



# PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 4 NUMBER 3

SPRING 1984

## MORE ABOUT OUR SUMMER PROGRAMS

### Holistic Assessment of Writing

In this two-day workshop, participants learn about several different methods of holistic evaluation of writing and are trained to use one or more of them. The training includes setting group standards and applying them reliably to over 1200 student papers in two days! The 1983 participants echoed those of previous years in recognizing the importance of holistic evaluation.

"Holistic assessment is likely to be a new term in educational jargon for veteran and novice educator alike. It refers to a variety of procedures which attempt to establish a consistent and reliable method for the evaluation of student writing. . . . Holistic assessment procedures could put an edge on the use of the calculator in scoring procedures. And — the evaluator won't require batteries." (Melanie Cohen Goodman).

"When I registered for the Holistic Assessment Workshop, I had no idea what it involved. As a first-year public school teacher, I was searching for a faster, fairer, more efficient way to deal with the more than one hundred weekly compositions I read. Though the workshop did not focus on the individual classroom, I learned several ways to incorporate and use holistic assessment in my weekly composition classes. More important, I learned a means of gaining a fix on the writing ability of entire grades, programs, and districts that I never knew existed. . . . Holistic assessment is a reliable, efficient means of judging and scoring large numbers of papers for the purpose of evaluating the general writing ability of students." (John T. Best).

The table leaders for this year's workshop, which will be held on June 20-21, 8:45 a.m. — 4:30 p.m., are Lois Snyder and Dolores Weiss. Both have served in this capacity since 1981. Lois Snyder was a fellow of the original PAWP Summer Institute in 1980. She has taught fourth through sixth grades and has been a guidance counselor as well. Dolores Lorenc Weiss teaches at Holy Family College in Philadelphia and has been a reader for holistic evaluation for the Educational Testing Service.

### The 1984 Summer Institutes

The Summer Institute at West Chester will be coordinated by three teachers who were Fellows of the first PAWP Institute in 1980: Martha J. Menz and Lois Snyder,

both from the Upper Darby School District, and Jolene Borgese from the Radnor School District.

The Summer Institute in Philadelphia will be coordinated by Irene Reiter, English Department head at Northeast High School, and Mary Ellen Costello, District 1 Language Arts Supervisor. Fellowships were awarded under a grant from the Atlantic Richfield Foundation. (This Institute will be held from June 26 to July 20, 1984, from 8:45 a.m. — 4:15 p.m., at the J. F. Kennedy Center. For more information, call the Philadelphia School District's Reading/English Language Arts Office, 299-7787, or the PAWP Office, 436-2281.)

The consultants for this year's Institutes will include:

Mary Ellen Giacobbe, Atkinson Academy  
Shelley Harwayne, New York City School District  
Jane Kearns, New Hampshire Writing Project  
Keith Caldwell, Bay Area Writing Project  
William Lutz, Rutgers University  
Marion Mohr, Northern Virginia Writing Project

The first four are described more fully in the write-up on the Process-Centered Writing Class. Lutz, who heads the English Department at Rutgers University, has published numerous books and articles on writing; he also chairs the NCTE Committee on Public Doublespeak (you know, the folks who give awards to the worst language use by public figures). Mohr, who is visiting PAWP a third time, is a high school teacher and co-director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project. She has recently published a book called *Revision: The Rhythm of Meaning*, based on her teaching experiences.

### The Process-Centered Writing Class

"This course has given me new . . . and deeper understanding of the writing process. I realize now how important it is to allow the child to 'own his own writing.' . . . The temptation to tell a child what to write and then to insist that he include various information in his writing needs to be avoided." (Sandra Schenck).

The Process-Centered Writing Class is a three-day workshop which for the first two days will be divided into four concurrent sessions. Participants can receive either in-service or graduate credit for this workshop. The session for teachers K-3 will be led by Mary Ellen Giacobbe, a first-grade teacher who worked extensively with Donald Graves

## SUMMER PROGRAMS (Continued)

on his noted research into children's writing processes and who has visited PAWP for the last three years. Shelley Harwayne, a teacher-trainer in the New York City School District whose exclusive assignment is process-centered writing, will work with teachers of grades 4-6. Jane Kearns, a secondary teacher who earned much applause for her work with the New Hampshire Writing Project and her workshop for PAWP last year, will lead the parallel sessions for teachers of grades 7-9. For the 5th year, Keith Caldwell of the Bay Area Writing Project will return to PAWP to lead the group of teachers of grades 10-college; Keith's superb style has created demand for his workshops from San Juan to Anchorage. We are fortunate to have these four stellar presenters to begin the 3-day workshop and to work with our Institute Fellows and teachers in the 3-week course on teaching composition.

On the final day of this workshop, PAWP teacher-consultants will guide participants in strategies for implementing the writing process.

### Teaching Composition

From June 25 to July 13, the Writing Project will run a three-credit course for teachers of writing at all levels. Participants will write, review approaches to the teaching of writing, study research in the field, and work with PAWP staff members and consultants for the workshop on the Process-Centered Writing Class and the Summer Institute. Available for in-service or graduate credit, the course will run daily from 9:30 - 12:30. It will be coordinated by Jim Trotman of the WCU English Department.

### Advanced Institute: 1984

"Is my class in for it next year! Revision is going to be a key part of my writing lessons. . . . I hope that another Advanced Institute will be offered. It affords PAWP Fellows an opportunity to broaden their understanding and answer questions about the writing process." (Guy MacCloskey, Ridley Township School District).

"I am very grateful for what the Institute has done for me as a teacher. After a Master's Degree in teaching writing and the Writing Project last year, I was still making evaluative comments on first drafts. I was also correcting mistakes for students by telling them what to do. I now see ways that I can keep from doing these things which I think impede the writing process. . . . I hope that other people can have the same experiences I have had." (Doris Kamley, Philadelphia School District).

The success of the first Advanced Institute has prompted participants to write to encourage a second version in 1984. The Advanced Institute on Revision is a two-week, 4-credit Workshop which links revision of one's own writing with the revision instruction to be shared with one's students.

The goal of the Advanced Institute on Revising is to increase the participant's knowledge about this key aspect of the writing process, and thus about the full process as well, in order to improve their abilities as teachers, writers, researchers, or presenters.

Assisted by consultant Marion Mohr of the Northern Virginia Writing Project and Chris Kane of the Philadelphia School District, Bob Weiss of PAWP will introduce and demonstrate varied methods for revising several modes of writing. Enrollment is limited to 15; a prerequisite is having been part of a previous summer institute or having taken

other advanced work in teaching composition; participants are requested to submit two writing samples by June 1.

The institute will run from July 16 to July 27, 1984 (9:00 - 12:00 and 1:00 - 3:00). For registration procedure and further information contact the Project Office.

### Computers and the Writing Project

Because computers will become important tools in teaching composition, this course will cover pertinent points of rhetoric and composition theory to evaluate CAI in composition training. We will look at stages in the composing process and examine software packages and computer-assisted teaching techniques for each writing stage. Theoretical and practical questions will prepare teachers of writing to incorporate useful computer assistance into their classrooms.

From June 25 to July 10, 1984, participants will study and experience the use of microcomputers at all stages of the writing process. Participants will be automatically registered in sessions of the 2-day conference on computers and the humanities, June 28-29 (see below).

Participants will complete two projects: 1) a review of existing software or a design outline for new software; 2) a project of their own design — a "teaching plan" for a lesson assisted by a computer, for instance. While participants may choose to do theoretical or research projects, one of the two class projects must be a practical application that they can take with them into a classroom. Both projects will be distributed to all participants.

Bob Weiss will conduct the computer workshops with the aid of three outside consultants: Kate Kiefer, who helped to pilot *Writer's Workbench* at Colorado State University; Helen Schwartz, who developed *Seen* as an aid for prewriting and writing about literature; and Stephen Marcus, author of *Compupoem* and member of the Apple Foundation Advisory Board.

A prerequisite is demonstrated knowledge of the writing process or knowledge of computers. (Having both knowledges is a plus but not necessary.) Participants should be willing to develop in-service presentations to offer as part of PAWP school-year programs.

### Computer Conference

A conference on Computers and the Humanities in Schools and Colleges will be held on Thursday and Friday, June 28-29 at West Chester University. Open to all interested teachers, the purpose of the conference is to enhance humanities instruction at all educational levels.

Joseph Raben, editor of *Computers and the Humanities*, and Michael Worman, Deputy Secretary of Education in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, will be the featured speakers. Raben will speak about the effect of computers on humanists and the humanities. Worman will discuss the value of technology in today's education, paying particular attention to the areas of social studies, language and values. Some of the other topics covered in the two-day conference will be:

- discussions on evaluating courseware, developing your own programs, and human and social implications of CAI in the future.
- writing process programming: pre-writing and revising.
- interactive video programs and teaching foreign language.

- hands-on experience with the newest published and experimental software in writing and the humanities.
- teaching the research paper via the microcomputer.
- displays and demonstrations of several new model computers, including the Macintosh.

If you are interested in attending, get a registration form from: Kostas Myrsiades, English Dept., West Chester University, West Chester, Pa. 19383. (Look for an article about the Project, the Conference, and Bob Weiss's *Compuwriter* software for teaching the writing process in the July-August issue of *Philadelphia Computer*.)

### FOR THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW

Bob Weiss will be putting together all of the courses offered this summer. Founding president of the DVWC, Bob directs West Chester University's cross-disciplinary Writing Program. He is a member of the National Board of Consultants of the National Endowment for the Humanities. As well as holding workshops and giving courses for teachers of writing, Bob hosts a monthly radio show on KISS 100. His textbook, *Cases for Composition*, written with John P. Field, is now in its second edition. Bob is presently working on computer software for the writing process, and has completed four out of many planned routines. Although the program still has a few bugs, students in his freshman writing course have enjoyed working with it.

Bob's next radio shows will be aired on KISS 100 at 7:30 a.m. and 1:00 a.m. on May 13 and June 10. Topics for the shows were not known as we went to press.

### ONE FELLOW'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE 1983 SUMMER INSTITUTE

by Marie Wardynski

One of the writing fellows should have been arrested on June 27, 1983. It was only the first day of the Institute and she was already involved in numerous offenses — ignorance of the writing process, ignorance of the writings of Moffett, Judy, Britton, etc., and, the biggest offense of all, a hatred of writing.

What was her motive for attending the Institute? Was she trying to reform? Was she trying to become more informed about writing? Was she trying to withdraw from her companions of fear, ignorance, and hatred? Was she trying to grow?

Her life of crime began to change when she started to read Peter Elbow's book, *Writing Without Teachers*. Elbow's suggestions on how to approach focused free-writing seemed to be useful in reducing some of her writing anxieties. According to Elbow, the response group was to offer support and encourage growth in writing. She liked the idea of writing words and ideas and changing them when and where it was necessary.

Yet the criminal sat in the back of the room trying to make herself inconspicuous. She didn't want anyone to become suspicious of her. Since she didn't want any unnecessary attention drawn to her, she refrained from participating.

Members of her response group became suspicious when she failed to turn in a personal piece on the first day. She did have an action piece, but it was on the wrong topic.

They tried to help her with the writing in the response group, and the other fellows tried to help her by sharing their knowledge of the experts who had written the books on the PAWP reading list. Slowly the authors' names became familiar to her ear.

The institute coordinators tried to help by shedding some light on the components of the writing process. Doing prewriting showed her that there was something worth doing and not too difficult before the actual writing. Some people would do anything to put off writing. Others had a special spot and a special time. The suspect began to discover that others had some of the same avoidance behaviors she did.

During the second week, some of the fellows tried to get her to write and maybe even feel successful. She put up a good fight. She wasn't going to let them mess with her yet. Sharing with anyone else besides her own response group was asking too much. She couldn't let down her guard. One set of institute activities involving interviews almost led to her being discovered. She was still fighting with putting her ideas on paper, but she was beginning to see how her students might benefit from the writing activities. Now she had to be careful. She was beginning to break down. Her defenses were weakening. Her response group was actually helping her find a subject for a personal piece. They were surrounding her with words and support. These two things were her arch enemies.

During that third week, more fellows became suspicious when she wouldn't "write" on the computer. The suspect began to question the other fellows on what they were putting into their position papers. She thought that maybe she could "steal" an idea. She was positive that they had all amassed a wealth of well-developed ideas which were just flowing from their brains through their arms and pencils and onto their papers. But she found out that others were also experiencing difficulty in searching for a position. They were going through the prewriting stage. Maybe Murray's words that "writing is exploring, discovering meaning and discovering form" were beginning to mean something to her. Was everyone trying to find that feeling of ownership?

The suspect was definitely beginning to reform. She was reading books by Graves and Murray. She was even beginning to write. She was beginning to become less apprehensive about her writing. Maybe there was some hope for her yet.

This fourth week was definitely making an impression on the fellow. Marion Mohr helped her to see that revision is a part of writing and not a crime itself. The suspect reflected and thought that maybe this was why she hated writing. She was beginning to see that she was confusing revising with editing. Revising and editing come in the later stages of the process. The words of Elbow and Murray were beginning to echo in her brain — write the ideas, work on content. During one of the revising activities, one of the fellows gave the suspect a stroke by saying that her meaning had come through. That hard wall of resistance was beginning to crack.

The criminal is glad that she was given the opportunity to reform her ways. The suspect is not free yet. She is given a reprieve. The suspect promises to do more reading about writing. She must continue to write. She must not be put into solitary confinement. She must try to find a response group in her area. She must attend PAWP's monthly meetings. When she works with her students, she should provide them with many opportunities for writing and emphasize prewriting activities. The suspect should hold off on the revision stage with her students until she herself becomes more familiar with it.

If you haven't discovered her, I'm not going to tell you who she is. Has she fooled you the way some of your students do? I hope not.

*Marie Wardynski teaches in the Southeast Delco School District.*

## NCTE RESOLUTIONS

At the 1983 convention of the National Council of Teachers of English, in Denver, the membership passed resolutions which affiliate publications have been asked to reprint in order to inform NCTE members:

### RESOLUTION

RESOLVED, that the National Council of Teachers of English through its publications and professional meetings explore the effective use of computers in the teaching of English and language arts;

that NCTE urge equity of access to computers among students of varying socio-economic levels and among various departments within a school; and

that NCTE provide leadership in defining legitimate uses of the computer by encouraging research and by disseminating information about the role of computers in the English language arts curriculum.

### RESOLUTION

RESOLVED, that the National Council of Teachers of English affirm the position that students should write frequently in every course as a way of learning the subject matter and of sharpening their writing skills; and

that NCTE seek ways to provide assistance to teachers of other subject matter disciplines in their efforts to improve students' writing skills in all subject matter fields.

### RESOLUTION

RESOLVED, that the National Council of Teachers of English discourage a narrow pedagogy which focuses on specific language skills, and remind its many constituencies that, while language proficiency is essential, we must continue to emphasize the importance of the full, humane discipline of English including the aesthetic, affective and the cultural aspects of written and oral expression as well as literature and the theater.

## NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT VIDEOTAPES NOW AVAILABLE

*Teachers Teaching Writing* is a set of six new videotapes and discussion guides presenting outstanding teachers (grades 3-12) at work in their own classrooms. All of the teachers featured in the series are at the forefront of new developments in their field — developments such as, classroom publishing, revising and editing, prewriting, peer response groups, and writing across the curriculum. Viewers of the *Teachers Teaching Writing* programs will visit the classrooms of these outstanding professionals for a first-hand look at the writing process in action from elementary through high school.

Seventy master teachers were originally nominated nationwide to appear in the *Teachers Teaching Writing* programs; four were ultimately selected by a board whose members included Donald Graves and James Gray. These four teachers were taped on location in their own classrooms by a professional television crew over a period of several weeks. Drafts of the programs were then field-tested

for three years in inservice courses conducted through the National Writing Project in colleges and schools all across the country.

As a set or individually, the *Teachers Teaching Writing* tapes are recommended for inservice programs involving teachers at all grade levels, and they are also particularly suitable for use in undergraduate and graduate education courses. Each of the tapes is introduced by John C. Maxwell, Executive Director of NCTE, who gives the background of the classroom sequence and suggests questions for viewers to keep in mind as the writing assignment unfolds. More detailed background and rationale, as well as suggestions for inservice activities and discussion sessions, are provided in the six printed guides that accompany the videotapes.

The videotapes are being distributed now by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). You may buy, rent, or preview one cassette or the entire set of six. To order, contact ASCD, Department 1126, 225 North Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314 (703-549-9110).

Note that PAWP has its own copies of these tapes (in ¾" cassette and in ½" VHS cassette) and the accompanying guides. Our policy for use of the tapes is as follows:

1. Any Fellow may view any NWP videotape on the WCU campus.
2. Any Fellow under contract to do a PAWP presentation may use any NWP videotape as part of the presentation.
3. Any Fellow doing a presentation for his or her colleagues may use any NWP videotape. A rental fee of \$50 will be charged to the school or school district sponsoring the presentation. Each rental will include a copy of the accompanying discussion guide (if available).

Call the office at 436-2281 if you want to reserve or preview any of these videotapes.

## NWP HONORED

"Now let us honor the National Writing Project." These words were recently spoken by Ernest Boyer at a special recognition program during the American Association of Higher Education's annual convention. The NWP was one of three collaborative university-school programs honored. Accepting the award were James Gray, director of the Bay Area and NWP projects, and Marion Mohr, co-director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project and a frequent consultant for PAWP. The School/College Partnership Program has been sponsored by the Atlantic Richfield Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

## KEYSTONE STATE READING ASSOCIATION

The Keystone State Reading Association holds its seventeenth annual conference on Sunday, November 11 through 14, 1984 at the Hershey Motor Lodge/Convention Center, Hershey, Pa. The theme of the conference is: Aiming for Excellence: Learning to Read — Reading to Learn. For more information, call the Project Office, 436-2281.

## THE WRITING ADVOCATE: ONE FELLOW RESPONDS TO TWO TEACHER CONCERNS ABOUT WRITING

by Betty Ann Slesinger

Q. After attending the fall session of the Delaware Valley Writing Council, I began using some aspects of the writing process, sporadically, in my classroom. At those times I had more student interest and involvement and a greater amount of writing than ever before. So, I would like to continue using the process and even expand my writing program next year. In order to justify my approach with my principal, colleagues and parents, I would like some research and findings about the writing process that will validate what we're doing in class.

A. For the past fifteen years, educational researchers have been trying to find some solutions to the writing dilemma. Some studies included interviews with, or monologues of, successful authors as they examined their own methods and behaviors while writing. The results were rather startling, and they set the stage for many changes in attitudes and practices about writing.

1. More than two-thirds of the writers did not make and use outlines.
2. There were almost as many ways to begin writing as there were interviewed authors. All writers spent an immense amount of time thinking and planning *before* drafting.
3. Real authors determined their own purposes for writing and had their own specific audience in mind. They then proceeded to address these issues and people.
4. Many experienced writers could not parse sentences or identify parts of speech, yet they could write accurately and clearly.
5. Active writers are intent on communication. They don't consciously plan to use a particular type of sentence or a specific kind of construction.
6. Even the most skilled writers needed to write multiple drafts and make extensive revisions. They read their work aloud to hear its voice.
7. Professional writers allow their writing to "gel" or set before reviewing it. They often find it productive to work on a variety of pieces at once to ensure perspective and to avoid "blocking."
8. Authors seek out and rely on friends, colleagues, spouses and editors to share and criticize their work. And, they don't wait until the piece is completed. They use these conferences to help them plan and revise.
9. Further, the studies concluded that authors carry on all these aspects of their writing process (i.e., the planning of the ideas and organizational strategies, the drafting and revising, and the sharing and editing) continually and simultaneously, until their work is published.

These findings showed a big discrepancy in the way real writers proceeded with their work and the way writing has been taught in schools. Enlightened by their discoveries, researchers like James Britton and Janet Emig visited classrooms. There the parallels between good student writers and authors were striking. Even when classrooms weren't using the writing process, the good writers intuited their needs and developed a process approach. Students who wrote well and enjoyed writing had personal and

impelling ideas, stories and purposes to share, and could handle a variety of types of writing. Their first attempts concentrated on their messages. They made mistakes — many — but because they wanted their writing to be correct and interesting, they were attentive, if not eager, to learn skills and mechanics within the context of their work. These students were also willing to do revising and editing when they could share and/or publish in some way with a real audience. Interestingly, the best writers were frequently not the students who scored highest on language achievement tests. Also, students who did daily writing connected to a content subject improved their test scores in those courses.

Recognizing the dichotomy between writers' methods and traditional instruction, the field of teaching writing evolved a new approach called "the writing process." Two leaders who provided solid foundations for the process are colleagues, Donald Murray and Donald Graves. Murray, a professional writer, has carefully examined his own writing habits and strategies. Graves worked closely with hundreds of students and dozens of teachers, applying writers' routines and attitudes to classroom writing with remarkable success. Graves, who values the experience story approach of British infant schools, believes good writing comes from an "impelling need to tell a story" (give an explanation, provide information, or create a drama, etc.). Currently, both men continue to validate their theories and learn more about writing through their experiences in classrooms.

Q. I'm very discouraged about the lack of quality and quantity of our students' writing. Although my department is hard-working and tries to keep current, they find only temporary involvement and limited success with activities like sentence combining, paragraph frames and formula writing because students don't apply them to their independent writing. Can you suggest an approach that gets students *involved* and *responsible* for their own writing?

A. Many investigators, notably James Moffett, Stephen and Shirley Judy, Janet Emig and Donald Graves, substantiate the idea that expressive writing that evolves from the author's own experiences and knowledge is the best source for good student writing. As Robert Weiss shows with his analysis of the features of all writing, when a person has a story to tell (information), a reason to tell it (purpose and occasion) and an audience to share it with, it is impelled writing. Authors have a stake in that kind of writing. Publishing it in some way creates a reason and need to be interesting, accurate and clear.

In a classroom where the writing process is taught, a student is inner-directed. The teacher gradually learns what is within students and finds ways to bring it out. In this way, students emit a natural writing voice. Writing makes students see their world and their places in it, and it also nurtures their maturation. As they build writing quality, they feel their success. They know when they've improved, so they gain confidence. Sharing with peers and teachers gives writers an important audience and builds an atmosphere of responsibility, support, and trust. A writing process classroom *gives students back their part in the responsibility of learning*.

*Betty Slesinger teaches reading in the William Penn School District.*

## DVWC CONFERENCE

On Saturday, February 25, at Villanova University, the Delaware Valley Writing Council held an interdisciplinary conference on the writing process and the use of computers. Attended by teachers and professors, some from distant places, the conference featured different software to help students to write better. Many programs were available for high school teachers, and some for elementary school teachers. The conference proved to be very informative. Consider attending these DVWC events in the future. They meet twice a year, once in the spring and fall. If anyone is interested in more information, contact Dr. Bea Moore at Gratz High School in Philadelphia.

## MAGAZINES FOR WRITERS

*YAM, Young Author's Magazine*, is a new literary magazine for young writers. Staffed almost entirely by students, the magazine is published five times a year in January, March, May, September, and November. Subscription fees are \$10.95 for one year, \$21 for two years. If interested, send check to *Young Author's Magazine*, P.O. Box 6294, Lincoln, Ne. 68506-0294.

*Scholastic Scope* encourages manuscripts from writers 15-18 years old. All work should be accompanied with the statement: "This is my original work; it is not a copy of someone else's work. I understand that if it is published in *Scholastic Scope*, it becomes the property of Scholastic Magazine, Inc." A teacher or parent must sign the pledge, as well as the student. Send material to Kathy Robinson, editor, *Scholastic Scope*, 50 W. 44th St., New York City, New York 10036.

*Stone Soup* accepts stories up to 2,500 words. The entire content of this magazine is by children (ages up to 13); fiction, poetry, artwork, or photography may be sent to *Stone Soup*, Box 83, Santa Cruz, CA 95063.

*Word Processing News*, described as "the national newsletter for wordsmiths who work with computers and computerists who work with words," is published by Word of Mouth Enterprises, 211 E. Olive #210, Burbank, CA 91502. Subscriptions are \$24/yr. for six issues, and sample copies are available for \$2 each.

## APRIL'S MEETING

On April 7, Beverly Bimes, the 1980 Teacher of the Year, and a former Gateway (Mo.) Writing Project Fellow, discussed her views on the teaching of writing. Although her current assignment is to direct the Lancaster School District program for the gifted, she believes that good methods for teaching writing work the same for all children. The only difference is in their responses.

Bimes shared the influence that the Writing Project model had on her. Before attending the Project, she felt her role as a teacher was to be "the great judge." She would make loads of comments on student papers — comments that did not help her students. As a result, her students were imitating her voice. Now she has developed an atmosphere of trust with her students. Instead of judging them, she now helps them help themselves in their writing.

Before the meeting ended, Bimes suggested several writing assignments, including role-playing and brainstorming, that she has found very successful in her classes.

## Mini-Review:

### WOULD YOU SETTLE FOR IMPROBABLE?

by P. J. Petersen

Reviewed by Virginia Conover

Are you looking for a good book to read to middle school/junior high students? Are you looking for a good book that will encourage students to write? If the answer is "yes," then I suggest you try *Would You Settle for Improbable?* by P. J. Petersen (Dell, 1981).

Petersen resides in California and teaches at Shasta College. *Would You Settle for Improbable?* is his first novel. All evidence suggests that he is a "process writer" and teacher.

The book is set in a Californian suburb. Most of the action takes place at Marshall Martine Jr. H.S., which translates as Junior High USA. Any experienced student or teacher will learn instantly how well and amusingly Petersen captures the junior high scene. Arnold Norberry, a teen-age con artist, has been released from detention and is to attend the ninth grade. His classmates are urged to help him adjust and if at all possible to graduate. The students eventually adjust to and grow fond of Arnold. But when all seems to be going well, Arnold is once again accused of a crime.

The plot, however, is not the outstanding feature of this book. The highlights for me are the English classroom and its very special teacher, Ms. Karnesian. Her students all talk (prewrite), write (in journals), respond (share their entries with her and us), and learn to grow, write, care for others, and — most of all — think for themselves.

The book is full of topics that the students and Ms. Karnesian discuss, as well as the students' written responses. My own classes discussed, laughed and enjoyed these responses and then began to write and share their own. The students in the novel and their journals provided a wonderful way to begin to get my students to write too. My students wrote on many of the same topics. They also wrote opinions and criticism of the characters, the teacher, the school, the ethical questions raised, and finally a farewell to the book as I read the last chapter aloud one day in October. The book then is finished, but the writing continues.

A final bravo for Petersen and *Would You Settle for Improbable?*. The book does not end on a happy note with all loose ends tied up neatly, as so many adolescent novels and sitcom T.V. shows do. Rather, we get a message of continued patience; that life for adults, teachers, as well students, is full of dilemmas for all to live through and hopefully resolve.

*Virginia (Ginny) Conover teaches in the William Penn School District.*

## FELLOW PUBLISHED

G. E. (Ed) Martin, a participant in last year's Advanced Institute, recently had an article published in the *NWP Newsletter* (republished in this issue of our *Newsletter*). The article, a result of Ed's experience with the institute, deals of course with revision. It discusses the role that the teacher plays in the writing process, with particular attention to teacher comments on student papers. Ed's piece is part of a collection compiled by the participants in the 1983 Advanced Institute, who hope to publish the series which will be entitled "Working Papers on Revision."

## TEACHER COMMENTS IN THE REVISION PROCESS

I can't stand it when John rolls the paper I have just returned to him into a ball, assumes a foul line stance, and scores two points—paperball landing with a thud in the circular hoop of file 13. I have just spent hours carefully grading those papers. Clever me, I had penned the most astute remarks. And for what? John had ignored my written comments. That's a cruel act!

Sound familiar? Frustrated? Well, I was too until I made a discovery that I *hope* will solve the John problem for me and maybe for others. Marian Mohr, co-director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project, led a two-day revision workshop at the Pennsylvania Writing Project Advanced Institute—Summer, 1983, at West Chester University. At one point she commented that she collects student drafts shortly after their fluency stage begins and makes assessment comments and questions, avoiding evaluative comments. Evaluation is reserved for later. At another time she had us do a focused free write relating an experience in our teaching about a student who wouldn't revise. I wrote about a student who had refused to revise a paper on which I had commented "nice job" in an early draft. The student, although bright and articulate, was a typical reluctant revisor who took any opportunity to by-pass the revision process. My "nice job" had been her out. She capitalized on it.

It wasn't until the next day that Mohr's comment and my free writing experience focused for me. When it did, I discovered what for me had been the missing link in the process writing program. What I discovered was that I was playing my role in the revision act of the program in the wrong scene.

And let's not kid ourselves. Although revision is student-centered, the teacher does have a role in the process, in all its facets—peer-conferences, roving and/or sit down oral conferences, and written comments. But it is in the written comments that I believe the teacher personally can be of greatest service. Here the teacher can be a motivational inspiration for even the most reluctant revisor. But when entering the writer's world the teacher must be careful with how and what he comments about the writing. What I discovered was that I had been entering at the wrong time. Oh, I was making some O.K. comments, but I was doing it at the wrong time. My expertise as well as my resource value was diminished.

After twenty-three years of teaching I am convinced that students don't revise, not because they don't want to, but because they don't know how. Also they never learn to appreciate the importance of revision. Sure, they give lip-service to revision. Many will even say they worked hard on it. But on close examination one finds that at best students only haphazardly make content or editorial changes and at worst they simply rewrite, perhaps more legibly, the first draft.

So let's examine more closely the teacher comment-assessment feedback in the revision process to see how it can help the student discover ways to revise.

### WHAT IS THE PREMISE

Revision is the key to successful writing. It is the single greatest advantage the writer has over the oral communicator, permitting reflection and refinement.

The teacher plays a key role in students' learning how to revise, and teacher commenting on papers is a powerful force in that learning process. Teachers should enter the revision process directly through comments only after prewriting is completed, usually after the student feels he has a readable draft.

The sacrosanct concept that teachers should comment only on a finished draft in an evaluative way is foolish. Revision is not an end activity. Incentive for revision is lost at that point, for the child views the work as "finished" and is reluctant to write anymore. (No wonder John threw away that paper. He was finished with it!) Also if the teacher requires correction beyond this point, the student often associates this "end revision" as punishment. That's sad.

Most teacher comments on drafts or on final papers steal the writing away from the writer. Often the teacher's comments are penned in ignorance of the writer's intention without any sympathetic regard to the writer's ownership of the piece. This situation is counter productive. The teacher must be careful not to stifle discovery. The student must retain his right to control his own work and make his own decisions. Therefore, teacher comments and questions must be written carefully, designed to help the student clarify his writing. Questions or comments which force responses to satisfy the teacher kill student impetus and make the activity a drab, correcting-the-errors activity which becomes little more than an impotent, unrewarding rewrite.

A key to revision is to get the students thinking about what they write. There is no reason why students can't revise while taking a shower or riding to school. The revision process is a matter of perspective. If students are

thinking about their writing at times other than with pen in hand at their desk, they're revising. They can add to the draft when they do sit down to the formal task. Teacher feedback through comments can promote this process.

### THE TEACHER'S ROLE

Let's face facts. None of us has enough time to do all that we want with our teaching. Thus one of the first questions a teacher asks about any change in the writing curriculum is "How will this affect my paperload?" The immediate second question is "What do I have to trade off to add this new idea to my curriculum?"

I can't deny that assessment commenting often requires two readings. But I don't believe this automatically doubles the paperload. Remember, the student is spending twice the time on this paper. This means that he doesn't have time to write on as many topics, so he doesn't have to do as many completed assignments—a reward for him and for you!

What do you trade off? Simple—get rid of some of those busywork writing assignments that never were any good because the kids knew the assignment was of little value. The resultant work was often so poorly done that you spent much more time grading the papers, marking all those errors. I contend it takes much more time to mark errors than to write comments. Kids will respond better too.

So why not read something twice? If the first reading is done well, the second reading may need only mention that a certain problem is still unsolved. Maybe you'll save some time!

A major problem that could occur by delving more thoroughly into the revision process is the reluctant revisor. Haven't you heard, "This is exactly what I want to say. And if I spend a lot of time on this, you wouldn't give me an *A* anyway because you don't think I'm worth it." After you bite your tongue because you know full well the kid's probably right, explain that you won't accept the idea that the paper is perfect. In as non-threatening a way as possible review your assessment comments with him. Let him know that he doesn't have to make revisions on all your comments. But leave no doubt in his mind that revision is necessary. He may be correct that his grade will not be an *A*, but it won't be much at all if he doesn't put more time and energy into his work. Be prepared to carry out your word. He may have to fail. That doesn't reflect on you. It doesn't make you a failure. Soon your reputation will be known and this problem should abate.

I think it needs to be mentioned here that teachers must re-think their roles as graders. Teachers must abandon the age-old concept that assessment needs to be corrective and prescriptive. We need to concern ourselves with assessment that will force students to be aware of their own problems. If we can accept this principle, then we can accept the principle that we can reward students for active and conscientious revisions.

One aspect of the teacher's role in revision is going to sound like heresy, but here goes! Teachers must abandon the use of editing abbreviations on early drafts, for they are negative error-oriented devices. The *frag.*, *cf.*, *agr.*, *trans.*, *sp.*, *awk.*, etc., are valueless. No substantive changes, no evaluative re-thinking will flow from the mind if it is imprisoned by prescriptive, dead ended editing.

Oh, this is not to say that organization, focus, form, content, coherence, clarity, and all the proper good forms of writing are not to be the teacher's concerns. They are of utmost importance; the good teacher could never abandon them. Assessment commenting only approaches them differently. I believe that the positive element in assessment commenting has the potential to heighten the writer's perception of himself as a writer and thus should make him more aware of all facets of good writing. Assessment commenting can also make them important to the student writer.

A final point I would like to make about the teacher's role concerns writing assignments—make them realistic for the grade and level of instruction. Just as we tell students to narrow and control topics for research, so too should we control our assignments. Recently my classes were studying Chaucer's 'Prologue' to *The Canterbury Tales*. I gave the following follow-up writing: Create a modern frame story. Briefly describe the characters that would be involved in the story. Then select one of these characters and write a Chaucer-like sketch (comic, satiric, or ironic) of the character. I got marvelous results.

As a matter of fact I'm convinced the student will play with, explore, learn more from, and revise more willingly this topic assignment than one I saw written on the blackboard of a fellow teacher recently. It read: "Compare and/or contrast the character types developed in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* Prologue." Almost as if to take pity on the poor class, he gave a secondary or alternative assignment. It read: "Analyze the symbols, both religious and secular, in the 'Prologue' to *The Canterbury Tales*." When I see an assignment like this, I cringe. The student may have loved reading Chaucer's "Prologue." He might be bubbling over with new-found knowledge and insights about the fourteenth century. But these topics do not allow the student to develop what counts for him, and secondly, they presuppose he can manipulate heady philosophical literary criticism. What a choice!

## GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT COMMENTING/QUESTIONING

Timing is crucial in productive assessment marking. The activity should take place when a truly workable draft is done. If done too early, either the teacher takes too much control of the writing or the teacher will become the only audience for the writer.

Assessment comments/questions should help the student to focus on one or more of the four basic techniques of revision. These four are

1. What needs to be added to the paper?
2. What needs to be deleted from the paper?
3. What materials need to be re-arranged?
4. What words or parts could be improved if you substituted something else?

There is no one right way to write assessment comments. Student age, academic ability of the class, and teacher familiarity with the students dictate the tone and level of the language of assessment questions/comments. At times I'll joke, harass, kid, bombast; sometimes I'm serious, sympathetic, frank. Most importantly the assessor should be sincere and positive. His remarks should motivate and suggest, but they should not take over the student's task of revising his own work.

The following papers are examples of student writing on the elementary fourth grade level and secondary twelfth grade level.

I have written assessment comments and questions for each and indicated by a circled number which revising technique I would expect the student to then work on. The number is for the reader's benefit; I would not put it on a student's paper.

This fourth grade writing resulted from a discussion about what it would be like to be something other than who I am.

### MY CHRISTMAS TREE

*I really liked being a Christmas tree. It was fun. Here is the story.*

*Once upon the time there was a Christmas tree. This family wanted a tree for Christmas. So the family went to the forest to get a Christmas tree. The tree fell and they tied it to their car. They went home and they put these round things on me. They put lights on me too. They had a happy Christmas. The next day I had boxes under me. The kids opened all the boxes under me that the funny guy brought. Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.*

*When the family chose you as its tree, how did it make you feel? (1)*

*Clever - I love this.*

*If you had to hide one sentence from your reader, which would it be? (2)*

At this grade the frustration level would probably surface quickly. Therefore I would restrict my assessment to a positive statement and two questions/comments directed toward the revision task. However I have listed below several sample questions/comments which I could have used.

I would like to hear what you thought and felt as a tree. (1)

What do you call the "things" put around a Christmas tree? (4)

In your home which do you do first—trim the tree or put the presents around it? (3)

Who were the family members? Can you tell something about them? (1)

If you started with "Once upon a time . . .," where would the first sentence go? (3)

The following twelfth grade writing developed out of a discussion of Beowulf's character traits. We narrowed our writing to one of the two traits—loyalty and duty—which the student believed were still important today.

I asked them to write about loyalty or duty; they could be theoretical, practical, or creative.

ON LOYALTY

True loyalty, in every sense of the word, is pretty hard to come by these days. It seems everyone is so preoccupied with other things. However, on occasion, one can find examples of it if one knows where to look. Here's a hint, look in Landenburg, PA. There one will find a cute, little, dumb blonde named Kim. She's my buddy. She has been for nine years, which is nothing to scoff at in this day and age. Sure, we've had our share of, uh, petty quibbles shall we say, but through it all, we've been the epitomy of loyal friends.

What are the "other things"? (1)

Do you think cliches add to your writing? (2,4)

I'm having trouble with time and tense. (3,4)

Is there a single word which says the same thing? (4)  
What is the reference? (4)

I wonder if you could use dialogue to make this point more forceful. (1,4)

I like this!

She has lived the life of a gypsy for the past three years, moving all over the country with her family. Personally, her mother is a bit flighty. She likes moving on whims. Be that as it may, the topic is loyalty, so I suppose I should be loyal to it, and get back to it. Anyway, we wrote each other almost every week, called when we could, and stayed as close as ever. That's my own experience with loyalty, one among many, but lets not bore you into a fit of tears.

If one wanted my opinion of what true loyalty is, one would read the book "Still Life With Woodpecker" by Tom Robbins. It's a sort of a love story. The main characters are Princess Leigh-Cheri and Bernard Mickey Wrangle, alias, "the Woodpecker." They are separated, he's thrown in the slammer, and she keeps up a personal vigil for him until he's released. Now thats loyalty to me; not to mention love. Love and loyalty seem to go hand in hand. If one is loyal to someone or something, a certain amount of love is involved, I think. But then again, what do I really know anyway?

Can you polish this? Try sentence combining! (3)

cliche!

This was not developed at all! (2)

I know that loyalty goes a lot deeper than surface kindnesses. I know that loyalty to oneself is the most important kind of all. And I know that if I can be and have one loyal friend in my lifetime, I'm pretty lucky. Gee, maybe I do know a couple things after all.

Indeed! And you're clever too!

After my assessment, the class members had a three day period to make further revisions. Here is the final draft of the paper.

ON LOYALTY

True loyalty, in every sense of the word, is rare these days. It seems that everyone is so preoccupied with their own lives that loyalty to others comes second, if at all. However, on occasion, one

can find examples of true loyalty if one knows where to look. There's a hint, look in Landenburg, PA. There one will find a cute, dumb blonde named Kim. She's my buddy and has been for years, nine, to be exact. That's nothing to scoff at in this day and age. Sure, we've had our share of, uh, petty quibbles . . . "You can be a real jerk, you know that?" "Oh, Shut up! and get out, and don't come back!" . . . but, disregarding those times, we've remained loyal friends.

She has lived the life of a gypsy for the past three years, moving all over the country with her family. Personally, I think her mother is a bit flighty. She likes moving on whims. But, putting that aside, the topic is loyalty, so I suppose I should be loyal to it and get back to it. During her absence we wrote each other almost every week, called when we could, and stayed As close as we ever were. Being close is easier now because they've moved back. Well, that's my own experience with loyalty, which is one among many I've had in the course of this life.

If one wanted my opinion of what true loyalty is, one would read the book "Still Life With Woodpecker" by Tom Robbins. It's a sort of a love story. The main characters, Princess Leigh Cheri and Bernard Mickey Wrangle are separated. Bernard, also known as "the Woodpecker," is thrown in the slammer, and Leigh Cheri keeps up a personal vigil for him until he is released. Now that's loyalty to me, not to mention love. Love and loyalty seem to go together. If one is loyal to someone, or something, a certain amount of love is involved, in my opinion. But, then again, what do I really know anyway?

I know that loyalty goes a lot deeper than surface kindnesses. I know that loyalty to someone takes a good deal of effort, and I know that if I can be and have one loyal friend in my lifetime, I'm pretty lucky. Gee, maybe I do know a couple of things after all!

#### **WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN BE DRAWN?**

Teachers of writing are at times the students' worst enemies. Probably it's true that some kids learn in spite of their teachers. But some don't. Much of the problem in writing, I believe, lies in ill-worded comments which, rather than stimulating and encouraging revision, at best limit the students' natural learning through writing and at worst destroy the creativity of the writing, taking life from the work.

Teachers might do well if they likened themselves to high paid executives who get paid for their knowledge, not for their manual output. The teacher should be the consultant, not do the work for the writer." He can do this only if he writes comments that stimulate thinking and give choices to the writer.

J.D. Parsons commented "Curiosity urges you on—(it is) the driving force for the writer." Assessment questioning and commenting inspires that wonderful master key to learning—curiosity.

# PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Published Quarterly  
by the Pennsylvania Writing Project  
West Chester University  
West Chester, PA 19383

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*Sponsors:*

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Pennsylvania Department of Education

The purpose of the *Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter* is to link together all teachers of writing in our area. The *Newsletter* features articles on the teaching of writing, information about writing courses, conferences, project meetings, reviews of books, and events relating to the writing process.

We seek articles from all teachers of writing at all grade levels and from anyone else interested in writing and the teaching of writing. All articles will be considered. Please send all articles, questions, and comments to: Robert H. Weiss, Pennsylvania Writing Project, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383.

The Pennsylvania Writing Project (PAWP) is an affiliate of the National/Bay Area Writing Project and a training site for the nationally validated New Jersey Writing Project. PAWP was created by the sponsors under grants from the William Penn Foundation and the University of California at Berkeley, with the National Endowment for the Humanities.

**Pennsylvania  
Writing Project**

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West Chester, PA 19383

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