

Workshop 8

Teaching the Power of Revision

Overview

Workshop 8 takes viewers into the classrooms of three language arts teachers—Velvet McReynolds, Mary Cathryn Ricker, and Jack Wilde—as their students tackle the ongoing task of revision. The workshop also features excerpts from a discussion the three teachers held at the end of the school year and from an interview with Linda Rief, a practicing middle school teacher and the author of *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*.

The first classroom segment features Jack Wilde, a fifth-grade teacher from Hanover, New Hampshire. Jack is conferring with a student about the first draft of a persuasive paper. The student has met with a peer to discuss her draft, but so far, she’s not made any revisions. The segment demonstrates how Jack’s listening and responding skills help the student focus on a specific issue for revision.

From Jack’s classroom, we go to Mary Cathryn Ricker’s seventh-grade class in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she’s talking individually with a student about applying a revision lesson to his writing. Later in the video, we see both Jack and Mary Cathryn teaching mini-lessons that will help their students revise more effectively.

The final classroom segments feature Velvet McReynolds, a seventh-grade teacher from Hoover, Alabama. For Velvet, revision is at the heart of the writing process—it’s “where the magic happens.” Using a student exemplar, class discussion, handouts, and individual and small-group work, Velvet prompts her seventh-graders to focus on revising personal narratives they wrote earlier in the year. The two-day session culminates with a Celebration Circle where students share “before” and “after” versions of their papers.

Workshop 8 Teachers

The teachers seen in the video program include:

- Velvet McReynolds, Grade 7, Simmons Middle School, Hoover, Alabama
- Mary Cathryn Ricker, Grade 7, Cleveland Quality Middle School, St. Paul, Minnesota
- Jack Wilde, Grade 5, Bernice A. Ray School, Hanover, New Hampshire

Background Reading

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the materials for Workshop 8 provided on the Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/) including Velvet McReynolds’ lesson plan, supporting classroom materials, and student writing samples. These materials may be downloaded and printed.
- Reading the three articles provided under “Related Reading” on the Workshop 8 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the articles in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the “Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 8,” available on the next page and on the Web site.

Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 8

This workshop demonstrates a variety of teaching practices that help students develop skills in revising their writing.

- Teachers affirm the importance of helping students with revision. The teachers' goal, though, is not just to help students develop a particular piece of writing but to help students acquire skills and strategies that will enable them to grow as writers.
- Creating a positive environment, a community of writers, is important in promoting revision: an atmosphere of trust, respect, support, and encouragement from the teacher and classmates; regular experience in helping others and being helped; comfortable surroundings; arrangement of furniture to facilitate discussion; and an opportunity to write and share writing without fear of undue criticism.
- Because students write about matters that are important to them and draw on their own experiences, they are motivated to revise and to revise effectively.
- Teachers demonstrate that they expect students to revise ("to get them in the revision door"). They organize specific lessons and tasks to help students learn to revise and to recognize the power of revision. Revision is a routine part of the writing workshop.
- Since revision often is difficult, teachers provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate (especially to peers) the benefits of revision. They also arrange for peers to help each other and to express support and approval of classmates' accomplishments.
- Teachers actively teach strategies for revision through a variety of practices: reading and talking about examples; modeling revision and having students model revision; structuring small-group conferences; providing mini-lessons on specific features of writing and on revision methods; talking with students one-on-one; raising questions to help students see options for revision and to help them think critically; displaying writing on the overhead; leading students in tasks that result in a sharing of before-and-after writing; helping students create and use revision forms and checklists for revision; and arranging for students to read their work aloud and to talk about revision with peers.
- Lessons aimed at helping students revise are well focused, and teachers are careful to be clear and specific in guiding students through revision tasks. Lessons often include samples of writing, which are displayed or provided in copies; open discussion of techniques; references to resources; practice in revision strategies; sharing; implementation of the lesson in the students' own writing; and more sharing. Students often include examples of revisions and the results of revision tasks and exercises in their writer's notebooks.
- Teachers do not merely promote revision; they lead students to understand reasons for revision—why a revision is useful and how a revised piece of writing can ultimately influence readers.
- Teachers draw on practices they have observed or have read about in professional literature, and they adjust the techniques for their own students. For example, one teacher uses Barry Lane's "exploding the moment" strategy with her seventh-graders.
- Teacher-student conferences are a major means of helping students revise their work and develop as writers. In these conferences, teachers are careful to promote student ownership and to guide students in making their own decisions.

Facilitator's Outline: Workshop 8

This outline of the Workshop 8 video contains approximate entry points for each section. Use this chart to help identify the pause points in the Watch the Video section. Zero your VCR counter at the Annenberg/CPB logo at the beginning of the tape.

Segment 1 (0:00–18:09)	Introduction (beginning at 0:00)	
	In the Classroom (beginning at 4:46) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finding a focus for revision Helping the reluctant reviser 	Jack Wilde Mary Cathryn Ricker
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 14:05) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging students to revise 	Velvet McReynolds, Mary Cathryn Ricker, and Jack Wilde
Segment 2 (18:10–34:09)	In the Classroom (beginning at 18:10)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mini-lesson on leads Mini-lesson on exploding the moment 	Jack Wilde Mary Cathryn Ricker
	Interview (beginning at 32:25) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of mini-lessons 	Linda Rief
Segment 3 (34:10–49:03)	In the Classroom (beginning at 34:10)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing revision criteria and applying them to drafts 	Velvet McReynolds
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 43:36) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role of computers in revision 	Velvet McReynolds, Mary Cathryn Ricker, and Jack Wilde
Segment 4 (49:04–end)	In the Classroom (beginning at 49:04)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebration Circle 	Velvet McReynolds
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 52:55) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowering student writers through revision 	Velvet McReynolds, Mary Cathryn Ricker, and Jack Wilde

Workshop Session

Discussion and Sharing (15 minutes)

- Describe your own revision process. How do you feel about revising your writing? What was your experience with revision as a young person?
- Share your most successful strategy for helping students revise their writing. How did you know you were successful? Why do you think this strategy was effective for middle school writers?
- Most writing teachers have encountered students who are reluctant to revise. Share your most recent experience with a student who resisted changing his or her writing. How did you deal with the situation? Do you feel your intervention was successful? Why or why not?

Watch the Video (60 minutes video plus 30 minutes discussion)

Watch the video, stopping at the end of each segment (see the Facilitator's Outline on the preceding page for help locating the pause points). If you are watching the workshop on your own, use your workshop journal to respond to two or more discussion questions from each of the four segments.

Segment 1 (0:00-18:09)

[Pause point: After the teacher discussion on encouraging students to revise.]

- Briefly describe how Jack Wilde structured his informal conference with Kelly. What strategies does he use that will help Kelly successfully revise her piece?
- In Mary Cathryn's informal revision conference, she shows her student how to trace his hand and use each finger to represent one of the five senses. How do graphic organizers such as this one help reluctant writers and revisers? How might graphic organizers help English language learners in particular? Share a graphic organizer you have found to be effective in teaching revision or some other aspect of writing.
- In the teacher discussion, Mary Cathryn says that her more experienced writers are often the most resistant to revising their work. Do you agree with her observation? Share any strategies you have used for helping these students overcome their reluctance to revise.

Segment 2 (18:10-34:09)

[Pause point: After Linda Rief's comments on mini-lessons.]

- What is the overall structure of Jack's and Mary Cathryn's mini-lessons? List and comment on specific strategies you observed during the mini-lessons.
- Discuss one of your most successful mini-lessons. How did you decide on the subject of the lesson? How did you structure it? What results did you see in your students' writing?

Segment 3 (34:10-49:03)

[Pause point: After the teacher discussion about using computers to revise.]

- Based on the attributes of the exemplar essay, Velvet sets up criteria for the students to follow in revising their own narratives. What would be the effect of having more criteria? Fewer?
- To what degree should teachers allow students to rely on computer spell checks and grammar checks to improve the correctness of their writing?
- Like Velvet's students, many of us now use computers to write and revise. Apart from the obvious advantage of having grammar and spelling checks, what effect do you think the computer has had on your writing and that of your students?

Workshop Session, cont'd.

Segment 4 (49:04-end)

[View to end of program.]

- Throughout her revision lesson, Velvet continually engages and encourages her students, both directly and indirectly. Name specific ways in which she communicates positively with her students.
- What classroom management techniques does Velvet use to make her Celebration Circle successful? In what ways could a Celebration Circle help students improve as writers and readers?

Going Further (15 minutes)

- Go back to the successful revision strategy you shared at the beginning of the workshop. What does this strategy have in common with strategies demonstrated in the video?
- In your workshop journal, quickly jot down your philosophy concerning the overall importance of mechanics and grammar in your language arts teaching and then share your thoughts with your fellow teachers.

Final Assignment

Homework

- Complete your exploration of the Web pages for Workshop 8—looking at materials, listening to audio files, and/or printing out resources. Record any comments or responses in your workshop journal.
- If you have not already done so, print out the overall “Best Practices for Teaching Writing” (see the link on the home page of the Web site). Go through the list to see which practices you presently use in your classroom, and then—based on the list, on the notes in your workshop journal, on your experiences watching the videos, on your reading, and on your discussions with colleagues—choose at least two or three new practices to include in your teaching. Implement these practices using the resources included on the *Write in the Middle* Web site and/or information gleaned from the books and articles in the “Selected Sources” lists in this guide.

Selected Sources for “Teaching the Power of Revision”

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