Voices from the Classroom

Dialogue

A Publication of the San Diego Area Writing Project

Spring 2006

Inside...

Voices in the Classroom: Provide Opportunities, and Listen

Jennifer Moore, SDAWP 1999

Last fall, *Vanity Fair* magazine sponsored an essay contest in response to "What is on the minds of America's youth today?" It struck me as a question adults ask one another in order to report findings to other adults—as this 18-and-over essay contest essentially accomplished. When we do ask our youthful counterparts, I mused, it is often in the form of multiple choice, with the answers pre-sorted and looking for confirmation that today's kids are deeply concerned about issues our politicians should be taking care of: terrorism, teenage pregnancy, the cost of college, and violence.

The more I thought about the topic, the more I concluded that what we expect to be on our children's minds is not always what's actually there, or what they would come up with first. Students in my high school English classes attended a school-sponsored assembly on abstinence last semester. Noting that we rarely host outside speakers for an all-school audience, a student asked me, "Why abstinence of all the possible topics? Isn't that kind of random?" "Well," I replied, "How random is it, really? Adults planned the program. What do adults think is on your minds?" "Sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll," one student grumbled. Another joked that the next assembly would likely be about the dangers of drugs, as it was improbable we'd invite a rock band to play during instructional time. And, while few argued with our speaker's message on abstaining from sex, the assembly amounted to an adult telling teens what she believes is first and foremost on their minds—and what she, and many other adults, think about that.

But looking out at my classroom of teens and the T-shirts they wear emblazoned with subtle innuendoes and rock band insignias, it's no wonder that adults imagine brains under the influence and teeming with lust and heavy bass lines. MTV, seemingly created exclusively for this age group, serves up plenty of additional evidence, all set to a rock 'n' roll soundtrack with lyrics featuring, well, sex and drugs. That's enough for most to confirm that this generation of youth is no different than that that of their parents. What is distinctive about these millennium youth, then?

If you ask them, they'll tell you that they endure more pressure and competition than youth before them, particularly in gaining entrance to college and finding jobs. Many are convinced that real estate and a full tank of gas will be out of their reach, too. Are they right? Could be. But the point is not what's true; it's what they believe, and who's telling them. And no one is being held as a more captive, listening audience than the youth of today. Ask them what's on their minds, and they'll likely tell you what they've been told is on their minds.

What teens need more than ever are the equivalent of public mirrors hung to demonstrate to all that they're not members of an inscrutable tribe.

In a discussion with my class about the *Vanity Fair* essay, I mentioned my discomfort with answering the central question on behalf of the constituents of a group I trust to express itself. One puzzled student confided that she "really couldn't tell anyone what's on anyone else's mind." Another noted that adults are, in fact (and the more they thought about it, yes!), very, very concerned about the traffic of teens' minds, while they rarely wonder what their parents are thinking. And why is this? My students supposed that adults' curiosities about them arises from teens' rapid and confusing developmental changes as well as from adults' desires to control them. And they agreed that what adults are thinking generally lacks mystery or intrigue as far as they are concerned.

But I suggest that adults want to peer into youngsters' minds because they stand to make a buck off what they surmise or decide they've found there. Today's technology provides adults with more opportunities than ever to fill in the blanks on behalf of teens. Via television, computer, and cell phone, adolescents are the receptors of a barrage of images and messages about what they yearn for and who they are or should be. MTV, after all, isn't a teens' network, it's a product created by adults for teens, like many youth-oriented periodicals, video games, and films. The problem is that these adult-created teen "worlds" are no mirrors of today's youth. And it can't be fair to judge youth by the popularity of these representations of themselves, or to even use them to speculate on teens' values and concerns, when popular reality series like *Big Brother* and *The Bachelor* lead to equally disturbing conclusions about what's on the minds of America's adults. At least in the latter examples, adults are mocking themselves in a more or less ironic, laugh-all-the-way-to-the-bank fashion. We're simply not offering teens the opportunities to portray themselves genuinely, or hardly at all.

I don't even have to ask my students what's on their minds to know. It's enough to give my creative writing students the daily freedom to write and express themselves. It may be one small arena in which they reveal to one another, and fortunate adult bystanders, what's really on their minds. Their thoughts aren't too far from ours, actually...regularly mundane, often frustrated with society and authority, sometimes fearful, and frequently celebratory and thankful.

Youth need us to clear a path that they can blaze, in the hopes that they will clear paths for the next generation.

A student from my high school won a young playwright's contest last year and her play, among others penned by teens, was staged at a local theatre. The characters in her production's vignettes, set in a high school and portrayed by teen actors, bemoaned acne and computer crashes. They pondered their identities and struggled with their parents and relationships. They were utterly normal and accessible, and yet this glimpse into the inner workings of teens was poignant—and original—in its rare honesty and authenticity.

What teens need more than ever are the equivalent of public mirrors hung to demonstrate to all that they're not members of an inscrutable tribe. Not more templates created for them to represent themselves outrageously, as in the so-called reality TV show *Laguna Beach* or at MySpace.com. They should control more outlets for their own expressions: walls to paint on, fairs and expositions, concerts, television shows, and writing contests in nationally recognized publications such as *Vanity Fair*. Not only would we be doing a service to the majority of kids jaded by the frequent stereotyping of their lives and concerns, but wouldn't adults everywhere be reassured by genuine portraits of the adolescents among us?

Youth need us to clear a path that they can blaze, in the hopes that they will clear paths for the next generation. Allow them to answer the question. Better yet, don't ask: just give them blank slates.

Dialogue

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Connecting through Writing

Rebecca Peacock Gemmell, SDAWP 2001

First semester, I always seemed to be ahead of my fellow teachers. While they struggled to keep up with the British Literature pacing guide we had collaboratively created, I was marching ahead. My colleague, Chris, marveled at my efficiency. At the same time, I was envious of the relationship she seemed to have with her kids. She was always talking about the discussions they had, both personal and about the material, which caused her to fall behind. I was left wondering, "Why aren't the kids talking to me?"

Fast forward to the end of second semester. In her last learning log, my student Catherine wrote: "I liked that second semester you were less distant with us. I think we all felt relieved when we realized you were a real person." Her words were representative of many of my students' feelings.

By talking about my own views students learned about opposing points of view, but they also learned a little bit about me.

So what was different about second semester?

While the classes were smaller and the students were more dedicated to learning, the difference that seems most significant to me was the instructional focus. First semester, the focus was on traditional literary analysis. We read *Beowulf* and *Macbeth*, and the students wrote literary analysis essays.

Second semester, I made writing the focus—and not literary essays. Students wrote in a variety of domains: persuasive, reflective, and satirical essays and poetry. For example, when we studied Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, the students wrote their own satirical pieces. When we studied the Romantic poets, the students wrote their own poems.

I didn't form special friendships with these students. We didn't chat about our lives over coffee in the cafeteria; we didn't spend time together in after-school tutorial working on their writing.

However, I did share my own experiences and opinions to give students ideas and models for writing. In writing persuasively, students needed to address both sides of the issue. To prepare for a persuasive essay about young children and video games, I discussed my own dislike of video games, but I also shared that my husband plays them religiously, and has since his childhood. By talking about my own views students learned about opposing points of view, but they also learned a little bit about me.

When I asked students to write down three rules that they live by in preparation for the reflective essay, I brainstormed around my own "rule" of balancing work and family on the overhead. Again, the students benefited from a model, and they learned about me.

To my student David, it made a difference. He wrote: "Thank you for opening up to us. It helped a lot to have you share your own life experiences. It draws us out. I improved in writing like tenfold because of the detailed help on all aspects of it. You provided a model on everything from word choice to concluding an essay and that helped so much."
What I took from my students' learning logs is that writing can be a powerful tool for connecting with students. After all, what is writing but a way to share thoughts and ideas? When you share, you can make personal connections.

To be honest, I didn't cover the entire "core" of literature. Writing takes time, and I sacrificed coverage to give students the opportunity to write in a variety of genres and to work on revision. Students graduated with an understanding that people write for a variety of reasons and in a variety of forms. As Dirk noted in his learning log: "Although I didn't always enjoy writing every one of the essays, they definitely opened me up to different kinds of writing."

Students need to have a clear purpose for what they are learning, and, maybe even more importantly, they need to feel a connection with their teacher.

In the end, my students entered the adult world with real writing skills. As Amber wrote: "After taking this class, my essay writing skills have improved a lot. I learned how to write reflective, persuasive, and satirical essays and also poetry. I also learned how to make my writing more interesting by using good hooks in my introduction, literary devices, and sentence variety."

Students need to have a clear purpose for what they are learning, and, maybe even more importantly, they need to feel a connection with their teacher. Writing is a way to make the connection and to teach students valuable skills. As I read those end of the year learning logs, Catherine's words both surprised and pleased me: "More than anything else I liked talking with you. Thank you for having influenced me considerably this year."

CALIFORNIA STORIES

In the Fall of 2004, the California Writing Project (CWP) and its local affiliates collaborated with the California Council for the Humanities (CCH) in a year-long project that offered teachers and students a powerful opportunity to read, write, and publish. When students learn to write about their history and heritage, their neighborhoods and communities, their challenges and hopes, they are better able to read and understand the words and worlds of others. Four provocative themes were used to inspire teachers, students teachers, administrators, community members, and students:

- Growing up and finding our identity in a changing California
- Understanding how our community, history, and heritage have shaped who we are as Californians
- Grappling with the realities and challenges of life in California
- Dreaming of a better life in California, as newcomers or long-time residents

Throughout California teachers participated in interactive sessions designed by K-12 teachers for K-12 teachers. They received a wealth of instructional resources, utilized the genres of standards-based writing, and gave students real reasons to write and real audiences to write for. The California Stories Uncovered Anthology provided a unique publishing opportunity for students and teachers were able to apply for a mini-grant funded by the CCH to create local opportunities for students to go public with their writing.

In culmination of this collaboration and with support from the CWP and the CCH, the San Diego Area Writing Project hosted a Young Author's Chair and Ice Cream Social on May 21, 2005, at UCSD. Parents, teachers, students, family, and community members celebrated and listened to young authors share their California Stories, listened to local authors and writers share their stories, and raised needed money for the SDAWP Young Writers' Camp Transportation and Scholarship Fund. The effort allowed us to bring six students from the East County to camp last summer—what a success!

(The student and teacher writing included on the following pages 4-7 was done in response to and inspired by the California Stories project.)

Katie's Family Heritage

Katheryn Caplinger—1st Grade

Before I was born my mom and dad had never lived in California.

My mom grew up in a two-story brick house with a basement. Where was it? Belleville, Illinois.

It was very cold in the winter. My mom had to wear mittens and hats and sweaters and snowshoes so she didn't get frostbite. But she still walked to school every day with her sisters, not with her little brother because by the time he went to school, my mom was in high school.

Did you know, when my mom was in school she had a person sitting next to her who did not want to be at school? No? Well, that kid snuck out of the classroom and jumped out of the window of the school and went home.

My mom liked school. She used to help in the Kindergarten. She loved to play volleyball, but she didn't like math.

It got very hot in the summer. The winds were hot, not like here. Before I was born it was so hot in Illinois my mom had to go down in the basement to cool off. There were spider webs in the basement, and spaces in the stairs where a slinky could fall through.

When my mom was little her grandma made the whole family flour tortillas. My mom makes them now. I hope she will make some tonight.

Did you know my mom used to make pretty cakes at Dairy Queen in Belleville, and that is where she met my dad? I think he was ordering a cake for his sister's birthday. If my mom hadn't worked at Dairy Queen, I would never be born.

When my dad was little there were cornfields everywhere, but he couldn't play in the cornfields because of the humongous mosquitoes. Did I tell you he lived in Illinois too?

When my family came to California it was cooler than Illinois in the summer. But that is the only time we can go back because we don't have school. So I never saw the snow in Illinois, I only saw pictures of my mom building a snowman.

We like California. California doesn't have cornfields like Illinois, but it does have the ocean.

We are the Gold in California: Building Community through Writing

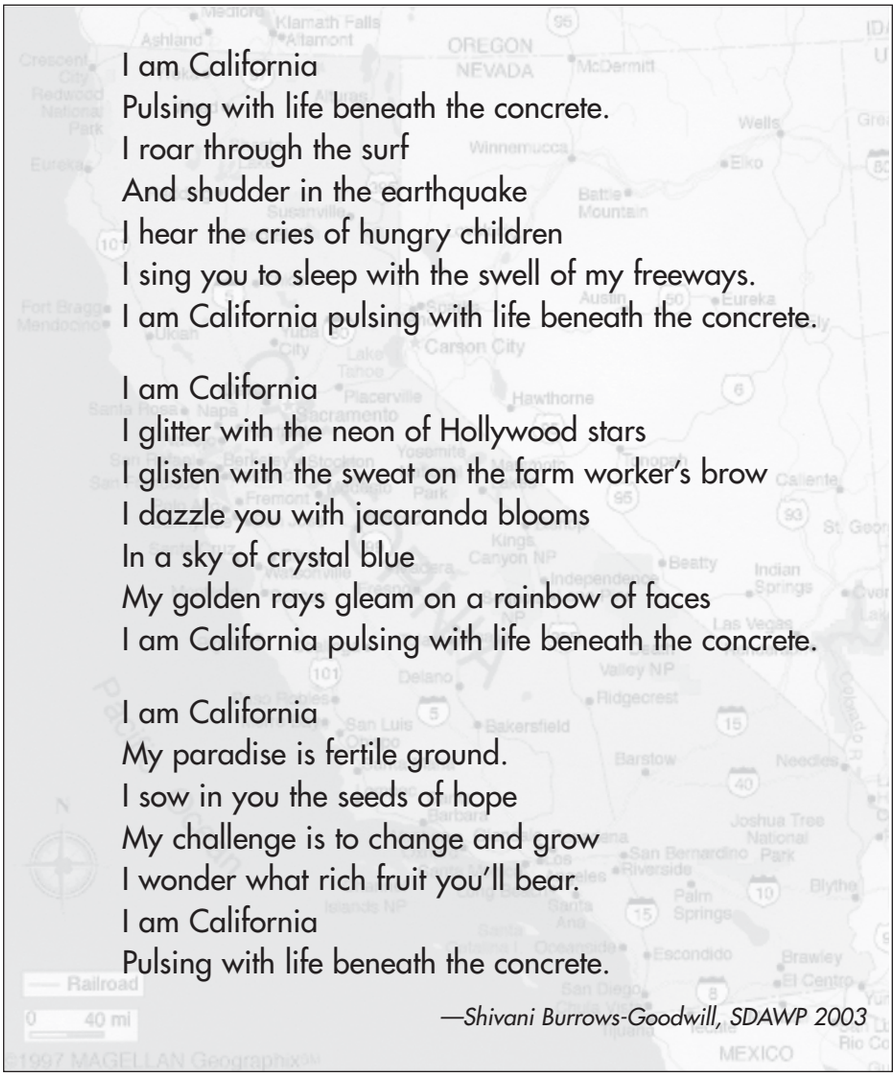
Shivani Burrows-Goodwill, SDAWP 2003

When we tell our stories, we reveal ourselves to others, and when we listen attentively to the stories of others, we cannot help but affirm our relationship to them.

—James Quay,
Exec. Director, CCH

Now, more than ever before, there is a need to build bridges of understanding to heal the dislocations caused by our hurried times. Mine is a small K-8 school that is rich in diversity. In recent times it seemed that a genuine sense of community was lacking, so I decided to use the CCH grant for California Stories to celebrate the diversity amongst our families.

California Stories Uncovered provided a dynamic vehicle for multiculturalism to come alive in my urban classroom. Using biography as our genre, students mined the primary sources of their families' heritages, crafted their raw material into memorable writing, and, through their efforts, brought their diverse families together into a new experience of community.



Too often the rich cultural value of our multiethnic urban children is overshadowed by a preoccupation with test scores and learning gaps. As Californians we remember that the richness of gold played a significant role in the history of our state. Times have changed. The future now lies in the "gold" of our cultural diversity. I discovered by taking on the California Stories project that as teachers we can tap into a treasure should we choose to embrace it in our very own classrooms.

At a recent GSDCTE (Greater San Diego Council of Teachers of English) presentation on my Tubman Elementary School experience with California Stories, an initially disparate group of teachers soon discovered the warmth of community simply by sharing our writing, as we recognized the diversity and common themes of our journeys to become Californians.

This was a sampling of the experiences that evolved in my first grade classroom as students uncovered stories from their parents' and grandparents' childhoods. Family interview results became writing in the raw, providing priceless material for crafting the living moments and meaningful mini-lessons using their own drafts. Favorite biographies became our mentor texts in the search for leads, enlivened prose, and topics for new interview questions.

Peer conferences often erupted in amazement at converging themes from wide-ranging places of origin. My favorite was the theme of the cornfield. Sitting near a pair of peer consultants one morning, I overheard a Somali child exclaim as his classmate read descriptively of her grandparents' cornfield in rural Illinois: "My mother's family had a cornfield in Ethiopia. She used to play in it too, just like your father when he was a boy!"

The more students shared from their primary research, the more a new quality of listening took over. Students showed genuine interest in one another's cultures, laughed at the humorous stories, and made comparisons in a search for common themes. Respect for each other grew, as well as curiosity about the world. Globe and atlas were our

daily companions, and soon the room was filled with books and pictures of the multitude of nations and states represented in the room. Room 3 suddenly became a microcosm of the world.

Each day evolved into a cultural celebration through writing. Students felt empowered as experts, only turning to the teacher for resources, writing advice, and, most important of all, a listening ear. Our eyes were opened through such simple comparisons as the ten ways we learned to say "grandpa." Language is the bearer of culture, and we had found an authentic way to showcase the nuances that make each of us special.

Celebration was the theme when the project culminated in a Family Heritage Evening, attended by a record number of relatives and supporters. Children from the five classes who participated in the project showed off their writing, and a rainbow of generations interacted with love and enthusiasm while we all enjoyed signature dishes from the ethnicities represented there.

Fellow teachers concurred on the value emanating from the California Stories experience. Each of us witnessed heightened motivation in student writing and research, greater mutual respect, as well as a dramatic improvement in parent participation. All of us felt a huge step took place in community building through the whole process.

As an added benefit, some of the students involved in the project were invited to read their work at a further CCH event sponsored by the San Diego Area Writing Project at UCSD where they met other writers involved in California Stories. Little did I know at my first encounter with the program in 2004, during Young Writers' Camp, what rich fruits it would yield. My life as a teacher, in a very diverse urban classroom, has been transformed. I now swear by the power of writing to build community. We are the gold in California!

Ayoub Family Heritage

Ayoub Abdi—1st Grade

Did you know that the map of Africa is shaped like a rhinoceros?

Before I was born my mom lived in Africa, in Somalia. In Africa it was peaceful. There were not many houses or much traffic, and not too many people, but there were lots of trees and a river and a cornfield.

Did you know that the cornfield was a neighborhood project? My mom liked to run through the field for fun.

Before I was born it was hot in Africa, hotter than an oven.

When my mom was little she would to go to school then come back home and eat lunch. After that she was supposed to take a nap, but sometimes she didn't. She would sneak outside and meet her friends. She wanted to swim in the river and play hide-and-seek with her friends. But when she went back to school in the afternoon, she was so tired, she would fall asleep!

Before I was born my mom liked to swim in the river and relax in the cool water. When she was little she used to dig holes and get water from the river to make pools. She made her own toys out of tree branches. She had a friend rock she loved. For fun she used to run races with her friends and jump over small bushes to see who could jump the highest.

There are lots of animals in Africa, but my mom never harmed any animals. The animals did not harm her. I am not kidding, if you harm animals, animals will harm you!

Before I was born, my mom sometimes made fire with sticks. They used the hot sun warming the ground to cook their food.

Did you know that they made sambusa by hand? My mom learned how to make them.

When my mom came to California there were lots of people and cars and houses. A lot of the food was frozen, not fresh like her home. She liked going to school and she learned English fast. Now she helps people from Africa who don't speak English.

California Stories:
Creating Opportunities in the Golden State

Christine Sphar, SDAWP 1996

Sunshine, waves, beach front homes, and avocado groves. Or is it traffic jams, families living on less than $1,200 a month, gang violence, and summers spent in cramped apartments? California, our golden state, is diverse, but its diversity means more than a multiethnic society. For all of its physical beauty and natural resources, California is a place where wealth is concentrated in certain zip codes and poverty is prevalent in others. A state with a dramatically diverse elementary school population but has a remarkably less diverse university population. California boasts the biotech industry but thrives off the cheap labor of illegal immigrants. While we celebrate our diversity, we also must rectify the inequalities.

For all of its physical beauty and natural resources, California is a place where wealth is concentrated in certain zip codes and poverty is prevalent in others.

The San Diego Area Writing Project attempted to do its part with our participation in the California Stories Project. We used the project's theme to inspire student writing both in classrooms and at our summer camp, then showcased the writing at a fundraising event that benefited our Young Writers' Camp transportation fund.

On a typically sunny afternoon in May of 2005, parents, students, teachers, Writing Project fellows, local authors, and guests gathered in a meeting hall set in a grove of eucalyptus trees at the University of California, San Diego, which provided a venue for student writers and adult authors to entertain the crowd with their own California stories. The audience listened attentively as Ayoub, a first grade boy, compared his native California with his mother's native Somalia.(See page 6.) Maggie, a red headed fifth grader, enchanted the audience with her poem describing wonders of beach life. Published author, John Ritter, explained how he created the setting for one of his young adult novels by melding together attributes from several of our local communities.

The event concluded with an ice cream social during which audience members hovered around the readers and responded to their writing, sharing the personal connections made to their own California experiences. Donations were generous, and enough money was raised to rent a large passenger van to transport select students from remote parts of the county to the Young Writers' Camp at UCSD.

Prior to this event, Young Writers' Camp had provided ten successful summer programs, but every year the leaders lamented the lack of ethnic and socio economic diversity among the campers. While fifty percent scholarships have been available since the camp's incep-

Poems I Like

Roxana Yonan—3rd Grade

She likes nature.
She likes snowflakes falling in her room.
I love dreaming.
I love finches.
I like raindrops in my room.
It's fun,
It's fun dreaming like a rose blooming in the sky.
I like flowers blooming in my bed,
Finches flying on my roof,
Butterflies buttering the kitchen,
Jewels decorating my room.
All the things make her laugh like a star
With the moon in my head,
Seashells in the sink,
Gingerbread cookies on my kitchen ceiling,
Rainbow colors in the pillows,
Gold fish in the bathtub,
The gold Sun God in my drawers,
Hermit crabs in the carpet,
Me in my colorful everything clothes.

tion, we have failed to address the true barrier to camp participation by students from the region's low-income areas. The cost of camp is something that families from inner city communities have been able to save for even with very tight household budgets; the main problem has always been transportation. For families with cars, that vehicle has one purpose: the daily commute to work and back. The logistical barrier was compounded by the mental barrier of sending a child away to a place they had never even visited themselves.

Camp organizers had discussed the idea of hosting camps at school sites in various parts of the county, but that would have defeated two of the camp's main purposes: to create a mix of students from different parts of the county and to expose participants to university life. The California Stories project allowed us to provide transportation for students from low income families, letting them experience the kind of summer activities they had only read about in books.

Six excited campers from El Cajon, a community in eastern San Diego County, piled into the rented van early each morning for the twelve days of camp. They learned to point out local landmarks along the route, including San Diego State University, the Presidio, the Pacific Ocean, and the Mormon Temple. Five of the six students were English learners, and all attended a Title I elementary school in a neighborhood of apartment buildings, gun shops, and free health clinics. They spent their days at camp writing, making friends, and examining every inch of the university campus. They met published authors, saw works of art, and explored a library bigger than the largest building in their small city. On the ride home each day they took turns reading their writing aloud, impressing themselves maybe even more than they impressed each other.

As the person responsible for driving these six students to and from camp, I couldn't help but marvel at the unique experience Young Writers' Camp was able to provide them. Few of their parents had graduated from middle or high school, and none had attended college. Many worked for hourly wages with minimal tips and had no medical benefits or retirement plans. None of the parents had ever attended a camp of any kind, and few had ever set foot on a college campus.

Now their young children have attended an enriching summer camp, toured a prestigious university, met celebrated authors, and have had their writing published in a camp anthology, sharing memories that previously belonged only to middle and upper class students from high performing schools. By providing six underprivileged children with the experiences of a lifetime, we have allowed each of them to imagine a world outside their small eastern San Diego neighborhood and a future filled with opportunity in California, our golden state.

MUSE BOX...

In Nancy Atwell's In the Middle, she talks about navigating "writing territories" with her students: "spheres of interest" that she and her students have and will possibly write about. These "spheres" include potential writing topics, genres, and potential audience.

What are your writing territories? Make a list of what you want to write about, how you'll decide to write it, and who will read it. (Will it be poem written for your mother? A cathartic memoir that you need to write for yourself? A letter to the editor about a local issue of concern?)

Allow yourself to explore what you need and want to write. Even if you only end up with a list, at least you'll have a palette that you can cull from later on, when you allow yourself the room to write.

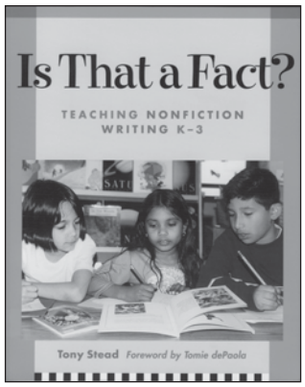
We'd love to hear what you come up with, be it list, love sonnet, or one-act play!

Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K-3
by Tony Stead

A Book Review
by Kim Douillard, SDAWP 1992

Often I approach professional books written for teachers of students in grades K-3 with a chip on my shoulder. These are the books with the cute pictures of children, colorful pages, and all too often, a lack of content. Instead of thoughtful, meaningful learning, the focus is often on black-line masters shaped like teddy bears and pictures of famous Americans to color. I resent not only that I am treated as though "cute" is more important than substance, but that my students are not capable of rigorous academic work. In fact, my students are cute—both in appearance and in the comments they make based on their short, eight years or less, life experience. They are also incredibly curious, asking insightful questions—many that I wish I had asked first. My students are capable of tackling important subjects and complex ideas. Naming the nine planets in the solar system does not satisfy their curiosity about space, yet for younger students, that is often the extent of the study. Neither my students nor my colleagues need watered down approaches to teaching and learning, the kind that some assume is suitable and appropriate for young children.

Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K-3 by Tony Stead gives me hope. Snead actually believes that primary students can compose a variety of nonfiction texts including recipes, reports, scientific explanation, and even persuasive writing. He begins by acknowledging the power of nonfiction with young children and the woeful lack of nonfiction writing instruction in the early grades. He quotes Donald Graves who said in 1994, "Unfortunately, little nonfiction, beyond personal narrative, is practiced in classrooms. Children are content to tell their own stories, but the notion that someone can write about an idea and thereby affect the lives and thinking of others is rarely discussed." Stead offers the suggestion that teachers broaden their definition of nonfiction writing. He reminds us that there are many purposes for nonfiction writing beyond the popular research report. Nonfiction writing can describe, explain, instruct, persuade, retell,



and explore. The writing can take a myriad of forms including letters, definitions, poetry, directions, debates, reviews, cartoons, scripts, and interviews.

Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K-3 is broken down into two parts. Part one, called "Teaching Nonfiction Writing," focuses on a more general overview of nonfiction writing and the thinking and research processes students will need in order to undertake nonfiction writing. Part two, called "Explorations in Action," gets more specific about particular types of nonfiction writing and how to apply them in the primary classroom.

In the first part of the book, "Teaching Nonfiction Writing," Stead addresses barriers many teachers face when teaching nonfiction writing including helping children locate and access information, and interpreting, recording, publishing, and sharing information. He also addresses another obstacle: getting young children to write independently. Many teachers lament that their students "can't write" because they are not able to read the students' attempts or because their students aren't willing to risk incorrect spelling. In the chapter called, "Helping With Spelling," Stead encourages teachers to "find effective methods to encourage children to approximate--to try spelling words they want to use—so that their message becomes paramount in their writing, and is not governed solely by spelling." He goes on to describe the development of spelling based on the stages identified by Richard Gentry (1987). Stead gives suggestions for working with students at each stage of development to encourage their independence and development of writing.

The second part of the book, "Explorations in Action," focuses on five specific formats of nonfiction writing including instructional writing, descriptive reports, scientific explanations, persuasive writing, and nonfiction narrative. In each chapter he takes us into a classroom and shows each step of the process with children. Stead begins with an overview of the particular text type, breaking down the purpose, listing forms it can take, identifying the text structure and language features, and giving an example produced by a primary-aged student of the text type. My only complaint is the lack of real-world examples. As a teacher, I need to see the goal we are working toward within the genre and my students need to see what they are aspiring to accomplish, beyond the classroom assignment. This way I can better understand how to break the task down for students and increase the complexity for students when they are ready, rather than assume that all my students will produce the same end product.

At the beginning of each nonfiction writing study, Stead encourages

I resent not only that I am treated as though "cute" is more important than substance, but that my students are not capable of rigorous academic work.

teachers to assess their students by having them attempt the particular genre before instruction begins. This way teachers are not wasting time teaching what students already know and can focus on those areas where students need instruction. To help with this assessment, he provides a rubric for each genre that includes purpose, craft, research skills, and surface features (mechanics). The rubric can easily be adapted to fit the individual needs of a particular classroom (and stretched to apply to higher grades as well). What I like best about the rubric is that it doesn't focus only on correctness. Instead the craft of the particular genre is considered including the structure, language features, and the writer's voice as the heart of the assessment. This is another place where real-world sample would be helpful. The rubric items could then be examined using both the student sample and the real-world sample, then compared to help develop instruction that meets the needs of the writer.

Throughout the book, Stead makes his own pedagogy clear. He believes that young children can be successful with nonfiction writing, that it has value even when it is not directly connected to school, district, or state assessments, and that time spent on an in-depth study pays off in the long run. *Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K-3* by Tony Stead allowed me to push that chip off my shoulder. This book includes "cute" pictures, endearing student comments, and is also filled with content about teaching nonfiction writing. Students are shown inquiring into topics that interest them, researching to find information, and writing about what they have learned so others can learn from them. As I read through Stead's ideas, I thought about my own approach to nonfiction in the classroom. I could see ways to make my own nonfiction writing instruction even more rich and rigorous. I considered new ideas to incorporate and ideas that would need adjustment to fit my own approaches. *Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K-3* is a resource that respects young students and their teachers.

With special thanks to Frank Barone. . .

Words You Inspire

Words are like clothes that you stash away in a closet
and take out for special occasions
Just right, made to fit, dashing

Take them for a stroll in the park,
juggle with them, fling them up in the air,
follow them, catch them.
Skip over 'is' 'nice' 'and' 'there'.

When you peer through a window,
the Christmas lights glistening inside,
oohs and aaahs appear.

Some words like to be fondled and cuddled.
Put them under your pillow
for sweet dreams and pleasure.
Others, like the raspberries on my yogurt,
make me feel I deserve everything.

—Felice Hubbard, SDAWP 2000

Project Notes...

Congratulations to Sam Patterson! *His article "How Much is Too Much...: is the winner of the Journal of College Admissions 2006 Muir Award best contribution to the Journal in the last year (2005). He has been invited to accept his reward and speak at the National Association for College Admission Counseling in Pittsburgh this coming fall.*

Kudos...*The Greater San Diego Council of Teachers of English honored Debbie Beldock (SDAWP '86) and Karen Wroblewski (SDAWP '89) at their annual awards dinner on May 31 at the University of San Diego. Debbie, Director of Instruction and Curriculum, San Diego City Schools, and Karen, Principal at San Diego High Educational Complex/School of International Studies, San Diego City Schools, both received GSDCTE's Awards for Leadership in English/Language Arts.*

PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITIES

English Journal NCTE

July 2007:
Issues and Innovations
Submission Deadline:
July 15, 2006

We are looking for articles that focus on teaching English language arts in a cultural and political climate that challenges us to rethink, revise and, perhaps, resist.
Issues challenge our thinking or ways of acting. For example, high-stakes testing and the culture of accountability associated with it affect curriculum, instruction, and our interactions with students. How do you address such issues? More and more students are entering school with some proficiency in a language other than English. How do you help them excel in academic work that is primarily in English? The achievement gaps in literacy persist. How have you helped students who have not traditionally been successful in school? An innovation can be an approach, program, technology, or something else. As you teach in the time of testing, what innovations help you and your students reach their full intellectual potential? What new understanding or approach in the past ten years has evolutionized your teaching and how? How have you changed your assessment of reading and writing, for example? Articles should focus on the impact of the issue and/or innovation on secondary school students. We will look for a variety of topics, but all articles should offer practical, classroom-based suggestions; reflect sound research and theory; and interest secondary school English language arts teachers.

Manuscripts should be directed to: Louann Reid, Editor, English Dept., 1773 Campus Delivery, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1773. Editorial correspondence may be sent to the above address or to English-Journal@ColoState.edu. For inquiries, you may phone 970-491-6417

Voices from the Middle

September 2007:
Reading the Signs: Vocabulary
Submission Deadline:
November 1, 2006

We are well aware of the strong relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension. Good readers have strong vocabularies. This issue invites us to take a closer look at what we do to increase vocabulary acquisition in our classrooms. In what ways are students given access to opportunities to engage in wide reading so that they can be exposed to new words? What strategies do you use to enable students to revisit newly learned words in different contexts? How do we motivate students to want to learn new words? What role does student choice play in vocabulary learning in your classroom? How do we engage students to apply newly learned words in meaningful ways? To submit a manuscript: 1) submit three copies of your manuscript along with an electronic copy sent via email in a Microsoft Word file to *Voices from the Middle* Editorial Office, Department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 6900 North Loop 1604 West, San Antonio, TX 78249, voices@utsa.edu; and 2) attach a cover letter that includes your name, affiliation, home and work addresses and telephone numbers, fax number, email address, and issue for which you are submitting.

Language Arts NCTE

November 2007:
The Power of Words
Submission Deadline:
July 15, 2006

Family members, preservice teachers, educators, and researchers care deeply about education, but we often talk past one another because we are not sure what we mean. What does literacy mean? Reading the world? Language arts? Critical? Equity? Scaffolding? Assessment? In addition, our students have their own ways with words. What do words about reading, writing, and talking mean to them? In this issue we seek manuscripts that address the ways words gain power and shape learning among people in particular contexts inside and outside school settings. Send submissions to: *Language Arts* Editorial Office, School of Teaching and Learning, The Ohio State University, 333 Arps Hall, 1945 N. High St. , Columbus, Ohio 43210. Phone number: 614-292-755. E-mail: langarts@osu.edu.

DIALOGUE

Call for Manuscripts

FALL 2006
The Revision of
Teaching and Learning

Submission Deadline:
August 31, 2006

E.M. Forester once wrote: "...what is always provocative in a work of art: roughness of surface." As we all know, mistakes are inevitable in the teaching and learning process. The willingness to learn from our mistakes, though, is what seems to matter most and often brings us closer to effective teaching and learning. What are some "roughness of surface" experiences you've had in your teaching or writing life that informed your teaching? How do you revisit mistakes? What is your revision process? Do you allow your students to critique you and offer their feedback? We look forward to hearing from you so we can celebrate and learn from each other's mistakes.

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:

Dialogue UCSD/SDAWP
9500 Gilman Drive, 0036
La Jolla, CA 92093 - 0036
Email: moonbeam5@cox.net
jenny4moore@hotmail.com

Calendar of Events

Open Institute Programs

What About Writing? K-8
June 26 - June 30
8:00 - 3:00
Facilitators:
Shivani Burrows-Goodwill,
Wendy Weisel-Bosworth
and Kathleen Phillips

Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum K-6: Taking a Closer Look
July 24 - July 28
8:00 - 3:00
Facilitators:
Jan Hamilton and Judy Leff

Reasons to Write! Writing Across the Curriculum in Middle and High School
July 5 - July 14 (8 days)
8:00 - 3:00
Facilitators: Becky Gemmell
and Sara Watts

Young Writers' Camp Programs

Introduction to College Writing
A workshop for
11th and 12th grade
high school students
July 17 - July 21
8:30 - 11:30

The College Admission and Application Essay
A workshop for high school
seniors and community college
transfer students
July 17 - July 21
12:00 - 3:00

For information regarding any of the SDAWP's summer programs, please visit our web site at:
http://create.ucsd.edu/current.htm
or call our office at
858-534-2576
to request a registration booklet.

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http://create.ucsd.edu/sdawp/

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