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**Why Writing Workshop?**

Indiana Partnership for Young Writers

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

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

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

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

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

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

Writing workshop mirrors the work of “real writers”
Writing workshop is a highly structured research-based curriculum that engages students in a complex, multi-layered process that resembles the work of professional authors. Other curriculums may move students through a process (pre-write, draft, revise, edit and publish) to achieve a desired product, but writing workshop goes further, engaging students in activities that include cultivating a writerly life—exploring, collecting, reading, talking, contemplating, co-authoring and questioning. Like professional writers, students in writing workshop know that “making something” takes substantial time and thought. The writing process is not a rigid formula. Students, like professional authors, learn to manage their writing projects through these complex and sometimes “slippery” stages.

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

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

Sample school-wide data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PD hours provided to school by IPYW in 2009-2010 school year</th>
<th>ISTEP+ E/LA school pass rate in 2009-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 hours</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 hours</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104 hours</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample classroom-specific data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PD hours completed by teacher in school year</th>
<th>Average student growth on IPYW Continuum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44 hours</td>
<td>2.2 levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 hours</td>
<td>2.3 levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 hours</td>
<td>3.2 levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a publication of the Indiana Partnership for Young Writers.

The Indiana Partnership for Young Writers is an affiliate of IUPUI School of Education and Orchard School Foundation. Our mission is to inspire the best teaching of reading and writing in grades K-8 and celebrate student achievements with innovative publications and events. For more information, visit www.indianayoungwriters.org. Texts referenced in creating this document include: Study Driven by Katie Wood Ray (Heinemann, 2006) and NCTE’s Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing (National Council of Teachers of English, 2004)