From Fear to Confidence

Dialogue

A Publication of the San Diego Area Writing Project

Spring 2009

Inside...

From Practice to Publishing:

An Interview with SDAWP Fellow Bob Infantino

An essential component of SDAWP's mission statement is that knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from those who teach, write, and research. Bob Infantino, SDAWP 1980, is one such teacher. He's recently completed a book, Tough Choices for Teachers, *co-authored with Rebecca Wilke and published by Rowman & Littlefield Education. The book contains 12 case studies and a role play about ethical challenges that could be faced by new teachers or student teachers. Bob Infantino, now retired, spent 43 years in the classroom at various levels, 9-12, undergraduate, masters and doctoral. He's served on 35 dissertation committees as chair or member while at USD. He was co-director of SDAWP from 1980-1991, having attended 11 summer institutes and facilitating outreach programs for teachers of underrepresented students.*

Frank Barone, SDAWP 1977, says of Bob Infantino, "While I appreciated Bob's leadership during my years at the Writing Project, the most memorable moments for me came at those times when he invited me to present poetry to his university students to reacquaint them with the pleasures and uses of metaphor across the curriculum. And I still remember that Bob wrote with his students, of course, and always wrote well."

In this issue, it is with great pleasure that we share a recent interview with Bob Infantino, a fellow whose extensive career and contributions to the field of education exemplify the important role of teacher as researcher and writer.

The Dialogue: Tell us about your book.

Bob Infantino: The book my colleague Rebecca Wilke and I wrote has as its main purpose to assist new teachers in understanding that they may be faced with ethical decisions they were not and are not prepared for. To make good choices, they need to understand processes and principles that will enable them to choose wisely and well. So after two introductory chapters, one on the purposes of the book and one on principles of ethical decision making, the book presents a "dirty dozen" cases or scenarios involving new teachers facing tough choices. Each case is based on events that happened in schools, although the names and places are changed to protect the innocent (and the guilty). There are several levels of complexity in each of the cases, as there often are in real life. We urge the teachers in training or teachers in induction programs in schools to think not only about an *immediate* decision but also about the ways in which they go about making the *eventual* decision. It is the latter which could have the most lasting impact on the lives of these teachers and on their interactions.

The Dialogue: What is the role of ethics in education?

Bob Infantino: In 1980, USD received a substantial three-year grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to develop interdisciplinary ethics courses which would meet our upper division ethics/philosophy requirement for undergraduate students. About 10

such courses were developed and taught. Professor Larry Hinman and I team taught the Ethics and Education class 9 times in the subsequent 20 plus years. It is the longest lasting of the original courses, though it scarcely resembles the first course we taught. We went from a rather theoretical, traditional ethics course to a very balanced course integrating theory and practice, using technology more and more as it became available on our campus.

More than one student has told me and Professor Hinman that our class was their favorite of any they had taken at USD—high praise for a requirement that students often suffer through toward the end of college. All of us in education know that we face decisions, large and small, every day in every possible configuration. A human endeavor like teaching often puts people in conflict—not just with their pupils but also with each other, with parents, with school board members and sometimes with the public. In literacy education, we need go no further than the so-called "reading wars" or the No Child Left Behind Act to see the decision making choices that teachers and administrators are faced with regularly.

Our book points out to teachers that good decision-making comes from the strong ethical character that each teacher should possess. But character is developmental, as are teaching abilities and personalities. So understanding principles of ethics and facing theoretical and practical decision making opportunities helps develop the moral character to "do the right thing for the right reasons," as a philosopher might express it.

The Dialogue: How does thinking about ethics trickle down from teacher to student?

Bob Infantino: As I said above, character development is learned as well as taught by all humans. Influences of other people, culture, social status, and education, to name a few, help us develop our ethical skills. So teachers who treat students with respect, who model appropriate conflict resolution skills, and who make good choices in their interactions and curricular choices can have great influence on how their pupils view the world and on the present and future choices they make. Of course it is not a one-shot deal. While we can't alter the neighborhoods our students live in or the socio-economic status of their families, we can and must offer them the best of ourselves, and that includes our moral selves. That's why people are so dismayed when teachers seem to stray from their best behaviors and engage in inappropriate behavior with students or fall into drug or alcohol habits which become evident in their classrooms. The book presents one such scenario, and even writing it was difficult for me because of the very nature of the ethical problem being manifested by the veteran teacher in the case.

The Dialogue: What are the "tough choices" teachers face?

Bob Infantino: Teachers have to make choices every day; some choices are easier than others, for sure. More importantly, they have to develop not only their teaching repertoire but also their decision-making repertoire. How should I decide whether to write a letter of recommendation for a student who is failing my class (Case 1), or why should I not take supplies without permission (Case 7) are just two of the choices we write about. More long-term issues of appropriate and inappropriate interpersonal relationships are also examined (Cases 12, 13). These cases get very murky when the young teachers get released by the people with whom they were in romantic relationship. There

While we can't alter the neighborhoods our students live in or the socio-economic status of their families, we can and must offer them the best of our selves, and that includes our moral selves.

are issues of curriculum choice, of hiring new teachers, of racism and sexism, and of grading complaints by parents. We know these are real ethical choices and hope that new teachers (and even veteran teachers) will take seriously the decision-making processes we propose in the book in order to resolve the dilemmas presented. Ethics scenarios do not suppose one right answer to any dilemma; just as in real dilemmas, right answers often prove elusive. But there are always choices that are better than others, and doing what is right and just is always the best choice.

The Dialogue: What is the practical application of ethics for teachers?

Bob Infantino: In the structure of the text, Rebecca and I try to set up the reader with a preview of the issues in the case. We ask the reader to be aware of all of the stakeholders in the case, whether the readers has faced a similar choice, and what self-application there might be for this new educator. Within the cases, we present mostly inter-personal conflicts, since the actions of moral agents (people) are most often the causes of the dilemmas and their decisions have effects not only on themselves but also on others, often many others (stakeholders). Sometimes new teachers don't think about

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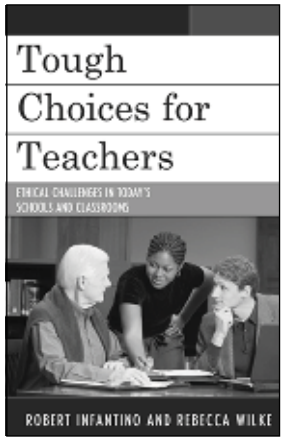
such effects, only on the quick and immediate solution to the problem at hand. They use a principle such as, "Well everybody does it this way here, so I guess I'll to it too" (like skip out of a meeting to go to the beach, or borrow supplies without permission). Such a relativist stance is a weak ethical way of thinking, yet sometimes predominates in certain situations.

The Dialogue: Do you see the possibility of ethical decisions and judgments we face in education changing in these times of rapidly evolving technology? Or are ethics timeless?



Bob Infantino: Ethical decision-making is both timeless and ever-changing. We call on Aristotle to teach us about virtues, and upon Carol Gilligan (1982) to teach us about the influence of gender on the "manly" virtues posited by Aristotle thousands of year ago. We are beginning to understand better the different ways that men and women go about making tough choices. We now know more about the influences of culture since we are able to understand cultures first hand by travel and research rather than just rumor. Technology has certainly influenced the ways we act, but not always for the better. Yet we know and understand more about each other because of technology and thus are able to have empathy and understanding for others' ways of doing things. Professor Hinman suggests that we need to use our moral imaginations in order to make as much moral progress as technological progress, resulting in a better, more just society.

The Dialogue: Every book evolves, from a germ of an idea, to its full form. Tell us about the process of writing the book. How was this endeavor different from previous writing pursuits?

Bob Infantino: Most of my previous writing efforts have been solo. I did a book in 1983, in collaboration with Dr. Ed De Roche, called *Real World Reading and Writing for Teachers and Students*. Rebecca has written two other books. But most of my articles and poetry have been individual efforts. Writing with a colleague had two differences: first, we each had to decide what parts of the book we would produce; and second, decide when and how we would tie everything together. We both had lots of years in classrooms and in teacher education, so the cases were easy to outline. But dialogue among the characters to make them sound like real 21st century people was not always easy. I had to change the name of one of my characters, for example, from Trudy to Kelsey when Rebecca said, "Bob, nobody is named Trudy anymore." Of course she was right. But I had started that case in 1998 when I presented it NCTE/CEL and people were still named Trudy, at least so I thought. We spent a considerable amount of time looking at similar texts and at ways of making ours different. We settled on a formula for the end of each case that I found years ago in an article by Kevin Ryan, a well-known moral educator from Boston College. I wrote him to ask permission to use "the 5 E's of Moral Education" as a template for our cases and he granted permission with enthusiasm. I think he was pleased that someone remembered an article from 1986. We owe him a signed copy of the book soon.

The Dialogue: How did you grow as a learner, writer and teacher as a result of writing this book?

Bob Infantino: Revision, Revision, Revision. I had to re-see parts of the book in order to make it whole. I had more cases to include, but have rightly left them out (maybe they'll be in the second edition). I learned that reviewers can be brutally honest, but also graciously helpful. I learned that if you get your commas and quotes generally in the right spots, the editors welcome your manuscript more readily. I learned to elaborate and condense in the same paragraph. I learned that men and women write differently but can be complementary and complimentary to each other. After seven drafts and nearly a year of writing, I share the deep breaths of my doctoral students when they would exhale and state, usually in a loud voice, "Man, am I glad that's over." And I would reply, "Not until I get a bound copy."

The Dialogue: What is the most important advice you would give a teacher just entering the profession regarding ethics?

Be prepared to make decisions as soon as you put your foot in the classroom. Your decisions will not always be right, but learn from the wrong ones and don't repeat them.

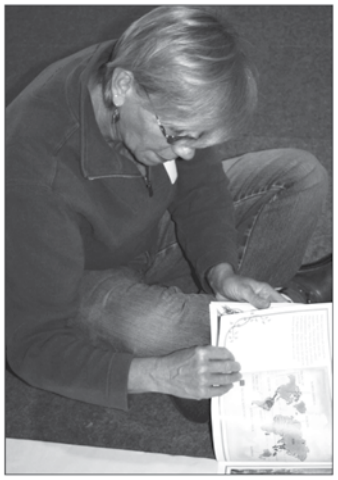
Bob Infantino: Be prepared to make decisions as soon as you put your foot in the classroom. Your decisions will not always be right, but learn from the wrong ones and don't repeat them. Your more experienced colleagues my not be the best sources to help you with important decisions since they may not have made as much moral progress as you might expect. So use their advice as one part of your total decision-making process. You are being watched every day, all day, especially by the pupils in your care. What you do is often more important than what you say. So treat everyone with as much respect as you can muster, and insist that your classroom be a place of safety and comfort for each of your pupils. Be careful of what you put on technological view for others to see and read. Do the "Would I want my mother to see or read this" test. Delete stuff that does not pass. Use your moral imagination to make moral progress in both your career and your life.

(*Tough Choices for Teachers: Ethical Challenges in Today's Schools and Classrooms* is available on the publisher's website at www.rowmaneducation.com. Use promo code 6S9WIL to receive the discounted price of $21.20. The book can also be found and ordered through booksellers.)

SDAWP Spring Conference

Teaching the Writer:
Voices from the Summer Institute

Spring is a time of renewal and the 79 participants at SDAWPs second annual conference had many opportunities to experience the spirit of the season. Held in UCSD's Cross Cultural Center on March 7, the morning event began with continental breakfast and time for socializing. After an introduction by Kim Douillard and a writing warm-up led by Susan Minnicks, four 2008 Summer Institute Teacher Consultants presented in break-out sessions to audiences of SDAWP Fellows and friends. Shannon Falkner explained how to engage students through basic literary theory, while Lisa Harris offered her approach to using mentor texts for non-fiction and research writing. PJ Jeffery provided inspiration for developing an inquiry approach to report of information, and Marla Williams demonstrated how to use photography to help students write meaningful compositions (see the articles that follow). As one participant, who was attending an SDAWP program for the first time, commented, "I was inspired and enlightened by the presentations!" All who attended were able to explore strategies and reflect on writing instruction with a community of educators that—like the growth and newness of spring—always leaves one feeling revitalized.



Dynamic Relationships:
When the Visual Becomes the Rhetorical

By Marla Williams—SDAWP 2008

The famed theorist and writer Susan Sontag once said, "As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of a space in which they are insecure." Having taught many students who would quickly identify themselves as "insecure" writers, I see this lovely sentiment by Sontag as a banner of sorts over both my teaching demonstration from last summer's Invitational Institute and further developed for "SDAWP 2nd Annual Spring Conference: Voices from the Summer Institute." When I initially decided to explore the role that the image can play in crafting good writing, I had no clue exactly how powerful the possession of the photograph was to become.

As a lecturer at San Diego State University in the Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies I am constantly pushing my students to not only understand the rhetorical moves they see other writers make, but to become aware of their own writing choices and actually view their writing task as a series of strategies aimed at bringing their audience into a relationship with the author. During SI and for the spring conference, I chronicled some of the problems I encounter in the classroom—mainly that students have difficulty generating interest in their assignments; they write for the grade and don't actually think, engage, take risks or truly own their own learning. My students who have been pushed by a rigorous departmental curriculum aimed at analysis of argument still don't fully understand their own use of rhetoric.

So last spring with my students, college juniors and seniors enrolled in a course vaguely named "Writing in Various Settings," I set out to see what would happen if I shifted their "Profile" essay, similar to basic feature writing, to a "Photo Essay" and required that they include at least one photo with their writing. I made it clear that they had complete control over their choice of photos. I did not limit the maximum number of photos. I offered no formatting rules and gave no penalty for composition or image quality. They could use expensive software, or do it old school and cut and paste; they could

use someone else's photo borrowed from the Internet and add a works cited page, or they could snap a poor quality picture with a low-resolution camera phone.

My only requirement was that the students had to include a photo, because the goal of the essay and the self-created inspiration for writing became the relationship between the photos and their essays, the word and the image; they had to figure out how to create a dominant impression and a dynamic relationship for their audience. Simply put, they had to think about their writing choices by keeping in mind the overarching question and directions, "What do you want your audience to think and feel as they gaze upon your photo? Write in a way that will allow you reach them. Make it happen."

Indeed, a simple image can bring to life our memories and experiences and can offer us "the possession of a past." A lesson in rhetoric and writing that would not have been, save the photograph.

And that they did. Yen, a graduating senior who had already been accepted to medical school, used the famous photo from the Vietnam War of the young girl fleeing naked from a village bombed with napalm. For the first time Yen told the mother's story as the daughter of the then-mayor of Saigon who had to flee from a rooftop helicopter and immigrate to the U.S. Another student, Dev profiled his best friend's father who spent the 60's hitchhiking around the country. Dev beautifully created the feeling of isolation, loneliness, fear and adventure with sensory language and voice with a photo of an empty roadside stool accompanied by a cardboard sign scribbled with the next destination.

The stories go on and on, students who protested in Venezuela, in-

(Dynamic Relationships continued on page 6)

My Reflections on the Photo of Carrick-a-Rede Ropebridge

(inspired by Marla Williams and Ed Gillet during the SDAWP Spring Conference)

Rob Meza-Ehlert

When I first saw the photograph that my partner, Ed Gillet, selected for this activity, my mind traveled back to a hike I took with friends along the Scottish coastline where a wooden suspension bridge connects the mainland to a tiny crag of rock surrounded by gray ocean waters. Ed's comments opened my eyes to a related, yet very different viewpoint from mine. Ed spent a number of years as the owner of a kayak company and traveled to far-off lands. He shared that viewing the picture brought back memories of seeing such wonderful places while floating on the water; he reveled in the freedom of carving out his own path on the ocean, often completely alone. My initial writing focused on the desire some people have to find solitude and peace in nature, but after listening to Ed's perspective, I wrote the following description of the photo:

People long for a place of solitude; a rugged, windswept spot to step away from the automation of our existence and touch the vastness of the world. This lone rock, the rough remnant of some ancient volcanic explosion, is just such a place. I've hiked to numerous spots like this, searching for significance amidst the solitude. My experiences, however, have always been hemmed in by paths, fences and guardrails.

Ed Gillet spent over twenty years of his life looking at such idyllic settings from a far different perspective: floating atop the surface of the deep in a kayak. Whether paddling along the coast of South America or spending weeks out in the Pacific, Ed lived through the trials and joys of true solitude. His is a perspective that few of us land-lovers will ever experience.

Now, at his current stage in life, Ed is more likely to find his solitude on foot, sharing the same path with sojourners such as myself who seek a more terrestrial form of solitude. I can almost see him crossing that bridge and looking out at the placid ocean. On the other side, I can hear him whisper an encouragement to a fellow traveler, "Go ahead. Get off the path and dive in." I think sometime, someplace, that I will.

As a teacher, I've developed the ability to stay calm and confident in a variety of settings, with both young people and adults. Consequently, I was quite surprised at how nervous I felt as I read my work for the group at the conference. As I stood up front, my voice shook, and I fixed my eyes on the page because I felt overwhelmed in a way that I hadn't felt in years. Somehow writing about Ed's perspective really struck a chord and spoke to me about my own life. Perhaps I've been living a life that is altogether too safe, with plenty of guardrails and signs to keep me on the path.

(Rob plans to take at least one step off that path when he attends the 2009 SDAWP Invitational Institute this summer.)

Photo of Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge in Northern Ireland taken by Marla Williams

(Dynamic Relationships continued from page 5.)
terviewing the photographer and commenting upon liberty and oppression, students investigating the controversial Trestles toll road project by actually surfing the spot for the first time and interviewing and photographing the die hard, bearded surfers who surf it daily, student veterans of Iraq, profiling the lives of forgotten and wounded soldiers at the VA from wars past. All of a sudden, this little essay became a grand project, but it was still only when my affiliation with SDAWP began that I heard for the first time the phrase "student buy-in." And here it was.

For the SDAWP conference, I created an activity in which teacher participants selected a photograph they connected to, and I asked them to talk freely to a partner about what they saw in it. Then I asked them to switch photos with their partner whose photo, experience and connection to it was to become the subject of a mini photo essay. Participants were asked to take time to describe the scene in the photo using vivid language and to develop a couple of interview questions so that they could consider what else readers might want to know and how they might capture their subject's voice to bring human interest to the piece. After this brief writing activity, participants had only three minutes each to conduct an interview, and then it was time to decide on a dominant impression, Each had to become the manipulator. They had to decide how they would represent the specific content of the photograph, the importance of the photo to their partner, and finally their experience and perspective of both.

During this activity, Rob Meza-Ehlert, a social studies teacher at Kearney High partnered with Ed Gillet who chose a photo of Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge that I took in Northern Ireland overlooking Scottish Isles. To Ed this photograph became symbolic of a quiet moment, one of which he rarely speaks.

Indeed, a simple image can bring to life our memories and experiences and can offer us "the possession of a past." A lesson in rhetoric and writing that would not have been, save the photograph.

Friday, February 6, 2009

MyWholeLifeisontheTipofMyTongue.blogspot.com

Kindergarten: Not for Babies

Jennifer Moore—SDAWP 1999

This piece is a post from Jenny Moore's Blog (mywholelifeisonthetipofmytongue.blogspot.com). Are you a Fellow who blogs, either personally or professionally? Send us a sample post or your URL for us to add to an SDAWP "Blogroll." And blog on!

The other night our five-year-old came home with a workbook from Starfall, which is a new curriculum I understand is being incorporated into her kindergarten class. First we had to staple together a little story about a rat named Zac (who encountered some ants, incidentally). Next she read the story aloud to me, and then she was to complete some exercises in her workbook.

I worry that No Child Left Behind makes assumptions based on every child's ability to learn that are spot-on and important—but that don't account for the magic and beauty of a child's spirit...

One of the assignments was to examine a picture and circle the objects with short vowel sounds. Now, my husband and I have had to learn the distinction between short and long vowel sounds, since it's obviously not intuitive (Me: "Honey, long vowel sounds SOUND long, you know, like treeeeeeeeeeeee." Him: "Huh? What about baaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?" We've since surmised that long vowels say their name, a helpful way for at least the parents to remember). I watched our daughter circle ants and the rat and a bag and grass in the illustration. Then she put a circle on part of the tree.

Photo of Jenny's daughter as posted on her blog at mywholelifeisonthetipofmytongue.blogspot.com

"'Tree' has a long vowel sound, honey," I offered helpfully.

"I know, Mom," she concurred, circling the flag and a mat.

"And 'leaf' has a long vowel sound, too, right?"

"Yep," she agreed. "But that's a braaaaaaaaaanch, Mom. Branch. Short vowel for branch."

Duh. Thanks, kiddo.

The last activity was to write a narrative based on a picture related to the little stapled story starring hapless Zac. The workbook helpfully provided a Word Bank (I had never heard of one until I became a teacher) for this writing venture so that one didn't need to worry so much about spelling and could also practice writing and using all those

words with short vowel sounds.

But of course, my daughter didn't want to write about flags and mats and ants and bags and grass. So she ignored the Word Bank and used her own invented spelling to write about the playground and swings—which, to be fair, were present in the picture, so who can blame her? Off she went writing whatever the heck she wanted, basically, and I didn't feel like stifling her long-vowel narrative. And when she wanted to write the word "were," she sounded it out: "w," "e," "r"...pause. "Oh yeah," she nodded. "There's a silent 'e' at the end of it." Her tongue popped out of the side of her mouth as she added that "e" on to the end of "wer."

Meanwhile, I was shaking my head like a dog does when it's about to shake water from its entire body. Like, "Silent WHAT?"

WE'VE GOT TO CONTINUE TO CHALLENGE CHILDREN, SHOWING THEM AND OURSELVES JUST HOW MUCH IS POSSIBLE, BUT WE ALSO MUST ALLOW THEM TO SHOW US WHAT IS RELEVANT.

So my daughter knows what "Silent E"s are and the difference between Short Vowels and Long Ones. What the heck are they teaching in kindergarten these days, anyway? It turns out I don't even know what my kid *knows*. I don't know what she *knows*, and I don't know *what* she knows, if you know what I mean. It's crazy. I'm pretty sure this kindergarten is not my kindergarten. It's both heartbreaking and reassuring.

Here's what's reassuring: all this focus on No Child Left Behind means someone has to be paying attention to every child's ability to learn. Conceivably, gone are the days when nice children who try hard can slip through the cracks and make it through 12th grade without knowing or showing much. According to NCLB tenets, each child will be achieving at grade level standards by 2013, or ELSE. Educators all over our state are working hard to make this happen. Children are learning about things and using terminology invented since our grade-school years. What's more: they're learning about their learning. It's impressive.

But it's heartbreaking. As a school administrator, I have sat in many meetings about Accountability and Achievement and Mastery of Skills, and the theme is always We Must Get Every Kid There. It sounds really noble but also simple: We Can Do This! However, any ONE of us who has sat with ONE kindergartener at the kitchen table doing homework for ONE evening has to wonder how ONE kindergarten teacher gets 20 kids through ONE activity successfully in ONE day, while identifying who needs extra help and then providing it. And here we are the fortunate parents of a well-prepared kindergartener with no special needs. She is well prepared because we have books and read to her but also because she is just That Kind of Kid who wakes up in the morning and wants to go write stuff.

Frankly, she's the kind of kid who delights so much in the structure of school that she almost needs breaks from it. Which is not to say that the children who struggle with the structure of school—or for whom structure is a foreign concept in and of itself—don't need those breaks too. I worry that No Child Left Behind makes assumptions based on every child's ability to learn that are spot-on and important—but that don't account for the magic and beauty of a child's spirit, which can get lost somewhere in that shuffle of standards and vowel sounds. A spirited teacher can help make sense of standards, and put them in their place. Our daughter is fortunate to have such a teacher.

Every so often, we've got to back off Zac the Rat and the Word Bank and just laugh at how silly is his picnic at the playground. We've got to search for the meaning—and the joy—in short and long vowel sounds. We've got to continue to challenge children, showing them and ourselves just how much is possible, but we also must allow them to show us what is relevant. Every child can learn; every child can achieve at standard. We are banking on that. But I am not sure every child's talents and gifts will properly emerge and flourish in this institution of schooling as it is currently designed.

We all know people who sucked at school and who thrive at life.

The question is, are we properly prepared to listen and respond to the Children Left Silenced?

Recollection

Dinah Smith—SDAWP 2008

Always prepared for inspection,

Presenting calmly a fine complexion,

Turning away from any objection,

Rejecting emphatically imperfection,

Unaware of the subtle inflection,

That might have led

to another selection—

Missing opportunity for connection,

To see my own reflection,

Already whole and pure perfection.

For my protection,

And to ensure no rejection,

I always chose the direction

Offering the most affection,

So I'd feel no dejection

Or, God forbid, experience

Correction

Because I missed my own election.

How could I have missed

the interjection:

Needing approval is deep infection.

Summer 2008 Young Writers' Camp

The Author

By Grace McGuire

The Author is born
When words integrate.
To create.
Your first poem.
Your first pair of wings.
A superhero.
It can fly.
Poetry.
It has super strength.
Observation.
The Author is born.

Summer Vacation

By Lenni Elbe

Summer a hall of fun
world of poems
butterflies flying
the chorus of the
wind in my ears
the sun sets
I jump into the pool
the cold water
hitting my face.

Colors

By Lauren Cook

If a color could represent me,
it would be,
The green of the grass, the green of the trees,
the blue of the breeze,
Orange representing creativity, pink and red for energy,
Yellow: the sun shining for me!
Brown for the tree trunks,
Brown for traveling trunks,
White for the clean sheet of paper
representing my life.
Grey for the pencil, constantly writing.
And grey for the mistakes that everyone makes,
Purple for my grapes, and
Turquoise for the shallow waters of the ocean.
But black for trouble I get into
And innocent white, again, saying,
"I didn't do it."
All together, I'm a rainbow,
Colors.

My Circle Poem

By Emily Mendoza

I am living like there is no **tomorrow.**
Tomorrow starts a new beginning **everyday.**
Everyday brings new stories and new **memories.**
Memories never forgotten, can either be bad or **good.**
Good friends leave footprints in your heart **forever.**
Forever changing, while slowly taking your **time.**
Time being everlasting never **stopping.**
Stopping to enjoy your last **moments.**
Moments can change someone in an **instant.**
Instantly people can **change.**
Changing my thoughts, but never changing me.

Summer

By Hannah Montante

Summer brings memories and freedom from school
Summer takes away rusty, dusty school days
And brings cannonballs at the pool
Or jumping in feet first
Summer brings giggles and joyful laughter
Summer brings mischief and crazy antics
Allowing daydreams to race across your head
Summer lasts long enough
For everyone to rustle and squish at the pool
And at least have fun

Where I'm From

By Maddy Horner

I'm from the washed-up seaweed,
the salty rocks in a wide expanse of water,
the melty, gooey chocolate in the
bottom of your Christmas stocking.
I'm from the splattered paint of your anger,
The soothing voice that sings you
"Good Night Irene."
I'm from a person who escaped misery.
I'm from a single piece of cotton candy
melting and bringing joy
to the taste buds at the tip
of your tongue.
I'm from the seed you planted last year.
I'm from the beautiful rose
that brings you happiness.
I'm from the threadbare blanket
that loves you so much.
I'm from your heart.

Reading, Math and Writing

Lisa Harris
SDAWP 2008

With a furtive glance towards the door, I hurriedly yank the plasticized covers off the phonics books and toss the worksheets into the recycle pile. You know, the pages with the word box at the top and the directions that state, "Please choose the correct word from the box that completes the sentences below," or you might have a reading response as a prompt which almost always initiates this question from your students, "How many sentences do I have to write?" —Hardly authentic writing. Once again I realize as the year concludes that the students only used five to ten pages out of these thick, tree-killing books. As the guilt mounts I wonder, *"Will I be discovered and castigated?" "Why do I let the office continue to order these books for me when they are hardly used?"*

With a furtive glance towards the door, I hurriedly yank the plasticized covers off the phonics books and toss the worksheets into the recycle pile.

Then I reflect and ask myself, *"Why don't I use these books more?"* Instantly I know the answer. These books, in my experience, do not help students become better readers and writers. They lack context and meaning, so the blanks are filled in and quickly the concepts are forgotten. In fact, the few pages the students did only helped them learn how to read directions and become familiar with the language and format used on standardized tests. This knowledge only takes five to ten pages to attain.

What *did* help my students become better readers and writers this year? As I analyzed the students' benchmark writing assessments and reading grades, the obvious progress encourages me. I am amazed at the perseverance of my students to produce a book of poetry and a research book about a habitat of their choice, both of which took over two months to complete. I also observe how confident they are when asked to write in different subject areas such as math or social studies. How did we get there? It certainly didn't happen by filling out blanks on worksheets. I realize it entailed the consistent time spent teaching and writing daily in Writer's Workshop, and studying writing craft during our Read Aloud (Story time). How true it is as Lucy Calkins, author of *The Art of Teaching Writing* says, "They will learn to write by writing, and by living with the sense of 'I am one who writes'"(1994).

Purposefully, four days a week, I carve out a forty-five-minute period of the school day and label it Writer's Workshop.

As a teacher of young children in kindergarten and first grade, I have a unique opportunity and an important obligation to teach writing as a separate school subject, just like reading and math. Lucy Calkins writes, "In some districts it is acceptable for teachers to say, 'I teach writing across the curriculum' and for those teachers to then not regard writing as a subject in the school day. I regard this as a problem." She further states, "Children's success in many disciplines is utterly reliant on their abilities to write; children deserve writing to be a subject that is taught and studied just like reading and math" (2006). With lower class size and less demanding content standards in the primary elementary grades, I believe we can teach writing first while embedding and supporting it with science, social studies, and health concepts. Too often writing is merely assigned and/or sprinkled throughout the instructional day.

Purposefully, four days a week, I carve out a forty-five-minute period of the school day and label it Writer's Workshop. Along with Reading Rotations and Math, this teaching block constitutes a cornerstone of my instructional day. A typical workshop starts with a mini-lesson, ten to fifteen minutes long, where I engage in direct writing instruction with the entire class. Following the mini-lesson the students then write for twenty minutes. During this time I facilitate by helping students choose a topic, inviting students to share to get others started, helping students sound out words or compose sentences, and assisting with revision. Writing time isn't always silent. In fact you may hear the following chorus throughout the time period, "What topic are you writing about?"

"Aliens!"

"Aliens again?"

"Yeah, I just love writing about space." You may hear me ask, "Who wants to share their lead?" Of course Mira's hand will shoot up and she will give all of us an excellent example. "Zap, crack, pop! Watch out, the lightning just split the tree in half!" The last ten minutes of the workshop is reserved for student sharing, the highlight for students. This activity motivates students to write and is absolutely essential to the workshop model. During sharing, students are taught to listen carefully and comment specifically on student writing in the form of compliments and questions. For example, students might offer the following, "It made me laugh when you had the cereal talk to the boy." Or you might hear, "You used a lot of color and detail in your illustrations. It makes your book exciting!" Of course students are anxious for their turn to share and are notoriously impatient, so it is imperative that Writer's Workshop is taught consistently, at least four days a week. Then most children will have a chance to share and receive feedback on their writing once a week.

Toward the end of the year, our school had its annual "Community Read-in." This is a day designated to invite professionals from the community to read in all the classrooms and share how reading impacts their lives. When our representative, a former space shuttle engineer, read to our class, she began to question the children as to their favorite part of the story and why. Immediately the hands shot up and Jack offered, "I liked the way the author used personification to give the story voice. She is having the animals talk and act just like people." Elizabeth added, "She also used sound effects words (onomatopoeia) to make the story come alive." This commentary, totally unprompted, placed a look of incredulous shock and joy on the face of our volunteer. She then asked the children to define personification and alliteration for her, and confidently and succinctly, the children did so. When this music reached my ears I knew, without a doubt, the students really did get it! They had internalized these concepts and knew them well.

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Various mini-lessons taught throughout the year may include: developing writing fluency, organization, focusing on one topic, making books complete with cover, title page, and dedication, writing in different genres such as narrative and nonfiction, using vivid verbs and specific nouns, identifying and utilizing writing craft such as alliteration, personification, simile, and text manipulation.

One might wonder how I can honestly say that my students really understood and internalized these concepts. After all, they are only kindergartners and 1st graders. I would answer: in addition to the evidence I saw in their writing, I heard it in their language. "Mom, look at this poem—I used alliteration here. You see how each word starts with the same sound?" or "Dad, do you like the way I started my habitat book? I borrowed the idea from another author and changed it to fit my habitat." It brought tears to my eyes and a lump to my throat as my students excitedly shared their writing at Open House.

How did we get there? I'm firmly convinced the answer is consistent time spent teaching and writing in Writer's Workshop.

Many teachers balk at this point, stating many barriers such as, "Who has time to grade all those papers or to give feedback consistently to so many students?" Other barriers teachers mention include: we don't have time to teach writing separately and still cover all the curriculum standards: the district hasn't supplied a systematic writing program for us to follow: we lack common understanding of what writing is and what it should look like at each grade level: or, we don't even have confidence in our own writing abilities.

When I contemplated these barriers I was hit with the realization that the problems didn't center on the students: instead, it rested uncomfortably on the shoulders of the teachers and school district. What can be done to rectify this situation? It simply cannot be ignored any longer. As Kelly Gallagher states, "If Langer and Applebee are correct—that good writing develops careful thinking and that writing is the cornerstone of producing literate human beings—then don't we have the responsibility that reaches far beyond simply covering our courses content?" (2006). Yes, we do have an awesome, often overwhelming responsibility to teach our students how to write and think.

As I consider my own journey and evolution as a writing teacher I realize how complex and time consuming it is. There just isn't a one-size-fits-all writing program a school district can purchase. It takes a lot of professional development and personal commitment to become an effective writing teacher. Attending writing seminars, reading professional works, and joining a writing cohort in our school district with other writing teachers willing to share their successes and frustrations have all helped me down this

path. At individual school sites perhaps grade-level planning, teacher mentoring, or departmentalization can help instruct students in a more effective and efficient manner. I know we all can't be experts in every subject; therefore, elementary teachers who teach multiple subjects must depend on each other for assistance and support. Next year a fellow first-grade teacher and I will team teach. I will teach Writer's Workshop to both our classes and she will teach math. We hope sharing our expertise with more children and the opportunity to concentrate on one academic subject versus two will raise the quality of instruction for all our students. The first steps in achieving excellent writing in the classrooms are teachers willing to be interdependent, willing to change and challenge ourselves, and willing to carve out that precious time each day to teach writing.

Primary students have so much potential. It is imperative that they begin to see themselves as writers, experience success, and build upon that writing foundation as they progress through the elementary grades. As theologian and author Charles Swindoll writes, "Works follow faith. Behavior follows belief. Fruit comes after the tree is well-rooted"(1990). My hope and desire is to see other colleagues join me in this essential endeavor of teaching writing as a school subject, and instead of recycling so many unused worksheets, we will use paper productively for students' journals, reports, and student-made books.

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Where I Come From

M.G. Williams—SDAWP 2008

Because I never know where to tell people I'm from,
they always want to know.
I tell them I'm from Stockton,
But in my heart I know I'm from New Orleans.
Where I'm from, I'm not allowed to be from.
I wasn't born or raised there,
A hurricane interrupted my chance to earn my birthright.

Where I come from they eat red beans and rice on Mondays
We watch parades from the neutral ground on Napoleon
And I make groceries at the A & P.
Would you believe me if you knew, I bleed purple and gold?

Where I'm from is the corner of Fourth and Camp,
And where South Scott meets Canal.
I did grow up in New Orleans.
I saw humidity soaked flowers bloom
and drench the air with the sweet scent of magnolias and honeysuckle,
And I saw friends get lost in the democratic, always open, we'll-accept-anyone bars on the cocaine-laden dark side of Decatur.

Where I'm from, you walk down the street, you look people in the eye and smile.
In the beginning, you smile in gracious acknowledgement
and say "Morning" to your elders.
Then you learn to purse your lips, open your eyes wide with power
And offer up the head nod in feigned respect as you pass the company of men.
Where I'm from, you have to tell people you won't be a victim.

Where I'm from we eat at Theo's Pizza, Juan's Flying Burrito and Dante's Kitchen.
Where I'm from we eat whatever we want, drink more than we should
And then drive home through narrow, pothole-spotted streets lined with oak trees, shotguns and run-down camel-back houses.
Where I'm from porch sittin' is an art and excess is still not enough.

Where I'm from there are natives and then there's everyone else.
There are transients and gutter punks, west bankers and blind tourists.
Where I'm from there are kings of krewes and widows of the projects.

Where I'm from darkness lasts longer than decades
The battles of fine cultures, greedy nations and blended races emerge in the jazz-lit smoky nightclub, on the iron-laced balconies
And from the tears of those whose heart the city devours.
Where I'm from is haunted by its opulent past and bleak future.
Where I'm from will quietly suffocate your soul
And if, when, you leave her—
You leave a broken child, forever unaware of all you left behind
But acutely aware of that which you will never regain.

In Your House I Long To Be

Lisa Muñoz, SDAWP 2008

Ok, so I'm listening to Audioslave (hence the title) as I'm grading papers and I'm distracted. Not just by the music, but by my thoughts. My husband, Alex, wrote this huge Humanities paper on Nietzsche's ideologies and how they relate to the decadence of society today. I gave Alex ideas and resources, and he honestly did me a favor by letting me "teach" him what I know. When I start reading and thinking about various perspectives I get so immersed that it's all I do. This past weekend, my family and friends listened to me prattle on and on about seven or eight different philosophical concepts and how they pertain to society, life, religion—the whole world—for, I don't know, every waking second of every hour. Oh, did I tell you I'm going to be a renowned philosopher someday? Yeah, I don't exactly have philosophical theories per se, but I read a bunch and talk a lot, so I'm sure I'll be able to firm up ideas soon.

Anyway, Nietzsche wrote about this concept of the "Superman," and I very much would like to know how to become superman… um superwoman. By the end of the weekend, I decided I would become the rare, extraordinary human he writes about. He began "The Antichrist" (by the way, I'm Christian, so go work out that paradox) with "This book belongs to a select few. Perhaps none of them yet live." Then he described this super human: (s)he is truly honest in all intellectual matters (I'm still working out what that means) and must be accustomed to living away from civilization, above the "gossip of politics and national egotism" (I think I've failed on both counts).

But! His main argument was that people should think for themselves, rather than follow "herd mentality" (aka mankind). Well, I'm all about my own ideas. I mean, I've accepted years ago that I don't think like most people. I'm okay with that.

So, I decided on Monday that I would be amazing, but by Tuesday I was exhausted with the task and had nearly given up. Here's the deal: teaching sometimes is the equivalent of being in an abusive relationship. You're told you're not good enough, even when you've stayed up till three the night before, making sure lesson plans were perfect and all essays were graded. You're told to do and be more, even when you regularly work seven days a week, missing birthdays and Sunday family lunches. You get to your class, ready to expand minds and change lives (or at least get them to grasp the concept of the comma) and only three students show up. And, you get the random student who verbally abuses, disregards, and patronizes you, even though you've shown that student the utmost respect. For these reasons, the job can feel pretty emotionally and physically draining. Yet, you keep coming back, like the injured, jaded soul that you are, to start up another semi-dysfunctional relationship the following semester.

On Tuesday night I had directed an especially insightful class discussion, followed by an unpleasant (and highly inappropriate) outburst from one student. I'm usually all about specifics in my writing, but they just aren't important in this case.

What is relevant is the fact that I let a student throw me off track for the rest of the night. I did manage to compose myself in around thirty seconds to make it through my three-hour night class without breaking down or ending early, so in that sense, I prevailed. But when I got home, I fumed, complained, and dawdled. One incident allowed me to waste precious hours that could have been spent cuddling with my husband, or, more realistically, grading papers.

Thus, I realized I am nowhere near a superwoman. I won't even become Batgirl at this rate.

Basically, according to Nietzsche, I need to be above all that taints and clouds my path and goals. Not there yet. On the other hand, I don't teach because of some vague, impersonal sense of "duty," which is a step in the right direction. In "Morality as Anti-Nature" Nietzsche wrote, "What could destroy us more quickly than working, thinking, and feeling without any inner necessity, without any deeply personal choice, without pleasure—as an automaton of 'duty'?" He promoted intrinsic desires and motivations rather than extrinsic ones. I teach because I am compelled by forces deeper than any monetary or social gain. When I was around five, I used to teach my dolls letters and numbers. I would prop them up and write on my little chalkboard. I would encourage my stuffed pug and plastic Shamu to finish their homework and would tell them they were on the right track.

Basically, according to Nietzsche, I need to be above all that taints and clouds my path and goals. Not there yet. On the other hand, I don't teach because of some vague, impersonal sense of "duty," which is a step in the right direction.

As with writing, I can't imagine not teaching. Maria Montessori, echoed this sentiment by saying, "Everyone has a special tendency, a special vocation, modest perhaps, but certainly useful." While I know I've found mine, I don't think it has necessarily made life easier. But, what a life. I have an opportunity to work with at least 140 students a semester. Imagine the potential.

Last night, I shared this with Alex by emailing it, and he spent about an hour writing non-stop while I

was sleeping. This is a big deal, as I've always wanted him to write me something. So this would have been his first time. Anyway, this morning, as I woke up, he said he loved reading about my ideas so much (you'd think that he'd get enough of it living with me!) that he felt compelled to write back his own views. By the way, today he will present his huge final project in order to graduate, yet he sacrificed an extra hour of sleep to write me back. Just as he was about the hit send, he accidentally deleted it all.

Ironically, he was writing about the absurdity of life and the philosophy of absurdism. He questioned his own purpose in life and asked me (and himself) why he's even trying to find meaning. He said he didn't have the energy to write me again, so he emailed me a quote from the *Myth of Sisyphus* by Camus: "If there is no meaning in life, why live? If you feel as though there is no meaning in life, is it worth suicide? No. I have the freedom to choose what I want to do. Life doesn't make sense, but death doesn't either. I decide not to kill myself. I decide to live my life knowing that life has no meaning. I will live my life as if it has meaning."

He then wrote, "I'm tired and sad that I wrote so much to you, only to make such a stupid mistake. It really shows how absurd life can be."

And yet, we will continue to look for purpose in our daily lives, even if it is all an illusion. Even if we are stuck in the cave that Plato wrote about, looking straight ahead and admiring mere shadows, I will continue to make my life worthwhile. A student once told me (after I was particularly animated about sea life and my desire to learn more about the depths of the ocean) that I need five lives to live out the passions I have (if you knew how many interests I have, you'd think so, too). But why not this life?

Quite importantly, Plato said that we are all-knowing souls before birth. Then, as we live this illusory life, we forget everything and have to "relearn" it, or as I like to say, remember it. I want to remember it all. Is that so much to ask?

MUSE BOX

Stacey Goldblatt, SDAWP 1999

In his book *The Courage to Write: How Writers Transcend Fear*, author Ralph Keyes asserts:

> *Considering directly how scary writing can be, and why, can do more to facilitate writing than a dozen classes on technique...Finding the courage to write does not involve erasing or 'conquering' one's fears. Working writers aren't those who have eliminated their anxiety. They are the ones who keep scribbling while their heart races and their stomach churns and who mail manuscripts with trembling fingers. The key difference between writers who are paralyzed by fear and those who are merely terrified is that...the latter come to terms with their anxieties. They learn how to keep writing even as fear tries to yank their hand from the page. They find the courage to write.*

We all want to write. We believe in it. We know that when we write with our students, we model the joys and obstacles we as writers face. But what's getting in the way of your own writing? What stops you from sending out your manuscript? Write about what fears cause roadblocks in your writing. What prevents you from publishing that piece you have tucked away in your mind or even your filing cabinet? Challenge yourself to write with a racing heart and mail your manuscript off despite trembling fingers.

For inspiration, take a peek at the National Writing Project website for some possible places to send your work:

http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource_topic/being_a_writer

SDAWP NOTES

Congratulations to Divona Roy, SDAWP 1996, whose ninth grade student, Erin Singer, won first place in the CATE writing contest. This year's contest topic was "change." Erin wrote about her experience in the fourth grade when she couldn't run, and she was made fun of for it. Her teacher helped her overcome her insecurity. Her personal narrative was published in the February edition of the *California English Journal.*

Kudos to Patricia Jeffery, SDAWP 2008. Eleven of her students were selected as sweepstakes winners in this year's San Diego City Schools History Day competition. The kids were required to make a poster describing a person in history and his/her legacy (using only 350 words). They competed at the county level on March 14th.

Congratulations to Karen Wroblewski, SDAWP 1989. As principal of San Diego High School of International Studies, she has been named the Magnet Schools of America National Principal of the Year. This award recognizes an outstanding school leader who has succeeded in providing innovative programs that promote equity, diversity, and academic excellence for students in magnet schools. Karen's award was announced during the Magnet Schools of America conference held in Charlotte, North Carolina, April 27-29, 2009.

PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITIES

FacultyShack
Call for Submissions

FacultyShack—started by teachers for teachers—is an online publication, providing educators with a thoughtful and often humorous look at the realities we face. For the past seven years *FacultyShack* has served as an alternative to traditional, scholarly, education journals. We offer interesting looks at teaching life written in non-edese; if you want to laugh at the craziness of the world that we deal with everyday, then *FacultyShack* is the place for you. We have no strict parameters for article topics (mullet haircuts and multicultural literature—do you see a theme here?). We are looking for thoughtful and/or funny articles about new teaching ideas, the state of education, specific curriculum area concerns, or observations on students, teachers or administrators.

The journal serves as a clearinghouse for new approaches to classroom challenges and provides a forum for ongoing discussion of complex educational questions. If you have an article idea that you would like to share, please submit it to us. Published first-time authors get a free (and fine looking) *FacultyShack* T-shirt. Now, what academic journal offers that? For more information, please visit: www.facultyshack.org/

Voices from the Middle

International Literacy
Deadline: September 1, 2009

The world is shrinking as globalization brings us closer to people around the world. We want to widen the focus of this call to include the following: What kinds of literacy projects are happening in countries around the world? What aspects of literacy are currently drawing attention in your country? What can we learn from your best literacy practices? How do literacy practices compare across different countries?

We also invite articles from American teachers and researchers that address the following questions: What literacy projects have you and your students engaged in that involve other countries? How has current technology opened the door to international literacy practices? What projects have your students been involved in that support the literacy development of students in underdeveloped countries? Are you involved in other international literacy practices, projects, initiatives, and issues that would be of interest to VM readers?

For guidelines, please visit: www.dev.ncte.org/journals/vm/write

Language Arts
NCTE

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

Classroom Notes Plus
NCTE

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

DIALOGUE

Call for Manuscripts

Fall 2009 Issue
Submission Deadline:
July 30, 2009

Choices in the Classroom: The Everyday Judgments of Teachers

"Teachers make hundreds of decisions every day about how to allocate their time, express ideas to pupils, introduce new concepts, and teach fresh skills. They have to decide when to assist pupils and when to leave them alone...which teaching strategies to employ, how to handle a recalcitrant child, and so on. Other decisions involve judgments about allocations of grades, classroom management, curriculum implementation, task differenitiation and pupil assessment." Denis Hayes, Primary Education: The Key Concepts.

Relate a decision or judgment call you have made—or have been forced to make—in your career as an educator. Describe the context. What was at stake? Which resources, values, and beliefs guided your decision making? What were the implications for your relationships with students, parents, and/or colleagues? How did your decision influence your feelings about yourself as an educator or professional, and about being a teacher?

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

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

San Diego Area Writing Project
University of California, San Diego
9500 Gilman Drive, Dept. 0036
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Calendar of Events

Opportunities for Educators:

Reading Like A Writer
Grades K-12
June 22 - June 26, 2009
8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Registration $375.00

Improving Students' Academic Writing
Grades 2-16
July 20 - July 24, 2009
8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Registration $495.00
(Includes 4 follow-up half-days during the 2009-2010 school year)

Opportunities for Students:

Improving Students' Academic Writing
Grades 11-12
July 13 - July 17, 2009
8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
Registration $295.00

The College Admission and Application Essay
High School Seniors and Community College Transfer Students
July 20 - July 24, 2009
8:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
Registration $295.00

For registration materials and information regarding these programs, please contact the SDAWP office at 858-534-2576 or sdawp@ucsd.edu

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