

# CHAPTER 1

## Shared Literacy Leadership

### *Getting Involved on Behalf of All Readers and Writers*

We're all in this really hard thing together. Sometimes we laugh, sometimes we want to give up. But we're a team.

—TARYN BENNETT

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It is the beginning of a new school year as the literacy leadership team at Hatchery Hill Elementary School reflect on last year's successes and challenges. As the principal of the school, Mrs. Griffin experiences the same "butterflies-in-the-stomach" feeling that accompanies the start of most new school years, but feels confident in knowing that the school literacy team and district administration are there to support her. Hatchery Hill is a warm and welcoming school community where everyone is involved and has a shared mission and vision for helping each and every young reader and writer reach his or her maximum potential. Within the school community, striving readers receive support from Mrs. Rosenfeld, the literacy specialist and coach. District-level support is provided by Mrs. Calabrese, a supervisor of curriculum and instruction who strongly believes in a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. Another feature that makes Hatchery Hill unique is a teacher-leadership structure, in which informal leaders emerge through their focus on best practices for teaching and learning. All voices in the school are heard and valued. A new addition to the literacy team is Mrs. DeMarco, a lifelong learner who has been teaching second grade for just a little more than 2 years. As the literacy team convenes in September, Mrs. Griffin is excited that her team is balanced and includes a school principal, district-level supervisor, reading specialist, and teacher. Wondering how to start the first meeting of the year, Mrs. Griffin grabs a piece of chart paper and begins to write, "What is our 'WHY?'" She begins to draft ideas for an inclusive tagline to support the school's mission and vision statement. She thinks to herself, "How about: EVERY student is worth hatching?"

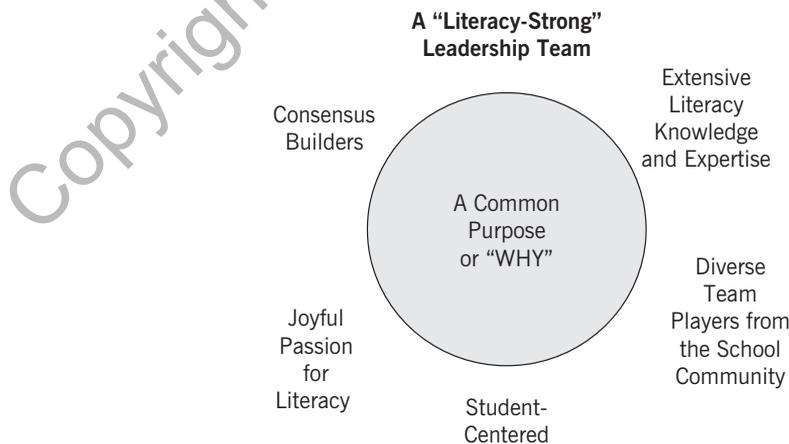
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## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT SHARED LITERACY LEADERSHIP

Twenty-first-century literacy leadership is about a shared commitment toward improving student literacy performance: Shared leadership among stakeholders within and outside schools is necessary in order to actualize educational goals (Lewis-Spector & Jay, 2011). Literacy leadership cannot be shouldered by individuals, and, while there is plenty of research that demonstrates the leadership qualities needed by a principal, for example, for leading a school, studies that focus solely on shared efforts to impact literacy achievement are less common. However, we do know that literacy changemakers are often recognized for (1) having expertise in the foundations of literacy and in meeting the diverse needs of all learners, (2) being familiar with the theory and evolving research around new literacies, (3) sharing their beliefs and knowledge within the school community, and (4) finding creative ways to get their colleagues onboard to support this worthwhile work. When everyone works together and has a strong foundation in literacy best practices, great gains can be realized for students within a local school or district. This type of collaboration also ensures that the literacy aspects of the strategic plan of a school community stay on track, avoiding the top-down mandates that can often result from single individuals making decisions about language arts curriculum and instruction. Figure 1.1 highlights some of the key ingredients of a “literacy-strong” leadership team that are discussed in this chapter.

### How to Find Your “Why”

In order to cultivate a school culture that embraces all students as readers and writers, it is important for all involved in this worthwhile work to have a shared belief about why the work is important. Shared literacy leadership means that everyone must get involved. Many books on school leadership emphasize the importance of getting your

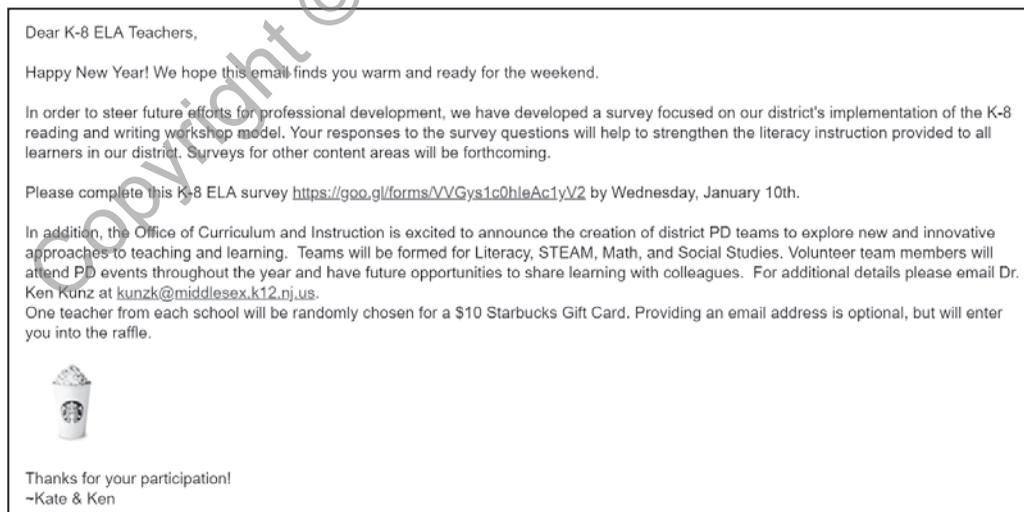


**FIGURE 1.1.** A framework for shared literacy leadership.

faculty and staff “turned on” to the work that lies ahead. In essence, all members of the school community should understand why they are needed and why their work will make the world a better place (Blanchard & Bowles, 1998). In *Move Your Bus: An Extraordinary New Approach to Accelerating Success in Work and Life*, Ron Clark (2015) describes the runners that you will find on your “bus” or within your school community: “These individuals are working as hard as possible, and they essentially carry the load of the bus. They come early or they stay late. They never complain, and they provide a positive spirit. Their work ethic is strong, and their attention to detail is spot on. They are the strongest members of the team, and they are the driving force behind the success of the organization” (p. 4). It is important to seek out the individuals who are committed to literacy teaching and learning. They are the faculty and staff members who are driven by a goal of professional excellence, which can be seen in their daily teaching, interactions with staff, and formal and informal leadership.

### Lit Idea

Spend time listening and learning in your school community. Whether you are an administrator or teacher-leader, it is important to get a pulse for what is happening in your literacy community. Seek out volunteers and form a literacy team (see Figure 1.2). This team should consist of a diverse group of “runners” who are interested in supporting the literacy growth of the school. Team members may include, but are not limited to, administrators, teachers, reading specialists, reading coaches, parents, and child-study specialists. When forming the team, be sure that a majority of the members selected have a strong literacy content knowledge.



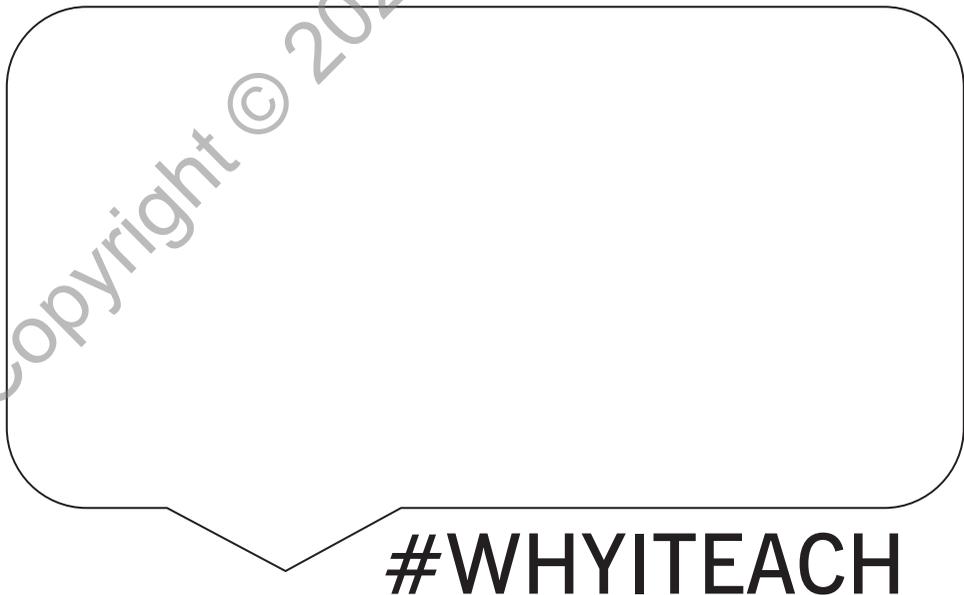
**FIGURE 1.2.** A sample email invitation sent to faculty/staff for joining curricular teams.

In addition to forming a team, increasing staff engagement can also happen in more informal ways. For example, the #WhyITeach campaign on social media is an excellent example of teachers tapping into their “why” and telling their stories. Countless tweets with this hashtag can be found on Twitter, as educators post reasons for why they are proud to be part of such a rewarding profession. No work is more rewarding and valuable than helping students find a joy and passion for reading and writing, while continuing to nurture and develop new skills and apply the new strategies they’ve learned. Teachers can use the template in Figure 1.3 to introduce students to who they are, and what inspires their teaching of reading and writing. Teachers can take a “shelfie,” or selfie picture with a favorite book and post the #WhyITeach poster on their classroom doors to show students, parents, and local community members that literacy is an important part of our lives (see Figure 1.3).

### Lit Idea

Reflect on whether or not your “why” includes a statement that shows a commitment to equity and social justice. Review your school or district mission and vision statement to determine if this commitment is explicitly stated. If not, engage your literacy team and school community in revisiting and revising your mission statement and tagline.

**ELA Department:** \_\_\_\_\_



**FIGURE 1.3.** A template for teachers to reflect on their reasons for choosing to teach in English language arts.

## Mixing Joy in with Your “Why”

As the title of this book suggests, it is our collective belief that now it is more important than ever for us to bring a joy for literacy teaching and learning back into schools and classrooms. Once everyone is turned on to the idea that promoting students' literacy development is worthwhile work, mixing in joy will reap great benefits. Throughout the book, our reference to the concept of bringing joy back into the classroom is based on the following belief: *Helping students realize their potential as readers and writers is an experience that will bring great pleasure and happiness to all of those involved.* According to Eckert (2016), “if I am not enjoying teaching, student learning will suffer. If I am bored, burned out, or beaten down, it is highly unlikely that my students will engage in vibrant learning. This is true for assessment, content, and classroom management—the three cornerstones of quality instruction” (p. 21). In essence, we have to look beyond the high-stakes testing and accountability that often take the joy out of the literacy classroom, and, while it would be naive to write off these powerful factors completely, teachers and literacy leaders are finding new ways to rise above the “noise” and challenges.

## How to Build a Collaborative Team

No matter how strong the administration in a school may be, it is essential to build a collaborative team to create a positive and successful literacy environment where everyone embraces a common purpose and finds joy in helping students succeed. Your team will consist of a variety of stakeholders from the school community, and each member will play an important role in defining and sharing the vision, bringing staff members onboard, building excitement, providing professional development (PD), and mentoring teachers to achieve success. Once your team has been assembled, you will be amazed at the magic that can happen when you put them together in one room! Energy is contagious with leadership teams of dedicated teachers and staff members, and yours will be no different. But before you can start to celebrate your new, invigorated literacy environment, you need to assemble your team of change-makers.

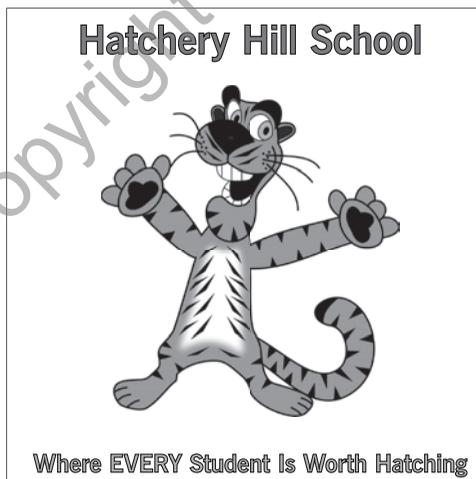
Determining where to start can seem intimidating, but it may be simpler than you think. Deciding who your “runners” are is half the battle. Look around your school environment, and you'll find that nearly everyone you need is already beside you! There are also a wide variety of literacy experts and consultants you can bring into your schools to help guide the process, provide PD to fill gaps or raise awareness, and bring your school's literacy game to the next level. As we know, there is no one in a school with a better understanding of the students' and teachers' needs than the teachers themselves, and that's a great place to start. However, don't forget to look outside the teaching staff for potential literacy leaders. In *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems*, Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn (2016) remind us of the importance of mindful collaboration: “Recognize that finding solutions to complex problems requires the intelligence and talents of everyone. Create a task team that is small but representative of the layers of the organization to strategize

a plan and provide leadership” (p. 22). As you begin to form your collaborative team, consider potential members from various parts of the school community (see Figure 1.4). Keep in mind that it is not only acceptable to have dissenting voices or members with differing opinions on one collaborative team, it can also be necessary to push you in new and exciting directions. Be sure, however, that the people you choose to develop into literacy leaders will be willing to keep an open mind and work professionally alongside people with different beliefs.

In *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*, Brown (2018) refers to these folks as the “square squad.” In essence, her concept suggests that if you were given a 1” × 1” square piece of paper, there are only so many people who will make the cut. They are not necessarily the literacy folks who agree with all of your ideas or those who “yes you to death.” They are the individuals who challenge the status quo in productive ways, always looking to come up with new solutions to complex problems. They are innovative and flexible when it comes to change, and have a special way of dusting off their peers when it’s needed, helping to keep the school on its feet, as opposed to basking in those moments where things seem to be “off balance.” These team players are part of your “power posse,” and will do anything to light and lift you up when it comes to this worthwhile work (Sincero, 2018). As you focus your energy on shared literacy leadership in a school community, unstoppable teams can be formed. At the same time, all teachers should be encouraged to think about who they can lean on to improve outcomes for kids.

### Lit Idea

There is something energizing about being on a team that has shared beliefs for helping all students realize their potential as readers and writers. Building on your school’s tagline, collectively come up with a team name that captures the essence of what your team is all about. For example, a playful, yet spirited, team name might look something like “Smells Like Literacy Team Spirit.”



A sample school logo and tagline, demonstrating a shared belief that all students are valuable members of the learning community.

Team player	Unique contributions to the team
School principal	Building principals have an understanding of the instructional day schedule. They recognize the human capital within their building and how daily functions contribute to (or impede the progress of) educational initiatives. Although it is an added bonus to have a school leader that has expertise in an instructional area, not all of these leaders will identify as “literacy people” (yet). Their understanding of the schedule, finances, and school community needs are incredibly valuable.
Literacy coach/ reading specialist	The literacy coaches and reading specialists likely have advanced degrees, training, and professional development when it comes to a highly specialized area such as literacy. These folks bring a passion to the team because they recognize that literacy opens doors and worlds of possibilities for learners. Invest in their talents.
District supervisor or administrator	District-level administrators play a unique role in that they serve as ambassadors between every school’s needs and what’s outlined in the district’s strategic plan (a cluster of what the district, community, and often-changing local boards of education value). Leaders in this role often have access to a plethora of resources and can support literacy initiatives.
Data specialist	As school leaders, we have to take an <i>honest</i> look at our data. We all know that data can be used to tell a story, and this story can be manipulated on the basis of how it’s presented. For example, school performance reports may show that all targets are met for literacy achievement, but a deeper look at the data suggests that marginalized populations are not meeting targets. If your district does not have a data specialist, consult with an expert who can help point out trends over time and evolving needs. Professional development and professional learning that is steered by fads or spur-of-the-moment hunches or trends are bound to kill the spirit of the faculty and staff.
Teacher	Research confirms that teachers are the number one in-school influence on student achievement, and nothing beats having a respected and quality teacher on a literacy team. Including teachers from different programs and backgrounds is also helpful. Teachers will have expertise in different areas, depending on their courses of study, certifications, and advanced degrees and/or training. Get to know the teachers to find out what they’ve accomplished, what they’ve studied, and what drives their passion for teaching and learning.
Librarian or media specialist	Some of the latest controversies involve ongoing debates as to whether or not having high-quality classroom libraries replaces the need for media specialists and school libraries. It is our unified stance that they work in tandem. Countless articles and resources published by the American Association of School Librarians demonstrate how a joyful librarian and a well-stocked library can transform the literacy culture of a school. In every high-achieving school we have worked in, the library has served as a hub, and even the “heartbeat” of the school.
Support staff	In <i>Breaking Through the Language Arts Block: Organizing and Managing the Exemplary Literacy Day</i> (Morrow et al., 2018), it is argued that language can be used to create a literacy community in the classroom. This same language broadly impacts the school community as a whole. Involve staff members who recognize (or are open to the fact) that literacy development, within the school context, occurs the moment students leave their homes to attend school until the moment they go home. This includes, but is not limited to, administrative assistants, teachers’ aides, custodial staff, cafeteria workers, and school crossing guards. Ask yourself: Who will support our literacy initiatives A.M. to P.M.?

(continued)

FIGURE 1.4. An incomplete list of potential literacy team players.

Team player	Unique contributions to the team
Parent	Parents all want the best for their children. If you are able to identify one, or even a few key parents to be part of the literacy team, you will have insight into messages about the school's progress based on a variety of social media representations and talk between parents. Parents are always invested in their local schools and have a vested interest in these schools serving the needs of their children. The story we imagine may not always be the story being told.
Board of education member	These individuals have been elected to represent the community regarding the management of the public schools. Connect with board members who have a shared interest in literacy. In order to do this, you have to attend board functions (e.g., board meetings, curriculum committee meetings). Find the board member who shares a wide smile when curriculum is updated to reflect the diversity of the children attending the district's schools. Embrace the board member who smiles from ear to ear when discussing that books are making their way into homes and reaching the hands of readers of all ages.
College/university literacy consultant	It is well known that every school and district has a story that is being written (voluntarily or involuntarily). Partner with a local college or university literacy consultant to take charge of your literacy story. Even with the smallest amount of federal, state, or local funds, our team has witnessed literacy transformations in myriad ways. Take advantage of the research and scholarship that often exist not far from the city limits of where you teach and learn.

FIGURE 1.4. (continued)

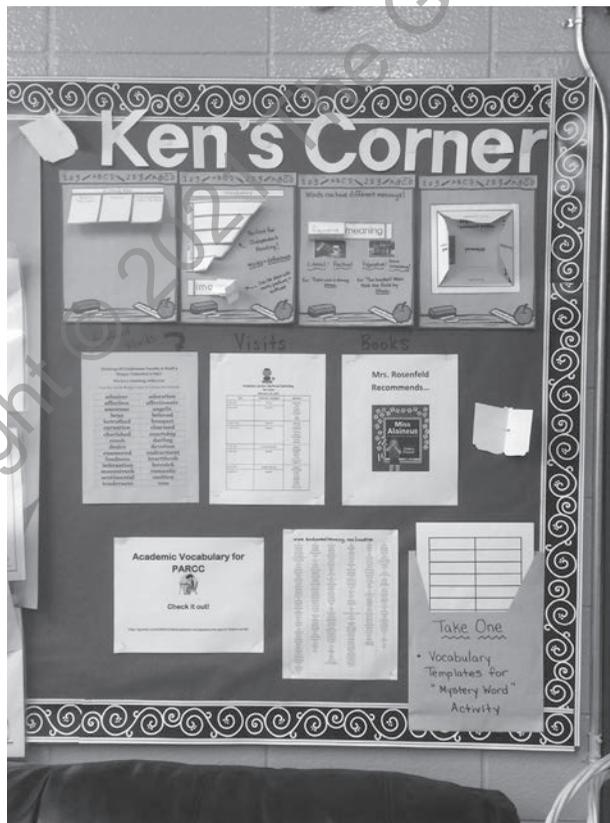


A bulletin board space allows for “staff shout-outs,” building a collaborative culture in the school.

## How to Seek Out the Connected Literacy Leaders

When seeking out connected literacy leaders in our school communities one should consider the words of Brown (2018): “a leader is someone who holds herself or himself accountable for finding potential in people and processes.” Therefore, as literacy changemakers we must be accountable for finding the potential in those assigned to our charge. Seeking out these individuals should not be a simple formality, or a matter of choosing favorites or familiar colleagues, and most definitely should not involve nepotism. As the leader of a school community, caution and care should be dedicated to seeking out those who are committed to 21st-century learning, contemporary best practices, and virtual professional learning networks (PLNs). We must keep an eye out for the individuals who are engaged in professional development long after the dismissal bell has rung.

True literacy leaders can often be overlooked and be hidden in plain sight. They may be outliers, for example, implementing practices unfamiliar to some of the in-house colleagues. Where are these other forward-thinking educators? Many are found sharing virtual PLNs or attending unconferences, such as Global EdCamps,



A bulletin board space in the faculty room of a school provides an area where teachers can access literacy resources from the literacy specialist/coach.

and collaborative events taking place on weekends. Twitter is one platform where countless educators connect daily with colleagues in their favorite PLNs. They connect to share ideas, to learn from one another, and to improve their craft and practice. Imagine the wealth of knowledge shared across social media from the highest level administrators to preservice educators. Then, picture the individuals who return to their school communities full of newfound passion, insight, and wisdom. They are the literacy leaders who have the fuel to fire up literacy initiatives. Ask yourself: Are any of the folks described here hidden in plain sight in your school community? If so, it is worth every effort to get these changemakers on the team!

### Lit Idea

After professional development days or literacy workshops have taken place, keep an eye out for the leaders who have returned fully ignited and equipped to lead change and be part of a greater literacy movement. They may be walking and talking missed opportunities. Take a moment to canvass these hidden jewels within your school communities. Identify the literacy areas in need of attention where these leaders can take action and get involved.

## Emphasizing a Core Mission and Values for Literacy

Once a strong team is established, it may still take time for individuals to articulate a core literacy mission and literacy values for the school community. Consider the challenge posed in the following anecdote:

After partnering with a local university's literacy center, Mrs. Griffin is excited to have some additional support in her school, as fresh and new ideas for comprehensive literacy instruction are shared with her literacy team. Teachers appear to be embracing the components of an exemplary literacy day and excited to begin making changes to their instruction with embedded support from coaches. One influential member of the team, however, remains unsure about the "why" behind the literacy work that the school is pursuing. He asks, "If our scores are so low, can't we just have the students read at home and not in school, so that the teachers can teach when the kids are in class?"

It is evident that, at times, literacy team members or stakeholders in a local community will question the decisions that teachers and administrators make when it comes to teaching and learning. If you are familiar with the work of the "book whisperer," Donalyn Miller, you may realize that the time is ripe for the literacy team to declare, "We've got research, yes we do! We've got research, how about you?" A core literacy mission and literacy instruction values should be based on key findings in the research. For example, Allington (2002) found that time spent reading in school is one of the major factors that define effective literacy instruction. He warns that

when “stuff” dominates reading instruction, warning flags should go up, and that classrooms with high levels of student literacy achievement include opportunities for more guided reading, independent reading, and reading in the content areas. According to the International Literacy Association (ILA; 2018b), over 781 million people worldwide still cannot read and write. We also know that if a child is not on grade level by the end of third grade, he or she has less than a 10% chance of ever making it to grade level in the future. A collaborative literacy team must reference the research and present a call to action that brings all stakeholders on board.

### Lit Idea

Recognize the difference between a literacy core mission and values. When drafting a literacy core mission, the literacy team should reflect on what the school community is actually going to *do* for all readers and writers. The values should be a statement of what the local school community *aspires to do* for all readers and writers.

## BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND: WELCOME TO THE EXEMPLARY LITERACY DAY

In *Breaking Through the Language Arts Block: Organizing and Managing the Exemplary Literacy Day* (Morrow, Kunz, & Hall, 2018), we began our work by introducing the literacy community to our new way of thinking about moving beyond what is traditionally referred to as the “reading block.” Instead, our work with colleagues at Rutgers University led us to embrace the idea of a comprehensive literacy day over a “balanced” program with pieced-together components of literacy instruction. In essence, we advocate for a literacy day in which readers and writers engage in authentic and relevant literacy experiences across the school day and beyond the reading classroom. Morrow et al. (2018) state, “It is important to understand that the exemplary literacy day is not a prepackaged program. Instead, it is a compilation of best practices that will allow teachers to use data and professional judgment to become experts in their craft. Research has proven that there is no program or material that is best for all children” (p. 2).

Because it is our belief that literacy changemaking is not limited to early childhood and elementary schools, two formats for an exemplary or ideal, literacy day are outlined (see Figures 1.5 and 1.6). While the K–6 exemplary literacy day is dissected in detail in *Breaking through the Language Arts Block: Organizing and Managing the Exemplary Literacy Day*, it is our belief that a core part of being a literacy changemaker is embracing the nature of literacy instruction and the possibilities that exist when decisions not to use purchased programs are made. Each outlined exemplary literacy day can be orchestrated through authentic lesson and unit design or by adapting resources provided by local schools and districts.

**Do-Now or Think-Now** (10–15 minutes)

Upon arriving at school, students should . . .

- Engage in an immediate independent or partner activity in reading or writing that sets the tone for the rest of the day.
- Practice skills and strategies previously taught and prepare for the day's lessons.
- Partner read/write or independently read/write.
- Contribute to writing journal entries.
- Take a partner on a tour of his or her reading or writing journal.

**Vocabulary Meeting** (15–20 minutes)

- Students participate in an activity centered on a vocabulary-enriched message.
- Students collaborate to deepen their understanding of word meanings.
- Utilize a vocabulary word wall in the classroom to reinforce word meanings.

**Reading Comprehension Workshop** (time varies, 30–60 minutes)

- Time may be spent engaging the students in a read-aloud, during which the teacher will utilize questioning and think-aloud techniques.
- Students engage in a comprehension-focused mini-lesson, in which strategies and skills are taught to help students master grade-appropriate comprehension skills.
- Time is set aside for independent/partner practice concentrating on the strategies and skills taught.
- The teacher confers with readers.
- The teacher and students participate in a group share.

**Guided Reading, Strategy Groups, and Literacy Work Stations** (minimum of two rotations of 15–20 minutes each)

- For guided reading, teachers meet with small, homogeneous groups of no more than six students to explicitly teach strategies and reinforce skills as needed.
- With strategy groups, teachers meet with small, heterogeneous groups of no more than six students who share a common need for strategy or skill instruction.
- Students can move through literacy work stations to practice strategies and skills previously taught. An accountability assignment should be included at each literacy station; however, the teacher may choose to emphasize one accountability assignment in particular.
- When students reach a maximum 40-minute stamina for independent reading, teachers may choose to utilize literacy work stations only when needed.
- Common literacy work stations include listening (comprehension), word work (vocabulary and spelling), writing (independent or partner), library (independent or partner), and technology (skill-based programs).

**Word-Work Session** (15–20 minutes, but varies according to different approaches used)

- Teachers provide explicit instruction in phonemic awareness (for early and emergent readers) or phonics/decoding (for emergent, transitional, and fluent readers).
- Students often engage in word sorts, word building, and word games.
- Programs vary according to school districts.

**Writing Workshop** (time varies, 30–60 minutes)

- Students engage in a writing-focused mini-lesson in which strategies are taught to help them master grade-appropriate writing skills.
- Time is set aside for independent/partner practice concentrating on the strategies and skills taught.
- The teacher confers with writers.
- The teacher and students participate in a group share.

**Interdisciplinary Project-Based Instruction (IPBI)** (time varies)

- IPBI is a student-interest-based project that crosses disciplines.
- Long-term activities include research and the creation and completion of a project that demonstrates student learning.

(continued)

**FIGURE 1.5.** Sample exemplary elementary literacy day.

- IPBI may also include connections to iSTEAM (integrated Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics).
- Reading and writing skills are embedded throughout the project.

**Wrap-Up** (5 minutes)

At the end of each school day, conclude on a positive note by saying to the students:

- “What did you learn today in reading and writing that is most important to you?”
- “You can choose to read a poem, riddle, joke, or short story, or to sing a song.”

**FIGURE 1.5.** (continued)

For schools that utilize a block schedule, the time spent on each component can be doubled or adjusted based on the needs of the students.

**Do-Now or Think-Now** (10–15 minutes)

Upon arriving at school, students should . . .

- Engage in an immediate independent or partner activity in reading or writing that sets the tone for the rest of the day.
- Squeeze juicy vocabulary words to create lists of synonyms/antonyms, student-friendly definitions, graphic or illustrated representations, lists of words based on an analysis of word roots or meaningful word parts.
- Practice the skills and strategies previously taught and prepare for the day’s lessons.
- Partner read/write or independently read/write.
- Contribute to writing journal entries.
- Take a partner on a tour of his or her reading or writing journal.

Optional: When time is scarce, consider rotating the use of the Reading Comprehension Workshop and the Writing Workshop.

**Reading Comprehension Workshop** (time varies, 30 minutes)

- Time may be spent engaging the students in a read-aloud, in which the teacher will utilize questioning and think-aloud techniques.
- Students engage in a comprehension-focused mini-lesson in which strategies and skills are taught to help students master grade-appropriate comprehension skills.
- Time is set aside for independent/partner practice concentrating on the strategies and skills taught.
- Students may spend time collaborating in inquiry literature circles or book clubs.
- The teacher confers with readers.
- The teacher and students participate in a group share.

**Writing Workshop** (time varies, 30 minutes)

- Students engage in a writing-focused mini-lesson in which strategies are taught to help them master grade-appropriate writing skills.
- Time is set aside for independent/partner practice concentrating on the strategies and skills taught.
- The teacher confers with writers.
- The teacher and students participate in a group share.

**Wrap-Up** (5 minutes)

- At the end of each school day, end on a positive note by asking the students:
- “How does your independent reading today contribute to your reading life?”
- “What reading and writing skills or strategies have you been working on?”

**FIGURE 1.6.** Sample exemplary middle and high school literacy day.

**Lit  Idea**

Beginning with the end in mind can have a promising impact if teachers and building leaders are able to witness best practices in action. When it comes to the implementation of an exemplary literacy day, consider reflecting on the following question: “Which are the schools and districts to watch?” Scheduling a visit to another school allows you to reimagine what literacy instruction could look like in your school. To avoid information overload, insist that each team visitor look at the school environment through a different lens.

**TAKE THE TIME TO BUILD CONSENSUS**

All of the research and experience of our own point to the fact that consensus within the group when making decisions is truly important. But when we speak of consensus, what exactly do we mean? Consensus does not mean that all members of the group have reached 100% agreement about a course of action. It does, however, mean that all stakeholders have gone through a process that has allowed them a voice in the decision making, and that the decision is something all parties “can live with.” It is generally agreed that the principles of consensus building include that it is:

- inclusive, in that as many stakeholders are involved in the discussions as possible;
- participatory, because everyone is given a chance to contribute;
- collaborative, as the group modifies the proposal to address individual needs, but no one has individual ownership;
- agreement seeking, because the goal is to find as much agreement as possible; and
- cooperative, in that the good of the group is foremost in the minds of stakeholders.

Building consensus is a multistep process, and all members of the group need to understand its ultimate goal. It is helpful, also, to bring food to meetings. While having food may seem like a small gesture, it can have a big impact when the group is “hitting the wall” and needs just a small boost to regain momentum. A highly successful consensus-building superintendent we know always carried a “chocolate salad” to team meetings. This, of course, was a large crystal bowl filled to the brim with all kinds of chocolate “fun-size” candy bars and tossed with salad tongs. For many people, chocolate = joy. We have witnessed several times when this kind of treat helped to save the day.

The steps in the consensus-building process include:

- discussion,
- identification of the proposal,
- identification of remaining concerns,

- collaborative modification of the proposal to address concerns,
- assessment of the degree of support for the proposal, and
- finalization of the decision or a return to the step that addresses remaining concerns.

There are several reasons to use this process, because the goals include concepts that make it most productive for school groups. The process also results in decisions that are more likely to:

- be better for the group, since they include input from each stakeholder;
- allow for better implementation, due to the degree of agreement by all parties; and
- contribute to better group relationships because of the cooperative group atmosphere.

Would it be simpler for a central office administrator or principal to create a mission statement and an action plan and hand it down to teachers, parents, and students? Quite possibly, yes. The trouble with this model is that we have all seen it fail so many times. Without the buy-in of major stakeholders and the commitment achieved through consensus, even the strongest initiatives will often fail to take hold.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we present a case for shared literacy leadership and the importance of having a team joyfully engaged in collaborating around a shared purpose (why) for impacting readers and writers across diverse school contexts. We combine the research (what) with the practice (how), while reintroducing the exemplary literacy day and the components of comprehensive literacy instruction. “Lit Ideas” for success in classrooms and schools are suggested, and opportunities for advocating for social justice and equity are introduced. The reader is introduced to literacy changemakers and vignettes representing real leaders and decision makers in the field. Now, it is time for an aspiring literacy changemaker to stop, think, and take action.

### Stop, Think, and Take Action

Based on the ideas presented in this chapter on shared literacy leadership, take time to consider the ways in which you might get everyone involved to support readers and writers in your local school community. Reflect on the following:

*If your role is that of a . . .*

- **Classroom teacher or teacher-leader**—Consider the impact that you have in your classroom and local school community. What is one idea from the chapter that you could put into practice? Think of one or two colleagues who might be willing to join you.
- **Literacy specialist or literacy coach**—What are the benefits of forming a literacy team

in your school? If you already have a team formed, how might you engage teachers in reflecting on the exemplary literacy day?

- **School administrator or school-level leader**—What are some ways in which you will communicate your “why” with key stakeholders? How will you spotlight your literacy mission and core values?
- **District administrator or district-level leader**—We live in a world where data seem plentiful. Moving beyond simply documenting literacy successes and challenges, consider a forum for having an honest conversation about student achievement. Ask yourself, “Which students in the school community need your attention now more than ever?”
- **Professional developer**—Consider how you can support the decisions that the educational professionals in the schools where you work have made. Plan two to three steps to foster a sense of shared leadership in the school community.