



Five Ways to Build a Strong Writing Community

By Marine Freibrun

One of the most important things a teacher can do is to create a classroom environment and community that fosters writing. Students need to evolve as proficient writers while also enhancing their desire to write, and teachers can do that by creating a community of writers.

In my third-grade classroom, we built a solid community of writers through a practical and engaging approach. I modeled the writing process to my students, sharing my own ups and downs to make it clear that we were all in it together. Getting hands-on with writing alongside my students, I joined our class as a fellow writer.

Our classroom turned into a hub of creativity where I made sure to create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere for everyone to share their ideas. During our group learning sessions, energy filled our classroom as students freely shared thoughts, crafting a mix of creative stories.

Seeing the genuine pride in their eyes as they shared their written pieces, it hit me how crucial it was to create a space where each student felt heard and appreciated. In that warm and nurturing setting, creativity thrived, and writing became a shared journey for our community of emerging authors.

Creating a community of writers is one of the recommendations of the [What Works Clearinghouse's Educator Practice Guide, Teaching Elementary School Students to Be Effective Writers](#) (Graham, et al., 2018). The authors of these practice guides combine their expertise along with research to create specific, evidence-based recommendations for educators.

So, how can you carry out this recommendation to create a community of writers in your classroom? This article explores five suggestions from the guide and my personal experience implementing each one in the classroom.

SHARE YOUR WRITING

One of the most powerful ways to teach writing is through explicit instruction and modeling, and through sharing your own writing as a teacher. By doing this, you are participating as a member of the writing community.

As you teach writing, use metacognition while thinking through the writing process, and show your students the perseverance required to create a strong piece of writing. You can also show the satisfaction that comes when finishing a piece of work.

Some more easy-to-implement strategies to share your writing include:

- Drafting a letter or narrative in front of students
- Collaborating with students on a writing project, like a class newsletter
- Offering your own examples for writing assignments that students are completing
- Demonstrating how you actively decide on a topic you're going to write about

My personal experience

Metacognition was always an effective tool to use during instruction with my students. During explicit instruction and modeling, I shared my thoughts aloud with my students. Depending on the writing activity, I would create my writing piece live—in front of and with my students.

Through this process I was not only demonstrating metacognition, but I was also creating success criteria for students to refer to as they started to complete their own writing pieces.

PROVIDE WRITING CHOICES

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You can foster choice by having students keep notebooks they can use to record writing ideas, like memories or their experiences throughout the day. Give students daily access to their notebooks so they can easily add and build upon their ideas throughout the school year. In addition to keeping a writing notebook for ideas, encourage your students to write just for themselves in a journal format, or to write for their peers or an imaginary audience.

In addition to writing choices, provide students with instruction for writing to prompts. Prompts help students to write while also making sure their writing is aligned with your instructional purpose. Make sure the writing prompt clearly states expectations for content and writing skills.

Students should also be given room to express their thinking. Using prompts can help teachers to utilize specific content standards, assess student writing, and build engagement among students.

My personal experience

Giving students choice in writing can foster a love for writing, while also supporting students to practice mindfulness and enhance their creativity. To incorporate choice and mindfulness in our classroom, I instituted an end-of-the-day reflection writing session. Each student had their own spiral notebook that they used as a journal to reflect on their learning for the day.

I would sometimes give students a “free write” session where they were encouraged to write freely about their day, goals, or anything that was on their mind. Other times I would give students a specific end-of-the-day prompt to use to help guide their writing.

COLLABORATE AS WRITERS

Another way to build a community of writers is to encourage your students to collaborate throughout the writing process. Students can work together while brainstorming ideas for a topic, forming writing groups during the drafting process, and by editing and reviewing each other's writing.

Collaboration can also look like students creating a piece of writing together. Students can use chart paper to collaborate on and to display their collaborative work. Students can also work together to develop a school or class newsletter or to write stories they share with peers in other classes.



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When you collaborate as writers, you're also honoring students' diverse perspectives. As mentioned in the white paper, *Writing for Life: The Evidence Base for Powerful Writing Instruction*, (Ramirez Stukeley, M. & Eidman-Adahl, E., n.d.), recognizing and magnifying the voices of students in writing stands as a crucial element of effective writing instruction and serves as a means to nurture the distinctive abilities and talents of each student.

Writing, being a fundamental mode of communication, should offer students the chance to articulate their perspectives in a manner reflective of their life experiences and individual voices. When students collaborate, they can amplify each other's voices.

My personal experience

My favorite way to collaborate as writers was through creating a class story book. This was a great end-of-the-year activity that encouraged collaboration among students. We had a book theme, and students worked together on their individual stories—brainstorming, drafting, and giving each other feedback. The finished product was a memory of our school year together that my students could keep.

GIVE AND RECEIVE FEEDBACK

Throughout the writing process, students need opportunities to give and receive feedback. Through feedback, students will know whether their writing is able to convey its message. Students should be sharing their writing with you, and responding to your written and verbal feedback.

Students should also be responding to their peers' feedback and having conversations about what could improve their writing. Encourage your students to participate in the feedback process with one another. Use rubrics, teacher-student conferences, peer conferences, and writing exemplars to encourage feedback conversations. When students work together to provide each other feedback, it can enhance their understanding of their own writing.

Before sending students to give each other feedback, however, make sure your students have been explicitly taught strategies on how to provide and receive feedback. Through explicit instruction, model and provide sample language for students to use while they're giving and receiving verbal feedback. Give students sentence frames to guide their conversations.

Here are some examples:

- When you wrote ____ it helped me understand ____.
- I could picture ____ when I read ____.
- A standout line in your writing for me is ____ because ____.

My personal experience

My favorite way to help students give feedback was through the jigsaw method. I used it in a variety of ways, but the most influential way to support students with collaboration was using the jigsaw method as a form of feedback. Engaging in this activity, students learned from one another while also learning how to give and receive constructive and effective feedback. This was also a way to collaborate and learn through a shared experience. Giving students opportunities to receive individual feedback is also a vital part of the writing process. When this is modeled, students can use those strategies during a jigsaw activity.

PUBLISH STUDENTS' WRITING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Build your community of writers by publishing students' writing. There are so many ways to publish their work:

- Displaying writing in the classroom on poster boards and anchor charts
- Posting on a blog
- Sharing through Google Docs
- Working with a student book publishing company
- Using web-based resources (FlipGrid, Canva, etc.)
- Creating construction paper books with binding

You can post your students' work outside of your classroom, too! Post their work for others to see by hanging completed writing pieces in the front office, in the hallways, or in multipurpose rooms and auditoriums. Take it one step further, and have your students complete a gallery walk that showcases everyone's work. Have students use sticky notes to leave each other positive praise on the work. Through this activity, students' writing will be celebrated and your community of writers is built and strengthened.

My personal experience

I showcased my students' work in our classroom in a variety of ways—anchor charts, bulletin board displays, class books, etc.—but one of my favorite ways was through an “Author’s Tea.” This was typically something I did at the end of the school year, but it could be done during any time of the school year. Students would choose their favorite writing piece from the year. I got fruit platters, juice, tea, and other yummy treats and decorated a classroom table with the food and flowers. I invited students’ family members to join us for tea and set out all of my students’ writing that they chose. I also set up an Author’s Chair where students could sit and read their writing pieces if they wanted to read aloud. It was a wonderful way to showcase writing and include family.

By embracing these strategies, educators can effectively create a vibrant and supportive community of writers within their classrooms. This approach not only aligns with best practices in teaching but also empowers students to develop essential writing skills while finding joy and value in their writing endeavors. ■

TIME TO REFLECT

1. Think back on times in your life when you felt heard and appreciated, whether in school, work, or simply with friends and family. Do you think that feeling impacted your writing?
2. Have you had an experience where you felt unheard, unsupported, and perhaps unsafe? How did that impact your writing and/or other work? What could have been done at the time to help you feel more supported?
3. **Connect to Practice:** How is your current classroom community? In what ways might you bolster it to ensure students feel heard and appreciated?
4. **Connect to Practice:** How do you currently showcase student writing? What ideas would you like to try implementing in the future?

REFERENCES

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