Writing to Engage

Dialogue

A Publication of the San Diego Area Writing Project

Winter 2019

Inside This Issue:

It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen.

—John Wooden

Christine Kané introduced the idea of micro-moments in her keynote address during SDAWP's 11th annual Fall into Writing Conference held on September 29, 2018 at UCSD. She suggested that small moments are important and that simple changes in daily routines can have a significant impact.

Educators are often met with monumental challenges, but focusing on incremental and attainable goals can lead to long-term and wide-spread success.

As you peruse this issue of *Dialogue*, the editors urge you to read with Kané's message in mind and reflect upon the seemingly small steps you can take to increase student engagement in your classroom and beyond.

Start where you are.
Do what you can.
Use what you have.

—Arthur Ashe

Building an Inclusive and Purposeful Writing Community:

Including Student Voice and Aspirations

Dr. Janet Ilko Ed.D, SDAWP 2008

It is not easy to teach in today's classroom. There are many things both internally and externally that pull and push on our time and attention. But there is one aspect of my pedagogy that remains consistent: I teach to inspire my students to use their knowledge and voice to make the world a better place. The purpose of being a powerful reader, writer, and speaker is not just to do well academically, but to use those skills to make a change and inspire others to do the same. Empowering students to be more than they see in themselves does not occur by happenstance. It doesn't happen just because I want it to be so. Instead, it requires setting high standards with structured support to provide every kid the chance to be successful. It also demands that student voice and aspirations are heard and built into the classroom writing community.

I have the passionate belief that student voice and choice should be the catalyst in creating relevant instruction in the classroom. Student interests and needs must be part of the equation when creating the literacy plan for the year. This tenet has driven my teaching since I stepped into the classroom thirty-one years ago, and it inspired me to spend the past three years of my life focusing on student learning and the power of relevance for learners in my doctoral program.

What I have learned in all my research is that there are no clear-cut answers to meeting the needs of the diverse learners in our classroom—no cookie-cutter program will educate all our youth. What I still know to be true, however, is that when we build a safe community, and student voice and interest is addressed and honored, students learn. More importantly, they value learning.

Working with SDAWP over the past ten years has allowed me to explore in depth what it means to infuse student voice and audience into the classroom. The issues of equity and the power of student voice have driven both my professional work and my personal passions. I have taught grades 2 through 12 in my career, currently working with students in grades 9-12 in an independent study program, and coaching and supporting English language learners. The diversity of this program allows me the flexibility, freedom, and the responsibility to empower and assist students in their academic writing. We are exploring new ways to incorporate digital writing and spaces to create relevance and community for kids who often do not feel connected to this thing called school.

The Digital Learning Continuum: Consumer, Producer, Mentor

The use of technology in the classroom is a double edge sword. On the one hand, technology offers the opportunity for differentiation with a keystroke. Technology and digital spaces can open a whole world of possibilities for students to produce language. The access to a variety of relevant materials and supports can be mind-boggling as you try to navigate what will help you build a writing community. The question should always go back to your purpose: why are you using digital spaces? The answer to that question depends on the power of the voices at the table. Creating and curating digital spaces with students allows for the opportunity for students and educators to create and share the work to a larger audience, which in turn, opens the learning for the students.

I have the passionate belief that student voice and choice should be the catalyst in creating relevant instruction in the classroom.

When students see their teachers creating and writing alongside them, a community develops that honors process and builds a writing community that values process over product. On the flip side, many times the selection of digital media can be yet another way to stifle student creativity and learning. If the selection of the digital media is focused on remediation, then many times students are exposed primarily to drill and kill activities with low level critical thinking skills. In this situation young writers see minimal purpose in the work, and without purpose, there is no real writing instruction or the building of a writing community.

The power to connect is based on the intention of the use of media. Do we want merely to plug our students into a program? Do we want

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computer-scored essays under the guise of independent and expedient scoring, or do we want to create discussion boards and writing groups that bring authors to a digital table to receive feedback to enhance their work? Are our digital spaces serving to build connection and discussion, or are they merely a digital bulletin board, posting finished products with little to no interaction?

About eight years ago, Christine Kané, Margit Boyesen, and I worked on developing digital spaces for students to write and read and share. The work was not solely about creating a summer program, but instead led to more significant discussions of techquity, access, and empowering student voice. Our mantra from the very beginning of this work was to have students become producers of media, not merely consumers of media. There were many discussions about what it means to leverage digital media. What were our roles and responsibilities as lead learners in the room? We have worked through several iterations of our initial discussions, and over the years, this idea has evolved to what I now call a digital continuum. Students and educators fall on this continuum in a variety of ways throughout their work. The goal is that we all take on these different roles in working with producing media.

Our mantra from the very beginning of this work was to have students become producers of media, not merely consumers of media.

We believe there's a time and a place on each level of the continuum, and it is not linear. Each one of us can move from one role to another throughout a project, but our concern from the very beginning has always been that students spend far too much time consuming media and not enough time producing media or mentoring others. This year, I am becoming more of an advocate, going back to the roots of my digital journey and recreating a digital space for students to connect and share—to empower student voice with relevant and timely content. What's old is new again.

Creating Digital Spaces

In working with students in an independent setting, creating a community is a challenge. How do we integrate both a face-to-face and digital community with students who already feel a disconnect with school? It starts like it always starts, by connection and passion.

When students are given a choice on how to produce digital media, it becomes empowering and complicated at the same time. Trying to determine how to store student digital work is challenging. I began playing in blog spaces about eight years ago, and it has changed somewhat since our early days. Keeping a digital portfolio is great for students and educators because it allows students to see their work over time, to share portions with others easily, and to create a sense of community and audience far beyond the four walls of a classroom. This year my high school students are building blog sites using Google Sites to create a portfolio space. We begin our portfolio by establishing a blog space, assigning some topics, and allowing for free choice writing is the best balance. But when I first want to hook my students, I have to begin with teaching them how to tell their story.

Poetry as a First Step

My students love spoken word poetry. I knew that I could get them to begin to write by starting with this genre. Many students were reading a collection of poems in *Adultolescence* by Gabbie Hanna. I asked them to choose a poem or a stanza and write about why it stood out to them. One of my girls selected the following:

"I jumped today, and I survived.
Everyone assumed that I wanted to die.
I just wanted to know what it's like to fly."

—from *Adultolescence*
by Gabbie Hannah

The student response included this,

"I chose this certain poem because I usually am the type of person to jump to conclusions. If I were to have seen this person 'jump,' I would not have known that they wanted to fly. Instead, I would have thought that they wanted to die. I am a person who goes with what is shown. Instead of thinking ahead, whatever I see/witness is what I form to believe is happening. I mean, of course, it's happening but with different reasons that I don't think of. There was a point in my life where I was small minded. The saying, 'don't judge a book by its cover,' well… I judged them by the cover without knowing what's on the next page."

This led to some great discussions on identity, which I hope carries into her projects for this year.

Irvin is another writer in my room; quiet, and challenged to complete assignments, he writes often and is just now willing to share. After reading several poems from *Adultolescense*, he wrote:

When life stopped
All was said and done
My heartbeat was gone
Not even a fond

No tears left to shed
My soul was not fed
All the emotions fled
Nothing was left

As I walked through a dead garden
I stand clear
I contemplate the horizon
Amazed
How one flower was in the risen
Beautiful and bold
One flower arose
Beautiful and pure
A white rose
How in that moment
Oh in that moment…..
I felt a pulse

—Irvin Rosario

This assignment was the first post in our blog and the first piece that students shared out with each other. It was a beginning step in empowering student voice in a relevant format and has now led to our next project in the identity unit: telling our story.

Digital Storytelling

One of the most powerful ways I have found to inspire student voice is through storytelling. In thinking about today's political climate, it is more important than ever to help students define themselves and create spaces to explore their identity. Now more than ever we need—as educators, as people—to encourage and support a new narrative. It is easy to hate what you do not understand. It is easy to close the door on those without a history, a face, a story. We are at the perfect time to create a new narrative. A narrative filled with truth, and experiences, and have the robust and crucial conversations that push back on the narrative of hate and fear. To sit and deny that danger doesn't exist, to be foolish enough to say that it will be easy, or even safe would do a disservice to our students. This is our role as educators and advocates for student voice and choice.

The focus is genuinely on voice, both in the sense of content, and the actual voice that so many students do not want to share out loud.

So how do you begin to share differing narratives? We started by creating common assignments that helped students get to know each other as writers. In assisting students to identify critical issues that are important to them, we took a page from National Public Radio (NPR) and had students write *This I Believe* essays. These essays served two purposes. The first was to help students write a structured piece, and the second was to have students record them as podcasts, giving voice to the words on the page. Writers get that extra practice in oral language built right into the instruction of the content class, allowing them to hear other voices alongside their own.

Writing a *This I Believe* essay and creating a podcast is interesting because it relies solely on student voice, and perhaps background music. The focus is genuinely on voice, both in the sense of content, and the actual voice that so many students do not want to share out loud. This idea of actually speaking their words, without the bells and whistles of video or photography is a serious challenge. They are very nervous, to the point where I will be opening my classroom up before school, after school, and during lunch so they can "privately" record. They will re-record their work at least ten times before they finally publish this piece. If you'd like more inspiration in creating audio texts in the classroom, check out Troy Hicks' chapter on "Crafting Audio Texts" (Chapter 5) in his latest book *Crafting Digital Writing, Composing Texts Across Media and Genre.*

Podcasts, and any other digital recording project, foster an understanding of the content. It allows students to deeply think about the ideas they would like to share, clarifying and focusing the conversation in a way that simple conversation does not. Those recordings can be saved in a digital archive to demonstrate academic language progression over time. And by sharing them with a broader audience through NWP's *Youth Voices* https://www.youthvoices.live/, StoryCorps https://storycorps.org/, and NPR's *This I Believe*, https://thisibelieve.org/, we also set the norm that your words matter, and you can and should contribute to conversations on broader platforms.

Our work continues as advocates and teachers of digital literacy. We have the opportunity and the responsibility to teach our students to share their stories and learn from others. As teachers, we must teach the structures of writing, the genre, and the craft. We must not forget the reason we are doing so: to empower our students to communicate effectively and with power in the world.

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Congratulations!

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Othering

Katie Martel, SDAWP 2018

One day when I was out at recess, a student brought me a flower and said, "Thank you for taking care of our foreign exchange students."

I replied, "I didn't know we had any foreign exchange students."

The little girl said, "Oh, I mean kids like Sarah. Kids with disabilities..." She made a confused face. "Anyway, just have a good day." Then, she ran off.

She was a third grader, and as innocent as it sounded, it had already begun. I suspect it started long ago: Othering.

Other (verb)
gerund or present participle:
othering
1. view or treat (a person or group of people) as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself.

As my first year as a special education teacher came to an end, I entered my reflective phase. Throughout the year, I reflected on my day-to-day experience to better my teaching. Later, I reflected more on my year as a whole and I noticed some things that left me feeling a little unsettled. And still do.

The othering that occurs isn't isolated to special education; it can be seen in many places, impacting many groups of people. It has ripple effects that change the way we treat others in society. It starts young and continues into adulthood. We create biases and prejudices based on this othering. As adults, it impacts how we interact with the world and it can impact how we vote.

Exclusion: not being included because a person is seen as different—the ultimate form of othering. Before Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) became a right for all students in the United States guaranteed by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly known as Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) (1975-1990), it was not uncommon for students with disabilities to be denied access to public education. That's right. Denied access. Children and people with disabilities were seen as so different that they were not capable of learning; therefore, it was not considered worth our resources or time.

Segregation: once students were guaranteed access to education, what was "Free and Appropriate" became a place for debate and disagreement. The idea of "Separate but Equal" was quite popular and to be honest, it is still happening today. Most Special Day Classes (SDC) or specialized schools would be examples of segregated education.

Later, I reflected more on my year as a whole and I noticed some things that left me feeling a little unsettled. And still do.

It wasn't until Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) came to the forefront with Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education (1989), that it was determined that students with disabilities have a right to be included in both academic and extracurricular programs of general education to the maximum appropriate extent. It also states that if students need accommodations such as supplemental aids and services to achieve academic goals within the general education classroom, they must be provided those supports and services. Throughout the 1990s to present day, there are still court cases revolving around LRE; the debate on what LRE is and means has not ended.

Integration: with LRE in mind, many schools across the country now integrate special education students into the school community and general education classrooms. "Mainstreaming" students has become more popular, but this model still has limitations and contributes to othering. Students are allowed to follow subjects in regular classrooms, but if they cannot keep up, they are often taken out and separated. The idea is "If they are here, they need to do the same work." One size fits all or they don't belong. If students are unable to follow and keep the same pace, they end up only integrating with general education peers during lunch and recess. This model is an improvement from the past, but it still stigmatizes students with disabilities, furthering the othering.

Inclusion: in an inclusive classroom, everyone is learning together. Teachers use Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is a framework based on scientific insights into how people learn and aimed at designing lessons that are accessible to all kinds of learners, not just one. Teachers of inclusive classrooms change their teaching to meet the needs of their students and do not expect their students to change to meet the needs of their lessons. Teachers of inclusive classrooms understand the importance of community and use practices in their classrooms that promote understanding, empathy, and respect for all people.

Imagine for a moment that it is Monday morning. You walk into your classroom, put away your personal items, sign into your computer, check your email, and review your plans for the day. The bell rings and your students enter. One student has had a horrible weekend; his dad's new girlfriend called him a monster. He's already in trouble for hitting a kid on the way to class and doesn't even look at you as he enters the room. He sees his morning work, yells as he pushes it off his desk, and heads to the library to sit on a beanbag chair and cry.

Another student enters the room, but they were running late and didn't eat breakfast. They are *hangry*, but the cafeteria stopped serving breakfast. You hand them a granola bar.

Another student missed morning recess and has way too much energy to sit and do their work. Instead, they pace back-and-forth for a while. After a few minutes they start to settle but can't sit still. They stand behind their chair, swinging their hips back-and-forth as they start to tap their pencil on the desk and begin their work.

Another student runs up to you and describes everything they did over the weekend, because they could not wait another second to share with you.

All this happens in the first five minutes of class and you haven't even taken attendance yet.

As you read this, could you tell I was talking about a general education classroom full of nondisabled students? I have had these experiences in every single classroom I have ever taught in. I have had them with disabled and nondisabled or undiagnosed students alike. Children are much more similar than they are different. We, as educators, need to remember this and teach our students that we, as humans, are more alike than we are different; our differences make us unique individuals who have something different to contribute and share with the community, and those differences should be celebrated.

To provide context on my background, my first class was an inclusion model, 2nd grade general education classroom in Vermont. I had around seventeen 2nd graders and I would say one-fourth to one-third of them had Individualized Learning Plans (IEPs). Within the classroom, there was a variety of disabilities: cerebral palsy (CP), autism, Tourette syndrome, emotionally disturbed, early childhood trauma, attention deficit disorder. Two students had one-to-one aides, and there was also a classroom aide. The school had a strong behavior support system that included a separate and safe classroom students would temporarily go to when they needed to take a break, as well as staff that aided with behavior issues throughout the entire school. Students would go to this safe space, reflect on their behaviors, and take the time they needed to fully de-escalate before re-entering the class. The staff was well trained and all students knew them well.

My student with CP also had multiple disabilities. He had a one-to-one aide because he was not able to move independently. He was wheelchair bound, would sometimes have seizures, and was almost nonverbal. He participated in Morning Meeting, listened to my lessons, and participated in them when he could. When it came time for independent work, he worked with peers at a table, on work tailored to his needs with me, his aide, or the special education teacher. He had a bubbly personality and had friends who would invite him to play, draw him pictures, and make jokes with him; even though his abilities were visibly limited. The other children always included him.

Early childhood trauma has ripple effects that are hard to understand, and many times children can't explain it to us, because they do not understand why they are behaving a particular way.

My student, who had experienced early childhood trauma, had a number of behavior issues and was considered "emotionally disturbed." Early childhood trauma has ripple effects that are hard to understand, and many times children can't explain it to us, because they do not understand why they are behaving a particular way. Similar to my student with CP, she would fully participate in Morning Meeting and all other whole class activities. Independent work was often differentiated, but she was always there and engaged for whole group instruction.

In my first classroom, I had everyone together. My entire class participated in Morning Meeting and they were all included, even those with what would be considered a severe disability. They were all part of my general education classroom and school community. For those with visible disabilities, students would go out of their way to make sure they felt accepted and knew they had friends. For those without visible disabilities, they were seen and treated as they are; they were just seen and treated as children.

Later, in my first special education position, I was in a self-contained, segregated, SDC special education classroom teaching 3rd-5th grade students in the desert in California. It is common practice in California to break special education students into two different groups: Resource Specialist Program (RSP) and Special Day Class (SDC). There was a wide range of disabilities: Down syndrome, autism, emotionally disturbed, epilepsy, attention deficit disorder. We started off the year with eight students and two aides.

After the ninth student arrived, something needed to change. Some of my students had habits of self harm or would throw items in the classroom. There was not enough supervision, which created an unsafe dynamic. I had to advocate for my students to get additional support, and then had three classroom aides. None of my students had a one-to-one aide, even though many had one-to-one requirements in their IEPs. We also had no additional school wide behavior support sys-

tem outside of being sent to the principal's office.

I had three students in my class who had "Learning Disability not Otherwise Specified," which is the category used when there is a discrepancy in a child or person's cognitive ability and their performance. In other words, something is not connecting somewhere. None of these students had any major behavioral issues and, while all below grade level, were only marginally so. Importantly, there were nondisabled peers in general education classrooms with similar abilities. All were capable of learning in the general education setting with the right support. All of them were social, energetic boys. All of them felt different and less than their peers because they were isolated in my class, at times feeling depressed and ostracized. It took half the school year to reclassify them as RSP and get them in a regular education classroom with support. They had been in SDC for years, mostly isolated from their grade level peers. Why was I the first one to fight for them and say this was not the LRE? My student with epilepsy had both drop and grand mal seizures regularly. She had seizures at school on a daily basis and she needed constant supervision due to safety concerns. In the past, she had become injured at school during a seizure because she collapsed to the ground, completely losing of control of her body. She had to wear a helmet at school and a gait belt so an adult could hold it while we walked, just in case she had a seizure, so we could help guide her to the ground, minimizing the damage from her fall. Other than her seizures and her need for an adult, she was a regular girl. But she was not viewed that way by other students and only interacted with nondisabled peers at recess, with adult prompting. Because she was so isolated being in a separate class, many other students didn't seek her out for play.

In my special education position, this is when I really noticed othering. My students were labeled as different, as separate. They were treated differently by their peers. Other students knew that they had a disability simply because they were in my class. We were literally in our own, separate building. We had a separate PE class, separate lunch table, even separate recess at times. When we were with the other classes at recess, my students were mostly not accepted by their peers.

In my special education class, I like to believe it was not by design or malice that this othering had occurred. But we were separate, and so we were viewed as separate. As a teacher, I was isolated on my own little island; my colleagues didn't understand or see what was happening. I was the only SDC teacher in the school. Teachers would say to me in the halls, "Oh, I have a student for you," because they had a student who was performing below grade-level or was learning at a slower pace. My students were on the island with me. We had a nice island and among ourselves we belonged. However, in the scope of the larger school community, it was made clear that we were different and we did not belong. As the year progressed, it became more and more apparent. When it came time for other students to be GATE (gifted and talented) tested, some general education students expressed they were concerned that they would have to go to a "special class, like Sarah." At recess, other students ignored some of my students when they wanted to play or would tell them to go away. Frequently, general education students with behavioral issues would get aggressive towards my students, sometimes physically, and then blamed my students when they could no longer control their bodies and hit them back, getting my students in trouble for their own entertainment.

In my special education position, this is when I really noticed othering. My students were labeled as different, as separate. They were treated differently by their peers.

I saw my students cry or start to show signs of depression because they were seen as different from their peers. They cannot control their disabilities, they did not ask for them, and they need to live with them for the rest of their lives. At eight, nine, ten, and eleven-years-old they were already becoming depressed. Adults with specific learning disorders are 46% more likely to attempt suicide, even after adjusting for childhood adversities, mental illness, addiction history, and socio-demographics (Fuller-Thomson, Carroll, & Yang) This is a serious problem and othering is contributing.

Both districts in which I taught were fairly small and both had a transient population, one because of poverty and one because of the military. Both schools practiced Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). In my first school, they also used responsive classroom techniques, including Morning Meeting, in every classroom.

Due to these varied experiences, I strongly feel that the self-contained special education model is less than ideal. I know not all of the students meant anything negative with their othering, like the little girl who gave me flowers. However, this culture of othering is not positive for the students or the teachers. It perpetuates stereotypes and biases of all kinds. We need to use an inclusion model, starting with our youngest learners, to promote prosocial behavior in both our general education and special education students (Henninger & Gupta, 2014).

General education students will be more understanding and special education students will feel more ac-

(Continued on p. 10)

SUMMER 2019 Young Writers' Camp

Writing an Ocean

By Amy Wang

Words flow out of my
mind like a sieve,
letters splash
onto blank pages,
making white paper
something more.
Let your mind wash
up thoughts,
glowing like
treasures,
create,
as you write,
make sand castles
of your ideas.
Listen to the words,
sing silently,
with everlasting
rythym,
like the ocean.

The Seed of Writing

Ethan Huntington

An ingenious idea.
A single seed.

Buried deep within the depths
of the soil,
struggling to fracture,
then burst through its outer shell.

Your pencil hits the paper
as a minute seedling emerges,
burgeoning from the earth
like a space shuttle taking to the skies.

The roots and trunk soon take shape,
your hand now wandering on its own,
flying, soaring, and gliding
across the pages.

Exultantly, you conclude
the closing paragraph,
as a sense of relief and jubilation
flush through your body,
a sloppy grin,
plastered onto your face.

A single seed, a grandiose tree.
An ingenious idea, a prodigious story.

A Found Poem

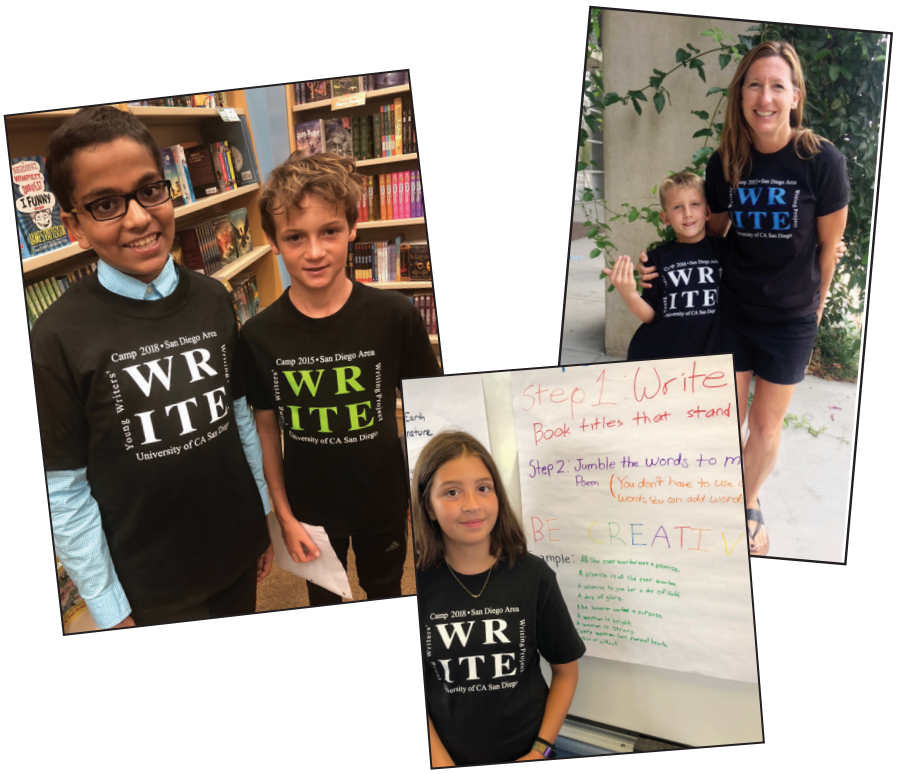
By Eloise Melendez

Mighty women
Shooting for the stars,
Reaching for the sun,
Rising to the moon,
Flying away to the good,
the kind,
the love,
the gold.
The infinite future
made of light,
glory,
and wonder.
Shining bright as the sun,
marching with the glow
of burning fire.

Tomato

By Jonas Brown

When I began, I was just a wee little seed,
Buried deep beneath the soil.
Pushing out of the seed, I began
My upward struggle.
I slowly worked my way to the surface.
At last I emerged,
Sprouting out of the dirt.
I felt the replenishing warmth of the sun.
I had longed for sunlight.
Now, I finally had sunlight.
In that wonderful light I grew.
Stretching, reaching for the sky.



How to Touch the Sky

By Tina Li

Inspired by *How to Eat a Poem*
By Eve Merriam

Holding your hand out, feeling the wind.
You feel the tip of your toe lifting off,
then your whole foot.
Don't look down! Stay focused!
Seriously, don't look down, you might fall!
It feels as if you are walking up infinite stairs.

Your silky hair, flying like Pegasus.
Flying everywhere in every direction.

A strawberry cloud hits you, like a soft cotton pillow.
The sweet aroma of sugar, whiffs up your nose.
It smells as if you are walking into a candy shop.
As you bite into a juicy sweet cotton candy cloud,
you see birds flying.
You join in, flying and chasing the airplanes.
The nice cold breeze gently walks past you
and says a little "Hello!"
Image of a human, heart of the sky.

(Continued from p. 7)

cepted if we change the culture to be one where all students spend more time together. When we change the culture from one of exclusion and segregation to one of inclusion, everyone benefits. Students who model the behaviors of others would benefit from getting more time to see what positive models look like. If they mimic behaviors of others, shouldn't they get the chance to see the behaviors we want them to mimic?

I know there are many reasons why my students were in a separate situation, from funding to the way the different states structure classes. I know that with the way policies were and are, my ideal won't happen because that would require that almost all of my students have a one-to-one aide. However, I question how a small state like Vermont was able to do what is best for students, but in a large state like California it did not happen. How is it that in 2016 it was reported that California has the 6th largest economy in the world but is 21st out of 50 in education spending per student ("Education Spending Per Student by State" 2018)?

I know there are no perfect solutions or answers.

But after that year, I am even more of a believer that all students would benefit from a base or homeroom in a general education classroom.

In order to make that happen, more staff will be required, but it will be more positive for all students. I know that students who need specialized academic instruction will sometimes need to be provided that instruction in a separate setting. Unfortunately, too much focus has been put on academics and not other human essentials. Yes, academics are important, but many students also need their social and emotional needs met, and this is not currently happening in the best way it could be.

To feel included, to be included; that is a beautiful thing.

That is what many of my SDC students were missing and what my first students had. Talking to teachers from other schools and districts, I know my feelings are not isolated ones. While this is more of a nationwide cultural issue rather than a local one, sometimes, we need to start small to change a culture.

To begin to change, we need to start with educators. We need to move away from "my kid, your kid" mindsets and think of all our students as "our kids." All teachers need to be trained appropriately and understand special education students are capable of learning if given a chance and the right supports. All teachers need to take responsibility for the culture of a school and model inclusiveness, rather than the "I have a kid for you" mentality.

There needs to be a safe environment created where all students can participate and feel included. Using practices like Responsive Classroom creates that space. Respecting students enough to include them, even when they may not be able to fully participate or their work may look different also creates this environment.

Supporting schools by properly funding them so that all students have access to general education classrooms is essential. Trying to move from the isolated model to the inclusive one will not work without proper support and there will be a backlash against it if this occurs. There is evidence of this throughout history. Separate is not equal. Students who have been isolated will need a lot of support when they reenter the general education world. We need staff members available to gradually assist students back into the population or available to be present with them if they are not independent. We can structure recess so all students are engaged in inclusive play. We can create cluster classes where co-teaching occurs using UDL benefiting all students. When we set the rules, we get to choose the rules; we need to make sure they promote inclusivity not exclusivity. We need to be promoting positivity and modeling inclusion if we want our country to have those values when our students are older.

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Project Notes

Congratulations to Dr. Janet Ilko (SDAWP 2008). Janet graduated on May 13, 2018, from SDSU with her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership PK12. Janet currently teaches middle school literacy at Health Sciences High and Middle College.

Our condolences to the family of Terrayne L. Klein (June 15, 1949-August 2, 2018). Having taught in the San Diego Unified School District, Terrayne—a San Diego Area Writing Project Fellow of 1994—was a beloved colleague and friend who profoundly impacted the lives of everyone around her.

"Like us" on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SDAWP where links to writing resources and research articles are posted regularly, offering a wealth of ideas for curriculum design and implementation.

Peeling Back the Layers:
Journaling to Build Emotional Intelligence

Judy Caraang SDAWP 2018

It was the third week of third grade. One student, Nickson, had yelled insults and profanities to yet another child and the incident escalated to him hitting and both kids crying. This had become a familiar scene. Many of us have had a student like Nickson in our classrooms—the student that everyone knows by name, the student involved in many incidents around campus, and whose parents' phone number we've memorized. It was going to be an excruciatingly long year.

Our campus embodies the belief that the future is the place we create. What kind of future would I be creating if all of my time was managing behavior? Moreover, what kind of future would my students create if they didn't have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be leaders that elevate humanity? These questions kept me up at night.

Drawing on my previous experience with behavior challenges, I went through every strategy that I knew would help: long lectures, review of rules and expectations, negative consequences, a phone call home to mom and dad. When all else failed, I turned to the dreaded behavior contract. A behavior chart identifies key behavior outcomes.

Each day, the student can receive a happy face for meeting the behavior goals or sad face for not. The chart is sent home for parents to sign and five or more happy faces results in a reward agreed upon by parents. This strategy can quickly modify behaviors. In Nickson's case, however, there was no change. Smiley faces did not motivate him, and I could see his growing resentment towards the learning community.

Nickson, a strong academic student, struggled with impulse and emotional control. Making and sustaining friendships were challenging. This was most evident with his experiences on the playground. While playing soccer, he would often get angry with various calls made during play. Instead of negotiating or compromising rules—techniques that frequently worked with other students—Nickson resorted to tactics that would hurt others. The teams of students that were willing to play soccer, football, and basketball with Nickson dwindled. Soon, his friendship circle was limited to his twin brother and two other boys. These impulsive behaviors also carried into the classroom. Learning was often disrupted with his blurting and excessive talking. He avoided or abandoned many tasks in favor of disturbing his peers, and he refused to complete work that required perseverance. For instance, our math projects—that included problem solving, providing data, and presenting findings—challenged Nickson and were often left unfinished. He also had a competitive nature that was fueled with a desire to be the first to finish work. In math, Nickson completed computation problems first and with ease. However, in a math community where growth mindset is valued and providing evidence of your thinking is critical to the work, he would shut down and get angry.

> …what kind of future would my students create if they didn't have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be leaders that elevate humanity?

I grappled with how to support Nickson and the others like him in my classroom. I was afraid that he was on the pathway to be another statistic. Research has found that as students promote through the grades and into high school, 40-60% become disengaged in school. In addition, 30% of high school students whose high-risk behavior interferes with their academic success jeopardize their potential for life success (Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, CASEL study). I could not let this happen.

Understanding EQ, Emotional Intelligence

In his groundbreaking book, *Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman redefines what it means to be smart. He argues that emotional intelligence is a leading factor in success over IQ, and that it plays a role in thought, decision making, and individual success. This spoke to me as I reflected on Nickson and the challenges we were facing. Nickson's emotional intelligence needed growing. Having identified six qualities in successful individuals, Goleman claims that people whose relationships flourished, who stood out in the workplace, and achieved physical well-being had impulse control, social deftness, self-awareness, motivation, persistence, and empathy. It was time to reevaluate how I was approaching Nickson's emotional

intelligence. If a healthy EQ was needed to shape a person's destiny, it was time to put a plan into action.

This plan included taking a closer look at CASEL (Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning), an organization dedicated to "developing, synthesizing, and disseminating evidence that documents the impact of social and emotional learning." CASEL had found that social and emotional learning (SEL) programs showed immediate improvements in mental health, social skills, and academic achievement in students. In the long term, up to "18 years later, students exposed to SEL in school continue to do better than their peers on a number of indicators: positive social behaviors and attitudes, skills such as empathy and teamwork, and academics" (CASEL). This sounded like a good place to start and something that would benefit both Nickson and our entire learning community. With the help of our campus counselor, we began to introduce SEL lessons that focused on mindfulness, empathy, and social responsibility. Within just a few weeks, we found students using "I" messages and language that supported better communication and cooperation. It was becoming apparent that developing these social and emotional competencies was critical. It would help build them up for not just our classroom, but for our future as well (Roosevelt).

Restorative practices gave him a place to have a voice, understand his feelings were normal, and be reflective with the choices he had made.

So, my path was set. To help Nickson, I was going to seek out new routines that would build EQ and support social emotional learning.

Journaling for Self-Discovery

"Ok, let's get a piece of paper and write down everything that you remember that happened," I said.

"Why?" Nickson said, still reeling from the altercation that occurred on the soccer field at lunch. He stomped over to a table and plopped himself into a chair. Clearly, he had no intention of writing.

I walked over to the paper tray, took a sheet and walked it over to him. "Get started," I suggested.

Glaring at me, he grabbed the paper. I slowly moved away to give him time and space to reflect. I returned a few minutes later to a blank piece of paper. I could see that he was still fuming and itching to explain what unfolded in the altercation at lunch recess. There would be no writing this time. I sat and listened. Nickson explained that the boys were putting his friend down for missing the goal and he intervened to provide protection. What began as a heated argument turned into a physical fight.

I nodded to let him know that I was listening. "It sounds like you were trying to be a good friend. What might be another way to help your friend?" I asked.

He shrugged. Coaching...he needs coaching, I decided. This decision to coach Nickson via restorative practices such as reflective journal writing began by building empathy for Nickson. Restorative practices gave him a place to have a voice, understand his feelings were normal, and be reflective with the choices he had made. Nickson needed tools—sentence stems, moves to de-escalate strong feelings, time to talk over situations to see how to respond differently, and the confidence to move from being reactive to strategic.

We had good days, but more bad ones. Nickson was asked to leave our learning space in a fit of rage often. He was banned from playing soccer on the field. His small group of friends went from four to two. He spent many recesses in restorative practice: picking up trash around campus, helping to organize books, and sharpening pencils. We had many heart-to-heart talks.

One day, he returned from recess, his head hung low.

"How's it going?" I asked and he started to cry.

No one wanted to play with him. Not even his brother. "I'm sorry to hear that," I said.

With no time to talk, I suggested he get his journal to write about what happened and assured him we could talk after. It took about twenty minutes for him to finish writing when he walked to me and said he was done. "Ready to talk?" I asked.

Nickson needed tools— sentence stems, moves to de-escalate strong feelings, time to talk over situations to see how to respond differently, and the confidence to move from being reactive to strategic.

"Yes," he replied. He was visibly calm by now and ready to process what happened. I had him read what he wrote and I asked a few clarifying questions.

I then summed up what happened and he agreed. "So now what?" I asked.

Our conversations followed the same

routine. We'd process what happened and the role he played in the problem. His writing became a tool for us. We used it to support Nickson's social emotional learning. He was gaining empathy for others and was gaining more self-awareness. He took responsibility for restoring relationships with his peers and showed the community he was capable of making different decisions. Throughout the year, with each incident that Nickson found himself in, I encouraged him to write and reflect. His journal became a place where he could unload his frustrations, tell his story, and process what was happening in his mind and his body. The power of the pen was helping to grow EQ and, specifically, his self-awareness, social awareness, self-control, and social skills.

Trapped in the privacy and safety of his journal, were all of Nickson's thoughts, ideas, feelings, and stories.

Self-Awareness

Trapped in the privacy and safety of his journal, were are all of Nickson's thoughts, ideas, feelings, and stories. The journal captured the words that described situations and reactions that helped to build self-awareness. Nickson reread his thoughts, which opened the door to understanding who he is. Patterns of thinking, responding, and behaviors emerged. It provided explanations on how and why he may have responded. Nickson gleaned his strengths and weaknesses.

Social Awareness

Writing about social interactions, relationships, school, and work is a reminder of the connections we have to the world around us. While these interactions can be energizing and joyful, they can sometimes be fraught with conflict, as Nickson experienced. Instead of keeping it trapped in his mind, Nickson allowed it to flow out into a journal, clearing his mind of negativity. He reflected on what could happen at another time and became ready to process the relationships. Slowly, but surely, the layers peeled back to offer insights about acquaintances, friends, and family.

Self-Control

The process of writing slows the mind and body down. We organize our words into sentences and then sentences into a paragraph and our paragraph speaks our truth. Nickson's truth about how he was feeling showed vulnerability and an internal struggle to control feelings. It gave us opportunities to tune in to these feelings and explore different ways of handling conflicts.

Social Skills

Building and sustaining relationships requires empathy. By noticing deeply and listening intently, Nickson filled his journal with observations of those around him. His journal grew into a mentor and guide. He could refer back to his reflections and the decisions that he had made. His attention shifted to nurturing healthy relationships. With journaling and coaching his mindset changed. He grew to believe that he had choices and that he could affect outcomes so they could end in a positive way.

The Future is the Place We Create

Our work is just beginning. During the last week of school, Nickson was in a fight with another student. "Nickson is in the office," the kids tattled after lunch recess, "he got into a fight." Frustrated, I stormed up to the office to find out what happened. Nickson and the other student were sitting together in a conference room. Nickson handed me a behavior sheet with his narrative of the altercation. It said that, "It was Steven's fault. He kicked me. So I hit him back to protect myself." After we went through our routine restorative practice, it became clear that Nickson had taken the soccer ball away from Steven to start a new game so that his group could play soccer at lunch.

He told me his consequences: "We're going to stay in at recess this week," he said, "and we're going to help pick up trash."

I signed the behavior sheet.

It is clear that Nickson will need continued support in school and at home to grow his emotional intelligence (EQ). This year, he gained one new tool to add to his tool belt, reflective journal writing. With guidance and reflection, Nickson will continue to build self-awareness, learn to maintain self-`control, collaborate with his peers, and manage his emotions. Nickson can grow the EQ needed to be a leader that elevates humanity. And with the tools learned at CASEL, I can help other students achieve similar growth.

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Conversations in the Margin

Callie Ryan Brimberry, SDAWP 2008

There is something about the margins of a book that have always fascinated me. It is where the words begin, where they end. These small empty spaces left bare and open—enough space for more words, more choices left unchosen. Any writer knows that a blank page can be an intimidation and—if you're lucky—a revelation. For students, an unwritten page is typically more daunting than inspiring. Margins, however, are the opposite of the abyss that is the blank page. They are welcoming; the confined space inviting any writer to contribute—to draw their own conclusions and make their own choices. I am a firm believer in writing margin comments, a firm believer in encouraging students to fill in the blank spaces with their own voices, experiences, and truths. Allowing students to have margin conversations with socially relevant novels has encouraged engagement in thoughtful discourse amongst students, families, and within the community concerning the very poignant issues of diversity, equity, and justice.

One book, one classroom.

When I first introduce the concept of having an unfiltered conversation with the text, students are instantly curious, and cautious—they want to know what is really allowed. Can they really write in the book? (Yes, they can, but, sticky notes are a great alternative and can make students feel even safer as they are less permanent; students in my classes select the method they feel comfortable using.) And the truth is that I encourage them to talk to the text the way they would talk to a friend—ask questions, write comments, note shared experiences—and always do so with integrity and respect. In my most recent classroom, student notes initially ranged from, "Why wouldn't he (the character) just be honest? Totally causing his own problems." to "Use this for essay—don't forget to draw comparisons." The margins were a space for students to write notes—students weren't having the conversations with texts I'd envisioned and I realized I wasn't giving them a relevant text worth conversing with.

I am a firm believer in writing margin comments, a firm believer in encouraging students to fill in the blank spaces with their own voices, experiences, and truths.

In the alternative high school setting, class sets of novels are hard to come by, and the books we do have aren't usually relevant to the lives of students. The students that come into my classroom are often facing the harsh reality of racial discrimination and the effects of generational poverty, on top of having been intentionally marginalized in previous school settings. They need novels and conversations that provide a safe space for them to discuss the social chaos compounding their daily lives. Hoping for inspiration, I looked to my own bookshelf. I was reading *The Hate U Give*, by Angie Thomas, and my own margin conversations were constantly flooding my thoughts. Soon, after donors came to the rescue, we had a class set of *The Hate U Give*. The novel is socially relevant, and intense conversations—both in the classroom and in the margins—soon followed. Margin comments evolved into margin conversations: "At what point is our silence not enough? At what point are our raised voices too much? When are we enough? Why can't we simply exist?"

Not only did these margin conversations cascade into meaningful essays, but they spilled into our daily classroom discussions. Students were more focused on current news, they were more engaged and attentive in class, and most importantly, they weren't just talking—they were crafting with intention, speaking with authority and experience, and engaging with power—they were finding their voices.

Better yet, others were listening.

One book, one family.

A parent approached me, asking if I had an extra copy of the novel; she'd never seen her son so engrossed in a book, much less a school assignment, and wanted to be able to talk to him about the text. I didn't have an extra, but I promised to get a copy to her as soon as I could. Fortunately, we didn't have to wait long. Her son finished the novel—early—and passed the book to her. From there, it is as if this reading journey took on a life of its own.

Our shortage of books turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Word spread amongst parents, books passed back and forth within households, and the margin notes began to read like memoirs. Often, when I'd take a peek in the novels I'd feel like I was witnessing something sacred, private, historical—and in many ways I was. This safe space found between the pages was one I helped create and curate, but it wasn't necessarily mine. When I read margin notes from a parent to a student that began, "Remind me to tell you about your Uncle Mike and the docks," I knew there was a shared significance taking place. There was a rift occurring in their daily lives—lives that didn't routinely allow the comfort or time needed for such discussions, especially ones that may refresh pain and injustices. I still don't know about Uncle Mike and the docks or why a student needed

to talk about what happened on page 67, and while I know why there were names added to the list on the last page of the novel, I never interfered in those conversations. I, of course, allotted time for anyone who wanted to share those notes in the form of a letter writing assignment to and from family members, but honestly, the best part of the entire session was the writing in the margins—the conversations that weren't mine.

One book, one community.

As part of the students' elective community service, we hosted a community book club. Not only their parents and teachers attended, but so did the retired Naval Officer who volunteered at the local recreation center and the manager at the Burger King the students frequented across the street. These family and community members came in with respect and curiosity, as well as opinions of their own, to engage in civil dialogue about the novel and the current political issues within society.

Evening book club conversations were bi-weekly and informal. Conversations swayed between the novel and current issues of injustice students and community members were being bombarded with on a daily basis. The conversations were always, *always*, focused on student voices. I, as a facilitator, never had to discuss this with the other adults in the room—we all wanted the students to be able to articulate their thoughts and experiences with power and authority; we all wanted them to be prepared to use their voices outside of the safety of the classroom.

Granted, discourse wasn't always easy. Students were moving from conversations with the novel to conversations with their families to conversations with strangers. Often times, voices raised to passionate—but never disrespectful—levels that echoed the pain of discrimination many participants had felt firsthand. Other times, there were disagreements that initially had students giving me the side-eye, asking for permission to engage—to be true to themselves and their emotions. Not everything was a success; we had to muddle through some basic issues, like taking turns to speak respectfully, without raising hands. Respectful dialogue about disrespect can be difficult. Inside the classroom, we used a Give-and-Take Protocol—two students hold a string (a ribbon tied in the middle, three knots on either side) between them, the speaking student gently pulls the string toward them with each point they make, once they pass a knot they should turn the conversation to their partner. If they reach the ribbon in the middle of the string, the speaker has dominated the conversation. Students soon learn that conversations should be give and take.

Once we navigated the nuances of having respectful conversations about issues of racism and injustice, students flourished. They spoke up without prompting, they questioned opinions that lacked critical thinking, and they created a space to encourage each other to traverse difficult, yet important, conversations that are often marginalized.

If I had to itemize the successes of allowing students to have conversations in the margins of their novels, it would be quite a long list. From improved annotating and engagement with texts, to more thoughtful and comprehensive essay and letter writing, to increased classroom participation amongst students, parents, and the community—the successes are endless. There were incoming students interested and engaged before walking into the classroom and the increased parent involvement led to increased student involvement. More meaningful than all of the quantifiable achievements is the knowledge that students felt safe using their voices inside of the classroom because our curriculum taught them that their voices deserve to be heard everywhere else—in their homes, in their communities, and in their futures.

Dialogue

Call for Manuscripts
Spring 2019 Issue

Submission Deadline:
February 1, 2019

Building Community

Manuscripts should consider but not be limited to the following questions:

- What professional development strategies do you use to build a thriving community amongst staff? In what ways do these methods trickle down into the classroom?
- Describe techniques you've successfully used to bridge divides on your campus.
- Are there ways in which you have included the entire school, or local community, in your classroom learning?
- In your classroom, how does writing play a role in fostering engagement and developing a trusting, respectful community of student writers?
- How do you create an inclusive and academically challenging environment for all learners?

Dialogue values experiential knowledge and would love to receive reflective pieces written by educators and students. We encourage you to submit your stories, experiences, and strategies. We are especially seeking voices from K-6 educators. Please submit!

Email all manuscript submissions, suggestions, letters to the editor and/or Project Notes to

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California Writing Project: CATE Pre-Convention

February 21, 2019

San Francisco
Hyatt Regency, Burlingame

CATE 2018 Convention

Voices of Literacy in Pursuit of Human Rights

February 22 - 24, 2019

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Hyatt Regency, Burlingame

For information about CATE and the CWP Pre-convention, visit
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