

A Principal's Guide to Leadership in the Teaching of Writing



**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN
THE TEACHING OF WRITING**

HELPING TEACHERS WITH UNITS OF STUDY

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OCTOBER

MAKING AND MEETING EXPECTATIONS

It is October, and reforms are underway. Teachers stop you in the hallway to show you great pieces of writing, and when you are in the lunchroom, children talk with you about their stories. The paper order has doubled since last year. You have started to attend writing celebrations. You can almost hear your school humming with energy. At the next faculty conference, you plan to compliment teachers about the great work that they are doing. Although you know that actually only some of your teachers have come aboard this new initiative, the progress has still been dramatic. You plan to tell the staff as a whole that the school has taken a turn, that it has entered a new phase.

If something good is happening in at least many of the classrooms in your school, you should realize that your school, as a whole, is entering one of those teachable moments. The new momentum that you feel does not mean your job is *done*; it means that your job has *begun*. It means that your school is brimming with promise and that this is your opportunity to help writing work its magic. This chapter will help you know ways that you can take the glimmers of good work and fan them into flames.

To do so, this chapter will first put a spotlight on the challenge of creating close-knit, grade-specific teaching cohorts. Then Laurie and I will outline what you can hope to see in writing workshops at various grade levels by the middle of October. Finally, we will help you work to create consistency across a grade level, ratcheting all your classrooms up to the levels of your most effective rooms. This work will necessarily require that you defuse resistance; we will address this as well.

THIS MONTH

- Create close-knit grade-specific cohorts.
- Build effective cohorts with grade-level meetings.
- Use grade-level meetings to prepare for teaching.
- Visit classrooms to assess student writing, grade by grade.
- Deal directly with resistance in order to nurture good teaching.

CREATE CLOSE-KNIT GRADE-SPECIFIC COHORTS

Start with this premise. You cannot lift the level of your whole school if you work simply with one teacher at a time. If you try to do this, you will move one teacher forward and then look over your shoulder to see that the others have slipped backwards. Your time is limited and precious. The best way to leverage that time is for you to work with your teachers within cohorts, groups of teachers who have something in common. In most schools, the cohorts that make the most sense are those comprised of all the teachers across a grade level. For your work and the work of your literacy coach to be effective, your grade-level cohorts need to be close-knit, learning communities.

Strive for Consistency of Teaching Within Grade Levels

Howard Gardner, the Harvard educator who is best known for his work on multiple intelligences, has written a couple of books on leadership. A decade ago, when Howard spoke to our community of school principals, he told us that to lead, you need to give yourselves time to go into the mountains. You need to sometimes look down over everything and reflect. I think the image is an important one because those of us who can be consumed by the details of leading our very particular place do need to give ourselves opportunities to see the big picture of our work, to view what we are doing from a more distant perspective.

If you step back and think about the social fabric of your school, you will probably see that the teachers across some grade levels in your school operate as close-knit teams. Try this. Mentally, if not physically, walk in and out of all the classrooms at the grade level in which relationships seem especially cohesive. Do those rooms look and feel similar? Stop at a child's desk in each room—just pull close to a randomly selected child. Page through a collection of that youngster's work, looking at it in such a way that you see fingerprints of teaching. As you look at one child's work in one room and another child's work in another room, compare and contrast the teaching that underlies the work. Does the teaching in each room seem somewhat similar? My hunch is that in grade levels where teachers work with collegiality, you will see consistency of instruction, and more than this, you will see that the teachers' collaboration has already lifted the level of their teaching, creating a consistency of strong instruction that doesn't exist in more socially disjointed grade levels.

Take another grade—one where relationships are fractured. Do a similar walk-through at that grade level. You may find that the different

classrooms feel vastly different, one from the next, and you may feel convinced that one or two of those teachers are doing a substantially better job than the others—perhaps these differences underlie every curriculum area or perhaps they are just in the area of focus for this book, the teaching of writing.

Either way, if you mentally or physically visit rooms and find vast differences in the quality of teaching between those rooms, ponder your response to this. I believe something is the matter if these differences don't fill you with a sense of disequilibrium. Your job is to make sure all children are given the opportunities they deserve. The thought that there are vast differences within a single grade level should ring in your brain with the urgency of a fire alarm. As you read this, you may protest—and yes, of course, you are right that there will always be some teachers who are especially strong and some who are the opposite. But your strong teachers need to function like tent poles, lifting up the level of instruction across the school or at least the grade level. This will only happen if it is someone's job—and that someone needs to be you—to be sure the strengths of particular teachers are “socialized” and the wealth distributed.

Encourage Classes in a Grade to Progress in Sync

So how does a principal make it more likely that the teachers across grade levels function as close-knit cohorts? More specifically, how can a principal make it likely that effective teachers lift the level of teaching across their grade levels?

First and foremost, if you want your teachers to work closely together (remember that we are writing as if the members of a cohort will be all the teachers across a grade level; you may imagine different cohorts in your school), Laurie and I strongly recommend you encourage members of each cohort to follow a shared sequence of units of study. The specific nature of that curriculum must be open enough that the teachers have input into it, but aligning the teaching in one classroom to the teaching in another is so fundamentally important that it must become one of your personal priorities.

Earlier in this book, we talked about the importance of teachers approaching their school year having already decided to proceed through a mutually agreed upon sequence of units of study. Although yes, it is important to approach the year with this plan in mind, those intentions and plans will be for naught unless you weigh in to make shared curriculum a reality. If your teachers are relying on the Heinemann *Units of Study*, this shared

resource may lure them to travel the same general curricular path, but unless you urge teachers to progress in sync with each other, you'll quickly find that some teachers let weeks go by without finding time to teach writing, while others zoom ahead.

If your teachers are relying on the published *Units of Study*, you can anticipate two related problems. One is that without intervention from you, teachers across a grade level will probably not stay in sync enough with

If you want teachers across a grade level to plan, assess, and replan together, it is vitally important that one classroom stay roughly in sync with another.

each other that grade-level grouping can work its magic. The other problem is that some teachers will proceed incredibly slowly through the units of study, inventing interim minilessons and spending several days persevering on one minilesson. I think it is essential that a unit of study take no more than five weeks of time, especially for teachers who are somewhat new to teaching writing and to teaching a specific unit. It was never the intention that before a teacher proceeded to another day and another

minilesson, every child would master a concept taught in the preceding minilesson—the curriculum spirals for just that reason. Writers will not necessarily all grasp a technique that is taught on any one day—frankly, most writers spend a lifetime trying to actually grasp what it means to write with focus, detail, voice, drama, and the like. If your teachers tell you that they need to spend more than four or five weeks on a unit of study, ask them to try doing otherwise. For at least this one year, ask them to set publishing deadlines, so that all teachers at a grade level say something like this: “We will hold our first celebration by the first week in October, and the next one by Veterans Day.”

For now, then, let us say that if you want teachers across a grade level to plan, assess, and replan together, it is vitally important that one classroom stay roughly in sync with another. If all your third grade teachers, for example, are nudging kids to revise, then in a grade-level meeting, those teachers can write together in ways that allow them to create relevant demonstration texts for their minilessons. In those grade-level meetings, they can also help each other revise the upcoming published minilessons to make these are more accessible for their third graders. The next time this group meets, teachers can bring student work together and study the revisions kids are—and are not—making. If one teacher's kids are revising up a storm and other teachers feel their kids are locking knees in protest, then the context is perfect for the one teacher's “intelligence” to be socialized.

Because the easiest way for you to keep classrooms across a grade level roughly in sync is to insist that teachers finish a unit of study and publish every month (or every five weeks), be sure to ask for the publishing dates well ahead of time. You can tell teachers that you need the dates on your calendar and on the school's calendar because you want to be sure that you or another administrator can attend. Meanwhile, of course, the now public publishing date acts as a deadline not just for the children in that classroom but also for the teacher. Deadlines make any writer spring into action. The good news is that while you emphasize your commitment to celebration, you will also help to create and reinforce an infrastructure that is absolutely essential to your school's progress.

Support Model Cohorts to Lift the Level of Teaching

Of course, making sure that teachers across a grade level are teaching roughly in sync with each other is a necessary but insufficient step to take if your ultimate goal is for teachers across grade levels to support each other. Another way to begin spreading the spirit of collaboration among teachers is by finding a grade-level cohort that's already working collaboratively.

If you have a grade level in your school which you believe could become a strong model, you may want to consider talking directly to those teachers, saying, "I'm coming to think that you have forged a professional community among yourselves that is breathtaking and that could become even more important to the three of you. I would love for us to think of ways I could support you as a unit and ways your collegiality could lift the level of teaching across your grade level. My real goal is to create a model that I could then show the rest of the staff. What I am seeing among you three is giving me an image of what this school might become." Your teachers' energy would soar!

Ruth Swinney did exactly what I have just described when she was the principal of PS 165. One of her teachers, Amanda Hartman, wrote a grant and secured ten thousand dollars for herself and her second grade colleagues. They would receive lots of children's books so long as they planned and assessed teaching together. Ruth helped those teachers develop a system for working together, and then she identified other grade levels that she believed stood a chance of working in similar ways. She said to these teachers, "The four of you third grade teachers could become an amazing support group for each other if you had more time to meet and some shared resources. Could I free you up to listen in on the way the second grade teachers conduct their grade-level meetings, and could you

think as you watch them, ‘Are there ways we could work together that would be equally helpful for us?’” In such a fashion, Ruth helped one grade level after another in her school begin to fashion new images of possibility and to work with each other in dramatically new ways. I’ll describe those ways in greater detail later in this chapter.

BUILD EFFECTIVE COHORTS WITH GRADE-LEVEL MEETINGS

One of the most effective ways to help teachers across a grade level work as a close-knit planning and support group is to establish grade-level meetings. Talk to your staff about other schools you’ve visited. Read about schools whose grade-level meetings are essential to those schools’ lives. Perhaps over the past decade in your school, similar meetings lost their luster, becoming merely times for administrative busywork, and were thus eliminated. Your hope now is to revive them.

Relay to your staff the observation that too many of them are operating in isolation. That might have been okay years ago when pressures weren’t so intense, when teachers were not asked to solve so many problems. But in today’s world, the pressures on teachers are so great and the knowledge base about methods of teaching well is so extensive that it is no longer possible for a teacher to know enough on her own. If a school is going to become smarter, then one teacher on a grade level needs to develop expertise in understanding the ways that children’s spelling reveals their level of development in phonics, for example, and another teacher needs to become the guru for children’s literature. That way, our teaching can be like a potluck feast; each person can bring something different to the table, nourishing us all.

Make Time for Grade-Level Meetings

It is important that you provide enough time for teachers to meet in their grade-level meetings and that you do this in ways that do not impose on teachers’ free time, creating resentment. If you go to enormous lengths to adjust schedules so that teachers have more school-sanctioned time to work with grade-level colleagues, you will find that more often than not, teachers end up finding these groups so supportive that they invest their own free time in these relationships. That’s a great bonus, but it is not something you can count on. Your first job is to do the creative scheduling required so that you free up time for grade-level cohorts to meet. Those groups need more than

one hour a week together, and this is especially true now when you are trying to channel those teachers to begin using these groups as support structures. Here are some ways other principals have carved out time for these meetings:

Ways Some Principals Have Carved Out Time for Grade-Level Meetings

- ◆ You might decide to cancel a few faculty meetings, for example, and in their place schedule grade-specific study groups. Those grade-level meetings might occur concurrently in the time slot that would normally be used for faculty meetings, but teachers may also be willing to agree on different times, making it possible for you and/or the literacy coach to attend the grade-level meetings.

- ◆ You might find a way to keep all the kids at a grade level occupied at either the start or the end of the day, one day each week (or two days each month), freeing their classroom teachers to convene as a group. For example, perhaps your music teacher can lead some whole-grade work for second graders in the auditorium at the end of Tuesday, and in turn you'll provide the necessary help for that teacher to release the kids directly from the auditorium. If you can find a way to establish a ritual such as that, then all your second grade teachers could convene for a grade-level meeting every Tuesday afternoon, forty-five minutes before the end of the day.

- ◆ You could, then, use per session pay to support teachers continuing to study after school for an added half hour or hour. All in all, these two structures together could mean that all your second grade teachers would work together for between seventy-five and ninety minutes every Tuesday (in addition to their regular grade-level meetings). Ideally, all the teachers at every other grade level would have similar meetings on other days.

- ◆ Some schools simply extend the morning recess by making use of parent volunteers. That is, while most children line up to go inside at 8:10 on Mondays, the first graders are told, "Remember, on Mondays you have extra play. We'll gather in half an hour." That half hour of extra recess time is not enough time for teachers to do substantial work, but if teachers agree to come half an hour early as well, receiving per session pay for that half hour at the start of the day, this would mean that these teachers could meet for an hour, once a week, at the start of the day.

Of course, these extra meetings are in addition to the prep times that you normally allocate (or that are within teachers' contracts).

- ◆ Finally, some principals that I know have extended every day's lunchtime by ten minutes, which means that one lunchtime a week is time that teachers "owe back." This then means that one lunch a week is earmarked as a grade-level meeting. Principals distribute those grade-level working lunches across the week so that an administrator or the coach is free to attend. That is, fifth grade teachers may always spend their extended lunch period on Monday in a grade-level working lunch. Meanwhile, fourth grade teachers may do this on Tuesdays, and so forth. Of course, it also makes sense for you to do everything you can to give teachers across a grade level common lunchtimes and common prep times because the unofficial meetings are as valuable as the official ones.

Establish Norms for Grade-Level Meetings

Once you have gone the extra mile to schedule time for these meetings, bear in mind that the start of the year (and the start of a new procedure) is the best time for setting standards of behavior.

Start and end meetings on time.

Be sure to begin your meetings on time every time. It is almost inconceivable that people will arrive on time if meetings do not start on time. Why *should* they if chances are good the meeting won't get underway for ten minutes? It can be difficult to start the meeting at the appointed moment if only half the group has arrived, but if the meeting doesn't start promptly, the outliers will arrive late, see that the meeting has not begun yet, and think to themselves, "Good, I'm not late." It is, therefore, incredibly important to start a meeting at the moment when it has been scheduled to start—this is true not only for grade-level meetings but for all meetings. You won't personally always be on the scene, so you'll need to work with whomever is the facilitator. Brainstorm strategies for handling late comers.

My own personal strategy is to close the door when it is time to start, using the closed door as an additional way to signal, "You are late." It is also important to me that I do not repeat everything that people have said to each of the stragglers. The whole point should be to signal to people, "These meetings are precious, and every minute is well used. If you come late, of course you will miss a lot."

Respecting people's time also means that meetings need to end on time. If a meeting is scheduled to last for half an hour after the end of the school day, after that half an hour, the facilitator needs to say, "Our time is up. Anyone who has other things planned, you should go. If a few of you want to stay and finish this up, that is up to you, but the meeting is officially over." It is not fair for people who plan to stay for half an hour to end up feeling that it is almost impossible to leave once that time is over, and if grade-level meetings are only for people with over-the-top levels of commitment, then they will not be a useful structure for supporting whole-school consistency.

Rely on a facilitator.

Each meeting will profit from the presence of a facilitator. Often this will be your coach. Many principals try to attend one meeting per month for each grade, attending more frequently only if a particular grade needs extra support. If your coach is unable to be present for any reason, ask a lead teacher to step in as facilitator for that meeting. I recommend this request be official—that is, that you send an email or otherwise explicitly state that so-and-so will take the place of the coach who can't be present. It is not easy for one colleague to elbow past others, saying to them, "I'm the facilitator."

Of course, the facilitator is not a boss but an enabler. In most meetings, the facilitator is the one to watch the clock and to say, "Should we get started?" Usually the facilitator then says, "Let's talk for a minute about our agenda," and he reviews the agenda that was in place prior to the meeting (perhaps this is a standing agenda). Then he asks, "Are there other things we should add to this agenda?" Once the agenda has been established, the facilitator is the one to herd the group along so that everything on the agenda is covered (or if not, so that this is decided together). This means that if the meeting will be forty minutes long and there are four items of roughly equal weight on the agenda, after about eight minutes the facilitator will say, "We should be moving on to our second item soon. What do we need to do before we move on? Any action plans?" If an action plan needs to be made, one person will probably need to volunteer to take responsibility for that action, and the person facilitating will be the one to ask who will agree to take this role.

If your school has not yet established norms for how meetings proceed, it is not enough to simply hope that those who have been asked to facilitate will do so in these ways (or in other preferred ways, if you arrive at those). Be explicit with your facilitators. If your coach and assistant principal are each leading grade-level meetings, you are leading faculty meetings, the director

of special education is leading yet other meetings, then convene your various meeting facilitators to talk together about how you can all align yourselves so that meetings progress in one of two or three agreed-upon ways. The way I've just detailed will probably be one commonly used template, and there may be another template or two. For example, another template might involve a large group meeting dispersing into smaller groups. The essential thing is that facilitators recognize that together you are all working to establish a professional learning culture in the school and that one way to do this is to induct people into some shared expectations for how meetings will proceed.

Communicate expectations clearly.

It goes without saying that you will want to be transparent with teachers. At a faculty meeting or in a letter to the faculty, tell people that you have been giving careful thought to your own role as the teacher-for-the-school and that, just as many of them will sometimes realize that they need to pay more attention to the norms and structures within their *classrooms*, you have come to realize you need to pay more attention to the norms and structures within the *school*. Then lay out some of your tentative hopes for how meetings will proceed. Be sure you say, "I have asked the facilitators of meetings to keep groups progressing efficiently through the agenda the group agrees upon" so that when one colleague says to others, "I think we need to move off this topic," or, "Let's keep an eye on the clock," this person

You will want to be transparent with teachers. At a faculty meeting or in a letter to the faculty, tell people that you have been giving careful thought to your own role as the teacher-for-the-school.

will be acting as your ambassador, deriving authority from you. It goes without saying that if the group challenges the facilitator for playing this role, you need to back the facilitator (while also investigating the problem and inventing new solutions).

Keep working meetings small.

Some groups will be too large to work mostly as a whole. In these instances, the facilitator will need to plan some of the meeting time for the whole group and some of it for small groups or partnership conversations. If there are four or more teachers per grade, the meetings are more productive when the facilitator plans for people to talk in partnerships or triads, with these small groups then coming together for intervals in the midst of the meeting

to share what they are figuring out. Partnerships among teachers will be best if they are long-term arrangements and if you help the partners spend time—even just a small amount—in each other’s classrooms as well as talking in meetings. Some principals or facilitators choose to hold meetings in rotating classrooms. You will be amazed how much teachers can learn just by observing one another’s physical environment!

USE GRADE-LEVEL MEETINGS TO PREPARE FOR TEACHING

Of course, the logistics of the grade-level meeting alone won’t make these meetings significant. The agenda will do that. You, the literacy coach, and teachers will want to think about the nature of these grade-level meetings. What will happen during them?

Teachers who are teaching in sync with each other will appreciate meetings that help them prepare for their teaching. Grade-level meetings are vitally important because they provide opportunities for the literacy coach and for colleagues across the grade to compile knowledge and experience so that each teacher feels prepared to lead minilessons and conferences during that week’s writing workshops. If your teachers are leaning on the *Units of Study* books, this means that teachers reflect together on how to tweak the minilessons they offer and on how to write their own.

This can be a time for teachers to give those minilessons to themselves and each other, carrying out the writing that minilessons entail. This serves many purposes. For one thing, the opportunity to share writing can often meld people into a warm, cohesive group. It can also provide an opportunity for every teacher to preview the upcoming minilessons and to gain invaluable insight into those minilessons. A writing technique may sound very simple, but actually putting that technique into action is usually more complex, demanding, and interesting. If teachers experience the content they will be teaching, they’ll understand it in a much richer way. They will learn about teaching writing from the inside. This, of course, will also allow teachers to test out the published minilessons and to have the grounds to sometimes say, “This needs to be different.” Finally, by allowing themselves to function as students of their own teaching, teachers will develop the bits of writing they need to make published minilessons their own, as well as to be in a position to write their own minilessons.

If all the teachers across a grade level are working together to teach the same unit of study—say these are first grade teachers whose children are

all writing how-to books—then the teachers, as a group, can develop the insights, resources, energy, and teaching plans they need to support that unit. In many schools, teachers across a grade level compile all they learn into units-of-study binders. That is, the second grade teachers in a school will gather all their shared ideas about the second grade writing curriculum into a whole set of binders, one of which will be titled “How-To Writing.” This binder might include plans for how the second grade teachers will tailor the minilessons in the published book to suit second graders. The plans might include a list of teaching points and a calendar. Teachers who write their own minilessons might contribute those to the binders. Perhaps someone finds a chapter in a professional book related to the unit of study—it goes into the binder. Samples of student work go into the binder. As teachers name predictable problems their kids are encountering and invent ideas for small group work, these, too, go into that binder.

Later in this chapter I will talk about the importance of visiting all the classrooms at a certain grade level so that you familiarize yourself with that grade level’s writing work and identify writing workshops that are functioning well. Once you have done this work and you or, more likely, the coach has helped those strong classrooms become even stronger, you can use them as resources for your grade-level study groups so that your best writing workshops lift the level of the others. This will lead to more consistency of strong instruction across each grade level. Later, I’ll discuss methods for doing this well.

Help Grade-Level Cohorts Study Students’ Writing

You will probably want to make it likely that teachers at every grade level spend some time looking at student work and using it to help them think about instruction. If you encourage teachers to look at student work in the company of each other, this can be a way to nudge them to deal with hard truths. A teacher who claims, “My kids can’t,” will find it harder to maintain this position if the other teachers across the grade level have lots of examples that their students can do the same work.

Just as it is important to establish norms related to attendance in meetings, it is also important to establish norms for sharing student work.

Be specific about the student writing every teacher will share.

Start by holding yourself accountable (and asking the coach to do the same) for structuring studies of student work well. For example, if you and the literacy coach decide to ask teachers to bring student work, let teachers

know well in advance what you'd like them to bring. Especially as you induct teachers into the rhythm of doing this, make a point to send a reminder or two so there won't be any reason for some teachers to come empty-handed to the meeting.

We recommend that you ask teachers to bring a very specific selection of student work. If teachers come to meetings carrying armloads of texts, the chance that those texts will be discussed is minimal. It won't be long before teachers cease bringing those armloads, feeling justified for that decision. So, for example, for the second grade level meeting in October, you might say to teachers, "Please make sure that you have cleared student folders out so that all the writing they did prior to the first publication is no longer in their daily writing folders. That should go into cumulative folders. Would you choose two students—one who struggles and one who is stronger—and bring just their writing folders." Teachers of older students can't bring only the writing that students have done since the first publication because much of the students' writing will be in writers' notebooks that cumulate across many months, but again, these students' folders (where they keep their rough drafts) will be cleared out after each publication. Upper grade teachers might be asked to bring notebooks for two students. These could again be students who represent the high and low ends of the spectrum of writing abilities, but, of course, it would be equally or even more interesting to suggest teachers bring the work of two students who are fairly representative of what most of the class is doing. Either way, be sure to establish clear parameters for the work that teachers will bring; make sure that they bring only a limited amount of student work and that all teachers select similar work.

The point is that you want teachers to grow theories off the work that they study, and this will be easier to do if each of the teachers has selected work using a similar criterion. If one teacher brings the work that her best student wrote that morning and another brings the collection of work her most struggling student has done all year, the two teachers will each be bringing something utterly different to the table—and won't be able to draw conclusions across the work.

Smooth over contrasts in student writing samples.

Once teachers have convened, student work in hand, you'll need to tread carefully. Writing researcher Mina Shaughnessy, author of *Errors and Expectations*, wrote, "Writing creeps across the page, exposing as it goes

all that we don't know. Writing puts us on the line and we don't want to be there." The truth is that, just as our own writing puts us on the page, exposing all that we do not know, so, too, does our students' writing put us as professionals on the page. If three teachers come to the meeting loaded with reams of pages that their two students have written, and a fourth teacher's students have each written just a paltry amount, nothing needs to be said. That fourth teacher will look to the right and to the left and chances are good that she will get the message. So be gentle!

The truth is that, just as our own writing puts us on the page, exposing all that we do not know, so, too, does our students' writing put us as professionals on the page.

For now, you may deliberately want to say something that diffuses the contrast between the work accomplished in one class and in another. For example, you may say something such as, "One of the hard parts about teaching writing is that we teach one minilesson to a whole class full of

diverse writers. Let's look at the upcoming minilessons in the *Units of Study* books and imagine the kids that are represented by this student work all sitting in those minilessons. Then let's think about ways in which that minilesson will and will not work for all these diverse kids." In that way, you'd let teachers off the hook for having students whose work doesn't measure up to that which others are doing. I recommend doing that. If you want to create professional learning communities that work, you need to make sure that everyone can gather around the table without feeling shame.

On the other hand, as I have said before, you, as the school principal, should feel deeply uncomfortable over inequities you see in the education that children are receiving across your school. It will be instantly clear to you from the writing work that teachers bring to grade-level meetings that the children in some classrooms are writing up a storm and children in other classrooms are not getting chances to write. And you do need to make sure that you visit the teachers who are not making time for writing and say to them, "It's clear to me you are having a hard time getting to the writing workshop. Can you and I sit down and think about your schedule and see if we can figure out ways to use time differently so that your kids do get to write every day?"

Once you feel as if you have made expectations clear to teachers, supported them, and given them concrete help, be prepared to hold teachers accountable for their teaching.

Study the volume of student writing.

If you've decided to use grade-level meetings as a forum in which you hold teachers accountable for teaching writing, then first and foremost, ask teachers to bring student work (as described earlier), and right there in the meeting say something like this: "I've been learning that there is a close connection between the amount of writing that kids actually do and their growth in writing over time. Let's look at the work we've brought—I know it is just the work of two kids, and it is just the work they've done since their first publication—but let's look at this and simply count how much each child has done." If you'd like, you could pass out a record sheet so the teacher can record what she finds. If the child is a K–2 writer, the teacher will want to count how many books the child has written, how many pages in most of the child's books, how many words/sentences/lines on most pages. If the child is an older child, the teachers can count the number of entries written either since the start of the year or since the last publication, and the average length of each entry.

Then, of course, you'll want to let this lead to a conversation about how the teachers can all find ways to make more time for writing and can encourage students to write with more volume during the time they do have.

Study teachers' responses to student writing.

Of course, each time teachers meet, each time they bring student work, the focus can be different. You may find it helpful one time early on to simply ask teachers to read over one entry—either an entry you bring to the table, or say, the most recent entry contained in the student work they've brought. Then ask the teachers, "Jot down whatever you notice in the child's work. Record some things you might teach this child."

So often, teachers will focus on conventions only and record only errors! Be alarmed when this happens. Be alarmed because your teachers are seeing first through the lens of "what is not working," but wince even more because very often your teachers' responses to children will echo your responses to teachers. Ask yourself, "Do I notice in what teachers say and do only what they are *not* doing, only what is missing?" Resolve to change your ways!

If you criticize your teachers for what they are seeing in student work, you'll only replicate the deficit model. Try demonstrating to teachers the journey you hope they take by taking onto yourself the very problems you see in them. That is, try telling them about a time when someone asked you to

record what you noticed in student work, and then tell them that the person then said, “What you see in student work says more about you than it says about the student. We do not see with our eyes but with our beliefs.” Tell the teachers that you were aghast, noticing that you’d only recorded all the things the kid was doing wrong. And tell teachers that, as a principal visiting classrooms and as a teacher like them, trying to help kids grow, you do know that it is terribly important to realize that we can choose the lens through which we look. You can look out the window onto the playground and watch kids playing, looking through the lens of noticing how kids do or do not play differently based on their gender. Alternatively, you can look out the window during play time and notice the colors that children wear. Or you could notice the posture of adults who work with children during recess time—some adults stand tall, supervising, others crouch to children’s eye level. You can choose what you will see. Similarly, you as the principal can visit classrooms looking through the lens of noticing ways that students collaborate with each other. You can look at the use of space in the classroom, or at the role children’s literature plays in different writing classrooms, or at any one of a zillion different things. And teachers, too, can choose to look at student work through a variety of lenses.

Vary the ways you study student writing.

You will, over time, want to help teachers look at student work through a variety of lenses. Here are a few that you might demonstrate:

- Teachers can reread student work looking for the presence of details.
- Teachers can look at student work looking for evidence that the child is spelling some high-frequency words with automaticity.
- Teachers can look at student work and notice how students tend to start off their narratives (or end their narratives).
- Teachers can look at student work and notice the time span that students’ narratives tend to cover. Are these stories of a twenty-minute episode? Of an hour episode? Of a month? Are they more all-about texts than narratives that recount an event that took place over time?
- Teachers can look for evidence that children are valuing their writing—or are not valuing it. For example, if children are putting spelling or math work into their notebooks, or if they have scribbled on pages in their notebooks or torn pages from them, this does not suggest they are valuing those notebooks.

VISIT CLASSROOMS TO ASSESS STUDENT WRITING, GRADE BY GRADE

Earlier, I suggested that you respond to the buzz in your school over student writing by realizing that your work is not done, but has, instead, just begun. This is a teachable moment for your school. People are still new to the teaching of writing, so chances are good that many of your teachers are still in a learning posture regarding writing instruction. It will be much easier for you to intervene now, capitalizing on teachers' early successes to push them further, than it will be to intervene at a later point, once teachers feel as if they have arrived.

Establishing cohorts is a vital part of your work, but it is only half the job. The other half of your job is to get into classrooms again this month, watch teaching, and look at student work. You need to do this with some expectation of what you should ideally see so that you have a sense for what to support, what to ask for. It is not helpful if you turn somersaults over work that is nowhere close to what one should expect.

During this particular round of visits, I'll help you to focus on student work. If that will be the focus, ask teachers to be sure that each child's writing folder is out on the table that day (sometimes teachers will otherwise keep the folders in bins to make table space less congested). Ask teachers to leave the folders on the tables during the minilesson, too, so that while you listen with one ear to the minilesson, you can meanwhile browse through folders of children's work. You can't afford to lose any time. If your school is very large, you may divide these classroom visits with the assistant principal, or you may need to resort to simply looking at the students' work after writing time is over. You might decide to tell the teacher that you will be in another time of the day just to look at the writing. In this case, ask the teacher to gather the folders in one place so you can collect them as unobtrusively as possible. Alternatively, you might decide to look at writing during the late afternoon after everyone has left the building, when you can spend some quiet time.

Establishing cohorts is a vital part of your work, but it is only half the job. The other half of your job is to get into classrooms again this month, watch teaching, and look at student work.

You only need to look at a sampling of work from each classroom. The sampling needs to be random, however. Teachers are human, so of course they will try to arrange it so that you see the work of their best children! If a

teacher hands you a few folders, take those folders in hand and then do not look at those folders. Instead, go and help yourself to some other folders and look through those.

In the upcoming sections of this chapter, you will learn what you can hope to see in October of the school year—assuming a school begins after Labor Day and assuming this is your school’s first year leading writing workshops. Afterwards, we will discuss ways this will be different in schools that have had established writing workshops in place for years. Then we will share ideas for what you can do when these expectations are not yet in place—which is, of course, a likely scenario.

October in Kindergarten: What to Expect

Start by visiting all your kindergarten classrooms, making these visits in one or two concurrent days. Tell the teachers the days you will visit their grade. “Kindergarten teachers, I will come to you on Monday and Tuesday during writing time.”

Kindergarten, of course, has its own special challenges. First, everything we said earlier about your focus on the written products won’t really work for kindergartners. At this grade level, you need to, in fact, watch the children at work on their writing. Then, too, oftentimes kindergarten teachers will have assumed that writing workshops couldn’t possibly be developmentally appropriate for their kids. “After all,” these teachers will say, “my kids don’t even know their letters and sounds.”

Do not be surprised, then, if you visit classroom after classroom and find that in fact, very few of your kindergarten teachers have actually even launched writing workshops! This is not an unusual state of affairs, but by all means you must jump into action immediately. There is almost nothing that a kindergarten teacher could teach that would be more developmentally appropriate than a writing workshop, and writing workshops are more spectacular at this grade level than at any other. Trust me. My colleagues and I have worked with thousands and thousands of kindergarten classrooms, including classrooms in the poorest sections of New York City, and there has never been an instance when kindergarten children were not ready for writing workshop at the very start of the school year.

The secret, of course, is that teachers need to tailor writing workshops so they match kids—and this is challenging work.

Do not let your kindergarten teachers convince you that their kids are not ready for the writing workshop. Be sure they launch writing workshops tomorrow, if they haven’t done so already, and that they devote at least

forty-five minutes or an hour a day to those writing workshops every day for the next month. Encourage the teachers to follow the unit of study laid out in the published series—it is perfect for kindergartners (less so for second graders). If, after a month, the teachers still insist their kids aren't ready for the writing workshop, that will be another story (they won't, though, so we do not even need to discuss how you'll respond if they do!).

You may well discover that although you are visiting classrooms in October, many kindergarten teachers didn't start teaching writing on day one of the year (next year they will!) and, therefore, may not yet be in their second unit of study. Let's assume, therefore, that the teachers are somewhere towards the middle of unit one, *Launching the Writing Workshop*. What should you expect?

First, instead of looking at the written work, watch the kids. You want to see that they all feel as if they can do this thing called writing and that they are all able to function with a lot of independence. If children can carry on as writers without needing a teacher at their side every minute to support each and every next step, then this means that teachers are, in fact, free to actually teach. So watch and see.

Kindergarten children, by the middle of their first unit of study, should be able to select paper for themselves (there may not yet be any variety of paper choice, but they can at least reach for the paper themselves, not needing to be on dole). The paper will probably have a space for the child to write his or her name as best the child can, and otherwise will probably not have any lines. The kindergarten child—let's imagine this is a boy—should be able to think of what he will put onto the paper without needing help choosing a topic. He should be able to get started putting what he imagines onto the page—through a picture that at least gestures towards being representative. If you ask, "What is your story about?" (call it a story although it will look more like a drawing), the child should be able to say something like, "I am writing about the park" or, "That's me on the swings" or, "When I went to the park." The content will probably come from the child's life, but it may not be a narrative—that is, the child may not be telling about one time when he did something (and that is fine). Ideally, the child will add details to the picture.

Watch the kids. You want to see that they all feel as if they can do this thing called writing and that they are all able to function with a lot of independence.

You should see that some children are gesturing towards writing in one of two ways. Either they will label the picture or they will write on the side or

underneath the picture. The writing will probably not be anything you (or the child) can read. The child may possibly have used knowledge of sound-letter correspondence to record a couple of initial sounds (as in writing an *m* for *me* beside the child's self portrait). Alternatively, he may have used a rudimentary knowledge of the fact that each sound in a word translates into a mark on the page to write the word *sun* as three marks (and these could be letters or letterlike marks). When the child finishes the drawing, you should see that he has a way to get started on the next piece of writing without needing intervention from the teacher.

If what you see matches what I have described and you wonder why this is a worthwhile use of children's time, consider the changes you will observe over the next two weeks. First, in short order, children will write stories that span several pages and that are sequentially organized and hold together as coherent narratives. These stories will tend to be mostly oral, but children will be able to say aloud the story almost as if they were dictating their writing: "I went to the park. I went high on the swings. I almost touched the leaves. Then I got off." Then, too, you should see that within two weeks, every child is labeling lots of items on his or her pictures and using letters to represent initial sounds, if not initial and final sounds. The letters will not

There is a rule of thumb you will want to keep in mind. Before kindergartners can begin to read conventionally, you and they both must be able to read at least stretches of their writing.

always be correct, but still children will be beginning to grasp the concept of saying words slowly enough to hear sounds, and then the concept that a spoken sound is represented by a letter. Children will use whatever sound-letter correspondence they have learned to record sounds.

There is a rule of thumb you will want to keep in mind. Before kindergartners can begin to read conventionally (before it is reasonable to put them into leveled books and to support them through guided reading groups), you and they both must be able to read at least stretches of their writing.

Generally, schools aim to move children into conventional reading by January of kindergarten. This means that by the end of December, a child who is ready for this will write, "I rode my bike" somewhat like this: "I rod mi bik." Even if children do not know sound-letter correspondences, they should be stretching out words and recording sounds as best they are able by mid-October (this assumes your kindergartners got a late start; if not, the timeframe would be earlier). In late October, I have written principals in schools that are linked to the Teachers College Reading and writing Project

and said, “Please make time to look through the writing that your kindergartners are doing. Do you see evidence that every child is writing a whole lot—probably this means they are writing four to five booklets a week—and that every child is labeling several items on each page? This is vitally important!”

This write-up has no doubt put undo emphasis on spelling. Forgive me. It is, of course, also crucial that children see themselves as writers, that they approach writing with confidence and energy, that they believe their stories are interesting and important, and so forth. Your coach can help you know other things to look for at this crucially important grade level.

October in First Grade: What to Expect

I’ll assume your first graders got started in writing workshop at the start of the year, which means that when you visit classrooms in mid-October, you should first of all see that each child has already published a piece of writing. In most classrooms, these finished pieces will be hung on a bulletin board that has been divided into a grid, with one square for each child. Expect teachers to hang next month’s published pieces on top of this month’s, so that you can track growth over time. Expect, too, that the published pieces will be in children’s own spelling, perhaps with translations written in tiny letters in some marginal place.

Look through one child’s folder and notice first the dates of the pieces. If pieces are not dated, be sure to give the class date stamps tomorrow and to insist that every piece always be dated. Children quickly learn to date-stamp every day’s work. As you look over the dates of the student work, check that September’s writing is no longer in this folder. Once a class has published the written work for that month, it gets taken from the work-in-progress folder and either sent home or saved in cumulative folders. This may sound very pedestrian, but teachers will need help managing all these papers, and frankly, consistent management structures will make your job as supervisor easier. For example, once earlier work has been emptied, you can contrast the volume of writing that one class and another does just by weighing the folders! It is much more complex to contrast the volume of writing in one room with another if there are no consistent ways of managing the paper chase.

If you notice that teachers in many rooms have not yet cleared out the writing from the start of the year, don’t be surprised, but do make a note to follow up not just with this grade level but with others. These grade-level write-ups will not all address this concern—but this doesn’t mean, of course,

that we don't expect you to comb through the folders and others across all the grades. You needn't wait until you visit those rooms, either, before clarifying expectations.

Children will be writing in booklets by now, on a variety of paper. Some children will be writing in booklets that do not contain any lines for writing. These children will be labeling their pictures, and, we hope, will be beginning to use several sounds to represent a word.

Be very careful that teachers are not limiting children's level of performance by giving them paper that does not stretch their abilities.

Once you can somewhat make out what the child is trying to write, that child needs to graduate into writing sentences under the picture and into using paper with a line or two underneath the space for a drawing. Other children will have paper that contains space for a picture and space for a sentence or two. Yet other children may have multiple lines. Be very careful that teachers are not limiting children's level of performance by giving them paper

that does not stretch their abilities. In a first grade classroom in which most of the children attended kindergarten, you should expect that at least a third of the class will use paper on which there are three to five lines for writing, and these children will write more than one sentence on each page.

Once you have determined when the class published, you can also figure out how many school days there have been since publication and how much writing each child in the room tends to produce each day. At this point in first grade, you can expect that most children write approximately a booklet (a story) a day. This will be equally true whether the class is filled with high-need kids or with kids who have had all sorts of advantages. The differences based on prior schooling and home life may well affect the maturity of kids' spelling and the length and complexity of their sentences, but either way, expect that first graders produce something like a book a day at this point in the year. Only your very strongest first graders will regularly work across two or three days on a story, and those stories will tend to contain many sentences on each page. That is, the stronger the writer, the fewer pieces of writing they produce—but the more complex and mature that writing will be.

If you are able to sit with a child, ask that child to read her writing. If the child is a beginning reader, expect her to read with her finger under the words and to read with one-to-one matching. Ideally, as such a child reads, she will notice instances when she left out a word (which happens) and will make insertions.

Expect to see children use invented spelling. This means that children are drawing on all they know and on the resources in the room to spell as well as they can. Invented spelling is not “free spelling.” The fact that children use invented spelling simply means that the children themselves are doing this work, and it means their work reflects what they know and can do.

It is incredibly revealing to study children’s spellings, and many phonics programs suggest that this is the single best way to assess a child’s knowledge of phonics. In general, you will want to see that a child represents every sound that he hears in a word with a letter. That is, you’d hope that a child spells *phone* with at least three letters, one representing the sound made by *ph*, one representing the sound made by the long o, and one representing the sound made by the final consonant *n*: *fon*. The concept that each sound must be represented by at least one letter is one of the building blocks of written language. The hope is that your children master that concept in the fall of kindergarten.

You should also see that first graders have a growing command of high-frequency words. These will be words that teachers explicitly teach, and the classrooms should probably have word walls on which these words are displayed. Expect first graders to spell *you, it, we, like, home, Mom*, and so forth with automaticity.

You can expect to see that first graders are writing what we refer to as “small moment stories.” These will tend to be chronologically organized narratives in which the author recounts something he has done. Ideally, these narratives will contain a few details and will tell not only what the child did but also his thoughts, responses, or feelings. A fairly modest first grade small moment story might read like this: “I went on the monkey bars. I went from bar to bar. Oh no! My hands slipped. I fell. I was sad.” Some children will write stories that are richer and sound perhaps like this: “My mom, my brother, and me went to get some ice cream. I got a double chocolate cone with sprinkles. I was happy. My mom got a baby cone, but she is not a baby. Then my dog jumped up and ate my ice cream. I got a new one.”

Children’s focused stories will tend to encompass twenty minutes or an hour of time, not a whole vacation. When children write with focus, this often leads them to write with details—as in the detail in the above example about the child’s mother getting the baby cone despite the fact that she’s not a baby. Details add tremendously to a story. If you notice that children are not writing a small moment, glance at the teacher’s demonstration piece on the white board often located at the front of the room by the meeting area.

Often the teacher's demonstration piece is not the best example and could very well be the reason the children are not writing small moment pieces.

You may also see that writers are including their responses to events (their feelings). This is a good sign. Elaboration, in general, is something to support. Then, too, you may see evidence of writers beginning to use story language. (Note the start of stories, for example. Do they begin *One day* or, better yet, *One sunny day*, or do they in other ways gesture towards using story language?) Endings, too, are a great place to look for evidence that children are using story language.

If you do have a chance to watch youngsters working during writing time, watch for their independence. If you enter the room at the end of the minilesson, watch to see how they access their materials and transition to writing. If you enter during writing time, glance over at the writing center. Ready-made booklets should be available, as well as one or two kinds of paper that they can add on to their booklets. The paper should be different from the paper used at the start of writing workshop. If you are not sure whether children are getting materials on their own, sidle up to a couple of kids and ask them to explain the routine for getting started writing. This short interruption will teach you a lot.

October in Second Grade: What to Expect

Your second graders need to write longer stories than those written by younger children. Second graders generally write in little booklets that are five or more pages long, with each page containing almost a paragraph of writing—say, seven sentences or so. Second graders will probably write two or three of these little books each week. These youngsters may still sketch in order to plan the content that will go on each page of a booklet, but the space allotted for these sketches will be significantly diminished.

Check that children are choosing their own topics. That's easy to see—look across the work done by several children and make sure they are not all writing on the same subject, even if it is an open-ended one, such as one episode from my summer vacation. Assigned topics, even open-ended ones, indicate that children are all writing in sync with each other—and that teachers are, therefore, not following the workshop method. If teachers are leading a true writing workshop, you'll see children who are writing about different topics (of their choosing) at different rates, drawing on a variety of writing strategies.

Check, too, that if the teacher is teaching children to write narratives, the story ideas that children are selecting are appropriate for this genre

study. This means the texts tell about a character (the writer, probably) doing one thing, then the next thing, then the next. A plotline is essential to a story.

Look more closely at the narratives children are writing to see if they are focused in time. Eventually youngsters will learn a variety of ways to focus a narrative, and they may be able to write focused narratives that span more than one stretch of time, but for now, the easiest way for teachers to move children towards writing well-organized, detailed, and vivid stories is to encourage them to zoom in on limited stretches of time. For example, a child can tell the story of a friend who has moved by zooming in on the afternoon when the moving truck arrived, and the child watched her friend's house being emptied into the truck, and then watched as the truck and the friend drove away. Notice that in this example, the story may span an hour or two of time. The story could, alternatively, span just the last twenty minutes of that episode. Either of these would qualify as small moment stories. Be sure that teachers are not misinterpreting the injunction to focus and aren't channeling their children to write stories that can literally fit inside a single moment!

It is challenging for second graders to write stories that are true, focused, and also significant.

It is challenging for second graders to write stories that are true, focused, and also significant. Some children have no trouble writing focused stories about tiny events—but those stories may be inconsequential to them. There are two ways to respond to this. One is to talk to children about choosing moments that fill the writer with big feelings—a sad time, a scary time, a hopeful time. Usually, for second graders, moments that are laden with feelings are also moments that brim with significance, although children will not understand the concept yet of these moments being meaningful or significant.

The other way to guide children whose vignettes center on seemingly insignificant moments is to help writers realize that big feelings lurk in those everyday moments. A haircut, for example, can be told as just a sequence of actions—but actually, haircuts are big deals. Haircuts matter. A good writer asks himself or herself, “What is the really important thing about this haircut?”

Take note of not only the topics that children are addressing (and their investment in those topics) but also the qualities of writing they are incorporating into their narratives. Notice, for example, the leads to their stories; second graders likely will have progressed from beginning stories

with captionlike sentences (“This is me going to the store”) to beginning with a character (themselves) on stage who acts (“I got on my bike and started pedaling to the store”). Some second graders will begin their stories by depicting the setting (“One snowy morning . . .”). Applaud this effort. You will also notice that second graders make an effort to conclude a story. They may do this by having the character make a closing action. Perhaps the character turns off the lights, for example, or closes the door. Some second graders will end the story by telling the reader the lesson learned: “I will never go to that store again.”

In addition to crafting their beginnings and endings, second grade writers pay attention to developing their characters in several ways. They use dialogue as one way to help readers get to know characters. They may also include some of their characters’ thinking. For example, a writer might say, “I walked into the kitchen. I wondered if my mom was going to get mad.” You’ll want to celebrate instances when children tell not only their characters’ actions but also their reactions.

You will also see second graders take more control of conventions of language. Their sentence structure will be more complex; you’ll notice this especially because their stories will include more varied (if not more correct) punctuation. Children’s spelling will be easier to read, with more words spelled conventionally. Any spelling approximations will at least be decipherable. Children will spell well over a hundred sight words conventionally.

October in Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grades: What to Expect

When you visit the upper grade classrooms, you’ll want to check, as you did in the first and second grade classrooms, whether children have already published. Expect that they have done so and that they are well into their second unit of study.

Look at the published work. There will not be gigantic differences between the pieces that third and fifth graders do. In fifth grade writing, the font will be smaller, the texts longer, but across these grades children will all retell true-life episodes. In many classrooms and especially in the younger grades, children may write their narratives across a few pages, with each page telling the story of one step in the sequence of events. Page one might tell about a child ascending towards the top of a mountain during a mountain hike. Page two might tell about the child reaching the mountain top and looking down from it. Page three might tell about lunch on the mountain top, and page four might tell about the start of the descent. Frankly, this example may be more focused, still, than the work you see, but you should

see evidence of temporal focus. Ideally, this focus will help writers write with details and write narratives as stories rather than as summaries. Become accustomed to noticing the difference between summaries and stories. In a *summary* of the mountain climb, the piece might go like this: “I remember when we climbed a mountain. It was a lot of fun. The climb was tiring. My legs felt like they were going to fall off. Finally, we got to the top . . .” In a *story*, the same piece might sound like this: “‘When will we reach the top?’ I called out. I sat on a rock to rest my legs. Then I thought, ‘It can’t be much longer’ and started to climb again . . .”

Chances are good that the published work of some children will not be focused or detailed, nor will it sound especially like a story. That is normal. More important is that children are attempting this. As you look through children’s notebooks from the start of the year towards the present, you should definitely see lots of evidence of instruction and of progress towards writing chronological, detailed, storylike narratives.

Look also for evidence that children’s volume of writing has increased dramatically. A child whose first entry at the start of the year was half a page long produced that amount in a single day of writing at that point. Now look at the entry the child wrote most recently, and contrast it with that original piece. You should see that the writing is becoming dramatically longer.

In general, most third graders can produce approximately a page of writing during one day’s writing workshop. Of course, some writers, strugglers in particular, write in miniscule letters so while their pieces fill only a half or two-thirds of a page, they aren’t short. I worry about the self-concept reflected in some of that writing and would encourage those children to let their writing use a bit more air space.

By fifth grade, children should produce more than a page of writing in one day’s writing workshop, and of course the font will decrease in size (hopefully without seeming to say, “Excuse me for existing.”).

Like primary students, children in grades 3–5 should put the date on every day’s work. Most principals and teachers also ask upper grade children to record whether the work was written in school or at home, and of course this helps you. Make sure there is time for both. Most upper grade teachers assign at-home writing several days a week. The challenge is to make sure

As you look through children’s notebooks from the start of the year towards the present, you should definitely see lots of evidence of instruction and of progress towards writing chronological, detailed, storylike narratives.

children are writing in school. Look at the entry lengths for at-school and at-home writing, expecting them to be comparable to each other. Become accustomed to leafing through the notebooks, saying to yourself, “I see Monday’s in-school writing and Monday’s at-home writing, I see Tuesday’s in-school writing, I see Wednesday’s in-school writing. Where is Thursday’s writing? Friday’s?”

In general, the flow of a month for writers in grades 3–5 will look like this: For just under half of most months, children will write in their writers’ notebooks and you will expect approximately a page of writing in school and a page of writing at home each day. Then for a good portion of each month, children will write outside their notebooks, working on rough drafts. These will be stored in their folders. At this point in the year, most children will write one- or two-page drafts (unless children are writing in the booklets I described earlier), and they will revise the drafts by adding flaps to them in which they insert more elaboration. To do this, children may scissor open the original draft to insert extensions, perhaps writing several leads or several endings (these may be written with flaps on the actual draft paper or on other paper, perhaps in the notebook).

Next, children will edit their well-revised drafts, and then finally they will recopy these into final drafts. Final drafts will not be perfect unless the teacher actually writes them—which is a waste of teacher time and not helpful to kids. Revel in your children’s pieces and hang them proudly. This is children’s best work, for now, but the children themselves are works in progress.

Do your best not to feel insecure about posting work that contains errors. You could have a case for work that is posted in the hall, but not for work that is posted in the classroom. Perhaps teachers can title these displays of finished work in politically astute ways, hanging an announcement over the entire display that says, “See Our Works in Progress.”

Cull the information you gather and look for patterns. Make notes of students you are concerned about, as well as any teaching that might raise concern. If you notice a problem consistently across a grade, make that grade an emergency. This might sound like a drastic and grandiose assumption to be making early on in the year, but viewing work in this way is often a litmus test, and the results will continue to haunt the well-being of this initiative and the school if there isn’t an early intervention. Students can’t afford a huge gap in their progress, and you can’t afford it either. All grades should be in sync with the school at large.

DEAL DIRECTLY WITH RESISTANCE IN ORDER TO NURTURE GOOD TEACHING

About five summers ago, Laurie's front lawn was turning yellow and discolored. The plush carpetlike grass now felt like scratchy straw. First, Laurie blamed it on the hot summer sun and began watering the garden daily, sometimes even twice. Then she blamed it on the chemicals and changed the chemical applications. Then, she got a different gardening service. One morning, as she was walking down the driveway, Laurie stooped down on the lawn, hoping that a stroke of magic would hit each blade of grass, rejuvenating it back to the way it had been before. A patch of grass seamlessly came out. Laurie turned the patch of grass over. Clusters of bugs were pulling at the roots. Laurie lifted out another patch, turned it over, and saw the same. She wanted to pretend that she never saw those bugs and walk down the driveway to the car as on any other normal day. But Laurie knew herein lay her problem, and herein lay her success.

I tell you this story not because Laurie has not solved all her gardening problems, but because as school leaders, you need to turn over "patches" in your school and not run away from what you see (and don't see). Be happy to find problems, and know that these will later turn into your successes. In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins rallies leaders of the corporate world to face head-on the hard truths. He says, "There is a sense of exhilaration facing these brutal facts and saying, 'We will never give up. It may take a long time, but we will prevail'" (2001, 68).

As you walk your building, you will, in general, be pleased with what you see. You will look at student writing and believe it is similar to the writing on the DVDs. You'll notice that a few teachers who have only had writing workshops for two short months will be teaching as though it had been encoded in their DNA. Classrooms will look impressive, and you'll begin to feel like a proud parent, marveling at the growth spurts all around you. While you won't see (or expect to see) model classrooms just yet, there will be evidence in most classrooms that this is the priority for this year.

However, if your school is like most others, there will be a few exceptions. You may have heard some rumblings and gathered some clues that things are not going precisely as you had hoped in all classrooms. A couple of your teachers are not receptive to having the coach in their classroom. They come to professional development sessions without paper, and they come to grade-level meetings without the materials they are asked to bring. They don't want to teach in ways that are different. They have heard that

these are “best practices,” but they would prefer to use best practices from a different time. You learn that your visits to some teachers’ classrooms do not make them feel supported, and moreover, they believe what they were doing before was fine. They are resistant.

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Resistance comes in a lot of different forms. Sometimes it will be disregard for your requests. Perhaps you have requested that all your teachers display student pieces on the hallway bulletin boards, and, instead, three teachers chose to uphold their past tradition of hanging store-bought holiday decorations. Perhaps you have urged teachers to arrive at lab sites and study group meetings on time, and you’ve already made a great point of being

sure that these teachers’ replacements reach their rooms on time, yet still the teachers straggle into the meetings, coffee cup in hand. Sometimes, the resistance will come from teachers announcing to you that their kids aren’t ready to write and can’t produce the expected volume. Often the resistance will be unspoken and invisible until you get into the classroom, look at the students’ writing folders, and see that these teachers simply haven’t made time for the teaching of writing. The following are some thoughts to help you deal with resistance.

Form a consistent approach.

My first suggestion is that you and your ambassadors—the coach, the assistant principal—act consistently in response to resistance. All of you need to uphold the same message so that your school has a consistent approach. In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins points out that in order to lead an effective organization, your school has to not only have discipline (and this means for teachers as well as for children), but also a culture of discipline. This is not easily achieved, but it is essential. In his book *Change Forces*, Michael Fullan discusses some of Collins’ findings. Fullan writes, “All companies have a culture, some companies have discipline, but few companies have a culture of discipline. When you have disciplined people, you don’t need hierarchy. When you have disciplined thought, you don’t need bureaucracy. When

you have disciplined action, you don't need excessive controls. When you combine a culture of discipline with an ethic of entrepreneurship, you get magical alchemy of great performance" (1999, 9).

Address the resistance; others are watching.

If the resistance is public, others will watch your response. You have no choice but to respond. If you have requested that all your teachers display student pieces on the hallway bulletin boards, and three teachers chose, instead, to hang store-bought holiday decorations, teachers across the school will look at those bulletin boards as an indication that your injunctions can be disregarded. Be sure to address the behaviors of teachers who defy your requests without talking to you about their concerns. Do so not only for those people to learn that disregarding your requests is unacceptable, but more importantly, because the whole community will be watching. The norms you establish in your community matter very much, and all of us establish those norms in large part by the ways we do or do not choose to work with boundaries. Your words, alone, do not establish norms. Your words and your actions, in combination, do this.

This does not mean that you need to publicly scold those teachers, but it does mean you need to do something to address the resistance. If the bulletin board has store-bought decorations on it, you may want to start with a warm, jesting comment. Humor or a light injunction is probably the most appropriate response for the time being, but use it right away, before the problem grows. Humor can also dissipate tension. "Mary Lou, it is so *creative* of you to use holiday decorations as the back drop for student writing! When will the writing go up on top of those pumpkins?" Of course, if the resistant teacher doesn't rectify the matter, you may need to take a more direct approach—perhaps even a public one. Be sure that your response is not a public humiliation, but a gracious nudge.

Realize that where there is smoke, there is usually fire.

Resistance is complex because people are complex. Generally, when teachers arrive late to meetings, when they do not remember to bring the requested student work, when they sit in a grade-level meeting and, instead of participating, grade their students' spelling tests, when they plop a gigantic bag onto the table obscuring their view of the coach, these behaviors are all indicators of trouble. If you've heard that a couple of your teachers are not receptive to the coach, chances are good that the tensions are greater than you've heard. And if some teachers regularly come to professional

development sessions without paper, chances are good that this is no accident. These teachers are probably unhappy about your efforts to reform the teaching of writing, or they are unhappy with the coach or the staff developer. They are resistant—and you need to think long and hard about how to handle the difficulties.

Before you do anything else, make sure your evidence is correct. Is it resistance or something else? Perhaps you visited the kindergarten and saw that no child has written anything for a week. It could be, however, that the date on the date stamp hadn't been changed regularly and for that reason it only appeared that the kindergarten children had not been writing daily. Perhaps teachers haven't launched writing because they are still waiting for the shipment of supplies that you'd promised. Make sure that the problem really does exist before you take it on.

Decide to study the problem: Listen.

What's really going on? Schedule an appointment to talk one-on-one, away from the public eye, with the dissenter, and in that meeting try to create some open (but limited) conversation. "It's been clear to me that you aren't crazy about this new writing initiative. I need to understand your reservations. Can you take five minutes to explain to me the big concerns you have about this, and then can we talk together in order to find a way to go forward that feels okay to both of us?" You could say it differently. "Let's take ten minutes to clear the air, to put gripes on the table, and then we'll try to see a way out of this morass."

Then listen. As you listen, resist the assumption that the problem is the other guy, that the dissenter is wrong. Frankly, chances are pretty good that you inadvertently offended this person, that you stepped on toes in ways you didn't intend, and even if the person with whom you are talking doesn't realize this, chances are that the dissent is a response to actions you took.

There is another option. The person could be dissenting out of firm beliefs. If you have tried to rally your whole school to use the *Units of Study*, this teacher could be angry because she believes you are trying to push a scripted curriculum onto the school or because she believes the *Units of Study* do not showcase fiction as much as they should. So listen. Listen, because this is a democracy and dissent is part of the American tradition. Listen, because your fondest hope is that your teachers will be critical thinkers and questioners. Listen, because your teachers will never teach well if they can't draw on their own beliefs.

Look for common ground and areas for acceptable compromise.

If a dissenter is resisting the writing initiative because he holding tight to goals that you believe could serve the school well, then you can say to that teacher, “I believe your goals need to be our goals, as a school. I do not think we feel differently about the goals. I think our differences are only about the path to those goals, and I’m asking the school to take on the writing reform as a school, for now. But I am 100 percent convinced that once we are, as a school, working together to learn this approach to teaching writing, then we will need to outgrow this approach, to do yet more. And I’d love it if you could be ready to help us go past this starting point. But could I ask you to try, for now, to help me bring the whole school together around this writing reform? Could I ask you to take a leadership role just for now, for the next four months, and then I promise that you and I can talk again and can think about how you could also lead us to go beyond this work? Because I have no doubt that we will need to do that.”

Your dissenter’s goals may not be your goals, and you may not respond in that way. But, in any case, listen well to what this teacher has to say, and respect his right to say it. Listening should not just be a courtesy. Listen to learn about points of agreement you and the dissenter share. Listen to learn ways in which you can allow the dissenter to tweak aspects of the writing workshop. If he does not think partnerships can be started in the first month of school and would prefer to wait until the second month—go for it. If the dissenter wants to abbreviate minilessons for now because his children don’t seem able to listen—great, the rest of us can learn from how this goes. That is, you need to convey that some aspects of the writing workshop are negotiable—while others are not. If the dissenter wants to assign topics and to be sure every child is writing on the same topic—no, it is really important to a writing workshop that children have chances to write about topics of their own choice, so that needs to be a schoolwide policy.

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I have sometimes found that my strongest dissenters end up as my strongest team members. Dissenters are often people with convictions, with backbone, with the tenacity to hold to their convictions—and those are exact qualities you especially want in your efforts to reform the teaching of writing.

Recognize that resistance can come from being overwhelmed.

Sometimes resisters are just teachers who need help. They may have camouflaged their lack of understanding as resistance. Or they may simply have encountered enormous difficulties when they tried to teach writing. Of course they resist the writing workshop—it isn't working for them! These teachers need a huge infusion of help right away. If the problems include classroom management problems (which is apt to be the case,) these teachers need first to receive one-to-one help, presumably from the literacy coach or from the assistant principal if she is a good teacher. Usually it will help if this teacher and the coach visit other classrooms with an eye only on how those teachers are managing their rooms. (Often this means visiting classrooms of teachers whose teaching may not be radiant but whose systems are well-oiled, and these teachers are often not the superstars who regularly receive visitors, so you'll be helping the host as well as the visitor.) Then the teacher and the coach will need lots and lots of time (perhaps a full day) to rethink rituals, systems, rules, expectations so as to be able to restart the year on a better footing. I usually think it helps if a few people help the teacher put an entirely new face on the classroom, too, rearranging the desks, perhaps adding a new rug, some new flowers.

When children come into the room, the classroom teacher will need to say to them, "I've rearranged the room because we are going to turn a page in the story of this room. We're starting a whole new chapter. And things will be different from now on. So today, the coach and I will be showing you how we'll act in this new chapter. First, let's talk about how we convene for meetings. Every day, we will often gather in the meeting area, and right now I'm going to show you how we go about doing that. Then we'll practice a few times so we get this really perfect."

The coach will need lots of time in that classroom for a few days, just to help the teacher install new rituals and procedures and expectations. That teacher will need tons of compliments from you, as will the children in that room. The new approach, like a fragile seedling, needs the sunshine of your approval.

Recognize that resistance can stem from the fear of losing control.

Sometimes, teachers who worry about losing control over their classroom become fearful, and that fear translates into resistance. They prefer to have their rooms in rows rather than clusters; they worry about conferring with one child instead of controlling the whole class; they worry about students going "off task." They have not yet built the trust that children will be able to

talk productively. Writing workshop makes these teachers feel insecure. They worry about having kids sit next to each other.

Many times, these teachers already have challenges around classroom management, and the lack of what they see as control will only make it worse. Teachers in this category would benefit most from interacting with the coach in a one-on-one situation. Classroom work should always include very clear and direct demonstrations of management techniques.

These teachers would also benefit from visiting other teachers whose instruction is rigorous and whose children are independent. Ideally, they should visit classrooms of students similar to their own. If a teacher struggling with management issues has a lot of English language learners, for example, try to find a similar class. It would be a wise use of the coach's time to gather together the teachers that fall into this category and work with them as a group and point out all the structures that support the independence of children they (the teachers) might not yet be using. Be prepared for these teachers to tell you that their students are different, that they can't do these things. In your visits to these classrooms, make sure that your compliments are focused around management and independence. Compliment teachers if they are now letting children get their own paper. Compliment teachers if they have rearranged their seating. Compliment teachers if partnerships are up and running. Ask your coach to make a cheat sheet of techniques that you can look for.

Recognize that resistance can come from feeling undervalued.

Resistors may be experienced teachers whose preeminence as superstars has been challenged by the new reforms. These teachers were the ones that administrators before you relied on because of their expertise. Now, finding their knowledge is no longer highlighted in the same way, they feel undermined.

You know how to help people in this position regain their footing! Find ways for these teachers to know that you value their skills, their experience, their wisdom. Ask for their advice. Find ways their teaching is exemplary, and send others into their rooms to learn from those pockets of excellence.

One of those teachers may have expertise in math, and you may have sidelined math as well as that teacher through your focus on writing. Call her into the office and tell her that before long, the school will be thinking about math and you'd love it if you and she could be thinking about the new directions the school might take at that point. Another teacher has tremendous experience helping with parent communication. Recruit these

teachers to lead others in their areas of expertise. Meanwhile, separately, compliment any progress you see in their teaching of writing. On the other hand, you needn't pretend that the teacher is doing good work if he is not. Do not allow much time to go by before saying, "I can't live with your kids not getting a real chance to learn to write. What can I do to make it more likely that you'll start teaching writing with the same intensity you bring to teaching math?" Don't let much time pass before rallying these teachers to be invested in the writing reforms. These are your leaders, and disgruntled leaders can do your school a lot of harm.

Work with each resistant teacher individually.

Struggle happens for different reasons. One person's struggle is not another person's struggle. If one of your teachers treated all struggling readers the same, you would want to help her try to look at each child separately and find the reason for the struggle and possible ways to help. You need to do the same with your resistant teachers.

Know that the best way to deal with resistance is to nurture a culture of kindness and respect in your school.

Congratulate acts of kindness and generosity among the staff. Send notes of appreciation when you see one teacher going out of her way for another. Pay attention to the small ways in which people contribute to the community, and let them know their efforts are appreciated. "It was so kind of you to bring donuts to that meeting," you can say. "How incredibly nice of you to go to the trouble of copying this poem for all of us!" "I noticed you staying late after the meeting to restore Jenny's room to order. That was so kind of you, so like you. These little acts of generosity that you do mean the world."

The biggest suggestion I have for you is that you cannot be an ostrich, putting your head in the sand and ignoring your resistant teachers. You need to ferret out indicators of resistance, you need to know clearly which teachers are resisting you, and you need to understand that although resistance comes in a lot of different forms and exists for a lot of different reasons, the fact remains that some teachers have not taken up the new writing initiative, and this will only be a schoolwide initiative if you are willing to work past the hard parts so that in the end, yours is a school where teachers teach writing and where kids are given opportunities to flourish as writers.

You need to be willing to talk firmly and clearly about the code of behavior you expect in your school. A teacher can disagree with a colleague and can say so. But acts of rudeness and incivility are not acceptable.

Whether you like what the coach is saying or not has nothing to do with the fact that you cannot sit in a grade-level meeting and correct math homework or talk on your cell phone. That's simply rude and, therefore, unacceptable. You can let people know that complaints (verbal or nonverbal ones) are masked requests. Instead of folding one's arms and rolling one's eyes, it would be preferable to voice your suggestions and your requests using words.

So deal with resistance. No one else can. Your coach can't be the person who says to these teachers, "You must." Your outside staff developer can't be the one who conveys this message. This needs to be your job. You need to have a list of teachers who are resisting, and you need to make a plan to visit their classrooms more regularly and to develop action plans with those teachers that include positive steps forward that the teacher agrees to take. You need to invest your own time and resources in enabling that teacher to have success teaching writing (and in other ways), and you need to be especially alert for any indications of progress and to support those with heart and soul.

The real goal is that your school is one where teachers are invested in the common good and are willing to set aside individual gain for the common good. The single most important suggestion I can make for those of you wanting to do more to nurture that sensibility is that you must hurry to the bookstore and get yourself a copy of the book *A School Leader's Guide to Excellence: Collaborating Our Way to Better Schools*, written by two of the leaders I respect more than any others in the world—Carmen Fariña and Laura Kotch. Their book will help in zillions of ways, but it will especially help you create a culture of collegiality, and that will be the strongest antidote to resistance.



"Lab Sites and Study Groups" and "Planning the Curriculum." In these two sections, principals discuss specific strategies for promoting collaborative learning and planning among teachers.