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That's What Community Is All About

Eagle View Elementary School, Virginia
April 2012

Topic TEACHING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BE EFFECTIVE WRITERS

Practice ENGAGED COMMUNITY

- Highlights**
- » Collaborating and sharing ideas with someone in the class helps students feel safe and builds their confidence.
 - » To be a part of the writing community, teachers complete the same writing activities and share their own ideas as well.
 - » Students should create a list of possible writing ideas by talking to each other and building relationships.
 - » Students use a Peer Share form to give praise by saying something nice and providing suggestions.

About the Site Eagle View Elementary School
Fairfax, Virginia

Demographics

- » 38% Asian
- » 27% White
- » 15% Hispanic
- » 14% Black
- » 6% Other

- » 21% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- » 30% English Language Learners
- » 13% Special Education

Eagle View Elementary School, in Fairfax, Virginia, integrates writing into the daily curriculum of all subject areas. The teachers emphasize writing's importance in communication and learning. Eagle View teachers:

- » Provide daily writing time through Writer's Workshop;
- » Teach the writing process and writing for a variety of purposes;
- » Develop students' foundational writing skills, such as spelling, handwriting, text structure, and sentence construction; and
- » Build an engaged community of writers.

Full Transcript



 **00:04** My name is Sandi Poteet. I teach sixth grade at Eagle View Elementary in Fairfax, Virginia.

00:10 I know that as a writing teacher, collaboration is a pivotal part in the classroom. Your students should never feel like they're alone because that's when they shut down. They must always know that there is somebody to turn to. So whether it's somebody sitting at their table, maybe it's the teacher, maybe it's a small group, they have to have somebody that they can talk to just to bounce ideas back and forth.

 **00:35** To participate in the class as a writer, the teacher's role is huge. She must be seen as a part of this writing community. And I never ask my class to write anything that I haven't already written myself so that I know exactly where the struggles are going to be, where the successes are easily going to come, where they're going to need more time, which piece of it is going to take longer, where they're going to need lots and lots of guidance. So my students need to realize that I'm in the same boat that they are.

 **01:05** So as I'm modeling, I'm writing it on the board, and we're going through exactly the same process of idea building and sharing and pulling our thoughts and ideas together into sentences. When I share my writing with the classroom, it's important that they see that it doesn't come easy for me, just as it doesn't come easy for them.

 **01:26** Writing is hard, and it takes a lot of work, and it takes a lot of talking. So we start by talking. Whatever the concept is, we just have this brain sharing session, where kids toss out all these ideas that they know, and of course I am scribing up on the board, keeping track of all of this. And all ideas are acceptable because what we want is just a treasure trove of things that they can pull from and put their ideas, then, down on paper. So we share as a group, they'll work individually, with partners, or in small groups, just talking it out.

 **02:00** When students talk and get a chance to share, first of all it builds confidence because it's a frightening thing to have to pick up the pencil and look at blank paper when you don't have anything to back it up with. Writing is a personal thing, and you have to feel comfortable and in a safe environment, and you have to feel like you're surrounded by people that are going to be honest with you and take care of you and be gentle with you.

 **02:23** As a classroom teacher, there is nothing that could be valued more than for my students to feel safe and comfortable in that classroom. And it starts from the very beginning with us just building a relationship. We have class meetings all the time where we just talk about things that are important to them, things that interest them, things that they're worried about, and we just talk. And I share from my life, too, and of course you have to filter and be careful what you say. But they need to see me as a person, not just as their teacher who is on the other side of the room and standing up, that I'm part of this class with them and I have feelings and I have concerns about things.

 **03:04** And so the more I share about me, the more they're apt, or at least are tempted in the beginning to share about themselves. And when we share our writing, it's all about praise. What did you find in

their writing specifically that you liked? It could be a word, a phrase, it could be how they began their story, it could be something that we've learned in class, the use of transition words. And they have a Peer Share form where they write down the things that they like.

 **03:29** On the Peer Share form that we use, the first part is always about something nice—say something specifically that you love about their paper—and then we also give three suggestions. And again, we're not trying to be cruel or hurtful, so we learn as a community how to say things nicely. For instance, they might want to say, "Perhaps you need to look at paragraph two again. I got a little confused as a reader when I was going through that. Maybe you should look at it again." And then they can say, "I feel like there are several misspelled words."

 **04:04** So really what you're doing is you're telling them there are some mistakes in their paper, but you are saying it in a nice way. It has to be specific and to the point so that when the author gets it back and reads it, they can see where they've really been successful. And of course that builds confidence.

 **04:19** As a teacher, I have to be very careful with the topics that I give, ensuring choice, clearly, always—huge piece of it is choice—and ensuring that I've hit the hot spots, something that every kid in there is going to be able to write about. Otherwise I have shut down what I wanted to create, which was a group of writers who believe in themselves, who believe that I'm going to be careful and cautious with them and not do anything that would hurt them. And that's what community is all about.