

Why do we do literacy workshops?

By Michele Krank | Categories: Reading

Recently, I joined in on a What are the essentials of Independent Work in Being a Reader? webinar and talked with educators across the country about Independent Work areas in the primary classroom. One of the resonating themes in this conversation was giving students real purpose, choice, and ownership of their work during this valuable independent time. As many a educator will do, I began questioning my own practice as the conversation came to a close.

Was I really providing my students with meaningful activities, or were they just engaging in busy work? Did my students know why they were doing what they were doing? Did I give them enough guidance for authentic reading and writing practice? Were they actually working while I pulled small groups, or were they just “faking me out”?

These questions swirled through my head all last night, and I awoke with a newfound purpose for today's weekly Independent Work Check-in lesson. I began with a very simple question: Why do we do literacy workshops?



I held my breath and hoped for the best. A few students timidly raised their hands. I called on one student, and his response blew me away. To paraphrase, “we do workshops to get better at reading and writing and it makes our brains smarter.” The conversation

continued, and I let out an audible sigh of relief. So I have taught them something this year. Each child who added to the conversation shared their own version of the first student's statement. They most definitely know that workshops have an important purpose in their school day.

We continued our check-in with a class discussion about the ways each of the independent work areas prepares them to get better at reading and writing. I modeled using a sight word dictionary to select "just right" sight words to practice. We talked about some off-task behaviors that had arisen at the word work area recently. One of my students excitedly raised her hand and parroted back a familiar phrase of mine: "It's word work, not word play, Ms. Krank. We should be working while we are there." I had to smile; they'd been listening all along! In thirteen years of teaching, I have never failed to have the beginning-of-year freak out, the middle-of-year freak out, or the end-of-year freak-out. However, today showed me that we need to shift our focus. Celebrate what we have accomplished with these tiny human beings, because they have learned...and they have learned so much!

Our students are sponges for our words and actions. They rise to meet our expectations every single day, and they are eager to learn and practice new things. We just have to find the time and space to give them the gift of independent practice. I am thankful to the Being a Reader program for building in this time for students. I wasn't sure what difference I would see with my students during this first year of implementation. Today showed me that Being a Reader has made all the difference in the world. These students own their learning, and they are proud of it!