



Workshop Guide

The Literacy Principle in Action

with Karen Szymusiak



1. Introduction

Questions for Discussion:

- How has your history as an educator affected the way you lead others?
- Think of a time there was tension between your experience as a classroom teacher and the structure of a classroom you observed. How did you resolve it?
- What are the biggest changes in your thinking about your role in the past few years? What changes in the field have led you to shift your thinking about your job?

2. Literacy Chat (Grades 3-5)

In my school, the teachers have monthly "literacy chats" to discuss current trends and issues that arise in our classrooms. These are informal discussions designed to help us build a supportive community as we all work to improve the ways we teach reading and writing. Our focus for this school year was to look at the workshop model in our literacy programs, with an emphasis on reading workshop.

If you want to start monthly literacy chats with your colleagues, you might begin with a question or list of questions you have about your reading workshop, and ask a colleague or group of colleagues to do the same. Set aside some chat time and let the conversation flow - with an open-ended structure that allows everyone to share their concerns, you may be surprised at how much you learn and how helpful the format can be.

Rationale:

- We were a new building with teachers coming from a variety of experiences at other schools, and we had several first year teachers on our staff that would benefit from conversations about literacy.
- Our biggest challenge was TIME for thoughtful discussions about literacy.
- We wanted to build blocks of time for conversation within the school day.
- Other meetings were always scheduled before and after school so we had to think creatively about a solution.

Purpose:

- Discuss best practices for Reading and Writing Workshop.
- Review and implement the Dublin Workshop Model.
- Examine the contents of the Dublin Language Arts Target Binder.
- Share and align practices (word study).

Format:

- Split the staff into a primary and an intermediate group (K-2 and 3-5)
- Each group met once per month from 3:00-4:00pm.
- While the teachers in one group met the other teachers took their students for the last 30 minutes of the school day and dismissed them at 3:35pm.
- Shared leadership and facilitation of meetings
- Between scheduled Literacy Chats, teachers are encouraged to try new strategies, document how they supported the most challenged students in their classes, and continue to have conversations with colleagues.

Questions for Discussion:

- How do you foster informal conversations about literacy in your school?
- How can you help teachers take more of a role in leading these discussions?
- What are some of the practical constraints in your school when it comes to finding more time for curricular discussions? How might you resolve them?

3. Tiger Teams

Here is a brief list of some of the activities and topics covered by Tiger Teams at our school during the past year.

Share Your Favorite Book

Illustrate the cover or favorite part of the book. They were put together in a quilt.

Service Projects

Imagine if you could help someone anywhere in the world. What would it look like? What would it feel like? Students decided to do chores to earn money for St. Jude's Children's Hospital. Each time they did, they got a piece of a paper chain that was hung in the common area.

Respectful Ways to Treat Each Other

In Tiger Teams, strips of paper were passed out to each child. On the strip was a description of an action. Students had to figure out if the action was kind or unkind (positive behavior/bullying behavior). Students discussed acts of kindness. Each member of the Tiger Team shared one idea they would try the next few weeks to show kindness or develop a plan of what they would do if they noticed another student being unkind or a bully.

Setting Goals In Tiger Teams, students discussed and identified one academic goal and one related to friends.

Celebrate No Name-Calling Week

Students made and wore bracelets to remind them that it was No Name-Calling Week.

End of the Year

Fifth graders (with the help of the Tiger Team) made a poster describing the top 10 ways to be successful at GRE.

The other members made cards for the fifth graders wishing them well as they moved onto middle school.

Questions for Discussion:

- What might be the benefits of mixed-aged student groups at your school?
- Who might you tap to lead these groups in addition to classroom teachers?
- Which of the activities undertaken by the Tiger Teams at our school sound most appealing to you?
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4. Grade 2 Synthesis Discussion

Questions for Discussion:

- How do you organize your time to allow for informal visits to classrooms?
- What challenges do you face in supporting young teachers on your staff like Lauren?
- How can you take what you've learned in observations like these of individual teachers and use them in other literacy team meetings and chats?

Here are the kinds of questions and materials I often collect before an observation through a pre-observation discussion:

Glacier Ridge Elementary Pre-Observation Discussion Sheet

Questions about Reading Workshop

- What is the predictable structure/schedule of your reading workshop?
(e.g., mini-lessons and Share, Individual Reading Conferences, Small Group Instruction, Individual Reading Conference)
- What is your routine for independent reading?
- How do you promote student choice in the reading workshop?
- What have you planned for whole-group, small-group and individual instruction?
- What do you know about your students that informs your instructional decisions in reading workshop?
- How do you promote student ownership and choice in your reading workshop?
- What routines do you have in place that encourage children to respond to what they read?
- How are you helping your students learn about themselves as readers?
- How do you plan to assess? How are you documenting student progress?
- How are you using the Target Notebook to support your classroom instruction?

5. Team Meeting 2nd Grade

Questions for Discussion:

- What routines are in place at this team meeting?
- How often do your grade level teams meet?
- Pam Hahlen, our literacy coach, participates in these meetings. What support personnel or administrators attend your team meetings? Why?
- One of the biggest challenges principals face is supporting diversity and creativity among teachers, yet also ensuring shared standards. How do your team meetings help meet this goal?

6 - 7. Student Interview and Debrief - Ana, 2nd Grade

Sample reading interview questions include:

- How would you describe yourself as a reader?
- What are you currently reading?
- What are you going to read next?
- How do you choose the books you read?
- What kind of reading is easy for you?
- What kind of reading is hard for you?
- What are you most proud of in your reading?

Questions for Discussion:

- Do you ever interview students about their literacy? Why or why not?
- How might student interview information be used to supplement data from more formal assessments?
- Ana is identified as a struggling reader. What surprises you about her?
- How would you have conducted this interview differently?

8. Case Studies

Here are some of the criteria and processes we use in our Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as we complete our case studies.

Purpose for Case Study

- Take a closer look at children who make us wonder
- Get to know our students
- View each child as an individual learner
- Collaborate with colleagues
- Generate questions and hypothesize about student learning
- Observe case study students and collect artifacts
- Intervene and support case study students
- Monitor progress

Case Study Process - First Meeting

- Identify three children who make you wonder
- Write a narrative profile of each child as a learner
- Meet with your Learning Team to share narratives
- Develop plans, questions and strategies for supporting students

Continuing Case Study Work

Learning Teams meet throughout the year to share and continue to search for ways to support students.

9. Finding Words Minilesson Grade 3

Questions for Discussion:

- How do you link community organizations and agencies to work in classrooms?
- Are you comfortable leading literacy lessons? Why or why not?
- What approaches to vocabulary instruction are used in your school?
- How would you have conducted this lesson differently?

10. One-on-One Conferencing with 5th Grade Teacher

Questions for Discussion:

- How do you work with teachers to set goals and measure progress over time?
- I begin by taking home some student work to examine overnight in preparation for the meeting. What do you do to prepare for conferences with teachers?
- Much of my time in conferences is spent examining what is going well in the classroom, before moving into needs. What format or protocol do you prefer for conferences?
- How would you have conducted this conference differently?

11. Learning and Teaching Team

Questions for Discussion:

- Our Learning and Teaching Team is a large, diverse group of specialists, grade-level team leaders, and administrators. What challenges do you find when you are meeting with large groups?
- What is the focus of your literacy team work this year?
- How have you changed the routines and structures of your literacy team meetings over time?

12. Literacy Chat (Grades K-2)

For the Grades K-2 literacy chat, we wanted a place to begin our conversations rather than just saying, "So, what are some of current literacy concerns or celebrations?" I took another look at Debbie Miller's article for Choice Literacy titled "Room for Beliefs: Linking Classroom Design and What We Value." In the article, Debbie challenges us to walk into our classrooms and think about what the room arrangement and materials say about what we value in reading and writing instruction. I thought, Why don't we try viewing our reading workshops as outsiders, thinking about what we value based on what we see as children work together? As a group, the K-2 teachers in our school reviewed Debbie's article and then we considered the following three questions before our next literacy chat:

- What do I like about my reading workshop?
- What gets in my way or bothers me about my reading workshop?
- What would I like someone else to see when they walk into my classroom during reading workshop?

After we jotted down our thoughts, we had some great conversations. The literacy chat stayed focused on reading workshop and how to help students become more engaged, independent, and purposeful.

After a few months, we revisited the three questions and our responses. Pam Hahlen, the literacy coach, asked everyone to send their responses to her on email, and she compiled the responses in a three-column chart. This enabled everyone to see the range of responses from their colleagues. You can click on the link below to view the simple three-column chart of concerns:

<http://www.choiceliteracy.com/litchat.pdf>

We found some common themes among each of the three questions. Many of us felt that we gave our students many choices about books as well as allowing for flexible grouping. Time was the biggest issue that bothered many teachers. We all agreed that we would like to see our students enjoying books and having meaningful conversations about books and reading.

Our literacy chats, team meetings, and shared discussions of literacy have led us to create the "Hallmarks of Reading Workshop" - these are the beliefs and practices that we all agree must guide our practice:

Hallmarks of Reading Workshop

One of the many things we value at our school is ensuring that the experiences students have in workshops are authentic. Part of the process of coming to common understandings about what "authentic" means within our school community is sharing expectations of what reading workshops include.

By having discussions about the common elements of workshops, and sorting through the best resources together for enacting these workshops, we help all

students having meaningful experiences with books, their classmates, and their teachers. Here are the hallmarks we have developed as a staff - the definitions and standards for reading workshops in our school that we share.

Workshop Schedule - (approximately 45 minutes)

Mini-Lesson

Mini-lessons come from what you know about your students and are focused on a topic or skill that you know many of your students need. The topic of the mini-lesson should not be something that most of the students already know how to do. The time for mini-lessons will vary but the majority of them should be quick (10 minutes). The teacher should monitor this over time and strike a balance of shorter and longer mini-lessons.

Independent Reading Time

During independent reading time, students should be reading books of their choice. They should not be limited to their guided reading or small group book. Their choices should not be dependent on reading levels but should reflect a wide range of texts and genre. During independent reading time, students develop the stamina to read for an extended time. Establish a reasonable amount of time you expect students to read independently. Begin the school year with short periods of time, push the limits keeping in mind students' developmental levels, and monitor their engagement. Help students recognize what independent reading looks like and sounds like.

Individual and Small Group Work

During independent reading time, the teacher should be having individual conferences and small groups. This is when explicit teaching should be evident. Instruction can include working with students at their reading level, but should also include a wide range of work on skills, strategies and reader identity. Small group work and individual conferences do not always need to depend on leveled texts.

Individual conferences and small group work should not be just observation and monitoring/assessment. Each encounter should help students understand themselves as readers, help them focus on improving a skill or strategy, and help

them set goals for their reading. Figure out what a student needs to become more independent and thoughtful.

Share Time/Closing Conversations

End the reading workshop time with a whole-class conversation. Focus for these conversations should be to share a skill or strategy, to share something students learned as readers, or one of many conversations about being a reader and the reading community in the classroom.

Read Aloud

Read aloud occurs beyond the structure of the reading workshop. It should be interactive and focused on the skills and strategies that students need. Read aloud time offers opportunities to have conversations that strengthen understanding and develop strategies for independent reading. Discuss developing themes but help students realize that as they move through the story their thinking might change and a theme may become clearer as they uncover characters and events in the story.

Planning should be a balance of knowing the standards/targets, thinking about the most authentic activities for children, what you know about individual students and patterns of need across the classroom. When you are planning, always ask yourself "Is this an authentic task that represents real reading and writing?"

Never assign an activity just to fill time. Teach children to use the time in authentic ways that will help them as readers. Teach them to be independent thinkers and active reading workshop participants.

Depend on honest conversation with students about their reading lives.

Challenged readers should have access to the same level of learning experiences as other children and, in fact, should have more and richer experiences to move them forward.

Have a reason for everything you do in the workshop and make sure that the reason focuses on authentic learning.