

Workshop 8: Teaching the Power of Revision

Velvet McReynold's Reflections

Revision vs. editing

A lot of adults in education don't understand what happens at the revision stage because we are so married to the editing stage. They want them to get the periods right. They want them to get the capitals right. The revision for me is the most important. It's where the magic happens. I want my students, first and foremost, to have something to say. So my revision goal is the same as my drafting goal. Don't let your teacher, don't let anyone throw something at you where you don't have something to say. Have an opinion. Have something to say, then you have something to work with and to change. Everything that you do is not final and the end-all.

The second would be: Use your references. You don't have to memorize all of the rules. You just have to know where to get them. I give handouts. I give a lot of handouts. I give exemplars. I actually Xerox the pages from their grammar book. The page that I gave them on dialogue actually came from a seventh-grade textbook. I guess I could have passed out the textbook, but it's not as user-friendly. That's short and sweet. It took all of eight minutes to go through the lesson that I wanted to go through. And it's not bulky. It doesn't give them all those bad vibes.

The third thing is: Use your resources. There's lots of people that can give you that feedback, not just the teacher, not just your parents. So I enjoy it when my students give me feedback, and I enjoy it when they give feedback to one another. And you have to have all of those components going. Otherwise, the writing just stays stagnant, stays as is.

Looking for evidence of revision

The first thing I look for is writing on paper. Are you willing to scratch up something that potentially represents you, part of your self esteem, your writing? And as I walked around and I actually saw notes and I saw circles and I saw margin notes, that says to me they are willing. They are willing to trust me that adding dialogue is going to make their story a better story to tell.

When we actually move to the next level where they're actually crafting, it would be the before and after. What did it sound like last August when you first

wrote this and what does it sound like today? And I will be able to hear and they will be able to hear that before and after. That's one of the reasons I have them keep a portfolio so that they can see their growth. They know when they are achieving a goal, when they are taking a risk and the risk pays off.

Strategy for reluctant revisers

I would actually use the strategies that I might use with non-readers or with second language students, ask them to talk to me and I would write it down and then, through the questioning, get the places where they can add the dialogue or change the introduction. So I end up doing the physical work but they're still doing the thinking.