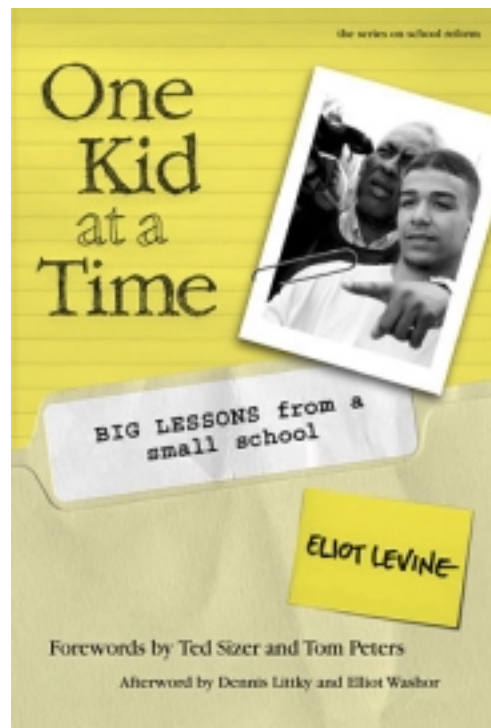


# One Kid at a Time

**How to Make Learning  
More Engaging, Relevant and Real  
in Your Classroom, School, and District**



## **A Series of Workshops**

*based on*

**ONE KID AT A TIME: BIG LESSONS FROM A SMALL SCHOOL**

Teachers College Press (2002)

**Workshop I – Learning Through Real Work**

**Workshop II – Personalized Learning / Building Strong Relationships**

**Workshop III – Performance-Based Assessment**

**Create Your Own Workshop (tips included)**

Workshop updates will be posted at [www.bigpicture.org](http://www.bigpicture.org)

*One Kid at a Time Workshops*

**CONTENTS**

<b>Workshop I: Learning through Real Work</b>	1
Book Passages	2-3
<b>Workshop II: Personalized Learning</b>	4
Book Passages	5-6
<b>Workshop III: Performance-Based Assessment</b>	7
Book Passages	8-9
<b>Creating Your Own Workshop</b>	10
<b>Other Ideas for Customizing This Workshop</b>	10

**WORKSHOP I: LEARNING THROUGH REAL WORK**

**1. Introduction**

- Discussion of this issue's relevance / importance to workshop participants.

**2. Small Group Discussion: Learning Through Real Work**

- What learning through real work examples do you have from your own school?
- Which of these activities feel most real or authentic? Which feel most contrived for the learning situation?
- How do these differences in authenticity affect students' learning and personal development? Their engagement and enthusiasm?
- What factors influence your ability to use authentic learning activities?

**3. Sharing Between Groups**

- Share the most important points from your small group discussion.

**4. Examples from the Met School**

- Passages from *One Kid at a Time* (attached)
- For greater depth, read Chapter 4: Learning Through Internships and/or Chapter 5: Learning Through Everything

**5. Local Examples**

- If possible, invite brief presentations from local students, teachers, or others who are already doing innovative practices related to learning through real work.

**6. Small Group Discussion: Moving Toward More Authentic Work**

- In your ideal school, to what extent would your learning activities involve "real" or authentic work? Would you like to do more than you do now?
- What changes could be made in your classroom or school to make authentic work happen more often?
- What are the obstacles? What would make it work? (If your school has already made changes, share your experiences with the group.)

**7. Sharing Between Groups**

- Share the most important points from your small group discussion.

**8. Next Steps: Changing Your Classroom or School**

- If this discussion has motivated you to move in new directions, we hope that you will make additional steps forward – whether through changes in your own classroom or working with your colleagues to make schoolwide changes. Beyond the few passages included in this workshop, extensive examples of Learning Through Real Work can be found throughout *One Kid at a Time*.

## *One Kid at a Time* — A Sampling of "Real Work" Passages

*from "Shaking Off Gravity: Tamika's Story"* (pp. 1-4)

As a junior and senior, Tamika collaborated with several students and mentor Joyce Golden to create their own community service organization. Teen Outreach started out with no money and no place to meet other than Golden's living room. Within 18 months they had won \$80,000 in grants, rented office space, hired Golden as full-time director, and reached 1,000 youth with their cultural and educational programs. Tamika was involved in all aspects of the process.

"At first Tamika was always losing things and struggled to get her point across," Golden says. "Now she has directed a complex event attended by 90 people. After deciding on a theme – the impact of African-American culture on our society – she did a timeline, booked performers, managed publicity and rehearsals, and supervised six youth assistants. The next year, for her senior project at the Met, she created an intensive support group for at-risk middle school girls. Her work has been phenomenal."

*from "Birkenstocks and Biotech: Julia's Story"* (pp. 4-7)

Julia planned to become a veterinarian, so she arranged an LTI studying penguin development at the zoo. She learned about spreadsheets, graphing, research methods, and teamwork. "It was great," her advisor says, "because she had to stop hiding behind books and really work with people. We used to joke that I was always yelling at her for reading. When her mentors asked her to redo her report from scratch, she was incredibly frustrated – but that's the real world."

In a traditional classroom Julia would have received a B+ and never taken another look at her report, but for the research lab she had to revise and revise until her work met professional standards. Eventually her data became part of a presentation at a scientific conference.

*from "Two Feet Ahead of the Train: Cesar's Story"* (pp. 7-12)

Summer is high season for gangs, so the Met helped Cesar arrange summer internships to keep him far away from Providence – Outward Bound in Utah, house building in Honduras, working at a summer camp in Pennsylvania. The wisdom of this strategy was tragically proven one summer when two of Cesar's close friends were murdered and several others were sent to the adult prison. Now Cesar is slated to be assistant director of the General Reading Center at the special needs camp where he was a counselor last summer.

*from "Learning Through Real Work"* (pp. 41-45)

"Things really take off when students find an LTI they love with a mentor they love," Dennis says. "That's when they get the most out of the Met. For 20 years I was the principal of schools with caring advisors and interesting projects, but it wasn't enough. When students do all their projects inside the school building, their inspiration eventually drops off. But when they work in real-world settings with a great mentor, they shoot up to the next level. They get so proud and their learning takes on such meaning for them. We've had dozens of students who were ready to drop out until they got turned on by an LTI. And students who are already thriving get turned on too."

*from "Learning Through Real Work"* (pp. 41-45)

Phil had a keen mind and was passionate about boating and carpentry, but he was unable or unwilling to learn from books on those topics. His LTI was at a yacht restoration school. His mentor began by saying, "Here's some wood. Spend some time with it. Just fool around with it and figure it out." Later Phil worked on various yacht design and repair projects. Before long, his Met advisor noticed that Phil was able to discuss and write about woodworking in ways that had previously eluded him.

"Many times you have to let go of the academic to get to the academic," Elliot says. "We're slowly coming to understand this. Lots of students just won't succeed using traditional methods, even though they're intellectually powerful with their hands or in other ways. And even with students who *can* get there the traditional way, we *still* need to do the real-world piece. Once they've actually *used* calculus, they move to a much higher level of ability and understanding."

*from "Finding and Developing an LTI"* (pp. 45-50)

At Kaufman-Parlow Architects, we met with Lucia and her mentor in a newly furnished conference room filled with blueprints for a new housing development. At this same LTI the previous year, Lucia developed a scale model of the Met's new campus. This year she's helping to draft floor plans for a nearby clinic. When Lucia arrived at the Met, she was withdrawn and tongue-tied, but her passion for architecture gave her direction and self-confidence. In 11th grade she spoke about the Met at an educator's conference and later won a \$5,000 scholarship in a national design competition for high school architects.

Next we drove 20 miles west, into forests and farmland. Cathy's LTI is with a retail store that sells horse-riding equip-

ment. Her dream is to be a horse trainer, but she knows it doesn't pay well, so she chose an LTI that would expose her to the business side of riding. We found Cathy and her mentor Lena with the store's account ledgers spread out on the front counter. Cathy's project was to learn the store's accounting software and then write a training manual for future employees who need to use the software.

*from "Education Cornucopia"* (pp. 62-73)

#### Service Learning Projects

- Designing and building a wave tank for a zoo exhibit
- Serving on the mayor's antigraffiti task force
- Tutoring elementary school students in reading and math

#### Independent Projects

- Launching a candle business with a \$250 start-up loan
- Assembling and editing a book of student-written poems
- Acting in a play written by another student

#### Senior Projects

- Writing, directing, and acting in an autobiographical play
- Creating a citywide magazine for youth artwork
- Planning a week-long backpacking trip for 15 students

#### Public Speaking

- Addressing the legislature during its review of Met funding
- Making presentations at education conferences
- Teaching pharmacy managers how to display cosmetics

## *One Kid at a Time*

### **WORKSHOP II: PERSONALIZED LEARNING / BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **1. Introduction**

- Discussion of this issue's relevance / importance to workshop participants.
- At the Met, many aspects of learning are personalized – internships, projects, assessment, and more. Tying all of this together are strong relationships between students and teachers who know each other well. Those relationships are the focus of this workshop.

#### **2. Small Group Discussion: Strong Relationships With Students**

- Have you had the opportunity to build strong relationships with students? Which relationships stand out most strongly?
- What factors have made it easier or harder for strong relationships to flourish?
- Have your strong relationships with students influenced their learning and personal development? In what ways?

#### **3. Sharing Between Groups**

- Share the most important points from your small group discussion.

#### **4. Examples from the Met School**

- Passages from *One Kid at a Time* (attached)
- For greater depth, read Chapter 2: Personalized Learning

#### **5. Local Examples**

- If possible, invite brief presentations from local students, teachers, or others who are already doing innovative work around building strong relationships with students.

#### **6. Small Group Discussion: Moving Toward Stronger Relationships**

- In your ideal school, would you have the opportunity to build strong relationships with more of your students than you are able to do now?
- What changes could be made in your classroom and school to make strong relationships flourish more often?
- What are the obstacles? What would make it work? (If your school has already made changes, share your experiences with the group.)

#### **7. Sharing Between Groups**

- Share the most important points from your small group discussion.

#### **8. Next Steps: Changing Your Classroom or School**

- If this discussion has motivated you to move in new directions, we hope that you will make additional steps forward – whether through changes in your own classroom or working with your colleagues to make schoolwide changes. Beyond the few passages included in this workshop, extensive examples of Personalized Learning can be found throughout *One Kid at a Time*.

## *One Kid at a Time* — Personalized Learning / Building Strong Relationships

*from "Relationships and Respect"* (pp. 17-25)

"Maybe nothing is intrinsically interesting. Knowledge gains its meaning, at least initially, through a touch on the shoulder, through a conversation....My first enthusiasm about writing came because I wanted a teacher to like me."

– Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary* (1989)

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"I like the Met because you have a close relationship with your teacher," said one student. "I procrastinate a lot, and when I had to write this essay for an Outward Bound scholarship, my teacher was like 'You're *not* putting this one off. It's too important. You're coming over my house, and you're writing it.' And I stayed at her house until late that night and got it done. Then when I got the scholarship she took me shopping and paid for my boots, because my mother didn't have the money. My mother paid her back later."

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Met students are divided into groups of 14, known as an "advisory," which replaces the traditional classroom. A primary teacher or "advisor" oversees their learning and generally stays with them for all 4 years of high school. The advisory is designed to be a small, supportive group of learners and an extended family in which all students feel well known.

Advisories meet for an hour in the morning and a half-hour in the afternoon. Once or twice a year they take outdoor trips together to build group spirit. Advisors touch base daily with every student and schedule frequent one-on-one meetings. They become deeply familiar with each student's abilities, needs, and interests so that they can suggest well-informed strategies for

each student's learning. Advisors also come to know their students' families through frequent phone calls, school events, committee meetings, and quarterly exhibitions and learning team meetings where parents help to assess their child's progress and plan their curriculum.

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"Personalization isn't about being best buddies," Dennis says. "It's about respect and listening and treating people well. I've told some of my toughest students to be here at 4:00 P.M., to sit down and we were going to look at some book together. And they came, because we had a relationship."

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In my teacher certification program, one professor told us "You need to go in there as a taskmaster and get a pound of flesh from these kids. None of this Mr. Big Heart stuff! Do your job and then close your door. If you want to get involved personally with students, look into becoming a guidance counselor."

Mr. Big Heart is alive and well at the Met, and intense relationships often develop between students and advisors. Tamika and her advisor Marcus sometimes refer to each other as brother and sister. "Sometimes I put myself out there perhaps more than I should," Marcus says. But then who's to say how much I should? She doesn't have an older brother, she doesn't live with her father, and I just got caught up in the relationship in an ultra-positive way, because I want to help her the *best* way I can and in *any* way I can." Many educators would say that Marcus has "bad boundaries," but the Met takes the opposite view.

*from "Leaving the Nest"* (pp. 156-160)

Like everything at the Met, departure happens one student at a time. In addition to proms and beach trips, the school holds a separate farewell event for each graduate. Known as final exhibitions, these events have four parts: the senior project overview, the valedictory address, the advisor address, and the diploma signing.

At most schools, the student who earns top class rank is named valedictorian and delivers an address at graduation. But rather than elevating one student above all others, the Met prefers to honor all graduates for what they have achieved. Consistent with the Latin *valedicere*, which means "to say farewell," every Met graduate delivers a valedictory address during the final week of school. Standing at a podium before 20 or 30 students, staff, parents, and invited guests, each graduate reflects publicly on her growth, her plans, and the people who have nurtured her development.

Following the valedictory address, the advisor offers an extended reflection on the student's years at the Met: "When Solana arrived here in ninth grade, she was already bright, responsible, confident, caring, and hilariously funny. She's leaving with all those same strengths, but the difference is that now she's fully aware of them. Solana and I always used to argue about careers and colleges, because my sights were set much higher than hers. But now she has high expectations too, and her transformation has been beautiful.

"Solana has done superb projects on physical therapy, AIDS, poetry, environmentalism, and many other topics – and senior year has been more of the same. The Girls' Math Group was her official senior project, but she also did college coursework, an LTI at children's hospital, tireless work on the yearbook, and editing her autobiography over and over until it was really polished. She worked hard at college applications and was accepted to Temple, Northeastern, Rhode Island College, and others. She'll be the first person in her family to graduate from high school or attend college, and I'm confident that she will be very successful.

"Even though Solana has been a stellar student, my favorite part has been our personal relationship. She helped everyone in our advisory, myself included, to gain the wonderful personal qualities that she already has in such abundance. She kicked me out of advisory when she knew I needed to eat. She brought flowers and food to my house when I was sick. She even taught me Spanish. But what I will miss most about Solana is that she's my friend, my sister, my student, and sometimes my daughter – *mi hija*. Solana, you were always there for *me* if I had a tough day, not just the other way around. I want to thank you for everything, and for being someone I can be so proud of. I will miss sharing my days with you."

The details varied from student to student, but all advisors spoke with a beaming pride and a sense of shared journeying that could only be described as parental. Few public schools provide the opportunity for all students to be so well known and so deeply loved by their teachers.

**WORKSHOP III: PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT**

**1. Introduction**

- Discussion of this issue's relevance / importance to workshop participants.

**2. Small Group Discussion: Performance-Based Assessment**

- Have you had the opportunity to use performance-based assessment with your students? Which instances stand out most strongly?
- Compared to traditional assessment, in what ways has performance-based assessment affected your students' learning? (Or what do you *think* its effects would be?)
- What factors influence the degree to which you use authentic assessment? What factors make it more or less successful?

**3. Sharing Between Groups**

- Share the most important points from your small group discussion.

**4. Examples from the Met School**

- Passages from *One Kid at a Time* (attached)
- For greater depth, read Chapter 7: Standards and Assessment, and Chapter 6: What Should Students Learn?

**5. Local Examples**

- If possible, invite brief presentations from local students, teachers, or others who are already doing innovative work around building strong relationships with students.

**6. Small Group Discussion: Moving Toward More Authentic Assessment**

- In your ideal school, to what extent would assessment be authentic or performance-based? Would you like to do more than you do now?
- What changes could be made in your classroom or school to make authentic assessment play a stronger role?
- What are the obstacles? What would make it work? (If your school has already made changes, share your experiences with the group.)

**7. Sharing Between Groups**

- Share the most important points from your small group discussion.

**8. Next Steps: Changing Your Classroom or School**

- If this discussion has motivated you to move in new directions, we hope that you will make additional steps forward – whether through changes in your own classroom or working with your colleagues to make schoolwide changes. Beyond the few passages included in this workshop, extensive examples and discussion of Authentic Assessment can be found throughout *One Kid at a Time*.

## ***One Kid at a Time* — A Sampling of Performance-Based Assessment Passages**

*from "Standards and Assessment"* (pp. 102-119)

The exhibition panel concluded that Jo had not gone deep enough with several of the tasks on her learning plan. "You can't just *read* the book about Lori Berenson," her advisor said. "You need to do some analysis and writing about why two Peruvian presidents have kept an American human rights journalist in prison for 6 years without credible evidence against her. Or why two American presidents haven't come to her aid, despite the appalling lack of due process in her trial. We know the answers are in your head, but you need to get them out on paper."

Jo did make some analytic comments later, off the cuff, about the Grateful Dead's attempts to promote community through their music and live shows. "Now *that's* the kind of thinking we're looking for," Dennis said. "These writers and rock bands are trying to get people to *think*. And that's what I just heard you doing for the past 15 seconds."

*from "How Exhibitions Work"* (pp. 104-107)

Questions from panelists are designed to assess the depth of students' understanding and their ability to apply what they've learned to new situations. One student had designed a spreadsheet to track hospital volunteers, and a panelist asked why the student hadn't taken the simpler approach of typing the data into a word processor. The student's response made it clear that she didn't understand the advantages of spreadsheets for data management, analysis, and reporting.

In contrast, another student brought a computer to her exhibition and did a live demonstration of the spreadsheet she had

developed. When asked what she would do if she needed to incorporate a new variable into her model later, her answer exceeded the panelist's expectations. Rather than just explaining how she would do it, she immediately modified the spreadsheet to include the new variable.

Another role of panelists is to "distribute the nagging," as one advisor said. Panelists comment on students' shortfalls and push them to take more responsibility for their work. Shaming is never the goal, but some students do feel ashamed when their shortcomings are discussed publicly or when they see the disappointment of adults they respect.

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The Met does not assign letter grades. Instead, advisors write lengthy narratives each quarter about each student. The bulk of each narrative is a review of the student's exhibition and progress during the past quarter, followed by suggestions for the next quarter or year.

*from "Why Exhibitions and Narratives, Not Tests and Grades?"* (pp. 107-111)

Exhibitions build skills that conventional tests ignore. "Danny could sit down and get all the answers right on a test," his advisor says. "But that wouldn't help him with his central problem, which is getting organized. Exhibitions force him to work on that. He needs to develop an outline and an agenda, prepare handouts, assemble a work portfolio, rehearse, and make a well-organized presentation. We evaluate him on the organization of his work in addition to the actual content of what he learned."

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"No matter how well you do at the Met," an advisor says, "your learning team will always point out something you need to work on. That's very different from getting an 'A', which in some ways puts an upper bound on what you're expected to learn. For students who have always earned top grades, suddenly the pressure is on because now they're competing with themselves. They're always trying to outdo their last exhibition."

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By overemphasizing grades and test scores, schools have lost sight of the most important reason for evaluating student work: to help students learn. A terse 'D' or 'F' on a report card says nothing about how a student could improve his work. The Met's narrative evaluations paint a more informative and forward-looking picture.

"It was very difficult for Tanya to motivate herself to finish her papers on time," one advisor wrote. "She left them until the last minute, which made it impossible for me to give her adequate feedback. Tanya has a lot of raw talent as a writer. She wrote an editorial on campaign finance reform that was the best in our advisory. If she would leave herself the time to really edit and perfect a piece of writing, she could become a truly outstanding writer." This rich detail continued for three pages.

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Exhibitions and narratives also present formidable challenges. Tests are easy to administer and grade, but exhibitions are messy and complicated. They require flexible scheduling, rehearsals, and group consensus about the quality of students'

work. Advisors must assemble appropriate panels, orchestrate productive exhibitions, and write lengthy narratives that offer learning suggestions while carefully balancing praise with constructive criticism. The Met's staff accept these challenges, because they believe that exhibitions and narratives lead to superior learning.

*from "Standards One Student at a Time"* (pp. 111-119)

A unique aspect of the Met's standards is that they assess personal qualities – the fifth learning goal. "Getting promoted to Senior Institute is about being a functional young adult," an advisor says. "If I still need to chase you to do your work, then you're not ready for Senior Institute. It's not just about history and physics; it's about time management, motivation, self-direction, perseverance, and seriousness of purpose. The same is true of our standards for graduation. We need to feel that students can negotiate their own learning more independently than before. Over time they are expected to take on more and more responsibility for their own learning."

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"In the end," Elliot says, "we base our decisions on a consensus among people who know the student well. *They* are the ones who decide if a student should graduate or pass an exhibition. The decision mostly rests with the advisor, who is in the best position to see the big picture of a student's learning. But if there's disagreement, then we all sit around and discuss it – student, parent, mentor, advisor, and principal."

## *One Kid at a Time*

### **CREATING YOUR OWN WORKSHOP**

- Select a topic and related passages (or an entire chapter) from *One Kid at a Time*.
- Find students and teachers inside or outside your school who are already doing innovative work related to your topic. Invite them to make brief presentations.
- **Workshop Structure** (see Workshops I - III for sample question formats)
  - Participants discuss their experiences with the topic at hand.
  - Participants read relevant passages from *One Kid at a Time*.
  - Guest speakers share their experiences.
  - Participants reconvene to discuss directions and strategies for change.
- **Possible Topics:**
  - Learning through interests (Chapter 3)
  - Developing internships (Chapter 4)
  - Senior projects, summer projects, service learning, public speaking (Chapter 5)
  - Setting learning goals (Chapter 6)
  - Setting local standards (Chapter 7)
  - Creating a successful environment (Chapter 8)
  - Evaluating your innovations (Chapter 9)
  - Sustaining your innovations (Chapter 10)
  - Rethinking graduation (Chapter 11)
- If you create additional workshops, please email them to [books@bigpicture.org](mailto:books@bigpicture.org) so we can share your efforts with others.

### **OTHER IDEAS FOR CUSTOMIZING THESE WORKSHOPS**

- For more in-depth discussion around particular topics, have teachers read the entire corresponding book chapter ahead of time, not just selected passages
- Use the book with groups of students, parents, and/or community members to help them understand and change their own school
- Show relevant passages from *Learning Journeys*, a video about the Met School; 11-minute and 30-minute versions available at [www.bigpicture.org](http://www.bigpicture.org)
- Check [www.bigpicture.org](http://www.bigpicture.org) for workshop updates
- Let us know if you used this workshop, what was and wasn't helpful, suggestions for improvement, etc. Email comments to [books@bigpicture.org](mailto:books@bigpicture.org)