The Revision of Teaching and Learning

Dialogue

A Publication of the San Diego Area Writing Project **Winter 2007**

Inside...

"I Believe in Teaching Children to Think Deeply":

An Interview with Judy Leff,

SDAWP Fellow ('91) and County Teacher of the Year

Judy, can you describe the journey that your career has been to date? What have been the significant milestones or turning points?

Growing up, I never thought of becoming a teacher. I developed a great love for the Spanish language and respect for the Mexican culture while earning my bachelor's degree in Latin American Studies. As I prepared to enter a Master's Degree program in psychology, a friend told me about a unique opportunity. California State University Los Angeles was initiating an innovative credential program for bilingual students, an internship in the East Los Angeles community. Students would work in classrooms full time for the year and all university classes would be held at the school site. I seized the opportunity to utilize my Spanish, be on the ground floor of a new experiment, and contribute to the community. I was so inspired by my master teachers and the training we received in the community, that I embraced teaching as a career and never looked back.

I began teaching in the early 70's in East Los Angeles. Those were heady times. We were young and inspired bilingual teachers fighting for a cause that was just gaining momentum in the epicenter of the Chicano Pride movement. We were fighting for the right of all children to have equal access in public education. This was not a new cause; we were standing on the shoulders of Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez, giving life to the Latino community's passion and dreams for the future.

Those early years built the foundation for my career and the belief I have never abandoned: that all children deserve an education that honors their culture, their abilities and their right to realize their dreams. That commitment grew not only from the times in which I lived, but from my family upbringing that taught, by example, the power of standing up for what is right and just. My mother was Soroptimist president and a community leader for many years in my hometown of Monterey Park, California. As a businesswoman, her life was devoted to improving the lives of others. She founded a school for the mentally challenged at a time when "mentally retarded" children were still hidden from view. My childhood was filled with fundraising and volunteer opportunities. That sense of purpose was coupled with another of my family's values, a thirst for knowledge. My father was an avid reader, amateur political analyst, and lover of the arts. He was affectionately nicknamed "The P.E." (Professor of Everything). Our home was filled with books and intellectual conversation on every imaginable topic. I had wed purpose with love of learning, and I was ready to conquer the world.

As an educator, what in particular are your beliefs or philosophies regarding children and instruction?

First, I believe in teaching children to think deeply by implementing a rigorous, integrated curriculum based on big ideas. I begin each spring to think ahead to the next year. I bounce around ideas in my head, to create a language arts curriculum based on a big

idea, which I tie to an historical time frame. This year my big idea, courage, is linked to the WWII timeframe. We explore courage in our own lives, in the lives of those around us, and in the lives of historical figures. We read and study stories based in WWII that speak to personal and collective courage. I invite speakers like a concentration camp survivor and a decorated prisoner of war from WWII who bring the era to life. Students learn to think big, feel safe, and fill in the details for themselves. Under my guidance, they manage their own learning, collaborate in reader's workshop, write like writers to develop such pieces as monologues on a person of courage, and research topics and issues that capture their interest. Using my WWII webpage as a launching pad, students independently research and study the building of the Atomic Bomb, the music and art of the Concentration Camps, and much more. One student describes the learning environment this way, "Learning in this class is a big challenge for our brains. We get in depth on every subject and it seems like everything we study is connected so it means a whole lot more."

I believe in delivering this curriculum to all students, which requires meeting students where they are without compromising the content. When my transition students were preparing to write a five-paragraph essay on pandas, I led them through the process step by step. We researched together on the Internet, found key words and took notes. Paragraph by paragraph we built our essay. Through collaboration, we created our topic sentences, selected supporting details and developed our paragraphs. When they were confident enough, I let small groups work independently and continued to support others. One student explained, "When we don't understand something Ms. Leff doesn't just say, 'You figure it out,' she helps us figure it out."

Each day I teach, my rewards are plentiful and my hope is renewed. When a student writes me a note that says, "You're my hero," because she needed someone to talk to, I've made a difference in that moment, for that child. When a Spanish speaking student whom I nurtured returns to tell me, "Thank you Ms. Leff, because of you I'm going to college," I have made a difference for that child and her family. When two tough-looking teenage boys stop me in front of the movie theater and give me a big hug, I know the truth. I can only make change one life at a time. And for the lifetime of opportunities I've had, I am truly grateful.

Explain the role of SDAWP in your professional life. How has it influenced, changed or validated what you do?

My greatest contribution to teaching has been sharing what I've learned with others in my profession. Throughout my 30-year career, I have embraced change and allowed myself to step out of my comfort zone as a learner. In 1986 when I attended the San Diego Area Writing Project, I became a writer. This pivotal moment in my teaching career taught me about ownership of the learning process. I also stepped out of my comfort when I entered the world of technology. After spending one very uncomfortable summer writing a CyberGuide at the San Diego County Office of Education, I became convinced that weaving technology into my curriculum was mandatory and have spent the past ten years teaching teachers how to do just that.

I also elevated my teaching by becoming immersed in teacher research. During my tenure as co-director of an Eisenhower Science Foundation grant, I received extensive training in the Classroom Action Research model in Madison, Wisconsin. Through teacher research, I learned another way to challenge assumptions about my teaching using a systematic research process that challenged me to prove my beliefs about my teaching. This knowledge I passed on by leading many teacher research groups in my district.

What I have learned, I willingly and joyfully share. In my district, and across the county, I have taken a leadership role in professional development. I want all teachers to know how to deliver a rigorous, yet appropriate, curriculum to all students. I want them to know about the power of reading and writing to shape a child's world, and I want them to see that an old dog can learn new tricks by introducing them to the ways I have integrated technology into the fabric of my curriculum. I share what I have learned formally and informally with colleagues and the many student teachers I have mentored. This year a group of teachers approached me to ask for help with their writing curriculum. We formed a study group and have met regularly. I especially enjoy mentoring young teachers at my school site because I feel responsible for giving back to my profession, for helping to create a new generation of educators who will base their teaching on thoughtful, skillfully designed lessons that have meaning and relevance to their students.

Which instructional approach do you consider your trademark or innovation? What have you been working on or have you fine-tuned in terms of promoting achievement with your students?

Dialogue

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A chorus of murmurs floats on the air as pairs of students read quietly to their partners who hold stop watches to time and chart their partner's reading. Repeated reading of short passages targeted to their reading level has dramatically increased fluency and word recognition for my English Language Learners. By charting their results daily, students assess their own progress and are motivated to improve.

One student wrote in her reflection "I used to read words, but now I love to read because I feel like I am in the story."

I meet my students where they are. I use formal and informal assessment tools, monitor student progress closely, and change my teaching content and strategies as needed. I use a variety of strategies in my transition language arts classroom to assess initial levels and progress including standard reading fluency and comprehension assessments like the Stiegletz and District benchmark tests. These students, who are beginning their English only instruction with me, are assessed frequently. Assessment drives my curriculum. When some transition students were acing their spelling tests weekly while others consistently failed, I assessed each student's sight vocabulary and developed individualized spelling programs.

During silent reading, I scan the room and notice Rosa is reading a Junie B. Jones book. I approach her and whisper, "Rosa, this is the first time you have chosen a chapter book." She beams with pride and responds, "I know how to pick books now, and this one's just right." I sit down next to her and we read together for a short time. I observe the types and levels of books students choose to read during silent reading time. I interact with them informally to assess their changing attitudes toward reading.

Students write daily while reading. I teach specific strategies to interact with text and spend time modeling orally and in written journal entries. At first, I give them daily feedback on their written responses as a way of monitoring both their writing fluency and the quality of their interactions with the text. As they progress, students often interact with each other in small groups, and I monitor and record their conversations.

On a quarterly basis, students reflect on their progress by reviewing the work in their portfolios. One student wrote in her reflection, "I used to just read words, but now I love to read because I feel like I'm inside the story." Twice yearly, students present their work and explain their progress to their parents at student-led parent conferences. Juan explained to his mother at his student-led conference, "I am like Cesar Chavez. Before I didn't think I could write a whole essay by myself. But now I know I can. I am like Cesar because I keep saying to myself, 'Si se puede, si se puede.'

What educational issues are you most concerned with locally, and nationally?

Two issues in public education that concern me are the achievement gap between white students and English Language Learners, and the alarming rate at which boys are failing in school. It is this second issue I wish to address because it has become the center of discussion for our 6th grade team.

Early in the school year, a male teammate and I began talking about the group of boys in our 6th grade classes who comprise the majority of the behavior problems. These are boys for whom traditional forms of discipline are counterproductive. I was particularly concerned about a group of Hispanic boys who are bright, underachieving, and making the wrong decisions. The recent attention of mainstream media on this same topic reinforced our belief that we needed to delve deeper. We met with our principal and the district administrator of special projects to discuss our concerns. As a result of this meeting, the four of us formed a study group to research the causes, effects and solutions my team partner and I might implement in our classrooms next year.

Our readings identify several causes for the increasing failure of boys across all demographics and age groups. First, boys are physically active, impulsive, action-oriented and natural risk-takers. These traits are not normally nurtured or rewarded in school settings. Second, boys lack what Dan Kindlon in, *Raising Cain*, calls emotional literacy. They do not know how to name their own emotions or how to read the emotional signals or intent of others. This lack of emotional literacy means boys have a low threshold for emotional pain, which leads them to withdraw or act aggressively. These behaviors can draw harsh punishment. Third, many boys lack male role models.

I returned to teaching and found that I had to be present for my students. I had to set aside my grief in order to meet their needs.

As the *Newsweek* article, "The Trouble," January 30, 2006 stated, "A boy without a father figure is like an explorer without a map." Boys, especially poor boys, need men in their lives to look up to, men who can guide them.

The effect of these risk factors has been that boys are failing at an alarming rate. They are two times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with learning disabilities and be placed in special education classes. Boys between five and twelve years of age are 60% more likely to repeat a grade in school than girls. Between ages five and fourteen they are 200% more likely

(See Interview continued on p. 14)

Congratulations

SDAWP Fellows Summer 2006

Raquel 'Kelly' Car
Vista Focus Academy, Vista

Roberts Ewing
DePortola Middle School, San Diego

Patricia Floren
Hardy Elementary School, San Diego

Mayla Guth
MIssion Estancia Elementary School, Encinitas

Nadia Mandilawi
San Diego City College, San Diego

Patricia 'Trissy' McGhee
San Diego City College, San Diego

Shannon Meredith
Carmel Valley Middle School, San Dieguito

Tamara Muhammad
Nubia Leadership Academy, San Diego

Pianta
San Diego Mesa College, San Diego

Linda Sennett
Nubia Leadership Academy, San Diego

Sandra Smith
Correia Middle School, San Diego

Michael Weller
Correia Middle School, San Diego

Alison Wise
Rancho Santa Fe Middle School, Rancho Santa Fe

Weavings

Patricia Floren, SDAWP 2006

For nearly twenty years, I have carried a basket. It's a strong basket, handcrafted in Ohio by a family-owned company known for heirloom quality weaving. It's a basket that's been filled with, at different times, different things. At first I bought it just for magazines, picturing how nice it would look next to my bed, the current issues of my reading journals and gardening tomes nicely stacked, waiting to be devoured. Then I decided to use it as a car basket, filled with necessities for a trip across town or across country: a map or two, a bottle of water, a sun visor. The basket became, over the next months, a carrying case for many things: flowers from the farmer's market, sand toys for a walk to the park, lunch for two little boys and me. On the day that I decided to make it a diaper bag, my life was changed forever.

I packed the basket up with enough toddler gear to last a couple of hours, perched Baby Ben on my hip and walked into the principal's office at the school of our then-kindergarten son Christopher. I smiled, gulped, and offered myself as a volunteer. "I'd like to help children write poetry, stories, anything, for a few hours a week," I began, "because I love writing and would like for them to love it too."

"Great!" the principal responded. "I just got a grant to hire someone just like you. How would you like a job?" That's honestly how it happened. I was offered a job at that school, on the spot, wearing my momjeans and tennis shoes, as a California Writing Project Writer's Assistant. I didn't know if I wanted a job, what the job was, how many hours I would work, how my husband would react or what I would do with my baby. But I said yes. And my life was changed forever.

We worked out the details, of course, which aren't so hard to work out when it's something you really want to do. Over the next five years I filled my basket with picture books, stories, poems and ideas, and spent a few hours with kindergartners through fifth graders each week. It was great: There were not a lot of parameters, because this was a grant position at the school and we could make it whatever we wanted it to be. The teachers were each glad to have me for an hour a week, working with their kids, while they were free to do prep-work or teacher-work. The kids seemed to enjoy it, and I liked the extra money. Christopher was proud of his Mom working at the school, and Ben had fun in the preschool sandbox.

I liked teaching children so much that I decided to get my multiple subjects credential, encouraged by that same principal to keep the job and attend classes at the same time. I learned about and started weaving more substance into my lessons. I felt I was making a difference in the students by bringing the world of writing to them. I began to prepare myself to enter the world of "real teaching"—that is, finally getting my own classroom and having my own students to mold into little writers. I was ready! But all that was put on hold when we had another baby, our Hannah, and then I was diagnosed with Stage II breast cancer when she was four years old. The story of my battle with breast cancer is another story, but it does figure here. Dealing with a life-threatening illness changes your perspective on things. It makes you pay attention, and it makes you closely evaluate how you spend your time.

Our family dealt with the illness, did what we had to do, and I got ready to go back into the classroom. I approached the same school, and offered myself to the new principal. The grant that had supported me all those years ago no longer existed, but he hired me with other monies. So I started up again, discovering new picture books, planning new lessons to take to each class and learning new kids' names.

Right away I noticed differences in the classrooms. The new administration in the district had made some big alterations. Many of the "creative" things were gone, replaced by strict literacy blocks and stringent schedules. All of these

things had woven together to make a change in the teachers and in the students. I wondered how they were going to make a change in me.

Teachers were glad to see me because I was going to bring something back into their classroom that they felt had been missing. But, since I was also a different person now, I had to evaluate how I wanted to make a difference. How did I fit into the bigger picture? How could I make it matter?

I quickly found I wasn't the same person that I was before. I had faced death. I had faced the prospect of me not being here to continue what I had started—with my family, with my friends, and with my students. I just wanted to pick up where I had left off, but that was impossible. I had to create a new path and a new journey. A new sort of basket.

As I worked with the kids at this school, a new desire formed. I now longed to be more than the enrichment person, more than the Miss Rumphius of Writing, striding in with her basket of cute projects and ideas. I longed to make a difference in their writing lives, not just for the day, but forever. It would have been easy to return to that younger me, but that wasn't enough. Was it that I knew more about writing, more about teaching, more about life, or more about me? Probably it was all of these.

My goal was always to spark a passion for writing in the students and teachers with whom I work. Now I wanted to do it in a more lasting way. I began to look around for great resources and mini-lessons, and found many. But my urge was to show the teachers and students more than a mini-lesson and, more importantly, to become more than a mini-lesson giver.

I began to believe that we can help children become more confident writers by teaching focused skills and crafts that they can weave into their writing organically, such as using powerful verbs in everything they create. I began to prepare my lessons by intertwining some of the points that have become the center of my belief system about teaching writing.

We need to not just talk around writing, but model writing in the classroom. We need to help our students find powerful writing in mentor texts. We need to look at what other writers have done in appropriate mentor texts, and try these craft moves in our own writing. We need to know what we are teaching. We need a focus. Within a context, we need to let our students have freedom. Beginning with a certain structure or focus may seem limiting at first, but it can be safe and then motivating because the students have something to hang on to. We must encourage our students to move beyond the safety net, and find the power and the voice that is uniquely theirs.

A change happened in my students because a change happened in me. I started to notice it when these new children, my second generation of students, would run up to me during recess or after school, clutching their notebooks and screeching, "Mrs. Floren—I LOVE writing!"

"Writing is my passion and power," declares Adrian. "Each day when you come, I feel like a brand-new boy," scribbles Jay-Von. "It was a starry fall night when she was born, Mainya-Laya," pens Mara. "On the border of Texas, stood a little house. There she lived. It was the beginning of a new cowgirl."

A new cowgirl, indeed. It's a very small time that I am with them, really. Such a small window of time. And it would be a very easy thing to not claim the space as mine, the students as mine. But when I watch those students beam over a poem, listen to them read a beginning that hits the mark, and feel their words sweep at the soul, I know I am their real teacher.

The lines we lift each day show wisdom in these young writers. That, coupled with my own wisdom from dealing with an ongoing, life-threatening disease makes me want to squeeze the most out of every moment, and that is what makes it real.

Two years ago, I bought a new basket. It's chunkier, but then, so am I. It has leather handles that are easier to grip, easier to hang on to when glowing boys like Adrian and Jay-Von run up to enlighten me about how they are becoming writers.

Most of us teachers have some sort of basket—those places close to our heart where we weave the words, stash the ideas, let the language churn and burn. Some are backpacks, some are tote bags, some are carts with wheels. Some are little handheld devices where our thumbs and forefingers tap out words in a quiet room.

But in the end, we weavers know we have something that is uniquely ours: A finished product of different shapes and sizes that will really never be finished. And now that you know it—What will you do with your basket?

MUSE BOX

Writer and poet Mary Oliver says, "When we have learned how to do something well…we say it has become 'second nature' to us. Many are the second natures that have taken up residence inside us, from the way Aunt Sally threads a needle to the way Uncle Elmer votes. It demands, finally a thrust of our own imagination—a force, a new idea—to make sure that we do not merely copy, but inherit, and proceed from what we have learned."

Read your favorite passage from a book, then write it word for word. Observe a masterful teacher and attempt to implement a lesson plan/technique of hers in your own classroom. Write like the student who impresses you most in the classroom then let your hand imitate the prose of the student who struggles the most.

Reflect on how you can grow as a teacher and a writer through the act of imitation and, in your own words, let us know.

Strategies When Students Write Alone

Pianta, SDAWP 2006

Over fourteen years ago I was teaching at an intensive English program at a program in Hawai'i. The students were from affluent families and came to the program to have fun for a few weeks and get some exposure to academic courses in English. On his writing placement test, a beginning level student was able to produce just two or three sentences, and at the end, gave an apology and wrote "somebaby [sic] help me!" He was clearly joking about his desperation, so the raters and I shared a laugh—although we were also fairly sure he was unaware of his error. This student was in Hawai'i to have fun and learn a little English—these placement results and struggles with English wouldn't affect his life in any real way.

My multilingual college students aren't in such a fortunate position, however. At this point in the game, they must often perform in high-stakes assessment tests and in classroom assignments that require fluency, accuracy, and reasoned thought. They do need "somebaby" to help them. Further, if they want to exit from programs or levels at an accelerated pace, they are asked to exhibit certain minimum skills in their writing. As the number of students lacking basic skills continues to multiply, I've been trying to think about what I do in the classroom to help them and why.

As the number of students lacking basic skills continues to multiply, I've been trying to think about what I do in the classroom to help them and why.

Like most community college instructors, I often struggle with the gaps that exist among writing theories, their application and outcomes. Instructors are left to assume that students transfer what they learn through "process writing" to pieces they produce alone under timed conditions. But definitions of "process" and what students do when they write have become pretty messy. Some students have been taught to adhere to a highly rigid sequence of brainstorming, freewriting, revising of multiple drafts, and peer and teacher editing. Others have been exposed to a more individualized experience which may incorporate all or none of those features. As for what goes on outside of class, students may go to peers, tutorial services on campus, or sometimes family and friends for help.

But what is it that I actually do to increase students' self-sufficiency, particularly in the areas of critical thinking and error monitoring? What really helps students value content and tend to mechanics, such as grammar and punctuation?

Coming up with an answer isn't easy. After all, language learners can only authentically produce based on what they can acquire. And what they can acquire, along with other variables, hinges on input and whatever stage they are at in their language acquisition. All of these influences operate in a dynamic, synergistic way, and speakers have their individual timeframes. Thus, it is impossible to rush, short cut, or artificially accelerate receptive or productive skills.

Further, I'm acutely aware of conflicting expectations of multilingual learners (whether too high or too low or inappropriate), biases in testing and evaluation, crudely designed assessment tools or outright systematic linguistic discrimination. Particularly in K-12, assessment of language skills has left the pedagogical arena and spilled over into the domains of identity, politics, and ideology. This is part of my personal experience. I grew up in a multilingual environment. People in my home state, Hawai'i, code switch as they move from one dialect or register to another. I grew up among many language models. And like many of my students, I worked and went to school fulltime, so I often didn't have time to revise or ask people to read my papers as I made my way through school or standardized tests. I can understand, even if only in a limited way, the conflicts my students feel and the predicaments they face.

Thus I advocate for more refined methods of assessment, but I also feel the urgency of time that my students feel as educators and politicians attempt to sort things out. Here are some things I do now:

- Anatomize the reading passage and prompt of the essays they've just read and written. I walk them through the passage to identify the author's claims and possible positions to take in response to the prompt.

- Prepare myself to read their papers carefully and analytically. I read their papers closely for gaps in logic. Like a detective or a fastidious psychoanalyst, I have to trace the thoughts of the students, to find precisely where their ideas begin to break down. This is time-consuming. My ability to read and understand expository passages well is key. Every passage students read, I must read with new eyes. Every claim both the author and student writer make I have to consider and test. The more the student writer is struggling, the more difficult it is to do this. It takes time and effort to identify problems, construct solutions, and convey them sensitively to students in writing or in conferences.

- Make a list of typical errors as I read their papers, which often include misreading of the article, errors in logic, incorrect word

choice, and misuse of grammatical structures. I debrief them first as a class and then privately in conference. Teaching students about common fallacies in logic doesn't seem to stick, but seeing flaws in logic by other student writers in response to the same prompt helps: "A picture is worth a thousand words." (Student papers are always anonymous and never from students in current classes.)

- Have them reflect in writing for just 5 – 7 minutes just after an essay to see what they felt after writing: "What part was easy? What was difficult? What would you do differently? Why?" I ask them to bring reflections to the next class for discussion.

- Give frequent in-class essays with varying levels of teacher input. During 2-hour practice essays they can ask me anything. In other types of sessions, to replicate authentic protocols, they write solo. Time expands for them when we do this regularly.

- Encourage internal checklists to check the soundness of their logic. In class we go over "E" (evidence) tests. "What's the evidence? Is it truly evidence (and not just an example)? Is there enough of it? Who/where is it from? Is it relevant to my point? Is it consistent (not some out-in-left-field exception)? Is it appropriate contextually? (e.g. "being teased by your brother is not on the same scale as 'sanctioned tor ture' as defined by the reading.")

- Have students read and rate sample student essays at the beginning of the semester using the department/program rubric. Acting as readers, they see things they don't notice as writers. Students also see there is a systematic way of scoring papers. The hope is that they start to self-evaluate and feel a transfer of authority to themselves rather than feel they are merely at the mercy of someone else's evaluation.

- Regularly mark the text and do line-by-line analysis with them. This works well as a class, in groups, partners, or alone. Once they become more familiar with this strategy, groups can be given overhead transparencies of the text which they can annotate and then share with the rest of the class.

- Use questions as a strategy to understand readings with which they feel no connection. Young, multicultural, and/or disenfranchised, they often can't relate to the readings. This is a golden opportunity to instill a strategy for global competency—that is, as a world community, we are responsible to cultivate curiosity and interest within ourselves about things to which we may not relate. The very fact that it may not interest students makes it most useful as a teaching tool to prepare them for college and university level work. I have students explore disconnection through inquiry—"Why is it boring?" "What's in here that's the least appealing and why do you think that is?" Rather than avoiding the problem of disinterest by artificially providing only high interest material, it's useful to acknowledge that much of their work in college is expository and may often be unappealing initially. Thus they need to get better at becoming interested. That in itself is a strategy-based skill.

- Bridge their interests by exposing them to authentic popular publications. Depending on the level, a subscription to magazines like *Newsweek* can be effective. For $4.72 per student, the class can enjoy 8 weeks of enjoyable, provocative reading in class. I also give prereading activities with standard freewriting questions like "What do I know about this topic? What do I need to know? What do I want to know?"

- Provide grammar and editing instruction directly related to the reading and the errors in the papers they write. The debriefing sessions are perfect for doing this.

- Spend more time with them to break down the prompt and variations thereof. Students frequently misread the prompt or are baffled if the question has more than one aspect to it.

- Have students log grammar errors and monitor the contexts in which they make them over the semester. It's not that the logs inspire radical change, but it increases both awareness and motivation to improve—which are useful when writing alone or with others.

Ultimately, writers all have their own internal processes when they write. Strategies differ depending on the task. When I write things for work, I treat the piece as if it were very hardy—I can slice it, dice it, and chop it. With creative work, I am much more observant of the wholeness of piece, so I am gentler and more cautious about fundamental changes. Revision tends to take place over a much longer period of time. I like to let a piece "set" before trying to rework it. The spirit of creative work seems more fragile and harder to recover if lost during revision.

...as a world community, we are responsible to cultivate curiosity and interest within ourselves about things to which we may not relate.

Students also have a myriad of ways to approach their writing. I try to offer them different things to try and lots of writing time to experiment.

When I think about it, it's sort of like a swimming class—and they need to be in the water a lot. I diagnose and offer solutions, and they get back in the pool. We debrief as a team or privately.

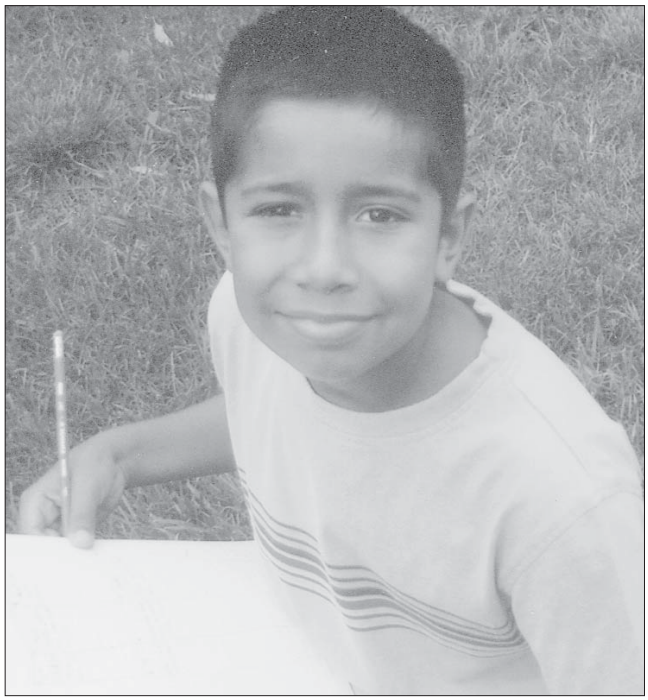
The student about whom I began this essay probably spent his days drifting on his raft in a big resort pool. My students are in trickier waters, but they regain their humor as their muscles get built up. They head out, glancing back at me occasionally, in tandem or alone, moving out in long pulls or short quick strokes, working steady, becoming more assured.

Summer 2006 Young Writers' Camp

The Bird

By Vineeth Murukuti—5th Grade

Moving through the breeze
Fluttering by with the wind
A propitious bird flies by the meadow



My Embarrassment

By Nathan Khuu—4th Grade

Embarrassment is like
Getting eaten by a predator.
Embarrassment blushes
For help. Embarrassment
Is a flower about to die.
Embarrassment smells
Worse than gasoline.
Embarrassment sounds
Worse than a giant
Playing with his set of
Drums with an amp.
Embarrassment tastes
Worse than medicine
That you're not
Supposed to bite,
But you bite it anyway.
Embarrassment feels
Hotter than the burning
Sun. This is my embarrassment.

Left Out

By Annie Xu—4th Grade

All I am is a little sprout being
Left out, left out, left out.
My elders such large plants,
Treating me like a scrap of paper,
Already whipped away in the wind.
They spit out rude comments:
"Look how timid he is" "Too small to be a plant!"
"He's as helpless as an ant
with a broken leg under a hammer!"
They laugh with the greatest of guile as they breathe
in the fresh sunlight, leaving no more for me.
I am so miserable, my ears too small to hear,
my voice too small to speak.
But my leaves shine green with happiness!
Because even the gentlest rain will drip from the high leaves
of my elders, and I will get to drink, the buzzing of the bees
and the chirping of the hummingbirds cheer me up.
One day I will grow up to be a beautiful plant
and everyone will notice me.
I am a plant who chose to live.

I am a Prayer

By Jane Han—5th Grade

I am a prayer
I wonder what's within the heavens
I hear angels whisper in my ears
I see doves soaring in the skies
I want peace among the world
I am a prayer

I pretend the world is a piece of hope
I touch the warm spirits of the people
I worry for those who are ill
I am a prayer

I understand the ways of the world
I say prayers with everyone
I dream for peace among countries
I try to learn to love all
I hope for peace for everyone
I am a prayer

YWC 2006 Reflection

By Alison Sternal, T.A. for 4th/5th grades

I am amazed by YWC every summer.
I wonder where all these great kids come from.
I hear pencils and notebooks constantly falling off desks
and clattering onto the floor.
I see flip-flops, Airwalks, sandals, Vans slip-ons, and Converse All-Stars
on feet that don't quite reach the ground when their owners sit in college desks.
I want to be a 5th grade teacher—a decision I made solely because of my
positive experiences at camp,
interactions with wonderful kids, and exposure to enthusiastic teachers.
I pretend three weeks is a whole year's worth of learning, exploring, and writing.
I am amazed by YWC every summer.
I feel so lucky that I stumbled onto YWC
as a 12-year-old wearing overalls and half of a"best friends" necklace,
and lucky that I never stumbled out of it.
I touch the Boulder Bear, the Snake Path,
the Silent Tree, and the Sun God.
I cry that I'm not a carefree, cute 5th grader,
but a harried college student looking for an apartment.
I am amazed by YWC every summer.
I understand this camp is too unique for words,
which is why I have a hard time explaining it to people.
I say, "Of course you can read your poem to me,"
whenever a camper eagerly asks.
I dream of having students like these
in my classes someday.
I try to imagine what these kids
will be like in a few years,
but give up because they are so awesome
as they are right now, in this moment.
I hope this is not my last summer here,
as my studies and the "real world" call me away.
I amazed by YWC every summer.

Sketch

By Emily Senes—7th Grade

You start with a scribble or even a line,
Your sketch will eventually turn out divine.
A pinch of color, a dash of black,
You know that you are on the right track.
Then you connect those scribbles and lines.
Start to form a picture in your mind.
A curve, a doodle, a square, or a star,
You can always sketch wherever you are.
Now just remember the dots and the shade.
All done; you're finished;
Your sketch has been made.

Spring

By Noemi Barragán—4th Grade

Smells like fresh air through my nose.
Feels like green grass tickling my toes.
Tastes like sweet honey from the bees.
Sounds like humming birds
flying in the trees.
Looks like colorful flowers in spring!

In Defense of Poetry

How to Not Tie It to the Chair and Torture a Confession Out of It

Ali Wise, SDAWP 2006

March and April were tough months for me. State testing is high stakes at my school, an uber-affluent we-send-our-kids-to-the-Ivy-League kind of place. If enough kids weren't in the "advanced" band, then we might lose our standing as the top public middle school in the county. Not to mention that in California, all students at the seventh grade level take a written exam that affects student placement, school reputation, and seventh grade writing teacher tenure. At the same time, I was accepted into a low residency MFA program in North Carolina, which meant I would have to take a week off at the beginning of May.

So before I left for North Carolina and after the tension of testing was just snaking away, I encouraged my 7th grade student writers to honestly describe how they felt about reading poetry in a pre-assessment that asked them to read "Ode to Pablo's Tennis Shoes" by Gary Soto and answer some questions about it. The responses did not shock me after being in a middle school classroom for four years.

Reading poetry, some said, is like: "sitting in detention," "stepping in dog poo," or "my sister ripping hair out of my head." Now, some of the kids had what I consider to be positive reactions to reading poetry, but I won't focus on those students right now. I am looking at the majority of my writing students (honors and otherwise) who just flat out didn't like to read poetry. And though I didn't know why definitively yet, I guessed either someone else had been explaining it to them throughout their lives, or they'd never moved beyond Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky, or perhaps they'd never been given the tools for accessing a poem and falling in love with language.

So, considering that these are fiercely independent end-of-seventh-grade students, I decided not to challenge their beliefs outright. I wanted to approach things with a sense of humor and a non-threatening tone. I made a group poem of all their responses and shared it with them the next day. We laughed. And that's it.

However a detectable discomfort squirmed into my thoughts.

Why is poetry literature's last suitcase on the baggage carousel? Why are so many educators fearful of teaching their students how to read a poem? Why is the teaching of poetry so often relegated to April, during its "month", which is so much like the marginalization of black history to February that it's scary? Why do educators consider poetry to be a useful unit after testing, after it really matters? Why is the poetry section at Barnes and Noble miniscule in comparison to celebrity autobiographies, or cookbooks, or travel guides, or—gulp—chick lit.? Why is writing poetry "fun" and reading it terrifying? Why can successful novelists, essayists, and screenwriters make a living out of their life's calling, while accomplished poets must maintain "real-world" full-time jobs and hand out their chapbooks for free?

With the myriad of negative messages kids receive about poetry in school and in mainstream American culture, is it really any wonder that students almost stick their tongues out at me when I pull out William Carlos William's "The Red Wheelbarrow"?

Okay, I'll shoot you straight—I am obsessed with poetry. I love the forms, the freedom, the rhythm, the subtlety, the momentum, the compression. But, listen, I don't totally nerd out on kids. I don't start talking about iambic tetrameter, or how the enjambment of a line lends itself to dada-ism. I don't do that. I don't want people to run away. If anything, I want them to feel intrigued by poetry. Giving someone access to poetry is an enormous gift. So, my challenge lies in motivating educators and students to like reading poetry, which consequently, makes the poems they write more likable too.

One of the strongest responses I get when I talk about having a poetry jam or moving the unit closer to the beginning of the year is: "It's not in the standards." Well, duh! We live in a culture where being an adept socialite is more acceptable than obtaining a Ph.D. in sociology. Of course the "standards makers" left poetry out. Who even reads modern poetry anymore? Who attends poetry readings? Truth be told, America has a small, and fierce, poetry community. But it is an art form that is increasingly relegated to the back of the bookstore, the basement of a coffeehouse.

Truth be told, America has a small, and fierce, poetry community. But it is an art form that is increasingly relegated to the back of the bookstore, the basement of a coffeehouse.

For three years, I taught at a school that faced charterdom every year because of poor performance on the state's standardized tests. My colleagues there were all about poetry, with the exception of one, who snarled during our planning day: "I don't do poetry." Luckily, she was outnumbered.

Because we planned the unit as a team, picked engaging poems, and organized an end-of-unit poetry jam, the kids were wild about it. Failing students attended after-school rehearsals to recite Langston Hughes voluntarily; English learners memorized Gwendolyn Brooks' "We Real Cool"; even the kids who consistently

ditched school or ended most of their days in ISS (In School Suspension) wrote poems from their voices, their experiences, their place in the world. All kids want to be heard. I wished I had BEGUN the year with the unit, not ended it!

At my current school, the polar opposite in socioeconomic and demographic terms, I have encountered: "We barely get to poetry at the end of the year, and a lot of times, we just skip it. It's not in the standards and the kids can't stand it." Hmm. Because I was new, I followed my directions like a straight "A" student. What was the last thing on the list? You guessed it. Hence, the happenstance of beginning a poetry unit after testing season, and right before the end of the year.

Why was the teacher writing about a turn on?
On the white board? In class?
All I wanted was their attention. I had it.

Gathering my ideas, the next morning after the group poem, I drew a T-Chart on the white board for my seventh grade writers: "Turn-ons" and "Turn-offs" (a questionable pedagogical decision, for sure). There was a detectable pink elephant in the room. Why was the teacher writing about a turn on? On the white board? In class? All I wanted was their attention. I had it.

"Guys, I'm gonna let you in on something. There are some things I really like about poetry, and there are some things I really don't."

Stares. Some a teensy bit hostile, some curious.

"You see, I love when I read a poem and it means something to me; but I hate when I can't understand a poem, even after reading it a few times."

Some stares still. Some nodding heads.

"And I also really appreciate when a poet uses new and sometimes dazzling words instead of the same old, same old. And that's why I don't really enjoy clichés. I mean, I can't even imagine how many poems I wrote about teardrops and rainbows and unicorns until I really realized that I didn't like to read poems like that, so why would anyone want to read mine?"

They were catching on. I showed them some poems I like in a poetry packet I created for them—"Introduction to Poetry" by Billy Collins, "I Never Said I wasn't Difficult" by Sara Holbrook, and "My Papa's Waltz" by Theodore Roethke. I then asked them to flip through the packet themselves and find poems they liked, or at least, could tolerate. I asked them to create their own T-Charts of turn-ons and turn-offs when reading poetry.

When we shared out loud at the end of class in my second period class, one student said, "One of my turn-ons is a short, easy-to-read poem, and one of my turn-offs is any poem you have to read more than once to understand." Almost every single student nodded emphatically in agreement. Uh-oh. I was in hot water.

You see, the conundrum was—should I challenge that right then and there, and tell them the best poems aren't transparent upon first reading?

You see, the conundrum was—should I challenge that right then and there, and tell them the best poems aren't transparent upon first reading? Or should I agree? Make it easy. Make them feel like I was on their side. I opted for the easy way out.

But I had big plans for them. I wanted them to fall in love with Whitman, Garcia Lorca, and Naomi Shihab Nye. I wanted them to recite Langston Hughes' "Mother to Son," marvel at the weirdness of Wallace Stevens' "Disillusionment of Ten O'clock" and imitate Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman." I wanted them to develop a style as unique to them as Emily Dickinson's was to her. I wanted to save my students, one poem at a time.

I left for North Carolina the next day with the nagging feeling that I had failed my students and poetry. The best poems have to be read more than once. But you have to want to read them again and again to appreciate language nuances, revolutionary ideas, and the scarcity of sentimentality. I had just given my student's permission to crumple up important poems because they might seem too difficult. What kind of teacher does that? And didn't I too shrink away from poetry that was too intellectualized, too remote, or too long?

Cue the poetry gods. During my first seminar at Queens University, entitled: "How to Read Like a Writer," Cathy Smith-Bowers began by reading a position piece she was working on for *Southern Review*, in which she describes getting in trouble for hanging out with boys at too early of an age. Her mother let her know exactly what people would call her behind her back—a slut. Though Cathy didn't know what that meant at the time, she discovered later on that like good girls, the best poems "ain't no sluts." They don't give it up easy.

Cathy went on to explain a simple approach she uses with her students to help them access good poetry:

1. Feeling
2. Story
3. Language
4. Line

First of all, after reading a poem, how do you feel? Do you feel something? If you don't feel anything, don't bother to read it again. What? That's right. There are so many poems in the universe, you're bound to find one that makes you feel something on first reading.

Second, after you read it once, go back and read it again. Does it have a story? You should try to piece

together a narrative within the text at this point. This helps you navigate the text on a literal level.

Read it again. This time, focus on the language. What dazzling words does the poet use? What words or phrases "speak" to you? What techniques does the author use to create surprise, emphasis, and/or tension?

For the fourth go-round, notice the way the poet had chosen to break the lines. What are the results of certain words having emphasis? Notice punctuation here, or lack of. Discuss what affect it has on the poem, or even the idea lurking inside the poem.

Now, as Cathy says, the poem is a part of your DNA. You remember it like you remember the smell of your momma's hand lotion.

Now, as Cathy says, the poem is a part of your DNA. You remember it like you remember the smell of your momma's hand lotion. It doesn't leave you. Wow. Did I have a gift to bring back to my students.

In case you're wondering, I didn't go back and explicate the slut analogy. These are seventh graders. I did, however, address the discussion we had before I left.

"Guys, I have to tell you. It's been eating me up that since we last talked: you guys think it's okay to read a poem only once. And if you have to read it more than once, it's no good. I take full responsibility. I did agree with Josh at that point, but now, I feel differently. I think the best poems HAVE to be read more than once."

An audible groan or two, but I expected that. We opened up our packets to "Oranges," another poem by Gary Soto. I purposely selected this poem because it is rich in language, somewhat difficult to understand on a first read, and most importantly, it's about a twelve year-old boy taking his crush to the drugstore for a "date."

After reading I drew a four square on the whiteboard and asked them to do the same in their writer's notebooks:

FEELING	STORY
LANGUAGE	LINE

I asked Josh to read the poem out loud for the class while we followed along, or closed our eyes, or stared at something flat in the room. Josh is the classic class clown, and I was expecting him to ham it up, but surprisingly, he didn't over-read it. He read it so well in fact, with enough but not too much drama that the students felt something. It was palpable in the room. When I asked them to call out how they felt, I got "quiet," "freezing," "loving," and "confused." I purposely didn't say anything. I just wrote down what they said to me.

Then I said, "Well, I don't know about you, but I'm a little confused, too. I don't know if the speaker shoplifted the orange for this girl, or if the clerk let him only pay for it with a nickel and an orange." Many heads nodded in agreement. "Let's read it again."

A normally shy Latina girl, Liliana, volunteered to read it aloud the second time. An intense debate ensued about whether or not the speaker steals the orange. We didn't reach a definitive conclusion, and this again, was purposeful. I asked the students to write down their own interpretation of the story, regardless of what the person sitting next to them wrote.

"Okay, guys, we've read this poem three times. I feel closer to it now, don't you?" They were probably thinking—what the heck is she talking about?

By the time I asked for a third reader, over half of the class had already raised their hands. These kids are so good, I thought. This is important. I sometimes go through my teaching day frustrated with Cecilia for talking under her breath when I ask her to move seats, and impatient with Matt who forgot his homework again; I don't often think—Wow, these kids are so awesome! I wish I had more time with them! So to have an opportunity to appreciate them is really, well, cool.

I chose not to talk to the kids about metaphors, similes, and repetition at that point. My experiences with these students had warned me to let them discover those things naturally. I had to believe they would. And I had to suppress the English teacher in me. I just asked them to name the dazzling words and/or phrases from the poem. I wrote amid their shouting (a very new, uncomfortable thing for me): "I was making a fire in my hands," "tiered like bleachers," "starting at the corners of her mouth," "frost cracking beneath my steps."

"Okay, guys, we've read this poem three times. I feel closer to it now, don't you?" They were probably thinking—what the heck is she talking about?

"I want to read it one more time together. You might have noticed that we haven't looked at the way the poet has arranged the words on the page." For some kids, I think this might have been the first time they realized that poets make choices about line length, that poems don't come out of the writer's head looking the way they do in a book. They noticed "short, skinny lines," and "mostly four word lines." And when I asked what this did for the poem, they called out: "it makes you read faster," and "it makes me want to be there."

Now, I have a confession. At that point in the "lesson," I did a dreadful thing: I brought up the word "enjambment," which is a technical French term describing the process of breaking a line in an unexpected way, so that a thought or sentence is placed on more than one line (e.g. "Fog hanging like old/ coats between the trees). I believed it was a teachable moment, but in retrospect, I wish I had waited. Not that they didn't take on the word,

everything after that was "enjamb this, enjamb that," but I think it would have been better had they discovered it on their own.

Hopefully, they owned "Oranges." I asked them to choose a poem from the packet, and using the same process, own that poem. In this way, I tricked them. That sounds malicious, but if you're a middle school teacher, you know it's all in the approach. My students were thinking critically without being aware of it, and better yet, they wanted to think deeply, have validation for their observations, and write about it.

Within two weeks, my students could: discuss any number of poems on an aesthetic level, write interpretive responses to poems that moved beyond personal connections, and revise each other's original poems using the four-step model. They created a full-scale workshop—turning in batches of poems for class discussion, listening intently to each other's comments, begging me to make a literary journal of their work. What world was I living in?

Were these the same students? Had they been sneaking their insightful minds behind my back this whole year? Of course they had. I had subconsciously created that kind of right-wrong-black-and-white culture in my classroom because I wanted to be in control. I was the one with the access. I was the smartest one in the room. And you'd better recognize it, too. I missed out on so much. And so had they.

How many students had I disappointed? How many students had a voice that wasn't heard? How many students wanted to express an opinion but were too fearful of being "wrong"? How many poems had I tied to the chair and tortured a confession out of, making my students stand by and witness? Pobrecita, poor poetry, indeed. I apologize to you—Walt Whitman, Josh Smith, Ezra Pound, Marceles Carter, Lauren Farmer, Robert Frost, Pablo Neruda, Maria Cruz, and Deshawn Dillard—just to name a few. I'll do even better next year.

But it's not just how to approach a poem, I've realized. It's that poetry must be prominent in a language arts classroom, at any level, from the get-go. Poetry is short, for the most part. It is less intimidating in many ways than an essay, or novel, or even a short story. Once kids learn how to approach a poem, and they are confident in owning it, there is a momentum in their thinking—their ability to analyze a piece of text begins to move, they want to write reflective responses, they build their own community and encourage each other's creativity, they try on the identity of a writer, and most importantly, they feel success.

Good poetry has a distinct voice, is honest with the reader, incorporates dazzling, surprising and sparse language, has been thoughtfully (often relentlessly) revised, parlays a narrative, and twists or comes full circle at the end. By recognizing good poetry, students can then recognize quality writing. And it translates to their writing.

Too often, poetry misses out on sitting shotgun. I agree with Paul Janeczko in his book *Opening a Door* on teaching poetry in the middle school classroom when he says:

"The more poetry we read, the more comfortable we'll be with it, and the more confident we will feel bringing in poems for students to share. Together with them we can explore the varieties of poetry, from rhyming poems to free verse, from classic to contemporary. We are not going to like all of the poems we read. But, by reading many poems, we will see all that poetry has to offer. By reading many poems, we will develop our sense of what makes a good poem, for ourselves and for our students."

Poetry is the back door to critical thinking. Like all art, it pushes the limitations and expectations of its audience; it raises questions about the everyday; it expands human connections and can drive the reader, listener, or viewer deep within oneself. For many students, poetry is a way into a world that might otherwise be closed.

This is Why I Teach

Mayla Guth, SDAWP 2006

I can't

You can—
Just find a quiet place
and listen to
your thoughts.

I can't

You can—
Listen to the sounds you hear
when you speak the word.

I can't

You can—
Draw yourself a picture
and search for all the details.

I can't

You can—
Think of all your stronger choices
when writing down a verb.

I can't

You can—
By remembering
your metaphors and similes,
they will have
a visual comparison.

I can

And as my student
reads his writing
I remember—
This is why I teach.

(Interview, continued from p. 3)
to commit suicide than girls and are 33% more likely to drop out of high school. The enrollment of males in college has decreased 14% in the last 30 years. The statistics speak clearly to us. We are failing our boys. The question that engages our team is, "What can we do differently?"

Our research is telling us that we can make an impact, that we can engage boys in a different way. First of all, it is imperative for us to help them develop an emotional vocabulary so they use words and not aggression to solve problems. Next year we plan to meet with boys separately from the girls to address this issue. Second, boys need to move. We are planning lessons that rely more on active participation and less on lecture. They will be involved with multimedia activities that require set building and video taping and editing programs. Third, boys need role models to guide them. We are planning a mentor program that will bring male community members into our rooms on a regular basis. They will address not only academic issues but social-emotional issues as well. Fourth, we plan to include boys as consultants in solving their problems. We want them to understand what is troubling or angering them. We will at the same time provide clear and consistent but not harsh discipline.

Our journey has just begun, but with the help and support of our principal and a key district administrator, we hope to address the issues outlined and develop an action plan that will begin to turn the tide for our boys in our school.

Please talk about being named Teacher of the Year.

I could say that teaching has saved my life. Whenever I'm asked what I do for a living, I have always proclaimed with great pride, "I am a teacher." I believe that teaching is the highest form of service. That belief was unexpectedly challenged and ultimately reaffirmed because of my own personal life story. Seventeen years ago, my daughter, my only child, died of cancer at age fifteen. After her death, I really did not know if I had the courage to return to teaching, to look into the eyes of children, without daily mourning the loss of my own precious child. But it was a conversation I had with my daughter that required me to at least try. Just before her death, she looked me straight in the eye and said, "Mom you have to promise me that you will return to teaching, that you will never give it up!" In that moment I did not respond, but I knew that she knew and understood that teaching was my passion, that without it I would be, "A broken winged bird that could not fly."

These last words come from a Langston Hughes poem that begins, "Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly. Hold fast to dreams for if dreams go, life is a barren field frozen with snow."

If you teach, your life has purpose every day. No matter what you are going through, no matter how bad your day or your life is going something will happen during the day that will make you smile or give you hope. It might be something as simple as a child looking up at you and stating, "You love children." Or it might be as spine tingling as a student standing in front of the class and reading his elegy to his twin brother who died at birth. It could even be something as precious as a Spanish-speaking child saying his first word to you in English.

If you teach, you will accumulate a treasure chest of memories, letters, drawings, silly and strange looking mementos that make you chuckle every time you look at them. But most of all if you teach, your life will never be a barren field frozen with snow. For sure, there will be one face among the many that will smile up at you, thaw out that snow and melt your heart.

I returned to teaching and found that I had to be present for my students. I had to set aside my grief in order to meet their needs. I cannot say that any of the children's lives I've touched replaced the loss of my daughter, but I can say that I have found something to be grateful for each day of my life. I could say that teaching has saved my life, and it would be the truth.

What are your hopes, plans, and goals for the future, both in your personal career and with your students?

"You know, after thirty years of teaching, I think I really get it," I recently said to a friend. I finally understand the teaching and learning process. I understand because I have been held accountable for my teaching. Through formal evaluation, peer evaluation, self-reflection and training, I evolved as a teacher. I want each and every teacher to live up to the highest standards of our profession. To accomplish this goal, teachers must first and foremost reflect on their teaching practices in a systematic way. New teachers need ongoing training in the basics of good teaching, meeting the state standards, meeting the goals and objectives set by their districts, and implementing thoughtfully designed lessons. They need the mentorship of veteran teachers, and clear feedback from administrators that will show them how to develop their skills. As teachers progress in their careers, they must reflect on their practices, develop the ability to ask hard questions about their teaching, and find the resources and support to answer their questions and advance their skills. Veteran teachers who have honed their skills must continue to grow, expand their repertoire of strategies and tools, keep up with changing times and be the mentors who provide leadership to the young.

Just as we must differentiate curriculum for our students, so too must we differentiate the accountability process for teachers if we want them to grow. At the heart of growth is the understanding of the teaching process, knowledge of grade level standards, ability to design effective lessons, a forum for exploring and examining teaching practices, and the support of administrators to assist in that growth process. We must not only understand the goals and objectives of the grade we teach, but we must be engaged in a continual dialogue with our colleagues about the standards below and beyond our own grade levels, and we must communicate those standards effectively to the students we teach and their parents.

PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITIES

English Journal NCTE

American Cacophony: Languages, Literatures, and Censorship
Deadline: May 15, 2007

The United States is a noisy nation. We argue, we celebrate, we moderate—all through language. For us, a disputatious society has been mostly healthy for the growth of a democracy. Since it was written, we have attempted to define what the freedom of speech clause in the Bill of Rights means for us as a people and a society. This issue focuses attention on the multiple voices—historic and current—that have constructed and do construct our concept of America. We invite manuscripts on a range of topics related to languages, literatures, and censorship. In some districts, more than one hundred languages are spoken. How do you design language instruction in such a context? What is important for native English speakers to know about language and how do you teach them? What do you teach students about American English dialects? How do we define/redefine through literature? What texts do you include and for what reasons? In what ways do you teach the works and ideas of the "under-ground" or dissident voices in America? What roles does censorship play in text selection and teaching approaches? How have you addressed attempts at censorship? For submission guidelines visit: *www.englishjournal.colostate.edu/infoforauthors.*

Voices from the Middle

Making Connections: Are We There Yet?
Deadline: May 1, 2007

The transferability and application of literacy strategies are at the heart of all learning. Day in and day out on the journey through school you teach many facts, concepts, and literacy strategies that you hope your students will ultimately use both in academic settings and personal contexts. What opportunities do students have to use what you teach them? How do you help students become aware of the usefulness of what you teach them? How do you help students become aware of and articulate their understandings of "what do I do when I do it?" In other words, how are your students becoming more metacognitively aware of their use of literacy strategies? For submission guidelines visit: *www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/vm/write/110485.htm*

Language Arts NCTE

Explaining Change: Theories of Learning and Literacy in Action
Deadline: May 15, 2007

Why did this child succeed? Why did this child "fall behind"? What difference does a teacher make? How do I explain the energy and commitment of my students when they "get into" their writing? Literacy educators grapple with dozens of such questions in their classrooms every day. Sometimes we manage to slow down and ask ourselves what we mean by learning. Other times we read news reports about student success and failure and become frustrated with limited explanations of what it means to learn and change. In this issue, we hope readers will discover explanations of learning that will be useful for conversation with parents, community members, colleagues, and students. We invite authors to describe and explain change. What theories of learning and concepts of literacy guide your interpretations? How have you made these ideas about learning your own and what seems elusive or paradoxical? How can you illustrate ideas about learning and literacy so children, parents,and community members can also raise questions and suggest alternate perspectives on learning and language arts education? For submission guidelines visit: *www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/la/write/10.htm*

DIALOGUE

Call for Manuscripts

Spring 2007 Issue
Submission Deadline:
March 1, 2007

Relevance

Meeting standards, incorporating technology, preparing children for college, careers, and the "real world": how do you keep curriculum relevant and meaningful to you and your students while striving to meet often competing goals? State standards, your students' needs, district mandates, team/department approaches, latest research: how do you sift through all the information coming your way to determine what's most relevant for you in your classroom?

Write about what's relevant to you and your students NOW. Give us an example of a lesson relevant to your students and their characters and needs. Discuss the issue of relevance as it relates to how we educate children in the United States, our state, your school.

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

Send all manuscript submissions, suggestions, letters to the editor and Project Notes to:

Dialogue UCSD/SDAWP
9500 Gilman Drive, 0036
La Jolla, CA 92093 - 0036

Email:
moonbeam5@cox.net
jenny4moore@hotmail.com

Calendar of Events

SAVE THE DATE

"A Moment in Time"

San Diego Area Writing Project
30th Anniversary Celebration
Saturday, March 3, 2007
2:00 - 5:00 p.m.
UCSD

2007 SDAWP Summer Institute

Attention SDAWP Fellows!
Please consider nominating
a fellow teacher for our
2007 Summer Institute.

For information,
contact Kim Douillard at
teachr0602@aol.com
Tentative dates:
June 26 - July 20, 2007

Applications will be
available in January.

CATE Conference

Fertile Ground:
A Landscpre of Choices

February 8 - 11, 2007
Fresno, CA
CATE Pre-Convention/
CWP Strand
Thursday, February 8

Promising Practices Spring Conference

April 28, 2007
Marina Village Resort
San Diego, CA
8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

For information regarding our programs, please call the SDAWP office at 858-534-2576, or visit our web site at
http://create.ucsd.edu/sdawp/current.htm

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