

Literacy Studio: Conditions for Success

In highly successful literacy studios:

- ✧ Teachers create a climate of respect and civility using rituals, a predictable schedule, and well-defined procedures and trust children to become increasingly independent and to work together to solve problems.
- ✧ Teachers create a warm, inviting environment with soft lighting, work areas defined by rugs and bookshelves, readily available materials, and abundant examples of children's work and records of their thinking on display.
- ✧ Teachers ensure that the classroom includes a variety of work spaces—comfortable places for children to work independently and talk with each other, a place for the whole group to gather, and a place for the teacher to meet with small groups.
- ✧ Teachers create a culture of rigor, inquiry, and intimacy by continually expecting more, probing ideas further and pressing children to explore their intellect.
- ✧ Teachers create a culture conducive to in-depth study of books, genres, topics, authors, and comprehension strategies.
- ✧ Teachers provide equal access for all to the materials and expertise needed by readers and writers.
- ✧ Teachers serve as “lead learner” by living literate lives and modeling how literacy plays an important role in their lives.
- ✧ Teachers model what readers who comprehend think about and how they create a literate life.
- ✧ Teachers model what writers who write convincingly think about and how they observe the world to feed their writing.
- ✧ Teachers think aloud to reveal the ways that proficient readers and writers think during reading and writing—they use think-alouds to show how to use comprehension strategies and writer's tools.
- ✧ Teachers confer with children about their work as readers and writers—teachers use conferences to understand children's present performance level and to suggest new directions for their reading and writing.

- ✧ Children have opportunities to participate in large-group, heterogeneous lessons focused on comprehension and writer's tools at least three times a week.
- ✧ Children have ownership for most book and topic selections and the ways in which they share thinking and knowledge.

Conditions for Success *(continued)*

- ✧ Children have daily opportunities to read and write for long periods of time to apply what has been taught in small- and large-group settings.
- ✧ Children have opportunities, as needed, to participate in more focused and intensive small-group instruction to meet specific learning needs that teachers have identified through conferences.
- ✧ Children engage in in-depth discourse about books, writers, and ideas every day.
- ✧ Children have regular opportunities to share ways in which they have applied what they learned in new contexts. Often children take responsibility for teaching each other.

What Is a Crafting Session?

- ✧ A time to study readers' and writers' craft.
- ✧ A time when all class members gather to experience the beauty of written language and the magnetism of story.
- ✧ An opportunity to become an apprentice to the finest readers and writers.
- ✧ A time to observe the teacher model, think aloud, and demonstrate.
- ✧ A time for intimacy, rigor, and ritual.
- ✧ An opportunity for explicit teaching that extends well beyond a particular task or assignment.
- ✧ A time for precision and clarity in teaching.
- ✧ The moment when readers and writers are invited into new challenges and, at the end of the session, leave to pursue them in composing.

From Effective to Artistic: A Closer Look at Crafting Sessions

Key Ideas for Deep Structure (Meaning-Based) Crafting Sessions

- ✧ Thinking aloud helps children peer into the mind of a proficient reader or writer; when you think aloud you allow them to observe how a successful reader or writer thinks about his task.
- ✧ The texts you choose are fundamental to the success of the lesson—select text that is conducive to thinking aloud and authors whose craft you can scrutinize.
- ✧ Clarity about the teaching intention/learning objective leads to precise and elegant language in the lesson—which leads to a tone of rigor and intimacy.
- ✧ Modeling from your own experience grounds the lesson in the real world—talk about your own literacy experiences to show how literate people act and interact outside an academic setting.
- ✧ Help children see connections beyond today—how they will use this concept in independent reading or writing well into the future.
- ✧ Use silence to help children understand the gravity of certain points.
- ✧ Limit the focus of the lesson to one teaching intention/learning objective unless the goal is to link to previously learned material.
- ✧ Send them off to meaningful independent work based on the concept you've explored in the crafting session.

What Is a Crafting Session? *(continued)*

Key Ideas for Surface Structure (Word Learning/Fluency/Conventions) Crafting Sessions

- ✧ Thoroughly understand the possibilities and limitations of teaching surface structure skills—surface structure strategies are best taught at the moment children need them.
- ✧ Emphasize short, engaging lessons including word play, rhyme, songs, and games with younger children.
- ✧ Focus on teaching intentions/learning objectives truly needed by the whole class.
- ✧ Record and post children's learning.
- ✧ Help children see connections beyond today—how they will use this concept in independent reading or writing well into the future.
- ✧ Demonstrate use of the skill in literature and writing so children can see real-world applications.
- ✧ Send them off to meaningful independent work based on the concept you've explored in the crafting session.

What Is a Composing Session?

- ✧ An extended time each day for children to immerse themselves in reading challenging and interesting texts in a wide variety of genres, applying what they have been taught in crafting sessions.
- ✧ An extended time each day for children to write in writers' notebooks, collecting and gathering short pieces they may choose to develop into more formal pieces later.
- ✧ The time during which children develop written pieces into published pieces.
- ✧ An opportunity for children to select text that is interesting to them and appropriate, given their goals as readers.
- ✧ An opportunity for children to select writing topics about which they are passionately interested and that permit them to apply what they have recently learned in crafting sessions and invitational groups.
- ✧ The time when individual children meet in conferences with their teacher to show their application of deep and surface structure strategies recently taught.
- ✧ The time when children read and write independently while their teacher hosts invitational groups.
- ✧ An opportunity for children to meet in pairs and small groups to discuss their application of recently taught deep and surface structure strategies in reading and writing.
- ✧ A time for children to meet in pairs and small groups to apply speaking and listening teaching intentions/learning outcomes taught during crafting sessions.
- ✧ An opportunity for children to meet in book clubs to discuss books they have read in common and ways in which they have applied deep and surface structure strategies in those texts.
- ✧ A time to plan (with the teacher in a conference or with other students) what a student will share and teach others during the reflection time.

What is characteristic of effective composing sessions?

- ✧ Children are deeply engaged in independent work—they read and write with intensity for long periods of time.
- ✧ The classroom is filled with a sense of urgency—children are eager to apply what they have learned in crafting sessions and they work in texts that are challenging to them, at the conceptual level as well as the reading level.
- ✧ There is an atmosphere that supports rehearsal. Children experiment with the deep and surface structure strategies they have learned, taking risks in their reading and writing and spend a substantial amount of time rereading and rewriting.

What Is a Composing Session? *(continued)*

- ✦ Children plan to demonstrate their new strategies for their teachers in conferences and with their classmates during reflection.
- ✦ Children feel independent and trusted to make the right choices—they know it is up to them to choose the right text to read and writing topics—and when they encounter problems, they know to attempt to solve the problems independently first.
- ✦ There is a spirit of camaraderie. Children eagerly share their insights with other children in small-group discussions and book clubs.
- ✦ Teachers move around the classroom engaged in a variety of tasks—observing the children at work, taking anecdotal notes and running records, conferring with individuals, encouraging experimentation, helping book clubs get started, and hosting invitational groups.

What Is an Invitational Group?

- ✧ A time during composing when the teacher meets with small groups of children based on their shared need for more intensive instruction and discussion. Children practice, with teacher support, surface and deep structure strategies recently taught in crafting sessions.
- ✧ Invitational groups are identified based on evidence that they need to work on a particular skill or strategy. They do not convene because children read the same “level” text, but because they have the same learning need.
- ✧ A time to read instructional-level, rather than more challenging texts in order to experiment with or reinforce deep and surface structure intentions recently taught.
- ✧ A time to write short pieces in which children can experiment with or receive more intensive instruction in deep and surface structure intentions recently taught.
- ✧ A time during which a small group of children explores ideas with an intent to share them with others later in crafting or reflecting sessions.
- ✧ An opportunity for children to observe the teacher model in a more controlled, focused setting than in a large-group crafting session.
- ✧ An opportunity for the teacher to model a deep or surface structure strategy again and to observe children closely as they begin to apply it.
- ✧ An opportunity to introduce a skill or strategy that the rest of the class already demonstrates independently.
- ✧ A time for students to read and write silently and discuss problems they encounter immediately.

What is characteristic of an effective invitational group?

- ✧ Invitational groups are short, focused, and active.
- ✧ Children are actively and enthusiastically involved as they have been effectively prepared—their teacher has created a learning environment conducive to energetic student involvement.
- ✧ The group has a spirit of support for all group members.
- ✧ The teacher is free to focus exclusively on the invitational group, having taught the rest of the class to read and write independently for long periods of time.
- ✧ Students and teachers plan to share what they’ve discussed with other children in the reflection time.

What Is an Invitational Group? *(continued)*

Some Words of Caution About Invitational Groups

- ✦ Invitational groups are not static—the same group of children may meet one to three times to focus on an area of need, usually identified through conferences.
- ✦ Invitational groups are not convened because the children have the same assessed reading “level.”
- ✦ Invitational groups are not necessarily homogeneous in terms of level.
- ✦ Invitational groups are designed to offer instruction in the groups’ zone of proximal development—in other words, instruction closely matches a clearly identified need for each child in the group.
- ✦ Invitational groups are not used as an opportunity for the teacher to listen to children read aloud in a round-robin style.
- ✦ When the teacher is working with an invitational group, the other children are reading and writing.
- ✦ When the teacher is working with an invitational group, he/she does not permit interruptions from other students nor does he/she initiate the interruption to manage other children.
- ✦ The teacher creates a sense of anticipation and excitement for those invited to a group.
- ✦ Children who have participated in an invitational group are often invited to teach or demonstrate to others what they have learned during a reflecting session.

What Is a Reflection Session?

- ✧ It is a time for readers or writers to share with classmates what they have learned or tried. It is a time for the teacher to highlight something that a few readers/writers attempted or did successfully (most often, in connection with the crafting lesson).
- ✧ It is a time for readers/writers to reflect out loud on how their use of a certain strategy (or literate behavior) will help them as a reader or writer, so that their learning is more permanent and applicable to future learning situations.
- ✧ In reflecting sessions, teachers model various ways in which responsible learners might respond to their classmates' work. In responding to a child who is sharing his work, the teacher might model and then expect the listeners to:
 - ▷ *praise* the attempt or successful use of a taught (or "child generated") strategy
 - ▷ *question* the child's process, future plans, or ideas about how this will be useful to her as a reader/writer
 - ▷ *suggest* other strategies or behaviors, ways to continue the work, next steps, etc.
 - ▷ *challenge* (even argue diplomatically about) what is being shared in order to push the child to expand his/her thinking
- ✧ Teachers model various forms of reflection sessions before asking students to use them. Different forms might be sessions in which:
 - ▷ a few individuals share
 - ▷ partners share (pairs, trios, etc.)
 - ▷ the whole class shares (e.g., seated in a circle, children read snippets of their writing, saying one sentence about a mental image they made while reading)
 - ▷ children teach students other than the immediate class members
- ✧ Teachers model and explicitly show children how to "teach" their peers in a reflection session. While reflecting/sharing their work, children should eventually be expected to:
 - ▷ clearly explain how the strategy or skill will help them as a reader or writer
 - ▷ emphasize ways in which their "students" can apply what they learn to future situations (i.e., how they might use the strategy being shared in other books or in their own writing)
 - ▷ conclude with a challenge to their classmates to apply what has been taught to their own reading and writing
- ✧ All class members need opportunities to share and conduct reflection sessions. The session is a time for the group to benefit from hearing about something that a classmate did that will enhance their own work in the future. The session is intended for the benefit of the group, not just the person sharing.