



Dialogue

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Spring 2011

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Writing in Nature

Lilian Cooper—SDAWP 2001

***Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.***

-Mary Oliver

Just as this Pulitzer Prize winning poet turns to nature for her inspiration and the sense of wonder it instills, so, too, do I turn to nature to inspire the teaching of writing. Both in my classroom and field experience, I have found that, once connected to nature, young writers seem more eager to tackle the skills necessary for getting their thoughts on paper. Nature provides an engaging way to learn. But developing an engaged and nature-connected mindset is not an easy task in our media obsessed culture. With students as young as kindergarten, I have had to find ways to teach the sense of wonder, paying attention, and being amazed.

When first teaching kindergarten in the urban core of San Diego 15 years ago, I realized that many students did not notice the world around them. Recess was at first filled with poking, shoving, and the urge to chase and tease. Most of the school’s playground was covered in asphalt, but there were a few trees, some flowering shrubs, a little sand lot, and a tiny patch of mottled grass sprouting an occasional dandelion. In the classroom, I was having a hard time getting students excited about learning. So I began to model wonder and amazement during recess duty. “Wow, look at this bright yellow flower!” and “Look how those leaves spiral as they fall from the tree.” It didn’t take long before students were sharing their discoveries at recess.

Back in the classroom, they were eager to write and display these discovery “stories” on sentence strips, supplementing their sight words with new descriptions from the playground. Playing became more peaceful and purposeful. One day dozens of miniature castles with flags of twigs and pointed eucalyptus leaves arose from the sand lot after reading a mentor text, *Grandma’s Walk*, in which a disabled grandma takes her grandson collecting on the beach; he then creates castles and other sculptures along the way. We used our shadows on sunny days to learn directional language, something difficult for many of my second-language students. I took photos as they learned to turn their bodies to match their language: “My shadow is behind me; my shadow is to my left,” and so on. Not only did this facilitate language, but the photos then provided a way for them to engage in a science lesson of shared writing on what causes shadows, followed by another lesson on what causes clouds, sparked by their observation, “Too many clouds, no shadows”—all lessons within the standards.

When I was asked by my principal to assist teachers in implementing writers’ workshop in the upper grades, I again found that learning was expedited if nature was infused into the lessons. For example, similes, metaphors, and other literary devices were understood

easily when students were allowed to collect the falling leaves of liquidambar trees, bring them to their desks, and work in groups to create descriptive passages and poetry. My experience in the classroom taught me that nature is an important tool to be used in creating the intrinsic motivation for learning to write.

So why is this connection between kids and nature such a powerful motivating force? Do kids need nature? As a Writing Project teacher, I am always seeking the latest research—both as validation for my teaching methods and to better understand how to meet the myriad of needs of those I teach. With all of this in mind, I attended a lecture two years ago by Richard Louv. He had just authored a book, *Last Child in the Woods, Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, full of research showing that children need nature for the healthy development of their senses, and, therefore, for learning and creativity. From 1997 to 2003 there was a 50% decline in the proportion of children ages 9 to 12 who spent time outdoors hiking, walking, fishing, playing at the beach, or gardening. To encourage more time in nature,

Louv announced that he had started a national movement, the Children and Nature Network (C&NN), with a website and resources for connecting with nature. Information gained that night convinced me that my next goal as a writing teacher was to somehow get involved in this movement. I met leaders who were starting a San Diego Children and Nature Collaborative (SDCaN) and became an active member. They encouraged me to be trained as a naturalist by becoming a Trail Guide at Mission Trails Regional Park (MTRP).

Additional resources documented how being in nature was positive, as opposed to the negative effects on youth of a sedentary, electronic-media-dominated, indoor lifestyle. In a lecture series on children and nature at the San Diego Natural History Museum, Dr. Stephen Kellert, professor emeritus of Yale University's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, stated that our mental and physical fitness relies on experiences in the natural world. He showed how contact with nature promotes stress reduction, focused attention, problem solving, critical thinking, mastery of skills, imagination and creativity, health and healing, exploration and discovery, and productivity—for children and adults. Hearing this made me think back to recess with my kindergarten students.

According to the Center for Ecoliteracy, students who learn nature's principles in gardens and other natural settings have been shown to score better in creative thinking and problem solving, science, and other academic subjects. A growing body of research examines benefits of higher test scores and grades, improved classroom behavior, and increased self-esteem. Eric Jensen, author of *Enriching the Brain*, cites neuroscientific research showing that the developing brain needs active exploration to learn the world of senses. The real, physical world is where the child's brain needs to interact. Exploration and engaging all the senses encodes the love of learning, a natural curiosity, and excitement for discovery more than any other activity.

Emboldened by this convincing research and my naturalist training,

I contacted a park ranger at MTRP, who was starting a Saturday morning Nature Club at the park. I asked if I could volunteer once a month to teach writing while out on hikes with the group, children ages 8–12. She excitedly said, "Yes!" because she, too, sees the need for children to "have a lot of WOW! moments" in the world around them. Both she and the senior ranger feel strongly that it is through connecting with nature that each successive generation will appreciate, preserve, and become stewards of the natural systems that sustain life. Her dream was that, in addition to sketching and writing

Exploration and engaging all the senses encodes the love of learning, a natural curiosity, and excitement for discovery more than any other activity.

in nature journals, children in Nature Club would pass on their enthusiasm for nature in a newsletter, *Hidden Treasures of Mission Trails*, where their thoughts and writing would shine through to inspire their families, park visitors, and, someday, new generations, to connect with nature. In April of 2010, she invited me to come along to help make her vision a reality!

But even in this beautiful urban park in a region blessed with one of the most diverse ecosystems in the country, with species of plants and animals that exist nowhere else in the world, I found that not all kids were noticing their surroundings. I would have to be resourceful to trigger their intrinsic motivation to be amazed and pay attention before they could write about it. Another challenge was that several of the children could not write at all, while others were quite adept at expressing themselves—how to design writing activities to include them all? I first focused on, and modeled, observing closely by using all the sens-

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Resourcefulness

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es, such as Owl Eyes and Deer Ears, as outlined in a great book, *Coyote's Guide to Connecting With Nature*.

My experience with engaging children in writing, and nature writing in particular, is that there also needs to be a certain amount of vocabulary building in order to provide the language to write about experiences. I realize that labeling sketches in a nature journal accomplishes much

With an arsenal of words, all could be successful in such beginning activities as writing one sentence each for an all-hands poem entitled "Nature is."

of this, but it needs to go further for descriptive and creative writing. Specifically, what I have found helpful is to either provide students with, or brainstorm together, a page listing nature words like silence, shadow, storm, sunset, hues, scent, breeze; describing words like golden, vibrant, glistening, iridescent, crisp, hovering, stalking, sneaky, crouching, circling; action words like skitter, dart, soar, spiral, emerge, shine, swoop, swirl; and feeling words like happiness, wonder, alone, fearless, laughter, smile, lazy, frightened. This speeds up and enhances the ability to write about nature in new and imaginative ways. For Mission Trails I included names of the most common native plants and animals in the park.

Also, during each hike, I read passages from mentor texts for non-fiction descriptive nature writing, such as by author Rachel Carson:

The sea wracks have no roots, but instead grip the rocks by means of a flattened, disc-like expansion of their tissues. It is almost as though the base of each weed melted a little...creating a union so firm that only the thundering seas of a very

heavy storm, or the grinding of shore ice, can tear away the plants. (*Edge of the Sea*, 78)

or Jean Craighead George:

To fight dryness...they grow spines...which cast shadows on the plant to protect it from the blazing sun. They thicken stems and leaves to hold water. (*A Day in the Desert*, 14-17)

Some field guides offer descriptive passages, such as *Birds of San Diego*:

With its fierce facial expression and untidy feathers, the Red-tailed Hawk looks as though it has been suddenly and rudely awakened....It's hard not to spot a Red-tail perched on a post or soaring lazily overhead along most freeways, highways and byways passing through open country.

With an arsenal of words, all could be successful in such beginning activities as writing one sentence each for an all-hands poem entitled "Nature is..." or writing a simple poem about characteristics of the native animals: "Pounces, runs, creeps/ kills its prey, stays low/ careful bobcat."

Networking with other SDAWP teachers inspired more ideas. At one professional development, a teacher who was retiring offered copies of several folders worth of nature writing materials she had developed over the years. From this, I led a hike in which the children sat under a Coast Live Oak at least 150 years old and wondered what the tree had

observed in its lifetime. They ran their fingers over its fire-scarred bark; imagined it from the perspective of critters at the top, middle, and bottom of its limbs; and investigated its surroundings. They told about it being the playground for the spider, that snakes can tickle, that there had been a flood in the riverbed beside it, and that it would love to live forever, but water will carry its seed into another beautiful spot to grow another mighty oak.

At another SDAWP meeting, a colleague talked about her professional storytelling, which reminded me of the importance of oral language development prior to writing. I often observe how young writers are frustrated in their attempts to write because their thinking is so much more complex than what they can physically get down onto the paper. The thoughts fade away as they try to hold them in their heads long enough to write. So on a subsequent hike, we sat on the historic Old Mission Dam, constructed by the native Kumeyaay to supply water from the San Diego River to the first mission in California. In complete silence, we observed and listened. The budding "naturalists" were then asked to tell the story of the waters below. I recorded their thoughts. One boy who had not yet learned to write in school had some of the most insightful and eloquent observations. Because he was able to voice them through storytelling, he became much more engaged on future hikes, noticing things long before the others.

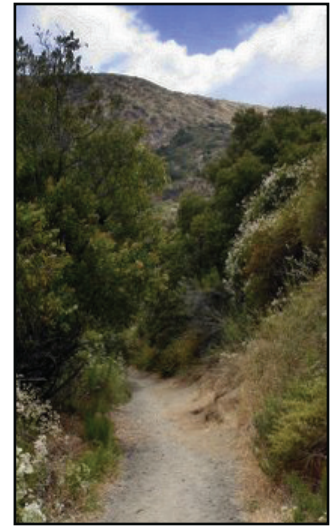
A final mention goes to the SDAWP study group that read about intrinsic motivation in Daniel Pink's *Drive*, in



which he maintains that rewards, if used incorrectly, can actually undermine someone's intrinsic motivation toward an activity. The activity should be the reward in itself. Concurrently, we read Carol Dweck's research showing that praising for intelligence instead of effort encourages a fixed mindset that saps students' motivation. From these studies, I have refined how I give encouragement, direction, and praise. Instead of, "Good job," or "You're smart; you can figure it out," I now give specific feedback for attempted learning tasks. On one hike, a Nature Club member was physically standing apart and not participating in our writing activity. I mentioned how on a previous hike, it was his observations of seasonal changes that got many of the others to think in new ways. He looked at me in disbelief, was silent for a moment, but then enlightened us with his thoughts on water's reflections. Again, the others responded with fresh ideas, and he now shows more leadership and involvement.

Each month the park ranger tells me that another participant has been "transformed." By this she means that they are truly connecting to their surroundings—observing, noticing, questioning, and curious. I am noticing more fluency in getting thoughts on paper. They want to explore, discover, and, yes, tell about it. The park ranger's dream has materialized—two quarterly editions of *Hidden Treasures of Mission Trails* have been published, full of writing in nature. All of us as mentor-teachers can have a role in connecting kids with nature, whether in urban, rural, suburban, school, or park settings. As Rachel Carson states, "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder...he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."

(See page 13 for information regarding SDAWP's newest Young Writers' Camp programs, including *Writing in Nature*, which will be led by Lilian Cooper.)



**Nature Club Hike
October 23, 2010**

Storytelling

Participants observed how the recent rains had changed the ecosystem along the San Diego River riparian and grassland areas as we hiked the Grassland Trail to Old Mission Dam. Once there, we sat on the rocks of the dam and took turns telling the story of the water we were observing.

I am water,
so powerful, sleek, silent and magical.
I will carry you up,
Blow you over, and pull you down.
I will overthrow rocks.
Quickening and rippling,
I am water.
I wash up trees and leaves.
I come from waterfalls,
Waterfalls like a slide.
Bubbles flow on top of me;
Roots of the cattails grow under me.
I am home for fish, mallards and coots.

I come in many shapes, sizes, and colors:
A river,
A droplet,
A lake,
An ocean,
Blue, aqua, teal, dark and greenish,
Dirty and clean.

I am light.
I am reflection.
I'm like a mirror
Showing trees—
Sycamore, oak, cottonwood, and willow,
Showing the world to people,
Showing kids' faces.

Without me, nothing would grow
Plants would die,
People would be thirsty,
People could not cool off in a nice blue ocean.

There would be no life anywhere.
I pass by rocks that make me
curve and tumble,
I tumble rocks to make them swim.
I meander round and round
As I make them soft and smooth,
Or crush them into sand.
When rocks land on me, I fly.

I swirl,
I trickle,
Crash, gurgle, splash, roar,
Or say nothing.
Sometimes I can be quiet.

Here I come,
Rushing,
Strong as a windy storm.
I come from snow that falls from the sky.
I fall as rain from the dark, gray clouds,
And splash in the San Diego River.
I can make puddles.

I'll always be moving along—
Great for all living things.

I am water,
Flowing, flowing,
Majestically taking with me
Anything
In my path.

(Originally published in *Hidden Treasures of Mission Trails*, Winter, 2010.)

Strength of Character

Callie Brimberry,
SDAWP 2008



Of everything I have seen in my life, my favorite moment is watching someone fall in love with literature. This year, that “moment” looked like this: I begin to read aloud as if no one else is in the room with me. Within moments the students quiet each other down. My tone changes. I yell when needed, whisper when instructed, pause when necessary. I read like a reader who has done nothing but float upon words her entire life. Slowly, as I circle the room reading words so familiar I can glance from text to students easily, I see students lean into each other as all books are turned to the correct pages, eyes glance around when my accent subtly changes, backs straighten when my words become rushed, matching the urgency of the characters’ actions. And then...nothing. I close my book and tell them we’ll continue tomorrow.

And now, groans for another reason. They do not rush outside for lunch and their eyes glance around with looks of unfulfilled inquiry and desire. A few begin to leave, but when they see that the others remain seated, they return to their seats, the creaking of their chairs exploding in the silence of the room. One student pulls out a giant bag of chips, another, a package of Oreos, and so on, until the variety of foods makes its way around the room. “Well,” I say, “I suppose we could read a few more pages.” And I try to hide my smile behind the novel as the term *gotcha* runs through my head. They don’t eat in the lunch room for the rest of the year and I acquire a taste for Flaming Hot Lime Cheetos. There is nothing as invigorating as the moment when you realize the beauty of words. Absolutely nothing.

Now, in efforts to further your understanding of why we should all fall in love with reading, close your eyes and picture yourself in

your favorite book store, searching for texts focused on characters that represent an imperative part of who you are. Now imagine what it would be like to be told these books are too inappropriate to be in a school library, not respected enough to be in a public library, and not popular enough to be in a chain of bookstores. Imagine being told you—and anyone who resembles a defining part of you—shouldn’t even exist in print. Imagine trying to feel worth something after that.

I soon realized that this was exactly how I was making my lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students feel when I pushed them into relationships with literature that did not encompass all, or even parts, of who they are. It was eye opening when I realized that the very words that provided such beauty were only available for students in the forms of thousands of characters who had one thing in common: they were all straight. As an educator, I aspire to provide literature to students in hopes that they can relate to the characters and their struggles, as well as develop an awareness and understanding of characters who maintain different belief and life-

...this was exactly how I was making my lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students feel when I pushed them into relationships with literature that did not encompass all, or even parts, of who they are.

style choices than their own. I try to choose multi-cultural and multi-demographic literature that examines real life issues and choices. (Though I intentionally do not choose texts about Hispanic youth trapped in a life of gangs, drugs, and violence as this genre seems to be the only literature many believe my students can comprehend.) So, it was more than devastating when I realized that I was not providing my students, both gay and straight,

with literature that encompassed the reality and authenticity of LGBT students’ lives.

I had to be honest that I had been excluding my LGBT students, even if it was unintentional, from feeling safe and comfortable in our classroom. I had been depriving *all* of my students of literature that accepted *all* lifestyles. My realization and subsequent journey to find young adult LGBT novels resulted in the understanding of what I believe to be a very clear, yet ignored, need in high schools: In a society and school system where LGBT students are frequently harassed, ridiculed, and made to feel unwelcome, it is imperative that educators not only offer and teach novels about gay characters and the struggles in coming out, but also teach novels in which characters “just happen to be gay” (Trumble, J).

In determination to provide a more equitable and safe classroom atmosphere via literature, I scoured and searched our dusty school library. Sadly, I wasn’t surprised when I found no such selections there. I was surprised, however, when I had to travel to three different bookstores before I could find young adult literature with LGBT characters. And even then, there was only one copy of the first novel in the Alex Sanchez’ *Rainbow Boys Series*. And, in contradiction to what I saw as the culminating triumph to my fatalistic search for this novel, a young male grabbed the book just as I was reaching for it. Despite my protests, he gracefully handed it over, saying

he’d already read it and just wanted another copy after a friend failed to return his. He recommended other books with LGBT characters and suggested I try ordering from Amazon. I optimistically commented that maybe they were all sold out because they were so popular. He shook his head and said they only stocked one copy at a time. “The bookstores *really* need to focus on their vampire customers,” he exaggerated, as he nodded toward the

shelves full of the *Twilight* Series. “I mean really, can you imagine more than one gay teen existing?” he said, rolling his eyes and laughing at the absurdity of it all.

We chatted for a few minutes, despite the fact that he was adamantly Team Jacob, and he directed me to a young adult book reviewer’s blog “Naughty Book Kitties” written by a fifteen-year-old openly gay student named Brent. It was at Brent’s

It was at Brent’s site that I realized the importance of blogging for change as well as the crucial and urgent need to provide LGBT teens with literature to which they could relate.

site that I realized the importance of blogging for change, as well as the crucial and urgent need to provide LGBT teens with literature to which they could relate. As a guest blogger for librarian Janet Trumble’s blog, “Pinched Nerves,” Brent eloquently recalls the time when he went to his school library in search of LGBT literature.

“...she (the librarian) replied, ‘This is a school library. If you are looking to read inappropriate titles, go to a book store.’ The librarian claimed LGBT novels were inappropriate, yet she approved of books that had heterosexual sex. There are tons of gay teens, struggling to find a group to fit in. LGBT YA lit helps us find out that no, we aren’t alone and no, we aren’t worthless or disgusting” (Trumble, J.).

Of course, one of the most positive ramifications of teaching and offering literature with LGBT characters is to provide LGBT students with characters and situations to which they can relate.

LGBT students should have the opportunity to see characters who struggle with coming out, as well as characters who struggle with other typical teenage issues such as divorce, friends turned enemies, boyfriend and/or girlfriend heart-break, etc. Literature can be pivotal in one’s self-discovery and the realization of self-worth, especially when a reader is first introduced to a character that thinks, acts, and feels

like they do.

In the article, “A Good Mystery: Why We Read,” *New York Times* writer Motoko Rich referenced author Sherman Alexie’s discovery that others were like him. In fact, the National Book Award winner “thanked Ezra Jack Keats, author of “The Snowy Day,”.... ‘It was the first time I looked at a book and saw a brown, black, beige character—a character who resembled me physi-

cally and resembled me spiritually, in all his gorgeous loneliness and splendid isolation” (Motoko 1).

When realizing, for perhaps the first time, that there are characters—and in turn other people—who are like you and meant to represent your struggle, a reader cannot help but begin to re-analyze their self worth and existence. Brent of the “Naughty Book Kitties” blog states: “Around

Non-gay students should experience these characters for the same reason as LGBT students: to see the connectivity and universal issues we all face, gay or straight.

eight grade, it really settled into my head that I liked boys, not girls. I still tried to suppress it, but I was more open to the idea of being gay.”

He then recalls the saving grace of books featuring LGBT characters:

“When I read books about it (being gay) I found one that seemed like what we were looking for: *What They Always Tell Us* by Martin Wilson. I read it...we talked about it. And cried about it. *People really write about this stuff?* I thought. It felt...great. Imagine that you are an alien on your own planet. And imagine you find out that there are more aliens, just like you, on your planet. And imagine what it would be like—to know that someone knows what it’s like. What you’re going through” (Trumble, J.).

Instances of self validation such as these only further prove the need to offer similar experiences and opportunities of self-affirmation for LGBT teenagers.

In addition, Rich claims that it is not only the reader’s identification with the characters, but also the desire to “embrace the Other that draws them into reading” (1). The universality of all genres of literature allows readers to develop a thoughtful understanding of a world in which they do not directly live, and often choose to ignore. I intend for both my gay and non-gay students to make this connection and benefit from the inclusion of LGBT characters in high school literature. Non-gay students should experience these characters for the same reason as LGBT students: to see the connectivity and universal issues we all face, gay or straight. The universality of teenage life can only further serve to dispel misconceptions about the cause and consequences of being gay amongst teenagers. Imagine how the attitudes toward LGBT teens would change if students were shown—in all modes of education—that being gay was normal, natural,

and accepted. By not including characters which happen to be gay in our literature curriculum we are in turn suggesting that being gay is abnormal and something that exists, but should be hidden. Is our lack of inclusion of characters who happen to be gay an intentional refusal of acceptance of LGBT students?

This unspoken truth about the luxury of ignorance and the negative stereotypes associated with being gay seem to have instigated a uniform obliviousness or outright refusal of LGBT literature in high school education. I, for one, do not want my students to be taught through lack of teaching that being gay is wrong or should be kept a secret. Especially when principals at over 1,580 public schools throughout America reported that over 92% of their students were harassed based on gender expression (how masculine or femi-

nine they appear) and their assumed sexual orientation. This statistic is particularly alarming when the same principals acknowledged that although “nearly 96% of their schools have anti-bullying policies, less than half specifically mention sexual orientation (46%) or gender identity or expression (39%)” (*The Principal’s Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment*).

Instead of teaching our students, through our non-inclusion of LGBT characters, that the LGBT lifestyle is not natural or acceptable, we should be focusing on the power LGBT YA literature can have in not only the lives of individual students, but in the overall safety of the school. According to the California Safe Schools Association, nearly 85% of California high school districts report including LGBT issues in their tolerance curriculum. Within those high school districts, there was an increase, ranging from 10-22%, in both gay and straight students reporting feeling safe in their schools. In fact, students in these districts reported nearly 25% less harassment for being LGBT or being assumed to be LGBT (Russel, S. T., et al.).

Imagine how much safer our students would feel if being LGBT was not just said to be normal in tolerance curriculum (which I acknowledge to be much needed and successful), but shown to be normal and natural in literature, where characters just happened to be gay.

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Through the Eyes of LGBT Characters

Boy or Girl

Anonymous

Do you understand what it is like
to live in the brief pauses
of conversation?
To be the awkward silence
that no one
cares to fill?

Eventually...
they mumble and stutter
try to make up for what they think
you lack
but their words are hesitant
their glances unsure
and you know
they are questioning
what you are:
boy or girl?

Your eyes meet theirs,
the instant splinters
and you are left with
The dull
Aching
Devastating
Realization
That you
Will never
Be
Enough.

My X

By Quiara Sanchez

Am I out of my mind?
Why are you doing this?

Red drips.
I feel no pain
Might as well go all the way

It sounds like a far away cry
I continue with my business

Relief.....
I feel weak
Visions
Fade

Wake up the next day
An X is what I find....
Marks the spot
Of where I've cut

Now I'm crossed out
Out of my own life,
Like everything is.

The way you always wanted me to be

Under the Same Sky

By Ramon Avila

Going to school
Everyone looks at you
As if you did something
To them
As if being you was a bad choice
And not a gift
At School
Students make fun of you
Especially the guys
Call you fag and puto
People think they have the right
To take away yours
In School
There is no choice in which bathroom
you get to use
No place to hide at lunch
No one to cushion the impact
of the harsh reality
that some of us aren't taught
that a human
should be humane because
We are all a family
We live under
The same sky

Love

By Brenda Nieva

Love
Two people that see each other's' flaws
and still think they are flawless.
Two people that create happiness
with just a single star.
Two people that locked
heart and eyes
in a crowd of a thousand.
Two people who are willing to make
sacrifices for one another
and expect nothing in return.
Love is what makes the world go round,
and the ride of life
more enjoyable.
So why stop two people,
who are in love,
from being together
just because
they're the same gender?
Love is love.
You can't stop it.
So why are you trying?

Relevant Professional Development: What Does Diversity Have to Do with It?

Kim Douillard, SDAWP 1992

The room fills with chatter as teachers arrive, greeting each other with stories from their summer away from school. Mixed with the cheerful greetings and anticipation that comes with the beginning of another school year are the undercurrents of complaints...mostly having to do with all the work it takes to prepare a classroom, both physically and mentally, for a new school year. The administrator quiets the room, compliments the teachers on the wonderful work they always do, and proceeds to introduce the professional

*...the best
professional
development is
found connected
with Writing
Project sites.*

developer. He gives glowing praise about the talents of the professional developer and is certain to mention any particular credentials (advanced degrees, books published, and years of experience). The teachers listen quietly and wait—to decide whether this will be another one of those professional development sessions that are mandatory (or highly encouraged) and usually tucked into a preparation day before school begins or at the end of a long teaching day. Will this be a professional developer who seems to have forgotten the realities of the classroom and the fact that teachers bring expertise to every professional development situation, and/or a topic that isn't important right now? (And right now, when we are talking about the precious few days before school begins, this is of utmost importance!). It doesn't take long to determine which variety of professional development this will be—just watch for the level of participation, the number of bathroom breaks, the side conversations, or

the other work that is quietly pulled out.

There's nothing worse than bad professional development and nothing more motivating than good professional development—and in my very biased opinion, the best professional development is found connected with Writing Project sites. I believe this is because Writing Projects honor teacher knowledge, pay attention to what teachers want and need, and create opportunities for interaction that allows teachers to collaborate with their peers, take in information, process it for themselves, and apply it to their own unique teaching contexts.

None of this is to say that Writing Projects have no room for improvement. One of the strengths of Writing Projects is that they are not static. Each summer brings a new group of leaders into the Summer Institute and with them come their experiences, perspectives, teaching context, constraints, and ways of operating in the world. In the best of situations, each group of leaders represents the teachers and students who need and deserve excellent professional development in their local area. These leaders are diverse in race and ethnicity, language and gender. They represent a range of economic status, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation. They come from a variety of teaching situations: different grade levels, content areas, school types (public, private, charter, alternative), locations (urban, suburban, rural), years of teaching experience and variety of student populations.

Of course, this ideal is hard to achieve. Word of mouth is a powerful recruitment tool for Writing Project sites—teachers who have experienced the power of writing and professional support from their local Writing Project site invite and encourage their friends and colleagues to experience it as well. This hand-to-hand marketing has served the

writing project well for 35 years. Problems arise, though, when we look around and realize that there are people missing from our projects. We often work with, live near, and interact with people who are much like us. When we recruit by inviting our friends and colleagues, we may miss the potential for diversity.

In spite of good intentions, Writing Project sites often struggle to have their leadership represent the diversity of the teaching population and student population they serve. Many reasons play into this struggle to recruit diverse leadership. There are structural constraints: work schedules, family demands, even the location of the writing project. There are financial constraints: stipends (if they are offered) often are too small to support a family during a summer month without a paycheck. But I think the most significant constraint often goes unexamined by those currently leading their projects: the diverse teachers (broadly defined) simply can't see themselves, their concerns, their hopes and dreams, within the current practices and structures of the project.

Wanting diversity and welcoming diversity are not the same as inviting diversity. Writing Project sites cannot simply wait for diverse teachers to decide they have something to offer the Writing Project—or that the

*Wanting diversity
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Writing Project has something to offer them. We must invite diverse teachers into our projects in honest and genuine ways and be willing to make the changes that will surely happen as conversations, practices and values shift with our changing leadership.

Inviting diversity means welcoming change and messiness. Leaders will have to learn to communicate in new ways and to learn to see their

work in new ways. What works when we are all similar will be disrupted when we see the world and our work from different perspectives and through our varied experiences. But it will also create new opportunities to learn from one another. The richness that diversity brings can also bring new opportunities for relevance and credibility in the professional development arena.

I'm often asked, "Doesn't your Writing Project represent the diversity of the teaching population in your area?" I understand that the teaching population is largely Caucasian and female, but even if that is true, it is not a reason to accept as good enough whatever efforts we have made. So, if we do not have the diversity in our project leadership, what do we do to invite African American teachers, Latino teachers, Asian teachers, Native American teachers, male teachers, math teachers, science teachers, special education teachers, and all the others that will continue to inform our thinking and allow our writing project to grow in ways that will better serve the teachers of our diverse student population?

This is where we, as Writing Project leaders, have to move beyond our comfort zones and seek out great teachers who are different from us. We must connect with administrators at schools we haven't yet reached to solicit recommendations of promising teachers. We must connect with community members to find the teachers they want for their children. We must find out what our colleagues in math and science and special education are doing with their students—inquire about the ways they see writing in their content area and invite them to share their insights with us.

The possibilities that come with diversity are simply too rich to leave to chance or excuse by saying we have tried and failed. To offer teachers and their students the best professional development possible, Writing Projects must continue to work to figure out how to invite and retain diverse leadership, even if it means disrupting what is usual.



Facebook: No matter who you are, from the I-don't-want-everyone-knowing-my-business-haters, to the I-can't-start-my-day-until-I-have-a-cup-of-coffee-and-check-out-how-many-people-liked-the-picture-of-my-cat-in-a-tutu-addicts, it's hard to deny, this social media giant has intertwined itself into the very fabric of our society. But SDAWP utilizing Facebook? Really?

Really! The very website you may have just yelled at your child/student/spouse to get off of is now the home of its own SDAWP Facebook page. Kim Douillard, SDAWP Director, has been interested in the prospects of having a sustainable online community for SDAWP for years, so in January 2011, she and a group of nine other SDAWP fellows (some, surprisingly, sans Facebook accounts) decided to investigate if combining forces with Facebook would do the trick.

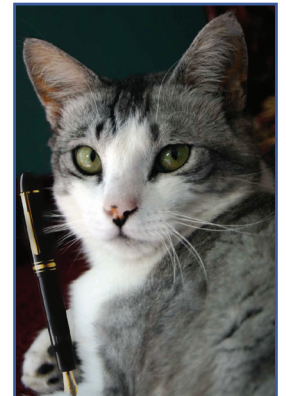
To date, the combination has been highly successful. In just a few short months the page has grown to include over one hundred members and it's easy to see why. From professional development links from such sites as InsideHigherEd.com to posts regarding practical teaching techniques (including videos for students to use), the page has become a one-stop shop for members to stay pedagogically up to date.

At present, the newly created SDAWP Facebook page is still growing, but the underlying goals of this endeavor should not be a surprise to anyone who has ever been involved with SDAWP: (1) Positively influence teachers' practice, (2) Connect colleagues, and (3) Promote dialogue on current issues. So, while you will not find many pictures of cats in tutus (unless said cats happen to teach writing), anyone who "likes" the San Diego Area Writing Project page might drop in to:

- Get some ideas for his/her next unit via BigThink.com or
- Catch up on previous issues of the Dialogue or
- Find out about upcoming SDAWP events or
- Start or become involved with online discussions

The possibilities are endless. As the site continues to gain membership, Kim Douillard, and the others who helped to create and continue to maintain SDAWP's online community, look forward to the site gaining more direction and usage. One of the best aspects of a social media page is the ability to collectively assist others with common interests, which ultimately may end up being the driving force of the page's purpose: Providing instructors an online forum to learn and to be heard.

So, the next time you visit Facebook, search for and join the San Diego Area Writing Project. And If you would like to get involved in the conversation, please share a link that you have discovered, make a comment about something you see that interests you, or simply hit the like button for one of our posts. Of course, if you have a ridiculous picture of your cat with pen in paw we would certainly enjoy seeing that too.



DANGEROUS WRITING

Judy Geraci—SDAWP 2010

I came to writing long before I came to teaching. Since my late teens, writing has provided me with a way to process my life experience and attempt to make sense of the world. I prefer writing fiction to address topics that are too painful to face head-on, to “tell the truth, but tell it slant,” as Emily Dickinson said. For many years, I wrote privately, closeted at home, and shared with only a very few trusted friends. With time and maturity, I began pushing myself to attend writing classes and workshops—each time overcoming fear and gaining skill. Eventually I gained enough confidence to read at open mics and public events, and to submit manuscripts to local anthologies. Still, to this day, every time I enter a new class or writing group, I shake inside.

A few summers ago, I had the privilege of participating in a workshop led by Tom Spanbauer, an award-winning author of several widely-acclaimed novels. I was excited to take

Why did my focus on process-over-product feel like I was pushing the boundaries of form and expectation?

the workshop because it came highly recommended by a trusted and respected writing teacher. At the same time, I felt more apprehensive than usual, not only because of the leader’s literary stature, but because the workshop was entitled “Dangerous Writing.” Spanbauer has founded a community of “Dangerous Writers,”

including Chuck Palahniak, and advocates going into “the sore places” that give writing depth and honesty. I feared going to those dark spots in my soul, worried that I might get stuck there and be unable to come out. What if I started crying and couldn’t stop? I revealed my fear to Tom and everyone in the workshop, and asked what I could do to prevent it, or remedy it when it happened. His advice was to do whatever works when you find yourself spiraling: go for a walk, engage in some other form of art/creativity for a while, and most important—write in community and find support in friends. And, he added half-jokingly, get a good therapist. All good advice for an adult who has a writing community, friends, and access to therapists.

But what about dangerous writing in a school setting? One of my biggest challenges in becoming a teacher later in life was figuring out how my experience as an adult writer could or couldn’t transfer to teaching fourth graders. I knew dangerous writing meant something different in elementary school, but had difficulty putting my finger on it. I only knew that gut feeling I had at those times when I wouldn’t want anyone to walk into my classroom and look over my students’ shoulders. Yet, what was I doing that was so risky? Why did my focus on process over product feel like I was pushing the boundaries of form and expectation? In my heart of hearts, I know the process really matters more, allows better deeper learning, and ultimately produces better work. I get on my soapbox and tell this to other people all the time. Still, I tend not to allow sufficient time for it, opting instead on the familiar lessons and formats that produce assessment results. Still, I feel underlying anxiety when I do block out daily time for free writing, when I say yes to genres like comic writing, or when I

post marked-up revisions rather than final drafts on the bulletin boards for Open House.

Why?

Because it feels scary, messy and out of control.

As a teacher, it becomes even scarier because I’m supposed to know what I’m doing—for the sake of the students, administration and other teachers. I don’t know if I can get my colleagues, let alone my principal, to understand. And I can’t afford to alienate anyone—teaching is lonely enough as it is.

I feared going to those dark spots in my soul, worried that I might get stuck there and be unable to come out.

To define “dangerous writing” in the elementary classroom, I had to examine my beliefs about what “safe” writing is. Safe writing is giving students a prompt, a time frame, and a rubric. Safe writing is an outline, a beginning-middle-end framework, a formula, a five-paragraph essay. Safe writing is always setting down a draft with a planned purpose and audience. Yet this went against what I knew about the process of successful, creative adult writers: often this messy disorganized process can result in the most powerful work. Pulitzer Prize winner E.L. Doctorow once explained, “Writing a novel is like driving a car at night. You can see only as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.” Similarly, Kurt Vonnegut has said, “Writing is just having a sheet of paper, a pen and not a shadow of an idea of what you are going to say.”

Once again, though, I was falling back on adult writers who didn’t necessarily relate to my fourth-grade students. I thought back to Tom Spanbauer’s advice: find a community. In the San Diego Area Writing Project Summer Institute, I found that support. Our first reading

Dialogue, Spring 2011

assignment, an article by Margaret Wheatley, put words to my feelings:

Of course it's scary to give up what we know, but the abyss is where newness lives. Great ideas and inventions miraculously appear in the space of not knowing. If we can move through the fear and enter the abyss, we are rewarded greatly.

And then there was our pre-Institute reading, where I was introduced to the voice of Thomas Newkirk. Newkirk was a new-to-me voice, who urged using popular culture as a tool for developing literacy. He questioned the blanket ban on violence in student writing, and he promoted Peter Elbow's concept of "free-writing."

I dug deeper into the educational literature for elementary teachers and found further support in Ralph Fletcher, who put the cultural fears of violence in writing and into historical perspective in the context of 9/11 and Columbine. Over and over, I found my own questions and struggles addressed and laid out in clear language by Fletcher. He identified

What if a student wrote something jeopardizing a family member or opening up a wound too painful to deal with at school?

other forms of what he calls "dangerous words," beyond the obvious sexually explicit or racist words, including defiant, anti-school and anti-social words. Finally, he spoke about the danger of words that break confidentiality giving the example of a student who revealed his parents' AA experience. I found myself nodding, highlighting, underlining. Yes. This was what I feared. What if a student wrote something jeopardizing a family member or opening up a wound too painful to deal with at school? I thought back to my adult experience in Tom Spanbauer's workshop, and projected my person-

al fear to my students: What if one of them started crying and couldn't stop? This was dangerous writing in the classroom.

Still, I found Fletcher urging me to be more open to violence and "dangerous words" used appropriately in writing, and describing the process by which he and others negotiate where they draw the line with their students. With this advice coming from a prominent figure in children's writing instruction, I felt my teaching style validated and empowered to continue these "dangerous" practices with care.

In the SDAWP Summer Institute, I have been able to discuss these complex issues with like-minded, dedicated, intelligent teachers who are willing to explore and push back when needed. In my writing response group, we have become animated talking about now-classic literature that pushed boundaries when it was originally published. Didn't books like *Lord of the Flies* or *House on Mango Street* seem dangerous at one time?

Finding professional literature backing my position really helps me feel more secure in implementing my beliefs. Being fortunate to teach in an International Baccalaureate primary school helps, too. After all, we spend countless hours in community circle, year after year, talking about what it means to be risk takers. We value attributes and attitudes such as caring, creativity, and integrity. Our focus on inquiry-based learning supports the process of questions leading to more questions, and letting those unwinding threads guide the writing.

Which brings me full circle to the SDAWP community of writers and a debate that arose in my reading response group about the necessity of intention when setting out to write. I found myself wanting to quote Doctorow and Vonnegut, to say, "Hey wait, not everyone writes that way." Newkirk and others point out that sometimes intention reveals itself through the process of writing, and sometimes it takes another reader to point out those subconscious "golden threads" that weave themselves into the writing. Identifying audience and purpose is important and nec-

essary, I agreed, but always starting out that way, for me, feels too "safe" and constraining. Our conversation progressed through the differences of opinions, to hashing out a definition of intention, and finally, coming to the shared conclusion that while first drafts may sometimes arise from the subconscious, revision always and necessarily must be intentional. Drafting dangerously is definitely easier to embrace when it's paired with revising thoughtfully.

Didn't books like Lord of the Flies, or House on Mango Street seem dangerous at one time?

This is not to say all writing must be dangerous to be powerful. It isn't saying that some excellent writers don't use plotting devices or frameworks or outlines. What I am saying is that dangerous writing, as discussed here, is an effective way to get writing out of yourself, your peers, and your students, and that it is worth the risk.

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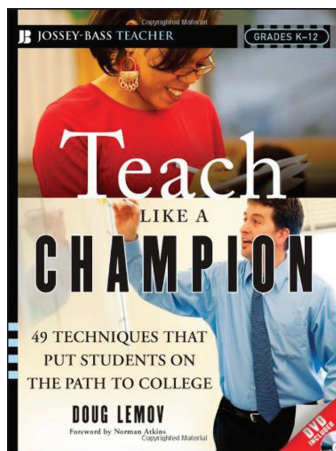


Teach Like a Champion:

49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College by Doug Lemov

A Book Review by Divona Roy, SDAWP 1996

Doug Lemov is “the John Madden of professional teaching.” Lemov has done the research, watched the game films, and analyzed the plays. In his book, *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*, Lemov presents actionable techniques for a winning game. He doesn’t play with test scores and points; he fosters champion teachers who mentor champion students—students who will be successful, no matter where or in what shape they started. Lemov’s goal is to close the achievement gap. He has an “I know you can” philosophy and is willing to dissent from what is expected to ensure that our students—all of them—win.



The book is divided in two parts. In the first, Lemov presents his research results: “the techniques that separated great teachers but from those who were merely good.” In the second, he asserts that all teachers must be reading teachers and then presents the skills and techniques that effective reading teachers use. The book comes with a DVD comprising 25 clips showing *champion teachers* using the techniques in their classrooms, an appendix of “Behind the Scenes Interviews” with *champion teachers* featured on the DVD, and an index. Most of the DVD clips show younger children, which was, at first, a turn-off to me

because I am a secondary teacher. But when I opened my mind and analyzed the teachers’ techniques and the students’ responses, I didn’t worry about the grade level of the students in the clips.

In his introduction, Lemov states, “The techniques described here may not be glamorous, but they work.” The names he gives to the techniques are not sensational or enchanting; he simply calls them what they do. Part One begins with my favorite tool: “No Opt Out.” Champion teachers know that “it’s not okay not to try.” When we allow our students to answer, “I don’t know,” it becomes part of the classroom culture. We may feel that we’re helping students rather than embarrassing them by pursuing an answer (just in case they are honestly unable to answer), but what we’re really doing is allowing the student to opt out of learning, thereby opting out of success. We’re condoning and even expecting failure. Instead, “a sequence that begins with a student unable to answer a question should end with the student answering that question as often as possible.” When I first read about this technique, I wondered, how much time is this going to take in an already-tight schedule? As I kept reading and then viewed the DVD examples, I realized that champion teaching was going to be more efficient and effective than what I was already doing. I voraciously read and planned, read and rewrote my daily plans, adding “Cold Call” here and “Positive Framing” there. I wanted to try all of them, but as Lemov explains, “The structure of the book allows you to pick and choose techniques in order to improve and master specific aspects of your technique one at a time and in the order that best suits your teaching.” He also comments that “developing what you’re already good at could improve your teaching just as much, if not more, than working on your weaknesses...”

As you read through the techniques and watch teachers use them on the DVD, you will identify your favorites and try them on your students. When they work, you’ll try more and more. It doesn’t matter where you are right now in your teaching or which students you have; wherever you are, these techniques will set your classroom up in a “cycle of improvement (for teachers) and consistency (for students).” At the end of each chapter, Lemov includes a “Reflection and Practice” box that gives the reader time to process a few techniques before starting on another round. Since I read the book during the school year, I concentrated on one or two chapters per month, allowing myself to stop and try a few techniques before moving to the next chapter. I have a friend who read the book during the summer, and she read it differently—all at once. In the margins, she noted which unit and/or month she wanted to try which technique.

Lemov finishes describing and dis-

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playing the 49 techniques in chapter 7. Chapter 8 focuses on pacing, which doesn’t mean “the speed at which you teach.” Instead, Lemov describes pacing as “the illusion of speed [whereby] the students feel the progress and never know what’s next.” Sounds a bit deceptive, yet the “how-to’s,” such as “Brighten Lines” and “Look Forward” supplement and complement the 49 techniques in chapters 1-7. Chapter 9 investigates the difference between scholastic questioning and interviewing. It aims at increasing the challenge for students to think critically during discussions so that they are doing the thinking. All of Part One proceeds from the premise that “Great teaching...is strong enough to close the achievement gap.”

Part Two is divided into three chapters: “How All Teachers Can (and

Must) Be Reading Teachers," "The Fundamentals" of decoding, vocabulary development, and fluency, and "Comprehension."

So, why, if the subtitle's 49 techniques are revealed in Part One, do we need to read Part Two? The answer is simple, yet profound. Lemov declares, "If your students can read well, they can essentially do anything." He goes on to say, "...no other single activity has the capacity to yield so much educational value. And yet students in many schools spend precious little time actually reading." Lemov can't leave out the most essential skill. He presents techniques in these chapters, but they are not numbered or separate from the techniques in Part One. There are also DVD clips for this section that show teachers and students in the midst of "Show Some Spunk" and "Lather, Rinse, Repeat," among other aptly-named techniques. The conclusion of the book circles back to the beginning; Lemov reminds readers that "a decision and a technique is something you practice, hone, and adapt throughout your life."

While I read, I wondered and revealed. *Where can I use this technique?...This is perfect for tomorrow's review session...I've been doing this one for years!...How I wish I'd had this as a new teacher...Every teacher training program should require this as a core text...Why didn't I think of this nuance?* Throughout the book, Lemov challenges the reader to separate excellent from good. He believes that, with these tools, "teachers will make insightful, independent decisions about how and when to use the techniques of the craft as they go about becoming masters of the art of teaching."

No matter the age level or subject matter you teach, no matter how green or seasoned you are, this book will transform your everyday teaching. It will transform you and your students into more effective, more efficient "champions" of teaching and learning. Reading about and applying the techniques will help you to put your students on the path that leads to the greatest number of positive choices for their futures.



MUSE BOX

Stacey Goldblatt,
SDAWP 1999

The TeacherKu Challenge

The Writing Project gives us permission and emboldens us to write about our teaching practice, yet too often we keep our experience holed up in the vessel of our minds, regurgitating our classroom adventures inside the medium of memory. What of the genres we so eagerly teach? Why not allow our voices to be held inside a poem? A short story? A one act play? A Haiku?

Haiku consists of three lines, 5-7-5 syllables, respectively. Haiku allows us to capture a snapshot that will leave an impression.

Years ago a publication called *Brain, Child* sponsored a writing challenge to its readers: compose Haiku centered on the theme of motherhood. The result was *Mamaku*, a mix of mothering poignancy and humor touching on everything from birth to potty-training.

We challenge you to compose a TeacherKu. Think about a detail of your teaching life. It can be small, like what happens to you in the early morning when you first step foot into the classroom, or it can be a Haiku about a particular student or an average teaching day. Basically, give yourself time to play with seventeen syllables that will capture a snapshot of your teaching life. When you've completed it, send us what you have so we can publish your TeacherKu in the upcoming issue.

A couple of TeacherKu:

Budget cuts aside,
We continue to inspire:
teach, nurture, grow, love.

Tapping pencils scrawl
Words crack open on the page
Poetry ignites

Young Writers' Camp News

SDAWPs popular Young Writers Camp (YWC) typically fills up soon after registration forms become available, leaving many hopeful parents and children disappointed. However, some creative TCs have found ways to expand our YWC opportunities. During the summer 2011 camp season, we will begin offering two specialized YWC programs, *Writing in Nature* and *Writing in the Garden*.

Writing in Nature, led by Lilian Cooper, is open to students throughout San Diego County entering grades 5-6 and will run from June 20 through June 24 at UCSD. In addition to on-campus excursions, the participants in this one-week program will venture to the Scripps Reserve, where they will hike the scenic bluff trail to observe plants and wildlife in a pristine setting. Coordinated by Devon Azzam, the 8-day *Writing in the Garden* camp will be offered at Cardiff School from June 30 through July 8 (Tuesdays-Fridays). The inspiration for this program will be found in the organic vegetables and flowering plants growing in the expansive schoolyard garden. During both camps, nature journals will be the repository for observations and sketches, as campers explore ideas for writing found in the living things all around them.

Our two programs for older high school students and college freshmen, *Improving Students' Academic Writing* and *The College Admission & Application Essay*, will continue to be offered at UCSD this summer as well. Please visit the YWC page of the SDAWP website at sdawp.ucsd.edu/ for additional information about all of our programs.

SDAWP Conferences—2011

Write On!

Engaging Student Writers



Ann Zivotsky—SDAWP 2011

It's a very different thing, sitting in the audience versus standing in front of the audience.

It's the difference between wondering if the presenter will be interesting versus facing the terror that the audience will walk out before my presentation is done.

It's the difference between wondering why anyone would agree to be awake this early on a Saturday morning, and being so awake it seems like it must be noon and not just 9:00 a.m., because I've been awake for so long.

It's the difference between mistakenly putting my shirt on inside-out in October, and double checking every button and strand of hair in March. It's also learning that just as I silently encourage presenters I watch at SDAWP conferences, my audience did the same for me, carrying me through what seemed like the slowest and fastest 75 minutes of my life.



This past school year SDAWP has hosted fall and spring conferences welcoming teachers, administrators and future teachers. The topics included digital presentations, which give student writers an exciting new medium for presenting work, and using personal observations to inspire students to trust what they think and write about. There were also sessions on poetry, writing for English Learners, using AXES (Assertion, Example Explanation, Significance) as a structure for responding to literature, and writing

in math.

The strength of the SDAWP conferences is the authenticity of the presenters. These are writers and teachers of writing who share what works, and perhaps more important, what hasn't worked with their students, in their classrooms. You'll never see a canned program at an SDAWP conference. The "magic bul-

It's the difference between wondering if the presenter will be interesting versus facing the terror the audience will walk out before my presentation is done.

lets" peddled to so many educators bounce off the armor of SDAWP teachers who share tried and trusted instructional strategies.

When Aja Booker and Christine Kane shared the poetry they use to build a writing community in their classrooms during the fall conference, they focused on the strength of poetry in helping their students share personal stories in a non-threatening environment. The truthful stories their children recounted were a mix of pain and hope.

Writing a poem or story on paper, or even on a computer screen, seems so very "twentieth century" when one is introduced to Margit Boyesen and Rob Meza-Ehlert's stu-

dents' digital presentations (short films and podcasts with pictures) of their writing. Because SDAWP conferences are centered on real teachers sharing real teaching, Boyesen and Meza-Ehlert were eager to share the triumphs and pitfalls of using computer movie and podcast programs.

Summer Institute graduates get the chance to share and shine during the spring conference, and Heather Bice did just that when she presented the way she uses cultural awareness in her classroom at Coronado High School. Bice emphasizes student observations as a way to help students learn to trust their own thinking, and then adapts the practice to studies of different cultures. By becoming more socially aware, Bice's students become more critical thinkers and demonstrate that depth in their writing.

The use of mentor texts is a frequent topic of SDAWP demonstra-



tions, but Jennifer Chance brought a new twist, focusing on how mentor texts can guide students in using adjectives more effectively. We tell students to “show, don’t tell” us what they’re writing about, and Jennifer did just that in demonstrating use of adjectives in students’ personal narratives.

Elizabeth Lonnecker shared how she uses AXES to help her high school students analyze the structure of an argument in persuasive writing. Lonnecker introduced the powerful spoken poem “Knock, Knock” by Daniel Beatty to her students and had them respond to the poem’s persuasive message.

Offering a demonstration at an SDAWP conference is nerve-wrack-



ing, but the pressure was lessened when I reminded myself that it was more about sharing what works and doesn’t work than about impressing my colleagues. I introduced



RARE (Restate, Answer, Reasons, Explanation) as a writing strategy and explained the interactive way my students and I revise their writing, in a snapshot of how those processes are working in my classroom now, versus a pronouncement of a perfected process. That we’re all educators involved in processes of learning is a nice thing to remember when you’re honored to be asked to present at an SDAWP conference (oh, and check to make sure your shirt isn’t inside out!).



SDAWP NOTES

Thank you! Director Kim Douillard and Teacher Consultant Callie Brimberry spent three days in Washington, D.C. at the NWP Spring Meeting. They met with writing project colleagues from across the country and then met with their respective congressional delegations. Kim and Callie visited the offices of Representatives Susan Davis, Bob Filner, Brian Bilbray, Duncan Hunter, Jr., and Darrell Issa.

Earlier in the month NWP Executive Director Sharon Washington went with Kim and teacher consultants Christine Sphar and Lucy Rothlisberger to the local office of Duncan Hunter, Jr. to share information about the work of the SDAWP in his region. We want to thank all of our teacher consultants, as well as their friends and family members, for contacting their local and statewide legislators about the work of the National Writing Project and the San Diego Area Writing Project!

Congratulations SDAWP Fellow (1989) and former SDAWP Director Marcia Venegas-Garcia received the 2011 American Educational Research Association (AERA) Leadership for Social Justice Dissertation Award for her dissertation titled: “Leadership for Social Change: Learning from Latina/Chicana Activist Educators.” The award is made for a dissertation that expands the knowledge of the complexity of social justice issues, whether in postsecondary, K-12, community-related, and/or social policy-related. Marcia received her EdD from the University of San Diego.

Stay in Touch The SDAWP website has been updated!! And we have a new URL: <http://sdawp.ucsd.edu>. Come check us out and let us know what you think. If you are an SDAWP Fellow and would like to get regular updates about upcoming SDAWP and other local education events, please send us your email. Visit our website and go to the ‘Contact Us’ link, or email us at: sdawp@ucsd.edu. We would love to add you to our

DIALOGUE

Call for Manuscripts

Fall 2011 Issue
Submission Deadline:
September 9, 2011

The Power of the Writing Project

At its foundation, the National Writing Project poses “core principles” which serve as a model for writing project fellows. One of NWP’s core principles states: “Knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from many sources: theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing. Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically.”

What are the main sources that catalyze your own writing practice and teaching of writing in your classroom? How has your own knowledge about the teaching of writing been influenced or challenged by research, analysis of practice and/or your hands-on experience with writing? Which sources have been most effective in creating a writing community in your classroom? What resources have you culled through professional development? What source, in particular, has challenged an existing approach to writing in the classroom? Which sources do you see as most vital for students as they navigate through the writing process?

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/or Project Notes to

Jenny Moore at
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or to Stacey Goldblatt at
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San Diego Area Writing Project
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Calendar of Events

Invitational Summer Institute 2011

June 28 - July 22, 2011
8:30am - 3:30pm
UC San Diego

Writing for Change: 21st Century Writing Instruction (K-16)

*A writing and technology
workshop for teachers*

July 6 - 8, 2011
Kearny High
Educational Complex
(Digital Media Design)
8:30am - 3:30pm
\$300 individual
or \$250 each
for school teams
of 3 or more

YWC-Writing in Nature

(Grades 3-6)
June 20 - 24 at UC San Diego
8:30am - 12:00pm
\$195

YWC-Improving Students' Academic Writing

(11th/12th
and college freshman)
July 11 - 15 at UC San Diego
8:30am - 11:30am
\$300

YWC-The College Admission & Application Essay

(12th/community college
transfer students)
July 18 - 22 at UC San Diego
8:30am - 1:30am
\$300

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