

Learning to Write from Writers

Katie Wood Ray

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by Lori

Began by speaking of all her excitement related to a two year undertaking working with a first grade teacher (and co-author of the new book). They began by beginning to look at what successful writing that is mindful of Wondrous Words and other books that deal with young children and writing. Spoke of her book, *What You Know by Heart*, with a genuine conviction regarding the importance of what the teacher holds within her heart--the bigger picture and depth of understanding that guides interaction with children in writing conferences and mini lesson instruction. Her own goal in working with teachers is that leave with depth of understanding and learn to develop their own "lenses".

Presented a piece of writing done by a first grade child in the mountains of North Carolina. The child is one of passions, and he passes through these phases, and this writing is representative of his 'snake phase'. It was just a delightful piece and clearly reflective of lots and lots of READING like a writer.

The child had been involved in an immersions study looking at literary nonfiction: Picture books that entertain you but also inform you and give you factual information--they had been involved in genre immersion (ala Isoko Nia)

Rock of Ages--talks about the role of black church in American in terms of civil rights

Atlantic Karas

Gentle, Giant Octopus use to teach how to craft short, action packed sentences

I Call It Sky

Sophie's Skates

Bat Loves The Night

Tiger Trail matching print to meaning

Red Eyed Tree Frog interaction with the story, and the use of facts at the end of the story (I think I could find lots of examples like this my classroom library.

Speaking of what a child needs to know:

one kind of text a writer can make is a picture book
books of this kind often have dedications
books of this kind can have a mix of fact and story
pictures in a text like this are often labeled

facts a text like are often placed at the end and they relate to what happened in the story line
text can follow movement
text can be written in present text
illustrations can add more detail to words on the page
writer can bring the playfulness of language into writing
series of short sentences with strong verbs
the way print is manipulated on a page can be manipulated to make meaning
an illustration can run off the edge of the page
the feeling of some time period ending can bring a sense of closure to a text

Each of these understandings can be traced to a specific book and a specific discussion of the writerly aspects of literature.

When you read like a writer you...

see yourself as a particular kind of person--you are a writer
read with a sense of immediacy--there is an expectation of production
bring to your writing a clear vision of the kind of think you are trying to 'make'

It is essentially teaching children to "shop for ideas"---this how our children need to learn to read. The energy of all the teaching is "Somebody in here could try this..."

Told a story about this teacher she has been working with who, when working very early on with kindergartners, responds, "Don't worry honey, just pretend."

"What have you read that is like what you are trying to write right now?" is the most important question that you need to be asking your students. They need to be able to relate their vision to very specific types of writing--no piece of writing is the only example of a genre! The answer is not genre or type, but a very specific and accessible and can be given a name that works in Barnes and Noble. We need a real world answer to this question--good teaching will give them these answers.

Katie on length...

"When we're talking about writing, length matters."

Why? Because what we write in terms of length is tied to the types of writing we are doing and we need to make absolutely certain that the children are well read in precisely the type of writing we want children to be able to produce. For upper grade children, talked about review as an excellent vehicle for working with young writers.

Katie on essays...

Talked about Newsweek's "My Turn" column as a good way to introduce to genre of essays as a journey of thought. If we teach essay, we have to expose children to lots and lots of essays. Talked about the last page of Sports Illustrated and also a magazine called "Click", which an excellent source for procedural writing.

What Matters Most?

Time:

Children have time to work on writing every day.

Expectations:

Children are expected to finish pieces of writing on a regular basis.

Vision:

Students have a vision, taken from their reading life, of what kind of thing they are making when they write.

Teaching:

There is a strong sense of curriculum in the workshop--always "on about" something.

Assides on what matters most:

Time is the one common, non-negotiable issue that underlies learning to write. Stamina--the need to stay there and stick with it is a critical issue.

Expectation--Even if we do nothing else, the one expectation we must have is that every child must finish. Even if they write nothing of quality, even if it is a pile of JUNK what children must learn is that they must finish their writing.

Rules for finishing with little ones

**You have to fill up all your pages
You need to write about one thing**

The writing process is something we talk about after a piece is FINISHED. We need to be asking, “What kinds of things did you do when you were writing this?” “What were your decisions about crafting this peice?”

Teaching--there is a strong sense of curriculum in the workshop--we are always teaching about something

NTS--Do my kids know that we are working on using details or word choice or creating sensory images? Do they? Some do, but I need to do a much better job making sure my kids know this!

One problem with teaching writing, is that we can only teach what we know and early on the process of writing workshop teaching, and when we first get started our mini lessons tend to be disjointed and unconnected. They also primarily teach to conventions.

“Studies need to be ‘big’ enough that writers at many different places can thrive inside them.”

How big? SO big that we will never truly have complete understanding, it needs to be a **HUGE** thing, a meaningful thing!

A look at children’s work in a variety of grade levels and within a variety of text structures:

Text Structure

Use of a repeated phrase or transition device:

Shared from the first chapter of The Partner (Grisham), MLK’s I have a dream speach, and cited several beautiful picture books (many Rylant--no surprise there ;-)).

Point: examples of this DEVISE can be found in many, many genres and text types.

Use of movement from through time (On Monday, On Tuesday,etc.)

Question and answer

What a Wonderful Day to be a Cow River Story

NTS: Try to find a piece called My Four Best Friends and Me, by Corry Merano (a child’s peice)

Shared a comparison piece written by a child and shared this insight regarding comparison writing;

WAY ONE see saw--Fred this, George that (like Tough Boris) with bits of summary in the middle (possibly)

WAY TWO tell it all about Fred, tell it all about George and sum it up

Really emphasizes the beginning of writing with lists--because, in her view, somethings are stories, but essentially everything else we write is tied to writing lists. She spends lots of time working the structure of list books (*isn't this essentially organization?*). And does this struggle with this sort of issue--organizing, prioritizing, that sort of thing--is tied to an overemphasis on the 5 paragraph essay form to the exclusion of many other structures and that when we, as students, were taken beyond this form, we were essentially spoonfed the form and expectation.

Q & A

Q. Where can we find more examples of short pieces of writing?

A. Katie did a birdwalk here talking again about the importance of reading broadly within the genre before asking kids. And then... where do you find this stuff?

The internet, she says go to MSN.COM and they archive all the major articles from USA Today. There is a certain amount of up front work. Advised combing resources, teaming with teachers from your grade level, and begin to compile and SAVE, SAVE, SAVE! Find some folks you can really trust and compile, compile, compile.

What we study in Wirter's Workshop is:

Process or Product

Examples of Process:

keeping a writer's notebook

revision

how writers go about writing--reading the stories of their journeys

Examples of Product: (Will be the focus of the rest of the day)

The beginning of this disucssion is going to begin with a collection of writing in the middle of my table. It may be a collection of books which share a specific genre or it may be a collection that is very eclectic in terms of genre but share a

specific commonality for the purpose of study. (Ex., punctuation, structure, etc.). If we are really teaching children how to read like writers, then our collection might be wildly diverse and the point is to learn to read like a writer, to find, to collect, to identify and to begin to give children the opportunity to FIND these things. Noticing is important, recognizing the intentional use of language, of form, of repetition, down to the specific dig --be it punctuation, matching print to meaning, etc.).

The Roller Coaster (just another book Katie referenced with enthusiasm)

The process begins with the noticing, the collecting and sometimes the naming of something (a child noticed the unintentional use of something she called line spaces--the hyphens).

At this point she again referenced the ability to read aloud and to read aloud widely and well. Our reading aloud has to match our intent, so we read aloud with a focus on elements we want children to notice (NFM --note from me--not to the inclusion of the rhythm and beauty of the text--not with artice).

Talked about how interesting it can be to approach the teaching of punctuation through these sorts of digs--how purposeful, so that we need to do it once and maybe twice a year FOREVER. In this case, the purpose for writing is to see the child's use of interesting punctuation, show me and talk to me about your punctuation and how you made these decisions. This can be done by a child in the context of many different kinds of writing (NOT POETRY, obviously) as long as the child can

The word excerpt is a word we want kids to know in the context of writer's workshop .

NTS--I can do this so easily, I can begin naming it that when I ask kids to read me a bit of what they are reading when I do running records!!! I can say, "I am going to listen to you read an excerpt." Jeess--I write it down -excerpt--why the heck don't I say it?

Chicken Walk: We love poetry!! And we require kids to write an anthology (!!!) of poetry on a subject they love.

Examples of poetry books that are focused on a single subject:

George Toasted Marshmallows--Camping Poems

Come Sunday

Shoes

Look at Joanne Ryder's books next time I get a chance.

Talked about the need to talk with children about decisions related to making great decisions as illustrators (I LOVE THIS).

Structure for Writing Workshop

Daily Routine

Whole Class Lesson	10-15 minutes
Writing Time	30-40 minutes
Share/Processing Time	5-10 minutes

- Whole class lessons are organised into units of study around big ideas of interest to people who write.
- Teacher is conferring with individual students during writing time.
- Publication expectations are tied to units of study.
- Share/processing time is teaching time too--we learn from smart things students are doing

Q & A

Q. What about writing for test?

A. Sometimes we just have to do some 'fake' stuff. Writing for state assessment is a weird process, and so we just have to work with kids and practice that format. Suggested that for a period of time, that you from time to time suspend the REAL work of writing workshop, and teach children how to contrive to this sort of writing but at the same time, the children must see that learning that goes on during the REAL workshop time will improve ANY and ALL writing that goes on in our lives. Come back to the idea that the way to teach writing is to begin with sound examples, and we can share examples of what 'sound' writing to tested prompts looks like. So what is RIGHT about the idea of 5 paragraph writing? The idea that text has structure (but can have more than one structure).

A bit about Katie...

She started as a teacher in 1985, she did not set out to be a teacher of writing, but became.

Katie on spelling and revision...

The biggest tool you need is the sense of recognition--of knowing when a word is spelled wrong. Talked about the role of technology in the teaching of revision and of spelling and her own wish that children could begin drafting much, much earlier on the computer. Children need to get beyond the idea that revision is

hard work. The other issue is having the ability to recognize the need to revise...the need to change? Some of it is just “Textual intimacy”, that relationship between the writer and draft and possibly the future writing. Vision, the ability to envision a text, is far more important. If it is great the first time you write, and you can really KNOW that, then revision for the sake of revision is a waste of time. Talked a lot about Barry Lane’s work with revision and also Heard’s book (Revisor’s Toolbox) and the clarity of language they have given us together. Katie prefers to slap revision and drafting together, she is the sort of writer for whom writing is a constant process of drafting and revising and not an “after the end” sort of reflection.

Katie on working with gifted students...

Talks about how hard these kids are to work with, they think they know it, that their style is unique and they have to see that language is a shared thing---that we share ways of doing things.

Katie on grammar...

It is whole class teaching only when it is a whole class problem (or nearly so). Instead, it is something we need to teach to children on a ‘need to know basis’ (my paraphrase).

Katie on time...

Give up something. Typically the isolated instruction of grammar and linguistics is what we can give up. She also spoke of her belief that linguistics should have a place as a 1/2 semester course in high school, for the value of truly knowing your own language.

Katie on focus...

Know what you’re working on and stick to it. You have to let things go! You also have to sit down and keep Calkins in mind, “Teach the writer and not the writing.”

TAWL Note:

She shared a handout which basically explained all that we have learned from Ruby as she shared Isoke’s work with us in her classroom (and is the thread in so much of her writing. But what I loved, and had not heard or did not remember is this:

“Writing Under the Influence” which she described as “finishing a piece of writing that shows the influence of the study in the writing.” I just loved this--I think it should be the title of a book in and of itself--wouldn’t you just feel, pardon the pun, driven to read it?

Comments on grade level:

The way we teach second grade has to depend largely on the way that they have been taught in k-1. Children who have strong backgrounds in writing workshop are ready for more diversity in their writing in terms of genre.

By third grade, we need to start providing lots of specific guidelines, included the kinds of 'stepped' deadlines and specific expectation. (She was referencing a teacher handout that she shared that set up deadlines for topic selection, for research, for sharing first draft, etc.)

The Trip Back Home Janet Wong

Also talked about the differences in the way in which we immerse--by reading aloud to children with younger kids, moving towards some independent reading as our students get older. She also talked about typing up the text so that the text from each page is inside a numbered box and then sharing these with kids. Also use of photocopies. Kids need to be able to write, to highlight, to comment and to learn always to learn to become a writer of these types of text. All of this needs to happen within the framework of the mini lesson, got to keep it short, so that it become possible to work with wondrous text--fewer in number--over a period of time. Then at some point a day away from writing to assemble lists of our discoveries. With little kids, these are shared anchor charts. With the older kids, it becomes first the anchor and then part of writer's notebooks. (pretty much craft study here)

Reading like a writer is about looking at how it is written, not what it is about.

Katie on Charlotte's Web...

Is there anybody in here who hasn't read it? I shouldn't even ask that, but it's pretty unAmerican.

Talked about looking at fragments, run ons and the like in writing NOT from the standpoint of sentencing but from the perspective of ***making interesting decisions as you punctuate.*** *It is the idea of making sure that people will read your writing the way you, as a writer, want it to be read. It is about voice!! It is about how the writing works within the context of the piece and so much about whether it is a fragment when it stand alone.*

“It is not that knowing about language is not important but that it is more important than we ever thought it was.” *Katie Wood Ray*

Four Key Understandings

What it means to read like a writer

Writing Style is INDIVIDUAL but it is not unique.

Teaching of writing needs to be descriptive, not prescriptive (and we're willing to embrace the wonderfully messy ambiguity of language and all its potential)

Faith in inquiry

Talk about crafting is across text and across genre and through text.