

Workshop 2: Making Writing Meaningful

Damond Moodie's Reflections

The importance of student connection

I think it's important for students to find connection with the things that they write about because it creates a sense of ownership. And that sense of ownership, I think, propels the project forward. If they're to look at it from the opposite point of view, if they're not excited about it, then it becomes laborious and they're less likely to do their best work, they're less likely to approach it with a sense of "I want to complete this." But when they're excited about it, you know, there's no end to the lengths that they'll go to get the project done and to inject it with a sense of pride.

Connecting students to the world around them

One of the main types of writing that I do is current events. We start working with that within the first month of school, and the purpose is to give the students an opportunity to connect with the significant events that are going on around the world and throughout our community. But also, I think, it gives them a sense of place within the community and within the world—just to be able to read a newspaper, or hear a story, or see something on the Internet that they connect with that interests them. Whether they're asking questions about it because they don't understand it or if they're having an opinion about it, I think it generates this kind of understanding of, you know, where their place is. You know, in that sense of, oh, I have an opinion about this, or I'm not sure what that means, or it's interesting to me. So I like to use that as a way to kind of, you know, pique their interest about the world around them.

Teacher- vs. student-generated topics

I do journals with my students, you know, a couple times a week and they're just basic warm-up type things, you know, seven or eight minutes long, but I provide the prompt. When I provide the prompt, I really strive to find something that everyone will be able to make a comment on, but sometimes that's not successful and what I get is, "Well, I don't know," or "I don't have anything to say about that." And I've really tried to work with my students to get them to, even if they don't feel like they have an opinion or they're not quite sure what the answer is, that at least they can, you know, explore some thoughts or

possibilities.

Now, on the other hand, when it's completely student driven, when we're doing autobiographical incidents or it's a choice journal—because I do offer that sometimes—they tend to find something that is of worth to them. And something that, you know, I would normally allow them seven minutes, seven minutes comes and I say, you know, are we ready to share and I've got a whole host of hands that are saying, no, I'm not finished yet I still have a lot to do. And that's exciting for me and it kind of prompts me to sometimes, you know, offer them more opportunities to just, you know, go off and say whatever they have to say.