

Newsletter



Volume 21, Number 5 Summer, 2001

MAKE IT A

Plenty of variety: 46 three-credit and one-credit courses

A choice of locations: WCU, Bucks County IU, & Souderton SD

Wow! 21 Young Writers/Young Readers sites in six counties

Literacy Conference

Professional growth

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SUMMER



“WHY WE MUST RUN WITH SCISSORS:

VOICE LESSONS IN PERSUASIVE WRITING” will be the focus of

Barry Lane’s keynote address at the Celebrate Literacy II Conference June 21 and 22. Lane believes writing - and its teaching - should be fun. Come hear his humorous and inspiring presentation.



Barry Lane
Keynote Speaker
June 21, 2001

Other featured speakers include Carmine Coco DeYoung, author of Teachers’ Choice Book Award winner *A Letter to Mrs. Roosevelt*, and Sue Mowery, co-author of the PA Early Childhood Assessment Framework and member of PDE’s Writing & Reading Assessment Committee, whose topic is “Instructional Applications of the PA Standards for Reading & Writing: Should We Teach to the Tests?”.

Breakout sessions conducted by PAWL P Fellows address current issues in teaching literature and writing. Roundtable discussions on Character Education, Flexible Grouping, Reading in the Content Areas, Content Area Writing, Dealing with Standardized Testing, Working with Parents, and Guided Reading complete the conference agenda.

The cost of the conference is \$110 if registration is postmarked by June 1, \$130 for later registrations and walk-ins. Fifteen Act 48 hours and one-graduate credit options are available.

For information and a registration form please call 610-436-2202.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

An interesting research report crossed my desk recently. "**Beating the Odds: Teaching Middle and High School Students to Read and Write Well**" presents findings from the first three years of a five-year study conducted in New York, California, and Florida by Judith Langer, of the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement at SUNY Albany.

Before you stop reading (because who wants to read about education research?!), let me tell you several things that make this study truly interesting and make it worth finishing this column:

(1) Judith Langer does not do research to support a particular political agenda. She was an English teacher who became a literacy researcher. She's smart, funny, knows what English is about and knows how to get money to do real research in real classrooms.

(2) The research, briefly referred to as the Excellence in English study, is intended to answer a very important question: why do students in some schools do better on statewide "high stakes" exams than students at other schools *when the schools are otherwise comparable*? In other words, why are some urban school students more successful than other demographically comparable urban school students? Why are some suburban school students more successful than their demographically comparable suburban counterparts? (So the "beating the odds" of the study's title means "performing better than schools rated as comparable by statewide criteria.")

(3) The answers to this question are principles PAWLP Fellows know implicitly if not explicitly. In fact, they are the principles on

which most Project work is based and which it models. We just don't articulate these principles often enough for our own good. That's why I'm going to share them with you here.

Langer's findings are reported in six categories, many of which are current hot topics in literacy education. First, Approaches to Skill Instruction.

In schools that beat the odds, effective teaching and learning of skills happen as "separated" and "simulated" as well as "integrated" experiences. In more typically performing schools, one or another instructional approach dominates [usually either separated or simulated].

In other words, yes, there must be some direct instruction and some practice tasks (i.e., "simulations"). But they should be integrated "within the context of literature and writing instruction." As Langer points out, "the more successful teachers used all three approaches with equal focus or they used separated and simulated approaches but focused on integration a bit more." Teachers in more typical schools? Their "approaches to skills development seem to be more restricted and separated from the ongoing activities of the English classroom."

Second: Approaches to Test Preparation.

In schools that beat the odds, test preparation has been integrated into ongoing class time as part of ongoing English language arts learning goals. In the more typically performing schools, test preparation is allocated its own space in class time, often before testing begins, apart from the rest of the year's work and goals.

Does this mean the more successful schools make "test prep" part of their ongoing instruction? No, not at all. It means rather that the skills and knowledge required by the test are "infused" into the

curriculum of the successful schools. "Students were also taught to become more reflective about their own reading and writing performance... to help them gain insight into their better or less well developed reading and writing performance in response to particular tasks." In sum, "higher performing schools seem to focus on students' learning, using the tests to be certain the skills and knowledge that are tested are being learned within the framework of improved language arts instruction, while the more typical schools seem to focus on the tests themselves, with raising test scores, rather than students' literacy learning as the primary goal."

Because this column is short and the report is long, I will summarize findings 3-6.

Connecting Learnings: In successful schools, teachers make explicit connections between what students are learning within lessons, across lessons, and across the curriculum; between school and life, literature and life, writing and life; between instruction and assessment; and between goals, skills, and experiences.

Enabling Strategies: In successful schools, teachers make all necessary strategies explicit. This includes strategies necessary to do a task, reflect on a task, and improve performance on a task.

Conceptions of Learning: In successful schools, teachers take a "generative approach" to learning. They don't stop when they see students understanding a concept or acquiring a skill. Instead, they go beyond mere skill and knowledge acquisition to help students develop deeper understandings of what they read, learn, and do.

Classroom Organization: In successful schools, learning is understood as social activity,

-continued on page 3, column 1

-continued from page 2, column 3

"with depth and complexity of understanding and proficiency with conventions growing from interaction with present and imagined others." This does not mean all work is done in groups. It means, instead, that whole-class discussion, too, is used to foster "cognitive collaboration."

When I finished reading this report, my first thought was, "These findings aren't new. We've known all this for years!". My second thoughts, though, were questions: "Do we do this kind of 'meta' often enough?" and "How can we use this kind of research-based proof that we're right?"

I've done the meta for all of us this time. Now we can use Langer's report to help spread the word even more convincingly.

PAWLP FELLOW'S SITE CITED

Steve Heffner, PAWLP's Co-director for Technology and regular *e-literacy* columnist in this *Newsletter*, is the subject of two pages (complete with picture!) in *Teaching with the Internet: Lessons from the Classroom*, a new Christopher-Gordon publication.

"The home page for Steve Heffner's 9th grade English class [is] an exceptional model for any classroom," say Donald and Deborah Leu, authors of the book. "Regardless of the grade level or the subject you teach, we can all learn important lessons by exploring [this] web page." The Leu's describe the page in considerable detail and give the address (<http://www.pipeline.com/~sheffner/classroom.html>). So check out the book or, better yet, visit the site!

Read Any Good Books Lately?

So you want to teach reading. Are you yourself a reader?

I don't mean *can* you read. I mean is reading like food and drink to you?

If a day passes and you didn't read at least the back of the cereal box, do you get withdrawal symptoms?

Can you name at least one book that changed your life?

Is there a book you've read and re-read?

Do you give books you've enjoyed as presents?

When you finish a good book, do you think, "Hmm, who else would like this book?"

Do you usually have at least two or three books waiting for the minute you finish the current one?

Is it safe for you to go into a bookstore or log on to amazon.com?

Those of you who have been around for a while no doubt remember one of the first axioms for teachers of writing: a teacher of writing writes. Arguments—well, discussion—used to fill the breaks of Writing Institutes as to exactly what this meant. Some believed it meant teachers of writing tried to write for publication; some believed it meant teachers wrote with the students, explicitly explaining what their thinking was. Either way, teachers of writing

wrote.

It's my belief that teachers of reading read because they can't help themselves, but a wonderful by-product is their ability to help their students because, whatever the problem, they've been there too.

Student having trouble reading non-fiction? You can help, both because you've read Harvey and Goudvis' *Strategies for Teaching Reading* and Keene and Zimmerman's *Mosaic of Thought* and because you've run into the same problem.

Looking for a good read-aloud? You not only have the read-aloud lists from Fountas and Pinnell's *Guiding Readers and Writers* and Allen's *Yellow Brick Roads* but also shelves of books which moved you.

Have five reading logs in front of you? You can quickly reflect on the students' current abilities and, subtly, suggest the next move because—okay, okay, you get the idea.

Students value what we value. If we read, if we give class time to independent, self-selected reading on a regular basis, we send a message that students are quick to pick up on.

-Vicki Steinberg, PAWLP
Co-director, is the Language Arts
Supervisor in Exeter Township SD

FELLOW'S PUBLISHING CENTER FEATURED

Sue Smith, a favorite PAWLP course coordinator and presenter, was featured on the West Chester Local Life website for the successful publishing center she established at the Mary C. Howse Elementary School. The Shooting Stars publishing program, which provides each child with the opportunity to write, illustrate, design, and publish one book every school year, began in 1997 when Sue was awarded an Excellence in Education grant from First Union Bank. The center has grown each year, now involving over 100 parent volunteers. "I saw what [having a publishing program] did for my own students," Sue was quoted as saying about her teaching days in the Rose Tree Media SD. "It's so incredibly motivating. Seeing the finished product helps to make all the hard work worthwhile."

EDUCATION MATTERS

a column from Michaels Associates

A Time for Response

by Sharon Taberski

Just as the artist's work is realized in the observer's response, literature elicits a child's views, sentiments, and opinions. On this aesthetic level, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, just a growing appreciation for the "interaction" between writer and reader and an awareness that she is expected, even entitled, to respond.

During our meeting time, from 9:00 to 9:30, I read texts aloud - factual texts and poetry, as well as fictional pieces. My children respond orally right from the first day of school when I read to them and ask: "So, what do you think?"

It's not at all unusual for children to initially respond with short, generic statements, like "It was funny," and then for me to prompt them to be more specific. The conversation that ensues when I ask children to say more or explain their responses generates additional topics for discussion. It's usually the children's comments and questions, not mine, that spark a debate.

Here are several suggestions for improving children's oral responses to text:

- Provide time for responses. In the pressure of the curricular agenda, it's often tempting to read a book and then move directly to the next activity. Giving children the opportunity to respond may sometime seem too much of a luxury. However, the time we spend nurturing children's responses to text is important. It sets the stage for an interactive classroom where the children know they're expected to participate and enjoy the exchange. Unless we make responding to books a regular part of the classroom routine, children will be suspicious of the occasional time when we do ask for a response. They'll think we're checking up on their reading, instead of initiating a dialogue about books.

- Help children interact. Just as children begin pre-school parallel playing, indifferent to what the child sitting next to them is doing, their early responses to books show little regard for their classmates' comments. Then, as their social awareness develops, they begin to listen more carefully, and can eventually talk with one another about books.

I support interactions by asking a child to speak directly to his classmate ("Georgie, would you look at Thomas and say that again?") or by referring with a hand gesture to the child

who made the original comment, when another child inappropriately addresses a response to me.

- Improve our questioning technique. There used to be times when I posed a question (or more accurately - a series of questions, one right after the other) and got no response. I wanted to throw up my hands and ask: What's wrong with these kids? Instead, I've learned to ask what's wrong with my technique.

It's intimidating to have questions fired at us, one after the other. When someone really wants to know how you feel, they look you in the eye, ask a direct question, and give you time to consider it. Good questioning techniques provide response time, and the best questions foster divergent thinking, not one right answer.

Sharon Taberski is a teacher at the Manhattan New School and the author of On Solid Ground: Strategies for Teaching Reading K-3 published by Heinemann (\$22.00).

Readers of this *Newsletter* can receive a 20% discount on the book when you order through Michaels Associates. Request the discount by mentioning the *Newsletter* when you call or reference it in the body of your purchase order. This discount offer will expire without notice after a reasonable time. Qualified VCN account holders will receive free shipping in addition to the discount.

-Greg Michaels

MAKING CONNECTIONS: EDUCATORS AS READERS & WRITERS

Five Saturdays 3 graduate credits from WCU

Dates: September 15, October 6, November 3, and December 1
from 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. & December 8 from 9:00 a.m. - noon
Internet Access Recommended

For more information contact
Mary Buckelew, Associate Director

610-436-2998



When a long-awaited Borders bookstore finally opened near my home a few years ago, I assumed my study would soon house enough books to rival the Library of Congress. Eager to get started, credit card in hand, I drove to Borders several times a week to pass an hour or two before returning home—often full of coffee but usually without any new reading material. My problem wasn't a lack of choice, but rather, too much.

I'm like that, sometimes. Give me too much information and my brain just shuts down, refusing to make any decision at all. At the grocery store, I agonize over whether I should buy the skim, 1%, 2%, or whole (and then there's that vitamin D versus acidophilus question), so selecting a single book from several thousand is virtually impossible for me. After all, spending \$35 on a new Tom Wolfe or \$27.50 for the latest David Guterson is a much bigger commitment than going with the eighty-five cent medium brown eggs over the ninety-eight cent large white ones.

Fortunately, those days of frustrating indecision are over—at least when it comes to book buying. Borders, Barnes and Noble, Books a Million, and Powells bookstores have all created fun, interactive Internet websites that make finding the right book a whole lot easier. And, while I don't really do a whole lot of online book buying, I do quite a bit of online shopping (research, one might call it), so that by the time I make the trip to the store, I already have a list of books to buy.

With summer finally on the horizon, I'd like to share a few of the online resources that have made my book selecting process more focused and productive. Perhaps

these suggestions can help you to assemble your summer reading list as well.

Borders Books and Music (<http://www.borders.com>) provides online professional reviews of most of its offerings, but I prefer to read the customer reviews. These are often more honest and colorful than the ones written by paid critics and, somehow, are more attuned to my personal reading tastes. Anyone visiting Borders' website can submit a review of any book in print and can rate the book on the coffee cup scale (Five cups is "excellent." A spilled coffee cup is for "books to be avoided").

Like the Borders site, the Barnes and Noble website (<http://www.bn.com>) also provides both professional and customer book reviews, but allows customers to attach their e-mail addresses to their reviews. Subsequent customers can then ask questions or initiate discussions about a book, either prior to purchase or after they've finished reading. In essence, Barnes and Noble has created a huge book discussion group in which everyone can choose to remain anonymous. One other feature of the Barnes and Noble site is called "Discover: Great New Writers." Here, as its name implies, new writers are featured, often with excerpts from their works.

The Books a Million website (<http://www.booksamillion.com>) features cross-references with other customer purchases. For instance, if a customer searches for information on the *Harry Potter* series, the web page returned not only displays all of the available *Harry Potter* texts, but also a list of other titles purchased by *Harry Potter* customers. I've found this feature especially helpful, since I can see what other readers with similar tastes to my own have purchased.

The Powells website (<http://www.powells.com>) lacks the in-

teractivity of the first three mentioned, but it does allow a search by prizes and awards. For example, a customer can search for National Book Award, PEN/Faulkner Award, Pulitzer Prize, and Newberry Medal winners. Now honestly, I've never really desired to build my recreational reading list exclusively around such high brow reading, but the Powells' prize search may just help me show off a bit at my next dinner party.

Probably the most comprehensive reading resource site, however, is *The New York Times'* book site (<http://www.nytimes.com/books>). Here, readers can search and read over 20,000 reviews. The site also provides expanded versions of the famous *New York Times* Best Seller lists for hardcover, paperback, fiction, non-fiction, advice, and children's reading. There's a featured authors section and access to book discussion forums and reading groups. Audio excerpts from author interviews, lectures, and books-on-tape give extra life to this site, but my favorite feature has to be the many downloadable first chapters. If a book doesn't grab me by the end of the first chapter, most likely it won't, and the ability to read first chapters online has saved me from many regrettable purchases.

Thanks to the Information Superhighway, finding new reading material has gone from being a frustrating, often fruitless effort, to being a fun, interactive, and productive one. I'm already working on my summer reading list, and I'm sure that you're eager to get to yours.

Now . . . if only someone would create a website that would help me prepare my grocery lists . . .

-Steve Heffner, PAWLP Co-director for Technology, teaches high school English in the Conrad Weiser SD

SUMMER PROGRAMS FOR TEACHERS

Summer Institutes

Institutes in the Teaching of Writing Dates/Times Institute in the Teaching of Literature

West Chester University June 25 - July 20 Colonial SD, Plymouth Meeting
 Bucks County IU, Doylestown Monday - Thursday 8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Six graduate credits from West Chester University Total participant cost is \$950
 Fellows of all Institutes may become paid teacher-consultants eligible to coordinate courses,
 present in-service programs, and teach in our summer Youth programs

2001 Summer Courses

Chester County

Courses held at West Chester University

3 credit courses 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Strategic Guided Reading & Writing, K-3.....June 25-29
 Learning to Write/Writing to Learn, K-12.....July 9-13
 Portfolio Profiles, Teachers' & Students', K-12.....July 23-27
 Writing & Children's Literature, K-8.....July 30-Aug 3
 Managing a Writing/Reading Classroom, K-8....Aug 6-10

1 credit courses 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Developing Mini-Lessons for Writing/Reading
 Processes, K-8..... June 25-26
 Poetry Workshop, K-12 June 27-28
 Writing Process Revisited, K-12..... July 2-3
 Flexible Grouping, K-8 July 2-3
 Readers' Workshop, K-8..... July 5-6
 Readers' & Storytelling Theater, K-8..... July 9-10
 Emergent Literacy in Kindergarten..... July 11-12
 Writing to Learn, 2-12..... July 16-17
 PSSA Math through Writing, 3-8..... July 16-17
 Emergent Writers & Readers, K-3..... July 18-19
 Persuasive Writing, K-12 July 18-19
 Creating Author Studies, K-8 July 23-24
 Developing Literature Circles I, K-12 July 23-24
 Writing/Reading Classroom for Students
 at Risk, 6-12..... July 25-26
 Developing Literature Circles II, K-12..... July 25-26
 Managing Writing/Reading Classroom, 6-12... July 30-31
 Preparing for PSSA Reading, 3-12..... July 30-31
 Writing/Reading Classroom for Students
 at Risk, K-5..... Aug. 1-2
 Preparing for PSSA Writing, 3-12..... Aug. 1-2
 Multiple Intelligences in the Writing
 Classroom, K-12..... Aug. 6-7

Bucks County

Courses held at Bucks Co. IU, Doylestown

3 credit courses 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Writing & Children's Literature, K-8.....June 25-29
 Learning to Write/Writing to Learn, K-12.....July 9-13

1 credit courses 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Emergent Literacy in Kindergarten July 2-3
 Readers' & Storytelling Theater, K-8 July 5-6
 Guided Reading and Writing, K-3.....July 16-17
 Developing Literature Circles I, K-8..... July 18-19
 Flexible Grouping for Writing/Reading
 Classrooms, K-8..... July 24-25
 Developing Mini-Lessons for
 Writing/Reading Processes, K-8 July 24-25
 Writing Process Revisited, K-12 July 26-27
 Readers' Workshop, K-8 July 26-27
 Writing to Learn, 2-8 July 30-31
 Creating Author Studies, K-8.....July 30-31
 Preparing for PSSA Reading, 3-12 Aug. 1 & 3
 PSSA Math through Writing, 3-8 Aug. 1 & 3



Montgomery County

Courses at Franconia ES,
 Souderton SD

3 credit course 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Managing Writing/Reading Classroom, K-8..July 16-20

1 credit courses 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Writing to Learn, 2-8..... July 25-26
 Developing Literature Circles I, K-8July 23-24
 Developing Mini-Lessons for Writing/Reading
 Processes, K-8.....July 30-31

CELEBRATE LITERACY II

A conference for teachers K-12

at West Chester University

Keynote Speaker: BARRY LANE

June 21 & 22, 2001

Visualizing Words and Worlds: Writing, Literature, and Art

James A. Michener Art Museum, Doylestown

July 16-19 and 23-26 8:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Bandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford

July 30-Aug. 2 and Aug. 6-9 8:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

3 graduate credits from West Chester University
Limited enrollment

PA WRITING & LITERATURE PROJECT REGISTRATION FORM
REGISTER EARLY! Registration Deadline 2 Weeks Prior to Starting Date of Course.

(Please type or print legibly)

Cost for PA Residents: (Out of state tuition higher)

1 graduate credit: \$254 including fees
 C.P.E. or Act 48 credit: \$125/credit

3 graduate credits: \$762 including fees
 \$375/3 credits

| Course Name | Location | Type of Credit | Cost |
|-------------|----------|----------------|------|
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Don't wait until the last minute to register for a program! Registration closes two weeks before start date of each course. PAWLP reserves the right to set maximum enrollment or cancel an offering due to insufficient participation. If a course is cancelled or oversubscribed, registrants will be notified by phone, e-mail, or mail. In the event your course is canceled, you may register for another available class or request a full refund.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: _____ Social Security #: _____ - _____ - _____

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Address: _____

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(For Federal, State, and statistical reporting) Birthdate: _____ Residence county _____ Citizenship country _____
(yr - mo - day)

Sex: Male ___ Female ___ Check one: Black/non-hispanic ___ Hispanic ___ Asian/Pacific Islander ___ White/non-hispanic ___

Bachelor's Degree from _____ Year awarded: _____

Present School/School District in which employed: _____

Grade(s)/Level(s)/Subject(s) currently teaching: _____

METHOD OF PAYMENT (due at time of registration. Credit card information must accompany telephone and faxed registrations.)

Enclosed is my check/money order number _____ for \$ _____ payable to West Chester University.

Charge my credit card \$ _____ Visa ___ Master Card ___ Expiration: _____ / _____
month year

| | | | |
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Cardholder name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Mailing Address: Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383

For more information, call 610-436-2202 or 2297, fax: 610-436-3212, or e-mail: mshirk@wucpa.edu

PAWLP Website: <http://www.pawlp.org> http://www.wcupa.edu/_ACADEMICS/writing.prj/

For information on WCU offices, catalogs, StuView, etc. - http://www.wcupa.edu/_STUDENTS

Pennsylvania Dept. of Education - <http://www.pde.psu.edu/>

Call for policy on withdrawals and refunds 610-436-2297

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