

FIELDWORK

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The Workshop Model:

MAKING IT CENTRAL IN THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOOLWIDE

AN INTERVIEW WITH GRETCHEN MORGAN

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The Workshop Model of Instruction

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How do we use the workshop model throughout our classrooms and schools?

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Why is the workshop model a central, instructional practice for Expeditionary Learning Schools?

The workshop model is a reliable structure for explicit teaching, instant application and practice, sharing and discussion, and synthesis. Students quickly learn the routines associated with the workshop and teachers learn to limit their on-stage time and to become explicit and focused in their instruction. The workshop model requires teachers to articulate targets that describe what they want students to learn. These clear learning targets can then be used to engage students in reflecting on their own learning and in becoming metacognitive. In addition, the structure allows teachers to differentiate instruction; during the practice/application phase of the workshop, teachers can pull individuals or small groups for additional and differentiated instruction.



Esmeralda Castro, an eighth-grade student at The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland, sketched the moon as part of a science workshop during an astronomy expedition (see article on p. 8).

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EDITOR
Amy Mednick

LAYOUT AND PRODUCTION
Leslie Hansen

TEMPLATE DESIGN
Carroll Conquest,
Conquest Design

Fieldwork welcomes articles,
letters, reviews, journal entries,
and samples of student work.
Please submit entries to
amednick@elschools.org

Expeditionary Learning Schools
National Office
100 Mystery Point Road
Garrison, NY 10524
845-424-4000

www.elschools.org

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The workshop model is particularly powerful when it is used schoolwide. It then becomes a structure that students, whether in elementary, middle or high school, can rely on from classroom to classroom. In schools where the workshop model has been adopted schoolwide, students know that they will be introduced to clear learning targets and given explicit instruction related to those learning targets. And they know what their job is during the practice/application part of the workshop and how to participate in the debrief.

The workshop model is especially important in new schools or transforming schools where students are unfamiliar with the active role that Expeditionary Learning wants them to take. If one teacher tried to teach this in isolation, it would take much longer to teach students how to learn through active pedagogy. But if the workshop model is very consistent throughout the school, students will learn how to engage in an Expeditionary Learning school much faster.

What makes the workshop model so conducive to teaching investigation or expedition content?

The workshop model allows teachers to coherently layer more than one kind of learning target into a single lesson. For example, the teacher could select a small set of learning targets around an ecology investigation: *I can describe the components of the pond ecosystem and how they interact with one another.* The teacher could pair that content target with a secondary learning target in another area such as literacy, character education, or skills acquisition. In this case, it might be a readers' workshop focusing on determining importance paired with the ecology learning targets, and the teacher might ask students to read an expository scientific article to find information about the pond ecosystem. Or, it might be early in the school year when the class needs to focus on learning how to work in groups, and so the secondary target would be learning to take turns during small group discussion.



Second grader Jamie Gomez, of Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California, drew this juice container in connection with a writers' workshop on snack packaging (see article on p. 6).

One of the more elegant things about the workshop model is that you can provide instruction in one or two of these areas; support that instruction through the practice time; ask students to stop and reflect; and then debrief, asking them to check their progress toward the academic target and the secondary target. If the workshop is done well, it expects students to synthesize their current understanding every day, and that is challenging. But again, if done well, the students are supported by the structure. They are supported with the initial instruction that occurs during the mini-lesson and by their peers in social construction of understanding during the practice time and the debrief.

It's really a structured way for a group of students to participate in a very collaborative inquiry. Every day they go through this process together, learning new skills and new content, and every day they synthesize that learning. The next day they are reminded of their current theory, then learn some new information and/or new skills and support one another in

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The Power of 24 Minds:

USING THE WORKSHOP MODEL IN MATH

BY LAURIE WRETTLING

I often tell my mathematics students, “The power of 24 minds is greater than my one mind.” This philosophy allows the students in my multiage, middle school classroom to expand their mathematical thinking by grappling with many different perspectives while working collaboratively. Through Expeditionary Learning’s workshop model, students demonstrate their deep knowledge and challenge their own perceptions and beliefs about mathematical concepts while engaging in what might seem to be an every day, easily solved mathematics problem.

Recently, we did an investigation focusing on the study of probability in which the power of 24 minds proved to be true. The structure and routines that I have established within my classroom at Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning in Denver, Colorado allow students to discover the power of their ideas. Each class begins with a warm-up that consists of practicing a skill that will be needed for a more complex problem in that day’s lesson. Next, the workshop begins with a 10 minute mini-lesson, followed by a 25- to 40-minute practice time, and concludes with a 15- to 20-minute debrief session. Often we complete a full cycle of the workshop in two, 70-minute class periods.

In a recent classroom investigation, we focused on the guiding question, “What do you expect?” based on the seventh-grade Connected Mathematics program. Because I teach in a multiage, sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade classroom, it is essential to differentiate instruction for all learners. During this investigation, students used a variety of manipulatives, such as spinners, die, and colored blocks to experiment with chance, deter-

mine outcomes, and discover the meaning and relationship of experimental and theoretical probability. In presenting students with the familiar rock, paper and scissors problem (see sidebar below), I wanted them to be able to apply their knowledge of probability to a familiar situation and to listen to the thoughts of their fellow mathematicians.

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ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS PROBABILITY PROBLEM

The game Rock-Paper-Scissors is usually played by two people following these rules:

- On the count of three, players show a flat hand for paper, a fist for a rock, or a V sign with their fingers for scissors.
- Paper beats rock, rock beats scissors, and scissors beats paper.
- If both players show the same hand symbol, they replay to break the tie.

Joey, Paula, and Cie wrote these new rules for a three-player game:

- Joey scores 1 point if all three players show the same hand symbol, like rock-rock-rock or paper-paper-paper.
- Paula scores 1 point if no one shows the same hand symbol.
- Cie scores 1 point if exactly two players show the same hand symbol.

- Make a list chart, or diagram of all the possible outcomes of this three-layer game.
 - What is the probability that each player will win any one round?
 - The three friends play 200 rounds. How many rounds could each expect to win?
 - Change the point system to make this a fair game. Explain your point system and why it is fair.
-

MINI-LESSON

Using determining importance as the focus of the mini-lesson, I began with a think-aloud to model what problem-solvers do. I often focus on determining importance because I find reading comprehension challenges students working on word problems. I read the problem aloud while sharing my thoughts. “Hmmm,” I mused, underlining the important words as I read. “I think that *flat* must be an important word because it tells how you win paper. So, *fist* and *rock* must also be important for the same reason.”

I then asked students to do the same thing on their own. After a few minutes, I asked students to share their thinking. There were a variety of answers and we recorded all of their words for the class on an anchor chart (see side-bar below). They then used this chart to share their interpretation of the problem with the class.

PRACTICE TIME

After a brief transition, students began working on the problem in small groups. Those who were struggling to interpret the problem used their background knowledge and actually began playing the game. As they worked, they recorded their thinking in their math journals. As facilitator, I listened closely to student thinking and pushed them to share their ideas with each other. I roamed from group to group, asking questions such as, “What thinking strategies did your group use when you got stuck?” or “What methods are you using to organize your data?” or “How will you know when you have listed all the outcomes?”

I listened to conversations and used large, blank mailing labels to script students’ conversations. I recorded students’ noticings and wonderings. I simply stuck the labels in a binder where I have a page for each student. This data helps to plan future lessons, support individual students, and see how students’ understanding of mathematical concepts have grown over time.

As the practice session continued, the power of 24 began to intensify. Students who were stuck turned to fellow table members to explain their thinking process.

One student, Dane, said, “You don’t need to write outcomes down that repeat because it only matters how many outcomes for the person to win.”

The mathematical thinking grew as students challenged each other to explain their thinking and justify their answers.

Aly said, “Dominik, how did you get 30? You can’t just add a 0 on to the end of the three outcomes. You need to make an equivalent fraction.”

“Oh, I thought that would work because if I add up all the numerators then I get 200 that way,” Dominik replied.

After 40 minutes, I asked the small groups to take whatever problem solving they had completed and create large posters representing their thinking to share with the whole group. I noticed that the majority of students

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PROBABILITY?

- ~ Probability is chance.
- ~ If something seems unlikely, it probably is unlikely.
- ~ An even probability means there is a 50/50 chance.
- ~ There are sources of error when collecting data because different people do things differently.
- ~ Probability compares at least two things.
- ~ There is theoretical and experimental probability.
- ~ The more trials you do the closer the experimental probability gets to the theoretical probability.
- ~ Outcomes can be reversed to count as different outcomes (ex: blue/yellow could be yellow/blue).
- ~ Some problems do not have one specific answer but multiple answers.

The students in Laurie Wretling’s multiage, middle school math class, at Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning in Denver, Colorado, created this anchor chart during a workshop on probability.

had completed the problem and a few were still finishing up. Regardless, I encouraged all students to share their thoughts. This exemplified the important notion that sometimes it was not about the end product, but more about listening to others and seeing the different ways of thinking and solving a problem.

DEBRIEF

As students came to the board to post their thinking, I asked them to take several minutes to record in their math journals their observations (or noticings) about the mathematics on each of the posters.

“They all got the same number of outcomes for Part A, except for the last poster,” Aly stated.

“And all the posters have a different answer for the expected number of times each player would win if they played 200 times,” Olivia said.

“There are many different ways of representing the information,” Freedom added. “Some people used a table while others used a counting tree to organize their data.”


Again, the power of 24 minds was clearly evident as students’ observations led to numerous questions and students began to compare ideas and understand the various ways of representing data and looking at problems. The conversation then evolved into which answer was right.

I questioned the class, “Okay ladies and gentleman, how are you going to justify your solutions and figure out what you think is the ‘right’ answer?” Several students explained why they thought their answer was right and the dialogue continued with each group providing justification.

Aly finally stepped in and said, “It’s not about right or wrong, but how you interpreted the problem. If you interpreted the problem to ask how many outcomes without thinking about repeats for the winners, then you only got 10 outcomes, but if you thought it meant list them all regardless of repeating outcomes, then you would have gotten 27.”

This statement provided students with the

“A-Ha” moment that often comes with this more analytical step of the workshop model. The lesson concluded with the question of “What more do we know now about probability?” Responses varied from, “The number of possible outcomes affect the probability of each person winning,” to “Probability does not always mean games have to be fair,” to “The rock, paper, and scissors game is better off when just two people play.” As students shared their thoughts, I recorded their thinking on a large anchor chart that hangs in the room. By recording their thoughts and collaborating, students are able to refer back to the chart and use this information to help them as they continue to investigate probability.

The workshop model of instruction can be an extremely valuable tool because it allows students to challenge their own preconceived notions about mathematics and take ownership for their learning through leading the instruction. Students are able to use collaboration and gain deep insight into what it means to think like a mathematician and to problem solve. In turn, I am able to listen more closely and focus on the thinking that is going on instead of trying to micro-manage each student. The most challenging part for me as a teacher/facilitator is stepping back and allowing students to evolve in their understanding, which means I am forced to focus on student thinking instead of the one or two struggling or off-task students. Those students are often naturally brought back into the conversation because of the social context in which learning is occurring. Allowing students to grapple with the probability in this problem and draw on the strength of group members was essential in creating a collaborative learning environment where 24 young, eager, and energetic minds were able to come together to be more powerful than the one teacher mind. 

Laurie Wretling teaches middle school mathematics at Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning in Denver, Colorado.

The workshop model of instruction can be an extremely valuable tool because it allows students to challenge their own preconceived notions about mathematics and take ownership for their learning through leading the instruction.

Slurping, Pouring, or Gobbling: WORD CHOICE RULES IN A SECOND- GRADE WRITERS' WORKSHOP

BY HEATHER THOMPSON

I said in my mind, "Wow, I'm really hungry." I soon opened my yogurt and then started gobbling the yogurt. Then I looked at the empty plastic yogurt bottle. The yogurt bottle was real nasty. I had to throw it away.

Thus begins a day in the life of Marycarmen's snack packaging. Marycarmen, a student in my second-grade crew at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, CA, wrote this paragraph during a two-week writing workshop unit that combined content knowledge and the craft of narrative writing.

Throughout my three years of teaching in an Expeditionary Learning school, I have always found that writing is one of the easiest areas of the curriculum to integrate with the content of our expeditions. Authentic products, such as field guides or pamphlets, almost always contain a written component that must be carefully crafted and revised. In addition, students often have opportunities to write informally throughout the day.

Recently, however, colleagues and I realized that our students mainly did expository writing—descriptive paragraphs, scientific reports, and *all about* books. We were neglecting an important cornerstone of early elementary writing instruction: narrative. In fact, narrative writing is one of only two genres (the other being “friendly letter”) explicitly called for

in the California State Standards for second grade.

I decided to create a series of writers' workshops that would enable my students to write an engaging narrative about what happens to their trash. We had been studying our trash for some time as part of our fall expedition, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and were familiar with what types of materials occur most frequently in our trash, how they get to the landfill, and whether or not they decompose when they get there. However, we had not yet had a chance to synthesize our knowledge. Narrative seemed like a clear way to do this.

I chose only a few writing goals for the unit: first, that students would use past tense grammar when writing their stories; second, that students would develop the trait of word choice in their writing, using descriptive adjectives and interesting verbs; and third, for this crew of reluctant writers, that students would be able to write a lot and to continue one piece over multiple days.

In keeping with the structure of the Expeditionary Learning Writers' Workshop, each workshop began with a mini-lesson in which I explicitly taught a trait I wanted students to focus on as they drafted their pieces. Next, students had time to work on their writing, while I checked in with students and reinforced use of the focus trait. Finally, we gathered in our class meeting area to share and celebrate what students had accomplished that day.

On the day of our first workshop, we came to the meeting area immediately after snack time. Before we ate, I had asked the children to think about the experience of eating the snack: What did it sound like when you opened the package? What was it like when you were eating it?

As the students came to the rug, they buzzed

Kassandra Jimenez, a second grader at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California, sketched her granola bar wrapper as part of a writers' workshop on snack packaging.



with excitement. “Mine sounded like a pop when I opened it!” “I was so hungry before we started eating!” “My package had plastic and metal!”

After everyone had settled down, I told the class that when writers begin a new piece, they want to start strong: “One way to pull readers in is to describe what happened in your story using really interesting words. So let’s think right now about some of the words we might use to describe what it was like when we ate our snacks.”

Together, we generated a list of words that described what it had sounded like and smelled like when we opened and ate our snack. Then, we began the process of composing a sample text together.

“Let’s see,” I said, “I already started my story with what I was thinking or feeling before I ate.” This was something we had worked on in previous workshops.

“Then,” I continued. “You helped me think of how to describe what it sounded like when I opened my package. What should I write next to tell what happened when I ate my applesauce?”

Several hands went up.

“You were really hungry, so tell that you gobbled it down!”

“You dug in your spoon and slurped the applesauce!”

“It sounds like you are saying there are a lot of words I could use that mean the same thing as eat, but are more interesting!” I said. As usual, the students had one-upped me, and taken the point of my mini-lesson to the next level. I created a new chart with a list of words that could be used instead of “eat.” We settled on the following for our sample text:

I dug my spoon into the applesauce and scooped some out. Then, I slurped it down.

As students came up to help write the text, I pointed out how we were adding “ed” to the end of the verbs because this story already happened. We would focus more on this in later mini-lessons, but I wanted to plant the seed.

After the sample text was finished, I sent the children out to write. “Remember, use interesting words to tell what happened when you ate your snack!”

As I circulated, I noticed that many students were indeed using interesting words. Many of them were gathered around the charts we had

made, choosing just the right word for their story. For example, Chris, a student who frequently has difficulty getting past the first word had written,

“I am so hungry!” I thought. I poured the Cheez-its into my mouth.

And Raúl, also a very reluctant writer:

I ate the popcorn, and it was crunchy and buttery. And I said, “This is good. “ Then it was gone. Then I said, “I know what this bag is made of, oil.” Then I threw my bag away because I knew that it was empty.

Raúl had not only described the eating of his snack, he had also included some of his new knowledge about where plastic comes from. When we gathered together at the end of writers’ workshop, I read several pieces aloud, including Raúl’s.

“Raúl, how did you know I was going to ask people to include a part about what their package was made of?” I asked. “I hope everyone will add that tomorrow.”

Each day, for the next several days, we added to our stories, shared them, and revised them, until every student had a five-paragraph narrative detailing the journey their snack package took from our classroom to the local landfill. As is always the case when students are trying something new, some children overdid it occasionally:

It was a disgusting and icky, gross, smelly, awful dumpster.


Some children could not resist speculating:

I think Josefa [our custodian] said, “This garbage stinks.” At least she did not throw up.

But nearly everyone had at least one flash of brilliance:

They took all the garbage to the big, big landfill. My little plastic seaweed packaging tumbled into the soil.

And as for Marycarmen’s nasty plastic yogurt bottle?

Some big trailers duuummmmmppped allllllllll of the trash to the biggest landfill! My package is going to last for a million years. 

Heather Thompson teaches second grade at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California.



As part of a writers’ workshop on snack packaging second grader Raúl Ramos, of Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California, sketched his popcorn snack.

My Working Science Classroom

BY MYRA PARKS

*M*y science workshop is not just an instructional practice that I occasionally pull out of my bag of tricks. I use workshops to scaffold all that my students need to know, understand, and be able to do in order to work on meaningful projects. And, my eighth-grade students, at The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland, are continuously working on one meaningful project or another. There is always that sense of purpose, teamwork, and running out of time in my classroom.

The work (noun) is just as important as the work (verb). In other words, the actual product that is being created is equally as important as the process in which that creation happens. There are certain structures that help to organize the *work* in my classroom: mini-lessons, practice/application, conferencing, critique sessions; all applied to important project work. These structures have been around for years in the context of writers' workshops, but I will describe them using examples from my science expedition.

CONTENT WITH PURPOSE

At the heart of my science workshop is that sense of purpose. The purposefulness in my classroom comes from careful selection of important work surrounding a compelling topic or authentic project. One example of such impor-

tant work is found in my current astronomy expedition. During this expedition, students have been investigating some controversial aspects of astronomy. In partnership with the Hubble telescope and astrophysicists at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, the students are learning about the latest discoveries in our solar system and have been wrestling with the ongoing debate about whether Pluto should be classified as a planet.

Students have met with visiting experts, conducted fieldwork in Baltimore and Washington D.C. and have examined scientific reports and analyzed data in order to research these topics. This expedition will culminate with the installation of a student-created scale model of the solar system on the East Harbor campus of Living Classroom (a non-profit foundation that runs Crossroads). This scale model will include such cutting-edge discoveries as Kuiper Belt Objects (which could include Pluto) and Oort Clouds. It will not just list the traditional nine planets, but will have six categories of objects within this new solar system and will ask observers to make their own decisions about Pluto's classification. It will be the first scale model of its kind and will represent the newest scientific information for visitors to our campus. These high stakes give students a feeling of importance, that their work is a legacy. First and foremost in a successful workshop must be that sense of purpose; that everyone is working hard toward a meaningful goal.

But what about the content? In today's standards-driven environment, this is often the question that comes up first when discussing instruction. By providing a strong sense of purpose or creating a meaningful project, a *need to know* attitude has been sparked in my students. I am no longer just covering the required content standards, but providing them with the tools they need to successfully complete the task at hand. I create skill and content rich mini-lessons based on the needs of the students or the

Eighth grader Franklin Amaya, of The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland, drew the planet Saturn as part of a science workshop during an astronomy expedition.



steps necessary to complete the project. The mini-lesson is the common thread that holds each workshop together. All components of my workshop, the practice/application portion, conferences, critiques, are based on the mini-lesson for that day.

MINI-LESSONS


For example, I did a mini-lesson on how to use graphs to identify trends and patterns in data. Students then created their own scatter plots of data on the characteristics of objects in the solar system and classified the various objects based on clusters of similar size, distance from the sun, and composition. They realized that objects were clustered by size, composition, and distance from the Sun. The result was that Pluto was categorized as a Kuiper Belt Object instead of an outer planet. During our next class, this led into a lively Socratic seminar to discuss how we should categorize Pluto in our scale model. If students are stuck, for example, in the process of writing letters to potential donors of materials for our scale model, then we do a quick *6+1 Traits of Writing* lesson focusing on how to organize a persuasive writing piece or use strong word choices. If it becomes obvious to me through their work on the sizes and distances of the planets that there are math errors, then we will do a mini-lesson on scale. I review how to decide on a scale to make an object fit a desired size, such as making the Statue-of-Liberty fit on a postcard, then we practice with other objects before applying this skill to our project. Whatever the topic of the workshop, the paradigm shift is from spoon-feeding the required content to creating an environment of inquiry that is real and not just following recipes from an inquiry science cookbook.

FEEDBACK IS CRITICAL

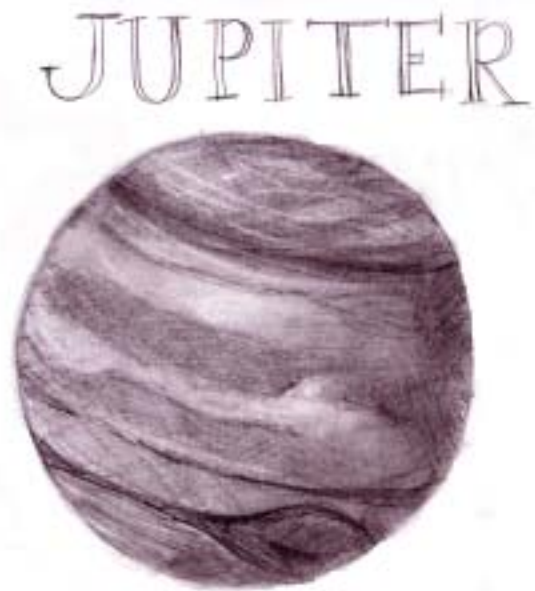
In order to meet students' individual needs, I conference with them regularly during the practice/application part of the workshop. This is not just a quick check-in, but a focused discussion with a student about the quality or substance of his/her work. This also helps prepare students for real life work. Bosses don't collect papers, grade them, and give them back to their employees. Instead, they sit down with each worker, discuss progress on the current project, make suggestions, ask questions, and redirect him/her if

off-track. Sometimes in my classroom, I require a conference to ensure that all students have completed a specific part of the project according to the rubric criteria. At other times, conferences are requested by students to provide descriptive feedback on student questions. This structure also allows for differentiation within the same project. I am able to push students that are more advanced and remediate or provide more support for those who are struggling. It helps to make sure that all students are focused and progressing at their own pace toward the same goal in my workshop-based classroom.

Critique protocols are an integral part of my revision workshop. We revised and improved the controversial *What about Pluto?* write-up for our scale model with a critique protocol. Another critique protocol allowed us to give constructive feedback to all groups on the design and layout of our solar system object plaques. Critique protocols help improve both the quality and content of our work. They not only give that author of the work great feedback, but also provide the person doing the critique with ideas about what works and what does not in their own project.

A major reason that the workshop model is so successful in my science classroom is that these key structures are consistent across grade levels and content areas at The Crossroads School. They are schoolwide structures, not confined to only my classroom. While I have discussed what they may look like in the context of a science-driven expedition, they can be successfully applied to any teacher's classroom in the school. 

Myra Parks teaches eighth grade math and science at The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland.



The planet Jupiter was sketched by Katie Thomson, an eighth-grade student at The Crossroads School in Baltimore, Maryland.

The workshop is both a metaphor and model for turning classrooms into learning laboratories. In the ancient crafts workshop, the teacher was a master craftsman who demonstrated a trade and coached apprentices in the context of making real products for the community. In contemporary classrooms, we borrow the workshop metaphor to create writing workshops, science workshops, math workshops, and other workshops across the curriculum. Students get large chunks of time to practice the trade of reading, investigating, or problem solving, while teachers take on the new roles of mentors, coaches, and models.

Harvey Daniels and Marilyn Bizar

Methods that Matter: Six Structures for Best Practice Classrooms
(Stenhouse Publishers, 1998)

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revising that theory through practice and debrief.

As a school designer in Denver, you have made the workshop model a central practice. How has that impacted what you see in the classrooms, and how teachers plan?

Last year at Skyview Expeditionary Learning School, a Gates start-up high school in Mapleton, Colorado, we organized comprehensive professional development on the different parts of the workshop model. We began by pulling excerpts from the Expeditionary Learning benchmarks that informed us of criteria describing good mini-lessons. The instructional guide, Colleen Broderick, and I modeled some different kinds of mini-lessons that would work for a variety of kinds of learning targets teachers might have with students. Teachers wrote lesson plans that included plans for mini-lessons that met all of our criteria. Colleen and I observed some of them teaching the lessons, debriefed with teachers individually, and then we came together as a whole group to debrief and to articulate more specific and personalized criteria about what worked well or didn't work well. Then we made plans for further mini-lessons. We then taught those lessons, observed, gave feedback, and continued to refine our understanding. Next, we focused on the practice and debrief portions of the workshop model and re-


peated the same process of generating criteria, trying things out, and coming back to debrief and refine.

We noticed that students who had been pretty passive about school now understood clearly what was expected of them and where they were headed academically because the workshops we created were centered on clear learning targets. We began to see those very passive students asking about their progress toward targets and becoming very involved in collecting evidence to persuade teachers that they understood certain targets.

So, how do teachers in Expeditionary Learning schools make this structure their own?

As teachers get really comfortable with the workshop model, they begin to use it flexibly. It might be that at first, they have one or two ways of creating mini-lessons, one or two ways to support students during practice, and one or two ways to engage students in debrief. But over time they begin to use all parts of the workshop model more flexibly and more purposefully to more precisely support student progress toward the identified targets.

At first, teachers might do separate mini-lessons on the content and character outcomes. As they get more comfortable, those things become more integrated. So, with experience, teachers learn to incorporate other practices into it (see Myra Parks' article on p. 8).

The workshop model requires that the teacher take on several kinds of instructional roles: providing explicit instruction; conferring and giving feedback; supporting students in practice and application; and helping students synthesize their learning by asking the right questions about the learning targets and students' understandings. In summary, the workshop model is the perfect structure to help both teachers and students take hold of active pedagogy. 

Gretchen Morgan is a school designer in Expeditionary Learning's Northwest region.

Bringing the Workshop Model Home

BY MARTHA MARTIN

If adding six new teachers felt overwhelming to our tight-knit faculty of 12 at Pocatello Community Charter School in Pocatello, Idaho, we knew that throwing the newcomers into an Expeditionary Learning classroom would be even more of a challenge for them. So, we wanted to find a way to make Expeditionary Learning doable.

Our answer? *The Power Benchmarks*. We distilled the *Core Practice Benchmarks* (guidelines for Expeditionary Learning practice) down to what we lovingly refer to as The Power Benchmarks—or those things that will get us the most bang for our buck this year.

Our school designer, Lorri Edwards, led us through a lengthy process and there was much discussion among teachers about which instructional strategies are the most important ones. We finally ended up with a relatively manageable list of reasonable expectations. Although we did all this under the guise of making Expeditionary Learning doable for new teachers, we were forced to admit to ourselves that when it comes to a few of the strategies that have become central to Expeditionary Learning, we don't get it! The workshop model is our best example.

With the exception of the six new folks, all my teachers have worked at this school between three and six years. During that time, we have had a full contract with Expeditionary Learning every year, and we have all attended off-site professional development as well as national conferences. We are smart, driven, and absolutely committed to the Expeditionary Learning model. Each one of us has participated in countless readers' and writers' workshops at institutes and other regional/national

offerings.

As we finalized the list of Power Benchmarks, choosing the workshop as one of the most important and powerful gifts we could present to our new colleagues, somebody finally blurted out, "Maybe I haven't been paying attention, but what exactly *is* the workshop model?"

A sigh of relief. The cat's out of the bag. Who can answer that? To be honest, there are those among us who had been designing and facilitating workshops in the classroom, but imbedding this type of instruction in expedition content was another story altogether.

As the instructional leader at this school, I attended the Early Literacy Institute in Stevenson, Washington in November with one goal—to figure out EXACTLY what a workshop is so I could come back and teach my staff. I was practically obnoxious, constantly asking questions, insisting that the facilitators break it down for me step-by-step, keeping our school designer up late at night discussing the components of a pure readers' or writers' workshop.

continued on next page

... We were forced to admit to ourselves that when it comes to a few of the strategies that have become central to Expeditionary Learning, we don't get it!

EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING WRITERS' WORKSHOP

1. Mini-lesson that teaches a particular skill
 2. Students practice and apply what has just been taught in the mini-lesson.
 3. Time to debrief and create anchor charts that describe the students' shared understanding of traits, process, and craft.
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FIELDWORK

NOTES FROM EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING CLASSROOMS

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Bringing the Model Home, continued from page 11

At last, I'm happy to report, I think I got it! I was ready to bring the workshop model home to my crew.

The job of a school administrator can so easily become a never-ending sea of phone calls, reports, and supervision issues. Making the time for instructional leadership, especially when your staff is already more than competent, is difficult to do. I often ask myself, "Who am I to be modeling instructional strategies for teachers when I am the one who had been out of the classroom for seven years?" Will they listen politely and then give each other knowing looks as if to say, "She means well, but has no idea!" Instructional leadership is a responsibility I actually enjoy and take seriously, and so I bravely go forth, planning the workshops to model for my staff. I know the workshops will be awkward, but hope they will be helpful.

As I write, it is mid-December and I have taken

my staff through two very basic workshops, pointing out each important component and spending considerable time debriefing the process. Several teachers have written kind notes to the tune of "Thanks! I think I can do this now," or caught me in the hallway to let me know my efforts have been worthwhile. Make no mistake, these teachers are far better instructors than I, so I know they will take this gift and create many workshops that are engaging for their students and deeply imbedded in content.

Now...which instructional strategy am I going to stumble through next? 

Martha Martin is dean of Pocatello Community Charter School in Pocatello, Idaho.