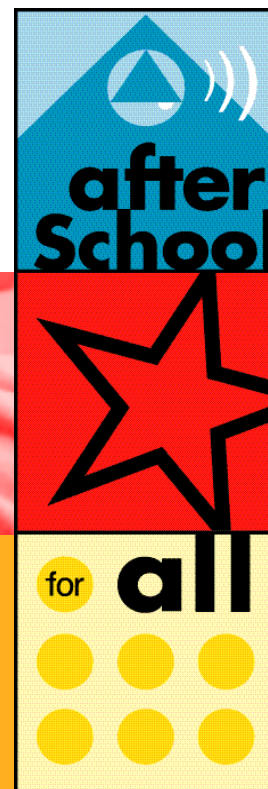


# Enhancing Literacy Support in After-School Programs

*Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE)*



Expand \* Improve \* Sustain

A Report Commissioned by  
Boston's After-School for All Partnership  
Learning Goal Research  
September, 2002



## **Enhancing Literacy Support in After-School Programs**

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While this research was commissioned by Boston's After-School for All Partnership, all the contents within are the sole property and responsibility of the authors and/or their sponsoring organization.

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**Executive Summary** **6**

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**Data Collection** 7

**Expected Outcomes** 8

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**Context: Literature Review** **9**

---

**Literacy Defined** 9

**After-School: Education or Recreation?** 9

**Literacy Instruction in the Boston Public Schools** 11

**Implications for Literacy Instruction in Boston's  
After-School Programs** 12

---

**Effective Practices Used by Three Boston  
After-School Providers** **13**

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**BELL: Using a Nationally Known Literacy  
Model to Improve Students' Skills in the Context  
of Socio-Emotional Development** 13

**Citizen Schools: Using Aspects of the BPS Literacy Approach  
in a "Homegrown" Model** 16

**Classroom at the Workplace: Using BPS Instructional  
Approaches in a Workplace Context to Help High School  
Students Pass the MCAS** 19

---

**Effective Practices in a National Model Designed  
for After-School: KidzLit** **22**

---

---

## **Challenges** **24**

---

<b>Varying Levels of Staff Experience</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Providing Adequate Training &amp; Professional Development Opportunities to Staff</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Creating an Environment That’s Different Enough from the School Day to Engage Students</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Adopting a Literacy Curriculum That’s Both Effective and Cost-Effective</b>	<b>26</b>

---

## **Recommendations** **26**

---

<b>Providers: Implement Two Components of a Balanced Literacy Program, Read Aloud &amp; Independent Reading</b>	<b>26</b>
<i>Read Alouds</i>	<b>27</b>
<i>Independent Reading</i>	<b>28</b>
<b>Boston’s After-School for All Partnership: Serving as an Intermediary</b>	<b>29</b>
<i>Acting as an Information Clearinghouse</i>	<b>30</b>
<i>Connecting Providers with Professional Development Resources</i>	<b>30</b>
<i>Providing Books for After-School Programs</i>	<b>32</b>
<i>Grants to After-School Programs</i>	<b>32</b>
<i>Helping Providers to Align Literacy Instruction with BPS Priorities</i>	<b>32</b>
<i>“Accrediting” After-School Programs</i>	<b>34</b>

---

## **Works Consulted** **35**

---

<b>Boston Public Schools' Core Components of Literacy Instruction, Grades K-5</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Boston Public Schools' Core Components of Literacy Instruction, Grades 6-8</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Workshop Instruction in Boston's Schools – Next Steps in Whole-School Improvement</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>How is AfterSchool KidzLit Aligned with National Standards?</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Voices of Love and Freedom (VLF) – Core Skills and Six Step Pedagogy</b>	<b>52</b>

## Executive Summary

*Children can't learn to swim without swimming, to write without writing, to sing without singing, or to read without reading ... anyone familiar with American classrooms knows that long stretches of time for reading are quite rare.*

- Lucy Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Reading*

As factories move overseas and jobs requiring minimal reading skills become fewer and farther between, our educational institutions must make important changes to how they prepare students for these new economic realities. One thing is clear: students, particularly those in low-income, urban communities, need more *time*, especially for reading, so that they can compete for jobs that demand higher-level skills. Echoing Lucy Calkins, researcher Stephen Krashen writes, “Reading is the only way, the *only* way, that we become good readers, develop a good reading style, and adequate vocabulary, and advanced grammar skills, and the only way we become good spellers” (1993). This is where after-school programs in Boston can play a key role. If every program set a goal of providing children with *time to read*, at least 30 minutes per day, and if providers learned strategies to increase students’ engagement in reading and willingness to read independently, they could make a major contribution. Boston’s After-School for All Partnership can also play an important role in supporting and promoting the attainment of the goal of every student in a program reading 30 minutes a day outside of school. There is sufficient evidence that this focus would improve students’ reading skills, help them to be better prepared for taking on challenging material in school, more likely to pass the MCAS, and better able to succeed in the world beyond school.

This white paper, “Enhancing Literacy Support in After-School Programs,” will examine the ways in which literacy instruction is already provided in various after-school programs in the Boston area and will make recommendations on how local providers might rethink and restructure that instruction in order to give students that additional time to read. The paper begins with a review of the relevant literature on literacy enhancement in after-school programs. The literature review will outline the role that many after-school providers – those working with elementary, middle, and high school students – see themselves playing with respect to improving their students’ literacy skills, as well as identify effective practices that enhance reading and



writing skills. In addition, it examines the role that after-school providers might play in students' literacy development if they had access to the appropriate resources.

Using the literature review as a theoretical framework, this paper will examine the way that three Boston after-school providers – BELL, Citizen Schools, and the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) – have incorporated literacy practices into their curricula and describe the challenges and successes they have experienced, along with the implications for other providers. Based on these three case studies, the paper will make several specific recommendations for how the larger after-school community in Boston might approach the issue of literacy enhancement in after-school programs. In particular, we will recommend that providers incorporate read alouds, and, more importantly, 30-minute independent reading blocks, into their after-school programs. As noted above, significant research points to the fact that students simply need more time – *outside of the school day* – to read, and the after-school environment is an ideal place for that to happen.

## **Data Collection**

Data was collected for this paper in myriad ways; however, interviews and observations served as the major source of information and provided many of the insights included in this report. Over a two-month period, we conducted interviews with staff from after-school programs and community-based agencies, as well as teachers and administrators from the Boston Public Schools (BPS). We also spent significant amounts of time observing local after-school programs, in particular the three that are profiled later in the paper.

In addition to interviews and observations, we have drawn upon existing research studies and personal experience as volunteers and staff developers at several Boston after-school programs. By using such a variety of data sources, we believe that we have been able to integrate theory and practice, thereby offering a well-rounded account of the use of literacy practices in after-school programs and developing highly practical recommendations for providers and other stakeholders.



## Expected Outcomes

Learning to read and write is one of the most important – and complicated – things that a child will do while in school. Reading and writing not only form the basis for all other learning, but also are necessary skills to develop and refine if students are to be able to compete in today’s job market. They are skills that are measured on the MCAS, which students must pass in order to receive a high school diploma. While the BPS has made a concerted effort to improve literacy instruction in its schools by providing more and better professional development for teachers, encouraging schools to schedule additional time for literacy, and making literacy a priority districtwide, Boston’s students still lag far behind their suburban counterparts in reading and writing performance.

This is an area where we believe after-school providers can have a significant impact on students’ skills. After-school providers are fortunate to have small teacher-student ratios, as well as a more relaxed environment, free of many of the pressures associated with the school day. Many factors, however, will affect their ability to improve students’ literacy skills, including staff quality and training opportunities, access to information about students’ reading and writing performance, and the literacy curriculum used in the program. With investment of the proper resources and a stronger connection between in-school and out-of-school time, after-school programs can *enhance* if not improve the literacy skills of their students, in particular, by incorporating time for read alouds and at least 30 minutes of independent reading per day. This paper will provide details on how that might happen.



## Context: Literature Review

### Literacy Defined

Historically, literacy has been understood narrowly as the ability to read and write. In recent years, with the changing economy dictating that employees have higher-level skills, the concept of literacy has been expanded to incorporate listening comprehension, problem solving, critical thinking, and the ability to express oneself verbally (Hynes, O'Connor, & Chung 1999).

Typically, after-school programs have taken varied approaches to developing literacy skills in children. Often, such programs were viewed – and often saw themselves – as childcare providers. However, there are many after-school providers who have integrated instructional elements into their programs and have tackled the issue of literacy skills.

### After-School: Education or Recreation?

Spielberger and Halpern (2001) explored the factors that contribute to the difference in focus among after-school providers in a study that included 212 after-school program employees located in Chicago, Seattle, and New York. Data was collected through interviews with agency and program directors, front-line staff, literacy specialists, and technical assistance providers. The guiding research question attempted to differentiate how after-school providers viewed their role with respect to the academic and social development of their students and how that view influenced the goals of the after-school program. The study showed that variations in providers' goals were the result of two factors: providers' beliefs about the emotional, social, and physical needs of children and providers' perception of their role in children's development. In the final analysis, after-school providers' goals fell into four basic categories: childcare (44%), academic support (23%), educational enrichment (19%), and recreation (15%) (Spielberger & Halpern 2001). Interestingly, this data illustrates that just over 40% of the providers surveyed viewed the goals of after-school programs to be related to education. Clearly, providers who consider their role to fall into the categories of childcare or recreation will be far less concerned with enhancing children's literacy skills. The question, then, that all stakeholders in the after-school community must ask is, *What should after-school programs be? primarily an extension of school-day learning or primarily recreation-focused?*



Much of the literature on after-school programs addresses the extent to which – and in what ways – the curricula, structures, and practices of schools should be employed in the after-school environment. According to Noam (2002), “... it is crucial to protect the differences and preserve the safety of the after-school environment from the increasingly high stakes atmosphere of the school day.”

Like Noam, many argue that the climate of after-school programs should remain considerably different from that of the regular school day. After-school programs are known to provide a risk-free and child-centered learning environment, a dimension of after-school programming that is valuable in an era when increasing pressures are being placed on students and schools (Spielberger & Halpern 2001). At the end of the school day, many children flock to after-school program sites where they might practice literacy skills, but are not forced to compete with one another. Moreover, children do not feel under the gun because their performance is not rated or measured as it is constantly during the school day, specifically through the use of norm-referenced tests (Noam 2001; Noam, Pucci, & Foster 1999; Spielberger & Halpern 2002).

The era of high-stakes testing, however, creates an interesting problem for after-school providers. Though providers would like their programs to remain enjoyable, stress-free experiences for children, the use of both summative and formative assessments has demonstrated that many students, particularly those in low-income, urban environments, have fallen woefully behind in their reading, writing, and math skills. As a result, funders, parents, and community members are increasingly exerting pressure on after-school programs to more closely resemble the school day (Spielberger & Halpern 2002; Noam 2002). They argue that after-school programming should include guided lessons where children’s progress is regularly assessed. In this model, the after-school provider essentially acts as an extended teacher.

Spielberger and Halpern (2001) propose that after-school programs should fill both roles – to offer children a relaxed environment where they can continue to learn what is being taught during the school day. They assert that there are two “... possible roles for after-school programs: to give children exposure to broader forms and uses of literacy and an opportunity to learn to use literacy for their own ends and to play a bridging role between the culture of literacy of home or community and that of the school.” Providers could

carry out both of these roles if they were more aware of the pedagogical methods used in schools, and they could adapt and integrate these methods into creative activities that would not only improve children’s literacy skills, but also maintain the program’s relaxed environment. For example, providers could use theater arts, crafts, or cooking to work on students’ literacy skills. In some after-school programs, children participate in “readers’ theater” where students rehearse and perform plays that have scripts with rich dialogue. “Readers’ theatre provides children with a legitimate reason to reread text and to practice fluency. Readers’ theatre also promotes cooperative interaction with peers and makes the reading task appealing” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn 2001). Through activities like this, students can recognize and appreciate the relevance of literacy skills to their everyday lives.

## **Literacy Instruction in the Boston Public Schools**

As the definition of what constitutes literacy has been expanded to include listening comprehension, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, and verbal expression, educators have had to rethink what practices – both in-school and out-of-school – support and enhance literacy development. In Boston, soon after being appointed superintendent in 1996, Dr. Thomas Payzant named literacy as the instructional priority for the entire district, citing strong reading and writing skills as the foundation of students’ academic careers. Along with this instructional focus, the BPS identified the 10 Core Components of a Balanced Literacy Program [see Appendix]. All schools then chose a proven literacy model that incorporated these ten components. Later, schools were also provided with literacy coaches, who supported staff in mastering literacy strategies, in identifying students’ learning needs, and in designing skilled professional development based on those needs (BPS-BPE Coaching Resource Binder 2001).

Most recently, in a further refinement of the district’s focus on literacy, Superintendent Payzant named Readers’ and Writers’ workshops as instructional priorities. In essence, the workshop approach is a way to organize literacy instruction that provides students with significant time to read and write, choice, and thus, ownership, over what they read and write, and



individual attention from teachers to guide their reading and writing learning based on their individual needs. A workshop lesson contains several major components:

- Mini-lesson – Teachers focus their instruction on a specific reading or writing concept.
- Independent Reading or Writing Time – Students have the opportunity to read and write, possibly practicing the skill learned during the mini-lesson.
- Conferencing – While the class is reading or writing, teachers meet individually with students to offer specific help.
- Share Time – Students share their writing or discuss their reading and receive feedback from peers.

The workshop approach to instruction complements the core components of a balanced literacy program and provides teachers with an even more effective method to teach reading and writing.

## **Implications for Literacy Instruction in Boston’s After-School Programs**

How might these changes to literacy instruction in the BPS relate to the role of after-school providers in enhancing students’ literacy skills? We recommend that two pedagogical practices that are part of a balanced literacy program – read aloud and independent reading – be adapted for use in after-school programs. When implemented properly, these strategies could be integrated into the after-school environment in a manner that does not compromise the creative and relaxed environment that is so important to after-school programs, but would still enhance students’ literacy skills by giving students more time to read. In this paper, we will focus on how to bridge the gap between school and out-of-school time in order to bring effective literacy instruction to after-school programs. The key research questions include:

- How can the BPS’s focus on literacy be supported and enhanced through after-school program components and activities?
- Which literary skill areas can be best supported in after-school programs?
- What types of activities support these literacy skills?
- What are the most successful literacy models and approaches for implementation in after-school programs?

## Effective Practices Used by Three Boston After-School Providers

Over the course of the 2001-2002 school year, we spent significant periods of time visiting and observing after-school programs in Boston. These programs were of varying size, served a wide range of students, and used multiple approaches to incorporating literacy instruction into their curricula. Of these programs, we selected three to profile here – BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life), Citizen Schools, and the Boston Private Industry Council’s Classroom at the Workplace – which we felt represented the issues faced by many after-school providers in the city. Though these three programs are all fairly large and reasonably well funded, they serve a high proportion of Boston’s students and have grappled with many of the same challenges that smaller providers have, including whether and how to incorporate academics into their programs, as well as staff recruitment, development, and retention. Here, we will outline the different ways that these three organizations have used effective practices to bring literacy instruction into their programs.

### **BELL: Using a Nationally Known Literacy Model to Improve Students’ Skills in the Context of Socio-Emotional Development**

BELL is a community agency based in the Fields Corner section of Dorchester. BELL serves approximately 450 students at ten sites, all of which are located in a Boston public school and only serve students from that school. Beginning as a homework center in 1992, BELL quickly realized that many of their students lacked the basic skills to complete their work. In response, staff began providing basic skills tutorials, which proved to be the missing link, helping many students to complete their homework successfully and improve their skills at the same time. According to Darnell Williams, BELL’s former Director of Teaching and Learning, “We give homework assistance, but we don’t guarantee that a child’s homework will be completed when they leave.” While there is little evidence that homework assistance bolsters student achievement, homework assistance is an important aspect of the BELL program that greatly benefits families by ensuring that students have support in completing their homework that they might not otherwise have were they not enrolled in the program.

In addition to assisting students with their homework, improving students' literacy skills is a top priority for BELL, and the program aims to do this while focusing on students' socio-emotional development and self-esteem. To that end, BELL selected the Voices of Love and Freedom (VLF) literacy curriculum for its sites, which connects personal development goals with the improvement of reading and writing skills. VLF's aim is to foster positive social development through the use of rich, multicultural literature. Lessons are created around literature that addresses social skills and values and cultivates literacy skills across grade levels.

The literature used in the VLF curriculum focuses on teaching one or more of eight core social skills and values [see Appendix]. Earl Phalen, Founder and Executive Director of BELL, explains, "People love the multicultural literature, and it makes for a more diverse reading list than we have had in the past. Folks also love the fact that it is character education based. From the social development standpoint, it aligns with what [BELL is] trying to do. Also, some of our schools, including the Trotter [a large elementary school in Dorchester], are using VLF books, so it is a nice complement to what's happening during the school day. Schools always want us to be directly linked with what's going on during the day."

Phalen continues, however, to describe the challenges associated with providing adequate training to his after-school program staff in the VLF model. Staff professional development is an issue that continues to perplex after-school program leaders. In order to help students improve their literacy skills, staff must be reasonably well versed in how children become literate and those activities that will facilitate literacy acquisition. Like many other after-school providers, BELL's staff varies in skill level, experience, and age. Site-based staff members, including tutors, generally work part-time, and the majority are college students who may or may not be education majors. Other tutors are high school students, and about 5% are BPS teachers or paraprofessionals. BELL, however, requires its tutors to work at least three days a week at their assigned sites, which provides more staff continuity than many providers have.

Darnell Williams explained the challenge faced by BELL in providing adequate training for staff members, "First, professional development needs to account for the variation among staff members in terms of education level and experience working with children in an educational setting. Second,

staff members need to be more cognizant of their role in promoting children’s literacy development.” Further, staff need to be skilled at addressing the varying levels of student academic skills that they will be confronted with in the after-school setting.

Leaders at BELL are trying to address the varying abilities of staff members through extensive training and professional development. Staff members initially participate in the same training in order to get everyone on the same page. At this first session, staff are introduced to the VLF curriculum, including its literature, during a 4-5 hour block of time. During subsequent training sessions, staff may explore various specific issues related to the implementation of the curriculum at their particular sites.

A recent observation at the Marshall Elementary School, a BELL site in Dorchester, demonstrates how a packaged curriculum like VLF might be used in an after-school setting. With more than 800 students, the Marshall is a large Boston elementary school. The majority of the school’s students are low-income, and more than 80% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, a common indicator of poverty level. The BELL site serves nearly 70 students at the Marshall, operating on a 1:7 teacher to student ratio.

A typical afternoon at BELL’s Marshall School site begins with snack and “community time.” After community time, students proceed directly to a 60-minute literacy activity using the VLF curriculum. We observed three tutors conducting a whole-group read-aloud with the book *Jamaica’s Find*, which describes a young girl who finds a stuffed animal in the park and is faced with the moral decision of whether to keep it or try to find the owner. The three tutors introduced the book by asking their first grade students scripted questions from the VLF curriculum guide, including, What do you think the book will be about? What kind of expressions do the characters have on their faces on the cover? Why do you think they have these expressions? As the tutors read the story out loud, they stopped at several points to check comprehension and to ask students for their predictions about what would happen next. In addition, tutors asked children to discuss the feelings experienced by the characters in the book, as well as their own reactions to what was happening in the story. This technique enabled children to relate to the plot on a personal level and made the entire read-aloud experience more engaging and meaningful for the students.

BELL has chosen to integrate literacy instruction into its after-school program through the use of a packaged literacy curriculum, *Voices of Love and Freedom*. Several **effective practices** can be identified that might be applied to other after-school settings:

- Using a structured – at times, scripted – literacy curriculum corrects for the varying levels of staff knowledge of literacy development and acquisition.
- Requiring staff to work at the site at least three days a week reduces transience and staff training needs and provides a more consistent experience for students.
- Using multicultural literature as part of a literacy curriculum provides a more engaging experience for students in urban settings.
- Asking all staff to participate in an initial training session on literacy practices gets everyone on the same page. Staff should then have opportunities to regularly address issues related to their specific situations and skill levels.
- Using literacy practices that are employed during the school day offers a more seamless experience for students, particularly those who need extra instructional time to meet school-day benchmarks.

### **Citizen Schools: Using Aspects of the BPS Literacy Approach in a “Homegrown” Model**

Citizen Schools is a major after-school provider serving Boston Public Schools students ages 9-14 at twelve sites across the city. Most Citizen Schools programs are located in Boston schools; however, they are not restricted to the students that attend that school. Citizen Schools programs focus on improving students’ skills through activities that support and build upon what they are learning during the school day. In particular, the program tries to provide students with “real life” experiences through hands-on apprenticeships, where children have the opportunity to learn valuable skills from an experienced professional, including journalists, attorneys, and businesspeople.

Citizen Schools programs contain three main components:

1. Homework Investment Time – 45-60 minutes of daily structured time for students to work on their homework assignments. Students are urged to work on the subject with which they are having the most difficulty.

2. Campus-Wide Apprenticeship – An academic activity that all students at the site participate in to specifically address learning needs.
3. Apprenticeships – Weekly, volunteer-led, small group “classes” whose culminating products are presented to the community.
4. Explorations – Field trips to sites throughout the city.

Improving students’ writing skills is the primary academic focus of all Citizen Schools sites, and the program has developed its own writing curriculum, drawing heavily on what happens daily in the Boston Public Schools. Staff concentrates on one of the following areas each week when working with students:

- Webbing – mapping out ideas before the writing process begins
- Hooks – writing a good introductory paragraph that transitions smoothly into a thesis statement and lays a foundation for an essay
- Organization – managing information to create a clear and cohesive document
- Conferencing – meeting with teachers and peers to receive feedback
- Drafting
- Revising
- Final Drafts
- Finding Web Resources

(Citizen Schools Writing Apprenticeship Curriculum 2002)

The Citizen Schools writing curriculum intentionally mimics Writers’ Workshop, an instructional approach recently adopted in all of Boston’s Public schools. In the workshop approach, students learn strategies used by effective writers, are given a lot of time to write, choose what to write, and receive regular feedback on their writing through conferencing with their teachers and peers.

In order to have an effective writing curriculum, Citizen Schools must have a well-trained staff. While many after-school providers struggle to hire highly qualified part-time staff, Citizen Schools has been able to make many of their Teaching Fellows – the staff working directly with children at their program sites – full-time employees through partnerships with other local non-profits. Teaching Fellows work in the mornings at another organization – the New

England Aquarium, for example – and spend their afternoons at a Citizen Schools site. This model was developed in an attempt to attract skilled professionals to Citizen Schools sites, and because Teaching Fellows work full-time, the program is able to provide them with a reasonable salary, as well as benefits.

Throughout the school year, Teaching Fellows meet regularly with their Campus Directors (Citizen Schools site coordinators) to adapt the Citizen Schools writing curriculum to their students' needs. The program provides regular professional development to staff on how children acquire literacy skills, as well as on what students are learning during the school day so that staff can determine how to best improve their skills during after-school hours.

Still, Citizen Schools struggles with striking an effective balance between alignment with school day practices while still maintaining an informal and comfortable environment for students. Becca Moskowitz, Curriculum Coordinator, at Citizen Schools says, “Sometimes the kids think that it feels too much like school. The challenge is balancing so that it doesn't feel exactly like school, but we don't want it to feel so different that they can't transfer their skills back to school. That's the juggling that has to happen, so it needs to be project-based, and we need to have a clear end product in mind. At the same time, we need to use the same language and structure as in schools.”

Recently, we observed a Citizen Schools Teaching Fellow leading a Campus-Wide Apprenticeship (CWA) writing lesson with nine students at the Wilson Middle School in Dorchester. Students read excerpts from *The Children's Crusade*, various stories about the civil rights movement, and then identified the five “Ws” (when, what, who, where and why) in the excerpts. Next, the Teaching Fellow shared a personal essay that she had written and asked students to identify the five “Ws” in her story. By sharing her own writing, the Teaching Fellow modeled that she is also a writer, like the authors included in *The Children's Crusade* and like her students. Students then took the drafts of their own personal essays that they had written during a previous CWA session and divided into pairs to conference. In these small groups, students gave feedback to one another and checked to be sure each essay also contained the five “Ws.” Students then made revisions based on what they discussed in their conferences.

Though Citizen Schools struggles to find a balance between what happens during the school day and creating an enjoyable after-school environment for its students, the program uses several **effective practices** that could be adopted by other providers:

- Creating a “homegrown” literacy curriculum that uses many school day practices allows programs the space to provide experiences for children that are based on what happens during the school day, but still different enough so that the after-school hours don’t seem “like school.”
- Offering students a range of activities – from field trips to hands-on projects – on a weekly basis makes an after-school program significantly different from the school day.
- Providing staff with adequate time to meet and assess students’ needs allows them to adapt the literacy curriculum to better meet students where they are.
- Using creative approaches to staffing – such as partnering with other community organizations so that staff members can be full time – will attract a more highly qualified, professional staff.

### **Classroom at the Workplace: Using BPS Instructional Approaches in a Workplace Context to Help High School Students Pass the MCAS**

Organized by the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) in collaboration with the Boston Public Schools, Classroom at the Workplace (CWP) served 215 students this summer from the Class of 2003 who had yet to pass the MCAS. The program endeavors to “... address students’ academic needs in a context that engages them – paid employment. In addition to the math and literacy focus of the program, instruction focuses on key workplace skills such as attitude, attendance and problem solving” (Classroom at the Workplace, Proposal Summary 2002). Students participating in CWP were placed in summer jobs with twenty Boston employers. For seven weeks, in addition to working full-time, students spent 90 minutes per day in a literacy or math worksite-based class (depending on which portion of the MCAS they needed to pass – ELA or math) led by a BPS teacher to prepare them for the MCAS retest in December.

This summer, CWP teachers used either Reading is FAME or Readers' and Writers' workshops as their literacy curriculum. Both approaches are used in Boston high schools and students are familiar with the structure of each. CWP staff has used FAME, a four-part literacy intervention designed to address the needs of young adults reading far below grade level, in previous years with much success. On average, students have gained one grade level in reading skills and improved their vocabulary and reading comprehension abilities. Readers' and Writers' workshops, instructional approaches being adopted by the BPS which aim to increase students' stamina, fluency, and comprehension, were used for the first time in CWP during the summer of 2002.

Because the FAME curriculum has been used successfully in the past and because it is easily adapted to a seven-week summer program, CWP staff decided to continue to use it this summer; however, since Readers' and Writers' workshops are BPS instructional priorities, CWP staff thought it worthwhile to introduce these instructional approaches as well. In order to make the transition from the school year to the summer more seamless, CWP hired BPS teachers to lead their classes and provided them with one week of intensive professional development in the literacy curricula prior to the start of the program. Because the workshop approach to instruction is relatively new, teachers who were interested or who had already begun implementing this model in their classrooms were selected to teach these classes. All other teachers used the FAME model.

In general, teachers and students were placed at their schools' business partners' worksites. East Boston High School (EBHS), for example, has partnered with Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) for several years, so East Boston students and teachers were placed there whenever possible. According to Chris Smith, the PIC's Director of School-Business Partnerships, this helps to expand the four walls of the classroom to the community and to the workplace, encouraging teachers, students, and employers to make the connection between work and school. In addition, by using BPS teachers, the PIC is investing valuable training dollars in instructional practices that will be used every day in the classroom and is creating a cadre of caring adults who will keep track of participating students' progress – both in and out of school.

This summer, we spent one morning observing a CWP Readers’ and Writers’ workshop session at MGH. These eleven students from EBHS began their day at 8 am with ninety minutes of literacy instruction and then went on to work in various departments at MGH, including histology, radiology, pharmacy, and patient care. The instructor, Audrey Schindler, an ELA teacher at EBHS, led the class in a mini-lesson on writing a personal narrative. Following the mini-lesson, students practiced their newly learned skills during writing time, while Ms. Schindler conferenced with each student, helping them address their individual writing issues. Finally, students were given the opportunity to share their writing with the class and provide feedback to one another.

In her classroom of eleven students, Ms. Schindler had six bilingual students and five native English speakers. When asked if the various levels represented in her classroom caused problems, she responded, “ Most teachers get worried when their students are on a variety of different levels, but fortunately Readers’ and Writers’ workshops lend themselves to addressing that.” She explained that she is responsible for choosing a mini-lesson that addresses a skill that students need, and, from there, she is able to give students individual attention and help when conferencing. Ms. Schindler continued, “The students are responsible for choosing their own books and topics to write about; therefore, they are reading and writing on a level that is comfortable to them – not too high and not too low. My role as teacher is to guide them through whatever they choose and monitor their strengths, weaknesses, and growth.”

Classroom at the Workplace appears to have found a way to actively engage older students in learning, while providing them with the necessary workplace skills. The program is using several **effective practices** that could be adopted by a variety of programs, including those serving high school students:

- Adopting a curriculum that is used during the school day makes the seamless connection between school and out-of-school time.
- Using Boston Public Schools teachers is an efficient use of limited professional development dollars. It also provides an additional opportunity for adults to make regular connections with students, thus reducing alienation.
- Providing academic instruction in a setting other than school is an effective way to engage students.

## Effective Practices in a National Model Designed for After-School: KidzLit

In response to many of the challenges that have been described throughout this paper and that are regularly faced by after-school providers when deciding how to provide literacy instruction to students, Developmental Studies Center in Oakland, CA has developed KidzLit, a literacy curriculum designed specifically for the after-school environment. Though we did not have the opportunity to observe a provider using the KidzLit curriculum with students, we did speak extensively with providers who have used KidzLit in New York City and in Los Angeles, in environments similar to what exists in Boston.

KidzLit is a literacy and character-building curriculum for students in kindergarten through grade 8 that centers around 100 texts, each of which is accompanied by a detailed guide with activities designed for that book. The texts used in the curriculum are well written, high interest, and culturally diverse, and program staff can choose from a range of picture books, chapter books, fiction, non-fiction, biography, autobiography, and poetry.

The KidzLit curriculum uses one primary component of a balanced literacy program – Read-Aloud. During a typical KidzLit “literacy block,” instructors and students participate in five activities:

- Introductory Activities – based on the theme of the text they are about to read as a group, the instructor may engage children in an arts activity, movement, poetry, etc.
- Read Aloud – instructor reads the text to students, stopping at critical junctures to check for student comprehension
- Discussion – students and instructor discuss the text as a group
- Connection Activities – again, based on the themes, characters, or ideas in the story, students engage in an enjoyable activity such as writing, art, music, drama, or games that deepens their connection to the story
- Wrap-it-Up – group reviews what was learned, what they enjoyed about the text and what they didn’t; the group also goes over “cool words,” or new vocabulary words that they learned as a result of reading the text

In some instances, instructors may ask students to read the text in small groups or read independently and then come back together for the structured activities.

Instructors use the detailed book guides, which provide an overview of the text about to be read, identify the major themes, suggest introductory and connection activities that might work well with the text, and list vocabulary words to discuss as a group, to help them plan and structure their lessons. And it is these guides which make KidzLit an easy-to-use literacy curriculum for an after-school environment. According to Eric Gurowitz, a KidzLit trainer affiliated with the Partnership for After-School Education (PASE) in New York City and former Director of Staff Development for LA's BEST, a large after-school provider in the Los Angeles Unified School District, "The materials are specifically designed for after-school staff. Most don't have a teaching degree, many are part-time, don't have time to prepare, and need something that's simple to use."

Yet, the KidzLit curriculum still leaves room for more experienced educators to be creative. The book guides only offer suggestions, and program staff are free to bring their own ideas into the lesson. Gurowitz believes that students enjoy the curriculum and see it as different from what happens during the school day. "The kids are having fun and connecting with each other," he says. "They are getting to talk about things that they don't normally talk about in school – their neighborhoods, families, the countries that they are from."

Once a program purchases the curriculum, KidzLit provides training tailored to the needs of the provider. In general, most providers participate in off-site workshops, which last for several hours and where trainers model the literacy practices used in the curriculum. Providers also watch videos of KidzLit in action and discuss issues specific to their sites. KidzLit trainers then visit each site to provide mentoring and coaching support. For sites that can't ask staff to attend off-site workshops or can't afford this training, an on-site training kit is also available. This kit includes how-to videos and a training handbook, and is particularly useful for programs whose staff changes regularly or is comprised primarily of volunteers.

The KidzLit curriculum is relatively affordable. According to Gurowitz, "When we purchased KidzLit for LA's BEST, we didn't find it to be expensive for what you are getting." Providers can choose to buy only certain sets of

books and guides, depending on the time allotted for literacy instruction and the number of children in the program. Still, for smaller providers who rely primarily on donations and free staff training, KidzLit may be out of reach.

KidzLit is the only curriculum of its kind – one that’s specifically designed for an after-school environment. As a result, there are several effective practices that providers should note:

- The literature used in the curriculum are high interest, well written trade books, and children can easily relate to it, making discussions interesting and sufficiently different from what happens during the school day.
- The curriculum is highly scripted, and each text comes with a detailed guide that instructors can use to design accompanying activities. This addresses the different levels of staff training and experience that is typical in after-school environments.
- KidzLit offers a variety of training options, depending on program needs.
- The curriculum is aligned with national standards [See Appendix] and includes at least one of the core components of a balanced literacy program.

## Challenges

As described in the three case studies above, after-school providers face numerous challenges in providing effective literacy instruction to their students. In general, their challenges fall into four broad categories – varying levels of staff experience, providing adequate training and professional development opportunities to staff, creating an after-school environment that’s different enough from the school day to engage students, and adopting a literacy curriculum that’s both effective and cost-effective.

### Varying Levels of Staff Experience

Because of the nature of after-school programs and because they generally do not require a full-time commitment from staff, providers typically attract volunteers, community members without significant experience working with children, high school and college students, and non-educators. This makes providing cohesive and effective literacy instruction to students incredibly challenging. Staff must first get up to speed on how students acquire literacy skills, as well as their role in and key activities that support that acquisition.

In addition, after-school program staff is often transient. Volunteers may not work at the site on a regular basis and part-time staff members come and go regularly. All of this heightens the challenge of getting staff ready to work with children on their literacy skills.

### **Providing Adequate Training & Professional Development Opportunities to Staff**

Understanding how students learn to read is rocket science, and with the varying levels of staff experience described above, providing adequate training to program staff is a significant challenge for after-school providers. Not only is training costly and time-intensive, but with high staff turnover, after-school providers may constantly feel as if they're training a new crop of staff members. In addition, it is difficult to meet all staff members at their own knowledge and experience level – from staff who are educators to staff who are high school students. Finally, providers often have a hard time identifying time during the school year for staff to assess student progress regularly and make adjustments to instruction as needed.

### **Creating an Environment That's Different Enough from the School Day to Engage Students**

It has been particularly difficult for after-school providers to determine how to structure their literacy curriculum so that students' skills still improve, but so that it doesn't seem too much "like school." As described in the literature review, after-school programs generally wish to maintain their reputation of being different from the school day, of having a relaxing and enjoyable environment, and being a place where students can learn important skills in a different context. In the era of high-stakes testing and new economic realities, students need more time to learn the skills necessary to be successful both in college and in work. This is where after-school programs come in, although it has been a struggle for most providers to incorporate an academic component that draws on what happens during the school day and yet is still different enough so that students remain engaged.

## **Adopting a Literacy Curriculum That’s Both Effective and Cost-Effective**

With so many options available – from packaged school-day literacy curricula, to homegrown models, to curricula specifically designed for the after-school environment – what’s a provider to do? After-school programs must contend with such issues as the funding available for literacy instruction, their students’ needs, staff skill level, and time allocated for academic support.

## **Recommendations**

In this section, we’ll address all of the challenges faced by after-school providers and make both concrete recommendations for individual providers, as well as recommend a role that Boston’s After-School for All Partnership might play in making effective literacy instruction in after-school programs more feasible.

### **Providers: Implement Two Components of a Balanced Literacy Program, Read Aloud & Independent Reading**

As noted in the literature review, all Boston schools must integrate the ten core components of a balanced literacy program – read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, word study, shared writing, modeled writing, interactive writing, guided writing, and independent writing – into their literacy curricula [see Appendix]. The use of all ten components leads to balanced, effective literacy instruction that has been proven to improve students’ reading and writing skills. While most of these components require a skilled educator, read aloud and independent reading can be implemented with little training, are generally enjoyable for students, and have a high likelihood of increasing the time children spend reading.

Reading is the foundation for all other academic skills. If students cannot read fluently, all of their other schoolwork suffers. They become frustrated with school and believe it is not a place for them. Because of the critical role that reading skills play in a student’s academic life and because so many Boston students are reading far below grade level, we strongly recommend that after-school providers, whether they have a structured literacy curriculum in place or not, use read alouds and implement an independent reading block into their programs. These two school-day practices can be easily adapted to an after-school environment with relatively little training for staff.

## Read Alouds

During a read aloud, a teacher reads a carefully chosen text in a structured way to teach children a particular point. According to the US Department of Education's Commission on Reading report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985), "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud ..." While many regard read alouds as a practice reserved for younger children, the report emphasizes reading to students at all grade levels. The format of read alouds remains the same across grade levels; however, the complexity of the texts and the types of predictions and inferences that students must make about the texts change dramatically as children get older. Read-alouds, therefore, are more than just reading any book in any way to students.

For emergent readers, read alouds serve to model the practices of a proficient reader, including reading for a purpose, fluent reading, knowledge of written language patterns, vocabulary, and oral language development (Fountas and Pinnell 1996). For more fluent readers, read alouds serve to improve listening and reading comprehension skills, as the reader is able to model these practices for students. For example, as they read, good readers continuously make predictions and make connections to their own lives, to other texts they've read, and to their experiences. During an effective read aloud, an instructor will model all of these things as she reads by noting connections and asking questions of her students. Jennifer Friedman, a BPS literacy coach, describes the importance of read alouds for Boston children, "We constantly read and hear about how urban children don't have the experiences that their middle and upper middle class counterparts do, which therefore limits their ability to achieve. However, read alouds provide a range of experiences which they can connect to by building a knowledge base."

Read alouds are particularly suitable for an after-school environment. With minimal training – general modeling of the practice and some guidance about what to emphasize depending on the level of the listeners – and quality literature, staff can engage a group of students in an interesting book and have a significant impact on their reading, listening, and thinking skills. In general, we recommend that after-school programs select a range of high-interest texts to read aloud to students and set aside regular blocks of time for this practice to occur. It is highly recommended, though not absolutely necessary, that students gather on a rug or in another comfortable setting so

they are able to relax and listen closely to what is being read. Instructors should stop at certain points and ask students questions about the text. Following the read aloud, instructors can engage students in a discussion about what they have just read, asking such questions as: Did you like this book? Why or why not? Did it remind you of anything that has happened to you? What would you change about this book? Why? Which character was your favorite? Did the ending surprise you? What did you notice about the words? This discussion period allows students to connect the text to their own lives and have conversations about issues that are important and interesting to them. Instructors may also choose to develop special activities – writing, art, music, drama – to connect with the themes in the text.

### *Independent Reading*

Independent reading is an important opportunity for students to practice reading strategies, as well as build confidence through consistent successful reading (Fountas and Pinnell 1996). In addition, significant research shows that if students are able to read independently for at least 30 minutes per day, their reading skills will improve dramatically. This is a goal after-school programs could help every student achieve.

Independent reading is a practice that's consistent across grade levels, with only the complexity of the texts and the time allotted to read changing as students get older. Children in kindergarten through grade two should read independently for 20 minutes a day, while students in grades three through five can read for 30 minutes and students in grades four and above should read independently for at least 30 minutes and up to 45 minutes.

Independent reading is more than just asking students to read on their own – it requires some staff training for it to be effective.

Independent reading works only if children are reading at a level that is comfortable for them; therefore, it is imperative that program staff understand how to help students choose books that are right for them. Children who are reading texts that are either too simple or too difficult for them will become easily disengaged and frustrated. After-school programs should have a range of texts available to students – a range of genres at different levels and with varying subject matters – and staff should be able to help students select “just right” books, something that children should also be learning how to do during the school day.

In order to select a “just right” book, students should first begin by leafing through the text. If there are pictures, are they interesting to the student? Does the subject matter catch their attention? Students should then read at least one page of the text. If there are five or more words on a page – or, for picture books with few words, on several pages – that children struggle with, the book is too difficult and they should select another text. Even after children have selected a book, program staff should “conference” with them as they are reading to ascertain whether the book is at their level. Staff should counsel students when to abandon a book and choose another.

As during a read aloud, students should have comfortable places to sit and relax while reading independently. Staff should set expectations for students – that they will read silently and not disturb their neighbors during independent reading time, for instance – and should read while students do (an important modeling opportunity).

### **Boston’s After-School for All Partnership: Serving as an Intermediary**

Boston’s After-School for All Partnership represents a powerful coalition of local funders, corporations, non-profit organizations, and the Mayor’s office that is poised to have a significant impact on the after-school community. By leveraging funding resources and working closely with the school department, city agencies, and after-school providers, the Partnership can help to improve literacy instruction in programs across the city. More specifically, they can consciously and deliberately promote a citywide after-school program goal of having each child in a program read 30 minutes a day outside of school. Among other activities, they could organize book swaps and coordinate training. In what follows, we will describe the role we envision the Partnership’s playing in Boston’s after-school community.

### *Acting as an Information Clearinghouse*

After-school providers in Boston are hungry for information on a variety of subjects – literacy curricula that might work for their programs, funding resources, technical assistance resources, literacy research, opportunities for staff development, and suggestions on hiring staff. The Partnership could serve as Boston’s information clearinghouse on improving literacy instruction in after-school programs.

### *Connecting Providers with Professional Development Resources*

There are few professional development resources for after-school providers trying to improve literacy instruction in their programs. Research indicates that only ReadBoston and Parents United for Child Care (PUCC) are currently offering any sort of training for programs in effective literacy practices; however, Boston’s After-School for All Partnership could also work with the BPS to make school-based literacy coaches available to train after-school providers.

ReadBoston currently only trains staff at Boston’s Community Learning Centers (CLCs) to improve students’ reading and writing skills. As part of their partnership with the CLCs, ReadBoston does the following:

- provides literacy specialists to assist, support, and improve CLC literacy programming
- provides literacy technical assistance, staff training, and development
- provides book collections, literacy materials, and training manuals
- assists sites in selecting literacy curriculum

As part of the technical assistance they provide to CLCs, ReadBoston holds regular workshops for staff, models activities during program time, coaches staff in developing their own literacy activities, and provides books and literacy curricula.

In addition to working closely with Boston’s CLCs, ReadBoston allows any after-school provider to visit their Out-of-School Time Library, located at their offices at 60 Clayton Street in Dorchester. There, after-school program staff can learn about literacy resources, book collections, and activity guides. They can also meet individually with an out-of-school time literacy specialist to discuss their program’s literacy needs.

Finally, ReadBoston offers Literacy Kits to any after-school provider in the city. These kits, each of which has a theme, include books and activities that are enjoyable and develop students' literacy skills. ReadBoston holds annual Literacy Kit workshops so that providers can familiarize themselves with the kits and can learn how to engage students in literacy activities.

PUCC does not currently offer formal training to after-school providers; however, they have the capability to do so, according to staff member Marta Gredler. They now provide training on creating a literacy-rich environment and thematic and project-based approaches to literacy instruction in the after-school environment, on an as-needed basis.

Both PUCC and ReadBoston might be able to greatly expand their reach if supported by Boston's After-School for All Partnership. Like The After-School Corporation (TASC) in New York City, the Partnership could designate several organizations as "official" professional development providers for the after-school community in Boston. To play this role, these organizations could learn more about effective literacy practices that are happening during the school day and ways to extend those practices into the after-school environment, with a particular focus on read alouds and independent reading. With additional funding and technical assistance from the Partnership, these professional development providers could help to make literacy instruction in after-school programs much more cohesive, effective, and enjoyable for students.

Further, Boston's After-School for All Partnership should work closely with the BPS to create a structure that would allow BPS literacy coaches to work both with schools and with after-school programs to train staff in effective literacy practices. It would be ideal for coaches to serve both schools and after-school programs – rather than exclusively one or the other – in order to create that seamless connection between the school day and after-school. This creative deployment of coaches would require the BPS to see the benefits of after-school education, particularly its effects on school-day student academic performance. The Partnership should play a role in facilitating these kinds of conversations with the BPS, as well as developing a structure with the school department where coaches could serve both schools and after-school programs.

### ***Providing Books for After-School Programs***

In order to successfully use read alouds and implement independent reading blocks in an after-school environment, programs need books – lots of them. And many providers regularly struggle to stock their program libraries. Boston’s After-School for All Partnership could work closely with organizations providing books to children, including ReadBoston and Reading is Fundamental (RIF), as well as encourage the funding community to donate books to after-school programs. In addition, the Partnership could broker relationships between providers who use space in Boston’s public schools and principals and classroom teachers, which would permit after-school programs to use classroom and school libraries, provided they adhere to certain guidelines. Currently, many providers are relegated to space in a school’s cafeteria or gym – learning environments that are far from ideal.

### ***Grants to After-School Programs***

Boston’s After-School for All Partnership should also offer small grants to after-school programs in order to enhance literacy instruction. Grants should be restricted for use on materials or services that will improve students’ literacy skills, such as purchasing professional development for staff on literacy practices, buying appropriate books for the program’s students, or purchasing a literacy curriculum for the program.

### ***Helping Providers to Align Literacy Instruction with BPS Priorities***

According to Cathleen Kral, BPS Instructional Leader for Literacy and Coaching, “You don’t want to have an extension of the school day during out-of-school time, but rather consistency between in-school and out-of-school time programs.” This consistency can be accomplished with “... a collaboration at the teacher and staff level, as well as a collaboration on the leadership level” (Noam 2001).

Helping after-school providers to align their literacy instruction with what’s happening during the school day is a tremendously important role for Boston’s After-School for All Partnership. Quite simply, students need more time to develop the reading and writing skills necessary for today’s economy, and after-school programs offer that extra time, particularly for extra reading.

While the Boston Public Schools have made some steps toward informing after-school providers about school day practices, it is not enough. With

direction and technical assistance from the Partnership, the district should create an out-of-school time department, staffed with people who are knowledgeable in BPS literacy practices and are able to connect providers with teachers and principals in order to get the assessment information and student data that they need to plan effective reading and writing instruction. The BPS needs to be aware that the after-school sector can help them to achieve their instructional goals – if they are willing to work together. And, with recent changes to federal education legislation as part of President Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” act, the relationship between after-school providers and school districts will become even more important. Children attending schools that have been deemed “in need of improvement” will be eligible to receive “supplemental services,” such as tutoring, from various state-approved after-school programs.

We recommend that Boston’s After-School for All Partnership facilitate an improved relationship between the Boston Public Schools and Boston’s after-school community. The Partnership could encourage regular communication between providers and the BPS in the form of monthly meetings where program staff would come together to share effective practices with one another and with district personnel. Currently, “Bridging the Gap” sessions try to address this issue, but these trainings are conducted too sporadically to be effective.

We also recommend that the Partnership encourage the district to require certain things of after-school programs that use BPS facilities. For instance, the district might require that providers incorporate read alouds or independent reading into their literacy curricula in order to gain access to school facilities. In return, the district would have to agree to provide information on literacy priorities and on student performance. This way, the transition between the school day and after-school would be more seamless for students, and after-school programs would be better able to reinforce skills being learned during the day.



### *“Accrediting” After-School Programs*

Boston’s After-School for All Partnership could also provide more information to Boston families on local programs that are using effective literacy practices and have been successful at improving student performance. The Partnership could develop some sort of informal “accreditation” system that would give families more information than is currently available when selecting an appropriate after-school program for their children.

Clearly, Boston’s after-school community is in need of an intermediary organization that can provide information, leverage funding resources, better connect the Boston Public Schools to out-of-school time, and, most importantly, recommend literacy practices that are particularly effective in an after-school environment. Boston’s After-School for All Partnership can play a powerful role in shaping improvements to literacy instruction in after-school programs.

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# Appendix

## **Boston Public Schools' Core Components of Literacy Instruction, Grades K-5**

Students learn to read, write, speak and listen successfully when a variety of instructional approaches are provided. The following approaches provide the framework for the implementation of Boston Public Schools' literacy program.

### **1. Reading Aloud**

Reading aloud introduces students to the joys of reading and the art of listening. Students develop understanding of the patterns and structures of written language and learn new words and ideas. Through reading aloud students learn about and locate models of particular genres or focus of writing. They understand that the language of books is different from spoken language. Reading aloud offers the reader many opportunities to model reading strategies.

### **2. Shared Reading**

Shared reading with an enlarged text, overhead or a text everyone can see provides an opportunity for all students to successfully participate in reading. Students and teachers share the task of reading the text which otherwise might prove to be too difficult for most children. During the reading, teachers identify and discuss the conventions, structures, and language features of written texts. The teacher demonstrates the reading process and strategies that successful readers use. The story is revisited many times and attention is drawn to phonics elements for blending words, sight words for creating word collections, unfamiliar words, as well as other skills that students need.

### **3. Guided Reading**

The purpose of guided reading is to promote independent reading by helping students develop effective reading skills and strategies, fluency and confidence. Students are matched to appropriate instructional texts (read with 90-95 percent accuracy) determined by performance on a running record or reading inventory. During the lesson the teacher works with small, homogeneous reading groups that are flexible and change regularly based on

students' needs. Because guided reading groups are comprised of students at similar stages of reading development, they present ideal opportunities for systematically teaching skills and strategies. Students read texts on increasing levels of difficulty, with each step providing opportunities for the kind of problem solving strategies that build independent reading systems. Students are prompted to use a skilled reader's strategies (predicting, questioning, confirming, checking, rereading and self-monitoring).

#### **4. Independent Reading**

The more students read materials they can read, the more they improve and progress toward independence. Teachers designate a specific daily time for independent reading and provide the rules for quiet reading. Independent reading provides students with the practice needed to gain fluency and independence. Students have access to a wide range of literature from which they can make choices. Teachers need to teach students how to choose books at their independent level to read successfully. Students need to read independently, not only books but also other printed material in the classroom. (E.g., poems, songs, pieces composed through interactive and shared writing, signs, directions, charts and posters). They read to themselves or with partners. Students may draw and write about the stories they read independently.

#### **5. Word Study**

Word study provides students with the opportunity to become aware of sounds in words and how they relate to symbols in written language. Word study prepares students to become familiar with both the visual aspects of letters and words and the phonological pattern of words. Beginning readers are taught the alphabet, the relationship between sound and letters, blending of sound-letter links, high frequency words as well as regular patterns. Students need a repertoire of strategies for recognizing words, including the use of phonics, context, word family patterns, and structural analysis that they can apply flexibly in a variety of contexts. When students cannot decode a word in context, the teacher models a number of different strategies, such as reading ahead a bit, using context clues, rereading, sounding out the word or thinking of words that resemble parts of the unknown word.

## **6. Modeled Writing**

Modeled writing is a think-aloud process. Teachers model their own writing processes including rethinking, revising, and editing. Students observe the teacher sort through various options and questions and making choices appropriate for the intended purpose and audience. Teachers show their own planning strategies, demonstrating that even expert writers work tentatively, revise often, and still may need to start over-and over. Teacher demonstration and articulation of the process of writing is critical to student's understanding.

## **7. Interactive Writing**

The teacher guides group writing of a large-print piece, which can be a list, a chart, pages of a book, or another form of writing. The teacher models and demonstrates the writing process and also shares the pen with the students. The text is constructed word-by-word with all students participating in various aspects of the writing. The teacher selects letters, words, or other writing actions for individual students to do. The piece of writing is read many times by the group during the process and as shared reading.

## **8. Shared Writing**

During shared writing time, students share experiences and interests with the support of the teacher, to generate ideas and language for composing the text. Acting as scribe, the teacher helps them shape their words and ideas into a coherent message. The teacher coaches the process of putting ideas into written language. Editing and proofreading as a class, provides students the opportunity to practice strategies for self-correction and meaning making. Shared writing enables all students to participate and helps them to gain confidence when writing independently.

## **9. Guided Writing**

Teacher demonstration and articulation of the process of writing is critical to student's understanding. During guided writing, students construct individual pieces of writing (with teacher and eventually peer guidance, assistance, and feedback). A guided writing session consists of a mini-lesson, writing/conference time, and sharing. The goal of guided writing is continuous growth in the writers as they learn more about the writing process.

## **10. Independent Writing**

Independent writing provides an opportunity for students to practice using the writing strategies they have learned in modeled writing, shared writing and guided writing. Students write for authentic purposes, for different audiences and use a variety of styles. They write their own messages and stories, helping each other at times. They use journals to reflect and respond to what they are learning. They independently write their own version of a familiar text and illustrate, label, and write speech bubbles of what the characters would say. They are taught how to use the resources in the room to find words they cannot write independently. Teachers conference with students and encourage them to publish their work. Observing independent writing helps the teacher plan for guided writing mini-lessons and suggests teaching points to raise during interactive writing.

## **Boston Public Schools' Core Components of Literacy Instruction, Grades 6-8**

Students learn to read, write, speak and listen successfully when a variety of instructional approaches are provided. The following approaches provide the framework for the implementation of Boston Public Schools' literacy program.

### **1. Reading Aloud**

Reading aloud introduces students to the joys of reading and the art of listening. Reading aloud provides opportunities to model reading strategies. Through reading aloud students understand that the language of books is different from spoken language, develop understanding of the patterns and structures of written language and, learn new words and ideas. They learn about and locate models of particular genres or forms of writing.

### **2. Shared Reading**

Shared reading with an enlarged text presented on an overhead projector or a text everyone can see provides an opportunity for all students to successfully participate in reading. Students and teachers share the task of reading the text which otherwise might prove to be too difficult for most children. During the reading, teachers identify and discuss the conventions, structures, and language features of written texts. The teacher demonstrates the reading

process and strategies that successful readers use. The text is revisited many times and attention is drawn to phonics elements for blending words, sight words for creating word collections, unfamiliar words, as well as other skills that students need.

### **3. Guided Reading**

The purpose of guided reading is to promote independent reading by helping students develop effective reading skills and strategies, fluency and confidence. Students are matched to appropriate instructional texts (read with 90-95 percent accuracy) determined by performance on a running record or reading inventory. During the lesson the teacher works with small, homogeneous reading groups that are flexible and change regularly based on students' needs. Because guided reading groups are comprised of students at similar stages of reading development, they present ideal opportunities for systematically teaching skills and strategies. Students read texts at their instructional level, with each step providing opportunities for the kind of problem solving strategies that build independent reading systems. Students are prompted to use a skilled reader's strategies (predicting, questioning, confirming, checking, rereading and self-monitoring).

### **4. Independent Reading**

The more students read materials they can read, the more they improve and progress toward independence. Teachers designate a specific daily time for independent reading and provide the rules for quiet reading. Independent reading provides students with the practice needed to gain fluency and independence. Students have access to a wide range of literature at their independent reading level from which they can make choices. Teachers need to teach students how to choose books at their independent level to read successfully. Students need to read independently in not only books but also all the written material in the classroom. (E.g., poems, songs, pieces composed through interactive and shared writing, signs, directions, nonfiction and fiction books). They read to themselves or with partners. Students may discuss, draw and write about the stories they read independently or about their use of different reading strategies to make meaning of the text.

## **5. Word Study**

Students need a repertoire of strategies for recognizing words, including the use of phonics, context, word family patterns, and structural analysis that they can apply flexibly in a variety of texts. When students cannot decode a word in context, the teacher models a number of different strategies, such as reading ahead a bit, using context clues, rereading, sounding out the word, or thinking of words that resemble parts of the unknown word. Teacher needs to provide students with opportunities

## **6. Modeled Writing**

Modeled writing is a think-aloud process. Teachers model their own writing process including rethinking, revising, and editing. Students observe the teacher and sort through questions making choices appropriate for the intended purpose and audience. Teachers show their own planning strategies, demonstrating that even expert writers work tentatively, revise often, and still may need to start over-and over.

## **7. Interactive Writing**

Interactive writing usually occurs with students in grades K-2. It would be utilized for middle school students whose reading and writing abilities fall below or within a primary level. The teacher guides students writing of a large-print piece, which can be a list, a chart, pages of a book, or another form of writing. The teacher models and demonstrates the writing process but also share the pen with the students. The message or story is composed by the group, and then constructed word by word with all students participating in composing and constructing various aspects of the writing. The teacher selects letters, words, or other writing actions for Individual students to do; the pen or marker is shared. The piece of writing is read many times by the group during the process and as shared reading.

## **8. Shared Writing**

During shared writing time, students share experiences and interests with the support of the teacher, to generate ideas and language for composing text. Acting as scribe, the teacher helps shape their words and ideas into a coherent message. The teacher coaches the process of putting ideas into written language. Editing and proofreading as a class, provides students the opportunity to

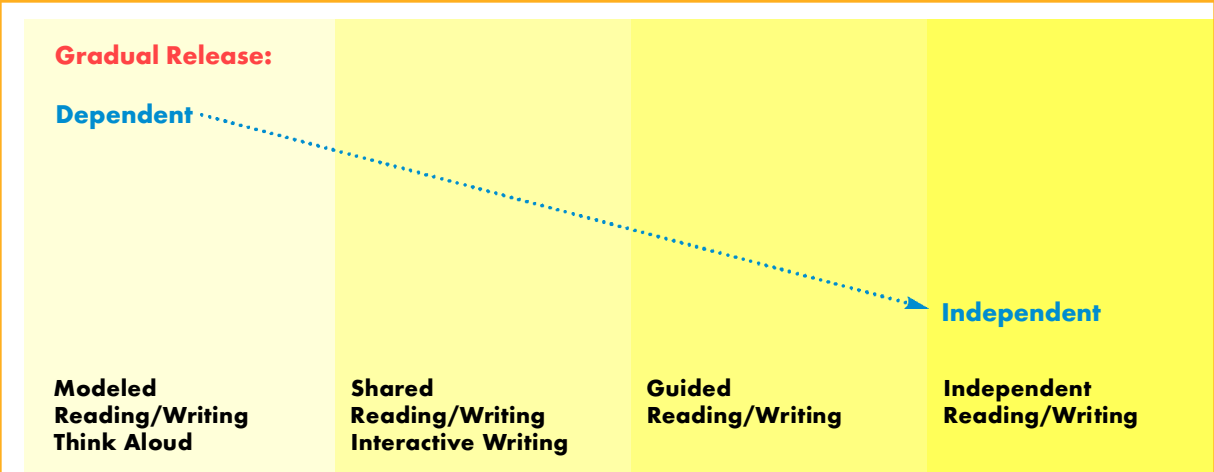
practice strategies for self-correction and meaning making. Shared writing enables all students to participate and helps them to gain confidence when writing independently.

### 9. Guided Writing

Teacher demonstration and articulation of the process of writing is critical to student's understanding. During guided writing, students construct individual pieces of writing (with teacher and eventually peer guidance, assistance, and feedback). A guided writing session consists of a mini-lesson, writing/conference time, and sharing. The goal of guided writing is continuous growth in the writers as they learn more about the writing process.

### 10. Independent Writing

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## **Workshop Instruction in Boston’s Schools – Next Steps in Whole-School Improvement**

*When states across the country began developing content and performance standards ten years ago, few educators – including superintendents – anticipated what would follow. As we have since learned, making the shift to standards would not be satisfied as other “reforms” have been by minor modifications to curricula or adjustments in our professional development offerings. It would require a rethinking of everything we do as an institution and would demand the attention of every staff person in the district.*

*Each September since we began, we have added pieces to complete this complicated puzzle. We developed local standards, matched to but more detailed than the state’s curriculum frameworks, to create a year-by-year outline of content. We focused on improving first literacy instruction and then math to keep from attempting too much, and knowing that our learning in these key areas would inform efforts in all other areas. With generous support from the private sector, we assigned staff developers to every school. Each year, we have learned from our experiences and made adjustments.*

*Among our most important lessons is that improving instruction is more than doing better at what we are already doing. Our first and most important task is to develop skilled, motivated, independent learners who love to read, write, and grapple with information and ideas. We cannot develop this kind of learner in a classroom focused on information transmission alone. We need learning environments and curricula that stimulate ownership, independence, engagement, and motivation. We need an instructional approach that helps students to learn how to learn – inside and outside of the classroom, on their own, and with their teachers and peers.*

*Building on what we have accomplished, I have taken the next step – promoting the workshop approach to instruction for the district. This school year and next, the priority for all elementary school teachers, middle and high school English language arts teachers, and Native Language and ESL teachers will be to implement Readers’ Workshop in their classrooms. This priority complements work that has already been done to introduce Writers’ Workshop in every school, and we count on your strengthening that work as well. In truth, the two are tightly interwoven.*

*Adding this piece to the puzzle may give us our greatest challenge yet, but it promises to deepen our students' learning, and that makes the challenge very worthwhile.*

— *Thomas W. Payzant, Superintendent*

### **Too many of our students...**

... are not skillful, independent learners who read and write well and have the knowledge and habits essential to success outside of school. The major reasons are two: our students haven't mastered the strategies skillful readers, writers, and learners use, and they don't read, write, or use disciplined discourse enough in or outside of school. By the time they start high school, the reasons are compounded: students are often so far behind they feel that they can't succeed and that no one cares if they do. As a result, they often lack the commitment and motivation that is a prerequisite to learning.

As a district, we need to ensure that all teachers:

- understand and teach students effective reading, writing, and learning strategies
- structure their classrooms and instructional time to teach the strategies well, to allow them to know each student as an individual, and to use the knowledge of each student's needs to shape their instruction
- give students sufficient time to practice and master the strategies and meet standards
- have sufficient resources to implement the strategies and enable their students to meet standards

To that end, Boston has chosen the workshop approach to instruction and has dedicated resources so that every school has the support to implement Readers' Workshop by September 2003.

### *The Principles of Workshop Instruction*

“Workshop” is both a structure for organizing classroom instruction and a vehicle to get students more engaged and invested in content. The structure provides more time during the school day for students to read, write, talk, and use effective learning strategies and to explore and respond to the topics and ideas they are studying. It provides more time for teachers to work with individual students, and for students to work with one another.

*The **THEORY OF ACTION** behind Whole-School Improvement is that for students to learn, instruction has to improve, and for instruction to improve, principals-headmasters and teachers need a very different kind of professional development and a different school organization.*

The structure evolved as teachers realized that much traditional instruction – the transfer of information from adult to student – was not leading to the ownership of the learning process and to the deeper understanding that students now need to meet standards. To do that, the teacher and students must co-construct learning. The teacher also must recognize that each student begins at a different place but that all must meet the same high standards, even though this may take more time.

Workshop starts with **Time** – time for students to read, write, talk, and think in class, independently or in small-group sessions. The structure also offers teachers time to observe, take notes, and confer with students. Because students often choose what they read and write, they develop **Ownership** of their learning. As they begin to use newly taught strategies that make them more skilled readers, writers, and learners, they are able to access more and a greater variety of materials, increasing their confidence and sense of ownership.

**Response** is built into workshop instruction. During the mini-lesson, students have the opportunity to question and clarify strategies before they adapt them to their own learning. The teacher-student conferences, small-group work, notebooks, and sharing sessions all offer opportunities for students to explore and respond to content with their teachers and others. By experiencing genuine discourse, considering and building on the ideas of others, finding evidence in what they read, and sharing their work, students develop as a **Community** of learners. In workshop instruction, the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts.

## *Expectations and Support for Readers' Workshops*

By September 2003, all Boston elementary school teachers, middle and high school English language arts teachers, Native Language teachers, and ESL teachers will have implemented Readers' Workshop in their classrooms, under the leadership of the principal-headmaster. Each school will have support from a full- or part-time Literacy Coach trained in workshop strategies and will receive additional reading and writing materials for workshop instruction.

Workshop instruction will begin to be used in all subjects, and the district will provide professional development for teachers on workshop instruction and how it can be adapted to science, social studies, and other subject areas. Much of Boston's curricula already supports workshop instruction: Investigations, Connected Math, Math Connections, History Alive, and the Foss, STC, Carolina Biological, and Cambridge Physics science kits.

Professional development in workshop instruction and support will be provided for all principals-headmasters, directors of instruction, program directors, and other instructional supervisors. By June 2003, all supervisors will have received sufficient training and support to effectively supervise the implementation of workshop instruction in all classrooms.

### **Suggestions for Launching Readers' Workshop**

- Start with a book. Those on the list below offer school staff an introduction to workshop instruction and practical advice for getting started.
- Organize inquiry groups for staff. Based on what student work and data show about students' learning needs, choose one or two books to read and study in small groups. Purchase books for all participants from sources such as transition funds, if needed.
- Take time to introduce workshop in the classroom. Establish routines, concentrate on a few comprehension skills, work to increase students' abilities to read independently.
- Begin book clubs once students have developed comprehension skills and are familiar with workshop instruction.
- Be patient. Ask for help. This is very hard and takes time.

## The Structure of a Workshop

### Mini-Lesson (20% of class time but rarely more than 15 minutes)

The teacher presents and often models a specific teaching point at the start of each class, helping students draw on their prior knowledge and answering any questions they have. The teaching point, which guides the independent and small-group work that follows, is determined by what student work and formative assessments show students need to know to meet standards and is part of a logical sequence of teaching points that comprise the unit of study.

During the mini-lesson, the teacher sometimes uses read alouds, modeled writing, shared reading and writing, and interactive writing. Near the end, he or she explains what students are expected to do during independent reading or writing time.

### Independent Reading or Writing (60% of class time)

Most class time is set aside for students to read or write independently, with a focus on the concept presented in the mini-lesson. As they become more skilled, students are ready to meet in small book clubs to read and analyze a book together. They usually choose the book and decide what they write, with guidelines and direction from the teacher. In their discussion and writing, they are asked to cite the text.

During this time, the teacher holds several individual or small-group conferences, serving as sounding board, facilitator, coach, and instructor and helping students

### Recommended Readings

- *Book Club for Middle School* (Raphael)
  - *Guiding Readers and Writers (Grades 3-6): Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy* (Fountas & Pinnell)
  - *How's It Going? A Practical Guide to Conferring with Student Writers* (Anderson)
  - *In the Middle: New Understandings About Writing, Reading, and Learning* (Atwell)
  - *It's Never Too Late: Leading Adolescents to Lifelong Literacy* (Allen & Romano)
  - *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups, second edition* (Daniels)
  - *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop* (Keene & Zimmerman)
  - *Reading for Understanding* (Schoenbach)
  - *Reading Instruction That Works* (Pressley)
  - *Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension to Enhance Understanding* (Harvey & Goudvis)
  - *The Art of Teaching Reading & The Art of Teaching Writing* (Calkins)
  - *There's Room for Me Here: Literature Workshop in the Middle School* (Allen & Gonzalez)
  - *Time for Meaning: Crafting Literate Lives in Middle and High School* (Bomer)
  - *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers* (Allington)
- Why Workshop? Changing Course in 7-12 English* (Bullock)
- *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide* (Fletcher & Portalupi)
  - *Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading* (Allen)

identify strategies they can use to solve problems they are struggling with. At the same time, the teacher is identifying areas where students – a small number or many – need more instruction, which may become a mini-lesson in a later class.

Conferences are one means to assess student learning, and teachers keep notes on each conference. Students are also assessed through their notebooks and more formal assignments. Student participation and contributions during shared learning also provide teachers with important assessment data.

During independent reading, teachers and students engage in guided reading and writing, literature circles (book clubs), interactive writing, buddy reads, and independent reading.

### **Sharing (20% of class time)**

Near the end of the class, several students share with the whole class how they applied the concept from the mini-lesson and what they learned. Other students and the teacher respond to the informal presentation, citing lessons learned. The class ends with the teacher clarifying the teaching point, assignments, etc.

### **Traditional Instruction: ELA**

- *The teacher always decides what books are read and what papers are written*
- *All students are given the same reading and writing assignments*
- *Reading and writing are done outside of class*
- *The teacher presents content in a lecture, and students answer questions the teacher asks*
- *Taking risks is not encouraged: Questions usually have one “right” answer and others are not considered*
- *Students are assessed primarily by assignments and test scores*

### **Workshop Instruction: ELA**

- *Students often choose what they read and write, with some direction from the teacher*
- *Every student keeps a reader’s notebook and a writer’s notebook*
- *Reading and writing are done in class as well as outside of class*
- *The teacher presents a concept or skill in a mini-lesson and confers with students as they apply that concept or skill to their own reading and writing*
- *Taking risks is encouraged: Students are expected to relate what they’re learning to the world outside school*
- *Discussion is among students as well as with the teacher*
- *Students learn to assess their own work and to improve it*
- *Students are assessed primarily through their notebooks and assignments*

Adapted from *Why Workshop? Changing Course in 7-12 English*

# How is AfterSchool KidzLit Aligned with National Standards?

AfterSchool KidzLit addresses eight of the twelve NCTE Standards for English Language Arts. The standards are sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA).

NCTE STANDARD...	HOW AFTERSCHOOL KIDZLIT ADDRESSES IT...
<p>1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment.</p>	<p>In AfterSchool KidzLit, students are exposed to a variety of literature that highlights the "big ideas" that are important to their lives. Through discussion and interactive follow-up activities, students explore their own experiences, as well as those of others – others in their after-school peer group, others in the books with life circumstance similar to their own, and others whose lives are quite different.</p>
<p>2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods and many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.</p>	<p>The 120-book AfterSchool KidzLit collection is diverse in genre and scope. In addition to high quality fiction and non-fiction, there are several books of poetry and a number of photo-essays. AfterSchool KidzLit books are chosen because they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are likely to interest young people,</li> <li>• highlight important ethical issues,</li> <li>• focus on the unique and common dimensions of the human experience, and</li> <li>• depict diverse populations and cultures accurately.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, graphics).</p>	<p>Students draw on their prior experience and interactions with other readers/writers as each AfterSchool KidzLit story is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• introduced, read, and discussed; and</li> <li>• explored through art, drama, writing, games, and other activities.</li> </ul> <p>Students draw on and expand their knowledge of word meanings with "cool word" activities. Specifically, they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• select, identify, and define new/interesting words; and</li> <li>• use new words in writing, role-plays, and games.</li> </ul>

NCTE STANDARD...	HOW AFTERSCHOOL KIDZLIT ADDRESSES IT...
<p>4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.</p>	<p>Students regularly express their ideas and opinions through speaking, writing, and drawing. Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discussions</li> <li>• role-plays</li> <li>• games</li> <li>• drawing/writing captions, cartoons</li> <li>• letters to authors and others</li> <li>• poetry</li> <li>• idea list-making</li> </ul>
<p>5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.</p>	<p>AfterSchool KidzLit journals, charts, games, and other activities give students a chance to generate a wide range of writing (while having fun).</p>
<p>6. Students develop an understanding of, and respect for, diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.</p>	<p>With AfterSchool KidzLit, students are exposed to a rich variety of characters from various cultures, communities, and parts of the world. The writing and dialogue in these books reflects and develops respect for the diversity of language use throughout the U.S. and world.</p>
<p>7. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.</p>	<p>AfterSchool KidzLit facilitators are encouraged to support non-native English speakers in using their first language to express their ideas.</p>
<p>8. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.</p>	<p>This is the crux of what AfterSchool KidzLit is all about—the opportunity to be a member of a caring, inclusive, thoughtful community of readers.</p>

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## **Voices of Love and Freedom (VLF)- Core Skills and Six Step Pedagogy**

The VLF “core skills” are as follows: (1) *Love and Freedom Values* (a child’s ability to love and trust as well as have confidence in themselves); (2) *Emotional Skills* ( the skills necessary to successfully contend with various dilemmas that a child may face); (3) *Perspective Taking* (the skill necessary for a child to understand and acknowledge the point of view of another person in order to solve a conflict) ; (4) *Storytelling Skills* (students ability to tell “their own” story); (5) *Conflict Resolution Skills*; (6) *Social Awareness* (skills that assist children in being confident, finding their niche in the world, and having the capacity to deal with various types of prejudices they are bound to encounter) ; (7) *Cultural Awareness* (encouraging students to understand and appreciate their own and others cultural identity), and (8) *Health Awareness*.

These skills and values are developed pedagogically through a linear six step process, including: (1) *To Connect* (making personal connections with students by teachers sharing their personal stories related to the central theme of the story and then students doing the same); (2) *To Read* (reading the literature through the use of read alouds); (3) *To Discuss* (students give their responses to open-ended questions regarding the story, which helps foster students’ comprehension of the story); (4) *To Practice* (students get an opportunity to practice the values and skills introduced in the story through the use of role plays and partner activities); (5) *To Express* (students are able to communicate their personal feelings toward the central theme illustrated in the story through the opportunity to write about the personal meaning that the story held for them), and (6) *To Participate* (activities that are linked to students newly learned skills that they can carry out in their school community) (Walker, 2000).



## **Boston's After-School for All Partnership**

The City of Boston, Mayor Thomas M. Menino

Barr Foundation

The Boston Foundation

Fleet National Bank, Trustee of the L.G. Balfour Foundation

FleetBoston Financial Foundation

Harvard University

The Hyams Foundation Inc.

Liberty Mutual

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Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

United Way of Massachusetts Bay

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Partnership**

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