



# Dialogue

A Publication of the San Diego Area Writing Project

Spring 2005

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## *Teacher Leadership, Equity, and Education Reform: A Dialogue*

Makeba Jones and Kim Douillard

San Diego Area Writing Project (SDAWP) Directors, Makeba Jones and Kim Douillard, have written an exchange around four questions they believe are very relevant to their professional lives as educators and to the work of the SDAWP. They decided to write a dialogue rather than an article for a couple of reasons. First, they wanted readers to get an idea of who they are as individuals and where they each stand on important issues such as equity, education reform, and teacher leadership within the SDAWP. Second, Makeba and Kim wanted readers to see how their individual responses are connected and interconnected, and create an exchange where each response pushed their thinking and influenced subsequent responses to the questions and to one another. The result is a powerful and open exchange where, by the end, they discover that their visions for education are shared and their passion for teacher leaders in education reform is strong.

### *What does equity in education mean to you?*

**Makeba:**

That's a loaded and layered question. It forces me to pause and think about how my conceptions of equity have changed over time. Until recently, I've always thought of equity as necessary for those children and adolescents who are economically disadvantaged and historically underrepresented in colleges and other important societal institutions, and least likely to be well-served by public K-12 schools. I've spent eleven years in graduate school and working at UCSD's Center for Research on Educational Equity, Assessment, and Teaching Excellence (CREATE) working with theory, research, and practice to improve schools and classrooms where students of color are the majority. While teaching UCSD college students, most of whom come from advantaged backgrounds, in sociology and education and in freshman writing courses over the last few years, I discovered that equity permeated my pedagogy and, when possible, the curriculum. I've always viewed teaching as a political act, particularly in the service of helping disadvantaged students of color access the tools necessary to compete in society's institutions. As a university teacher, I have learned to understand the power of teaching in new ways. When I thought about teaching as a political act, I typically associated the act with white teachers in mostly urban schools serving disadvantaged students of color. However, are teachers of color in predominantly affluent educational settings political agents as well? Yes! Equity is vital for everyone!

**Kim:**

My view of equity has also changed over time. I grew up taking equity for granted. My narrow view of the world meant that the United States was the land of opportunity. Anyone could make their dreams

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—Kim Douillard

come true if only they worked hard enough. In my working class family, effort and persistence were the keys to success. I wasn't aware of oppression or inequity. In fact, when I struggled in college I was certain the problem was with me. I never considered whether the university met my needs or even considered my problems. I was qualified to attend, therefore, if I worked hard enough, I should succeed. When I did realize that equity in education was not in fact a given, I noticed that the term "equity" was used only in conjunction with those experiencing inequity—mostly students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged. A closer look at educational reform has shown me that reform seems to be only for schools whose students are not "achieving" at a high level (as determined mostly by standardized testing and college admission rates). In my view, equity cannot be achieved without an examination of the entire system. Changing conditions of those who experience inequity without attending to the environment that created the situation seems futile. We must all work together if our desire is a more equitable educational system.

**Makeba:**

I agree that the public education system needs a dramatic overhaul. Yet, I must admit that five plus years of outreach work through school-university partnerships has taught me that trying to change an entire system is exhausting and overwhelming when the system is intricately flawed and, for many students, broken. I feel empowered, that is, able to take action that creates some kind of result, when I narrow my focus on contexts where change seems more possible and tangible—classrooms and schools. The actions of teachers and students in classrooms, or of administrators, can be in the service of equity-minded education reform. How can we all work together in our every day professional lives toward an equitable education system without feeling beaten down by the system (particularly in an age of testing)?

**Kim:**

I also agree that expecting and enacting overall change is overwhelming—and discouraging. Classroom teachers are more powerful than they realize—it seems that the classroom is the place where the most change can happen. I think that teachers (and administrators) need to find systems of support to help them enact the changes that will lead to a more equitable system. Groups like our teacher research group help teachers make small steps toward change and work within the system rather than fighting against it. I think teachers can make a more powerful case for change by demonstrating the effectiveness of their teaching rather than complaining about unfair practices.

*What are your views on leadership in the San Diego Area Writing Project?*

**Makeba:**

Leadership means many things and can be enacted in many ways. Teachers are leaders in the way they take the initiative to work with and support colleagues at their school sites. Teacher Consultants in the San Diego Area Writing Project lead by teaching and model-

ing successful pedagogy and curriculum for other teachers through a collaborative process that begins with each teacher's classroom, teaching experience, and knowledge. As I've reflected on my own leadership, I've learned that because I believe teaching is a political act, I believe that teachers are powerful agents of change. My role is to help sustain a culture throughout SDAWP programs that sparks, nurtures, and fuels teachers to take risks in their classrooms and schools because of a passion for teaching, learning, and, most importantly, for students.

**Kim:**

Leadership is complex and multidimensional. It is complicated further when teachers become leaders not only at their own site, but also at a district level and beyond their immediate work context. Teachers receive conflicting messages about their leadership. They are encouraged to do more "work" but are not always encouraged to ask the questions and make the demands that leadership requires. Teacher lead-

In Possible Lives: The Promise of Public Education in America, Mike Rose writes about the negative view of teachers and U.S. public schools that he sees. Rose does this largely by changing the paradigm of education. While he also uses anecdotal evidence, he is careful to contextualize the stories he tells.

**Dialogue**  
Spring 2005  
Issue No. 16  
*The Courage to Teach*

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Jennifer Moore

**Page Design:** Janis Jones

**Writing Angel:** Susan Minnicks

**Published by the**  
San Diego Area  
Writing Project at UCSD

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...claim universal decline in U.S. public schools; the compelling to some, but not the sloppy and irresponsible. We need to find more ways to understand and the kind of argumentation is not to say that what Rose's is not valuable and res...think it is; it is...that we need to bring...uses made to such arguments. how

ers often find themselves in an intricate dance that requires the knowledge of many roles and may lead to stepping on others' toes. Teachers' work with students, which is what brought them into leadership initially, is often the piece that is first to go when they take on more leadership. Should our best teachers leave the classroom in their quest to improve educational opportunities for all students?

**Makeba:**

That is a really tough question. Part of me believes that if real educational change is going to happen in ways sustained over time, the best teachers need to grow into leadership positions where they have the power to negotiate for the best curriculum, professional development,

Yes, thank goodness for writing projects! They are spaces where we can safely explore issues around race, class, gender, and language in schools and in our teaching.

—Makeba Jones

and overall educational policy. Academic research and policy-making arenas need voices that reflect grounded, experiential expertise and not just theory and written scholarship. Good superintendents should be educational professionals who've gone through several stages of their careers and still long for the classroom and opportunities to interact with students. And yet, it's important that every student gets the best teachers. Is our thinking too narrow? Are there other ways to view education and the development of teacher leaders that does not have to force teachers to choose between teaching and leadership?

**Kim:**

I think the way the educational system is set up currently forces teachers to choose between teaching and leadership, but I don't think it has to be that way. We need to be more creative about the ways we envision both teaching and leadership to allow flexibility in scheduling and in job definition. I truly believe that it is the classroom and the time with students that enables teacher leaders to make curricular decisions and understand the impact of educational policy. There must be a way to think about teaching and leadership that are not contradictory but are instead complimentary.

*Why is equity important to the San Diego Area Writing Project?*

**Kim:**

I would like to believe that writing projects are spaces that support innovation and creative problem solving. They are also one of the few places where teachers from a variety of settings come together to share ideas and work through the struggles inherent in teaching. If our national goal is equity in education, then writing project sites offer opportunities to explore issues of equity in new ways. Instead of a focus only on those faced with inequities, SDAWP offers teachers in San Diego a chance to interact with others both alike and different from themselves—personally and professionally—and to think about equity more broadly. What can suburban teachers learn from urban teachers? What can urban teachers learn from suburban teachers? How are students similar and different across contexts? What stereotypes do we hold that interfere with teaching and learning? How can we help our students gain a broader view of the world and understand their role and responsibilities in making change?

**Makeba:**

Yes, thank goodness for writing projects! They are spaces where we can safely explore issues around race, class, gender, and language in schools and in our teaching. Writing projects spaces are the only professional spaces I've experi-

enced where I take risks along with others to collectively understand how our personal lives and upbringing inform our view of teaching, learning, and students. That doesn't mean it's easy; these are topics that are difficult for many people to talk about in public. In writing projects, reflection and a need to grow as teachers and teacher leaders are part of their

I think teachers can make a more powerful case for change by demonstrating the effectiveness of their teaching rather than complaining about unfair practices.

—Kim Douillard

integrity. But change cannot happen without all teachers. How can writing projects support teachers who are uncomfortable taking risks?

**Kim:**

I'm not sure that the writing project can reach all teachers, but I do think that teachers can learn to take risks in a supportive environment. We have to help teachers see that change and growth are not the same as failure. Our goal is not to "fix" teachers or students but rather to help them continue to learn and evaluate their own progress. The writing project doesn't have all the answers, but it helps teachers continue to ask questions and to explore possibilities as they search.

**Makeba:**

I am an idealist in many ways, and I

hold onto the idea that systemic change needs us all to take risks by asking and exploring hard and important questions about education, teaching, and learning. Individual teachers who choose to participate in our programs have the opportunity to begin their search in a safe, professional space. But as a project, I think we too have to be proactive and do what we can to reach out to teachers who still view change and growth as failure. Doing so does not guarantee that those teachers will take that first step. But we've done our best to communicate that the writing project is here when they are ready.

### ***How can Fellows of the SDAWP be agents of reform in education?***

#### **Makeba:**

I believe Fellows of the SDAWP can be agents of reform in their every-

day professional lives. Fellows who are currently teaching, for example, are agents of reform in their classrooms as they create curriculum that is meaningful, relevant, and engaging for all students, including disadvantaged students, English learners, and Special Education students. Curriculum is very political as textbooks and standardized tests define what counts as important knowledge that students need to know. Often, mandated curriculum programs or adopted textbooks do little to provide meaningful and engaging learning experiences for students, particularly for students whose skills are below their grade level. When teachers decide to blend mandated curriculum and textbooks with curriculum they believe is important and relevant to students' growth as learners and student achievement, they are creating change in education. In other words, when teachers do what they believe is best for all students, their actions have the potential to increase students' access to opportunities such as college prep courses and to change students' views of school and students' views of what's possible for their futures.

#### **Kim:**

Reform can take a variety of forms, some more public than others. I believe that SDAWP fellows are agents of reform in education. Some innovate in their own classrooms and inspire students to learn in ways others haven't yet imagined. They touch students, families, and their local communities with their work. They encourage students and families who may not have found education a welcoming place. Others share their expertise beyond their classrooms. They go into schools and districts different from their own and listen to the struggles that other teachers and other students face. They examine mandates and find ways to incorporate the best of the mandates with practices they know offer students opportunities and support. Others publish, through writing and/or presenting to open their thinking and their practice to a wider educational audience. They let their students' stories and experiences shape the work of other teachers. There are many ways to enact

change—but I think Gandhi said it best when he said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world."

#### **Makeba:**

Ghandi's words teach me that hope for education reform that's relevant, inclusive of teachers, and lasting lies within each SDAWP fellow.

I believe our interactions with students, colleagues, parents, and community always carry the possibility of making a difference.

—Makeba Jones

Our actions everyday string together into our professional lives, as complicated as they may be by the challenges, fears, victories (big and small), passions, and politics.

SDAWP fellows may not always see their everyday professional lives and routines as actions in the service of important education reform. I believe our interactions with students, colleagues, parents, and community always carry the possibility of making a difference. That gives me enough to feel and think that hope is present and strong.

#### **Kim:**

For me, the SDAWP is a community of education professionals who offer hope for the future. Reform is not a something that magically fixes problems. Change is only possible through the actions of the people involved. I know that smart, caring, and committed professionals make a difference.



## **Project Notes...**

### **Karen Wroblewski**

(SDAWP 1989) is now principal at the San Diego High Education Complex School of International Studies.

**Patty Ladd** (SDAWP 1994) is now principal at Keiller Middle School in the San Diego Unified School District.

**Sam Patterson** (SDAWP 1998) has had his article "How Much is Too Much? Effective and Ethical Response to Application Essays" chosen by The NACAC Editorial Board for publication in a future issue of the *Journal of College Admission*.

**Kim Douillard** (SDAWP 1992) has been chosen by the National Writing Project to be a coordinator for the upcoming Project Outreach 3.

The SDAWP will host the National Writing Project's Urban Sites Conference scheduled for April 28-29, 2006 in San Diego.



# ***Desire and Pleasure: Language Poetry in the College Classroom***

**Wendy L. Smith, SDAWP 2001**

1.

LXX.

Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle  
quam mihi, no si se Iuppiter ipse petat  
dicit: sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti  
in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua.

-Catullus

70.

No one says that my woman is not nubile,  
but to me, even if Jupiter himself reads this, she is a petal.  
She loves it when I talk about love  
and when I rapidly write about liquid openings.

-trans. Don Cheney,

*The Qualms of Catullus & K-mart*

70.

My woman says there's nobody she'd rather marry  
than me, not even Jupiter himself if he asked her.  
She says, but what a woman says to a hungry lover  
you might as well scribble in wind and swift water.

-trans. Carl Sesar

Exercise: "translate" the Catullus poem (below) from the original Latin into your own language. Listen to the words, make random (or exact) associations based on sound, sense, whim, whatever. Play, interact with words and sounds and the physicality of the text.

*Aut, sodes, mihi redde decem sestertia, Silo,  
deinde esto quamvis saevus et indomitus:  
aut, si te nummi delectant, desine quaeso  
leno esse atque idem saevus et indomitus.*

2.

There used to be a character on Gumby, the "Groobee," which was bee-like, except that with its hammer-shaped arm, it would hammer small wooden cages around everyone and everything. The Groobee hammered its crates around Gumby, Pokey, other animals (like a gorilla in mid-swing), plants, and, in one episode, another Groobee. The Groobee was "both a saviour and a nuisance at the same time." According to Art Cloakey, the Groobee "was another instrument that Gumby could use to overcome obstacles." However, "The only problem is that the Groobee did not know when to stop. It would just keep on crating everything in sight until Gumby called it back into its little cage with an ultrasonic whistle" (gumbyworld.com).

3.

As writing teachers, we have a common goal: teaching students to write better. We differ in our approaches, sometimes to the point that we take up sword and shield to defend our practices. In *Style: An Anti-Textbook*, Richard Lanham quotes an English commentator: "On subjects like America and Prose one's mind cannot be made a blank" (1). Dialogue, Spring 2005

I am not immune. I have strong feelings against formulaic writing—some of these are my own preferences for writing, but some of these are based on my own training, experience, and scholarship. My interest in scholarship on this issue stems from the teaching of the five-paragraph essay nearly to death in my district. (Developmental writers must write a tolerable five-paragraph essay in an hour in order to go on to English 101. If they do not pass the test, they receive a "D" in the course, no matter how they were doing before the exam.)

The edge of the world, as far as formulaic writing is concerned, lies in the currently popular "Schaffer Method," a set of pre-formed guidelines (called "The Format") which are specific to the point of telling students how many sentences to include with each paragraph. Jane Schaffer, like a champion Groobee, says, "We get kids who tell us that we stifle their creativity." Her response is "Yes, we do."

Meanwhile, our mailboxes are filling up with readers and rhetorics which include divisions by readings and by modes.

I've heard this: "You can't dance the tango until you've learned the box step."

In other words (to drag the dead donkey out of the ditch one more time): "You must learn the rules before you can break them." The problem with the dance metaphor is that it assumes there are specific rules, that these rules do not

***I've heard this: "You can't dance  
the tango until you've learned  
the box step."***

change and that we agree on them. It also assumes that the five-paragraph essay is the basis for all other essays, when a quick skim through an anthology or newspaper opinion page reveals that it is not.

To return to the dance metaphor, I would ask whether the perfunctory essay writer could be compared to a dancer who does a perfect box step but has no sense of expression or connection to what she is doing or who really does not enjoy the even more "basic" act of touching others and whirling them around the room.

What are the basics? Desire and pleasure, of course! And maybe a partner, too: an empathic (or resisting!) listener who might think in a new and different way after reading what the writer has written.

Donald Murray says, "There are no rules, no absolutes, just alternatives. What works one time may not work another.

All writing is experimental” (17). Recently, I have been experimenting with language play in my classes. Free translation is an interesting example to focus on; the first students I tried it on were aghast! Some acted like this kind of language play was breaking the law. And maybe, in some ways, it was.

#### 4.

Free translation is a creative technique employed by the surrealist poets and more recently by language poets who strive to find humor, new life, and surprising meaning from texts written in languages more or less unfamiliar to them.

Most of us would agree that free play with language—like freewriting or clustering, or brainstorm-

### **When students have this pleasure with language, they also gain, theoretically at least, a greater desire to learn.**

ing—can help writers muse and word-gather in order to decrease writing anxiety, come up with ideas, and write more fluidly. Free translation is only a variant on this theme, except, unlike brainstorming around a specific topic, it doesn't have a pre-set goal.

The exercise of free translation brings the pleasure of the music of language back to students, an aspect of writing often overlooked in our efforts to teach mechanics and conventional form. When students have this pleasure with language, they also gain, theoretically at least, a greater desire to learn.

#### 5.

In April, Rob Brezny wrote this horoscope for Gemini: “As we prep you for a possible clash with dopey demons and maladjusted ghosts, we won't go for help to the world's major religions. Their holy books are too serious and grave. None of them seems to have figured out that the number one weapon against diabolical spirits is laughter and tomfoolery.” Among the more useful texts are the novels of Tom Robbins. Let me quote an especially sacred scripture from his *Jitterbug Perfume*: “He'd grown

convinced that play—more than piety, more than charity or vigilance—was what allowed human beings to transcend evil.”

Kathy Acker, experimental writer adds, “Well, I think writing is basi-

cally about time and rhythm. Like with jazz. You have your basic melody and then you just riff off of it. And the riffs are about timing” (Sirius).

I recently revisited an important book that I had not opened in a long time: Kornei Chukovsky's 1963 book, *From Two to Five*. As a writer

of children's stories and a great observer of children, Chukovsky posited the currently unquestioned theory that children from ages two to five are expert linguists because of their love of language and their fearless play with it. He also noted that nonsense in poetry, story, or song is the way children learn language but also the way they learn to make sense of the world

A critic of Chukovsky said that reading and writing should be

### **...language play is not the opposite of critical thinking; rather, it is a tool for critical thinking.**

about clarifying “for the child the world that surrounds him, instead of confusing his brain with all kinds of nonsense.” Chukovsky's response was that common sense is often the enemy of scientific truth, to which I would add that the modern world requires flexible thinking: the ability to both solve and pose problems. In other words, language play is not the opposite of critical thinking; rather, it is a tool for critical thinking.

William Covino addressed the same issue to college students in his 1990 book *Forms of Wondering*: “the most successful LSAT writers will be those well practiced in the flexible interpretation of texts.” He pro-

moted “intellectual dexterity,” rather than “obedience to stock forms.” He also said that “The possibility we're considering here is that a clear, effective, immediate written response—the ability to be eloquent on demand is a likely result of dialectical/exploratory writing”(297).

Chukovsky would add that “The present belongs to the sober, the cautious, the routine-prone, but the future belongs to those who do not reign in their imagination.” Not without reason did the famous British physicist, John Tindale, champion fantasy:

“Without the participation of fantasy. . . all our knowledge about nature would have been limited merely to the classification of obvious facts. The relation between cause and effect and their interaction would have gone unnoticed, thus stemming the progress of science itself, because it is the main function of science to establish the link between the different manifestations of nature, since creative fantasy is the ability to perceive more

and more such links.

In other words, you have to break the rules before you can learn them.”

In 1997, poet Ron Padgett published *Creative Reading: What it is, How to Do It, and Why*. Padgett introduces this book by reminding us that “It is the view of a poet who prefers ideas and images when they first materialize, still trailing clouds of mystery, (See *Desire*, continued on page 14)

## THE MUSE BOX...

*Feeling uninspired? We all lose our sense of creativity now and then. Why not write about how hard it is to write when your Muse disappears? Hopefully you will find inspiration in Frank Barone's musings on his relationship with his Muse, or in the writing of Jenny Moore's former creative writing student Virginia Roane, as she writes about her missing Muse.*

### My Muse is Missing

by Virginia Roane,  
Coronado High School '04

Ms. Moore, I know today is a Share Day, and we're all supposed to bring something to read aloud in class, but due to some rather unusual and unfortunate circumstances, I don't have anything to read today. I would have written something, but I didn't, and I can't, because my Muse ran away. We had a falling out on Sunday night. She told me she was tired of my never writing down any of my stories, and my taking so long to get around to drawing things. She got right in my face and told me that if I didn't appreciate her abilities, she was going to find someone else who did. Now, she has a record of giving me half-baked ideas and delusions of grandeur, so I didn't believe her at first when she threatened to leave. Of course, I didn't think she was serious, but she was.

My Muse left sometime yesterday afternoon, probably during Physics class. When I realized she was gone, I asked my friends if they'd seen her leave, but none of them had. I've been having a rather difficult time since then, because not only did she take all my creativity and artistic ability, she took my existing ideas as well. Now I can't think of anything to draw or write about, much less do something worth the paper it's on.

When I got home, I looked all over the house for her, but I couldn't find her anywhere. At least my Muse left me a note. She wrote that she'd come back once I fully appreciated what she did for me. Well, by yesterday evening I was ready to make up and tell her how great she was, and I stayed up later than usual to wait for her, but she didn't come back.

She still wasn't back by this morning. I'm growing worried that she's actually found someone else. Anyway, I wrote this while I was eating breakfast this morning, because I was waiting for her before I started anything for Share Day today. So if any of you see a lone Muse wandering around Coronado, please tell her I need her back as soon as possible. I don't think I'll be able to get through the week without her, much less write good college application essays by the end of the month.

There's not much else I can think of to say now. I can't even wrap this up properly. If only my Muse hadn't run away, I could put a decent conclusion at the end of this really long excuse for my not having anything to read in class today.

### Searching for My Muse

by Frank Barone, SDAWP 1977  
4/29/04

I thought I had lost Her.  
Never before had She wandered too far  
nor stayed away for more than a short time.  
I had searched for Her  
in all the usual places,  
the sunlit streets of my neighborhood  
within the pages of books  
the melodies of symphonies  
and the soft blue notes of jazz  
in the movement of silent stars  
the gnarled hands of old people  
the laughing eyes of children  
and lonely faces in crowds.  
In my search  
I followed the flights of hummingbirds  
and stared long  
looking for Her in Monet's Garden  
and in Van Gogh's Starry Night.  
Now here I stand  
alone, neglected,  
empty of spirit,  
uncertain if I can ever again  
conjure up the words  
that will bring Her back into my life.  
Then, surrounded by the silence in my room,  
I heard Her voice whisper to me.  
"Trust yourself.  
While you have been searching for me  
I have been waiting for you  
to come home from your journeys  
waiting for you to tell me  
all you have seen and heard.  
Now write.  
Show me those sunlit streets  
and silent stars.  
Let me hear the melodies of symphonies  
and the laughter of children.  
Begin to put the words on the page  
and when you do  
I, as always, will help you.  
I will listen to their rhythm  
and see if your words can still make pictures  
that dance before my eyes  
can still sing songs  
that touch my heart.  
If your words are honest and true  
we will embrace  
waltz around the room and celebrate  
yet another collaborative act of divine creation."

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### **Ode to Music**

By Antoinette Marrero,  
7th Grade

Flashing colors dancing lights,  
Diverse people like 'on the town' nights  
High notes low notes in between  
Some notes really upset me  
Smoother than chocolate  
Softer than silk subtly swell  
Like mother cow's milk  
Hotter than heat cooler than ice  
Temperatures in between and  
Everything nice  
Sharp as cheese bland  
As toast sweeter than sugar  
Salty spray from the coast  
Delicate as roses harsh as  
Fire smells like anything  
Your heart desires.



### **Writing in the Sky**

By Michela Rodriguez, 3rd Grade

Words are the stars. Paper is the sky. Letters are  
the birds as they glide. Everything is peaceful,  
everything is quiet as I sit in my room and write.

### **Sky**

By Matthew Peterson,  
4th Grade

**The sky expresses all my feelings,  
Sky is by my side  
Cloudy means I'm gloomy,  
and like to stay inside.  
Mornings are always gray,  
Most afternoons make me burn  
I don't know all the weather,  
But someday I will learn  
A Christmas sky is comforting,  
Though there isn't much to see  
I don't know about some others,  
but the sky's important to me.**



## Sleepy Head

By Zoey ZoBell,  
6th Grade

Hello my name is Joe,  
I am 9 years of age  
Yesterday I saw the strangest  
Thing I've seen in all my days.

I was waddling down the stairs  
When it really caught my eye  
It was wearing something fuzzy  
With a little pink bow tie.  
It had crusties in its eyes  
And brownish frizzy hair  
That was messy, tangled, gross  
And sticking straight up in the air.

It walked down the stairs quite  
slowly,  
Its arms were dangling down  
It had hairy legs and a bright  
red nose,  
I need to warn the town.

It rubbed its great wide eyes,  
And scratched a nasty blister,  
It was then I realized,  
"What a relief"  
It was just my sister!



## I Don't Know What to Write About

By Wayman G. Yerdell, 8th Grade

I am just sitting here waiting for something to write. I thought I should write about me not being able to write about nothing so I guess I am really not writing about nothing I am writing about something that is nothing and nothing that is something. Like when your dad asks you what did you learn in school and you say nothing but you really learned that  $2 \times 2 = 4$  and that George Washington was the first president. Also that you finally learned how to spell "what." It is a confusing process I guess. So am still writing about nothing or is this nothing that is something. If this is nothing then I wasted a page on nothing that is something. So maybe I should change the title into nothing that is something. Then maybe this piece will turn into nothing that is something.



## Writing Is...

By Megan Hastings,  
5th Grade

A world of hope  
Many bells chiming a beautiful song  
A key that unlocks all the world's wonders  
A letter, a word, a sentence  
Writing is a waterfall of letters rushing  
downward toward a river of imagination  
A smooth gem polished to perfection  
Writing is a single cloud in the sky  
Writing is...

# Too Many Shoes, Too Many Shoes

Regina Serbin, SDAWP 2004

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My four-year-old daughter and I went to Target to buy a birthday gift. The invitation to the party required it.

As soon as we got there, she asked me if she could try on some pairs of shoes. Being completely surprised and amused by her request I simply

“Mommy,  
I have five shoes  
but I really only  
need two  
because I only  
have two feet.”  
I agreed with her  
and went on  
getting her ready  
for bed.

said, “Okay.” I was surprised because I saw myself in her: the desire to try on something new. I was amused because I had discovered another layer in our mother-daughter relationship: we were true girlfriends. After about what seemed to have been hours, she was satisfied. All pink shoes in the store, regardless of size, had been on her feet for a while. We were finally free to move on with our task.

Upon our arrival at home with two bags, one with a gift and another with a brand-new pair of shoes for

her, my daughter remarked, “Mommy, I have five shoes but I really only need two because I only have two feet.” I agreed with her and went on to getting her ready for bed.

But before I could let go of the subject, my daughter added, “Mommy, you have too many shoes. Can you please give some away so I can have space for mine?”

“Too many shoes, too many shoes...” This sentence kept echoing in my head and I did not quite understand why. Once I lay in bed and closed my eyes, it all came to me.

As a little girl, I too found myself longing for pairs and pairs of shoes. Being from a poor Brazilian family, I soon understood that there were many earthly possessions beyond the means of my family. I wore the shoes that once were my brother’s. The same was true for my clothes. We never owned a house and we had our first telephone when I was fifteen. All my childhood toys fit inside one white plastic bag. And we rarely got birthday gifts, much less bought them.

I don’t quite know why, but shoes are special to little girls. They were special to me, too, and one of my strongest memories is that of a friend cat-walking in front of me with her brand-new, sparkling, red slip-on shoes. I can still smell their rubbery scent. I wanted them so badly. I dreamed about them almost every night.

Ah, dreams...dreams are simply

dreams. They aren’t given the chance to turn into anything else when you are poor. So, as many of us used to do, I would complain about the uncertainties and unfairness of life to my parents.

My father, poor and illiterate, but wiser, would hear all of that and swallow it. It was painful: the male of the house, the provider, was not capable of satisfying all of his kids’ needs. His lack of luck—and luck is all you rely on when you are born deprived in a developing country—had had such profound impact on all of us. He had given us all he had and all he could. Many times, his macho pride was hurt.

Ah, dreams...  
dreams are  
simply dreams.  
They aren’t given  
the chance to turn  
into anything else  
when you are  
poor.

However, he knew that it wasn’t enough. We wanted more: society has many trends and products.

They are imposed on everybody everyday independently of class, religion, political parties, etc. They were imposed on us, too. Friends and more affluent family members did it unintentionally. The TV, our only source of entertainment, did it



on purpose.

After trying to persuade my brothers and me that there is more to life than material possessions, my father remembered an old childhood story that was meant to give us some perspective. It goes like this: one day a factory worker decided not to go to his minimum-wage job. As an excuse he decided to say that he did not have any shoes. But when he returned to work the very next day, he came across a worker who did not have a foot. He felt small and regretful.

The moral that we were supposed to internalize was this one: don't complain so much. Things could be worse.

At first, we all listened to my father's story quietly. When adolescence hit and the desire to consume was even more circumscribed by our lack of money, I felt the need to rebel. I created my official answer to that story.

The moral that we were supposed to internalize was this one: don't complain so much. Things could be worse.

One morning, after our breakfast of bread with butter and coffee, somehow the story came up again. That time, though, I was ready, "Dad, the man without the foot didn't really have a good excuse not to go to work, did he? After all, he could not say that he needed shoes, could he?" In other words, don't even bother to try, we are poor and we can't have what we want. The suffering of others won't console me. "Too many shoes, too many shoes..." I couldn't stop thinking about this. What is the connection between my daughter and my far away past? I kept on regurgitating

that sentence as I dug deeper into my history.

Time went by and things got better for us in Brazil because my brothers and I got jobs. Even though we did not have health or dental insurance, a house or a car, my father and my mother struggled to maintain us in a semi-private school. I became a teacher, my older brother entered the Navy, and my younger brother also became a teacher. Everything was calm and we were living a life in which dreams did indeed have a chance to come true. We could afford our own shoes.

Until one day in July of 2001, when my father entered a public hospital with a cut toe and left without a leg. His diabetes had taken control of his body. Kidneys, lungs, and heart were severely damaged. His blood pressure could not be controlled. All the antibiotics in the world could not help him overcome the powerful infection he was dealing with.

Chaos, anger, pain, uncertainties and mounting expenses regained control over us. We had been deported back to our childhood and adolescent years. Our dreams were again clouded by the devastating reality of having to care for a disabled man in a country in which the word disability still is synonymous with less.

How does one deal with a diabetic amputee then? With a lot of determination, patience and hope. My mother did all she could and could not to get free medication and insulin syringes for my father and to transport him to his many visits to the public hospitals and clinics. She spent endless hours in lines waiting to receive a number to schedule a consultation for him. She went across city in hot, crowded buses after the necessary medical supplies he needed. She even had to run out nervously in middle of the street to flag down a taxi driver who would help her carry my father to his cab so they could escape the clinic they were at when drug dealer from a nearby favela

(slum) had demanded the clinic be closed.

In the meantime, my brothers and I paid for the nursing home and for medication not given for free by the Brazilian government.

My father was never able to walk again and my mother could not take care of him alone.

After a year and a half of constant sadness and pain, my powerless dad gave up. His last sentence to my

"Too many shoes,  
too many  
shoes...."  
I couldn't stop  
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this. What is the  
connection  
between my  
daughter and my  
far away past?

mother was simple and clear, "Can I have some water, please?" And yet I can't help but to think about how wise he had been again. What can be more essential to a man than a glass of water when his body is being drained of life?

"Too many shoes, too many shoes..." I finally got it too, Dad. I never really needed more than a fraction of what I wanted. Life can be happy and full with only the basics. It took the innocence of a four-year-old to bring out the true meaning of your story to me. I connected my past and present. As I get up to pray for you I hope that my enlightenment can help you rest a little better now. And I also hope I can pass on your message to my daughter.







# A Case for Making Writing FUN Again: My Experiences as a Writer and a Teacher

Romero Maratea, SDAWP 2004

*"All the fun is in how you say a thing."*

—Robert Frost

Is it necessary to suck the life out of something in order for students to properly "digest" it? The actions of some educators would suggest this much; however, any teacher worth her salt can think back to an activity that she did with her students and go on and on about how "everything just seemed to click." When asked why, she will undoubtedly mention how interested the students were in what it was they were studying. High interest leads to high motivation, which leads to improved effort, which, in turn, leads to greater mastery and understanding of the skill.

Writing is no different from other areas of learning when it comes to the importance of grabbing and sustaining students' interest. Assuming that this is true, we must pose one very important question: Where has all of the fun gone when it comes to writing? It is vital that teachers get students to enjoy writing if we are to successfully teach them how to write in a thoughtful manner. We need to build each student's "writer's ego" by bringing the excitement back into what has become the nemesis of students from the elementary school level up through the college ranks.

*"We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out."*

—Ray Bradbury

My first memories of viewing myself as a budding writer date back to 1985. When I was in middle

school I was fortunate enough to have a passionate language arts teacher, Ms. Florian, who sparked my initial interest in writing. Aside from the fact that she was the recipient of my first true adolescent crush, she had the unique ability to make writing not only painless, but also meaningful and safe. The writing exercises we completed in her class were enjoyable because they related to actual middle school experiences: bullies, love (yuck!), fitting in, dorky parents, and other issues to which we could relate.

*With rare exceptions,  
high school writing topics were  
painfully bland. They had no  
meaning in the greater context  
of a teenager's life.*

In Ms. Florian's class we kept journals and submitted one piece of writing per week. Our journals were ours. Occasionally she collected them, but she did not abuse our amateur scrawling with her red pen. She encouraged us and pushed us to experiment with our writing. At one point that year, each student had to prepare a persuasive paper and present it to the class. I had real trouble with this assignment because I could not think of an argument to present. After expressing my concerns to her, Ms. Florian turned through my journal until she came to an entry in which I, a budding star on the baseball diamond, expressed my disdain for professional athletes who claim to

be underpaid. Voila! Topic in hand I completed a presentation I remember to this day.

My seventh-grade language arts teacher also had genuine enthusiasm for writing, and it was infectious. Her comments on our submitted pieces were full of encouragement and praise. When I wrote about my life as a phone booth, she went on and on about how impressed she was with my creativity and my use of imagery. Ms. Florian knew how to get the "beautiful stuff" out of us, and we enjoyed seeing it when it was out.

*"My aim is to put down on paper what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way."*

—Ernest Hemingway

The love of writing that Ms. Florian sparked and stoked into a mini inferno was quickly and unceremoniously snuffed out by the drudgery of high school composition. With rare exceptions, high school writing topics were painfully bland. They had no meaning in the greater context of a teenager's life. Even worse, the steps to create effective pieces of writing were portrayed as an abstract series of objectives which were only achieved by a select few: those who could read the teacher's mind and mimic her style. Of course, my newly acquired disdain for writing led to poor efforts on writing assignments, which led to failing grades on these assignments, which led to more disdain for writing, which led to... Well, you get the cycle. I was never able to overcome this as a high school student.

I remember receiving an F minus on a paper I submitted in eleventh grade. Although I do not recall the exact topic, I remember that it was associated with the book we were reading at the time, T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*. I also remember that in high school there was no safe forum, such as the journals in Ms. Florian's class, in which to take risks and further develop my voice as a writer. In fact, I clearly recall that my teachers must have had a separate supply of red pens just for grading my papers. I spent those high school years disinterested in writing, frustrated that I



could not meet the expectations of my teachers and too afraid to ask for help. When I began high school, I searched hard for the “best and simplest way” to put my thoughts on paper. My experiences show that I was not successful in doing so.

*“Everywhere I go I’m asked if I think the university stifles the writers.”*

—Flannery O’Connor

My college experiences with writing were very similar to my high school experiences, with one memorable exception. English 101, 102, 202, 203 were a blur of turning in papers on topics in which I held no interest whatsoever, and receiving grades that were satisfactory enough for me to maintain my financial aid. I despised writing by this point. I even went so far as to have my roommate complete a few assignments for me in return for pizza. But I signed up for a journalism class in order to avoid taking a speech class. This would be the only time in college that I would have an experience to rival Ms. Florian’s class. From the first day I knew this would be different.

My teacher gave us the objective for the semester and told us to get to work right away. For each class

**The most thrilling part of my job is when I read a student’s piece that contains the author’s own unique and inspired voice.**

meeting we would bring in our infant stories to be examined by the group. For my first assignment I chose to write a review of a restaurant that had recently opened near campus. I enjoyed eating out, I had been a cook for a number of years, and the assignment was a huge success. My story was published in the school’s paper, *The Tiger*.

After completing several more assignments similar to this, I prepared for the big project. We had a list of prominent people in the community who we had to choose from. We were to interview one of these folks and write a lengthy article for the school paper. One of the people

listed was an old blind man, Cootie Starks, who had been playing the Piedmont blues in the area for decades. I chose to interview and write about him. I tackled this assignment with relish, and to this day it is probably the best piece I have ever written. Good enough to, once again, be published in *The Tiger*. Why? I was tremendously interested in what I was writing about, and I once again had a teacher willing to find and build upon students’ strengths. My passion for writing had been rekindled, but would not be properly stoked until my participation in the Writing Project.

*“...either write something worth reading or do something worth the writing.”*

—Ben Franklin

Fast-forward to the present. Arguably the greatest hurdle to students becoming proficient writers is the overall lack of effort and interest associated with writing. Many of my students hate to write because the process does not make sense to them. They have not been given adequate tools to write descriptive, organized, thought-out pieces of prose. (Although, in some cases they have been given too many tools with inadequate instruction on how to use them.) There is also a prevailing lack of interest in writing because most writing assignments are not very interesting. My poor students are subjected to writing assessment after writing assessment with such stimulating prompts as “Compare and contrast Taco Bell and McDonalds.” Such drab, uninspiring realms of written discourse can only turn the most inspired child into a disgruntled and frustrated writer.

*“You can’t wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club.”*

—Jack London

As a teacher of writing, I aim to accomplish several lofty goals with my students. First, I hope to inspire my budding authors to write about topics that have meaning to them and to write from the heart. The

most thrilling part of my job is when I read a student’s piece that contains the author’s own unique and inspired voice. Second, I want to provide them with a variety of strategies through which they can make sense of the writing process. Every writer has a preferred method/process for creating, and in order for students to develop theirs, they must be exposed to different

**If I can engage students through writing the way my seventh grade language arts teacher did, I will consider my classroom a place of overwhelming success.**

strategies in order to choose those which fit their needs. Third, I aim to empower them to draw upon their own experiences when writing. Too often, young writers set out to create writing that is dominated by what they believe the teacher wants to hear rather than their own thoughts and ideas. Often times this is done at the cost of excluding their unique experiences and viewpoints.

Most importantly, I would like to instill in them the sense of pride and excitement Ms. Florian gave to me. To make some headway on these objectives, I require my students to maintain a writing notebook in which they address daily topics. These topics and objectives cover a wide array of issues and ideas, and are created by all members of the classroom community. It’s not the “silver bullet” that will put an end to the bland writing assignments required by school districts and states, but it is a forum for them to experiment and find their own writing voice with no risk to their “writer’s ego.”

If I can engage students through writing the way my seventh grade language arts teacher did, I will consider my classroom a place of overwhelming success.



## **Congratulations to New SDAWP Teaching Fellows!**

### **2004 Invitational Institute**

**Amy Degenfelder**  
Westview High—Poway

**Donna Duchow**  
Mesa College—San Diego

**María Figueroa**  
San Diego City College—San Diego

**Amber Goslee**  
Clear View Charter Elementary—Chula Vista

**Christine Kané**  
Nubia Leadership Academy—San Diego

**Angela Kinlaw**  
Morse High—San Deigo

**Linda Knight-Valenziano**  
Tubman Village Elementary—San Diego

**Virginia Loh**  
Finney Elementary—Chula Vista

**Romero Maratea**  
Del Dios Middle—Escondido

**Gwen Osgard**  
Hoover High—San Diego

**Laura Radford**  
Mission Bay High—San Diego

**Alicia Sandoval**  
Chula Vista

**Regina Serbin**  
Bay Park Elementary—San Diego

**Tiffany Shockley-Jackson**  
Muirlands Middle—San Diego

**Susan Yonezawa**  
USCD; Crawford High—CREATE; San Diego

before the life gets squeezed out of them by codification. . . .  
“The general aim of the book is simply to enlarge the possibilities of reading, by demonstrating ways to make reading more flexible, various, and imaginative, and by suggesting a new, more inventive attitude toward the act of reading. The new attitude is one that encourages the integration of reading and writing. In one of his chapters, Padgett lists eighteen techniques for creative reading. They have names like “Line Looping,” “Transposing,” “Eye-Mind Split,” “Dueling Books,” and, of course “Foreign Languages.”

Padgett concurs with Chukovsky’s critique of the “routine prone” versus the playful:

“That’s what happens too often in school: we have our students study reading for a while, then close their books and work on spelling, grammar, and punctuation. What’s worse, we administer standardized tests that purport to measure progress in quantitative terms. All too often, the test scores become more important than what they were meant to measure, and we begin to ‘teach for the test.’ At the same time, we break down reading and writing into smaller units, known as ‘skills.’ . . . In the open system, reading is integrated with writing, and the instruction honors the students’ interests [and] students’ progress is measured by students’ enthusiasm for reading and self-expression.”

ESL learners and basic writers and readers can benefit from word play through free translation, as word play is an integral part of learning language. Free translation improves learners’ schema as they play with language in a fearless way, in a non-judgmental environment. Language poetry is very sound- and texture-oriented, as is any poetry, and, for that matter, any rhetorical act.

When I’m teaching in my utilitarian mode, I’m like the Groobee, caught in a frenzied vortex of putting limits and boundaries on every classroom writing activity. If I had my own Gumby, however, I’m sure he would call me back into my cage, allowing play to balance my teaching life as it should my psychic life. (If you’ve got a heart, then Gumby’s a part of you.)

Of course, I do not suggest spending entire semesters of developmental writing on language play (interpretive dance, maybe!), or that departments revise course outlines. Merely and meekly, I suggest that word-play be re-examined as a path to fluency, a way to develop a passion for language, and a tool for critical thinking.

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# PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITIES

## English Journal, NCTE

*Reading, Writing,  
and Re-presenting Research*  
Submission Deadline: July 15, 2005

English teachers value the teaching of research concepts and methods. Traditionally, we have translated that value into “the research paper unit,” a rite of passage dreaded by teachers and students alike. Yet, tradition has been challenged in the past several years, especially by innovative forms of presentation, such as I-Search papers, multi-genre research papers, and multimedia projects. State and national standards reaffirm the importance of research methods but do not dictate form. The proliferation of types of information available on the Internet also challenges the traditional content and presentation of “the research paper.” We are interested in knowing how you address the challenges. How do you teach secondary school students to read and present research? What concepts and skills do you teach? What innovative means of presentation have students used? How does the form of the presentation shape the content of the project? How do you help students read and evaluate the material they see on the Internet? How do you approach the topic of plagiarism in ways that students understand with strategies they can use to avoid it? What do you teach students about copyright, and how do they use that knowledge? In what ways are research and researching addressed throughout the curriculum? If you have worked with other teachers in your building or district to design a developmental sequence of research competencies, what does that look like and how does it work? How do you consider cultural and linguistic diversity in designing research assignments? How have you used technology?

For submission information:  
<http://www.englishjournal.colostate.edu/infoforauthors.htm#articles>

## Voices from the Middle

*Teaching, Testing, and Triumphs*  
Submission Deadline: July 1, 2005

It’s a tough time to be a teacher. Political mandates, high-stakes tests, overcrowding, underfunding, minimal professional development—the issues go on and on. And yet there are countless examples of exemplary teaching happening every day. Exemplary teachers know how to help kids master state-standards tests without reducing learning to test-taking skills. They know how to approach standards-based instruction with creativity and excitement so that students learn to think and question while mastering skills. In this issue, we share that excitement by focusing on exemplary teaching. Tell us what you do to connect students to learning, to help them master state standards in exciting ways. Consider how professional development has changed the way you think and teach. Who led it, what was discussed, how long did it last, how was it funded, and how was it sustained after the workshop ended? Tell us, too, how you involve parents in education. Finally, let us know how you network with colleagues, helping one another stay current with best practices.

For submission guidelines:  
<http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/vm/write/110485.htm>

## Classroom Notes Plus, NCTE

### *Classroom Solutions*

Do you have ideas for getting organized, managing the workload, improving your classroom environment, or coaxing the best from your students? Send your tips for creative coping to *Classroom Notes Plus*, 1111 West Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801 or e-mail to [notesplus@ncte.org](mailto:notesplus@ncte.org). For additional information, call Felice Kaufmann at 1-800-369-6283, ext. 3648.

## DIALOGUE Call for Manuscripts

FALL 2005  
One Student at a Time

Submission Deadline:  
August 15, 2005

In Naomi Shihab Nye’s poem, *Valentine for Ernest Mann*, she addresses a student who approached her and challenged her to write a poem. This challenge inspired the poem itself.

*You can’t order a poem  
like you order a taco.  
Walk up to the counter,  
say “I’ll take two”  
and expect it to be handed back  
to you on a shiny plate....*

*...Maybe if we reinvent  
whatever our lives give us  
we find poems.  
Check your garage,  
the odd sock in your drawer,  
the person you almost like,  
but not quite.  
And let me know.*

As teachers, our students are our poetry. They are a perpetual source of inspiration and challenge for us. How have particular students inspired you, challenged you? Do you have students who typify the challenges you face in the classroom in light of recent policies? Write your stories of inspiration and woe regarding students who have catalyzed you to rethink and grow your teaching practices—And let us know.

Writers love to get mail, and so do the editors of newsletters for writing teachers! *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. Send all manuscript submissions, suggestions, letters to the editor and Project Notes to:

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[jenny4moore@hotmail.com](mailto:jenny4moore@hotmail.com)

# Calendar of Events

## Invitational Institute Summer 2005

University of California, San Diego  
June 27 - July 1, 16 days  
8:30 - 3:30  
Pre-Institute Day - May 14

## Young Writers' Programs at UCSD

### Young Writers' Camp Grades 3-10

July 26 - August 12  
8:30 - 11:30  
Tuesday - Friday  
(\$250 per participant)  
Student/Parent Orientation Meeting  
July 26, 6:30 - 7:30

### Writing the College Essay

Grades 11 & 12  
July 18 - July 22  
8:30 - 11:30  
Monday - Friday  
(\$225 per participant)

## Open Institutes for Teachers at UCSD

### What About Writing? K-6

June 27 - July 1  
Facilitators: Shivani Burrows-Goodwill  
and Gabie Norton

### Reasons to Write! For Middle and High School

June 27 - July 1  
Facilitators: Jenny Moore  
and Becky Gemmell

### English Learner Summer Institute, Grades 7-12

July 25 - July 29  
Facilitators: Susan Minnicks  
and Gilbert Mendez

### Analytical Writing, Grades 7-12

July 11 - July 15  
Facilitators: John Adams  
and Melissa Miller

(Each of the Open Institutes runs for  
one week from 8:30-3:00 each day  
and is \$325 per participant.)

## San Diego Area Writing Project

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