

# Workshop 8

## Planning and Professional Development

*“Taking classes...and...[doing] professional reading really got me on track....And I’ve had mentors through all my professional life. I continue to have them...because I don’t think we ever stop evolving. Professionally, I don’t think you can.”*

—Flora Tyler, Sixth-Grade Teacher, Picacho Middle School, Las Cruces, New Mexico

### Description

A common thread among effective teachers is their spirit of inquiry. Effective teachers center their professional lives around the generation of questions and a search for solutions. They wonder about how their students learn and about what they might do to help them learn better. They wonder about their students—who they are as members of cultural communities and who they are as individuals. They are interested in new developments in their subject matter. They consider new understandings about thinking and teaching and learning, and wonder how they might be applicable to their classrooms. Posing questions and seeking answers are foundational aspects of their professional lives.

Some of this learning is informal. Effective teachers become ethnographers in their classrooms, watching students carefully to determine how they learn, what difficulties they encounter, and what kinds of instruction help them overcome those difficulties. They talk to people—parents, community members, and other teachers. They read professional books and subscribe to professional publications.

Effective teachers also engage in more formal modes of professional development. They join organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English or the International Reading Association, and attend the local and national conferences supported by those organizations. They may take classes at the local university to pursue advanced degrees or simply to update their understandings in areas that interest them. Or they may participate in teacher development workshops offered by their schools or by organizations such as the National Writing Project.

Thoughtful planning is a second component in the lives of effective teachers. While they may be pleased to discover an individual lesson or experience that their students respond to, they understand that even the best lessons are effective only insofar as they form part of an integral plan for instruction over the long term. From the earliest stages in their planning, these teachers consider what their students need to know and what they need to know how to do by the end of the school year, and they develop plans that weave together flexible instructional designs targeting those goals. Throughout the year they revisit their plans, adjusting them to meet developing student needs.

In this program, you will hear teachers talking about the importance of professional development in their lives and about the ways they conceptualize their planning. As you listen, think about your own professional life. What kinds of professional development are most useful to you? Do you allow yourself enough time for the development you would like to experience? Could you plan your instruction in ways that would be more effective for you and your students?

### Key Points

- The more professionally engaged teachers are, the more engaged their students are likely to be; a teacher’s professional development often validates his or her work to students.
- One way teachers help students learn is by continuing to learn themselves.

- Good professional development is experiential and leads teachers to rethink teaching and learning while providing new ways to approach classroom instruction and organization.
- Student populations are different than they were 10 or 20 years ago; understanding these differences and meeting the educational needs of these students requires different instructional strategies than many of those used in the past. As our society and the world change, educators have to rethink what they do and how they do it if they are to remain effective.
- Many teachers find attending the Summer Institutes run by local sites of the National Writing Project, or joining professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, help them stay abreast of current developments in education and return to the classroom informed and refreshed.
- Teachers have to be willing to take risks and try out new ideas and strategies for professional development experiences to be useful.
- Teachers need to be thoughtful and reflective about professional development experiences, considering what they are learning in the context of their own classroom communities and their own teaching styles.
- Professional development experiences may involve the opportunity to meet and talk with the authors of books students are reading; such encounters can provide rich starting points for later literary discussions in the classroom.
- Teachers who see themselves as learners validate the processes of learning for their students.
- In envisionment-building classrooms, every student's viewpoint is essential. When teachers learn new techniques or new approaches to a text, they often find new ways to engage those different viewpoints. Students for whom our instruction is ineffective challenge us to find new approaches.
- Teachers need their own community of professionals within which they can raise questions, share problems, and examine their classroom successes and failures.
- Research suggests that student learning is enhanced in places where teachers and other education professionals get together regularly to share ideas and support one another's professional development.
- In addition to workshops and professional reading, many teachers turn to mentors throughout their professional life to help their continuing evolution.
- Professional conferences provide opportunities to develop a network of teacher peers with whom to share ideas.
- One way teachers can support one another professionally is by observing and offering feedback on each other's classes.
- The most effective professional development activities are those that originate with problems teachers have and offer opportunities for teachers to explore and test various solutions. Effective teachers constantly pose questions and seek answers centered on their teaching and their students' learning.
- Thoughtful long-term planning is essential to effective teaching because it enables linking classroom experiences into a coherent learning sequence.
- Many teachers begin their long-term planning with a list of things they want students to know and be able to do by the end of the year.
- Some teachers begin their planning by reviewing student evaluations from earlier years.
- Goals or standards established by the state or by the school district provide a starting point for other teachers when they plan.

- Knowing the student population and targeting planning to meet its needs leads to effective instruction.
- When doing interdisciplinary planning, teachers identify the ideas and issues that are central to each discipline and focus on those that the disciplines have in common. Research does not show that students necessarily learn better as the result of an interdisciplinary approach, but such approaches offer students different ways to interact with the curriculum.
- A central aspect of planning in an envisionment-building classroom is determining what literature to offer students.
- Some teachers try to find one or two new books to offer students each year. Some teachers choose readings with a thematic focus; others choose readings by a single author.
- Choosing a focus for the literature helps students make connections between and among the different works throughout the year.
- In addition to identifying the topics that will be discussed, good planning involves consideration of the kinds of experiences students will have with the literature.
- Clear long-term goals provide teachers with the flexibility to adjust short-term activities to meet emerging student needs without losing sight of the overall plan.

### **Learning Objectives**

After viewing this program, you will be able to:

- consider multiple ways to continue your professional development and integrate it into your teaching life.
- consider ways to develop overarching goals for student learning that you can use to guide your instructional planning and design.

### **Background Reading**

In preparation for this workshop, read the introductory segment of “Strategies for Teaching” and “Closing Thoughts: Literature in School and Life” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press. Copyright 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

In addition, you may wish to read the abstract of Judith Langer’s article “Excellence in English in Middle and High School: How Teachers’ Professional Lives Support Student Achievement” available online at <http://cela.albany.edu/publication/abstract/odds.htm>.

For additional online resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). Select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, click on Workshop 8, and go to Additional Reading.

# Workshop Session (On-Site)

---

## Getting Ready (30 minutes)

In this program, you will listen to teachers discussing the importance of professional development to their teaching lives. They discuss the professional communities they have found especially useful. They talk about the importance of having mentors throughout their careers. They discuss the value of having trusted colleagues—within their school or elsewhere—with whom they can discuss what goes on in their classrooms. Reflect on their observations in terms of your own professional life. Are you giving yourself the development opportunities you deserve? What additional ways might you explore to support your professional growth?

Additionally, this program looks at how these teachers consider long-term planning and its importance to the overall success of their classrooms. As you watch and listen, think about your own classroom and your planning processes. What suggestions do these teachers make that might prove beneficial for you?

### Discuss:

Discuss the following questions:

- Are you a member of any professional educational organizations? Which ones? What do you find especially useful about your membership?
- Have you attended any local, regional, or national professional conferences? What was your experience like?
- What are some of the steps you take when you begin to plan for a new school year? What key thoughts do you try to keep in mind as you plan?

**Site Leader:** Use these questions to spark discussion before viewing the workshop program. Participants may write answers to the reflection questions in their journals, as time permits. You may use all of the questions or select only a few.

If you have Internet access, display the workshop Web site at [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), making participants aware of online resources and interactive opportunities.

### Reflect in Workshop Journals:

Respond to the following questions in your workshop journal:

- What professional development experiences have you encountered that were useful and effective? What made them so?
- What kinds of planning do you find most useful for you and your students? What do you do when your good plans go awry?

Think about your responses as you watch the video. How do they compare with the ones shared by the teachers in this workshop?

# Workshop Session, cont'd.

---

## Watch the Workshop Video (60 minutes)

### Think About and Discuss:

**Pause** at the title card "The Author's Words."

- Have you had professional development experiences that helped you implement new approaches to your students' learning?
- Have you ever tried a new approach and found that it was not successful with your students or that you were not comfortable using it?
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

**Site Leader:** If you are watching on videocassette, you may pause at the segments indicated here to give participants opportunities to discuss, reflect, and interact with the program. If needed, rewind and replay segments of the program so that viewers can thoughtfully examine all pertinent information. If you are watching a real-time broadcast, ask participants to consider the questions as they view the program, and discuss them later.

You may select any or all of the questions to discuss, as time permits and according to the interests of your participants.

**Pause** at the title card "Professional Communities."

- What opportunities have you or your students had to meet an author? If a face-to-face meeting isn't possible, what other "meet-the-author" experiences might you develop?
- Who are your mentors—the people who influence your beliefs about teaching and learning? These might be professors, colleagues, or authors whose books you have found particularly compelling.
- What questions or thoughts are raised as you watch the video?

**Pause** at the title card "Planning to Learn."

- What is your professional community like? Is it just in your own building? Does it include colleagues in other schools? How does it help you as a teacher?
- What are some things you do to maximize the positive values of attending a conference?

**View program until the end.**

- Once you identify your major goals for the year, what strategies do you use to plan your developing instruction?
- What happens when your plans don't work?

## Going Further (30 minutes)

### Work in Groups:

Form groups by grade level and identify three or four big things your students need to know and know how to do with literature by the end of the year. On chart paper, list each at the top of a column. In each column, list readings and experiences that you might use to build toward these goals. Share your charts with the entire group. Record key ideas in your workshop journal for future reference.

# Between Sessions (On Your Own)

---

## Homework Assignment

### Journal:

Respond to the following in your workshop journal:

- Joe Bernhart defines his job as reaching “all ... kids, even the ones we aren’t making connections with.”  
Which students do you have the most difficulty making connections with? What changes do you make to enable those connections? What else might you do? What resources and support do you have to help you?

### Reading:

In preparation for Workshop 9, read “Literary Thought and Literate Mind” in Dr. Judith Langer’s *Envisioning Literature* from the Teachers College Press. Copyright 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

For additional online resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, and look under Additional Reading for Workshop 9.

## Ongoing Activity

### Channel-Talk:

You are encouraged to participate in an email discussion list called Channel-Talk. Send comments and questions regarding the workshop to other participants around the country. Comments can also be viewed on the Web site. Go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature), select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, and click on Channel-Talk.

## Extension: Classroom Connection

### Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner:

Make a list of the classroom experiences with literature that you feel have been most successful for you and your students. For each experience, list characteristics including the kinds of activities students were engaged in (e.g., writing, whole-class discussion, small-group discussion, oral performance, etc.), ways in which students demonstrated their engagement and learning, and ways in which you knew it was successful. Use the teacher resource *Four Principles of Envisionment-Building Classrooms* to chart each experience. How can you use your analysis to develop additional successful experiences?

### Student Activities:

Try these activities with your students.

- Give students a list of activities and experiences they have had with literature in the past. Ask them to rate them 1-3 (1 = they learned a lot; 2 = they learned a little; and 3 = they didn’t learn anything). Then ask them to rate them as “Interesting,” “Okay,” and “Boring.” Discuss their ratings to find out what made certain activities and experiences both fruitful and interesting and what made them useless and boring. Consider their observations in your planning.
- Ask students to write about unpleasant or uncomfortable experiences they have had with literature—either within class or elsewhere. As they share their stories, use an overhead or chart paper to list characteristics of such experiences. Consider these insights in your planning.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

---

- Ask students to write about good experiences they have had with literature—either within class or elsewhere. As they share their stories, use an overhead or chart paper to list characteristics of such experiences. Consider these insights in your planning.
- Develop an evaluation that focuses on determining what students found most interesting and most valuable for them as learners. Ask them to complete it at the end of a unit or at the end of the year. Consider these insights in your planning.

## Additional Reading

Bartoli, Jill Sunday. *Celebrating City Teachers: How To Make a Difference in Urban Schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-00379-3.

Birchak, Barb, Clay Connor, Kathleen Marie Crawford, Leslie Kahn, Sandy Kaser, Susan Turner, and Kathy G. Short. *Teacher Study Groups: Building Community Through Dialogue and Reflection*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998. ISBN 0-8141-4846-8.

Bomer, Randy. *Time for Meaning: Crafting Literate Lives in Middle and High School*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995. ISBN 0-435-08849-1.

Brown, Dave F. *Becoming a Successful Urban Teacher*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002. ISBN 0-325-00361-0.

Burke, Jim. *The English Teacher's Companion: A Complete Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999. ISBN 0-86709-475-3.

Cambourne, Brian and Jan Turbill. *Coping With Chaos*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987. ISBN 0-435-08584-0.

Christenbury, Leila. *Making the Journey: Being and Becoming a Teacher of English Language Arts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-86709-476-1.

Fleischer, Cathy. *Teachers Organizing for Change: Making Literacy Learning Everybody's Business*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000. ISBN 0-8141-4999-5.

Freppon, Penny A. *What It Takes To Be a Teacher: The Role of Personal and Professional Development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-99371-8.

Golub, Jeffrey N. *Making Learning Happen: Strategies for an Interactive Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-86709-493-1.

Graham, Peg and Sally Hudson-Ross. *Teacher/Mentor: A Dialogue for Collaborative Learning*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998. ISBN 0-8077-3793-3.

Kaufman, Douglas. *Conferences and Conversations: Listening to the Literate Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN 0-325-00271-1.

Langer, Judith A. *Envisioning Literature*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995. ISBN 0-8077-3464-0.

Langer, Judith. "Excellence in English in Middle and High School: How Teachers' Professional Lives Support Student Achievement." *American Educational Research Journal* 37 (2000): 397-439.

Larson, Mark. *Making Conversation: Collaborating With Colleagues for Change*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997. ISBN 0-86709-424-9.

Lieberman, Ann, ed. *Building a Professional Culture in Schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1988. ISBN 0-8077-2901-9.

Lyons, Carol A. and Gay Su Pinnell. *Systems for Change in Literacy Education: A Guide to Professional Development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-00282-7.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

---

Miller, Janet L. *Creating Spaces and Finding Voices: Teachers Collaborating for Empowerment*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990. ISBN 0-7914-0282-7.

O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN 0-86709-427-3.

O'Reilly, Mary Rose. *The Peaceable Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993. ISBN 0-86709-328-5.

Perlmutter, Jane and Louise Burrell. *The First Weeks of School: Laying a Quality Foundation*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. ISBN 0-325-00339-4.

Rief, Linda. *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992. ISBN 0-435-08598-0.

Rief, Linda. *Vision and Voice: Extending the Literacy Spectrum*. Portsmouth, NH, 1998. ISBN 0-3250-0097-2.

Routman, Regie. *Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners K-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994. ISBN 0435-08836-X.

Stover, Lois Thomas. *Young Adult Literature: The Heart of the Middle School Curriculum*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. ISBN 0-86709-376-5.

Sunstein, Bonnie S. *Composing a Culture: Inside a Summer Writing Program With High School Teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994. ISBN 0-86709-342-0.

Tremmel, Robert. *Zen and the Practice of Teaching English*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999. ISBN 0-86709-480-X.

Vinz, Ruth. *Composing a Teaching Life*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. ISBN 0-86709-379-X.

Wilde, Jack. *A Door Opens: Writing in Fifth Grade*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993. ISBN 0-435-08761-4.

Wilson, David E. *Attempting Change: Teachers Moving From Writing Project to Classroom Practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994. ISBN 0-86709-340-4.

Wolfe, Denny and Joseph Antinarella. *Deciding To Lead: The English Teacher as Reformer*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997. ISBN 0-86709-420-6.

## *Professional journals about literature instruction:*

**ALAN Review:** The National Council of Teachers of English's Assembly on Literature for Adolescents produces a review of adolescent literature and literature instruction three times a year (fall, winter, and spring).

**CELA Newsletter:** The National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement, State University of New York, Albany, publishes a newsletter in the fall, winter, and spring. The newsletter addresses a wide range of issues concerning literacy. The newsletter can be accessed for free on their Web site at <http://cela.albany.edu>.

**The National Council of Teachers of English Journals:** NCTE publishes many subscription journals, including *The English Journal*, high school level, *Voices From the Middle*, middle school level, and *Language Arts*, elementary and middle school levels.

# Between Sessions, cont'd.

---

Texts mentioned by teachers in this workshop program include:

**Short Story:**

"Four Skinny Trees" (in *The House on Mango Street*) by Sandra Cisneros

**Novels:**

*The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis

*Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis

*Romiette and Julio* by Sharon Draper

*Darkness Before Dawn* by Sharon Draper

*Tears of a Tiger* by Sharon Draper

*Forged by Fire* by Sharon Draper

*Double Dutch* by Sharon Draper

*Among the Hidden* by Margaret Peterson Haddix

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

*The Giver* by Lois Lowry

*Mr. Tucket* by Gary Paulsen

*The River* by Gary Paulsen

*The Car* by Gary Paulsen

*Nightjohn* by Gary Paulsen

*Harris and Me: A Summer Remembered* by Gary Paulsen

*Stargirl* by Jerry Spinneli

*Loser* by Jerry Spinneli

*Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinneli

*Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush?* by Jerry Spinneli

*Wringer* by Jerry Spinneli

*The Bomb* by Theodore Taylor

*Timothy of the Cay* by Theodore Taylor

*Sniper* by Theodore Taylor

For additional resources, go to [www.learner.org/envisioningliterature](http://www.learner.org/envisioningliterature). Select *Making Meaning in Literature: A Workshop for Teachers, Grades 6–8*, Workshop 8, and Additional Reading.

# Notes

---