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PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 4 NUMBER 4 SUMMER 1984

SUMMER PROGRAMS BEGIN

All planned programs of the Pennsylvania Writing Project are off to a fine start. The Fellows of both summer institutes are listed later in this issue. Reports from each program will be published in the Fall *Newsletter.* This issue's potpourri of announcements and articles was prepared with the assistance of John Oliver, a graduate assistant in the West Chester University English Department.

PHILADELPHIA FELLOW WINS AWARD

Gladys Schultz, teacher of English at Lincoln High School in Philadelphia, was one of ten teachers receiving the Rose Lindenbaum Teacher of the Year Award this May. Gladys plans to use the cash prize of $900 toward a doctoral program in writing at the University of Pennsylvania.

The awards were set up by Rose Lindenbaum, a retired special education teacher in Philadelphia, to reward ten outstanding teachers annually.

Much of Gladys Schultz's work has been in writing. She has developed curriculum for composition workshop classes, for Advanced Placement English, and most especially this past year for a writing laboratory. For her, the Writing Laboratory at Lincoln High School has provided not only results but "an abundance of delights" in collaborative learning. As she says, "If there has been one special part of my education responsible for my work in writing and with the laboratory, it certainly has been the Summer Institute, 1982. The Pennsylvania Writing Project and my involvement with its participants that summer made me question many of my teaching techniques and helped me realize that both flexibility and discipline are needed if students are to learn how to write. There are lots of young people in our classrooms just waiting for the opportunity!"

A FALL WRITING COURSE FOR TEACHERS OF WRITING

This Fall, the Pennsylvania Writing Project at West Chester University will again offer a "directed studies" course to enable people to develop and complete an individualized project in writing or the teaching of writing. Called Directed Studies in Composition (ENG 594), this course will be adapted to the needs of the participants and will provide guidance and consultation for their proposed projects.

Participation will be limited. Participants will meet as a full group monthly or as needed in Fall 1984 to present and respond to proposals, work in progress, and completed projects. Acceptable projects include but are not limited to:

- development and refinement of a position paper or writing process journal
- classroom-based case-study descriptions or experimental research
- development of articles related to the teaching of writing or to courses and programs in writing
- development of "guides", monographs, or curriculum-related materials such as published by the Bay Area Writing Project and the National Writing Project
- development of other material

An individual's project may focus on writing as taught or learned at any grade level, on the writing teacher, on evaluation, on attitudes to writing, on writing programs or curricula, or on any related concern.

Directed Studies in Composition (ENG 594) is offered for three (3) graduate credits from West Chester University. The course will hold its organizational meeting on Monday, September 15, 1984, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. in Main Hall, Room 201. Tuition is $246.00 plus a $2.50 fee. (Tuition costs are subject to change by Fall.)

Registration forms are available through The Writing Project office, West Chester University, West Chester, Pennsylvania 19383 (Tel. 436-2297). Register by mail or at the Project office by August 10, 1984 if possible. Late registration must be in person at the Physical Education Center, South Campus on September 4th between the hours of 8:30-11:00 a.m., 1:00-3:00 p.m., and 5:00-7:00 p.m. or September 5th between the hours of 8:30-11:00 a.m. or 1:00-3:00 p.m.

If you wish further information about the course, please call Bob Weiss at the Project office.

LITERACY AND MOTIVATION IN ENGLAND AND THE U.S.

by Heather Jarvis

By way of introduction, I should clarify the limitations of my experience in the U.S. My experiences and observations at Martin Luther King High School in Philadelphia are far more limited than those in the British system (which has an intrinsic standardization). I want, however, to compare the American system of quarterly grading (culminating in graduation) with the British system, but my observations and conclusions are entirely subjective.

American teachers I have spoken with have had considerable difficulty fully grasping the complexities of the English public examination system. Nothing similar exists in the U.S., and it serves to highlight the totally different attitudes towards education and learning that prevail in these two countries. American teachers seem to place the blame for many of the problems they have with students in high school on the failure of the elementary schools which operate a "repeating" system or on automatic advancement in the earlier grades. This attitude is slightly baffling to a British teacher who comes from a system in which repeating is never an option: a student's progression through the school system is automatic.

Students in the British system enter their local comprehensive (i.e., secondary) school at eleven years old. Five years later, they take examinations in up to ten subjects. The average student will take five to seven exams, including math, English and a science. During their first three years in the comprehensive system, students may or may not be streamed or banded (tracked). At the end of that period, when the student is 14 (in most schools), some sort of selection and tracking will take place. This tracking determines which of two examinations the student will prepare for: the G.C.E. or the C.S.E.

G.C.E. "O" level (General Certificate in Education at Ordinary Level) was designed and is still largely controlled by the universities. Its original object was preparation for university entrance. It is therefore designed for the top 20% of students and is academic in content and assessment.

C.S.E. (Certificate of Secondary Education) is the examination taken by the majority of students. Whereas G.C.E. has a Pass – with three grades: A, B, C – and a Fail rating, C.S.E. has numbered grades – 1-5 – and an ungraded rating. The highest grade (1) is considered equal to the lowest G.C.E. Pass. Students of average ability usually achieve a grade of 2 or 3, although the less formally academic content and assessment enable students to gain an "O" level, which they may not be able to achieve in the more formal G.C.E. exam. Students receive certificates stating their successes and failures. This certification is vital for entry into further education courses and for all but the most menial employment. It encapsulates the students' educational achievements – as does the American diploma – but there is one major difference: the British examination system operates nationwide and results are comparable in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland has a slightly different system). Examination papers are marked and graded externally by personnel who have been instructed in and familiarized with the national standard required.

This system is radically different from the American system of evaluation in which a diploma does not show the subjects a student has studied or what his or her grades were. This diploma makes no distinction between the brightest or the hard-working but limited student and other students who, it seems to me, do the bare minimum but nevertheless will receive their diplomas dressed in cap and gown. (There is, by the way, very little ceremony in English schools; only a university graduate may wear a gown.) The regard, therefore, with which American colleges and employers hold the student's diploma obviously depends on a school's reputation – hence the need for S.A.T.'s, etc., for college entry.

As far as universities, colleges and employers are concerned, then, the advantages of a national system of certification are obvious. The motivational effects in the classroom, too, are radically different. In Britain, students often become aware of the hurdle of certification as young as nine or ten years old, particularly in the homes of educationally ambitious parents. Its long-term effect, then, is to make the student strive constantly to achieve the standard for certification by the time he or she is sixteen.

The decision of whether a student should take the G.C.E. or the C.S.E. is made when the student is 14 or 15, largely by his or her English teacher in consultation with the head of the department. A major factor in this decision is familiarizing teachers with the standards required for "O" level and the different C.S.E. grade levels. It is probable that the same teacher has taught the same class for two or even three years and can therefore make a good assessment of each student's potential and probable achievement level in the next two years.

This stability is an important part of the British system and one of the contributing factors to a high standard of literacy. It means that once a teacher has imparted to students a familiarity with his or her methods, expectations and responses, the student works in a stable, secure atmosphere for an extended period of time. This is particularly important in a subject such as English: the student knows the audience that he or she most often writes for, and a sense of trust develops between teacher and student and among the students themselves. This stability is also advantageous for collaborative work, as students can work in groups in which they trust each other and feel free to discuss and constructively criticize each other's work.

The British goal, then, is long-term, but it affects students throughout their school years. The academic standards and the work required to meet these standards are embodied in the culture and atmosphere of every school. Students mature visibly in the six months preceeding their examinations; they know that they will succeed or fail largely through their own efforts. Because the criterion for passing is a rational one with a standard ordained and measured by an outside body, there is less hostility and resentment towards the teacher and the work he or she sets.

Conversely, grading in the U.S. seems to me to be extremely subjective. Because there is no recognized national standard for each grade level, each classroom becomes a metaphysical microcosm where the teacher has the power of God but paradoxically considerably little respect. Students badger, coax or even threaten in order to attain a passing grade or a higher grade than they have in fact earned by their performance. This scene is repeated in every classroom, because not only is there not a national standard but there isn't even an agreed-upon departmental standard. A student's experience – particularly in English – can be very different depending on the teacher he or she has. In some classes the student may do a great deal of writing, whereas in others he or she may do very little.

Subject curriculum in the U.S. is largely determined by what is assessed at the end of a course. In the U.K., however, the examination of English consists of an assessment of student literacy (testing the student's abilities to read, comprehend and write.) C.S.E. English usually consists of the assessment of a writing folder containing ten or twelve

extended pieces of writing selected from work done over the previous eighteen months. This folder carries about one-third of the total marks. A lower percentage derives from an oral component, thus making talk an important element of classwork. Over fifty percent of the grade derives from two examination papers, which usually consist of an unseen fiction passage and comprehension questions which have to be answered in the student's own words. The nature of the second paper can vary. It may require essay writing or involve comprehension and response to different kinds of reading material (e.g. advertisements, newspaper articles, letters, etc.). Schools can contribute their own examination papers.

Since these examinations assess student literacy rather than a learned factual content, students cannot be taught just for the examinations. Teachers are free to cover a wide range of literature and themes, all of which are explored and studied with an aim to extend and improve the student's reading ability, level of comprehension, and range of writing experience. The student is made to feel that his or her opinion is important but that it must be supported by example and reasoned argument. Great importance is given to discussion and thinking. The content of the work, then, is student-oriented, often giving rise to rabid enthusiasm. Many English departments have no prescribed texts for each year but offer instead a wide range of fiction at all levels from which teachers can draw. At exam level, students have to study some texts in depth; the corresponding essays go into the students' writing folders. It is usually only in the G.C.E. literature exam that there are a few prescribed texts – including the mandatory Shakespeare play – which will be examined through the means of essay questions under exam conditions.

American teachers frequently ask me how we make the students work if there is not a pass or a fail grade given every couple of months or even at the end of the year. Much of the student effort has to do with the different motivational effects of short and long-term goals. While the amount of work covered in a British English class may seem less (in that students work for days, even weeks, on a work of fiction or project with a great deal of emphasis on drafting and re-drafting papers), the educational experience gained seems to be greater than that achieved by doing many short exercises. Students become self-motivated (because there is often an element of choice of assignment) and critical of their own work. The emphasis is on individual progress, and the measure is based on a comparison of a student's latest piece of work with earlier efforts. Continuous dialogue with a teacher the student trusts is the method by which he or she advances and the tool with which the teacher assesses the student's work. Without the continuous short-term pressure of the next grading period, an interest in learning for its own sake takes over, and there is more time and room for growth. In a country where English is seen as a skill subject rather than a content subject (up to 16, anyway), educators recognize that communication skills are improved by constant practice but that growth and facility may come in fits and starts. Thus there is time for those "plateaus" that all students reach and often stay on for several months at a time.

Despite the apparent advantages of the English exam system, it is by no means perfect. One of its major disadvantages is its divisiveness: the G.C.E. exam carries more status, and ambitious parents will often insist that their child be entered for this exam. The decision of the school prevails, however, and parents have no legal recourse to counter it. (Schools pay considerable fees for each exam a student enters.) Selection of students for the appropriate exam is an important process in the departmental calendar, since a school is judged in the community by its "O" level results, and these results are published. Therefore no student is prevented from taking G.C.E. "O" level exams if there is a reasonable chance that he or she will pass.

The exam at 16 is probably the most contentious educational issue in the U.K. at present. For the past few years, committees have been trying to devise a unilateral exam system which will replace the present elitist one and institute a tiered grading system. In the meantime, teachers try to gain more control of the exams, and both G.C.E. and C.S.E. exam syllabi exist in which teachers have at least fifty percent control of course content and initial assessment of their students when they reach 16.

Although I have dwelt more on the U.K. system, I am sure most readers have a strong impression of the inferential comparisons I am making with the American system. I was prompted to write this article by two disturbing aspects of the American system as I experience it at Martin Luther King High School in Philadelphia. One is the lack of student motivation and gross underachievement; the other is the lack of a recognisable set of standards – anywhere. My students seem to be immature and unaware of an acceptable standard for personal achievement. Work they produce for me is "my" work and not theirs. Much of the time I'm supposed to be suitably grateful that they deigned to do it at all. However hastily, sloppily done their work may be, they expect a good grade on it and will argue over its assessment.

It took until mid-January before they really began to trust me, write for me, and discuss their writing with me as something over which they had some control. Most of the improvement in their literacy level will in fact be lost next year, for even if I were not a transitory teacher I would not be teaching many of them again under this scheduling system. Even if they do go to another teacher who emphasizes writing, the whole trust process has to be restarted. Few of them have yet reached a level at which they will write fairly fluently, whoever the audience; that kind of fluency takes years of reinforced practice.

I regret that the quarterly grading period dictates the pattern, speed and nature of my assignments. It constantly intervenes between me and the students and hinders any internal motivation they may be developing. On the other hand, the lack of any major decisive assessment means that the student is never aware of any need to extend him or herself to make the extra effort which can often move him or her off of the "plateau" and onto a higher standard of literacy.

It is accepted now that the methods and standards of assessment procedures a school follows dictate – whether we like it or not – what is taught in the classroom. I think that they also profoundly affect the student's motivation and attitudes towards his or her studies and – in English – his or her standard of literacy.

Heather Jarvis, a "Second in Department" at a London high school, spent the past year teaching at Martin Luther King High School in Philadelphia.

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If I'd had more time, I'd have written a shorter book. – Mark Twain

PROJECT NEWS

Four PAWP courses were offered this Spring and Summer for 63 teachers in the Neshaminy and Norristown school districts. The coordinators were Irene Reiter, Judy Fisher, Doris Kirk, Jolene Borgese, and Martha Menz. Plans are afoot to run PAWP courses this Fall in the Council Rock, Great Valley, and Oxford Area school districts. Additionally, we are offering the 3-credit Computers and Writing course this Fall through the Chester and Montgomery County In-Service Councils.

PAWP EDITORS SOUGHT

PAWP seeks editors for the *Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter.* The editors (1) prepare a regular round of items for the year ahead by reviewing the writing done in institutes and courses; (2) periodically interview project staff; (3) call PAWP teacher-consultants for articles, book reviews, interviews; (4) maintain filler and announcement files; (5) write various articles. Further information can be obtained from Bob Weiss.

THE PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT FELLOWS, 1984

Carol Adams, Kensington High School, Philadelphia S.D. #5
Mary Ellen Ainsley, Adaire Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #5
Linda Baer, Conrad Weiser High School, Conrad Weiser S.D.
Anne Bailis, Beverly Hills Middle School, Upper Darby S.D.
Diane Bates, Penn Wood East Jr. High, William Penn S.D.
Conne Broderick, Delcroft Elementary School, South East Delco S.D.
Raymond Bruno, Ridley School District, Ridley S.D.
Gail Bullock, Douglass Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #4
Christine Cardamone, Delcroft Elementary School, South East Delco S.D.
Julian Chalker, Marple-Newtown Senior High, Marple-Newtown S.D.
Mary Corcoran, Klinger Jr. High School, Centennial S.D.
Phyllis Denbitzer, Fels Jr. High School, Philadelphia S.D. #7
Jacquelyn Dougans, Blaine Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #4
Maryellen Eck, Meade Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #4
Anita Edmond, Kirkbride Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #2
Bruce Fischman, Upper Perkiomen Middle School, Upper Perkiomen S.D.
Michael Gearty, William Tennent High School, Centennial S.D.
Faith Green, Turner Middle School, Philadelphia S.D. #1
Sarah Hnidey, Shoemaker Jr. High School, Philadelphia S.D. #4
Charles Jones, Exeter Township Sr. High, Exeter Township S.D.
Regina Jones, Locke Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #1
Cynthia Keaney, Wheatland Jr. High School, Lancaster S.D.
Mona Kolsky, Rhodes Middle School, Philadelphia S.D. #4
Betty-Jeanne Korson, Lowell Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #7
Gerald Lacey, Wilson Jr. High School, Philadelphia S.D. #8
Richard LaGrotte, Simmons Elementary School, Hatboro-Horsham S.D.
Grace Linkmeyer, Daroff Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #1
Barbara Maestle, New Holland Elementary School, East Lancaster County S.D.
James Mann, Mitchell Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #1
Lynada Martinez, Comegys Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #1
Kevin McAneny, Oxford Area Intermediate School, Oxford Area S.D.
Mary Ann McBride, Welsh Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #5
Jeanne Monteith, Comegys Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #1
Thomas O'Connor, Upper Perkiomen High School, Upper Perkiomen S.D.
William Page, Elkin Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #4
Nataline Pennestri, Ashland Middle School, South East Delco S.D.
Janice Pierce, Bartan (Human Services Annex), Philadelphia S.D. #1
Brenda Polek, Log College Jr. High School, Centennial S.D.
Shirley Rhone, Heston Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #4
Patricia Richards, Willow Dale Elementary School, Centennial S.D.
Hazel Robbins, Prince Hall Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #7
Michele Rodgers, Crossan Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #8
Mark Ruppel, Perkiomen Valley High School, Perkiomen Valley S.D.
Karen Scholnick, Affective Education, Philadelphia S.D.
Susan Smith, Media Elementary School, Rose Tree Media S.D.
Carole Straub, Garrettford Elementary School, Upper Darby S.D.
Elizabeth Summers, Nottingham Elementary School, Oxford Area S.D.
Patricia Turner, Upper Darby High School, Upper Darby S.D.
Harriet Walker, Ben Franklin High School, Philadelphia S.D. #2
Juanita Williams, Washington Elementary School, Philadelphia S.D. #1
Sue Ellen Wright, Upper Darby High School, Upper Darby S.D.

WRITING: LET IT GROW! LET IT GROW!! LET IT GROW!!!

by Elaine Gibbs

This position paper is my test of Peter Elbow's theory that writing, as a growing process, can work. From this point on in this paper I am experiencing the free writing process. I am starting to write without any preconceived idea of what I want to say. I have no outline on paper or in my mind. I have no plan directing where this piece of writing will lead my thoughts. I am writing ideas as they occur, making no attempt to develop any logical sequence or to separate babble from whatever good writing may occur.

The more familiar model of writing from an outline or with a plan in mind has been a stumbling block for me in the past in my attempts at writing. I have not written anything of any consequence since my college days. The few times I have been moved to write with the idea of publication I have hit a dead end. My unfulfilled efforts lie, to this day, buried in some Scripto notebook gathering dust on the shelf in my den, never to see the light of day again. Each time I have begun to set my ideas on paper my initial fervor has faded as the need to say something "good" takes over. At this point I have always stopped my writing and put my words away, discouraged and convinced once more that I really had nothing to say and that the task was too difficult for me.

With this writing I am adopting the view point of writing as quickly as I can whatever streams from my consciousness, not caring about word choices or what effect the words I write will have on some nameless, faceless audience. My only compulsion is to say whatever comes into my head and write it as fast as my fingers can pick out the keys on my word processor. What a wonderful device! The word processor is a boon to writing. Lauren Bacall can have her High Point. This is the real "writer's dream." Let those words and typos roll!

I just stopped to search for the exclamation mark. Already I can feel my concentration waning. So much for editing as I write. It's strange to be aware of the thinking process as I feverishly peck at the keys, not wanting to miss a single word as it comes pouring from my brain. I find that even before my fingers fly to the keys I am making choices in my mind, making judgments, deciding which word from the several flooding my brain to select. I notice a misspelled word as my finger strikes the wrong letter or punctuation mark. There, I am editing already. That's supposed to be the last step. What a compulsion it is to do it right the first time!

I can sense the power of the thoughts within me as I type and the need to keep going before my anxieties about what to say next will make me freeze at the keyboard, staring at the letters on the textured gray surfaces for inspiration.

This is fun! There, I almost got the exclamation mark the first time. Next time I'll use the upper case key and I will have it. This "stream of consciousness" stuff can sure get you off the subject. Oh well, if it works. I enjoy feeling the ideas pouring from my fingers. Writing with this technique seems to keep my mind active. When I finish I know that I will have some ideas which I can build upon and explore. What I have written so far will be the seeds, the nucleus from which other ideas will grow and explode.

I like the idea of not stopping to decide if what I have written so far is any good. I know that I have the ability to reshape this formless mass of words into something that will say what I like about the free approach to writing. It really is a chain reaction! Each idea I write leads me to a new thought.

I have been typing for more than 30 minutes already and I don't want to stop. This reluctance to conclude the euphoria is like the conflict I feel in a sexual experience: the impatience of the urgency for climax fighting the desire for prolonged pleasure.

Now I have blocked myself. I need to keep saying what I like about free writing. I want to see how these ideas will grow and shape themselves. When I began I had no idea that I would be able to say more than a few sentences before my thoughts dried up. But when I consider writing as a growing process I don't have to worry about repeating myself. I don't care about what I am going to say next. It is a real orgy. Just let it flow and worry about what I have said later.

I introduced the idea of free writing to some non-writing members of my fifth grade class. After a brief prewriting activity I introduced the idea of writing for ten minutes without stopping for any reason. They were intrigued with the idea of being able to write nonsense if they couldn't think of anything else to say. I was surprised and pleased with the number of ideas they included in the short writing time and with the intensity with which they wrote. When the time was up the room was filled with a hushed quietness, almost as if the writers had been summoned from a transcendental state.

I am experiencing this feeling myself as I am toiling at my console. A sensation takes hold of me, as though some magnetic or electrical field is enveloping my body, creating a medium for thought transmission. This sensation is replaced by a contrasting feeling of emptiness and disjointedness as I begin to feel my mind losing its train of thought. A nagging sense of uneasiness builds as I am finishing this sentence because I don't feel a new phrase emerging to fill the next space on the paper. I am wondering what I am going to say next. Just as I begin to stare blankly, a new thought starts to generate and the vibrations return as a new wave of possession sets my fingers flying to capture each fleeing thought. My head seems to feel warm and a dark fuzzy feeling surrounds my scalp as each idea is percolated to the tip of my fingers.

I am pleased with my first taste of the chain reaction that free writing produces. For me, I don't think there will be another way now that I have found it. I like the feel of it. I like the power of it. I like the results of it. Who knows, this may be the start of a new bestseller. What a contrast this is to the slow, depressing pauses while trying to think of what to say next or how to say it.

While I was writing I had to force myself not to break the rules and go back and edit as I made my many errors or as I thought of a better word. I know that the chore of editing will come soon enough, and that soon enough I will be struggling with the form and content of what I have written. I also know that the distaste of the struggle will be moderated by the pleasure just felt and that the pleasure will return in small measure as new chain reactions occur from the nuclei of this first burst of writing energy. What a good feeling to be struggling with too much to say and not too little! Will I be able to be ruthless enough with these words that I have enjoyed writing? Can I dissever myself from this sensual experience of lustful creation?

I find myself picking a stray piece of lint from my shirt. I guess that is my signal that this virgin orgasm of writing has run its course. Will it ever be the same again? Shall I remember it with the same poignancy with which one remembers that first innocent kiss: not as satisfying as more practiced kisses that followed, but still so satisfying in the moment of discovering a new pleasure that promises so much.

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The freewriting portion of this position paper is over. After rereading the text of my spontaneous thoughts, I can notice the emerging centers of gravity which Elbow said would appear. Two main centers seem to emerge: the description, rationale, and problems of writing with a plan; and the characteristics, techniques, and advantages of the free writing method. I have already edited the many typographical errors in this text for the purpose of submitting a readable copy, but there are obviously many tasks left in the job of polishing the free writing exercise before it becomes a finished product. The thoughts and the sequence of their occurrence remain to demonstrate the functioning of the mind, unencumbered by the straightjacket of predetermined rules and parameters. The point which I hope this position paper demonstrates is that the material upon which I can build and develop a discourse is plentiful. Even more important, the resulting piece of writing should evolve with a power and energy far greater than would have developed from sterile responses to items in an outline. There is a force behind the ideas that are a direct result of the free writing technique.

I have proved for myself that writing is a growing process and that the words and ideas shape the content, not the converse. I hope that to some extent I have also proved this for the reader.

Elaine Gibbs, a teacher in the Neshaminy School District, participated in a Pennsylvania Writing Project course last Spring.

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WASHINGTON POST FAVORS THE WRITING PROJECT WAY

A February 29, 1984 editorial in *The Washington Post* notes evident progress in the writing performance of college freshmen coming from school systems using the Northern Virginia Writing Project. Yes, the editorial writer states, the secondary English teachers still have a dreadful paperload — for example, 145 eighth graders writing a one-page paper a week would take 17 hours to correct and grade. Nevertheless, for successful results a school district's writing program need not assign all the labor to the English teacher. Some good solutions are constant practice in writing in all subject areas and use of a variety of audiences (including peers) for student writing. Such solutions, which our readers know are part of the Pennsylvania Writing Project platform, "need to be more widely disseminated," according to the Post.

NEWSLETTER FOR WRITERS

Teacher/Consultants who write or would like to write for publication might be interested in *Writer's Update,* a newsletter for fulltime writers and professionals who write as a sideline. The Newsletter digests information of use to writers from a variety of sources and surveys professional writers on issues related to publishing. Recent surveys have covered problems part-time writers have and how they overcome them, dealing with editors, writing skills that contribute to success in business, and activities established writers see as most useful in writing classes.

Persons interested should write for more information to *Writer's Update,* 4812 Folsom Blvd., #250, Sacramento, CA 95819.

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NCTE GRANTS

K-12 classroom teachers are invited to submit proposals for small grants (up to $1000) for classroom-based research on the teaching of English/Language Arts. These grants are intended to support investigation of research questions teachers raise about classroom issues. The grants are *not* intended to support the following: travel to professional meetings or travel of visitors to the classroom; purchase of permanent equipment or commercial teaching materials (for example: computers, tape recorders, class sets of texts or collections of trade books); extended released time; research done as part of a graduate degree program.

The deadline for submission of proposals is February 15, 1985. Applicants can expect a response early in May. One typed copy of the proposal should be submitted for duplication. Forms and guidelines for proposals are available from Bob Weiss at the Pennsylvania Writing Project office.

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CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

NCTE's Committee on English Language Arts in Rural Schools seeks manuscripts on the teaching of English in small rural schools. Writers might consider the following questions in putting together their articles: What works for you? How do you stay alive professionally? What characteristics of teaching in a small rural school influence your opportunities to teach English the way you believe it should be taught? What are the advantages of teaching where you do and how do you make them work for you? How do you overcome the disadvantages? How do you help bring about changes in your school?

Manuscripts should conform to these guidelines: 1) Typed, on 8½ x 11 inch paper leaving 1 inch margins; 2) Write your last name on each page and number the pages; 3) Do not use footnotes. Incorporate footnotes into the text or enclose a list of sources to be printed at the end of your article; 4) Include your complete home and school addresses and phone numbers; 5) Suggest a short title for your article; 6) Enclose 25-50 words of biographical information, as you would like it to appear. Be sure to tell where you teach; 7) Return of manuscripts cannot be guaranteed, so please retain a copy for your file.

Manuscripts should be submitted to: James S. Davis, 4401 Sixth St., SW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52404.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLUB

The New English Language Arts Club of Greater Philadelphia (ELAC/GP) seeks new members. ELAC/GP is a professional organization that publishes a newsletter and organizes workshops and social activities. Applications for membership can be obtained from: Dr. Beatrice Moore, Gratz High School, 17th and Luzerne Street, Philadelphia, PA 19140.

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GENERALLY DESCENDING DEPT.

From Colorado, John Bryan sends us the following jewel from a request for proposals recently issued by the Department of Energy's Western Area Power Administration.

"Technical evaluation criteria are listed below in descending order of importance. The relative importance of Criterion 1 is approximately 1½ times as important as Criterion 2. Criteria 2 and 3 are of equal importance; combined they are four times as important as Criterion 5. Criterion 4 is 1½ times as important as Criterion 5. Criterion 5 is approximately 1/3 as important as Criterion 1. Subcriteria are listed in generally descending order of importance."

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A TEACHER RESPONSE TO THE EXCELLENCE REPORT: A PARTICIPANT EVALUATES THE PROCESS

by Marilyn J. Hollman

Last September, eight teachers sat down in a classroom in suburban Naperville, Illinois, to consider what they might do to respond to President Reagan's commission's so-called "Excellence Report," *A Nation at Risk.*

They did not believe they were part of a "rising tide of mediocrity." When they read the lists of persons who testified at Commission hearings around the country, and the list of Commission members, they noted few classroom teachers among the former, and only one among the latter.

Eventually eleven teachers wrote portions of the local report, and nine served as editors. At this writing, their report, *A Nation at Risk: A Look from the Inside,* awaits that final step in the composing process: publication.

As always, it is difficult for writers to assess their own work, and as one of those writers and editors, and as chairperson for the committee, I perhaps have less distance than any of the others. However, two things strike me as interesting concerning our *Look from the Inside.*

First, teachers sat down together and wrote a response to a Federal Commission.

Second, our report, along with a number of others issued in the past year, makes a case for a return to some "basics" which the Writing Projects have pioneered.

If teachers are to work for excellence for themselves, and for their clients, one basic is the necessity for teachers to have time to act as spectators of their own lives and work (I use the term, perhaps loosely, in James Britton's sense, or rather, as I interpret his sense to be), and then, to act as participants, not only recipients, in their work lives—to work "out in the world, to get things done," to borrow from Britton again.

Our first task would be to make some observations about issues in the Excellence Report which, in our judgment, had been misinterpreted, sidestepped, or ignored completely by other commentaries and analyses. These issues included what we termed the "elitist nature" of the Report, continuing education, the professional life of teachers, and the positive aspects of public education. We reluctantly added "finances" to this list.

I don't know about other committee members, but I had rarely done "collaborative writing." Teachers I work with in workshops generally find it productive of good writing and good will, but I secretly harbored the conviction that "doing it alone" was somehow more satisfying.

However, one of the joys of collaboration emerged right away; other members volunteered to deal with "finances," and "elitist nature," two sections I felt uncomfortable with. I worked on two other sections, and embarrassed myself by not completing "professional life of teachers" comments by our first deadline.

Our procedure as a writers' group coalesced early. We arrived with multiple copies, and though we didn't read the shorter pieces aloud, as we might have in an official writers' group, we began with real composing issues. "Just what do you mean?" and "I'm not sure I agree with this sentence . . ." and "It sounds good; the only thing I wonder about is. . . ." Conventional concerns of spelling and punctuation came up, but, "We'll get someone to deal with that later."

In the longer sections dealing more directly with our District, the process was more difficult. Documents had to be gathered, interviews done, a survey prepared. I was continually amazed at how easily my colleagues seemed to arrive at reasonable copy without multiple drafts, and at the precision and rapidity of their editorial behaviors. I kept running drafts of "my" sections through my typewriter and their hands; frequently, I was still ruminating an editorial problem when someone else had solved it. The glorious variance in process which I extol to my workshop colleagues was indeed the case.

A word about the committee's makeup. Four writers work in grades K-5; two edited as well. Two represented foreign language, one came from mathematics, one from reading, one from speech, and one English. Six of the eleven have worked with the Chicago Area Writing Project as participants or workshop leaders or both.

Perhaps this *Look from the Inside* is part of a "rising tide of Writing Project mentality."

Marilyn Hollman is a Fellow of the Chicago Area Writing Project.

(Editor's Note: Copies of the report may be obtained by writing the National Writing Project Newsletter, School of Education, 5635 Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720. Include $1.00 to cover duplication and handling.)

A WRITING PROCESS WORKSHOP FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

by Charles R. Duke

More and more participants in summer Writing Projects are requesting experiences that build upon what has been learned in the Summer Institutes. Such requests were the impetus for an experimental two weeks writing workshop, July 11-22, 1983 for teachers and students in Ft. Thomas, Kentucky. Eight teacher participants were selected from those who had completed a five week Summer Institute with the West Kentucky Writing Project the previous summer, and thirty students from the Ft. Thomas School system were selected randomly from eighty-three who applied. The population of the workshop was kept small deliberately to foster greater contact between teachers and students.

The first week was devoted to teacher preparation. The participants followed a program of study which included discussing current problems in their teaching of writing, viewing selected videotapes provided by the National Writing Project that demonstrated various aspects of the writing process, reading current professional materials about the teaching of writing, becoming adept at the use of a basic word processing program, and preparing for the second week's activities with students.

The second week focused exclusively on working with students at all grade levels from second to the eleventh grades. (Students were grouped on the basis of the grade they would be entering in the fall.)

The teachers worked in teams of two throughout the workshop and rotated through a sequence during the week which gave each team an opportunity to work with each age level. The students were grouped in the following way:

Grades 2-4 — 8 students
Grades 5-6 — 8 students
Grade 7 — 8 students
Grades 8-11 — 6 students

The schedule for the second week followed a regular pattern; students and teachers worked together from 9 a.m. until noon. The students then left and the teachers worked until 3:30 p.m. evaluating the day's activities and preparing for the next day's teaching. Because of the rotation system, teachers had to spend time reviewing what they had done for the team that would be working with their group the next day.

The curriculum focus during the five days of the second week was to bring the students through the writing process, beginning with exploring various uses of language play, then moving to applications of language, and then the use of language in communication. Students at all the levels participated fully in prewriting, writing, rewriting, and publishing. The primary interest of the teachers in the week's activities was to determine how successfully they could use the composing process with students of varying abilities and grade levels. A secondary interest was teaching outside the usual grade level: high school teachers had an opportunity to work with second graders; elementary teachers had opportunities to work with high school students.

The students wrote frequently every day and in a variety of modes. Although it was not the principal goal of the workshop to produce finished pieces of writing, each student did take at least one of the pieces of writing done during the week and attempt to produce a relatively polished draft. These drafts were collected into an anthology, a copy of which was sent to each student and to each parent. In addition to the anthology of student writing, the teachers produced lesson outlines for the activities used in the workshop. These were put together in a collection according to grade levels so that readers might see the progression of skills introduced and reinforced throughout the five days.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Since we had access to the use of four Apple computers, we decided to incorporate them into the workshop. During the first week, teachers spent time teaching themselves how to use the word processing capabilities of the Apples; we were fortunate to have copies of a simplified version of the Applewriter (1.1) which had a tutorial and proved to be reasonably simple to master. As a goal, teachers attempted to produce two page of text on the computer with a minimum of errors, save the material, and produce a print-out of it. We also experimented with a few software programs, but the principal interest was generating text on the computer.

Having become somewhat proficient on the computers, we decided to involve students with them during the second week; as a result, all of the thirty students had at least two experiences with word processing. First graders were able to write simple expansion sentence exercises, second and third graders were able to write simple stories and poems. All of the other students were able to write rough drafts of pieces they were working on and some students even edited and polished their final pieces on the computer. Most of the students had had little prior experience with computers yet did not seem intimidated by them.

We also provided students with an opportunity to compose on typewriters, both manual and electric. Although the typewriters themselves were probably not of the best design for this activity, students at grade levels 5-10 did, at various times, do some composing at the machines.

Another special feature of the workshop with students was the development of on-going correspondence with Ace, the Word King. As an effort to promote a sense of audience and to provide an additional writing experience, a professional writer (actually the director of the workshop) agreed to write individual letters to each student in the workshop and to answer each response. AWK, as he was known, was introduced to the students the second day through his letter to them. The students then responded on their own to the letter. This process was repeated each day until the end of the workshop. Ace received thirty letters every day from Tuesday through Friday and responded to each one individually; the last letter that students wrote—on Friday—was forwarded to Ace who had left on a trip; Ace responded to each one of these from wherever he was so each student received a letter from him after the workshop was over. Ace had two goals in mind when engaging in this correspondence; he was interested in how detailed a response students could make to various topics, and in how students at the different grade levels would view the correspondence. Probably no feature of the workshop proved as interesting to the students as this correspondence. Some students came almost an hour early so they could get their daily letter from Ace and begin their response. Teachers could not begin the day's lesson until students had written their responses, but students did not seek teacher help for this activity. In almost all instances, the letters were developed by the students themselves and teachers did not see the final product. Ace reports that he still is receiving occasional letters from some students who were in the workshop.

AN EVALUATION

At the conclusion of the workshop, both students and teachers expressed satisfaction with what had been accomplished and offered suggestions for another time. Students expressed strong interest in having a repeat of the workshop next summer; they indicated their pleasure with the variety of writing activities and with the many different teaching approaches and styles they had encountered. Some students expressed an interest in having the workshop run a second week for them.

Teachers felt that the two weeks had been time well spent. They were grateful for the first week of planning and for the opportunity to gain experience with the computer prior to work with the students. The team concept appeared to work well and gave the teachers an opportunity to experience team teaching/planning. Although some teachers expressed reservations at the beginning of the workshop about working with such a wide range of grade levels, the participants agreed that it had been most helpful; seeing what a first or second grader could do with writing as well as what middle school and high school students could accomplish proved beneficial and put the writing process for all grade levels into clearer perspective. Teachers also agreed that as a result of the workshop experience, they were convinced that students at all levels and with varying abilities could write successfully and with enthusiasm, using the process approach. Perhaps the most important discovery, according to the teachers, was how easily the basic steps of the writing process could be communicated to students, and how well the students could grasp their responsibilities as writers.

Readers who have specific questions about developing a writing process workshop for students and teachers may write to Dr. Charles R. Duke, Director, West Kentucky Writing Project, Department of English, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky 42071.

Reprinted from the National Writing Project Newsletter.

SEARCHING PHYSICS

by Judy Grumbacher

I am a physics teacher and an NVWP Teacher/Consultant. Recently, I was introduced to an English teacher. Her response was, "Really, what can you possibly write about in physics?"

We write about everything in physics. It is, after all, physics which explains the universe. Not to be too chauvinistic about it, but physicists are doing what poets attempt: finding meaning in the universe.

Before I offend too many more English teachers, I'd like to share with you one very successful writing project my physics students did this fall: I-Search papers.

I had never heard of I-Search papers before the summer Institute. Then I read Macrorie's book, Searching Writing, and couldn't wait to try out some of his ideas. I was struck by the parallels between the methods of I-Search papers and the methods of scientific investigations. I was not sure how I was going to introduce I-Searches, but I was determined to try.

To introduce a unit in astronomy, my students and I went to the planetarium. During the presentation, the planetarium director mentioned that the light we see from distant stars has traveled over long distances and many years to reach the earth. He went on to say that looking at the stars is a way of looking back in time, that we may be seeing light from stars that no longer exist. Again and again he talked about the wonder of the universe.

When we got back to the classroom, we talked about how people since the beginnings of recorded history have wondered about the universe. I asked my students to write about some of the things they wondered about the universe, some questions that they would like to find answers to during our study of astronomy. I collected the papers and as I began to read them I was enchanted with the kinds of wonder the students were expressing. They loved the trips to the planetarium, and that experience and the writing seemed to unleash all sorts of questions: questions about the creation of the universe, where they fit into the cosmic scheme, questions about warped time and black holes.

As I read their writings after the planetarium visit, I realized that here were the beginnings of I-Search papers. I talked with my students about I-Search papers and

how they differ from research papers. Then we talked about asking questions, about how the way researchers ask questions can often determine the kind of answers they get. I broadened this discussion to science and the setting up of research problems. We talked about how scientists focus questions and related that to our own lab work. I asked my students to reread what they had written and to revise their questions in light of our discussions.

When I do this again, I will spend more time working with the kids on focusing their questions. From my limited experience with I-Searches, I think this is the critical step. After the students worked on clarifying the questions. Some students did not like sharing their writing with other students, and some students did not like commenting on others' works. The only ground rules I set were that comments could not be disparaging or vague and that researchers could ask anything about their writing that they wanted answered. Students revised their questions again after this group work.

Several days later—we continued regular physics work throughout this period—I asked, "What are some ways we can find answers to questions?" This discussion resulted in a number of suggestions: ask someone who knows, find reference books or magazines, do an experiment. Because I sometimes worry about becoming more of a writing teacher than a physics teacher, I kept bringing the discussion back to science and to physics. I think I may have pushed the connections too much; I think most of the students saw them and did not need me to point them out.

One of the important things that came out of that discussion was interviewing experts. I asked the kids to think about people they knew that might know about things relating to their research questions. A surprising number had parents or neighbors or friends who knew about things astronomical. I mentioned that we're in an area rich with researchers and that many are very willing to talk with interested students about their work. We talked about collecting information from museum exhibits, TV shows, and pictures. We then talked about documenting research. I introduced the method used in most scientific journals; the kids liked that method a lot more than footnotes, probably because the new way is easier and it's the way scientists write. I do want my students to think of themselves as writers and scientists (I'm just not always sure in what order).

I was quite surprised at the number of students who found people to interview, who went to the National Air and Space Museum, the Museum of Natural History, and called NASA for information. I guess it just shows once again that when students are working on projects that they care about, they'll go to all sorts of lengths to find answers.

One student asked what he should do if he couldn't find someone to interview. We talked about interviewing a book. What I was trying to do was get kids to break out of the passive habit of copying a bunch of stuff out of a book and hoping it would somehow be useful some place in the paper. I suggested that they try keeping their research notes in a different way:

> Divide the paper down the middle. On the right side make notes, on the left side write out questions about points not clear in the reading, make comments about the information, ask how the information will fit into the paper.

This is basically Bob Tierney's note taking/note making idea. Students who followed this form told me that when they were finished with the research, they found that they had already organized the paper. One student told me that the paper practically wrote itself.

I encouraged all my students to write drafts and bring them to class to share with their lab partners, but I only required it in one class. I wasn't sure how the sharing of drafts would work, and I was once again feeling some conflicts between my writing/physics teacher selves. I should have trusted my instincts: the class that I required to share their drafts created wonderful papers. They were much better, more polished, clearer than the papers that had not been through as many drafts. No surprises there. The surprise was that the kids didn't really mind being told to do drafts.

We talked about what the I-search papers should contain:

a question
story of the search for the answer
what was found

what the writer thought about the findings

sense of closure.

I asked the kids to read their papers with those things in mind and ask themselves if their paper had those things. I also asked each student to indicate how complete the paper was. The students turned in their papers, I read them, and returned them without a comment or grade on them. I asked them to reread their papers (there had been a few days in between here) and see if they thought there was anything they wanted to revise. I may not have handled this part very well. Some kids thought that I was unhappy with the papers and that they had done something wrong. Several asked me how they could make their papers "right." I discussed this with the classes. I hope I was able to correct the misconceptions some of the kids had. Not very many of them revised much this time.

Before I collected the papers for the last time, I asked each student to write an acknowledgement page. I showed them some examples of acknowledgements in various science and non-science books. I think a few students were reluctant to admit to a teacher that they had had help with the typing or proofreading. A number of students acknowledged their parents' help in driving them to the various museums in D.C. and several thanked their lab partners for their comments and help. Just like real scientists, just like real writers.

I have never enjoyed reading a set of student papers more, and I have never had a better set of student papers to read. Many of my students are planning to revise their papers and submit them to an area science writing contest and to the new Falls Church Science Journal. They'll be doing these rewrites on their own time for themselves. It's not required.

Only one student that I'm sure of plagerized his paper. Only a few did not use the I-search form. There were some problems. Some kids still rely too much on long quotes—I think they still lack confidence in their own writing and knowledge. But I think they can get over that—on our next I-Search. Many of the kids really liked doing the papers; I could tell that from reading them.

I didn't write many comments on the last drafts. I made no corrections—I did point out a couple of errors in physics by writing "careful! You may want to check this again." I don't feel the need to mark all over kids papers, and even if I felt the need, I'm no longer sure that I have the right to do that to beginning writers and scientists. But commenting on papers is the topic for another article.

What do we write about in physics?
Wondrous things.

Judy Grumbacher is a Fellow of the Northern Virginia Writing Project. This article appeared in the April-May NVWP Newsletter.

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BUSINESS VERBS FOR THE '80s

More than any other part of speech, the verb has suffered from outrageous usage in the 20th century business world.

To help you keep up with the most current outrages, we offer you some definitions of verbs written by one of our correspondents in the United Kingdom, Mike Cowlishaw.

VERB—Any word (i.e., any noun may be misused as a verb). "There is no word in the English language that cannot be verbed."

DIALOGUE—Talk to, as in "Why don't you call and dialogue with him about that project?"

INTERFACE—(Of humans) talk. "I'm going to interface to Joe Bleh, the new manager."

CALENDARIZE—To put an appointment into one's calendar. This expression replaces the more traditional, "Let me pencil that in for Tuesday."

BACK BURNER—To move something to a lower priority in the hope that it will go away or be solved by someone else. "Let's back burner this item."

DOLLARIZE—To express intangible assets (such as creativity) in terms of U.S. dollars — hence allowing the concept to be grasped by the materialistic.

NET IT OUT—Term used (mostly by managers) to denote a strong desire to bypass understanding of a proposed solution in favor of a simplistic quantification of it. For example, "I don't want to understand all the reasoning behind it, just net it out for me."

LEVEL SET—To get everyone to the same level of knowledge to be used as a base for further progress; "Before you start, let's level set everyone."

CONCUR—To give an irrevocable (often written) agreement.

DE-CONCUR—Once having agreed to the viability of a project, to remove your agreement from it. This ploy is most effective when used without warning and less than a week before the project is finished. A favorite weapon of the legal department.

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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.

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