

Literacy Leads

Karen Haag

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#9 From Workbook to Working Book: Using Daybooks In the Classroom --- Daybook Assessment

“It is our job to teach students to *recognize* their thinking.” Dr. Sam Watson, UNC Charlotte

Metacognition is thinking about thinking and it is tough. Even for us. Why do you like chocolate chip cookies? Have you ever analyzed why? Because we just do. It is difficult to separate the feelings from the facts, the important from the unimportant, the explanation from the gibberish in our heads. It's even more difficult to explain or write *why* we're thinking what we're thinking.

So, we must help. We have to provide class time for children to learn to think in ways that academics value. We need to be there to respond and help immediately. What I'm recommending goes way beyond assigning work and going about our business. It's about going down in the mine and helping the children separate the gems from the dirt, teaching them what is valuable and what's an imposter. We do that with talk, with structured conversations, and with gentle guiding questions to enable students to move to the deep levels of thinking required of them by their world.

One thinking task I use at this time of the year is the daybook reflection. I ask the students to take the time to reread their daybooks. This task accomplishes several things: students see their body of work as a whole, they see their improvements, they are reconnected with ideas they were going to finish but didn't, they see what they are good at and what they need to work on. Then, I ask them to write me a letter. The letter can take different turns depending on what I want them to think about.

For example, if I want them to examine what they learned in reading so far this year, I ask them to (1) sticky note their two best I-Learned, I-Will statements for me to read. (2) Also, they need to find and mark their reading strategy chart so they can see whether they've been keeping up with it or not. In addition, I want them to mark their (3) reading goal page, (4) building-reading-time chart, and (5) list of books read this year. (6) I might ask them to mark their best double entry journals where they gathered evidence to support the thinking they were doing about theme. (Limit the selections to mark for lower grade levels or struggling students. Differentiate within your room.)

In their letter to me, they make a list of the selections they sticky noted for me and make an annotated bibliography of sorts, on an elementary level. A beginning letter may look like this example.

(1) Teacher, I want you to see two very good I-Learned, I-Will statements. I wrote them about Winn Dixie. In the first one on page 21, you will see that I learned what foreshadowing is. In the second one on page 28, was when I thought that I needed to reread.

(2) My reading strategy chart is marked with a blue sticky. I have not been keeping up with it very good.

(3) My reading goal sheet is the second to the last page of my daybook. I changed my goal 5 times this semester. I'm proud that I can do each of the goals on the list. Right now, I'm working on reading faster and putting words together in phrases like you said. I work with my mother 15 minutes a night and I think I'm getting better.

(4) I've also been trying to build my reading time. I use Wednesdays because everybody has a lot to do that day and they leave me alone. The best I've done is 45 minutes.

(5) Look at my book list on page 2. I've read 7 books already this year! That's good for me.

(6) I marked my best double entry journal. It's on page 32. I am still having trouble with them, Teacher. I have trouble writing good questions but this is my best one.

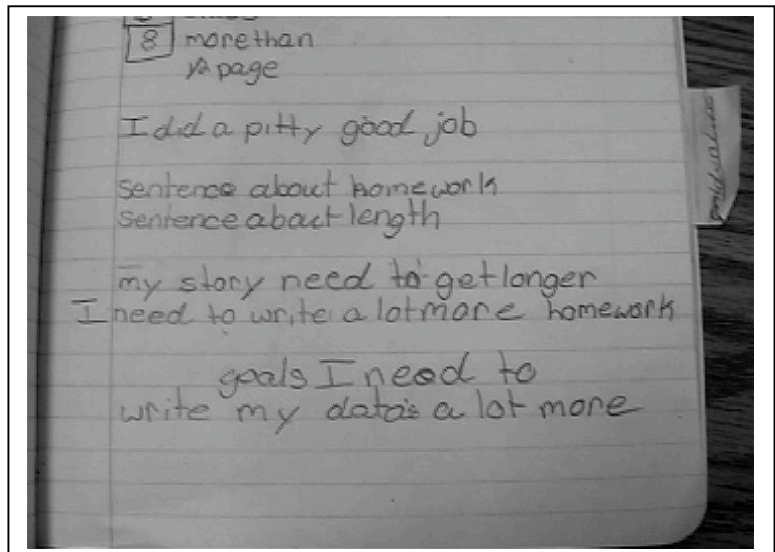
The second part is to write 1-3 goals to work on for the next quarter,

Teacher, I will (1) do better at keeping up with my reading strategies page, (2) I want to try to read at least one time for 90 minutes. (3) I will work on bringing good questions to my group.

For students, assessing themselves and setting goals are critical. Robert Marzano describes asking students to keep track of their assignments as “the most powerful, easy intervention to impact student achievement quickly.” He adds that it is especially effective if grade levels set a learning goal as an objective and gets together once a month to discuss the results. How much could we learn from one another and the children if even once a quarter we brought our daybooks together and discussed how it's going?

Teachers are released from the pressure to read every page of the daybook. We get to see what our students think is their best work. The students take more responsibility for their grades. Over time, most begin to discover the importance of the pages and to see a relationship between the work they do and their grade.

The idea seems simple, really, but it is not. The first attempts children give you are needy. The writing does get better if you write a sample to go with your questions and talk about what kinds of ideas students can write. You will have to make them feel comfortable enough to risk admitting that they need to improve. If you sit with students who struggle and talk with them, help them elaborate their ideas, and in some cases, even write for them while the rest of the group works independently, you will scaffold their understanding. They will learn from you how to explain what they're learning. Also, they need enough time, sustained time *in school*, to write these types of reflections. Let them know that it is hard and they may need to ask questions. Answer their questions over and over if you have to, one-on-one, because this kind of writing is new and they need our help.



Next issue: More ideas for self-assessment of daybooks.