



Dialogue

A Publication of the San Diego Area Writing Project

Fall 2008

Inside...

How I Came to Love Rhetoric
Cara Owens 2

SDAWP Log 6
Amy Brothers

Writing Marathon 7
Becky Gemmell
Heidi Paul
Nancy Rogers

YWC. 8-9
Paloma Acosta
Camilla Elizabeth Aguirre Aguilar
Cinnamon Roy
Eugenia Tzeng
Sarah Turk

Let's Walk the Walk. . 10
Ted Hernandez

Rethinking Native Language Use
in Our Classroom . . . 11
Shannon Meridith

Also included:

Muse Box 14

SDAWP Notes 14

NWP Announcements . . . 14

Publishing Opportunities 15

Dialogue
Call For Manuscripts . . . 15

Calendar of Events 16

SDAWP's Position Paper: Teachers Position Themselves as Knowledgeable Members of the Educational Community

Kim Douillard, SDAWP 1992

The position paper is a long-held tradition in the San Diego Area Writing Project (SDAWP) Invitational Summer Institute (SI). According to Jayne Marlink, Executive Director of the California Writing Project (CWP), the position paper and its presence in summer institutes goes back to Jim Gray, the founder of the National Writing Project (NWP). Many writing projects, both in California and nationally, still write position papers in their summer institutes, often as a core piece and cornerstone of professional writing.

The position paper gives teachers in the SI an opportunity to identify and explore beliefs about teaching and learning or other educational issues. As they consider issues, weighing what others have said or are saying about the issue in a variety of contexts, and investigate their own experience and beliefs through the writing, a position develops. In the safe, rigorous, supportive, and challenging environment of the SI, they move their writing from an initial rant or bland description to a carefully crafted articulation of the issue(s) and their point of view. This process allows teachers to discover and refine their position with an audience in mind—helping to define a stance that opens others to hearing their views. The position paper offers teachers a voice...building confidence and an identity not just as a classroom teacher, but as an educator who can make a difference and inform not only his or her own classroom, but the larger educational community as well.

Classroom teachers often find themselves awkwardly positioned in a profession filled with contradictions. Teachers are professionals who have achieved high levels of education. They have authority in their classroom to make decisions that are in the best interests of their students and their learning and are expected to make those decisions based on their professional knowledge. At the same time they are required to use particular materials, give particular assessments, and meet predetermined standards for student achievement as defined by national, state and local (district and site) standards, whether or not these are in the best interests of their students and their learning. The K-12 teaching environment, in particular, doesn't encourage teachers to articulate or publish the knowledge gained through teaching, classroom research, or their own investigations into teaching and learning. Knowledge about teaching and learning is often generated by educational researchers, many of whom have little practical knowledge or experience with classroom

teaching or with curriculum. These contradictions often silence teachers as they see that their professional knowledge and judgment is held in less esteem and is seen as less relevant than “research based” methods and mandated approaches.

The position paper in the summer institute helps classroom teachers negotiate the contradictions inherent in their profession. Through writing, teachers are able to articulate deeply held beliefs—beliefs they may not have expressed publicly before. With the support and encouragement of the writing response group in the SI, they are able to construct a reasonable case for their beliefs, consider other perspectives, and work through how they might mitigate conflicting demands while maintaining their integrity as knowledgeable professionals. Opportunities to rethink and revise their writing in this atmosphere allow their thinking to deepen. Reading their writing aloud and seeing their writing in print lets them hear their own voice and learn the power it holds. At SDAWP we see writing the position paper as an essential part of growing as a leader, a step toward finding the powerful voice that teachers need to transform their profession through their own knowledge and professionalism.

Teachers in the SI write their position paper with publication in mind. Publication begins informally in the writing response group, expands to the full SI group, and is archived in the SI anthology. These initial stages often become the starting place for more formal publication with broader audiences. Publication in the SDAWP *Dialogue* gives teachers a taste of working with an editor and for an audience of knowledgeable educators beyond those the writer has met or knows personally. Others go on to publish in educational journals such as NCTE’s *Language Arts* or *English Journal* or CATE’s *California English*. The position paper and the possibilities for publication take teaching beyond the classroom and situate teachers as active members of and contributors to the larger educational community.



HOW I CAME TO LOVE RHETORIC

CARA OWENS
SDAWP 2007

In 1997, I finally landed my first adjunct teaching positions at San Diego City College and Southwestern Community College. Fresh out of graduate school, I was excited to have students read about issues I thought were relevant and important. I envisioned having wonderful, in-depth class discussions about these issues. As I began to help my students develop their voices in order to empower them as writers and as citizens of the world, I ran into one major problem. Many of my students in my academic writing classes had voices, but I found out the hard way that I needed to help my students break away from our popular culture’s reliance on a combative discourse style (think Rush Limbaugh, Howard Stern, and George W. Bush) and move into the discourse of academic writing.

I remember that one of my first semesters teaching I chose the topic of immigration. Living and teaching in San Diego, immigration is a relevant and important issue for my students and me. My classes at the community colleges were always very diverse with a large Latino population. As a new teacher, I would assign my students three to four academic essays at a time to read as homework. My assumption was that they would indeed read them and understand them, and then we would have in-depth class discussions about the readings and about immigration. As Cynthia Brock writes, she was alerted “to the seductive—but potentially disastrous—tendency to assume that what I teach is what my children actually learn” (Brock, 2001). Reflecting back on my earlier teaching, this was me! Just because I assigned my students to read, did not mean they understood what they read. Yes, they may have read the assigned readings, but could they understand the subtle and nuanced arguments and rhetorical strategies the authors were using?

For most of my students, academic writing was very new. Of course students didn’t understand what they had read, because I hadn’t taught them how to read academic arguments. Somehow, in our class discussions, we would skip right over the readings and move on to what my students thought about immigration. While my students had something to say, were engaged, and were even passionate about immigration, at best, class discussions were just the students’ prior opinions with no references to the texts read, and usually not much in the way of substantiating their opinions with reasons or evidence. At worst, class discussions were a free-for-all of knee-jerk reactions, unfounded opinions, logical fallacies that often

In Possible Lives: The Promise of
Public Education in America, Mike
Rose works against the negative view
of teachers and U.S. public schools
that Hirsch offers. Rose does this
largely by changing the parameters
of the discourse. While he also
uses anecdotal evidence, he is care-
ful not to universalize the stories he
tells. Rose uses specific teaching
practices to support his univer-
sally applicable claims. He does not
claim universal excellence. Hirsch,
on the other hand, uses anecdotal
stories to support his claim that decline
in U.S. public schools; this may be
compelling to some, but it makes
for sloppy, imprecise argu-
ments. We need more ways
to understand and expose this kind
of thinking. This is not to say
that Mike Rose is doing is not valu-
able and well-developed—I
think he is. However, to say that
we need to broaden the kinds of
responses made to such arguments.
how much it relies on anecdotal

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included racist and sexist insults, again reflecting our culture's popular discourse style.

In one of my classes that semester, a student jumped out of his seat and exclaimed, "I am so tired of all of these border bunnies jumping across the border!" At that, three Latina students jumped out of their seats and one of them yelled back, "How would you like it if we called you a 'jungle bunny' since you are black?" I really thought at that moment that fists were going to start flying! Luckily everyone immediately calmed down as the first student left the classroom. However, I felt horrible wondering what I had done wrong and what I could do better. My students were engaged and some even passionate about their beliefs about immigration, which to me was great. But, how could I teach them to articulate their ideas within the context of an academic classroom?

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PLACE IN THE
ACADEMIC WORLD.**

Student writing suffered from the same sorts of problems. Even when students were engaged with the topic and had something to say, their essays were mostly a series of prior opinions, often unfounded and illogical and lacking any sort of reference to the texts we had read. I was discouraged because even though I was getting students engaged and my students were developing their voices, I was unable to teach them the skills and tools they needed that would help them succeed within the context of academic writing: making a valid

and reasonable argument, reasoning, and using appropriate evidence. I hadn't yet figured out a way to help my students become thoughtful writers and participants in the conversations that were taking place in the academic world.

What changed? I started part-time at SDSU as a lecturer in The Rhetoric and Writing Studies Department (DRWS). Yes, I was teaching at SDSU, City College, and Southwestern like many other community college writing instructors. At the time, Fall 1998 in DRWS, many changes were taking place in the curriculum and Student Learning Outcomes for each course. I started hearing terms used such as "rhetoric," "rhetorical strategies," "rhetorical situation," "argument/claim, evidence, reasons, and warrants," "ethos, logos, and pathos." As a comparative literatures major, these terms were foreign to me. Not only that, but they sounded mathematical and pretentious. I was intimidated. I couldn't understand how looking at texts in this "rhetorical manner" would be interesting to me let alone to my students. *Talk about taking all of the passion out of reading and writing* I thought. I would find out that I was wrong.

My department defines rhetoric as follows: "Rhetoric refers to the study, uses, and effects of written, spoken and visual language." But what does this mean to me as a writing instructor? This is what I had to figure out. Using rhetoric, my teaching started to be about what a text was doing in terms of rhetorical strategies, or strategies a writer uses, instead of just focusing on what a text is *about*. This took a willingness on my part to rethink my teaching practices. It also required many wonderful colleagues taking the time to answer my endless questions, showing me what they did in their classes and how they scaffolded their assignments. I also attended in 2003 and 2005 the summer Reading Institute for Academic Preparation (RIAP) hosted by SDSU. Both RIAP summer institutes gave me invaluable lessons on how to teach students to read and write academic arguments.

So what does this look like in practical terms in my writing classes? Well, instead of handing students a text, asking them to read it, and

then asking them to discuss what it is about, students are given a text and asked particular questions to help them understand who the author is, what was going on at the time the text was written historically and socially, and what motivated the writer to write—which we call context and/or "the rhetorical situation" (Bitzer, 1968). Students begin to learn that writing doesn't just happen arbitrarily, but that writers write in a particular time in history and are prompted to write because of something that is going on socially, politically, and/or personally.

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NOW HAD MODELS
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Students are also invited to look into a text in particular ways. After having an understanding of the context of the text, we can look at the text's claim, sub-claims, the evidence, and reasons. I have found that breaking down a text paragraph by paragraph, or groups of related paragraphs, helps students understand what a text is doing in each section. By doing this "charting," students are able to see what rhetorical strategies a writer is using. In many ways, looking at one text closely to see how an author makes an argument was very similar to using mentor texts. But rather than having my students copy the author's language and style, I was showing my students how other writers create an effective argument. My students now had models in their classes of what they were expected to do as academic writers.

Late in my RWS 280 class, we had three readings on whether or not torture was ever justified. For me, as well as my students, this was a very important and emotional issue. One of my students, Kelly, was very pro-torture, perhaps related to her having a husband in the Marines in Iraq. I could see that this would be a touchy issue since I am very much against torture. But here's what

happened. Instead of arguing our points back and forth and letting our egos get in the way, we focused on the texts. As a writing instructor, I want students to explore issues and come to their own conclusions, so by sticking to what a writer is doing in a text, we had opportunities to discuss torture that were safe. Even though students disagreed with other students and me, we could keep going back to the texts.

What did our discussion look like then? We had three articles: 1) Naomi Klein's "Torture's Dirty Secret: It Works" where she argues that torture is a bust for an interrogation tactic, but for social control, it works, unfortunately; 2) David Gelernter's "When Torture Is The Only Option ..." which argues that in extreme cases in order to save lives, torture should be used; and 3) Larry

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WAYS.**

C. Johnson, ex-CIA officer's, "... And Why It Should Never Be One" who argues that torture never produces reliable information and that relationship building works much better. Our class discussions focused on identifying who the author is and why he/she is writing, what his or her main claim and sub-claims are, and whether or not they were convincing. We also comparatively evaluated the evidence of each author. The discussion is never about whether or not the students agree with the authors or me, for

the most part. Of course students were able to give their opinions, but they were much more grounded in the texts we had read, and articulated in a more thoughtful manner. Most surprisingly about this for me was to see how by focusing on what the text was doing, students understand much better *what the text is about* in their discussions and in their essays

By focusing on what each writer was saying and doing, students were able to write sophisticated essays discussing the readings and articulating their opinion on torture as well. For example, Joe, in one of our class discussions said, "Even though I agree with David Gelernter's position that torture should be used in extreme cases, I find that his evidence is weak. He relies on fear-based emotional appeals rather than solid and factual evidence." Another student explained, "In Naomi Klein's *Nation* article, 'Torture's Dirty Secret: It Works,' she begins by telling the story of Maher Arar who was wrongly detained and tortured. Arar's story, to me, is a very real example of what can go wrong when we think it is okay to torture." Students were voicing their opinions by incorporating the texts we had read! More importantly, students were voicing their opinions in much more rhetorically sophisticated ways.

As for their writing, I discovered that students began to think like writers. They began to understand that they as writers make choices in *their* writing as to what kind of rhetorical strategies they can use to express themselves. Students still had their voice and passion, and they were able to articulate their ideas in relation to the texts we had read. For example, in a practice final, a timed-writing, Pilar writes how she feels about torture: "Like Klein's argument, I do not believe that implementing torture as a form of punishment is correct. I also don't believe in the use of torture functions as an interrogation tool since it doesn't guarantee a truthful answer. Gelernter's argument persuaded me to believe that perhaps there are certain situations in I which mild forms of torture, no physical or cruel pain, may be acceptable to save lives and prevent atrocities. Nonetheless, the use of torture will only create more

enemies, just like Johnson explains. Therefore, using torture would be counter productive and could have devastating results."

Although Pilar's writing at this point may be "clunky," trying to incorporate each author's text we had read to help formulate her opinion, she is able to express herself and keep herself grounded in the texts. However, her voice gets a bit lost.

**HE IS ENGAGED
AND PASSIONATE
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In Rorik's essay, he actually argues strongly against torture. His voice is strong and clear, and, for the most part, he stays grounded in the text. In his response he is arguing against Levin's argument from "A Case For Torture," which was the final text given for students to read and analyze on the spot for the practice final:

"I also disagree with his [Levin's] methodology, his idea that the end justifies the means. This is a dangerous thinking process that in history too many people have used. Stalin and Mao murdered and tortured millions to create their utopian systems. How many people dose [sic] Levin suggest we torture to save others? If we were to disregard the rule of law, as he suggests, we would destroy everything that we represent [...] One must recognize his [Levin's] argument for what it is. It makes us no better than a criminal to treat them [terrorist suspects] in the same capricious manner terrorists treat civilians."

Rorik's voice is strong and clear in this example. He is engaged and passionate about the topic, and he is able to articulate his ideas and stay grounded in the texts we had read. By looking at the texts as mentor

texts (as well as texts that they would later have to write about) with my class, we could see how each one of the authors formulated his/her argument, explain his or her reasons, and use evidence. My students began to understand how other writers write, and how they made choices as to which rhetorical strategies to use. My students not only understood what each author's text was about, but they had "mentor texts" of how to express their ideas and opinions. I now believe that I not only empower my students to express their voice, I also believe that I empower them to successfully participate in academic conversations about important issues. They need this to succeed at the university level in the kinds of thinking and writing they are required to do.

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More importantly, my students are better prepared to participate in the world around them. At the end of the semester, Rorik came up to me after class with a big grin and told me "I can really look at an essay and figure out what someone is trying to say. I was never before able to pick out someone's argument and evidence. Now I do it all the time. It's really cool." I couldn't be happier!

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Congratulations

SDAWP Fellows Summer 2008

Margit Boyesen

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Cardiff

Patricia 'PJ' Jeffery

Hickman Elementary
San Diego Unified

Janna Braun

San Diego Mesa College
SD Community College

Sharon Larry

Montgomery Middle School
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Callie Brimberry

MAAC Community School
Sweetwater Union High

Anne Leggett

Madison Elementary
Cajon Valley Union

Cheryl Converse-Rath

Encanto Elementary
San Diego Unified

Lisa Muñoz

Miramar College
SD Community College

Shannon Falkner

Coronado High School
Coronado

Dinah Smith

CPMA Middle School
San Diego Unified

Lisa Harris

Olivenhin Pioneer School
Encinitas Union

Kelly Thomas

MAAC Community School
Sweetwater Union

Stephanie Hubner

Mar Vista High School
Sweetwater Union

Lauren Wilensky

San Diego Met High
San Diego Unified

Janet Ilko

Cuyamaca Elementary
Cajon Valley Union

Marla Williams

San Diego State University
CSU

Susan Yates

Bay Park Elementary
San Diego Unified

SDAWP Log July 3, 2008

Amy Brothers—SDAWP 2007

As I look over my notes of the day to write this log, I ask myself, "What is the purpose of a daily log? We were all there, participating."

The dictionary states that logs are written to record performance or progress. The performance was according to schedule. Journaling, sharing, demonstrations, food, writing group discussion, reflection, announcements. My log could be a terse list to show our work. But the progress—if we could quantify the progress of our professional thinking during these days, it would be... a very big number.

I am struck by the diversity of professional practice, and yet the growing feeling of unity in this group. We teach at very different schools, from elementary to university levels. Our students are poor or rich, English speaking or English newcomers, struggling with literacy or not. We come from different places, diverse experiences, and disparate ideas.

The morning binds us together as we listen to journals: Kendra, Susan, and some others formed some sort of slippery bond yesterday after digging in messy trash, looking for Kendra's wallet. I feel thankful for a group that sticks together. Linda shares relief over projects finished. My stress level spikes as my mind runs over my list... at some point I will feel relieved, too. Cara writes of clearing the clutter from her mind, and I remember to breathe. Trish, a technological explorer, shares that the first time she surfed the net was like being swept away by a tidal wave, and I renew my appreciation of the willingness of this group to take professional risks. Allen shares thoughts of riding public transportation, contrasting train culture with bus culture. I think of how teachers touch the world, both in and out of the classroom. Iris shares a story close to her heart—her son's marriage—and I think of intersections, crossroads, and wonder where we are headed after these few weeks together. Linda shares her "caught poem" log. Our words, gathered from yesterday into a unified poem,

give some continuity to the beginning of this day.

Ted's demonstration requires us to tap into some core beliefs, as he shares ways he helps high school seniors know themselves better in order to write more compelling personal statements. Student writing shows improvement from the beginning to the end of this work. We find unity around a basic belief, and again demonstrate our diversity as we share our own writing.

Trish shares her use of technology and visual images to engage students in curricular content. We hear students' poems connected to photos and see the words made into movies. We see possibilities for helping all students build knowledge about a topic, using images, words, and music. We add to our knowledge, and write about the Trail of Tears.

Ted says, "I kept thinking, there's got to be a way to get more [of their stories], so I began using 'This I Believe.'" Trish says, "I saw the movies made without movie cameras, and said, 'I could do that.' Now that I know what can be done, I know what questions to ask." Again we are unified in our common goal of sharing and learning. Both Ted and Trish have picked up an idea—a radio program, a computer program—and modified it for use in their classrooms. Both have connected us to new possibilities for our own classrooms. We go to lunch with minds already full.

During our writing response group, we marvel at the value of sharing our words and getting feedback. We respond to poetry, an abstract, and position papers. We begin in the text, work our way out to laughing and telling stories, and then return to the text. Are all the groups such a wonderful mix of challenge and support? Although our writing voices are quite diverse, our unity toward purposeful shaping of words is inspiring.

Reflection and announcements at the end of the day bring us back together. The clean-up begins. Traffic gets checked on sigalert.com... should we

feel overwhelmed now, preparing to face future traffic? I discover that this website, new to me, made someone very rich. I think again about my career. I'll never get rich as a teacher. But wait. Today we agreed upon a basic belief that money cannot buy happiness. We had a really rich day.

"There are no corners in this writing institute"

—SDAWP Leader, Summer 2007

I hear this
from my seat
in the circle:
visually exposed,
thoughts hidden.

I write in corners.
I'm a corner thinker.
I speak out when
I've gathered my thoughts.
I don't cut corners;
I inhabit them . . .
habitually sit quiescent.

Am I a mouse, quivering?
No. Timid has never been
a part of my profession.
I'm boldly quiet in my
corner of the world.

Wait!
The world
has no corners.
Its textured face
forms varied habits
of mind and endeavor,
which we trim
into submission.
The innate curiosity
of learners
is circumscribed;
an artificial geometry
subduing the natural
landscape of learning.

I am a quiet gatherer.
Someday
I will gnaw through
the woven lines
that
tie learners down.

—Amy Brothers



SDAWP: Writing Marathon Balboa Park—Spring 2008

p p p p p p p

On May 3, 2008 SDAWP members convened with hosts Becky Gemmell and Warren Williams in Balboa Park to share writing time together. Writing Marathons, which were started by Richard Louth as part of the Louisiana Writing Project's Summer Institute, are becoming part of the Writing Project culture. We are currently looking for volunteers to host writing marathons for SDAWP. We thought it would be fun hold them in different parts of the county so that we can have opportunities to explore areas that may not be familiar to all of us. Please contact the SDAWP office if you are interested in hosting a marathon.

My watch said nine o'clock on the dot. The Spring Writing Marathon was supposed to start and we had three participants: Warren and me, the hosts, and Warren's girlfriend, Iris, who was obligated to be there.

I thought to myself, "What a big waste of time. We'll just cancel and go home."

But then I would've missed out on a beautiful day in Balboa Park. And to do what? To clean my house and run to the grocery store?

If no one had showed, would I have stayed there to wander around and write on my own? Probably not. So even though our group was small (we expanded to seven by 9:20), it gave me a sense of purpose and of safety to explore, to write, and to take a break from the daily drudgery.

We all need to take a break from the daily grind and make time to write. Otherwise, are we really practicing what we preach?

—Becky Gemmell
SDAWP 2001



Writing

I almost didn't come today,
Not because Balboa Park is faraway
(because I love Balboa Park)

But because life is so hurried,
I worried
this was just one more thing.

However come I did
and I got to know Iris and Warren,
and remember that writing is not painful
but a necessary cerebral cleansing and

now I am washed.

—Heidi Paul
SDAWP 1998

Butterfly Garden Balboa Park

Wrapped in a garden
of stone and trees and flowers
hummingbirds whiz by

Still on the stone bench
bird songs drift in on the breeze
butterflies float by

Monarchs mostly now
foreshadowing Kings and Queens
of summer Shakespeare

Sun filters down,
I'm carried off in a dream,
wrapped in butterfly wings.

—Nancy Rogers
SDAWP 1994



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Young
Writers'
Camp

KEEP GUARD

by Paloma Acosta, Grade 12

He guards his precious collection,
even from the soft, delicate rays of sunlight.
He can't possibly understand that his myriad
of knick-knacks and strange assortments
are considered trash flavored trash by the skeptical
eye, devoid of imagination.
To him, he protects priceless treasures.
But to the rest of the world, he keeps guard over

Ode to Horses!

by Eugenia Tzeng, Grade 4

*When I wake up
first thing in the morning
I look
out the window
Oh! My!
You are a beautiful horse!
Looking right in my eye!
It must be a dream
Of a horse with eyes
that blink perfectly
and a bumpy back.
Oh, what a beautiful,
perfect, amazing
horse.*



The Other World

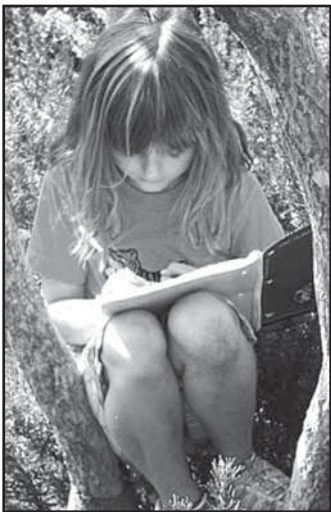
(a class poem,
YWC grades 7 and 8)

My foot sinks into the beige-colored sand
Callused feet assault from day to day
I could taste the salty air and
hear the rhythmic sound of
the crashing waves
In the burning stand, a crab sits
ready to attack
Diving down, grabbing grainy
handfuls of sand, and
feeling it trickle through
your fingers
Silver flash of fish in the water
Sunset stretching in an
endless line
across the horizon
A new world starts
beneath
beyond
below
the ocean's surface



*A million metal bugs,
hustling under a
rustling, polluted breeze.
It's 8:14 and they're already
paranoid and rushing
on their concrete sea,
to get where they need to be.
Fumbling between 91.4 and 101.3
and their morning routines,
never noticing the miracles in
the sky of God's jeans.
A washed out denim dream,
the color of Omi's eyes,
ripped and leaking golden ink
onto a strawberry field,
a quilt of green and singing trees,
onto an infected society that
injects and rejects
and collects
everything with their machines.*

by Camilla Elizabeth Aguirre Aguilar,
Grade 11



Rainbow Revelations by Cinnamon Roy, Class of 2007

*Red is a fire truck cling clanging its way to a house engulfed in flames.
Orange is a racer back worn-out shirt dripping with sweat.
Yellow is a water polo ball soaring past the goalies fingertips into the net.
Green is an evergreen forest slowing fading while gasoline seeps between its roots.
Blue is a crashing wave whose foamy fingers carry surfers to shore.
Indigo is a starry starry night in which galaxies swirl and stars meander across the sky.
Violet is a morning glory proclaiming its beauty to other garden flowers.*

What is a Poem? by Charlie Mann, Grade 5

A poem is a finger prodding the hearts of those who read it
A poem is a river flowing and peaceful
A lantern, glowing and fire lit
A coyote, padding its way through a lonely desert
Poems are eagles, spreading their wings and gliding smoothly
A poem is a bubble growing larger until it pops
A poem is a man trekking across an icy wasteland

A poem is a candle of words melting into oblivion,
until it transforms into a puddle of description
Poems are snowflakes, each one unique
Poems are music, letting off notes
of harmony, description and metaphors
A sunrise glowing in its splendor
A sunset, humbly dropping out of sight

Let's Walk the Walk

Ted Hernandez,
SDAWP 2007

Remember the saying, “Those that can, do. Those that can’t, teach?” A small cadre of educators at my school, constructing a Visual and Performing Arts Academy, one of our site’s small learning communities, are out to prove it wrong. They do not see teaching as disconnected from the activity we teach. They are writers, painters, teachers. They write. They paint. They teach. They believe if we’re going to talk the talk—that is, persuade our students that our subject is valid and essential—we should walk the walk. In other words, we need to be prepared to do what we ask our students to do.

Too many teachers, I am included, are inauthentic in our approach. I teach English and my students, seniors in high school, create web pages, construct power points and make presentations, read their poetry aloud and in public, and write in pressure situations. I do none of these. I did some, once, as a journalist, and that experience is an invaluable aid for me as a writing instructor. I refer to that experience with my students, but it’s not the same. I need to do more. I should participate in what I’ve asked them to do; it not only models, but it builds community and gives assignments authenticity.

Art teachers do this all the time. I watch in amazement as Ron Moya, a painter and one of my colleagues, moves about our campus and the community surrounding our site. Wherever you see him, he has his notebook. He’s writing or drawing. He’s visiting galleries. He’s begun to show his work again. (He’s not just referring to when he used to show.) He teaches his students to observe the world as artists and to constantly think about composition. When it clicks for them, he says, “Now you’re thinking like an artist.” In his life at school and in the community, he models this skill. He walks the walk. More importantly, as an edu-

cator, he is constantly growing and expanding his knowledge.

I write daily. But I seldom share my work with my students. At this summer’s San Diego Area Writing Project (SDAWP) invitational, Rebecca Gemmell told a similar story. She then demonstrated how she began to write with her students in her English classes, creating a strong writing community, and how their writing improved dramatically. Kim Douillard demonstrated

**We are historians. We are scientists
and mathematicians. We are travelers. We are students.
It doesn’t matter what we teach
or what grade level we teach.**

how she journals and reflects with her elementary school students, also building a strong community of writers. Last year, when she moved away from that process, her students’ writing suffered. She will write with her students again this fall. They are walking the walk.

It is not like the saying, “Those who can (write), do. Those who can’t (write), teach.” It has become, “Those who teach writing must write.” In their book *Inside the National Writing Project*, Ann Lieberman and Diane Wood state, “Thus, writers are the best teachers of writing simply because they are involved in the practice of writing.” They go on to quote a Writing Project teaching consultant, “Well, I think number one is that if I’m a teacher of writing I have to be a writer.” In the book *Because Writing Matters*, researcher Donald Graves says, “If kids don’t write more than three times a week, they’re dead, and it’s very hard to become a writer. If you provide frequent occasions for writing, then the students start to think about writing when they’re not doing it. I call it a state of constant composition.”

Aha. A teacher can best mine writing from students by writing himself. I can create an environment where students write by writing, too. I already write daily. But if I write daily with my students, modeling behavior and craft, they might begin to think like writers and work, as Graves states, “in a state of constant composition.” And if I take a further step, working toward publication and public exposure of my work and voice, my students might see the validity of their efforts and their writing becomes authentic. I will be walking the walk, and my classroom becomes a garden of voices.

This premise is not bound to writing teachers. We are historians. We are scientists and mathematicians. We are travelers. We are students. It doesn’t matter what we teach

or what grade level we teach. If we ask our students to perform a task, we must be prepared to do the same. We must be prepared to expose ourselves, just as we ask our students to expose themselves. By doing this, we are not only modeling professional behavior, we are growing professionally and personally. Let our students know we are walking the walk. They will only be the better for it.

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Rethinking Native Language Use in Our Classroom

Shannon Meridith

SDAWP 2007

“When they use their native language in the classroom it becomes a crutch.”

How many times have those of us who work with English learners, or for that matter, those who follow the English-only political debate in our country, heard this tired comparison? What’s so bad about a crutch, anyway? Is it that we automatically associate the word “crutch” with the word “injury”?

I’d like to suggest that under no circumstances is a student’s native language harmful to his learning, nor is his lack of English proficiency a deficit.

Let’s consider the crutch by itself. Doesn’t it give someone with a leg or foot injury time to heal? Doesn’t it provide her with continued mobility despite her injury? If so, why does the metaphor seem to demonize crutches along with native languages? A crutch is an invaluable source of strength, as is one’s native language. The use of both is to provide time, balance, safety, and healthier progress in the long run. To remove native language leaves the learner vulnerable at best, and in the worst situations—without a voice.

Both crutches and native languages are shortchanged in this metaphor, spoken so often in irritation, impatience, or intolerance. More importantly, we don’t consider the harm done when equating an English learner with one who is injured. I’d like to suggest that under no circumstances is a student’s native language harmful to his learning, nor is his lack of English proficiency a deficit. In fact, he’s an entire language ahead of those of us who are “highly educated” but monolingual.

He already knows how to negotiate the many functions of language within a different culture, and he brings that knowledge to the classroom table when he begins to learn English, if we choose to let him.

So why should we, his teachers, make this choice? By promoting native language use at the same time that a student acquires English, we allow for significant cognitive achievement. Drawing on

the research of Jim Cummins (as cited in Baker, 1996, p. 159), Baker summarizes three ways to explain how bilingualism and cognitive advantages seem related. “The first explanation is that bilinguals may have a wider and more varied range of experiences than monolinguals

due to their operating in two languages and probably two or more cultures” (Baker, 1996). Second, he explains a switching mechanism. “Because bilingual children switch between their two languages, they may be more flexible in their thinking” (Baker, 1996). The third advantage, he claims, is that “a bilingual may consciously and subconsciously compare and contrast their two languages” (Baker, 1996). Bloom’s taxonomy places the ability

to compare within the “comprehension,” “analysis,” and “evaluation” levels of thinking.

Any objections to a linguistically experienced and flexible student with high level thinking skills?

In addition, the ability to compare and contrast two languages gives a bilingual person a higher level of what Ben-Zeev (as cited in Baker, 1996, p. 156) refers to as “communicative sensitivity.” Baker explains “communicative sensitivity” as a heightened awareness of when to use which language:

“They need constantly to monitor what is the appropriate language in which to respond or when initiating a conversation (e.g. on the telephone, in a shop, speaking to a superior). Not only do bilinguals often attempt to avoid ‘interference’ between their two languages, they also have to pick up on clues and cues when to switch languages. The literature suggests that this may give a bilingual increased sen-

...teachers must stop thinking of a student’s native language as a “crutch”—something temporary and throw-away, needed only by an “injured” person.

sitivity to the social nature and communicative functions of language” (Baker, 1996).

To allow for these positive outcomes, teachers must stop thinking of a student’s native language as a “crutch”—something temporary and throw-away, needed only by an “injured” person. Evidently, a student on his way to bilingualism is in better “linguistic health” than his monolingual counterparts!

Despite my awareness of the potential advantages of bilingualism, I used to be part of the “crutch” camp of thinking. I could justify why students should have marginal use of their native language in content areas other than English, since the content is more the focus than the language. But in English class I believed that since the content was the language, English should be used at all times by everyone. That puts everyone on an equal footing, I reasoned.

In reality, the English language is only “the content” of the English class in the broadest sense. There are many sub-contents happening within that subject area. Let’s suppose that we’re discussing literary terms like metaphor and imagery. While an English Learner might struggle to articulate the purpose of such devices in English, she could certainly learn what they mean in her language if we allow for a quick translation. Won’t that get her on an equal footing with her classmates much more efficiently? Won’t it be easier for her now to learn the English words, since the concepts are already in her head? Additionally, the classmate who translated or explained the words to her has just reinforced his own knowledge of the vocabu-

in English, a neighbor’s quick translation is an efficient way for all students to gain the same background knowledge and be able to move forward collectively.

Though moving ahead with the same knowledge base might seem a desirable situation in our classrooms, there is one major obstacle in the way: our own anxieties. We might worry that when we let stu-

when we’ve accustomed ourselves to calling all of the shots, to making the most important decisions for them.

Since the perceived threat of native language use often originates from our own fears, not from any substantiated concern that it will impede the content being studied, it is critical that we learn to accept our own discomfort. Stephanie Jones, in study-

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dents use their native languages, we’ll no longer be able to control them. We are warned in our teaching credential programs and by our administrations that without classroom control, all may be lost. How can we be expected to control students when we can’t even understand what they’re saying? What if the animated Korean conversation is really about the overhead marker stain on Mrs. Merideth’s face instead of the theme of the book we just read?

ing the alternative language practices of young girls in a high-poverty U.S. neighborhood, asserts that, “far from a harmonious, predictable, and shared vision that the idealized concept of classroom ‘community’ might evoke, classrooms that open spaces where students’ multiple ways with words are centered and engaged in meaningful, productive learning are often sites of conflict” (Jones, 2006). We often equate “peacefulness” in our classrooms with “quiet.” Learning, however, means active—and at times loud and confrontational—meaning-making. It is natural for conflict to exist as students struggle not only with language meanings, but with their beliefs and identities and those of others. This conflict, as Jones suggests, might very well be productive and even necessary.

Everyone benefited from the exchange, even the teacher, who can proceed with the lesson knowing that metaphor and imagery were introduced and understood.

lary. Everyone benefited from the exchange, even the teacher, who can proceed with the lesson knowing that metaphor and imagery were introduced and understood.

Most of us have studied a new language at some point in our academic history, so we might recall that the only—though significant—barrier to communication was our lack of words, not an inability to think or reason. We had only to ask our friend, or a teacher, or consult a dictionary, to arrive at where we needed to be, at least temporarily. The same is true for my students. When my lesson grinds to a halt due to a few misunderstood words

I’ve come to realize that whether or not I allow this dynamic in my classroom is more about my own level of comfort, or discomfort, than about wildly subversive students scheming in their native language while I look on helplessly. Middle schoolers are seldom subtle, and body language says a whole lot. I have had to learn to live with not always controlling the conversation, and at the same time I trust my instincts about what students seem to be discussing. This, of course, means sharing some of the control with the students, and letting them be responsible for their own use of native language in their learning. It’s pretty intimidating, especially

The strongest conflict of all, though, may be within ourselves—the recognition and acceptance of our discomfort in allowing students the freedom to use their native languages. In addition we risk conflict with our colleagues when advocating for this practice. We then need to articulate why the crutch metaphor is so faulty, for surely they will summon it to their defense. Not only does the metaphor misconstrue the true intention of the crutch as well as the condition of the language learner, but it wrongly suggests that the metaphorical “it”—the native language—should eventually be replaced or put away. First language use should be able to support the acquisition of both English and content area subject matter as long

as needed, and thereby become a partner language of power and support. It is the foundation of English learning because it's the backbone of an English learner's thinking. It is one of the most powerful tools—if not the most powerful—in the acquisition of subsequent languages.

Shall we then consider a student's native language a tool rather than a crutch? After all, we love the tools of our trade, don't we? Teachers may disagree on methodology, but most of us are passionate about our content area, and will do almost anything to help students learn that content. We'll set chemicals on fire in our science labs, recite poetry on tabletops, play a version of classroom baseball to review before a test, and toss out Jolly Ranchers as students volunteer their correct answers. We use all of the tools at our disposal: dictionaries and thesauruses, calculators and graph paper, microscopes and beakers, to make learning more effective and explicit. In fact, we are our own most powerful tool. Would we deny students our own knowledge and ability to explain a concept if we saw it was needed? If not, then why would we preclude the use of native language as a tool to move students forward in their learning?

There is no such thing as true immersion in the target language, for that would mean the elimination of our thinking and feeling lives, which naturally and automatically happen in our native tongue. Never, when living abroad, was I forced to exist in only the language of the host country. There were many times when I was required to speak and hear the language of the country, but my knowledge of words and language use in general, from years of speaking my first language, eased this process. I don't mean that I was constantly translating from one language to the other when speaking and listening. In most communications, though, aside from the briefest bits of small talk, there was uncertainty for me to negotiate, and that is when everything I know about my first language bridged communication to the second. In order to make an instant decision about how to participate appropriately in an act of communication, I had to draw on my first language knowledge of context clues, cognates, voice inflection, etc.

When I returned home I was a much stronger and more confident speaker of Spanish because I'd used all of the tools at my disposal, especially my first language, to move me forward. Why would I deny the same opportunity to my students?

And unlike me, most of our students have not made the choice to live here, a country that is foreign to them, but rather are here by circumstances outside of their control. Many may be here for the remainder of their lives, which gives them an added incentive to learn the language of power in our country—English. Using their native language throughout this process initially provides them with balance, with a feeling of security, of knowing something in a setting of too many unknowns. According to Jones (2006), “their being positioned as knowers within a space where they are routinely positioned as lacking in knowledge opens up the possibility that they may want to learn multiple ways of speaking about topics of interest.” So their native language not only helps them learn what they need to know about their new language and country, but it actually keeps them motivated to do so.

When we honor that language, and the culture in which it's embedded, we show students that we welcome and accept them as they are. We send the message that English is not intended to make them over into a new person, but give them a tool to successfully negotiate the academic and professional demands of their new world. By valuing where they come from and the experience and knowledge that they bring, we build a trusting relationship in which they're more likely to follow us to new places of learning and risk-taking. We also increase the probability that our students will continue to feel pride and respect for themselves, their home languages and cultures, and in turn be able to extend that respect to the vastly diverse citizens who make up this country. Baker affirms that “those who speak more than one language and own more than one culture are more sensitive and sympathetic, more likely to build bridges than barricades and boundaries.” (Baker, 1996) This bridge-building originates in our classrooms, where we allow and encourage the native lan-

SDAWP NOTES

Congratulations

Laurel Corona (SDAWP '77) has published a book (St. Martin's Press) entitled *Until Our Last Breath: A Holocaust Story of Love and Partisan Resistance*. Check out her website at www.laurelcorona.com for more information about this book and her forthcoming novel set in Venice in Vivaldi's time.

Kudos

Christine Sphar has co-authored two books published by Math Solutions: *Supporting English Language Learners in Math Class K-2* and *Supporting English Language Learners in Math Class 3-5*. The books provide specific strategies teachers can use to help English learners succeed in math class. The lessons guide teachers in developing students' proficiency in English while also developing their mathematical understanding. In addition, teachers will learn how to modify existing math lessons to support students with varying degrees of English language proficiency. The books are available for preview and purchase at mathsolutions.com.

Birth Announcements

Jennifer Pust (SDAWP '03) and husband Michael welcomed a baby boy, Noah Michael, on April 21, 2008. Jennifer has relocated to Los Angeles and teaches at Santa Monica High School.

Sarah (Curry) Ogus (SDAWP '03) gave birth to Elizabeth Eden Ogus on May 29th 2008. Congratulations Sarah and family!

guage to be a bridge to English, and perhaps more importantly, a way for them to show who they are and what they know.

Often referred to as our home language, our native language is the center of our identity. It is how we express our deepest emotions and show our most intimate connections to the world. Gonzalez (as cited in Jones, 2006, p. 116) writes that “the interweaving of language ideologies and emotion for children cannot be overemphasized. How language connects with formations of identity and community for children is at the crux of the language wars that rage on.” When we remove—at any point in their education or lifetime—peoples’ facility to use their native language, we literally rob them of their ability to fully communicate who they are, where they are from, and what they feel and believe.

It need not be a war, though not in our classrooms. Yes, we might have to engage in the battle, in the conversation, outside of our classrooms to justify why we allow the use of this tool. But inside our classrooms we can let the conversations continue, live with our discomfort, and create a safe—if at times overly animated, conflicted, and even off-task—environment for our students to make sense of their learning without giving up any part of who they are.

We must lay aside the notion that our students’ native languages are a short-term support, and recognize the rich and lasting permanence of those languages in their lives. And we must move beyond simply recognizing those languages. We must encourage their use, celebrate their beauty, and create new metaphors to understand them.

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MUSE BOX

Stacey Goldblatt, SDAWP 1999

“Books aren’t written—they’re rewritten. Including your own. It is one of the hardest things to accept, especially after the seventh rewrite hasn’t quite done it.”—Michael Crichton

Since becoming a young adult novelist, I’ve struggled with both the internal editor (the one that reminds me anything I write is not worth reading) and the external editor (the literal woman in New York who line edits my manuscript and nudges me to find things like the “emotional trajectory” of my characters). The bottom line is that published writing goes through some sort of filter that either deepens or alters the intentions of the writer, but in the end, strengthens the piece so it’s ready for its reader.

That said, find a piece of writing to which you are willing to commit yourself. Either start fresh, or go back to a piece that’s been niggling at you. Read it aloud, without pen in hand. Next round, grab your pen, mark all over it. Ask yourself questions about it. Save it and start it anew. Then read it aloud again until you’re ready to share it with someone. Then share it and allow someone else to use the pen. The process can be painful, but it is worth the outcome. If we don’t revise, we don’t have the pleasure of seeing a piece of writing reach its potential. Allow yourself to watch it grow and change and most importantly, don’t stop when you’re ready to give up.

NWP Announcements

Letters to the Next President: Writing Our Future

For high school teachers and mentors who would like to capitalize on young people’s interest in the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, Google and the National Writing Project have teamed up to create Letters to the Next President: Writing Our Future. http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/nwpsites/writing_our_future.csp

Join the Conversation about Who is a Writer

What do people write and read every day? What makes people feel they are writers, or not? Through online video, audio, and print texts The National Conversation on Writing hopes to encourage a discussion on these questions. Members of the NWP community are invited to join the conversation about who is a writer. <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2546>

Start Planning for the Annual Meeting in San Antonio

Make plans now to attend this year’s annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, November 20-22. Online registration for workshops begins September 2. Check the NWP website for regular updates and information. <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/08am/home.csp>

Writing Matters: What’s Your Story?

Writing Matters offers online writing instruction for middle schools. It features genre studies, animations, lessons, publishing tools and professional development. The Writing Matters portal is set up to provide teachers access to lessons plans, classroom visual and an online location to collect, evaluate and publish student work. <http://www.writingmatters.org/>

PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITIES

English Journal NCTE

For the Fun of It!
Deadline: November 15, 2008

Do you remember what attracted you to the field of English? Was it your escapist forays into other lands through reading? Dreams of writing the next Great American Novel? Fascination with famous speakers who moved the world with their words? Whiling away the hours with a dog-eared comic book or pop novel? Indulging your ego with your own angst-ridden poetry? Playing your favorite songs again and again to hear and appreciate every word? Creating a famous Web site? You're lucky. Now that you teach English, you get to indulge these pleasures with your students and call it work. Since people learn best through play, there is an argument to be made that all teaching and learning should be fun. What do you teach that you and your students find to be a great deal of fun? Please, no Jeopardy!-style test reviews or mnemonic devices for naming the parts of speech. For this issue, we seek enjoyable, creative assignments that engage students in genuinely high-level learning in any area of English language arts. For submission guidelines visit: www.englishjournal.colostate.edu/info-forauthors.htm#articles

Language Arts NCTE

Locating Standards
in Language Arts Education
Deadline: January 15, 2009

Many professional organizations across content areas have established standards for teaching and learning (i.e., NCTE & IRA, NCTM, NCSS), providing the framework for state and local curriculum development. In this issue, we are interested in exploring the impact standards-based education has on preK-8 literacy education. How do you relate ideas, contents, and reflections with standards? What curricular absences

and possibilities should we be exploring? Who is the assumed audience for these standards, and how do the standards benefit or constrain teaching and learning in diverse settings? What are the tensions between skills and knowledge? How do these tensions serve teachers' and children's agency in knowledge production? How do we respond to standards in education based on our political and ethical obligations to our students? We invite submissions addressing these questions and other issues related to English language arts standards. For submission guidelines visit: www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/la/write/108999.htm

Language Arts NCTE

In each issue, we will feature a final page called "In Closing . . ." This is a one-page format (750-word maximum) that could take the form of a poem, essay, conversation, journal entry, short story, or visual art with caption. The focus is on the voices of educators who have recognized a shift in perspective, perception, or practice—in their school, their district, or themselves. We hope that readers will look forward to this feature because it prompts them to remember and rethink. For submission guidelines visit: www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/la/write/109012.htm

Classroom Notes Plus NCTE

Classroom Notes Plus, NCTE's quarterly newsletter of practical teaching ideas for the middle and secondary school level, invites descriptions of teaching practices for consideration. We ask that submissions be original and previously unpublished and, in the case of an adapted idea, that you clearly identify any sources that deserve mention. Please be aware that any student work needs to be accompanied by statements of consent by the student and his or her parents. For submission guidelines visit: www.ncte.org/pubs/publish/journals/109277.htm

DIALOGUE

Call for Manuscripts

Winter 2009 Issue
Submission Deadline:
December 15, 2008

From Fear to Confidence

Although we may read aloud and expose students to the inspiring possibilities of the written word many of them, and perhaps many of us, grow up with a real distaste for writing and a lack of confidence about our ability to write effectively and correctly. We fear it more than we love it.

—Mem Fox,
from her essay
Learning from Learning

In many ways, as teachers, we're trying to undo fears, insecurities (and unfortunately, dislikes) our students have about writing. What techniques or resources do you bring into the classroom that inspire your students to write? How do you imbue your students with a sense of confidence about writing? What are some books, stories, poems, essays that you find effective in catalyzing student writing? What is your own story about learning from your learning that has brought you closer to feeling an affinity for writing?

Dialogue would like to receive your work or the work of your students. Submit a story of student success, a strategy for implementation, or a personal essay on your teaching experience.

Email all manuscript submissions, suggestions, letters to the editor and Project Notes to moonbeam5@cox.net or jenny4moore@hotmail.com

Calendar of Events

Extended Conversations About Writing Grades 1-6

Workshop Series
SDAWP/SDCOE
October 21, November 18,
January 13, February 17
4:00 - 7:00 p.m.

For registration contact Karen
Wagner at 858-292-3782

Promising Practices Fall Conference

October 15, 2008
Marina Village Resort
San Diego, CA
8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Contact Kristen Gall at
kgall27@yahoo.com

Writing Across the Curriculum Grades K-16

Workshop Series
SDAWP
October 7, October 14,
October 21, November 4
4:45 - 7:30 p.m.

2008 Summer Institute

Follow-up sessions
September 27, 2008
1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
January 10, 2009
8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

*For more information
regarding SDAWP programs,
visit our website at
<http://create.ucsd.edu/sdawp/>
or call the SDAWP office
at 858-534-2576.*

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