



Table of Contents

- 4** Putting It in Perspective
- 8** Chapter 1: Why Workshop Plus?
- 26** Chapter 2: Workshop Plus in Focus
- 40** Chapter 3: Teaching for Independence and Transfer
- 48** Chapter 4: Responsive Teaching in Workshop Plus
- 61** Conclusion
- 63** References



WHY WORKSHOP PLUS?

“Skillful teaching involves a dynamic interplay of understanding around students’ background knowledge, motivations, dispositions, skills, and interests; the immediate goals for instruction; the command of a set of pedagogical tools and resources and automaticity in their use; and a capacity to continuously adjust on the fly.”

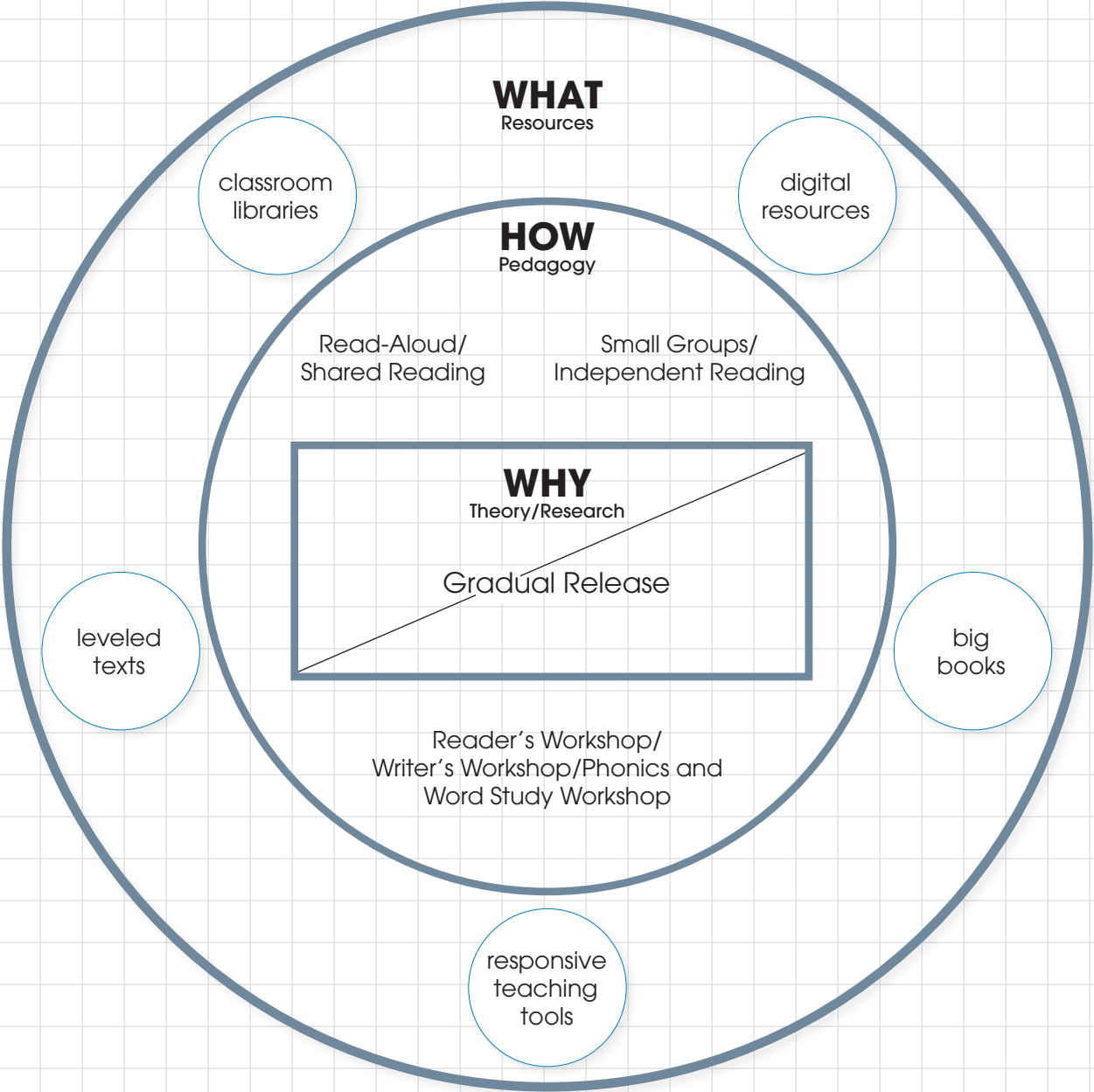
—Anthony S. Bryk

Knowing the Why behind anything we do is vital to our decision making. The Why is the theory and the research in education, and we keep it in our head to help us keep a strong grasp on the How, which is the pedagogy. The What refers to the specific actions and tools we might use, including books and other resources. Starting with the Why is good practice in all endeavors—knowing the thinking and research behind how we parent, what we eat to maintain health, the basis for happy relationships with self and others, to name just a few examples. So, let’s begin with the history and theory of Workshop—the Why behind it—before moving on to the How and the What. As poet E. E. Cummings said, “Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question.” Let’s keep asking questions of workshop so that it continues to be the beautiful answer for children.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- The Why of Workshop
- The Roots of Workshop
- Literacy Practices
- Units of Study

The Why of Workshop



The Roots of Workshop

The workshop approach has deep roots in culture and education. The famous Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo had a workshop, and like many architects, sculptors, and painters of that time, he trained apprentices to learn the craft and teach it to others. In mid-19th century America there was a severe shortage of teachers as people moved westward. To ameliorate the crisis, Joseph Lancaster developed a system in which more advanced students taught less advanced ones. The basic concept of “each one teach one” ensured that large numbers of students were educated, and planted the seeds for later educational models that valued peer work and coaching.

Flash forward to the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. A new Renaissance of Workshop was born, ushered in by scholars and practitioners such as Janet Emig, Margaret Mooney, Donald Holdaway, Donald Murray, and Donald Graves. Collectively known as the pioneers of the Process Approach to writing and reading, these thinkers looked to the processes of readers and writers in the world and argued that the composing and comprehension processes in school should mirror these real-world endeavors. Murray, a well-known journalist based in New England, recast the drafting, writing, revising, and editing routine into the writing process so many of us see in schools today. His friend Graves, an educator, conducted seminal research on the Process Approach and helped turn it into a replicable framework for writing instruction. During this same period, educators including Lucy Calkins, Ralph Fletcher, Sharon Taberski, and Shelley Harwayne refined the concept of Writing Workshop, and drew from its practices to develop Reading Workshop practices. These trailblazers upended the supremacy of the literature basal and shone a light on the power of authentic literature to teach reading and writing. Children’s book authors became revered as writing and storytelling role models for teachers and students.

“You don’t learn to write by going through a series of preset writing exercises. You learn to write by grappling with a real subject that truly matters to you.”
—Ralph Fletcher

“
The goal of reading instruction is to promote self-motivated, lifelong readers who choose to read for pleasure and for gaining knowledge.
—Louise Rosenblatt
”

Many of these educators of the late 20th century owe their concept of what it means to read to Louise Rosenblatt, whose Transactional Theory of the Literary Work (1978) posited that the act of reading involves a transaction (John Dewey’s term) between the reader and the text. Thus, there was no single, correct meaning in a text; yes, the author has intentions and works to impart his ideas—but the reader adds to it. The reader can’t help but impart meaning, because the reader perceives the text through the prism of her own experience. Rosenblatt asserted, too, that readers tend to adopt one of two stances with text: aesthetic, when focusing on feelings or emotions while reading, or efferent, when reading to learn or remember information. Elementary students need to read a variety of fiction and nonfiction genres to cultivate enjoyment of reading and to gain information.

By extension, Rosenblatt’s theory invites educators to reenvision how to guide young learners to understand, discuss, respond to, and appreciate literature of all kinds. The Reader’s Workshop is an ideal setting for Rosenblatt’s concepts, because it is a carefully planned space and time in which teachers and learners develop themselves as readers through a series of text-related endeavors, from selecting read alouds to reflecting in a reader’s notebook.

The Workshop design, and its premise that reading and writing are reciprocal processes, allow teachers and learners to look at a variety of fiction and nonfiction genres and text types from the same vantage point, and with the same basic questions in mind:

Why did the author create this?

What do I think about the ideas and points of view?

How did the writer go about building this?

What was her purpose?

Literacy Practices

Classic workshop practices include mini-lessons, independent reading and writing, conferences, strategy groups, and reflection and share time. They sit within a larger literacy framework, and the teacher chooses among practices based on unit goals and students’ needs. Shared reading, shared writing, micro-workshops, book clubs, and some of the other practices described below are outside of the classic Workshop model and make for a comprehensive literacy toolbox a teacher dips into and out of as needed. Looked at as a whole, they add up to a Workshop Plus concept.

Read Alouds

Read alouds serve different functions across the day as ritual, routine, or instructional strategy. The teacher is modeling and taking responsibility for the majority of the work, but the student is engaged and empowered, and is an active participant. A portion of the read aloud can be used to make a targeted teaching point in a mini-lesson. A teacher might read a poem or short selection to open the day; a text segment can signal a transition between activities. A portion of a longer chapter book might be used to close the day. The teacher might read a chapter from a novel as an afternoon routine to build community—a time to enjoy good literature together and listen for longer stretches of time to sustained text. Reading aloud immerses students in important ideas and themes; expands vocabulary, content knowledge, and literary language; and can create a state of enchantment that gives students a reason to invest more deeply in their own literacy development. Reading aloud is particularly supportive of students who are taking on English as a new language of instruction, and of students who are challenged in processing print; reading aloud is particularly recommended as an accommodation for special-needs students. And all learners enjoy listening to a story and accessing more complex ideas than they can reading alone.

“
Education is not preparation for life but life itself.
—John Dewey
”



In a Reader’s Workshop, teachers read aloud each day so that students are immersed in the rich language and content of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

Interactive Read Alouds

Interactive read alouds are similar to read alouds, yet here the students take a larger role by conversing with the teacher and partners at key points in the read aloud. In planning the interactive read aloud, the teacher identifies the most natural places in the text for modeling reading strategies such as making inferences, determining meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary, and using pictures to support meaning. The teacher reads aloud, inserting comments and questions that invite students to think about characters and the challenges the characters face. The teacher invites students to infer, explain, and ask questions that help them make meaning. All of these types of read alouds belong in every school day, as they provide readers with sheer enjoyment of story and information, as well as providing modeling of comprehension strategies needed for independent reading.



The teacher models for readers the wondering, inferring, and picture reading that supports comprehension.

Shared Reading

Shared reading is when the teacher leads the class in reading or rereading, singing, or chanting a text—a book, a poem, or even a message on a chart. The students take on more responsibility at this point, and often this leads to independent rereading of the shared text.

Shared reading is often done in the immersion phase of a unit of study. Any type of short text that can be enlarged for the whole class to see is useful for shared reading. Technology devices can help provide the enlarged format. Shared reading may include a segment of a read aloud, often previously read, when the teacher wants to emphasize a key sentence, a line of dialogue, or even a refrain.

Shared reading allows students to

- Observe the reading process in action, modeled by the teacher.
- Practice reading strategies or concepts in the safety of a group.
- Develop confidence by interacting with the same enlarged or projected text, rereading it several times over a few days.
- Observe the teacher read during the first few readings.
- Progressively take on reading portions of the text with support.

Often, after rereading the text a few times, the teacher will provide individual copies for each student. In each rereading in the early grades, children are encouraged to focus on phonics and concepts about print and to dig deeper into meaning at all levels. Each rereading should add a new focus or skill, so the purpose changes over reading and rereading of the text.

“While often considered only for use in K–2, shared reading has power for learning for all students and stretches students to read more complex text at all grade levels.”

—Adria Klein

Mini-Lessons

Mini-lessons are a key component of workshop. The mini-lesson opens the workshop hour and sets the tone and focus. The mini-lesson consists of direct, explicit instruction of a standards-based skill or strategy; early in the school year, it can also be used to establish a ritual or routine. The mini-lesson usually centers around a single focused teaching point, rooted in one of the major areas of reading, writing, or phonics instruction. In Reader’s Workshop and Phonics Workshop, this includes phonemic awareness, phonics, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. In writing instruction, major areas that mini-lessons address include phases in the writing process (idea generation, drafting, revision), craft techniques, conventions, and grammar. Mini-lessons can serve as a review or reteaching or take the known concept or strategy to a higher level of complexity.

Mini-lessons are ideally only 5–10 minutes in length, depending upon the time of year, grade level, content complexity, and the needs students demonstrate in their daily work. A teacher might choose to offer a mini-lesson using a shared reading, interactive read aloud, demonstration, or discussion. Mini-lessons build on each other in a learning progression across a week and across a unit. They are the heart of the modeling and mentoring in a workshop-based literacy curriculum.



Students apply a strategy modeled in the mini-lesson when it makes sense for their work.

Small Group Reading

Small group reading is a powerful way to meet the needs of students who are often reading at a broad range of reading levels in any single classroom. Providing direct, explicit instruction and follow-up practice through small group reading instruction is one way that teachers can differentiate and personalize to meet students’ needs. Different types of small group reading instruction can occur during the literacy work time in Reader’s Workshop, including guided reading, strategy groups, and book club–type meetings, as well as in partner work. All of these types of small groups are useful to personalize instruction for different learners including those new to English and students with particularly high needs.

Guided Reading students get short-term, supported practice with texts at their instructional reading level—a level that stretches them with an appropriate amount of challenge above their independent reading level, but not so much as to create frustration. Teachers guide readers to get all the dimensions of the reading process going to understand a text. They provide explicit instruction on reading strategies that they know these particular readers need, but students do the work and develop the skills as readers.

Strategy Groups, like guided reading groups, give students practice with just the right amount of challenge. Membership in strategy groups is based on formative assessment, and it is a short-term grouping option. Strategy groups provide opportunities to mix a wide range of readers together. Students practice the strategy in their own independent reading books; helping students know when the strategy might be useful is a teacher’s key goal with strategy groups. Teachers may meet with both strategy groups and guided reading groups in one day. As teachers introduce strategy instruction, they make it clear to students that the modeling, explanation, and thinking aloud provided will be a regular feature of all strategy instruction. Some students may need to be in more than one group. As in guided reading, students should do most of the work, while the teacher scaffolds and facilitates the learning.

“Keep the language grounded in good texts so that students understand their goal is to understand and notice rather than to ‘do’ a strategy.”
—Fountas & Pinnell



Gathering students in small groups provides the opportunity for targeted work on the upper range of their current abilities.



Membership in any type of small group is short term, and flexible, because readers’ interests and needs are ever-evolving.

Deep Reading Groups, which are outside Workshop, provide students with an opportunity to reread text, most often at a challenge level, and to dig deeper into shorter sections for a specific purpose. Annotating the text, often while working with a partner, encourages students to remember that deeply understanding an author’s ideas and text structures requires actively noticing and questioning every line. These reading groups, sometimes called close reading groups, are aligned to concepts taught at the whole group level. In the small group, students can stretch to high-level text because they may be rereading a section from the whole group instruction—which means they may have heard and even seen the text before they meet in the small group. Teachers may also choose a text that aligns and amplifies instruction occurring in the whole group. By reading, rereading, annotating, and connecting the learning to core instruction, students can have the scaffolds needed to engage with higher-level texts in the small group. Small group instruction doesn’t mean only instructional or lower-level texts are used; connecting the learning can stretch the challenge level of the reading.

Book Clubs/Literature Discussion Groups provide students the opportunity to read longer texts and novels of their choice. Students will often meet in these groups after reading independently or with a partner. These groups are vital to sustain throughout the year, as they enable students to gather based on their evolving interests, encourage collaboration and discussion, and meet individual needs. Readers can meet based on a favorite genre or author; based on a short-term curiosity sparked in Reader’s Workshop; based on a longer-term inquiry question—the possibilities are limitless.

The teacher stokes the fire of student-led groups through book talks, read alouds, and kidwatching to see which students are passionate about particular topics and authors and might enjoy collaborating. The teacher also poses arresting discussion questions that catch students’ imaginations, curates short text sets on themes, and provides a robust classroom library. The teacher may listen in from outside the groups to formatively assess; alternatively, the teacher may jump in briefly with a provocative question to jump-start a shallow exchange, and may meet with the group periodically. Generally speaking, students take on more of the responsibility for starting and sustaining these book club–style groups.

Partnerships and Partner Work

Partnerships and partner work are a vital part of workshop. Workshop teachers know that the writers and readers in their classroom community rely on partnerships. Partnerships are an essential structure in the architecture of a workshop. Aside from providing moments for all learners to orally express or rehearse thinking, partnerships that have strong “conversational capacity” take ownership of their learning and contribute to the learning of others. Working within a partnership does not always come naturally, so part of workshop teaching is coaching partners to seek out, give, and receive feedback. When peers provide feedback, share thinking, and head toward a learning goal together, it helps them process their understandings. It is essential to provide time for partners to plan, read, write, and talk throughout the day. Partnerships can be assigned or based on student choice. For example, a teacher might pair two readers as they leave a guided reading group to do some rereading of the text together. Two writers might team up spontaneously because both are ready for revision feedback at the same time.



Reading partnerships and writing partnerships are an important aspect of the Workshop model.

Independent Reading

Independent reading is a central part of workshop that occurs each day and often follows a teacher’s mini-lesson. During independent reading, students may read a text of their choice or may reflect on their reading in a reader’s notebook. Several factors contribute to why a reader chooses a book and whether or not the student reads deeply, including personal interest, background knowledge, and positive experiences. When readers pursue a topic they’re curious about or know something about, they seek out books on topics of interest. When they like a character in a series or enjoy the author’s style of writing, they look for that type of book. Sometimes they need guidance to read beyond their known areas of interest. Having access to a book collection in a classroom library as well as a school library is essential for wide reading by all students, including English Learners. The readability of the text is a factor in selecting and staying with a text. Readability (i.e., reading level, vocabulary, type size and spacing, page layout, illustrations, headings, etc.) affects overall text appeal, but so does the reader’s purpose for reading.



Independent reading time is time when students can develop their identities as readers.

Independent Writing

Independent writing is similar in intent to independent reading in the workshop model. The Writer’s Workshop is a place of discovery. The types of writing explored are vast, and young writers are guided by the frame of the units of study so they aren’t lost in a sea of choice. Writers are encouraged to be purposeful and creative. They might compose a podcast, write to share their thoughts on reading, compose poems—the goal is to have students pursue their areas of interest and always write for an authentic audience.

The teacher is a mentor who models writing strategies on an as-needed basis. That is, the strategies arise in some connection with a unit goal, or a text type, or a writer’s goals or current needs. These strategies and techniques are modeled often and on an ongoing basis throughout the year, for writers need step-by-step how-tos. In the 21st-century Writer’s Workshop, writers choose when and how they use the strategies; they do not practice strategies on command immediately following a lesson.

The fruitfulness of students’ independent writing depends upon a teacher who writes independently in front of students and shares aspects of his or her writing process with students. Says Donald Graves, “To be a successful teacher of writing, teachers must write themselves....You can’t ask someone to sing a duet with you until you know the tune yourself.”

“
You can’t ask someone
to sing a duet with
you until you know the
tune yourself.
—Donald Graves
”



Mini-lessons often precede independent writing time, and offer young writers step-by-step how-tos for strategies they might want to use in their writing.

“When students anticipate a focused conversation about their independent reading selection, they analyze more deeply while reading—noting important points and making more insightful observations about author’s themes, style, and techniques.

—Linda Hoyt

”

Conferring and Feedback

Conferring and feedback are at the heart of workshop. Not only do they develop the student-teacher relationship; the ongoing conversation tethers independent reading and independent writing to meaningful student goal-setting. During a conference, the teacher meets with one student or a pair or trio to discuss reading and writing work. This requires strong management and organization to keep track of the process and to record observations while interacting with students. The responsive teacher captures noticings in writing so she can help differentiate instruction for the students.

The teacher sees what students can do independently and what they need additional instruction on in the conference or subsequent mini-lessons and small group interactions. This observation helps the teacher better plan group instruction and meet the needs of English Learners and inclusion students.

In Reader’s Workshop the teacher doesn’t have to read every book the student might read before conferring; asking open-ended questions such as his favorite part of the book or why the student chose the book, and even if he wants to continue with or abandon a book, should lead the student to take the bigger role in the conference. By asking questions that involve noticing theme, character change, synthesizing, and identifying big ideas, the teacher is teaching into universal strategies the student can transfer to any text. The teacher is there to support the reader’s ideas and questions, foster use of a pertinent strategy, and nudge the reader toward deeper ways of thinking about a text.

In Writer’s Workshop, the role of feedback is not to correct or “fix” the writing, but to support the writer. When giving feedback, the teacher shows the writer what is working and then explains what she might want to try next. Conferring is focused on the writer’s progress toward unit goals, the student’s current personal goals as a writer, and the matters of craft that rise to the surface of the piece being discussed. As writing teacher and author Patty McGee says, “The teacher often models a writing strategy or two that is on point, and does so in the spirit of, ‘I see you are ready to try this. Let me show you, and then you can try it on your own.’”

Reflection and Share

Reflection and share often occurs as a whole group. Building in time to reflect gives a cohesiveness to each day. Students can solidify understandings, connect what they have learned to other content areas, and notice their own progress. Workshop teachers make use of an array of reflection tools, from reader’s and writer’s notebooks to whole-class share-outs.

Comprehensive Literacy Design of Workshop Plus



The majority of workshop time is devoted to independent reading and independent writing with mini-lessons, conferring, small groups, and reflection and share folding into it. The Workshop Plus teacher knows to bring in additional literacy practices as needed.

UNIT Goal Setting TIPS

Consider the larger purpose for the unit. What is it you want students to be able to learn—and do—by the end of the unit?

Where are most of your students in terms of the standards in your grade level? Make the unit goals a stretch but not too far a stretch.

Choose three to five goals that aim for the larger concepts and skills you are shooting for.

Study your goals closely to decide if they are really strategies, or teaching points, for a larger concept. Reword if needed.

Keep in mind that ALL students can meet the goals in some capacity and not all will reach the goals with the same proficiency.
—Patty McGee

Units of Study

In a workshop model, units of study provide an instructional framework for the year that supports students’ development by focusing on a specific genre and/or theme. For example, in a Writer’s Workshop, the year’s writing instruction can be planned based on several six-week units of study. Each unit focuses on a specific genre of writing, which matches the genre explored in the Reader’s Workshop unit of study. The rationale is that reading and writing are reciprocal processes, so they are ideally taught in a manner that reflects that “two sides of the same coin” relationship. The teacher selects the units of study that suit her current class; choice is vital. Writing and reading units are also organized around a handful of goals and strategies, which are also selected by the teacher. The goals are what teachers intend for writers and readers to learn and apply independently. The strategies help the writers and readers develop skills to meet the goals. In the course of the unit, the teacher models a handful of strategies for students to select from, and group work, conferring, and talk all deepen learners’ ability to know when to use what strategy. Modeling strategies leads students to develop skills that are options readers and writers learn to employ well to further what they are trying to accomplish.

Once the teacher selects three to five goals for a unit, she has a clearer picture of the strategies that will come into play to meet these goals. Much like putting together a jigsaw puzzle, the teacher then begins to fill in the pieces of the picture related to the mini-lessons she will use to model the strategies.

The students’ goals develop from the unit goals. The teacher meets with each student in a one-on-one conference to name the goals, which are meaningful to the student because they connect with his current work as a reader or writer. Educator Patty McGee advises Workshop teachers to set attainable goals; a less is more approach leads to successful units of study. In the margin boxes are more of McGee’s suggestions for effective goal setting.

Teacher Decision-Making

Teacher decision-making within the units of study finds its direction from what students are actually doing in response to instruction. In the Workshop Plus concept, teachers make decisions about how to allot the minutes and select a focus for the day based on what they observe students doing. They aren’t beholden to a prescribed script, but instead make adjustments in response to the learning progress of their readers and writers. The unit goals are their GPS if you will, offering up the desired destination, but teachers and students alike reflect and refine to build a powerful ongoing learning cycle. The teacher is an inquirer, a listener, and is always deciding how to plan the next steps in teaching in order to deepen each student’s understanding.

The teacher might ask

- How can I learn more about this reader’s process of thinking while reading?
- What might I model?
- Is this reader ready to try a new strategy?
- What does this reader need from me right now?
- Which book might make a powerful mentor text, given what my students are showing me today?
- What teaching plans can I adjust or put aside because I see something more urgent?
- What do these writers seem most curious about?
- How might I encourage more risk-taking?
- When can I find a few minutes to sit beside this writer and model a strategy?

In the next chapter, we take a closer look at what this choice and responsiveness look like in the Workshop Plus classroom.

STUDENT Goal Setting TIPS

Follow the Goldilocks rule: coach the student to name a goal that is not too broad and not too narrow but just-right attainable.

Help students to phrase their goals by starting with a can-do, active statement like: *Readers _____* or *Writers _____*, followed by an action verb.

Ask students to write down their goal and explain how reaching that goal will help them grow.

Ask students to list some ideas/steps for meeting their goal.

Help students use kid-friendly wording, reinforcing the fact that these are their goals to shoot for, not yours.
—Patty McGee