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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 skillful 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 enables individualized instruction

Workshop structure provides substantial time for whole group, small group and one-on-one instruction to students *daily*. Teachers plan strategic curriculum specific to the students in the room, moving students towards appropriate whole-group goals (standards) while simultaneously responding to individual needs. Much like an athletic coach considers, *What does this player need to know for this Saturday's game in order to play the best she can at this stage of her development*, workshop teachers strategically plan what to teach the whole class and what to teach each individual writer to enable him to produce the best text he can in each genre studied throughout the year. In writing workshop, *all* students can be successful—including the most advanced and most challenged students, two extremes often ill-served by other curriculums that teach to the median.

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)

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 uses conventions for audience

In writing workshop, students have audiences beyond the classroom teacher and see how their writing affects others. They learn to use grammar and spelling conventions that enhance and clarify meaning in the texts they write. They learn to identify and choose punctuation, line breaks, diction and other conventions appropriate to the audience to ensure that texts are read as the writer intends. In this way writers learn that their words—and how they present those words—have the power to inform, persuade, move, entertain, challenge and profoundly impact readers.



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

PD hours provided to school by IPYW in 2009-2010 school year	ISTEP+ E/LA school pass rate in 2009-2010
100 hours	84%
100 hours	85%
104 hours	81%

Sample classroom-specific data

PD hours completed by teacher in school year	Average student growth on IPYW Continuum *1.8 = one grade level
44 hours	2.2 levels
44 hours	2.5 levels
34 hours	2.3 levels
49 hours	3.2 levels