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Creating a Place Where Students Feel Like Writers

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Topic TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BE EFFECTIVE WRITERS

Practice ENGAGED COMMUNITY

- Highlights**
- » Teachers should participate in the writing community by sharing their writing.
 - » When students share their writing, it is important for their peers to give feedback that is positive and constructive.
 - » In earlier grades, teachers can use the activity Author's Chair for students to share their writing.
 - » In later grades, students can provide feedback by sharing reactions and summarizing the author's writing.
 - » Teachers should display pieces of student writing both inside and outside the classroom.
 - » Students should keep a list of writing topics in their notebooks, so they have choices when starting a new piece of writing.

About the Interviewee

Carol Booth Olson, Ph.D., is director of the UCI/California Writing Project and an associate professor in the Department of Education at the University of California, Irvine. She has edited three books: *Practical Ideas for Teaching Writing as Process*; *Thinking/Writing: Fostering Critical Thinking Through Writing*; and *Reading, Thinking,*

and Writing About Multicultural Literature. Her newest book, *The Reading/Writing Connection: Strategies for Teaching and Learning in the Secondary Classroom*, is now in its third edition. Additionally, she serves as a senior consultant for Holt McDougal Publishers. Dr. Olson is especially interested in making the cognitive strategies that experienced readers and writers use when they make meaning from or with texts visible to less experienced readers and writers in order to improve their literacy. She has received the Alan C. Purves Award in 2007 and the Richard A. Meade Award in 2009 from the National Council of Teachers of English for education research deemed most likely to impact educational practices.

Full Transcript





🔊 00:05 My name is Carol Booth Olson. I'm an associate professor in the Department of Education at the University of California, Irvine, and I'm a director of the UCI site of the National Writing Project. I was a member of the expert panel that worked on the Practice Guide *Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers*.


🔊 00:25 I think it's really important for teachers to develop and engage the community of writers because students really need two things in order to succeed: they need the skill and they need the will. So I think we need to help teachers enable kids to discover that writing can be something that's pleasurable, that's important, and where kids are able to actually write from the heart and find their voices. And I think you can't make that happen unless students feel safe and they're in a conducive environment. A community is a place where people feel connected to each other, where students have a shared sense of ownership, and they're in a place where they feel they all belong and see themselves as writers.


🔊 01:14 I think it's very important for teachers to participate in the writing community as sort of a senior member of that community. One of the things the teacher can do in participating in the writing community is to share his or her own writing in progress and to show


kids that writing doesn't just come out perfectly on the first draft. The teacher's text can become a mentor text for the class. The teacher can write with the class, the teacher can write in front of the class, actually thinking aloud and modeling the process of writing.

 **01:51** Collaboration among students on each other's writing is a very important way to create an engaged community of writers because each student gets to participate, but they're contributing in helping each other improve.


 **02:08** In the early grades, you're more likely to have something like Author's Chair, where one student is at the front of the room sitting on a director's chair. I've often seen teachers give them little microphones, and the student reads his or her piece of writing. And their peers are sitting around the carpet, then the students were given little sentence stems like "I really like..." or "When you said X, I could picture it because..."


 **02:38** In the older grades, collaboration can look a little different because students are at a level where they can become peer responders for each other. They might do *telling*, which involves giving the writer the readers' reactions as he or she is reading the piece, or they might do *summarizing* and try to tell the reader back, "Well, what you really mean is..."

 **03:03** Very often, the kind of feedback students get is often corrective. What a writer really wants to do is to communicate, and he wants to know or she wants to know that the message has been heard. Rather than coming from a deficit point of view, you start with the *glow* statement that helps to make the student feel good, and then you can offer a very constructive *grow* statement, which is how to make something better.

 **03:33** One thing that really gets kids excited about writing is having an audience, and one way to provide an audience for students is to find ways to extend their writing beyond the classroom. Inside the classroom you can publish student work by creating something called

the Wall of Fame. And on that Wall of Fame you can post just great sentences from students' writing that have lots of juicy words.

 **04:00** Another thing students can do is they can take their very favorite piece of writing and they can mount it around the room like it was a museum. And students can walk around and read each other's pieces, and they can take Post-Its and they can post their comments on each other's writing. And outside the classroom, their work can be displayed at bookstores, in libraries, they can be submitted to writing contests and online.

 **04:29** One of the best ways to help kids feel excited about writing is to give them choices. Very often, writing is assigned and it's very prescriptive. If they're allowed to keep a writer's notebook and to generate a number of choices for writing, I think it helps them be more involved.

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