Cultivating Writers: Elevate your writing instruction beyond the skills to ignite the will

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Book Review/Recension d’ouvrage

Cultivating Writers: Elevate your writing instruction beyond the skills to ignite the will
by Anne Elliott and Mary Lynch
Pembroke Publisher (2020), 148 pages

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Cultivating Writers fits nicely with the previous book written by Anne Elliottt and Mary Lynch titled Cultivating Readers (2017). It is well established that students who read often are usually stronger writers. However, reading alone doesn’t make one a good writer. Teaching writing is difficult. It requires students to understand spelling, grammar, form, and function. Cultivating Writers is a valuable guide for elementary and intermediate teachers (grades 3 to 8) who are either developing a writing program for the first time or looking for ideas to reenergize their existing approach. This book is not a step-by-step guide to creating a writing program, so readers will have to read carefully to find suggestions and strategies that will fit their classroom and pedagogy.

Elliott and Lynch are concerned with developing writing programs that demonstrate to students that writing is not just another school task to complete. They criticize the Ontario elementary language curriculum, noting that in all the specific writing expectations listed for grades three to eight, none address “student interest and motivation to write” (p. 11). I don’t think this observation is unique to the language curriculum. There are no expectations in any other curriculum that address student interest. Their observa-
The text discusses the importance of teachers seeing a subject or activity as intrinsically important and valuable. It highlights the authors' desire for students to recognize themselves as writers and for teachers to create language programs that go beyond just assessing curriculum expectations.

Each chapter addresses holistic concerns about writing instruction, such as modeling writing habits, incorporating students' lives for inspiration, and creating a positive writing environment. The book provides practical suggestions, such as using an author's chair for students to share their work and receive feedback, and including writing publication records to track progress.

The authors also recognize the importance of a well-stocked and curated library to support an energized writing program. They acknowledge the challenges of funding such projects, as classroom libraries are often funded by teachers, and school library budgets are minimal. Depending on enrollment, schools may not even have a full-time teacher/librarian.
There are times when the authors’ commitment to writing overlooks other valuable things that occur in the classroom. Elliott and Lynch clearly recognize that the most precious commodity in any classroom is time, and most teachers have experienced the frustration of losing instructional time to other activities. I agree with the authors that students need writing time every day. Still, they overstate the matter when they write that “a field trip to Apple Land or concert rehearsals cannot get in the way of providing students with an opportunity to practice their writing” (p. 62). It is easy for any teacher to become enraptured with their subject. The authors’ commitment to teaching writing is laudable; however, it is important to remember that other learning events that may seem ill-conceived or a waste of time to some teachers can bring both joy and substantial learning to students. These observations, however, do not detract from the very engaging and helpful book that Anne Elliott and Mary Lynch have written. *Cultivating Writers* provides sound advice for creating a writing-positive classroom. Both authors are passionate language teachers. Their desire to help students is genuine, and their combined years of experience are evident in the suggestions they offer. Elliott and Lynch want students to see themselves as writers, and this is a goal that all teachers aspire to achieve.