on curriculum, putting administrivia in memo

Plan — Study — Do — Act — Smart work takes time

Lisa Pearson, Principal at Pinellas Co. School in Tampa, FLA says teacher-principal support has been a four-year project. We must commit to be trained and to become trained in the schoolwide curriculum that builds in sustained change. “Teaching isn’t telling”

- Teachers keep reflective journals and do teacher-research — “What’s happening here? What’s special about our school?”
- Talk with students to find out what they know, what they missed (these things must be re-taught)

Why we do the things we do in reading-writing workshop

- Writing Workshop — everyone has a story; help students find themselves as authors, a child can become the subject of teacher writing; finding meaningful things to say, effective ways to say them
- Reading Workshop — Students learning to be different because we read; “If you read, you learn how to live,” “ Write yourself into the world”
- Paired Writing — It’s important for others to see that we are readers and writers