

Workshop 1: Creating a Community of Writers

Velvet McReynolds' Reflections

Community-building strategy

The Monday meeting for me does two things. Number one, it does give that physical practice of writing. And I tell them that, you know, you want fluency in writing, you write. You want fluency in reading, you read. And so I do talk about that, and I'm hoping that some day some of their quick writes turn into perhaps narratives or maybe it will be food for expository somewhere down the line. It's part of that routine and ritual.

Once we write, I used to give I think the first 15 minutes of class, and then I learned that that's way too long for a quick write and so I just, seven (minutes) is an arbitrary number, and so I just chose seven minutes, but I also want them to learn to be communicators. That's part of the language arts. That's what I teach. I teach communication skills, as well. And so I remind them that speaking and writing are two different skills, two different things that I want them to master. And so they have to close their books. I also share with them that I have no way of knowing whether they're sharing what they wrote. They may go off on a lark, but taking notes is part of organizing thoughts. And so I want to do a lot with them. I want them to be able to share with their neighbors, but I want it to be well thought out. Sometimes in the past I would get just shenanigans or very, very silly, not focused. The writing helps them focus, and that's important to me.

Importance of allowing time to write and talk about writing

I don't think any of us are going to do our best if we don't feel valued and respected wherever we are, on the athletic team or in the classroom. I listen to them. I take time. I give them time.

Traditionally, teachers of writing would give the assignment, send the kids away somewhere, like home, and then the next day collect it and grade it, and you don't have the dialogue. I don't think my students will be able to identify what makes my classroom a different place and hopefully a special place, but I know that it's the dialogue. It's taking time to talk to people. I talk to them through their writing and about their writing. I encourage them to talk to one another.