



## “What We Learned in Battle Creek Michigan”

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Yes, we did it. We went ahead and decided that our students were going to write a novel in 30 days. We didn't know how it would work out. We weren't sure if the students would buy into the whole idea of it. We didn't care. We told them this is what they would be doing during the month of November, so suck it up and start brainstorming ideas for your book. We coached, we supported, we cajoled, we outright double-dog dared them to take on this challenge. We told them they probably couldn't finish. We told them no other school in our state (as far as we knew) was trying what we were trying. We preached, we cheerlead, we offered up our own precious time to helping them meet this goal. And guess what happened? They (our 100+ crazy, brilliant, inspired students) blew us away.

From the first day of November, we knew immediately that something unusual was happening. At lunch that day, 20 students stayed in my room to type. After school, that very same day, 25 students stayed after to type. Everyday during the month of November, during every hour of school, we had kids writing their novels. I had started this project thinking I would need to force them to finish, but my primary roles became “official technology fixer” and “adult who will supervise us while we write.” We had naively thought, “We'll have to spend most of our time threatening them towards their goals.” Once again, how foolish we were! They needed no threats, no punishments, even no rewards – they had passion! They were invested! They owned this writing experience in a way that made me think of those “teacher saves urban students” movies!

These kids were becoming authors and they knew it! We asked them to provide us with evidence that they were meeting writing benchmarks the state has placed upon every grade. Those short little snippets of writing are now hanging, poster sized, around our building! Students from every grade level, from every clique, from every socio-economic bracket, before our very eyes became writers who knew they could write and liked to do it!

What did we learn from this experience? That writing in school is boring, but writing at school for your own purposes is amazing. We learned that our kids knew how to write paragraphs that could make you weep, stories that could make you laugh, sentences that stick in your head like a refrain from classical music. We learned that our kids could write in ways that we would never have dreamed they could. And we learned that if we

hadn't tried this crazy, amazing, brilliant experiment with them, we would have never known what they could do. We learned a whole new approach to teaching and learning.

For thirty glorious days, I experienced everything I had thought teaching was going to be when I entered the classroom for the first time ten years ago. I will never teach the same.