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Kathleen Zaprowski

TEPS Report

Strategies for Improving Reading and Writing: What Matters Most

July 30 - August 2

I recently attended the above mentioned reading and writing conference in San Diego led by authors and educators, Kyleene Beers, Robert Probst, Linda Rief and Penny Kittle. We started each morning off with a 75 minute Writer's Workshop session led by Linda Rief. She said, "You have to do a lot of bad writing to find good writing." She presented many different strategies to get students writing and to have them discover what good writing looks like by consuming and critiquing samples of student writing. Kyleene Beers and Robert Probst led daily sessions on how to engage readers. In this session we discussed roadblocks that keep students from succeeding and sorted these into groups. The point of this was for us, as teachers, to focus on the changes we can make as some issues we just do not have control over. Many times she stressed the importance of choice/volume if students are to become better readers and advised not to give too much background to students prior to read and to let the text do the work. Afternoon sessions focused on Reader's Workshop and were led by Penny Kittle, an author and middle school teacher. She again stressed the importance of choice, especially for adolescents. Book talks also motivate our readers, to take a chance on a new book. She said first comes engagement, then volume and complexity will come. Conferring is a must and "check in" conferences (touch base in hall before student enters) give a teacher a lot of information even though they are less than a minute long. Spring sessions (30 minute breakout sessions) were also offered each day which allowed us to get new ideas, ask questions and focus more on topics discussed in earlier sessions. This conference was outstanding. I left feeling invigorated and am excited for the new school year to begin.