

Reading and Writing: A Workshop Approach

A transcript of remarks by Lucy Calkins Founding Director, Teachers College Reading & Writing Project

In the schools that I've worked most closely in, the New York City schools, the suburbs around New York, and the cities and towns across the country where my colleagues at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project and I have been working, reading and writing have always been partner activities. And the reading workshop and the writing workshop have existed side by side in a symmetry that's been a very natural and beautiful thing.

But, I also know that there are schools across the country that have been relying on the Units in Study in Teaching Writing books to do wonderful work with writing workshops and have had other approaches to the teaching of reading. Sometimes I get phone calls from some of those places and they say, "What will it be like for us when we embark on reading workshop? Is reading workshop going to be a lot like writing workshop?" And my answer to those people is that, absolutely, reading workshop is going to be a lot like writing workshop. The similarities will be there especially in methods of teaching, because when you know how to explicitly teach the skills and strategies of writing, then you can take that same ability to teach with great explicitness and bring that over to the teaching of reading. What teachers have learned about leading minilessons in the writing workshop will provide them with tremendous foundations for leading minilessons in the reading workshop. Similarly, when you know how to really observe and listen and assess and interview writers to understand what it is that they're doing and trying to do, and then tailor your teaching so that your conferring and small group work is responsive to writers, that same ability to be responsive in your teaching will carry over into the reading workshop. All of the methods that you know as teachers about teaching assessment-based writing will help you to teach assessment-based reading. So, yes, absolutely, for teachers, units of study in reading and in writing will be similar in terms of the explicit strategy of instruction in your minilessons, in terms of the assessment-based instruction in your conferences and in your small group work.

There will be similarities, of course, in management. Managing a workshop is different than managing kids in rows facing forward. And teachers who've learned to manage a writing workshop will find all that is incredibly helpful when they move into reading workshops. In addition, teachers who have tapped their own literacy as a resource in the teaching of writing will also see how important that is in the teaching of reading. Teachers will see in that way as well, there's a tremendous parallel. There are, of course, differences, and the differences are going to be felt especially by children.

Writing a book is a very different thing than reading a book. And the skills of writing effectively and the skills of reading effectively are quite different. So the content that will be poured into the infrastructure of a writing workshop and a reading workshop is very different; very related and very reciprocal, but different. And I think that one of the wonderful things about these units of study books is that they will help teachers to really demythologize the skills and strategies of powerful reading. Just as teachers have learned through units of study in writing what it means to not just put up a good piece of writing and say "go write like that," but to, in a deliberate and planful fashion, scaffold kids' development in writing. I think it's going to be an exciting day for teachers to see that readers can grow in the same sort of very obvious and powerful and incredible way that we've been seeing writers grow.