

Ways To Respond to Student Writing

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

"I think that one of the most important things kids need to hear is what it is that they did well. I think that kids need to know that their writing that's on the page has value. And I think it's easy as a teacher to get caught up in a 'look at this, look at this.' 'This part doesn't make sense.' 'This transition isn't easy.' 'This should be parallel.' And forget to say you had a great idea. 'You had a great idea.' 'Look at how you used this phrase.' 'Look at how I got caught up in what was going on.' If we want kids to see themselves as writers, then we have to develop a confidence that says you are a writer. And you can't ever do that with a kid if it's constantly about the mistakes that they've made.

"At the same time, if all we ever do is say you did a great job, what we're not doing is providing any sort of scaffolded environment that moves them up. So, you know, what I tell teachers is sort of three for one. Find three things a kid did great. And some kids, that mean we're pushing to find those things. But find three things the kid did in a way that surprised you. Find one thing that you're real sure they can improve on, that individual child can improve on for the next time that you're with that student. And write that one thing down.

"A lot of times when kids get feedback from teachers, they get so much. That when they start to go to the next page, they don't know where to start. So, have a plan. And on the plan, it starts with 'look at this.' 'You did this well.' 'You did this.' 'You did this.' 'Here's the thing that I think if you'll do better next time, it's going to change the whole shape of your writing.'"