

Thoughts on Planning

Kylene Beers is a noted educator exploring ways to help struggling students become proficient readers and writers. In an interview for this project, she talked about some of the ways she encourages student writers through her comments on and evaluation of their work.

Transcript

"There are some things I consider when I'm looking at a writing year with kids. The first thing I want to do is constantly remind myself, whether these are my undergraduates or an eighth-grade class that I have the opportunity to work with, I want to remind myself that while I may say it's eighth graders or while I may say it's undergraduates, and that gives us the sense of continuity. They're eighth graders all year, you know. They're eighth graders in August. And they're eighth graders in May.

"The reality is these kids are very different from August to May. That's a long time in the life of a young adolescent, a teenager. So the first thing I always want to remind myself is where these kids are developmentally in August is not where they'll be developmentally in May.

"So I want to get a sense of who these kids are. For instance, which of my kids are still concrete thinkers versus which of them are abstract thinkers. And recognize that the kid who is a very concrete operational thinker in August and September may actually be moving into some formal operational thinking by the time I get to May.

"That means the kind of writing I expect to see from him in September ought to look different than the writing I expect to see in May. And so I want to think about who they are as far as their ages. I think when we're working with middle school, ninth grade kids, it even helps to sort of say where do the birthdays fall in? How old are the kids?

"I can teach a ninth-grade class and have 14-year-olds up to 16-year-olds. You know, just depending on birthdays and do parents hold kids back and a whole variety of things. So the responses from those kids are going to look different.

"Another thing I'm going to think about as I'm looking at that writing community is I'm going to ask myself all year long what kinds of experiences with writing do I want them to have? And I really mean by that what kinds of experiences do I want them to have with revision? I don't want revision to look the same all year long. What do I want to do with pre-writing? I want them to see that there's lots of different ways to be thinking about a text and be thinking about how I want to capture ideas. I want to look at how I'm going to focus on different ways of having peer editing going on. I want to say not just

do I want them writing comparison, contrast and persuasive and description. That's not it. I want to say within each of those big topics, what are the experiences I want him to have with all parts of this notion of writing as a process.

"And the other thing I'm going to spend time thinking about is what kind of reading experiences do I want them to have? If I want them to become multi-genre writers, then they better be multi-genre readers. And so, I need to look at where are those reading experiences going to be? How are they going to lay out in the classroom? And how are those related to the kinds of writing that I hope they'll produce that year?"