

Editor's Page

The Craft of Teaching the Writer

The Facilitator of Writing

Over the past few years, I have had the wonderful opportunity to teach many different writers in grades first through eighth. During this time, I have learned a great deal about myself as a teacher, and even more about my students as writers. Although teaching the writer can be a very challenging endeavor, it can also be very rewarding. I have learned that when equipped with the appropriate tools, knowledge, and strategies, teachers have the ability to move students toward mastery and ownership of their own expressive writing. It is extremely im-

“One must be drenched in words, literally soaked in them, to have the right ones form themselves into the proper patterns at the right moment.”

portant to allow our students freedom and opportunity to write as often as possible in order to create a classroom over-

flowing with writers.

Writing Conferences

When teachers analyze the way in which they facilitate the writing of students, it is essential to take the time to conference with students on a regular basis. These conferences should be led in a similar way in which you would hold a typical conversation, but the conferences should be structured. An example of a typical structure may go as follows:

- Glance over what the student has been working on and make a point to vocalize what they are doing well
- Pick an area that the student needs to focus on currently and in future writing
- Review the discussion with the student to check for understanding
- Send the student back to revise or add to his/her

writing.

During conferencing time, the rest of the class can work on their individual writing, read leveled books, share their writing with a partner to edit and revise, or draw illustrations to accompany their writing.

It is important to remember that conferences are for the following reasons:

- Provide an opportunity for conversations among writers
- Allow time for the teacher to listen to the writer and interject only on occasion
- To allow the teacher to ask probing questions to move the student towards ownership of writing and resolving his/her writing challenges
- Provide time for oral language, read alouds, and discussion of author's

craft.

“Through the conference’s focus on what the child does well, as well as what he needs next, teachers can get to the heart of the matter-seeing the growth of the writer.”

Jan Lamborne

Writing Workshop

Writing workshop is a strategy that I have incorporated into my classroom’s daily schedule since I began teaching. I’ve have witnessed over the past couple of years the many benefits of writer’s workshop, and the fantastic opportunity it provides students in moving toward mastery of their own writing.

When preparing for writer’s workshop, there are some very important ideas to keep in mind. Having a clear structure is always beneficial to ensure maximum learning and increased student engagement. A typical writer’s workshop should be structured somewhat similar to the following:

1. Mini-lesson(5-15 min.): a short lesson given about 2-3 times a week that focuses on one aspect the group as a whole needs to work on
2. Status of the class (2-5 min.): quickly find out what each student is working on
3. Working time (20-45 min.): this time is to write/conference with individual students/group
4. Sharing (5-15 min.): writers read a loud their published or partially published work

to receive feedback on what they have written.

A few things to keep in mind when conducting writer’s workshop:

- When conducting a mini-lesson, keep it short. Ensure that your mini-lessons are short and focused. Make sure your mini-lessons are authentic, select a topic that writers really need to know.
- During mini-conferences ask the students what they are working on, to read some of what they wrote, ask them how their writing is coming along and if they need help on anything, and ask them what they will do next.
- Teachers who write and reflect on their own writing process are more successful than teachers who don’t.
- Successful teachers don’t teach kids to write, they teach their kids to teach themselves by providing models, scaffolding, and strategies that help their students develop ownership and independence.
- Successful teachers act out of belief that their students are writers the minute they walk into the classroom.
- Effective writing teachers help students figure out what they really want to say and then make sure they say it as well as they can.

“My task is to make you hear, to make you feel and, above all, to make you see. That is all, and it is every-thing.”

Joseph Conrad

Effectively Teaching the Writer

There are many different strategies and theories on how to best teach the writers in your classroom. A couple key strategies to keep in mind would be the 6+1 traits of writing instruction and the use of writing portfolios to show growth. In addition to the use of these two strategies, instructors must align the content with the National Common Core Standards for their individual grade level.

I highly recommend utilizing the 6+1 writing traits in the classroom to help drive writing instruction. The key ideas in the approach are the following:

- Ideas
- Word choice
- Sentence fluency
- Convention
- Voice
- Organization

Students need to have clear topics and ideas for their writing, they must use appropriate word choice, their writing needs to have a continuous flow, correct grammar, individual voice, and clear and concise organization. Sometimes, especially for younger students, it is more effective to concentrate on one or two traits for a couple weeks so students get a firm grasp on the concept. As students progress in their writing they eventually should have full command of all six writing traits. Writing portfolios are also

an effective strategy in assessing student work and for students to analyze their own writing progress. Writing portfolios should be introduced in the beginning of the school year. Students should be provided with examples of excellent writing portfolios of students from the previous years. It might also be beneficial to provide examples of what a writing portfolio should *not* look like. Rubrics are also an option, which can provide students with knowledge of exactly what they will be assessed on and what should be included in their portfolios, this would be especially beneficial for older students. During discussion of writing portfolios, students have the opportunity to explain their choices for their writing samples included in their work and set goals for improvement. In self-assessing their portfolios, students become more self-evaluative and self-prescriptive. They begin to notice their strengths and weaknesses.

“Portfolios are powerful tools for supporting and guiding young writers . . . They provide a system of organization that is helpful to students and teachers, fostering a collaborative writing culture complete with parent involvement, authentic assessment and evaluation.”

Marsha Page

Finding Writing Voice

Writers need extensive support to move from creating flat, voiceless pieces to writing with intention and purpose. We need to provide our students with a variety of different writing pieces to examine and provide time for them to discuss how the author creates his/her own voice through the use of dialogue, word choice, metaphor, similes, punctuation, etc. The more opportunities students are given to analyze how the author’s voice is created, the more knowledgeable they will be when they strive to find their own voice within their writing.

“Rather than only looking at students’ writing, or approaching the teaching of writing through a formulaic system of skills and sub skills [we need to] work with the students to call attention to, and name, the author’s craft.”

Renee Webster

It is important for teachers to discuss with their students exactly what the writers do when teaching science, social studies, reading, and math. We need to have conversations about the choices the authors make when it comes to their own personal writing craft.

In terms of revising, we need to facilitate our student’s writing to ensure they have a clear audience and that they are writing for meaning.

We need to move our students toward owning their stories, finding their own voice, and bringing personal intention to their own pieces.

Key Ideas

I’ve learned a great deal about myself as a writer and how to better teach the writing and not the writer. Some of the key takeaways are the following:

- Writing conferences are a time when the teacher and the student have the opportunity to informally discuss the student’s writing, specifically, what the student is doing well and what he/she needs to work on.
- Writing workshop is essential in the writing classroom, because it sets aside a specific time for the students to focus on their writing and edit, revise, publish, and share as necessary.
- The 6+1 traits are a must teach for student writers to develop into masters of their own writing craft.
- Writing portfolios are beneficial for assessment and for students to analyze their own growth.
- Students should be provided with multiple opportunities to discuss author’s craft in order to find their own writing voice.

Stephanie Lee