

View From the Chalkboard



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Building a Community of Readers

*Students are seeing
reading as a social
event*

As I looked around my classroom, I saw book bins organized by popular authors and bins for different genres. I also saw cozy spots for reading, as well as a director chair students could use while reading. I had a great classroom library, gave students time to read independently, and allowed students to visit the school library, but I felt something was missing. My students were not engaged readers. I started questioning my techniques and their effectiveness in fostering a love of reading.

So the journey began to build a classroom of readers. I started reading my own third-grade independent reading book during Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time once a week. I was shocked at how quiet the room became when I sat on the carpet and read with students. That small change led to another. I purchased a bookshelf just for the books that I have read and

recommended to the students and placed it in a prominent area, hoping that I would entice at least one student to pick one up. Now, I have waiting lists for every book I booktalked! Furthermore, I never realized how easy and effective it would be to give up 15 minutes of instructional time each week to allow my students to share their book recommendations. Now, not a day goes by without students recommending books to fellow classmates because they are in tune with each others' interests.

Another change occurred when I began spotlighting authors and illustrators, including ones we have read together as a class. We learned so much about the author and illustrator from the dedication pages, too. Now, students look up authors online because they know if they liked one book by that author, they might like another. I understand how important it is to teach my students how to select interesting books. Instead of using

the DEAR time to check e-mails or grade papers, this time was better used matching a student with a "just right book" or conferring with students to see if their selections were working. Surprising, I have even given up half of my lunch time twice a week to read aloud to my students. Although it was hard to give up my personal time, I had no idea how much this would help build a community of readers. Students are seeing reading as a social event.

Now when I walk into my classroom, I see more than an organized library and an inviting reading area; I see students who are excited about reading. My classroom has changed because of the engaging adjustments I have made to foster a love of reading. Now as I looked around the room during DEAR time, each student is engrossed in a book. I know I have created a classroom of readers!