



Building a Writing Community: A Practical Guide

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Maupin House Publishing

Building a Writing Community guides teachers in developing the writer's craft in students. Marcia Freeman explains that the process is what writers do, but the craft is what writers know. This book defines target skills and helps teachers to know how to teach these skills in the writing workshop model. *Building a Writing Community* fosters writing proficiency that will have a positive effect on reading comprehension and achievement across the curriculum.

Building a Writing Community is one of the core books used in the CraftPlus K-8 Writing Program and Staff Development Resource. *Teaching the Youngest Writers* is also available as a resource for working with emergent writers.

About the Study Guide

This guide is designed to facilitate professional development in a collegial book study atmosphere. Five professional development sessions include discussion points, guiding questions, workshop activities, and classroom applications. To create a successful professional development experience, consider the following tips:

- Before you begin, seek input about teacher schedules and preferences. Try to arrange your professional development so that participants will be able to attend every session.
- Provide copies of *Building a Writing Community* for all participants. Meaningful application of the skills and activities discussed at each meeting depends upon access to the resource between meetings.
- Provide discussion questions ahead of time and encourage participants to become familiar with the material covered in each session prior to the meeting.
- Provide time between each meeting session to allow teachers the opportunity to apply the skills and be prepared to share their successes and challenges in implementation.
- At each meeting, allow for discussion before beginning the planned workshop activities. Teachers will gain understanding by articulating their successes and challenges faced when implementing the skills.

Session One

Introduction, The Classroom Daily Writing Workshop, Prewriting: Chapters I-III

Guiding Quote:

“Our job, as teachers of the craft, is to help students see that written text has two layers: the content (the material presented, and the craft (how the author conveyed the meaning and engaged the reader). Gifted writers may recognize the craft intuitively, but the rest of us need to be taught it.” (page 7)

Discussion Questions:

1. What materials and resources are necessary to implement writing workshop?
2. What is a target skill? How do I know what skills to teach my students?
3. What are some of the management techniques to make the writing workshop effective and to provide structure?
4. What is prewriting and why is it important?

Workshop Activity:

Webbing after Gathering Data or Brainstorming

Prior to the lesson: photocopy reproducibles #5 and #6 found in the appendix in the back of the book.

1. Follow the lesson plan presented on pages 51-52.
2. Discuss the value of each type of prewriting and how it can help the drafting process.
3. Divide the participants into four groups. Assign each group one of the following topics: environment and management, materials, daily writing, target skills, and the vocabulary of writers.
4. Encourage the groups to find key ideas about their topic and be prepared to share with the group.

Classroom Implementation:

Give students the opportunity to think and talk about topics. Survey the lessons in these chapters and plan for instruction. Guide students in the prewriting process by implementing one of the suggested prewriting activities.

Looking Ahead:

Be prepared to discuss the successes and challenges of implementing these lessons. Encourage teachers to bring student samples to the next session to facilitate discussion.

Session Two

Drafting, Response, Revision: Chapters IV-VI

Guiding Quote:

“Young writers need to know that their drafts are just one step in the process of gathering and presenting their thoughts about a given topic. A rough draft represents a starting place. If is constructed as a document with lots of room to add and move text, then the successive stages of response, revision, editing, and publishing will be much easier.” (page 64)

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the most effective techniques to help writers during the drafting process?
2. What are some response strategies and why are they effective?
3. How does conferencing help a writer? What can a teacher do to effectively facilitate the conferencing process?
4. How does the book define revision? What are some of the techniques used to assist writers in the process of revision?

Workshop Activity:

1. Divide participants into three groups. Assign each group to one of the following chapters: Drafting, Response, or Revision. Have each group read and discuss the key ideas and strategies.
2. Have each group report on their topic. Encourage participants to share any management strategies, activities, and content necessary for effective implementation.
3. Direct participants to select at least one idea, activity, or target skill to use with their students based on the writing sample from the previous session.

Classroom Implementation:

Plan for further needs assessment and progress monitoring. Identify target skills appropriate for selected grade level and student development. Facilitate the use of one new strategy or idea.

Looking Ahead:

Be prepared to discuss the successes and challenges of implementing the activities or lessons. Encourage teachers to bring student samples to the next session to facilitate discussion.

Session Three

Editing and Publishing: Chapters VII-VIII

Guiding Quote:

“Editing comes after revision and before publishing. Only about 30% of writing in your classroom writing workshop needs to be edited. You and your young writers should determine how much and how often work should be published; 10% is sufficient.”

Discussion Questions:

1. Why is editing an important part of the writing process?
2. What is the difference between revision and editing?
3. Discuss some of the models for editing that are effective in the writing workshop process?
4. Why do students need to publish their writing? What are some of the suggested modes for published work?

Workshop Activity:

Model Lesson: Class Edit Model

Prior to the lesson: Photocopy reproducible #14 for each participant. If possible, create a transparency of the sample to model the lesson.

1. Follow the lesson plan for Class Model Edit on page 96.
2. Discuss the benefits of this lesson and how it could be modified for future use.
3. Review the procedures for editing by ear on page 98. Discuss how this strategy would meet the needs of student writers.
4. In small groups, read the information about publishing student work and be prepared to share key ideas with the whole group.

Classroom Implementation:

Review the various techniques for editing and publishing student writing. Survey the lessons and activities and develop a plan for instruction.

Looking Ahead:

Be prepared to discuss the successes and challenges of implementing the activities or lessons. Encourage teachers to bring student samples to the next session to facilitate discussion.

Session Four

Writing Craft, Narrative Writing, Expository Writing, and Persuasive Writing:
Chapters IX-XI

Guiding Quote:

“Writers, like scientists, artists, philosophers, and comedians are observers of the world. They notice and record their observations enlightening and entertaining the rest of us.” (page 126)

Discussion Questions:

1. What are composing skills and why are they important?
2. What are some of the major characteristics and techniques associated with narrative writing?
3. What are the similarities and differences between narrative and expository writing?
4. What are the three components of a persuasive piece of writing?

Workshop Activity:

1. Divide participants into four groups. Assign each group one of the following topics: writing craft, narrative writing, expository writing, and persuasive writing. Have each group read and discuss the assigned chapter and identify key ideas and strategies. If possible, identify resources or professional books available that may support each part of the process.
2. Allow each group to present a brief overview of their assigned topic identifying specific tips for implementation and any known resources available.
3. Identify any challenges or barriers that need to be overcome in order to successfully implement a lesson or idea.

Classroom Implementation:

Choose a particular type of writing and assist students using the writing workshop model. Implement at least one new idea or strategy from the chapters.

Looking Ahead:

Be prepared to discuss the successes and challenges of implementing the activities or lessons. Encourage teachers to bring student samples to the next session to facilitate discussion.

Session Five

Poetry, Evaluation, Assessment, and Portfolios, Meeting Common Challenges:
Chapters XII-XIV

Guiding Quote:

“Do not evaluate and grade every piece of writing a student undertakes. That will inevitably turn off the flow of writing you are trying to achieve in your classroom writing community. Young writers need a good deal of practice and opportunity to experiment and take risks.” (page 187)

Discussion Questions:

1. What are literary devices? How can students use these devices when they are working with poetry?
2. How do you evaluate students to ensure they are making adequate progress?
3. What types of documents should be included in a student writing portfolio?
4. What are some of the common challenges teachers face when implementing the writing workshop model?

Workshop Activity:

1. As a group, brainstorm to determine which components make a piece of writing good. Make a list and entertain all suggestions.
2. Direct participants to turn to page 195. Review the list and add any additional ideas to the chart. Explain to participants this is an effective way to determine where students are currently focused and where they are in their development.
3. Read the common challenges and suggestions for how to handle those challenges. Discuss any additional challenges and use the book as a resource to determine how to respond. Encourage teachers to be proactive and set clear expectations for students.
4. Review the bibliography of resources on pages 40, 137, and 185. Identify resources owned by faculty members or available in your school's professional library.

Classroom Implementation:

Direct teachers to plan implementation strategies, continue progress monitoring, and participate in collaborative lesson planning. Encourage teachers to continue to support each other and use the book as a resource.

Looking Ahead:

Identify desired resources and materials not currently available at your site and explore funding sources you can use to acquire these resources.