In a Human Restoration Project *podcast, Cornelius Minor stated the following:*

> *So much of teaching has become this kind of cult of personality about the teacher. And really, it has to be about the community of kids that I'm serving. And so I'm really interested in, and again, to answer the question really specifically—of moving from this teacher monologue to authentic dialogue where we are engaging with children about crafting sustainable futures for them. (McNutt, 2019)*

> *Guiding students with self-assessing, setting goals, creating or sourcing tools, and selecting resources brings longevity to responsive instruction—equipping and sustaining students for a future in which writing is a tool for amplifying voices, solving problems, instilling change, healing, documenting, and inventing. However uncertain, such a future is one in which students learn to be the trailblazer of their own narrative.*

In planning this book, we knew no chapter would hold greater importance than this one. After all, time is limited with each group of students; a limited amount of time to nurture a love of writing, to move alongside children in their path, to celebrate and share their writing with the world.

Sure, on paper (and in many sections of this book), goals derive from developmental progressions. But reaching those expectations isn't the ultimate goal. When students leave the classroom and go off into the world, the skills, habits, mindsets, and identities they've cultivated as writers have the power to propel them to continue the work long into the future. What is built with them in the classrooms is the foundation for what can come. The most important skills are transferable—applicable in the classroom *and* in the world, as practitioners in writing workshops *and* practitioners in the world.

In the spring of 2020, students around the world left their classrooms much sooner than anticipated. A global pandemic—COVID-19—was not in curricular plans. Yet, with little time to prepare, students navigated school in unprecedented ways. This chapter, where we originally intended to tinker, explore, and dream with students as they grow agency of their learning, feels suddenly more urgent than ever.

During the time we wrote this chapter under quarantine orders, our own work in the

districts we serve has pivoted from predetermined units and genre studies to writing projects that must be immediately purposeful, relevant, and abundant with choice. We're supporting children and families with creating schedules, plans, workspaces, tools, and goals that are responsive to unique and diverse needs. During the spring of 2020, children spent more time working independently than ever before—documenting history in journals, sending mail to loved ones, hanging signs in windows, and taking their writing to the streets for protests against police brutality.

At the time of writing this chapter, we're not sure how the education system will evolve. We think of Arundhati Roy's (2020) quote: "Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next."

We are certain of this, however: It is imperative to teach students how to—independently, and with peers—assess, set goals, practice, and seek inspiration and mentors from in school or in the world. By doing so, preparedness shifts from developmental benchmarks and standardized tests to preparedness for self- and peer reliance. We cannot guarantee whether students will learn in our physical classroom environment, nor that they will always have educators and environments that are responsive. Because of this, the dynamic of responsiveness changes from *teacher responding to students* to *students responding to circumstance*—to problems or opportunities, to environment, to stakeholders.

This chapter culminates from all of the work presented in previous chapters. As with everything leading up to this point, we hope to inspire more than overwhelm. Throughout, you'll find charts that represent the gradual release of the components of writing instruction. Knowing that the gradual release model correlates to effective instruction and learning (Fisher & Frey, 2013), we recommend progressing along a continuum from teacher driven to student driven. There are also examples and dialogues for teaching into the processes and tools involved so that children have a clear understanding of the *why* and *how* before getting started.

Empowering students is often the messiest, most nonlinear, off-the-script teaching but also the most creative, innovative, fulfilling, and fun! We've outlined a process for student-driven work, because we're teachers, and teachers lean on outlines and processes. But this process is not definitive, and it is ever evolving. So we're inviting you into the process. Tinker, explore, dream, loosen up the reins, and *get messy*.

A Preview of This Chapter . . .

The structure mirrors the structure of the book, with a shift in focus from *responsiveness through the four domains* to *responsiveness through student-driven learning*:

- Assessments
- Planning
- Charts
- Mentor texts
- Demonstration texts

In each section, we share the following:

- *Why* student-driven learning matters
- *How* to gradually release ownership of learning through a continuum of teacher driven, to teacher facilitated, to student driven
- *What* student-driven learning can look like, in photographs, from Grades K–5.
- *What about the domains of responsiveness?*

Although we don't structure this chapter around the four domains of responsiveness in the same way as we have in other chapters, the domains are relevant and integrated here. We believe there is no greater responsiveness than student-made choices, modifications or creations of assessments, plans, charts, mentor texts, and demonstration texts. When student driven and student created, these components of writing instruction can do the following:

- Align with students' individual strengths and goals *(academic responsiveness)*
- Be written with language that students can access *(linguistic responsiveness)*
- Display text and visuals that reflect students' identities *(cultural responsiveness)*
- Incorporate students' interests and social-emotional development *(social-emotional responsiveness)*