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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The Responsive Writing Teacher, Grades K-5* by Melanie Meehan and Kelsey Sorum.

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## Why Responsive Plans Matter

In a 2018 interview, Zaretta Hammond stated, “Engagement comes when we are doing complex cognitive work that is fun... it is all about helping students not only reclaim their sense of confidence but be the leaders of their own learning—getting them to the point where as independent learners they are carrying the majority of the cognitive load.”

The learning environment of our dreams looks like the forest did that day: kids motivated by highly engaging goals, who are invited to practice through multiple paths of entry, in an atmosphere of trusted peer collaboration and feedback, with safe grounds for taking risks—alongside teachers, who coach, nudge, and offer a boost when needed.

Such an environment is possible, though it cannot be preprescribed. There is not one plan that we nor anyone else can offer that leads to the energy described. Such a plan can only be crafted for the classroom in which it will come to life. This is not to say educators should abandon curricular plans or devise their plans from scratch. These plans anchor work in developmental benchmarks, norm learning experiences across grade levels, and are often based on researched methods of learning.

What we are suggesting, and hope to make actionable in this chapter, is that educators modify, or as Cornelius Minor (2018) describes in *We Got This*, bend curriculum to align with each group of writers: the strengths, goals, language development, cultures, and interests that cannot be predicted by curriculum writers.

## Types of Plans

Thinking about plans, we funnel our considerations into the ideas and concepts students should learn for the year, how those concepts divide and support units of study, and then the daily teaching and learning plans that take aim at key standards and learning objectives. Many districts have a scope and sequence that structure and guide the year of learning. From there, units exist, outlining what students should be able to do and understand at various points.

The Understanding By Design framework, as described by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2011), aligns standards and content in three stages:

- Stage 1: Identify desired results.
- Stage 2: Determine assessment evidence.
- Stage 3: Plan learning experiences and instruction.

Leaning on this framework, begin by determining the concepts and skills students should learn by the end of the year; many districts have a scope and sequence that structures and guides the year of learning. From there, unit plans or genre studies provide a context for the instruction of those concepts and skills. At that point, daily plans can be designed with specific learning objectives. These plans contain opportunities for the following:

- A short lesson with a clearly defined teaching point
- Small-group lessons that target specific skills
- Individual conferences with students
- Share sessions when student work can be highlighted

## Planning Across the Domains

Knowing students across all four domains is a prerequisite to the responsive modifications in this chapter (and in each chapter that follows!). The planning tools provided work best alongside information collected, which is why we reference Chapter 1 so frequently.

In our opinion, this work is among the most challenging aspects of writing instruction. It can be, without a doubt, disheartening when carefully designed plans don't result in targeted growth. When this happens, the focus is often this: Why aren't students progressing as they *should* be? Responsive instruction reframes this question: Why aren't plans leading to targeted growth for students?

While writing this book, we wondered how to modify plans to better fit students (rather than the other way around). We even experimented with trying different approaches, paying close attention to the impact we have on student learning. Action research is powerful, and we leaned on the four-step model of identifying a problem or question, planning an approach, collecting data, and then analyzing or deciding upon next steps (Sagor, 2011). This approach inspired us to consider and then plan for various entry points and domains, capitalizing on students' strengths and supporting them in their development and learning.

As Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990) illustrate in *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*,

The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that [they] can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for students to become themselves.

Through multiple entry points, accessible language, representative contexts, and topics of interest, teachers can lean on what is known about students to plan instruction with as much emphasis on liberation as on academic skills.

Academic Responsiveness	Linguistic Responsiveness	Cultural Responsiveness	Social-Emotional Responsiveness
↓	↓	↓	↓
<b>Plan instruction that has . . .</b>			
Multiple entry points for students to access instruction and develop skills  Differentiated systems and structures for students to access instruction and practice independently	Supports to help students understand, communicate, and develop content-specific language and vocabulary  Supports for students who are developing expressive and receptive language	Connections, content, and contexts that are reflective of diverse communities	Writing experiences that are meaningful and align with student interests  Safe and supportive opportunities for students to take risks and work collaboratively