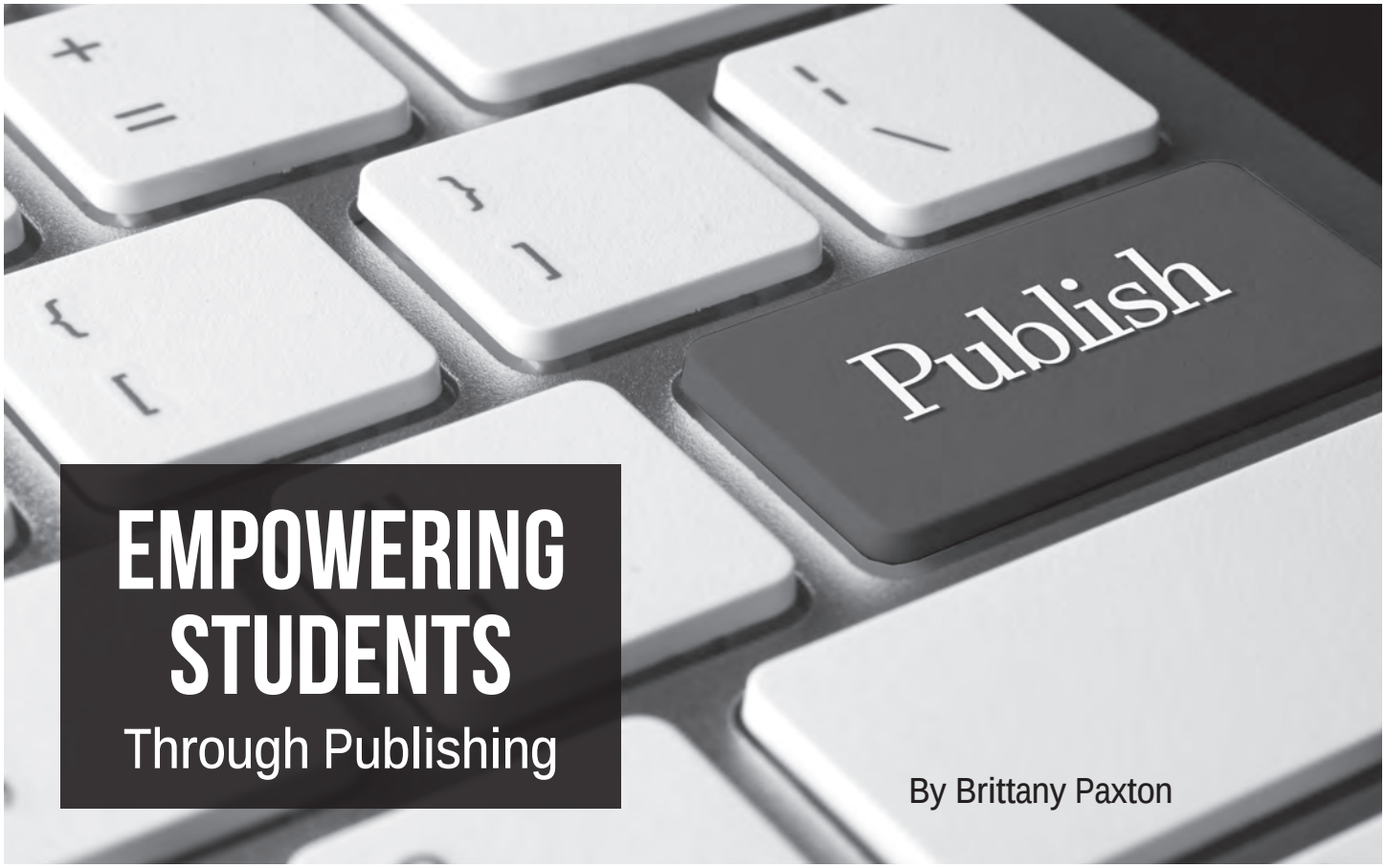


# EMPOWERING STUDENTS
## Through Publishing

By Brittany Paxton

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**Abstract:** One of the most difficult parts of the writing process for many teachers is publishing. It is easy to focus writing instruction on the process itself and give publishing much less time—or leave it out completely. Many teachers are unaware of options they have to help students publish outside of essay contests and often rely on gallery walks or student presentations that limit publications to within the classroom. But publishing is so beneficial for students both during the writing process and as whole learners. By publishing, students will more fully understand author's craft and the entirety of the writing process. They will also develop numerous soft skills like empathy and self-efficacy. Publishing leads to an increase in students' perception of themselves as learners and helps them take ownership of their writing. Once their work is published, students can hold readings across their district, further cementing their identity as authors and building a community among other students.

*Keywords:* publishing, writing process, social-emotional learning, conferring, self-efficacy

When I started teaching a decade ago, I was stuck in a cycle of low expectations. I assigned my first piece of writing; the results were disappointing. Students were unsure and confused about what an essay entailed. Their responses were little more than an incoherent, unconnected series of sentences. I turned my disappointment outward and assigned another, much harder essay, expecting students to show me how bad their writing could really be. Rather than reteaching or scaffolding future instruction, I was determined to show them how far behind they were by letting them fail and fail again. My freshmen and I were in a downward spiral that lasted all year and ended with discouragement and disenfranchisement. As a teacher, I didn't feel proud of my instruction, but instead of reflecting on my own values, philosophy, and skills, I lashed out at an entire generation of students, lamenting the lack of values and skills of "kids these days."

Since that first year of school, I've grown as an educator through research, reading, and training. I've become increasingly intentional in raising my expectations of the capabilities of students and have learned how to empower students to take ownership of their learning. When I moved to my current district that embraces authentic publication, I was excited to see publishing as part of the curriculum because I knew that publishing would enable deeper understanding of writing and increase some social skills like communication and receiving feedback. Initially, I believed that publishing was limited to creating a polished product that could be shared with other students, maybe even entered in a contest. I didn't understand the depth of social and emotional development students would undergo when publishing a piece of writing.

Social-emotional learning in conjunction with academic instruction has become increasingly important for me, and I've found that I've developed a greater emotional intelligence along with my students as I've become more intentional in embedding social and emotional learning into my instruction. At first, I believed that social and emotional learning required something extra of me, but I've learned that much of what we do as language arts teachers inherently helps students develop beyond academics. In order to publish their writing, students have to both analyze character in mentor texts and create character in their writing, both of which increase empathy (Junker & Jacquemin, 2017; McTigue et al., 2015). Publishing also requires students to take ownership of their learning and advocate for their needs as writers and for their role in the writing process. After publishing, students will have a self-efficacy that can drive their belief in possibilities for themselves. Without working outside of my curriculum, I was able to include social and emotional learning that was immediately applicable and changed student thinking and behavior for the better.

At some point in learning more about authentic literacy strategies, I came across Nancie Atwell's (1998) belief that student writers take more ownership of their writing and understand its power more thoroughly when they consider the effect it will have on an audience outside of their classroom. This was an appealing thought, but I still had concerns about requiring, or even encouraging, students to share their writing publicly. A significant portion of my students had dysgraphia, dyslexia, or are emerging bilingual students. I did not want to put them in a position where people would judge their progress unfavorably. Further, I knew that publishing would require them to be vulnerable, and I didn't know if they were socially ready for that. So, I approached publishing with them delicately. I was intentional in my choice of a piece of writing that would be published and built a scaffolding system that would benefit all of my authors and give them lots of opportunity for practice and conferences. While we had written many texts throughout the year, I had an idea for a publishing project that I thought would invigorate our class. I was excited when it was time to start our writing project and totally transparent that it would end with published children's books, but I never could have imagined the growth I would see over the unit.

We started this project in January 2021 at a time when we were desperate for human connection. We had spent the spring of 2020 at home learning remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the fall of 2020, we started a school year with some students in person and some in online school, but due to illness, quarantines, or personal choice, students bounced back and forth all year between remote learning and coming to school. Everyone was trying their best, but the inconsistency made it hard to build a classroom community. This was as critical for me as it was for my students. It's easy to think of community as a need for students, but the lack of connection with and among my students was causing me to flounder. I was unsure of myself and my instructional strategies. But I was determined to find some way to adjust my instruction to fill this desperate need.

For me, the value of publishing goes far beyond the writing process. The texts that we read and write build community and they develop our empathy. When we read books together, we create connections with one another. Sharing our writing requires bravery

and vulnerability. Publishing our writing means taking ownership of it and advocating for our own thoughts as authors. It means gaining self-efficacy and believing that each student is a writer. When we started the project in January, capturing these social and emotional skills was critical for my students and for me. I had no choice except to take what felt like a big risk and embark on a project outside of my comfort zone.

## Process

When I decided to have students publish, I knew that I would have to handle publishing carefully. I taught inclusion classes with 30-40% of students who were English language learners or had an IEP or a 504 due to dyslexia. I am proud of the students I teach and the growth that they make as writers during the year, but I also knew that I have to be careful about whom I let into our world. Many people would see only what they lack and not what they have overcome. Further, many students hold a poor view of themselves and their skills. If I told them upfront that we were working on a text that they would publish for the whole world to see, they would be too intimidated to even start. For those reasons, I chose a style of writing that would feel attainable for them but that I knew would be more challenging than it appeared: children's literature.

To begin the writing process, I built students' schema with lots of children's books rich in text and images. Initially, I had some concerns about using children's literature in a course for high school freshmen. I wanted to ensure they didn't feel patronized, so I made it clear that as writers, we have to study our craft. Also, I worried that the text in picture books would be too far below grade level to challenge my students enough for them to learn. I learned, however, that many picture books have significantly challenging text structures and require lots of inferencing skills to make meaning from images.

I applied for and received a grant that allowed me to purchase pre-illustrated templates for students to use as a starting point and that paid for the publishing fees for the books to be printed and bound. Students had to make inferences about literary elements like plot, character, and setting based on the images in the book. Then, they had to create a narrative that fit the images while including details to clarify distinct elements of their story.

When our templates arrived, the first step was for students to pick a set of illustrations that appealed to them before we started the writing process. This generated a lot of interest and discussion of possible stories. Students were also highly interested in naming their characters. However, when we started the process of brainstorming and storyboarding, interest in the writing process lagged. My initial plan was to let them choose templates one day and spend the rest of the week storyboarding and writing a first draft. Naively, I provided little support outside of instructions to outline a story with some opportunities to confer with a teacher. It became obvious that I would have to build in several lessons with daily models that students could work through at their own pace.

Our district has built curriculum around reader's/writer's workshop, so I built each scaffolded lesson around six critical elements of instruction: independent reading, mentor texts, minilessons, reader's/writer's notebooks, collaboration, and conferring. Each class period started with independent reading of choice novels for students. As they read, I conferred with them to ask about an area they were struggling with as writers. For example, if they had been struggling to develop character in their own writing, I would ask questions about how the author in their novel was developing character. Next, I would choose a picture book to use as a mentor text during whole group instruction and leverage the craft moves in that book for a minilesson on writing. When students started writing in their notebooks on their own, they had a collaborative team to consult if needed as well as both scheduled and impromptu conferences with a teacher. My co-teacher and I held most of the conferences with students, but I leveraged the support of our instructional coach to confer with students as well.

In order to create a tightly woven narrative, students needed to understand the illustrations and how the illustrations connected to one another (see Figure 1). While they were in charge of their own narratives, they needed to make inferences rooted in the illustrations. I anticipated this being an easy step for students, but I had severely underestimated the difficulty of making these inferences. Students were immediately frustrated, and their responses to this frustration included laying their heads on their desks, talking to their friends, turning to their cell phones for distraction, or complaining about how dumb the assignment was.

| Illustration 1: What do you see? | Illustration 2: What do you see? They are leaving their island to go on an adventure. | How are they connected? |
|---|---|---|
| Timmy is showing Bertram an amulet that he got from his parents. | | Timmy wants to go find his parents using the only thing he has left of them |

*Figure 1.* To begin, students looked at each illustration in their books and described what they saw. This was their first attempt at making meaning between the images.

Initially, I was frustrated because I had put so much energy and hope into this project. My personal mantra as a teacher, though, is to look at the system, not the student, as the problem, so I examined the systems I had put into place to support students through their writing. In the words of James Britton (1970), reading and writing "float on a sea of talk" (p. 164), and I realized that students hadn't had enough opportunity to talk about what they saw on their pages. So, I put students into groups based on their book themes, and they talked through their impressions of the story collaboratively and then while conferring with either my co-teacher or me. After having the chance to talk, they were much better able to see the connections in their illustrations and to write a summary of the story they envisioned (see Figure 2).

Write a summary of the images you see in your book.

A brunette girl is sitting on the beach looking a little frustrated, surrounded by papers with frustrated scribbles. Then a blonde girl comes up to the brunette girl with a smile on her face, maybe the blonde girl wanted to go for a walk but the blonde girl fell into the water and turned into a mermaid.

The blonde and brunette girl are now sitting in the water but I think that the blonde girl gave the brunette girl a necklace that gives the brunette girl the ability to breath underwater. The girls start to swim down, and finally the come across a few mermaids and introduce themselves.

The blonde girl introduces the brunette girl to her mom who I think is the queen because she seems to be in a palace and is wearing a crown. The brunette girl is now on the shore waving back to her friend, the blonde girl. The brunette girl sits on the beach where she sat before but this time she is surrounded by pages and pages of artwork.

*Figure 2.* Students wrote a summary of the images of the book to help them construct a narrative.

After students had a summary of a narrative based on their illustrations, we had a series of lessons on literary elements (like character and setting) and author's craft (like word choice and dialogue). In order to fully understand these elements as both readers and writers, we started with mentor texts and analyzed a particular element or device. Students then applied that skill to their own writing. They studied all of the elements and devices far more deeply than what appeared directly in their drafts, but it was important that they fully understand their craft and made

intentional decisions about what to include and why in order to have a fully developed narrative (see Figures 3 and 4).

| Character Name | What is your character like? | What drives your character? |
|---|---|---|
| Matthew | Matthew is very hardworking and generous. | Matthew is a farmer, and he farms to provide for himself and Flanagan. |
| Flanagan | Flanagan is very helpful. He always tries to help around the farm. He's really curious and gentle. | Flanagan is always trying to help to people. He helps people because he naturally has that desire. |
| Roman | Roman is a little snobby. He likes things going his way. He's not totally heartless, but sometimes his selfishness can get in the way of certain things. | Roman doesn't really do much. He grew up in he city so he believes that he is better than the country people. His mindset isn't necessarily intentional. |
| Eleanor | Eleanor is gentle and quiet. She's very smart and keeps to herself most times. | Eleanor runs the city market. Her love for helping people is the reason she opened the market in the first place. |

*Figure 3.* Students used this chart to create an in-depth profile of the character in their books. Because we were focused on social emotional learning, a deep understanding of character was critical.

| Character Name | Dialogue #1 | Dialogue #2 | Dialogue #3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Molly | "Come on sally put on some sunscreen," insisted Molly. | "Sally, you're little you don't need to see the map," implied Molly. | "If this lady doesn't get her hair out of my face!" shouted Molly. |
| Brittney | "This lady is snoring so loud." | "Sally was right!!" | "I'm so tired. I don't want to run anymore." |
| Sally | "Molly, I think we got on the wrong train." | "I want a hotdog so bad." | "Hurry up! You're running so slow." |
| Granny | "Girls, the stadium is just right that way." | | |

*Figure 4.* Students used this chart to envision dialogue for each character. They didn't use all of the dialogue but thought that creating lots of dialogue for the character would create a more fully developed character.

At this point, they began drafting their narrative. Conferring with each author was my primarily role during this part of the process. My co-teacher and I had plans for whom to confer with each day based on need, but we maintained flexibility for students who were unexpectedly stuck in the writing process. I was careful to let them struggle when it was beneficial but also keep them from getting overwhelmed with frustration. By holding individual writing conferences with each student, we were able to meet the needs of students based on what we knew of them as learners as well as what was written in their IEPs or 504s.

This step of the writing process required the most flexibility on our part. Many students finished within one week and wanted a teacher to look it over before they were ready to submit, while other students wanted lots of support from a writing partner almost daily. By this point in the year, most students had a trusted shoulder partner to talk to. Their most common need was someone to listen to and validate their ideas. Some students finished with only one writing conference with a teacher while others had a dozen. This was also the most fascinating part of the project. Students had really developed a sense of ownership by doing all of the lessons to lay the groundwork for their narratives and had established their identity as authors. They would talk about their own craft and the effect they wanted to have on the reader. For the first time in my career, I was working as an advisor to students, and they carefully considered my suggestions, weighing my advice with their own goals. In previous years, students had looked to me as the expert; this year, they became the experts.

During a writing conference, I would begin by asking students which step of the process they were on and what choices they were currently making in their writing. When we listened to their responses, we guided them toward thinking about how the choice would impact their audience and the perception of their overall

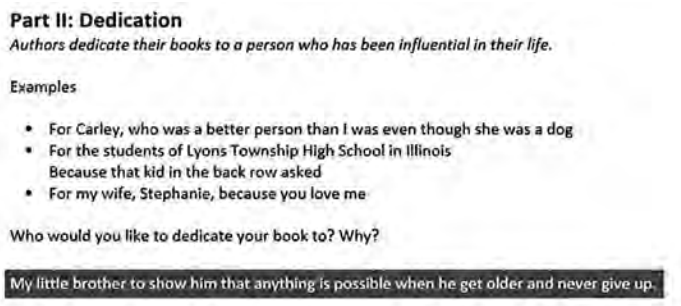
meaning. I remember conferring with one student who, previous to the project, immediately laid his head down any time he was asked to write. He was concerned about the actions of the parent in his book. He wanted it to be abundantly clear that the dad in the story was going to rescue the little girl even when she was on a daring adventure because he thought that the kids who read his book needed to have faith in their parents. I never asked him why that was so important to him.

As students completed their drafts, I met with them individually to read the draft together and discuss any remaining changes that needed to be made. At this point in the process, students were still quite nervous about their writing. They needed a lot of reassurance that they had written something worthwhile. I sat with numerous students who started the conversation with "I know this isn't very good" or "You can tell me if it's bad." The key to improving their perception of their own talents was having other students read their work. They were so proud of their classmates, and the excitement of vulnerably sharing their writing was contagious. Students were motivated to finish so they could share their writing with their community.

One student in particular was especially concerned with his draft and he expressed an incredible awareness of audience. The images in his book depicted a variety of aliens shooting a space laser at their adversaries. He worried that he couldn't write a narrative that would be age-appropriate for all elementary students. We talked a lot about the difference between the needs of a kindergarten student and a fifth-grade student, and he decided that he would write his book specifically for an upper elementary student because he felt that some of the details, like the use of space lasers as weapons, were too violent for a very young student. When we held readings of the books with elementary classrooms, he made sure to choose a fifth-grade room and donated his book to a fifth-grade class.

As students made their way through the writing process, they did need more support in the revising and editing part of the process than I had anticipated. I had lessons about grammar, mechanics, and usage that were rooted in reading mentor texts and imitating authors. Students edited a lot of their writing on their own, but I still acted as a copy editor and made extensive notes to help guide their editing. We talked about the role of editors and the importance of editing. I held meetings with individual students acting as an editor and talking about ways to correct their mistakes. As authors, they always made the final decision for how they wanted their writing to appear.

The last step in the writing process required them to write an author's biography for the back cover of their books and to provide a dedication at the front of their books. This was by far the most rewarding part and the place where I could see their writing become real for them. I expected to get lots of dedications to parents, and I did. I didn't expect the number of dedications they wrote for future readers. One student dedicated his book to "the students of Clear Creek ISD because they'll be the next generation and they should see that anyone can write a story no matter how old or experienced" (see Figure 5).



**Part II: Dedication**

***Authors dedicate their books to a person who has been influential in their life.***

Examples

- For Carley, who was a better person than I was even though she was a dog
- For the students of Lyons Township High School in Illinois Because that kid in the back row asked
- For my wife, Stephanie, because you love me

Who would you like to dedicate your book to? Why?

My little brother to show him that anything is possible when he get older and never give up.

*Figure 5.* Students used examples to guide the writing of their dedication.

The publication process took weeks, but in May, we received the printed and bound copies of their children's books. Now that they had printed books to hold, it was important for them to have readings to promote their books on our district's elementary campuses. I contacted some of their favorite elementary teachers, and we set up virtual meetings with the authors. During their meetings, they read their books and described their writing process. They often stayed longer to answer any questions that the elementary students or teachers had. Then, at the end of the school year, we donated all of the books to our local libraries.

## Outcomes

### A Sense of Completion and Fulfillment

My initial goal for the publishing project was for all students to have a deeper understanding of the necessity of the writing process, specifically revising and editing—two parts of the writing process they typically ignore. Students had completed the writing process before in earlier grade levels as it is one of our strands of TEKS. However, they had never had to understand the gravity of creating a product that was finished and polished enough to be sent to a publisher. Further, I wanted them to fully consider the effect their writing had on a reader because for their entire writing lives, they had considered only their teacher and possibly classmates as their audience.

Every single student who started the project published a children's book. This alone made this the most successful assignment I have ever given. Students were so invested in the books that no one even asked me what their grades were or how they were being graded. They cared only about the completed product. While students were not as invested in the editing phase as I had hoped, they were diligent in making revisions. They wrestled over which words to use to make the greatest impact and whether to include specific details about a character. In writing conferences, they often asked if including something would distract from the story or enhance it. While they listened carefully to my response, they always made the executive decision about their stories because they were the authors.

Students were also quite engaged with learning exactly who their audience would be and tailoring their writing to that group. They

were careful when deciding which grade level was most likely to read their book to make sure the content was appealing to that specific audience. When they were finished writing, they chose classes to read their books to based on the audience they intended for their narratives.

We completed this project early in the spring semester, a time when many other English I teachers are gearing up for the STAAR test by pushing expository writing. To some, it seemed incomprehensible that I would spend six weeks on narrative writing when a major standardized test that required an expository essay was on the horizon. Honestly, I was worried about this decision myself, but I know what the research says about authentic writing and learning. When the scores came in two months later, about 10% more students passed the STAAR test if they were in classes that participated in the grant-supported children's book writing project as opposed to those who were not, regardless of whether they were students with IEPs, were English learners, or were on-level students.

**Increased Self-Efficacy**

Many of my students had years' worth of educational baggage that led them to believe they were not good readers, writers, or learners. Whenever my students seemed to be giving up at a task, all I had to do was look at their testing history to see "Does Not Meet" attached to their name year after year. When students are repeatedly told by our educational system that they do not meet expectations, regardless of how hard they try, they learn to stop trying. This is an uphill battle for any teacher, and I knew this was an area that I had to combat.

In the beginning of the project, I struggled to get students invested, and my hunch was always that they didn't feel like they could complete it, and that the idea of other people seeing their work was a level of vulnerability they weren't ready for. When I scaffolded the steps, students could see a clear path forward that allowed them to make slow but steady progress, and that seemed to alleviate the overwhelming feeling of having to publish an entire book. Writing conferences were critical for building a sense of confidence in students. After they had multiple conferences with my co-teacher and me, we invited other campus and district personnel to have writing conferences with students. They also had numerous opportunities to collaborate with peers. Each positive interaction that resulted from sharing their book with an adult or peer built a little more self-efficacy. By the time the books were published, some of my most guarded students were willing to read to entire grade levels at local elementary schools because of the pride they had in their work and in themselves.

It's hard for me to capture in words the changes that I saw in them. When it was time to read their writing, one of my students was so nervous, he was shaking. For his reading in particular, an entire grade level of elementary students and his principal were in attendance. But once he started reading, his face lit up and he started smiling. Afterward, he said that he couldn't believe they were so interested in his writing.

**Greater Empathy**

One of my biggest concerns when I started this project is that I didn't feel that students in my classroom were exhibiting empathy in the same ways as I had seen in the past. We were in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, and students seemed to be in self-preservation mode. It was hard for them to consider the perspectives of other people when they were struggling in so many ways.

As they began working on their books, specifically on developing characters in their stories, I could see them processing the perspective of other characters. They looked carefully at the facial expressions and actions of characters in their illustrations to see how they would respond to one another. They made predictions about what could lead to the thoughts and feelings that were apparent in their characters. As an example, one student had an illustration in which a character slowly turned into a bug. She had to think deeply about the different ways a person might respond to that. During a writing conference, she told me that she believed that turning into a bug would be awful, but it was clear from the illustrations that the character in the book enjoyed it. She had to put her own feelings aside to consider why that character would be happy about becoming a bug, and this sharpened her ability to empathize.

Students also began to empathize more fully with each other as they collaborated. Because they were all facing the same pressures of publishing, they were more invested in each other's writing. When giving feedback, they were both honest and gentle in a way I had never seen before. Having to consider their audience also made them more empathetic. During collaboration, they would often ask each other questions about how children would respond to a certain aspect of the story. Some of my students had elementary-aged siblings, and their advice was in high demand. Students would seek them out to ask questions like "Is this too scary for your brother?" or "Would your sister think this is funny?" Writing their children's books required them to take on the perspective of the audience to make decisions about their writing in a more tangible way than writing had in the past.

**Extended Communities**

From the beginning of the project, students were aware that one of the outcomes would be reading their books to students at local elementary schools and then donating their books to those libraries. This was a critical part of the project because one of my professional goals for that year was to build the social and emotional skills of my students, and I believed that this type of community outreach would enable them to exhibit leadership skills and would showcase the way they had developed throughout the project academically, socially, and emotionally.

Many of my students had never received any type of academic honor, especially in reading and writing. This was the first time they were ever asked to share their writing outside of the four walls of a classroom. Students were able to read to a local elementary classroom or our preschool room that is housed within our high school. One student chose to read to the preschool room, but when it was time, he hesitated. He told me that he had never read anything out loud since he had to read to his teacher in elementary. I reminded him of the power of his words and how much work he had done to become an author. I told him that other people needed to know about what he had accomplished so that they could feel accomplished too. When he returned afterward, he said that he felt like a celebrity and that the teacher had to keep reminding the kids to move back to their seats because everyone wanted to sit at his feet while he read. Reading his writing with this type of reception built more confidence in this student than any award ever could.

At the end of every reading, the teacher in the room with the younger children would talk to them about how anyone can be a

writer. They had the opportunity to ask questions of my authors, and at the end of the question-and-answer portion, the teachers would always ask if any of the younger students thought they could be writers now. In every room, several students raised their hands. Throughout the writing process, I encouraged and praised my students every way I know how, but nothing I said could have built their self-efficacy the way this experience did. For the first time, they could see that the words they write matter.

As a teacher, I never considered that I also could extend my community, so I was surprised when this project strengthened my relationship with other teachers in my district. At the end of the project, I asked students to choose a favorite teacher they remembered from elementary school. I then emailed those teachers to invite them to a reading of the children's books. I had the opportunity to share success stories from students they had taught sometimes as many as ten years previously.

## Reflections

Not long after we sent off our books for publishing, my students were writing poems in class. One student asked me where and when these were going to be published. His expectation had changed; for him, writing ended with publishing because it was worthy of being read. Before this experience, I don't think a single one of my students believed this about themselves. In fact, most of them cited writing as a weakness, and their entire goal tended to be "finish an essay."

The part of the process they treasured most, though, wasn't the writing itself. It was the authors' readings. At first resistant to the idea of reading to a group of elementary students, they brightened when actually faced with the task. Some even had question-and-answer sessions where they talked about how they built character or included dialogue. In almost every elementary classroom, someone asked the high school author how they came up with all their ideas. They immediately began talking about their thinking as authors. In one of the books, a girl befriends a school bully after they both have the same experience with a scary dog in their neighborhood. My student told the elementary class that he came up with his ideas when he saw that the girl in the book had a choice about how she could respond to the bully, and he wanted to show everyone that people can be forgiven.

My students were proud of the impact they were able to have on younger kids in the district, and I was proud of the community they were building. For me, getting to meet with their previous teachers from elementary and plan their readings was a way to build a connection. Elementary teachers deserve a lot of credit for what our high school students accomplish, and they often don't get to see the way their students mature throughout their school experience. I was excited to share this moment with them.

Recently, I presented at a showcase with two of my authors. They clutched their books, flipping through them to remember every detail of the process, visibly nervous. Watching their clammy faces made me nervous too. How easily I had forgotten how truly capable they are. As attendees circled our booth, I watched my teenage students perk up like freshly watered seedlings. Everything about their language had changed since I met them as incoming freshmen. They spoke to district leaders about their process as writers and about how they used their platform to encourage younger kids to become writers too. They were brave and confident and truly owned their work. I could not have felt more proud of them than in that moment.

### Teachers as Writers

One of my most tightly held beliefs as a teacher is that modeling is the most powerful strategy we have. I modeled writing and reading, feedback and revisions, courtesy and core values. So, it shouldn't have surprised me when, just before we sent off our books to print, a student asked, "Miss, where is yours?" I was immediately embarrassed and told him that I didn't write one. He looked disappointed as he cited all the reasons I had told him about why publishing is important. He said that I didn't know how it felt to have to make sure my writing was good enough for everyone to read, not just the people in the classroom. I had told them many times that publishing meant that they were capable and brave and that I had confidence in their writing skills. If I didn't publish my writing, what did they say about me? I promised him and myself in that moment that I would be vulnerable myself and seek out the opportunity to publish.

If publishing is important for students, then it's important for us too. It's important that we continue to experience the entire writing process and remember what it's like to start brainstorming on a blank page and finish by making changes based on feedback from our peers. In order to be effective and empathetic teachers, we have to experience the vulnerability of creating a piece of writing and sharing it with an audience. Students produce what teachers model, so if publishing is critical for students to take true ownership of their writing, and I believe that it is, we have to be willing to model that because only if we have the experience of being the writer are we able to teach the writer.

Publishing is vulnerable for me just like it is for students. But vulnerability is growth. According to Brene Brown (2013), "Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity" (p. 74). If we want our classroom communities to be places where people belong and are free to have courage and empathy and to be creative, and I think we all do, then we have to be willing to take opportunities for growth, and that's what publishing is.

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