CHAPTER TWO

ACHIEVING LITERACY WITH A THREE-BLOCK FRAMEWORK: LANGUAGE & WORD STUDY, READING, AND WRITING

It’s my job to surround (kids) with the best models; authors to whom they can apprentice themselves, books they can lose themselves in, characters who tell them they’re not alone, words that make them think and feel and learn.

— LINDA RIEF

Effective instruction in language, literature, and the content areas begins with thoughtful, artful organization and planning. A prevailing issue in intermediate-grade teaching is using time effectively so that students not only expand their reading and writing capabilities but also develop in-depth knowledge in the content areas. A three-block framework is an effective tool for designing and managing the instructional program in grades 3 through 6. The level of activity, the content, and the materials will vary greatly by teacher and by grade level, but the essential elements of the framework remain constant:

1. Language. Reading and writing are language based. Using language orally—discussing, sharing opinions, questioning, criticizing, describing, and performing—is the precursor to sharing your thinking in writing. Teachers must ask students to do their best thinking, to share it orally, and to find many different ways to share it in writing.

2. Literacy. Although we realize there are many kinds of literacy (artistic and technological, for example), our focus here is reading and writing. There are powerful and complementary interrelationships between reading and writing; we cannot talk about one without the other. When students are learning how to think about text as readers, they are also learning how to notice and use the craft of writing. When students are learning how to compose and construct writing, they are also developing key understandings about text that will help them develop greater insights as readers.

3. Literature. Throughout this book, we talk about the value of literature. Students in the intermediate grades flourish as they learn about and read quality fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Each instructional context provides a different way in to this invaluable resource, from highly supported, teacher-guided analysis to independent reading to discussing literature orally and in writing.

4. Content. Learning in the content areas is woven throughout all three blocks of the framework. Students read and write about topics related to science, social studies, mathematics, health, communication, etc. The range of study for intermediate students is broad; they continuously increase their knowledge through experience, discussion, and reading in multiple genres, and they organize and communicate their knowledge through a variety of presentational formats. In the process, they expand their vocabulary and learn new ways of organizing written text. Infusing the language arts curriculum with rich content in many genres increases the sophistication of the language students use and expands their interests and knowledge.

This three-block structured framework will help you conceptualize the language arts curriculum, think about students’ literacy learning, plan and organize instruction, and provide a high level of productivity and engagement. The framework is flexible. There are many possibilities for variation—in the content studied, the texts, the configurations of students (individuals, small groups, the whole class), and the daily time frames.
Why Use a Framework?

When you approach the intermediate reading and writing curriculum in a highly organized way, your students understand how the classroom functions, know what is expected of them, and accomplish more in the short school day. A structured framework has several advantages.

A Common Language and Vision

Using this structured framework across the intermediate grades will facilitate grade-level discussions and planning as well as planning across the grades. As you and your colleagues meet regularly to talk and plan, the framework will help you focus on a common set of practices and bring coherence to the intermediate program. Using a common language, including common definitions for such instructional settings as "writing workshop" and "guided reading," allows you to help one another. It makes it easier to articulate the curriculum across the grade levels, so that learning builds on previous learning.

This common language also helps students. Moving from one grade to another is a significant change, but meeting familiar structures, described in ways students understand, makes the transition smoother. Students know what is expected of them in terms of routine and responsibility; they can focus on continually expanding their skills.

Efficient Allocation of Instructional Time

A structured framework makes it easier to handle time. You, your students, and your colleagues know, for example, that there is a specific time period for reading instruction and a routine that must be followed. Schoolwide schedules are easier to plan and can accommodate the maximum amount of learning. Because the framework actively fosters instruction in reading and writing in combination with content-area study, two or even three curriculum goals may be addressed within the same instructional period. We have allocated between thirty and sixty minutes for language and word study, an hour for reading, and an hour for writing. You can schedule one continuous block of three hours, or three one-hour sessions at various points in the day. The important thing is that you and your students consistently make connections across the three blocks. Many elementary schools have instituted "departmentalized" instruction as early as third grade level. We urge teachers and administrators to reconsider this policy since:

- There is no research to support this practice.
- Learners need teachers who know them fully and who can help them make connections across reading, writing, and content areas.

If you are in a school where there is departmentalization, work for a full hour of reading instruction and integrate writing with content areas and language arts. In addition, schedule many regular meetings with colleagues to discuss individual students and gain a full picture of progress. At this point, you may believe that devoting up to three hours to the language arts is impossible, but Chapter 6 shows you ways teachers have created schedules that work.

Routines for Independent Learning

If your students are constantly depending on you to tell them what to do, they will not develop the independence and self-direction that learners need. When your language and literacy program rests on a predictable structure, students can be more independent. Predictability and organization help your students deal with the daily ebb and flow; they can plan ahead with confidence, because they will have clear expectations for what they will accomplish on any given day. They will encounter a particular topic through reading, writing, and language/word study activities with an appropriate focus.

Making Connections

The framework also helps you recognize and plan for the relationships between and among different components of the curriculum. For example, what students are reading about can contribute to their writing or to their study of words. The content areas and literature are integrated; students read and write about the central, compelling aspects of their learning.

Let’s look now at the way a typical school day unfolds around the three-block framework.

Community Meeting

The day typically begins with a whole-group community meeting, held before you move your students into
language and word study. The purpose is to build the collaboration and cooperation necessary for learning throughout the day.

**Group Planning**
It is essential that you and your students outline and negotiate common goals and concerns. We can’t stress enough how important it is for intermediate learners to take an active role in planning and evaluating their learning; they are not passive recipients. The group planning session, which typically occurs near the beginning of the day, brings the community together. You might review the daily schedule, determine the shared goals for the day, discuss current issues and topics, make announcements, or offer reminders.

The meeting is brief and efficient, not long or complicated. As a rule, it shouldn’t last more than five to eight minutes. (Find other, more efficient ways to check off completed homework and take lunch count.)

---

**Block 1: Language & Word Study**

The focus of the first block is on developing children's language and word study knowledge and skills. Students investigate the nature of language as they explore high-quality literature, poetry, and informational texts. Later we discuss getting a poetry anthology started in the first few weeks of school. So the powerful language of poetic text becomes an integral part of reading, writing, and oral language from the start. After several weeks of poetry enjoyment and study in the language/word study block, the poetry work becomes part of a poetry workshop that takes the place of reading and/or writing workshop every week or every other week.

These components are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, “Investigating and Using Language,” Chapter 22, “Teaching for Word-Solving,” and Chapter 24, “Creating the Poetry Workshop.” Of course, you won’t select all these components every day. You’ll use them over the course of a week (or several weeks) to achieve particular teaching goals.

**Shared Language/Literacy**
The block begins with a community meeting. Here you present a brief, focused experience intended to expand students’ language and/or literacy skills. In the process, your students will become more sophisticated about the “do’s” and “don’ts” of group interaction. Here are several examples.

- Ask students, in groups of three, to talk about a topic for three minutes. Then, as a class, have them share the key ideas that surfaced.
- Build vocabulary by reading a paragraph that features one or more new words and then talk about what the words mean.
- Provide a short handwriting lesson and ask students to practice letter formation.
- Give students a topic, ask them to write three or four sentences in their writer’s notebook, and then share their writing with one another.
- Each day ask a different student to talk about something in the news, or have partners talk about a news item. (Assign this the day before so the students can prepare.)
- Provide short editing lessons by projecting a page of text on the overhead projector and have the students decide what to change.

---

**Language/Word Study**
(30–60 minutes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Edit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwriting Minilesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Reading/Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled or Shared Reading/Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers’ Theatre/Process Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choral Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry Share/Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Read Aloud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2–1. Block 1: Language & Word Study*
Each day read or have a different student read or recite a poem to the group. (Again, be sure there is a schedule of who reads when.) Invite comments on “What the poem says to you” or “What you notice about the way the author wrote the poem.”

Shared interactive language/literacy is also an appropriate time for helping students learn clear and flexible ways of displaying their language and literacy knowledge. For example, everyone might work together on the different kinds of questions found on standardized tests—open-ended, multiple choice, and so on—and discuss strategies for evaluating and checking the answers. (We will discuss these kinds of activities more extensively in Chapter 28.)

**Interactive Edit**
An interactive edit is a brief activity (typically no more than five minutes long) focusing on conventions. There are several ways to involve the group in cooperative editing. For example, you can dictate one or two sentences that present challenges related to capitalization, punctuation, grammar, spelling, word choice, whatever. (Have one child write it correctly on the easel for all to see while the rest use their clipboards.) Or you can display the sentences on a chart or on an overhead projector. Then have students copy the sentences, editing individually or with a partner. Afterward, talk about the reasons for using the various conventions. (This is a good way to bring dictionaries, style guides, and similar references to their attention.)

**Handwriting**
A five-minute minilesson once a week on letter formation will improve the legibility of student work. Make sure you include guided practice. One student can work on a chalkboard or flipchart while the others work on their own.

**Word Study**
A minilesson on a strategy or principle related to the ongoing word study described in Chapter 23 (see also Pinnell and Fountas 1998) helps students become better word users. The lesson can focus on the spelling of a specific word, sophisticated phonics principles, or on the development of vocabulary. Or you can ask student partners to complete structured activities that help them learn how words work.

**Modeled/Shared Reading/Writing**
You will want to model reading or writing or share the task of reading and writing to help your students expand their literacy understanding. In modeled reading, you read a text to students, engaging them by showing your thinking along the way. In shared reading, you and your students all have a copy of the same text (if the piece is relatively long) or the text is projected on the overhead or copied onto chart paper (if it’s short). The students follow along while you read the text aloud, perhaps inviting them to join you or take over from time to time. This is an excellent way for the whole class to study the same text with your support. In modeled writing you demonstrate the writing of a text. During shared writing, you and your students work together first to discuss and then to compose a common text related to an experience they have had or something that they are studying. You are the scribe, using an easel, the chalkboard, or an overhead projector.

**Interactive Read-Aloud**
Reading aloud to students allows them to experience a variety of quality texts in different genres. In the typical read-aloud, the teacher reads and the students listen, period. In an interactive read-aloud, you pause at significant points, ask your students for comments, and invite brief discussion. Be sure to share your own thinking to demonstrate how experienced readers engage with and think about texts as they read. Do not
stop too frequently or for too long or it will disrupt the flow.

These are only a sample of the shared language and literacy tasks you might choose. We will discuss several other interactive language and literacy options later in this book. You will want to design your block to include the options your students need.

### Block 2: Reading Workshop

In a typical reading workshop, the teacher gives a mini-lesson, students read individually, and then everyone gathers as a group to share thoughts and opinions. Our version (see Figure 2–3) includes independent reading, which is certainly important, but we expand the idea to incorporate two other reading contexts—guided reading and literature study. All three components are described in Chapter 4, and each is covered in detail in its own section.

You will want to focus on reading for one hour a day five days a week—four if five is not possible—so that students do not lose their momentum. And it’s always a good idea to encourage your students to read at home each night for thirty minutes as well.

Think about your own reading. What happens if you read a chapter or two of a book on Thursday and don’t pick it up again until Monday? You probably have to work to recapture your sense of what the book is about. It’s the same with students. If they’re only reading now and then, they tend to lose interest and begin to see reading simply as another tedious assignment. Your teaching also loses momentum when there are long gaps between periods set aside for reading. The continuity is disrupted, and students forget the kinds of strategies and skills you are trying to build day after day. Students who have the chance tomorrow to apply what they have learned today form stronger learning patterns.

Then, too, it is harder to establish routines when you do something occasionally rather than daily. Established routines help build community and security. When students read every day, they are continually learning new things that they can share with partners, small groups, or the whole class.

#### Independent Reading

In independent reading, students read individually and silently, typically selecting their own texts, sometimes with teacher guidance. When you implement independent reading for the first time, you will want to present several minilessons on how to select books. An organized book collection also helps students select appropriate books. While the students are reading, you will be able to hold one-on-one conferences. At the end of the period, you will want to conduct some sharing and evaluation.

#### Guided Reading

Guided reading is small-group instruction for students who read the same text. The group is homogeneous: the students read at about the same level, demonstrate similar reading behaviors, and share similar instructional needs. These small groups (anywhere from three to eight students) are temporary; they change as you assess your students’ growth and needs. In the small group, you introduce a text that you have selected, and the students read it silently and independently. Students usually read silently, though you might ask individual students to read orally at regular intervals and talk with them individually about the book. You also explicitly teach effective strategies for processing a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts. You select teaching points based on the reader’s needs and may assign oral and/or written responses and extensions. You might also engage the students in a minute or two of word work.

#### Literature Study

In literature study, you work with small heterogeneous groups of students who are interested in certain topics, authors, genres, or specific books. Together, you decide
on a text, assign reading/writing tasks, and agree on meeting times. Students talk in depth about what they have read (or, occasionally, what you have read to them). You are generally present for the discussion, although the students may take turns facilitating it. In consultation with the group, you sometimes structure written responses or brief sharing projects.

**Purposes**
With all three elements of reading workshop, students read for an extended period during the one-hour block. In all three contexts, constructing meaning is the overall goal. You want to help readers make personal and textual connections at the same time they are learning from and about reading. But each approach has a different format, different roles for the teacher and students, and different primary purposes. The three contexts contribute in different ways to the development of readers and look different when they are implemented.

In independent reading, you want to help individuals become readers who like to read, develop their own tastes and interests, and consistently learn about their world and about themselves through their reading. Your overarching instructional goal is clear: to help individual students engage in all aspects of what readers do, from choosing books to reflecting on what they’ve read. Independent reading is an authentic context in which students develop the skills, habits, and processes of accomplished readers by doing everything good readers do. In guided reading, your goal is to help readers develop more effective and efficient processing systems and to expand their reading power to more and more difficult texts. In literature study your focus is on helping students develop a deeper appreciation for and understanding of literature.

**Teacher and Student Roles**
Your role in all three contexts is critical, but you will provide explicit teaching in different ways and at different times:

- In independent reading, you present minilessons on everything from how to select a book to how to figure out unfamiliar words. You also have individual conferences with students “reader to reader” to discuss their reading, and guide the sharing in group meeting.
- In guided reading, you select and introduce a text, observe and sometimes listen to individual students while they read, and teach specific focused skills after the reading. You might engage the students in extending their understanding, or in a minute or two of word work.
- In literature study, you present book talks that engage the students’ interest, demonstrate routines that make for good group discussions, summarize the points students have made, make learning visible during or at the end of the discussion, and introduce structures (oral, written, or pictorial) for responding to literature.

Students also have important roles and responsibilities in all three contexts, and these also vary according to the focus and format:

- In independent reading, students are responsible for selecting their own books and using time efficiently for silent reading. They prepare written responses and should be ready to discuss their reading with others. They keep records of their reading and develop habits and attitudes of a reader.
- In guided reading, students actively apply the new skills they are learning; they become more aware of themselves as readers and sometimes read orally, reflecting on and evaluating their reading performance. Before and after reading they raise issues and questions, offer examples from their own experience, and connect what they have read to other texts.
- In literature study, students select the text or topic in conjunction with the teacher and other group members, attend the meeting at the proper time and place, and prepare for the discussion by reading and organizing their thoughts in advance.
meeting, they take turns talking, following the rules of conversation, and may serve as facilitator at times. They may also work cooperatively with others on a longer project related to the literature they are studying.

**Block 3: Writing Workshop**

In writing workshop students learn what it means to be a writer—how writers think, plan, compose, revise, and share their work. A typical writing workshop (Atwell 1999) begins with a minilesson after which students write on their own while the teacher confers with writers, followed by sharing. Our concept of a writing workshop is somewhat broader, including three contexts for learning (see Figure 2-4). Each component is explained in detail in Chapter 5. The three contexts make it possible to offer students more instruction and guidance in specific aspects of writing, and they also allow students to write across the broad range of topics included in the content curriculum.

Daily writing is as necessary as daily reading. Focus on writing an hour a day five days a week—four if five is not possible. It is difficult for inexperienced writers to conceptualize and finish a piece that is left unattended for many days. Also, students build momentum and skill if they write consistently over time. They need to be able to use the feedback they get in conferences and sharing sessions while it is fresh. Finally, students must develop a “routine” for writing; it is a daily activity, not a series of isolated assignments.

When we set aside sustained time for writing, we communicate to students that we value it. In school, writing is one of the most necessary—and most evaluated—skills. We will not develop writers if we ask students to write only when we can “fit it in.” And if we only assign writing as homework, students won’t receive expert help or benefit from peer support and interaction. When we develop a community of writers, students have the chance to give help and receive help from others.

**Independent Writing**

Students work silently and individually on their own writing. You provide a daily minilesson based on the needs of the writers. Students write and sketch, sometimes using writer’s notebooks, at other times drafting, revising, editing, or publishing a piece of work. Usually students select their own writing topics; occasionally they are assigned. The teacher confers with individual students, and the session is usually followed by sharing and evaluation.

**Guided Writing**

Small temporary groups of students meet to discuss aspects of writing and learn more about the writer’s craft and conventions. These groups consist of students who have similar needs at a particular time and to whom you teach explicit strategies and skills. The groupings are usually short term, as you re-form groups based on what you are learning as you read their writing.

**Investigations**

Students work independently or with partners on long-term projects. Investigations are an ideal setting in which to integrate the content areas. Using reading, writing, and a variety of media resources, including technology, students explore topics in depth. An investigation often culminates in an oral presentation, performance, or display that includes written material. The teacher provides guidelines, a structure, and a timeline for the projects, as well as explicit instruction as appropriate.
Teacher and Student Roles

In all three writing workshop contexts, you provide explicit instruction as well as guidance while students write.

In independent writing, you provide a minilesson for the entire class based on your observations of students’ writing. The minilesson is followed by conferences with individual students that center on those aspects of writing they want help with and need to learn. The writing conference is usually a time to check whether students are applying the new under-standings developed in the minilesson. It’s also an opportunity to document specific writing behaviors that will require future minilessons.

In guided writing you identify small groups of students who need to work at a particular aspect of their writing. You might meet with a group for several days or in a row until new understandings become part of their writing. You might meet with the group over several weeks or even longer (when introducing a new genre, for example).

Your role in investigations is more multifaceted, since it is connected to the whole range of instruction. You provide guidance and guide students in investigating a topic and guide students in investigating a topic through conversation, reading aloud, drama, topic through conversation, reading aloud, drama, topic through conversation, reading aloud, drama, topic through conversation, reading aloud, drama, or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips. You may provide some demonstrations or field trips.
In our complex society, language is constantly changing. New words are coined every day to keep up with the new technology and new events and customs: *cyberspace*, *hypertext*, *web access*. Old words take on new meanings. For example, what do you think about when you hear words like *surfing*, *grazing*, or *wrap*? Ten years ago we might have thought of young people riding ocean waves, cows eating in a field, or a coat. But your intermediate students will think about checking out web sites, changing TV channels in rapid succession, or a new kind of sandwich. Language changes, and students continue to learn new language by hearing it, using it, and reading it. McWhorter (2000) holds that the changing nature of language is much more pervasive than the “slang” expressions that pop up and as quickly disappear. He says, “there is no society on earth where people could manage a conversation with their ancestors from a thousand years back or more” (p. 2).

We want our intermediate students constantly to broaden and polish their communication skills. In this age of technology the opportunities for, and the requirements of, communication are increasing dramatically; it is no longer a simple matter of writing or talking. Conversation in the business world, for example, is interwoven with visual images, sounds, and many kinds of print. Speakers use a number of media to communicate information to audiences, and that information serves a variety of purposes—to persuade, to inform, to challenge, to inspire. Even less formal gatherings, however, involve visual and technological communication.

Communication on the Internet is an entirely new genre of writing/talking, one that requires a different way of organizing and producing words. The originator is thinking in many dimensions and producing information that can be used by the recipient in flexible ways.

Our framework represents students’ integration of reading, writing, talking, technology, and the visual arts as ways to represent, apply, and communicate what they have learned. With sufficient technology and teacher training, intermediate students can make PowerPoint presentations on their science experiment, their history investigation, their analysis of a novel or an illustrated poem. They can communicate instantly with people in different states, different countries, or different continents as they do their research.

**The Importance of Oral Language**

Four decades of research has established oral language as the foundation of reading and writing development, especially for intermediate students, who are expanding their use of literacy as a tool for learning.

The texts intermediate students encounter include sophisticated ideas expressed in complex language. As students read, they use what they already know about language to construct meaning. At the same time, they learn more about language. The more they know about language, the richer the experience they bring to reading. In language-centered classrooms, teachers value talk and its role in learning. “Language-centered,” however, doesn’t mean talk alone; it involves the juxtaposition of talk in conjunction with new, challenging learning experiences and texts. In other words, students are always talking about something: substantive, stimulating content and the exciting learning it inspires.

**Learning New Language**

We learn new language in several ways:

- **Conversation.** We talk with more expert others who provide new language models and interact with us in a way that inspires us to try something new.

- **Experience.** We experience something new and stretch to use new language to describe our experience to others. By talking with others about a challenging learning experience—performing a scientific experiment, solving a problem, looking at a painting, going to a play, taking a trip to a new place—we are moved to try new ways of expression as well as new words, phrases, or idioms.

- **Text.** We expand our control over written language when we encounter new texts. Written language is different from oral language in its structure and even its vocabulary. Our students’ written-language abilities will not expand unless they are exposed to text, whether through reading or listening.

**Connecting Oral, Visual, Technological, and Written Communication**

Students not only learn through oral and visual communication but also express and display their learning through these means—and, in the process, they learn more. Figure 2–7 depicts our language and literacy framework in a nutshell.
At the center of our language and literacy framework, connecting reading, writing, and word study, is oral, visual, and technological communication. Students converse, present, perform, and draw, using oral language as they do so. Oral language is linked to specific work in reading and writing and supports the development of these sophisticated skills. It is also a way to internalize, summarize, and display knowledge. Students express meaning in many different ways within the language and literacy framework, and use technology to communicate their language in a variety of forms.

**CONVERSATION**

As students investigate topics and explore literature, they engage in conversations with others (Wilkinson 1970, 1971, 1975). Through focused conversation, they learn how to:

- Listen actively.
- Speak directly to others, articulating clearly.
- Arrange the participants so all can see and hear one another.
- Take turns, being courteous to others.
- Respond to and build on others' statements.
- Stay on the topic.
- Share information effectively.
- Consider an audience.
- Ask for information and incorporate it into later statements.
- Summarize and extend the group conversation.
- Check whether others understand and are following the conversation.

**PRESENTATION**

In making presentations, students use oral language
and tools such as illustrations, charts, diagrams, and artifacts to communicate meaning to an audience. In the process, they learn how to:

- Select interesting findings to incorporate in their presentation.
- Arrange ideas in an interesting and informative sequence.
- Consider appropriate places for visual or other kinds of enhancements.
- Introduce and summarize the topic.
- Engage the audience.
- Learn how posture, tone of voice, and gesture contribute to the effectiveness of a presentation.
- Maintain a lively pace.
- Select precise words that convey meaning to an audience, elaborating where needed.
- Answer questions about the presentation.
- Evaluate their own presentations.
- Evaluate and provide feedback on presentations by their peers.

**Performance/Drama**
Through both improvised and more formal, memorized performances, sometimes incorporating art and music, students can explore the nature of story, learn about life, and empathize with other people. Dramatic performances enable students to enjoy literature and poetry in an active, participatory way. The language continues to “live” in their minds and is a resource for their own writing as they try out new ways of using written language.

Students can also use drama to imagine an experience (Heathcote 1983; Heathcote and Herbert 1985; Wilhelm, Edmiston, and Beane 1998). Guided by the teacher, the students interconnect inquiry and learning with being and doing. Events, materials, and new ideas are introduced to the community. For example, a class of students might imagine themselves as a group of pioneers heading West, encountering and solving various problems over a period of several weeks. They “step into the roles” as a way of making the thinking and experiences of others come alive. Both within and outside the roles, they gather the information they need—researching how many miles a day the wagon train could travel, for example. This process is particularly useful for exploring social studies and literature.

**Visual Representation**
Visual representation is an integral part of communication. Readers may draw, sketch, or print as a way of sharing their response to a text with others. Writers might draw or sketch an idea before they attempt to put it into words.

Sketching and drawing also play an important role in inquiry. Scientists prepare diagrams or charts; biologists and botanists record their observations via sketches, drawings, photographs, and videotapes. As students strive to communicate with an audience, they can use whatever visual representations best embody the meaning they wish to convey.

**Content of the Language and Literacy Framework**
Schools are places where students engage with others in learning activities that broaden their understanding of literature and the physical and social world. Students learn about literacy as they use reading and writing to explore the world around them. As teachers, we continually ask, “What is worthwhile for children to learn?”

**The Negotiated Curriculum**
The goals we want all students to achieve are the map for designing curriculum. They help us plan content area study as well as reading workshop, writing workshop, and oral, visual, and technological communication. When designing your curriculum, you start with your state or district goals and requirements, but add to and adjust them in relation to your own interest and expertise, and student/family interest and expertise. The creation of curriculum is thus a negotiated rather than prescribed process, as shown in Figure 2–8. It includes all these components.

![The Content of the Curriculum](Image)

*Figure 2–8. The Content of the Curriculum*
You can contribute to the curriculum by using your own special interests and areas of expertise. For example, Petra, an avid gardener, helped her fourth graders examine different types of plant life. They planted a flower garden in one area of the school lawn and used it to study the characteristics of growing plants and their needs.

Your students also have a real contribution to make. When children are interested in a topic, they are much more motivated to investigate, read, and write about it. Family members or other people in the community can provide interesting perspectives and information as well. The most productive plan is to match your overall goals with the resources and people who can provide the corresponding information and to search for ways to match specific student interests with the larger concepts you want your curriculum to develop. For example, if one of your students is interested in flying, you might incorporate the history of flight into his study of the early twentieth century and persuade a parent who is a pilot to give an interview about what the job entails.

**Range of the Curriculum**

The language arts help us unite a broad range of curriculum. The literature we study should invoke the breadth of literary experience, including:

- Expository books, fiction, and poetry.
- Classics as well as contemporary works.
- Books that represent a range of cultures and languages, including works written by members of those cultural and linguistic groups (for example, *A Summer Life*, by Gary Soto, 1990).
- A wide range of genres, including articles and essays as well as books.

Students also need to read, write, talk, and learn about a wide range of subjects, including:

- Social studies.
- Mathematics.
- Science and health.

By investigating the content areas in connection with a wide range of reading, you are able to connect the elements of the language and literacy framework in a way that brings seamless learning to your students.

For example, the following shows how Norma’s American Revolution emphasis played out in her fifth-grade classroom:

- Norma read aloud several picture books that made the times and events come alive.
- One literature study group was reading *Jump Ship to Freedom* (Collier and Collier 1987) while another was reading *Charley Skedaddle* (Beatty 1989).
- Norma filled a book basket with biographies about figures from the American Revolution and gave a book talk about them during independent reading.
- Norma and her students together compiled a list of possible topics the students could choose to investigate.

A note of caution: don’t attempt to connect everything all the time. If you contrive connections where none exist, you’ll end up with an artificial curriculum. Not all elements of the language and literacy framework will relate to every area of study. We also caution that reading and writing about science should not take the place of the process skills of the discipline such as hypothesizing, experimenting, observing, and so on.

**Variety in Learning Resources**

The world is filled with a wealth of print and nonprint resources that are highly effective in helping students expand their knowledge. Books, magazines, and newspapers are just some of them. Just think, for example, what students can learn from:

- Maps and globes, both current and historical.
- Photographs, audiotapes, and videotapes.
- Artifacts and objects.
- Original documents such as deeds and wills.
- Letters written in particular periods of history.

We will explore a great variety of print and nonprint resources for students to use in learning in Chapter 25.

**Planning for the Three Blocks**

You will want to plan for the language/word study, reading and writing workshop blocks across a week to be sure you are providing for well-sequenced, cohesive teaching and learning. We have provided two forms of a three block planning grid that we have found useful.
(Appendix 1 and 2). You can copy and place them in a 3-ring binder to plan for and keep records of your teaching.

**Organizing for Teaching and Record Keeping**

We have found that three separate three-ring binders with various labeled sections help us organize effectively. In a Language/Word Study binder you can keep sections on the various options you use in the block—a list of the interactive edits, your word study minilessons plans, a list of the read-alouds, your test reading and writing minilessons, assessment records, etc. In the Reading Workshop binder you will want to keep lists of your minilessons, sample charts, reproducible forms for the journals, conference records, guided reading observations, book graphs, assessment records, and lists of book clubs. You may want a section in this binder for poetry workshop. We will describe each of these later in the book.

In the Writing Workshop binder you will want to keep lists of minilessons, conference records, writing assessments, lists of research projects, and other useful resources. The key is to organize each binder in a way that enables you to plan and keep records efficiently.

**Conclusion**

The language and literacy framework for literature and the content areas is a conceptual tool. The purpose of a framework is to make your teaching more powerful and easier to plan. It enables you to think about organizing time and content in effective, productive ways. The flexibility of the framework lies in the three blocks of time. You can move from one block to another in sequence or address each during nonadjacent periods of the day. Either way, the connections and support they offer remain, because students are reading, writing, discussing, and investigating exciting, invigorating topics.

**Suggestions for Professional Development**

1. With your grade-level colleagues, design a daily schedule that includes two-and-a-half to three hours of language and literacy teaching:

   - If you encounter problems, think “outside the box”: integrate subjects previously taught separately, rearrange your planning periods, reexamine how you incorporate special areas like music and art.
   - If you have departmentalization and cannot change it, work on a plan for allocating time for reading, writing, and word study, and for regular communication with other teachers so you can make connections over content areas.
   - Compare the time you have allocated for reading with the time you have set aside for writing. Writing is often shortchanged.
   - Talk about ways to incorporate more social studies and science into your literacy blocks.
   - Discuss ways to be more efficient. Could the first fifteen minutes of the day become part of the independent reading block?
   - Try out the schedule for one month and then revise it based on your experience.

2. Reevaluate the existing organizational structures in your classroom. Can some of these be changed? Can you find ways to incorporate some of them into the language and literacy framework?

3. With a group of colleagues, discuss changes you plan to make in terms of time, instructional approaches, classroom structure, or content.