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“Ask Me Anything” with Valerie Bolling

How often should kids choose new goals?

Students shouldn’t change goals often. Presumably, they put a lot of thought into selecting their goals at the beginning of the year, so they should work on them consistently. If, during one of the goal check-ins, it seems that a particular goal isn’t working, it can be changed. It may also be that it’s not the goal that needs to change but the strategies for working on the goal.

What’s the first step for helping students set goals?

I think the first step to help students set goals is to have a general discussion about goals, so students realize that they probably set goals in everyday aspects of their lives. Next would be making sure they understand the types of writing goals they might set and providing examples of goals and strategies. There’s an organizer in my book that can help with this.

How do you help kids not forget their goals?

If students write frequently in your classroom, they will have the opportunity to work on their goals. You can create certain assignments where they will have to apply their writing goals, and you can supply time for them to reflect on their goals and get feedback on their writing from their peers.

How do you encourage reluctant writers?

I think giving reluctant writers choice about their goals and what they write makes a big difference. Providing concrete examples of not only goal setting, but also good writing, will help these students. They may also benefit from small group or one-on-one instruction. Of course, praise the achievements, even the small ones, that these students make.

Information Classification: General

How important is it for an unpublished author to have a website? Tips on getting started?

Having a website is extremely important. It's recommended that you have a website before becoming a published author. If you don't have a website when you sign your first book contract, you should quickly establish one. The best way to get started is to look at a lot of author websites, so you can get ideas for how you want to set yours up and what you want to include.

What's the most challenging part of becoming a published author?

There are many aspects to being a published author beyond the actual writing of a book. There are emails to manage; book promotion; and things like school visits and book festivals, if you're interested. It's important to find what works for you -- what brings you joy -- and balance that with other parts of your life.

What strategies do you recommend for building student agency?

I'm not recommending particular strategies, per se, but more of a mindset. When you allow students to make their own decisions, you are helping them build agency. Provide structures and instruction for them, and then allow them to make choices. For instance, students may have to write a particular assignment, but they can choose what they will write about, what goals they will focus on while writing -- and if they receive feedback on their writing -- what feedback they will implement.

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