Our Core Beliefs: The Foundations of the Daily 5

Respected adults engage in respect-full interactions in which respectful students can bloom.

—Marie-Nathalie Beaudoin

What beliefs and principles influence your teaching and learning goals? As we work to create independent learners, the following core beliefs serve as the foundation upon which the Daily 5 is built.

- ■ Trust and Respect
- ■ Community
- ■ Choice
- ■ Accountability
- ■ Brain Research
- ■ Transitions as Brain and Body Breaks
- ■ 10 Steps to Independence

In this chapter we describe the first six beliefs listed here. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the seventh, the 10 Steps to Independence.

Trust and Respect

Meaningful learning requires respect and trust between the teacher and students. Taking time to build trust and demonstrate respect is the foundation upon which all other elements of learning are built. Each child is worthy of trust and respect.

Prior to developing the Daily 5, we underestimated our students' abilities to read or write for an extended period of time on their own. Because we didn't believe our students capable of doing it, we didn't trust them to do it. And with little respect for our students' abilities to sustain independent reading and writing, we thought they needed to have "activities" to keep them busy. After all, reading for an extended period of time was foreign to them, but activities were certainly not new.

The change came when we realized that the reason our students were unable to stay engaged was the fact that we were asking them to do unauthentic activities and had never explicitly taught them how to engage in meaningful reading and writing. Looking back, it seems odd to us. If children came to our class needing to be taught to become better readers, we had such respect for them; of course we would teach them the skills and strategies to achieve that goal. However, if students came to our class without the stamina or engagement skills needed to sustain reading and writing, we didn't realize we should teach them these things just as we taught reading skills and strategies to them. We simply assumed we couldn't trust

them to read and write independently, so we put "activities" into their hands in an effort to keep them independently engaged. We finally realized that we could *teach* students how to build stamina and stay engaged in reading and writing for longer periods of time.

The Daily 5 works when we trust students, but it is not a blind trust. Through the 10 Steps to Independence (see Chapter 3) and guided practice, behaviors that can be sustained over time are gradually developed. Because we have taught our students how to read and write independently, we now trust and respect their abilities and can focus on teaching rather than policing. Individual students manage their own behavior. Children rise or fall, according to our expectations.

Trusting children is the underpinning of what makes the Daily 5 work. Trust is believing the best of others, even if actions or behaviors seem incongruent. If, while reading a book that is both a good fit and interesting, a student doesn't read the whole time, trust allows us to believe that the student hasn't yet developed stamina. When explicit instruction and extended practice are combined, our students acquire the skills necessary to become trusted, independent learners.

At times, despite having learned and practiced the skills of being independent learners, some students' stamina may falter or they may find themselves not being independent. Our deep-rooted trust in children's ability to learn the necessary skills of independence through explicit instruction and guided practice is what allows us to teach them again and trust them again. We look at these children and say to ourselves, "They are not being mischievous or malevolent; they need more instructional support and time to build stamina."

When Maria and Isaiah were in our class they were often the students who ran out of stamina first. Even well into the year they had physiological challenges that made it difficult to maintain stamina on some days. Every day, as the whole-group focus lesson concluded, we dismissed the rest of the students and then privately touched base with Maria and Isaiah and asked them to tell us what their plan was and double-checked that they knew what to do. On the days when their stamina was tapped out well before the other students' stamina, we would kindly bring the two of them back together, do another check-in with them, repeating instruction and practice if necessary, and then trust that they knew what to do and would carry it out.

Sometimes Maria and Isaiah were able to participate in all three rounds of Daily 5 with no extra support. Other days they needed us to have patience and guide them by making certain they knew what to do.

Even on difficult days, the key was to trust Maria and Isaiah. Knowing they were doing the best they were able to do and giving them more support, we sent the clear message, "Even though you just lost stamina early, we don't carry the memory of that off-task behavior into the next round. We believe in you. We trust that you can do it."

Community

We spend a great deal of effort creating and maintaining a healthy classroom culture. We build from a foundation of trust and respect to create an environment of learning and caring for all students. It starts with getting to know each other the first days of school and is embedded in the schedules we design together, the rules we construct together, the writing we fashion as a group, and the stories we read and draw on. The environment of the community becomes more intricate with each shared activity and lesson. For example, for weeks after reading aloud *The False Prince* by Jennifer A. Nielsen, it wasn't unusual to hear the class talking about Sage, the lead character. Each new group of children will fashion their own unique community based on the schema they bring to the classroom. This, our shared experiences and knowledge, binds us together.

A sense of community empowers students to hold others accountable for behaviors, learning, respect, and kindness. If a student is disruptive during work time, the community will join together to encourage, support, and positively hold this child accountable for his or her learning behavior, often referring to one of the posted I-charts to do so (see "I-charts," page 60). For example, when Michelle had a difficult time staying focused on her book, Talon quietly and respectfully redirected her by referring to the I-chart for Read-to-Self behaviors.

We work hard to help students understand that we are all in various stages of development. Students are taught to honor where they are and where their classmates are in their learning journeys. It isn't uncommon for two children to sit side by side, one with a chapter book and one with an early picture book, completely comfortable with the truth that each selection meets that individual's need at that particular moment.

Once the culture of honor and respect has been deeply established, the community becomes a place where achieved goals, and even small steps of progress, are met with sincere rejoicing. It is group dynamics at its finest.

Michael was a new student to our classroom. He arrived with a chip on his shoulder as well as a report card and note from his last teacher indi-

cating that he was reading substantially below grade level. And due to his attitude, Michael was at risk of not meeting the end-of-year standard.

When another student, Amanda, asked Michael to do Read to Someone with her, he was unwilling to read aloud, but listened to Amanda read to him. Each day she chose him as a reading partner, coaxing him to check for understanding with what she read, bringing him along into our positive community. After five days of Read to Someone with Amanda, Michael pulled out a good-fit book and quietly took a turn reading. This time Amanda checked for understanding. At the end of Daily 5 that day, as we were reviewing what we had learned, Amanda raised her hand and said, "I learned that Michael is a great Read-to-Someone partner and has really good fluency." His grin was instant, the whole class cheered, and Michael was well on his way to making the end-of-year standard, as he now felt the comfort of a community that honored all progress by each student.

Choice

Choice is highly motivating and it is one of the cornerstones of Daily 5. In an article on engagement in learning Gambrell wrote, "Choice has been identified as a powerful force that allows students to take ownership and responsibility for their learning. Studies indicate that motivation increases when students have opportunities to make choices about what they learn and when they believe they have some autonomy or control over their own learning" (2011, 175). In fact, not only does motivation increase, but also success: "It appears that students who are allowed to choose their own reading materials are more motivated to read, expend more effort, and gain better understanding of the text" (Guthrie, quoted in Gambrell 2011, 175).

Through Daily 5 students have control over what they read and write, where they sit, and the activity they participate in. Just as with trust, the opportunity to choose has to be earned and occurs only after instruction and practice.

Introducing choice in the Daily 5 can be daunting. Each year on the day we planned to introduce our students to choice in the Daily 5 (see page 110 for more on introducing choice), we felt a bit like we were jumping into the deep end of the pool without being able to swim. We would call each other and try to justify why our kids weren't ready to choose. But what were we really giving up? Control? A neat and tidy literacy time? Since we had taught our students to be independent with each of the Daily 5 tasks and had exposed them to all the different places to sit in the room through the lens of "Is this a place where you and others can be
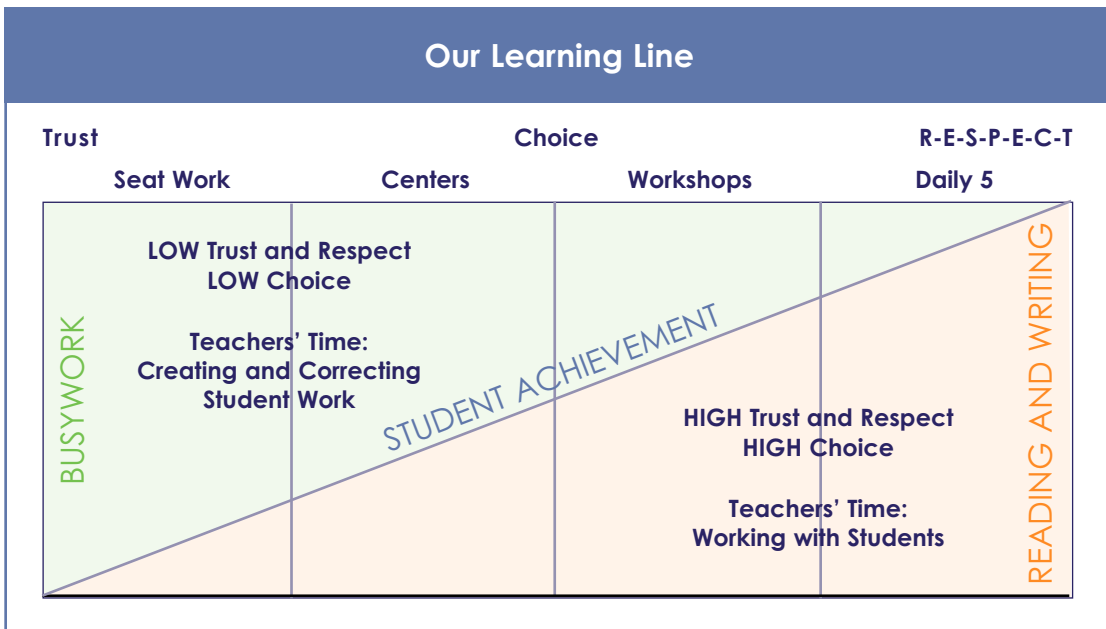
independent?" we would laugh and say to each other, "We have no reason to be nervous. After all, we've taught them how to be independent with each of the Daily 5 choices; the order they choose will not make a difference." What resulted, every year without fail, was a chorus of students expressing their excitement and oftentimes demonstrating extended stamina the very first day we allowed them to choose. We didn't need to feel anxious!

We recently met a new teacher at one of our conferences. She had taken over a very difficult fifth-grade classroom midyear. On her first day with this class, she introduced the Daily 5. All day she struggled with students' difficult attitudes and behaviors. She quickly got Read to Self and Work on Writing up and running so she could move into giving the children choice over their Daily 5 schedule. The day she introduced choice and had her students practice choosing between Read to Self and Work on Writing, all the students headed out to recess after Daily 5 time buzzing with excitement over being allowed to control their schedule. The most challenging child lingered behind. He approached this new teacher and in no uncertain terms told her she was "the coolest teacher" he had ever had because he didn't like people telling him what to do!

It rings true for all of us, not just the children we serve: When we have some say in the matter, we are much more motivated to complete the task.

Looking back on our literacy block development (see Figure 2.1), it is easy to see that at the beginning of our careers we maintained a high level

Figure 2.1
The Development of Our Literacy Block

Our Learning Line

Trust   Choice   R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Seat Work   Centers   Workshops   Daily 5

BUSYWORK

LOW Trust and Respect
LOW Choice

Teachers' Time:
Creating and Correcting
Student Work

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

HIGH Trust and Respect
HIGH Choice

Teachers' Time:
Working with Students

READING AND WRITING

of control over our students. We were in charge of what they read, where they sat, and the activities they participated in. Early in our careers we had little trust and little respect for students, and we gave them little choice in their learning. As we look at our literacy block now, we can see that it was the Daily 5 that led us to a high degree of trust and respect for children as we have taught them to make their own choices.

Without a doubt, choice is an essential core belief and true foundation for the success of Daily 5.

Accountability

We used to believe that accountability was about us "holding" students accountable. Picture this: It was a silent room, children sitting at desks busy with the exact same worksheets and assignments. We were looming over students, clipboard or grade book in hand, keeping track of the completion of their work. Because many of the students did not have the ability to fill out the worksheets, we needed to be out among the children, managing and redirecting, flitting from child to child in order to help them complete their work. And since so many of our students were unable to sit at desks comfortably, this resulted in us managing their behavior. It was not a pretty picture. Our students weren't making the progress we knew they were capable of, so we began researching the components of a meaningful, successful, and productive literacy block. Our research led us to the five tasks that we developed into the Daily 5. We also realized that accountability is a two-way street. With the Daily 5, we needed to be accountable to our students by thoroughly teaching them what it looks like, feels like, and sounds like to participate in these productive tasks. Through the research and the changes we made to our literacy block, our perception of accountability changed as well.

Now we teach our children to be accountable for choosing their own comfortable spots all around the room where they engage in meaningful reading and writing for extended periods of time. When launching the Daily 5 using the 10 Steps to Independence, we introduce children to all of the spots they can work when we Place Students Around the Room (step 6). Over time, our children show they are accountable for finding their own work places by choosing a location where they can be independent and maintain stamina. During the work times, the room is not completely silent. Instead, we have taught students to be accountable for the level of noise they create, resulting in a hum of productive and engaged conversa-

tions. Students show their accountability by keeping their voices to a level that allows others in the room to work independently. There are always days throughout the year where seat placement and voice level are not up to standard. At that time, it may require stepping back as a class, having a discussion, or reteaching or reviewing the I-charts. If it is merely an individual who is not being accountable for his or her behavior, we may simply need an individual conference.

Children no longer require management from us to complete unrelated worksheets and assignments. Instead, we have taught our students to select meaningful reading materials and writing topics, which naturally results in a high level of motivation, engagement, and achievement (Gambrell 2011). Meaningful independence is the ultimate in student accountability.

Brain Research

If you're familiar with the first edition of *The Daily 5*, one of the first things you may notice when looking at the updated, linear look of the Daily 5 schedule (shown in Figures 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6) is the brevity of the whole-group focus lessons between rounds of Daily 5. The short length of time of these lessons is not accidental; it's a reflection of the importance of brain-compatible learning time.

Years ago we had the opportunity to hear Ken Wesson speak at a conference. He was the first person we encountered who made a direct connection between children's ages and the impact lesson length has on their ability to process and retain information presented during direct instruction. It was Wesson who originally taught us the rule of thumb that would change the results of our lessons: The average number of years our children are in age parallels the average number of minutes they can maintain attention during direct instruction—whole group, small group, or one-on-one—as measured by PET scans.

Our immediate response to Wesson's ideas was simply, how could he make this kind of a judgment without ever seeing us teach? We worked very hard to make our lessons from the basal as exciting and engaging as possible even though this sometimes involved turning on our inner actresses.

We clearly remember Wesson's lesson-length guideline rubbing us the wrong way, for at that time in our careers we were still using a basal program for our reading instruction. The basal program started with a whole-group lesson that typically ran thirty to forty-five minutes. You may be familiar with the lesson format: a warm-up that included a review from the

day prior, then, of course, building background knowledge and introduction of vocabulary. By the time we would get into the meat of the lesson, twenty to twenty-five minutes had already passed.

Yet we did wonder if there might be something to Wesson's research. We had noticed that some of our fourth-grade students weren't understanding and applying the lesson's concepts as much as we would hope. It gave us much to think about, and, quite frankly, we left the conference with one goal in mind: We were going to see if Wesson's rule of thumb was relevant in our own classrooms.

We returned to our classrooms after the conference and promptly set up a video camera that would film our whole-group literacy lessons each day. At the end of the day we would rewind the lesson and watch our teaching. At first all we noticed was the delivery of the lesson itself: Did we hit the mark? How was the cadence? Was the lesson visual enough? Soon we realized that although we were caught up in reflecting on our teaching, which is not a bad thing, we were missing the whole point—to prove to Wesson that his rule of thumb didn't apply to us. We were sure our lessons were keeping our students engaged for much longer than the ten minutes that coincided with their age.

We turned the volume off so we could sharpen our focus on the children and their behaviors. Needless to say, we were never able to send Wesson a video to prove the research wrong. Not only that, but we noticed things about our students that we had never seen before! We kept an eye on the elapsed time on the camera. About seven to eight minutes into the lesson we became aware of some of the most horrific (or hysterical, depending on the way you wanted to look at it) "good-bye behavior" we had ever seen. Karima became hyperfocused on the pattern of the tread on her shoe, Ezechial used his fingers to separate the pile of the carpet and appeared to be counting the carpet loops per square inch, and don't even get us started on the fact that Jake turned completely around—yes, he had his back to us. Then Graehm actually got up and walked away! How had we missed all of these obvious signs that our children had reached their threshold for processing and retaining the information in the lesson? How had we not noticed when their brains were done?

Several books on brain research and brain-compatible learning have been published. In his book *Brain Rules*, John Medina discusses the fact that the brain has a stubborn timing pattern of ten (2009). After about ten minutes of direct instruction, the brain must make a slight shift in order to refocus. We simply cannot ignore the implications of these types of studies; if we do, we must know the ramifications of lessons that run over

ten minutes—we are wasting our breath and our students' time, as the ability to retain the information is greatly decreased.

In a presentation at the Washington Organization of Reading Development Conference, Regie Routman spoke about the 80/20 concept. It used to be that 80 percent of our time was spent delivering direct instruction to our students and about 20 percent of the time was given to student practice of the concepts. Routman counters that if we want to be more effective with our instruction, we need to switch the ratio to 20/80. Twenty percent of our time should be spent teaching our children based on their immediate needs, as guided by individual assessments. Eighty percent of students' time must be spent on practicing the skills and concepts introduced during their instruction, using books and writing they choose. No longer can we afford to use the "spray and pray" method of instruction. You may be familiar with this: We spray our kids with general instruction from a program that is written without knowing each of our students' individual needs, and then we pray the instruction works!

Extended amounts of time for student practice is key. Our brother and his wife have four daughters, all high school athletes. As of the writing of this book, their high school team has just won its fifth straight Washington State Basketball Championship in a row, setting a new state record. These girls provide insight into the concept of 20/80 versus 80/20. They are not particularly tall girls, and quite frankly there are girls on the team who are not even all that athletic. Yet they beat opponents by thirty or forty—even by fifty—points each game. We had the opportunity to chat with the coach after one of the games. We asked him about this incredible run of success. He looked at us and said, "You are both teachers. You should know." Red in the face, we responded sheepishly and asked him to enlighten us. His response? "We play the game more than any of our opponents. We are on the court more, we get more playing time, we practice shooting more. Our conditioning is running up and down the court, not laps, lines, or sprints, and I am out there with them, giving them just-in-time coaching right when they need it."

His explanation of the dominance these girls have had on the basketball court for the past five years has been such an effective reminder of the power of practice. After all, if we want to get better at playing the piano, it certainly won't come from listening to our piano teacher talk to us about what to do for forty-five minutes and then practicing for fifteen minutes. Likewise, the more time we give our students to practice, with our expert, focused, just-in-time coaching available right when they need it, the better they will become at reading and writing.

This is why we have taken the research from Ken Wesson, John Medina, Regie Routman, and others and put it into practice in our own classrooms. Focus lessons are now exactly that: focused on what students need (no spray and pray method). Eighty percent of students' time is spent engaged in practice, and we, their coaches, provide just-in-time instruction. "It just may be that reading achievement is less about ability than it is about the opportunity to read" (Samuels and Farstrup 2011, 155). We agree.

A study by Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) looked at a group of middle-class, fifth-grade students and the amount of time spent reading every day. Looking at Figure 2.2, you can see that students who scored in the highest percentile read the most and had encountered the most words. Likewise, the lowest-performing students in the class not only read the very least but also encountered a minimal amount of words. Based on this research, Scientific Learning (2008) projected the effects if each child's average time spent reading increased by ten minutes daily.

As you can see, adding just ten more minutes to the reading time for the students in the highest percentile raised the amount of words they encountered by over 1 million words per year. As impressive as that is, notice the students performing at the twentieth percentile. Increasing their time spent reading by just ten minutes a day gave them an increase of 1,429 percent in word exposure.

Figure 2.2

How Much Students Read and How It Influences Achievement					
Middle-Class Fifth Graders			**Plus 10 Minutes per Day . . .**		
Percentile	**Minutes per Day**	**Words per Year**	**Minutes per Day**	**Words per Year**	**Percent Increase in Word Exposure**
98	65.0	4,358,000	75.0	5,028,462	15%
90	21.1	1,823,000	31.1	2,686,981	47%
80	14.2	1,146,000	24.2	1,953,042	70%
70	9.6	622,000	19.6	1,269,917	104%
60	6.5	432,000	16.5	1,096,615	154%
50	4.6	282,000	14.6	895,043	217%
40	3.2	200,000	13.2	825,000	313%
30	1.8	106,00	11.8	694,889	556%
20	0.7	21,000	10.7	321,000	1,429%
10	0.1	8,000	10.1		
2	0.0	0	10.0		

Note: Adapted from Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988).

Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding found that among all the ways children spent their time, reading books was the best predictor of several measures of reading achievement (1988).

Truthfully, we cannot afford *not* to have our students increase their reading time each day. And the brain research that encourages us to keep our focus lessons brief also enables us to provide our students with extended periods of reading time.

Transitions as Brain and Body Breaks

When we began using the workshop model in our classrooms, we soon realized that this structure was well aligned to what brain research was telling us. We taught a short focus lesson and followed this with an extended work session. The workshop structure allowed children the much-needed time to read and write and then share at the end. However, each day we struggled with keeping many of our students engaged during the work session. The extended time for practice was essential, but it just felt so long.

In the beginning of our workshop experience, we noticed that when our children's bodies were in need of a break from the work time, they would get up, get a drink, go to the bathroom, or bother others. We grappled with this situation, even resorting to giving them "things" to do—such as worksheets, activities, reading, and arts and crafts—to keep them engaged during the work time. But we realized that when their bodies and brains were provided with the needed break, our children were able to settle back in and continue with reading.

It was this realization that led us to divide the long work sessions into short work times separated by movement and short bursts of instruction. As a result, the Daily 5 contains two to five different "workshops" in a day. Each workshop, which we call a "round" of Daily 5, runs for the length of time our students have the stamina to maintain independence. Once we see our students' stamina for the work session waning, we stop the class and have students put away their materials and join us back in the class-gathering place. The simple acts of putting their things away and walking back to join together provide the physical break children's bodies and minds need. Once gathered together, we are able to provide more movement in the form of a poem, song, or chant, if necessary. A break in the practice session provides us with an opportunity to conduct a short,

focused lesson based on the needs of the majority of the class.

At first we wondered if all the transitions would be disruptive for students or if we would have a hard time managing our students during all the movement. We have actually found the opposite to be true. The transitions allow for a longer and more focused literacy time, and practicing them also makes transitions throughout the whole day easier.

Transitions during Daily 5 provide a number of opportunities:

- A physical break from a student work session
- The kinesthetic movement children's brains and bodies require before continuing to work
- A brain break, which allows for refocusing
- A natural time to provide another short focus lesson

Many of you may be quaking in your shoes as you think of all the transitions that are at the core of Daily 5. Your experience with a class you have right now or one in your past may conjure up visions of noisy and wild behaviors during transitions and loss of precious work time. We also have had similar experiences in our careers, which is why we know that, as with everything we do in our classrooms, transitions must be taught.

We teach children how to make transitions, and how to build their stamina, by following the 10 Steps to Teaching and Learning Independence as described in Chapter 3. These 10 Steps are one of the things that set the Daily 5 apart from a traditional workshop model.

The core beliefs described in this chapter and the 10 Steps to Independence described in Chapter 3 are the groundwork for all of our work with children.