



# JOURNAL the Montana Writing Project

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**Place-Based Writing****Submission Deadline: November 1****Publication Date: December 1**

Some places are part of the landscapes in our minds. When we are homesick, we remember them. When we think of important events, times full of life, we see in our minds the places where they occurred, which are inseparable from what happened. Other places are storied with events of national significance, so the entire country remembers important events by remembering the place where they occurred. Gettysburg. Wounded Knee. Pearl Harbor. Thousands of people visit such places so that they can forge a personal connection with events that matter. And yet other places have more personal meaning. The place where a brother died, or the place where a friend shared a secret, or the place where you thought through a hard problem and decided to change your life. In these places, no memorials make the story public, but the story is real and important. The quality of many genres of writing is closely tied to how well the author integrates their observations and ideas about places. Of course environmental writing relies on strong writing about place, but some of the best writing from many other genres weaves writing of place into both narrative and argument. What assignments have you designed to help students write about their important places? How do you help students look closely and write clearly about place? What work have you done to help them begin to see the significance of the places that surround them? How do you help them find universal themes in personal experiences in particular places?

Please consider sharing your teaching ideas, experiences, and resources.

*The Montana Writing Project Journal* welcomes submissions for any of the following areas. Of course, there is also always room for quality work that does not fit the categories or the current thematic issue.

*The Practice of Teaching:* As you work to teach writing, what methods get results? You might build an article from a demonstration lesson or a successful classroom unit. Reflect on what pedagogical practices have proven effective and share some ideas or strategies we can put into play in our own classrooms. The length of the submissions for this section could vary wildly. They might be brief pieces of no more than a paragraph or two that outline a successful lesson but might also materialize as lengthier pieces that explain a whole unit and give some theoretical background or support for your work.

*Fresh Insight:* What is happening in education that you feel you must say something about? Use this as a forum to share your views on writing education. There are many things going on at the classroom level up to the national level that we as teachers are thinking about, wanting to change, or are hopeful or angry about. This is a platform to expand and articulate some of those ideas. What important issues are those around us (or are we ourselves) not thinking enough about?

*Teachers as Writers:* Amid the daily chaos of teaching, what personal writing have you been able to do? What are you ready to publish? What better way to encourage all of us to continue to be writers than to offer one another some of the work we are doing. Submissions of any genre are welcome.

*Book reviews:* What titles have you found useful when working on writing? Consider reviewing one of your favorite texts to give others an idea of the content and approach that they can expect from the author. We would be especially interested in fairly new releases with which others may not yet be familiar.

*Original Photography:* Share images from your classroom, professional development, or photos that complement any of your writing submissions. Images should be sent as 300 dpi image files. Anyone who appears in the photo should be identified, along with any other relevant caption information such as a brief explanation of what is depicted, the photographer's name, and an approximate date the photo was taken.

*Announcements/ Upcoming Events:* Please pass on any information about upcoming events, opportunities, or any other information that would be of interest and use to the Montana Writing Project Community.

*Upcoming Issues***Publishing with Students**

Submission Deadline: February 1

Publication Date: March 1

**Highlights from the Rural Writing Conference**

Submission Deadline: May 1

Publication Date: June 1

**Submission Guidelines:**

Send any submissions to [montana.writing.project@gmail.com](mailto:montana.writing.project@gmail.com).

Manuscripts are only accepted in digital form saved as an RTF, Mac Pages, or Microsoft Word file.

DO NOT embed image files or diagrams in your text files. Please send them as separate attachments.

In general, manuscripts should not exceed 2,500 words.

Please list your name, address, academic affiliation, and e-mail address on your manuscript.



Publication Opportunity for your  
High School Writers

## AERIE INTERNATIONAL

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**Submission Deadline: February 1, 2009**

*Aerie International* is published annually by the students of Big Sky High School in Missoula, Montana. Subscriptions are \$12 to U.S. Subscribers, \$15 to friends outside the U.S. Sample copies are \$5.

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*The Missoula Summer Institute participants had weekly writing marathons where they used their surroundings to spark new work. Here the group shares their writing during one of their Missoula stops.*



*For their final writing marathon the group traveled north to the Flathead Reservation. Above, during the stop at Salish-Kootenai College, Heather Cahoon, Elliot Jacobs, and Heather Bruce discuss the day's work.*



*Photos from the Missoula Summer Institute by co-director Dave Christensen.*

Don't miss the Montana Writing Project sectionals  
at this fall's Educators' Convention!

2008 MEA-MFT Educators' Conference  
October 16-17, 2008  
Missoula, Montana

Wednesday

7:00 - 9:00pm DAVIDSON HONORS COLLEGE, UM  
Montana Writing Project 30th Anniversary Celebration

Thursday

9:00 - 9:50 SHS 171  
Portfolios in the 21st Century: Go Digital!  
Casey Olsen

10:00 - 10:50 SHS 243  
"Does This Count?" Aligning Grading With Pedagogy  
Jake Hansen

10:00 - 10:50 SHS 171  
Portfolios in the 21st Century: Go Digital!  
Casey Olsen

10:00 - 11:50 SHS 242  
Montana Writing Project Live!  
Heather Bruce

11:00 - 11:50 SHS 244  
Readarounds Made Me a Better Writer  
Annie Oakes

1:00 - 1:50 SHS 243  
Journals in the Primary Classroom  
Nancy Linnell

1:00 - 2:50 SHS 171  
Advanced Digital Portfolio Lab  
Casey Olsen

2:00 - 2:50 SHS 243  
Writing Together: Whole Class Writing Workshops  
Caroline Simms

**MWP KEYNOTE**  
**3:00- 3:50 SHS Auditorium**  
**The Write To Be Heard: Storytelling & Indian Ed**  
**Debra Earling**

Friday

8:00 - 8:50 SHS 227  
The Art of Imitation  
Donna Miller

11:00 - 11:50 SHS 244  
Poetry Out Loud in the Elementary & Middle School  
Nancy Linnell

12:00 - 1:50 SHS 244  
Building Peace in Our Classrooms  
Heather Bruce

1:00 -1:50 SHS 243  
Journals in the Primary Classroom  
Nancy Linnell

MWP Keynote:

**Debra Earling**

**The Write To Be Heard:  
Storytelling & Indian Ed**

3:00 - 3:50 SHS Auditorium



*Earling, a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, completed a BA in English at the University of Washington in 1986 and an MFA in Fiction at Cornell in 1992. Currently, she is a Professor in the English Department at the University of Montana and teaches fiction and Native American Studies. Earling's work has appeared in Ploughshares, Northeast Indian Quarterly, and many anthologies including Song of the Turtle; Contemporary Short Stories Celebrating Women; Circle of Women; and Talking Leaves: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Short Stories. Her first novel, Perma Red, received the Western Writers Association Spur Award for Best Novel of the West in 2003, the Mountain and Plains Bookseller Association Award, WWA's Medicine Pipe Bearer Award for Best First Novel, a WILLA Literary Award, and the American Book Award. It is a Montana Book Award Honor Book and was chosen by Barnes and Noble as part of its "Discover Great New Writers" series. Earling received a prestigious Guggenheim fellowship in 2007 for work on the story of a Salish warrior woman and a memoir.*



# Journal Writing in the Primary Classroom

## Nancy Linnell

As I was sitting across from Megan, a bright and eager kindergarten student, taking dictation for her daily journal entry, I realized that journaling in my classroom was not what I wanted it to be. It was a chance for the students to draw a picture of their own choosing each day. This gave them ownership and choice and the belief they were artists. But there was something askew, and I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was. So I held fast in the belief that journals needed to be a consistent, honored part of my students' day, but I began to explore my practices to try to determine where, specifically, my discomfort was.

As I was searching for a journal writing program that would fit my needs, I had a visit from a student's grandmother who was a special education teacher in Philadelphia. She introduced me to the book, *Kid Writing: A Systematic Approach to Phonics, Journals, and Writing Workshop* by Eileen G. Feldus and Isabell Cardonick. As I started reading I realized I had found a program I could believe in and use successfully in my classroom. When I read one of the philosophical foundations for their program, I was struck by this quote:

"Teachers need to help children do their own phonics-based writing or kid writing, rather than take dictation from children. Teachers' expectations of children's writing send the empowering message, 'You can do it!' Taking dictation sends the self-limiting message, 'You can't, so I will do it for you.'"

Immediately upon reading this, I realized the act of taking dictation was doing exactly what I did not want to do. I was showing my students that they could not do it, when I wanted to be sending the opposite message.

So I had found the source of my discomfort *and* I had found a resource that would help me eliminate my discomfort. Over the following summer, I read Feldus and Cardonick and learned more about their program and the implementation of it. I remembered the conversations I had had with the student's grandmother. And I remember her telling me to start this the first day of school. I had a difficult time with this suggestion and thought of all kinds of reasons why the first day would not be the best time to start. But as the summer waned and the first day got closer I realized that if I didn't start on the first day, I might never find the right time to start.

School started and journal writing started and I have never looked back. This program has worked for my students and myself for nine years now and I can't imagine using any other format. I do continue to try to improve the program and my delivery of it. But the individualized instruction and the student empowerment components of this program are things that I will not give up.

What follows are excerpted portions of a workshop handout I have given at Montana Writing Project's Rural Writing Conference and the MEA-MFT Educators' Conference:

Invite your students to learn phonics, sentence structure, and grammar during daily writing/art experiences that honor the students' lives. Journal time is highly structured and individualized for maximum student (and teacher) success.

As we go through arrival activities, the students who have finished putting coats/backpacks away will go to their seats and begin work on their journals. Every student starts by copying the date from the white board so all students are able to start without assistance after the first couple weeks. Half of the students in the class write each day while the other half draws. (This year I would like to get back to having every student write every day. This will depend on class size, and classroom aides' schedules.) A chart on the white board tells the student which they will be doing each day. Some students remember what they did the previous day; some students don't. The artists get right to work on their pictures. If they wrote the previous day, they may need a quick reminder of what their sentence says. If they are writers, they finish the date and wait for an adult to write with them. I have an aide in the classroom for this 30 minutes so she is immediately ready to begin with a writer. As soon as I finish with arrival activities, I will write



Nancy Linnell, a Montana Writing Project teacher consultant, teaches kindergarten at Potomac Elementary School.

with students.

Here is a loose transcript of a typical writing experience with a student:

*Me:* Tell me about your picture.

*Student:* It is a robot.

*Me:* Is that what you would like to say in your sentence?

*Student:* Yes.

*Me:* O.K. Do you know any of the sounds in "It"?

*Student:* "T" I hear a T. (She writes an upper case t because it is the first sound in the sentence.)

*Me:* How about "is"? Do you know any sounds in is?

*Student:* S (I remind her to leave a space. She does and then writes a backward s.)

*Me:* "A"?

*Student:* That's easy. It is a.

*Me:* Remember to write a lower case a. (She does—beautifully.)

*Me:* Robot?

*Student:* R O B

*Me:* Ah. What letter says ah?

*Student:* O, but that's a different o from before.

*Me:* Yes. O makes two different sounds in the word robot. What sound do you hear at the end of robot?

*Student:* "T".

*Me:* Yes. Write your t please. And what comes at the end of your sentence?

*Student:* A dot.

*Me:* And what's the other name for the dot?

*Student:* Period.

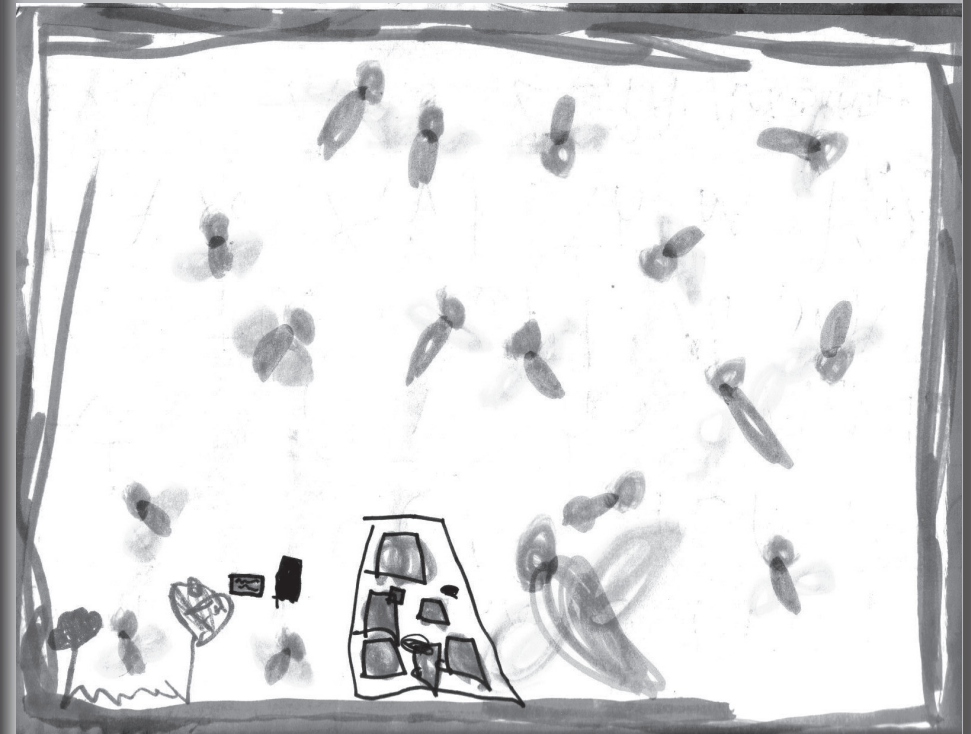
*Me:* Yes. Now. It's my turn to write. It -here is the t you heard. Is-and the s you heard. A-That says its own name. And robot—a long word and you heard all the same sounds I did! Good job. Pointing to each word in her sentence I read: This is a robot. Then pointing to each word in my sentence we read: This is a robot.

Journal writing is my favorite part of the kindergarten day. We cover a great deal of curriculum in this 30 minutes and it is individualized instruction. It is engaging for the student and the teacher. At the end of the year I have a clear picture of growth, the students have learned that they *can* write, and the parents have a keepsake of their child's kindergarten year. Win-win... win!

Kid Writing: A Systematic Approach to Phonics, Journals, and Writing Workshop by Eileen G. Feldgus and Isabell Cardonick. © 1999 Wright Group / McGraw-Hill. ISBN: 032206435X. \$32.10.

## "The Butterflies"

Azia LaFrombois  
Age 5, Kindergarten



the BuddFis Fild to  
the House. That  
Got STUCK Und,  
the Bed. the Mon  
BuddFis Got the  
BuddFis. Out.



In addition to writing about butterflies, Azia continues to use her writing skills to make cards and letters for her friends and grandparents, create stories about Hannah Montana, and construct signs to keep all boys (especially her brothers) out of her room.



## Book Review

Heather E. Bruce, Director Montana Writing Project

***About the Authors: Writing Workshop with our Youngest Writers.***  
**Katie Wood Ray with Lisa B. Cleaveland. Heinemann, 2004. ISBN**  
**0-325-00511-7. 244 pages. \$27.00**

“No matter what, let them write every day.” –Lisa Cleaveland

In *About the Authors: Writing Workshop with our Youngest Authors*, co-authors Katie Wood Ray and Lisa Cleaveland explain that everything they have learned about teaching very young children to write can be summed up by the dictum: “No matter what, let them write every day (ix).” They proceed to explain that young children who have time to write every day can grow in all of the important ways anyone who writes every day would grow. In a very practical guide developed from work done in Cleaveland’s kindergarten and first grade classes, Ray and Cleaveland show teacher-readers that with lots of teaching, young children develop important understandings about what it means to write, useful strategies to guide them in the process of writing, a sense of form, genre, and craft in their written texts, and a good beginner’s control of the conventions of written language. Ray and Cleaveland share what they have learned about what such teaching looks like, the support structures that need to be in place for such teaching to happen and how the teaching makes sense in the context of five-, six-, and seven-year olds’ writing. They demonstrate how teachers of young children can get a writing workshop under way, prepare units of study, conduct mini-lessons, confer with and assess young children’s writing and address developmentally appropriate concerns for doing so. Their book gets to the heart of what it means simply to be a young child who’s learning to write and a teacher who’s learning, every day, what it means to teach young children.

Writing workshop is a time when students get to “make writing stuff” (5). This “stuff” includes picture books, poems, letters, a few songs here and there, and by the end of the year, some writers even attempt chapter books. A crucial concept addressed by Ray and Cleaveland is that writing with young children begins with their understanding that when they are asked to write, they are being asked to make something and it should be something that looks and sounds like what they know exists in the world of writing. It is like something that they have read. The key to making writing stuff happen in writing workshop, Ray and Cleaveland explain:

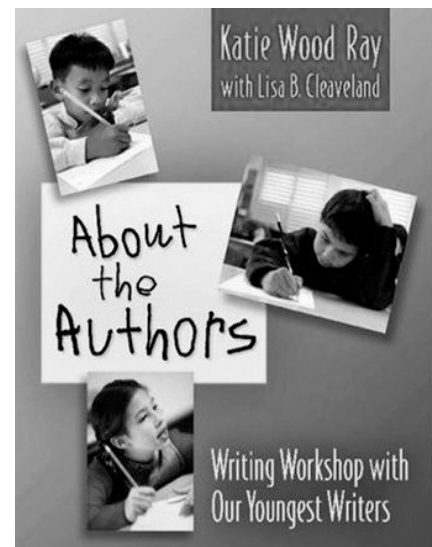
is learning to read like a writer. Reading like a writer means that when you read, you think about more than just what a text is about, its meaning. When you read like a writer, you also notice and think about *how* a text is written, because you write yourself and you just notice things like that. ... [W]hen children come to think of themselves as people who make books, they begin to look at books differently. Everything they notice about how books are made becomes something they might try when they make them. (14-15)

These children become people who make books and their teachers teach into this essential identity.

Ray and Cleaveland show teachers how to create the work, space, and time that are essential for children’s development as writers. Children need lots and lots of experience with writing, and they need teaching that supports it. Each day’s sixty-to seventy-minute workshop begins with a whole-class lesson that typically lasts from ten to fifteen minutes. Lessons are organized into units of study, each of which consists of a series of lessons on some writing topic. One of the most important things Ray and Cleaveland have to say about these lessons is that they don’t give children work to do for the day—the lessons are not assignments. Students engage during this time in writing—“in making stuff”—for anywhere from thirty-five to fifty minutes. While students work, Ray and Cleaveland have individual or small-group conferences with students where they teach directly to each writers’ specific needs. The workshop ends with share time that lasts about ten minutes, a time when the teacher keeps teaching pointing out specific smart things students have tried in their writing, things that have the potential to raise the level of everyone’s work in the room (25-26). Ray and Cleaveland establish guidelines for successful workshops and criteria for finished pieces of writing that they often develop along with the children.

Cleaveland and Ray offer a wealth of ways in which they help children learn about language all day long. These include considerations of environmental support, read alouds, talking about routines, writing demonstrations, word study, center work, songs and games, and writing to support other work. Ray and Cleaveland understand writing both as a noun and a verb. Good writing comes from having a compelling idea and then knowing how to shape that idea with form and genre and structure and write about it clearly with voice and style and this book shows teachers how to teach students to make good writing.

Each chapter in the book provides teachers with useful practical knowledge for teaching writing well with writing workshop. They show us how to help students use the writing process to make books, how to look closely at mini-lessons—whole class teaching that fills writing workshop with possibilities, how to organize for thoughtful instruction with units of study, how to assess so we can learn all that we can about our youngest authors, how to lead writing conferences and share times with rich individualized, differentiated instruction, and they outline several units of study to help teachers get started. Ray and Cleaveland take us front and center in their teaching and show us the extraordinary writing that young authors can accomplish when given the right tools, the right work environment, and the right teaching. Although their aim is to help us see that young authors can accomplish stunning work when given the chance, what the authors have to show us about teaching writing works with writers at every stage of development. This book provides a well supported rationale and practical strategies for teaching writing thoughtfully and knowing in the best literacy-rich ways.





## Bugs, Birds, and Storytelling Engage Early Writers

Merrilyne Lundahl

“Khaa khaa khraack ack!” The chatter of Clark’s nutcrackers in the ponderosa pines near the school causes us to stop and notice these gray and black birds. I’m with Iris and Gareth, ages four and five, and we are out looking for things that start with the letter B. They are the youngest of fourteen students at Two Creeks Community School (TCCS) in Victor, Montana, a private nonprofit school led by head teacher Steve Archibald. I worked there as an intern during the fall of 2007.

As they learned the alphabet and its sounds, Iris and Gareth would explore the natural playground of TCCS hunting for words to put in their alphabet books. On this day, as we walked around the school grounds, they found blue sky, branches, red-winged blackbirds, a bridge, barbwire, and bugs. Later, they made a page with a capital and lower case B, illustrated it and labeled whatever b-words we’d found. This activity transferred so that often when we were out for other purposes, Iris and Gareth would tell me the sounds and letters in things—usually birds—we heard or saw. I might start by asking, “Do you hear that ffffflicker?”. My emphasis on the f sound signaled them to pay attention to letter sounds. Sometimes I prompted them, “What letter does ‘rrrrraven’ start with?”. They picked this up and made it a game. Listening to just the beginnings of bird names served to make us all more aware of language, its sounds, and the translation to a physical meaning.

Part of the indoor morning routine at TCCS involved phenology, the study of the annual cycles of plants and animals and how they respond to seasonal changes in their environment. Students kept phenology journals where they recorded the date and time, weather data, observations classmates had made of animals or plants, questions for further study, and space to draw a picture. At the beginning of the year, Gareth and Iris mainly practiced the physical act of writing by recording the most basic information. Soon, they wanted not just to record but to create. Concerned about spelling and handwriting, at least for these journals, Gareth would come up with a question he wanted to pose or an observation he wanted to put down in a complete sentence. He would ask about how to spell a word—like “universe” or “carnivore”—and I would write it for him to copy. The drawing component of the journal pages often took them into field guides. They would find a bird or mammal they’d seen or hoped to see, we’d sound out its name, look at the map of where it lived, and then they could copy whatever information they found most important. Writing like this was naturally integrated and interdisciplinary throughout the day.

The TCCS students broke into two groups of older and younger students. When I facilitated writing with the older group, Steve often would engage the younger ones in storytelling. They would collaborate to tell a story, each student contributing some element of it. Steve—a phenomenal, animated storyteller—would narrate and cue the students to speak their parts. Best of all, Steve would record these sessions as a means of “publishing”. This allowed all of us to hear the stories. One of the key elements of TCCS was the community aspect, and we all cheered these productions. Everyone felt good about stories, narratives, and performing.

After my tenure at TCCS, I took a job as a home-school instructor for a family in Missoula. The parents primarily wanted their children to continue to enjoy learning, something they felt perhaps was being a bit quashed in their kindergartner. My sessions with Lucia, age four, and Calvin, age six, were relatively free form, so taking advantage of teachable moments became necessary. On my first visit we found a stinkbug in the basement. I had a clear magnifying specimen box, and we stuck the insect in to look up close at its features—its antennae, coloring, eyes, and body segments. Later, we added a spider. For Calvin, the enlarged, captive critters translated into writing about traveling to Africa and riding giraffes. Sometimes Calvin wanted to write himself, but at other times he was resistant to doing anything so I would offer to be his scribe. This always worked to pull him back into “school” mode (instead of wrestling with sister mode). As he dictated and I recorded, I might try asking in-process questions about what next, sometimes questioning his grammar ears—“Does it sound better to say ‘was’ or ‘were’ here?” I would wonder aloud about how a character might feel, what sensory details he imagined for his characters, throw out terms like “setting” and “plot,” and give specific praise about an idea or a certain choice in words. I asked him about his favorite parts and the parts that he thought didn’t work as well, and always ended by speculating with him about what he’d write next. He controlled the story, and would practice reading—often complaining about my handwriting—with his own stories.

Gareth Pope, age 5, finds some branches on his hunt for “B” words to write in his alphabet book.



Four-year-old Iris Downey, the youngest student at Two Creeks Community School in the 2007-2008 year, eagerly looks for materials to write about.



All of these children are fortunate because they come from homes where literacy is emphasized and incorporated as a part of daily life. I’m sure they each were read to while in the womb. Not enough children have this luxury and few “real” teachers get to work with just one or two students at a time. I like to think that teachers in any setting can play a significant role nurturing in young children a love of story, of sounds, and of expression through writing.



## Beginning, Middle, End Stories

Michelle Dean, Kindergarten Teacher



*Creedence writes the end to her story.*



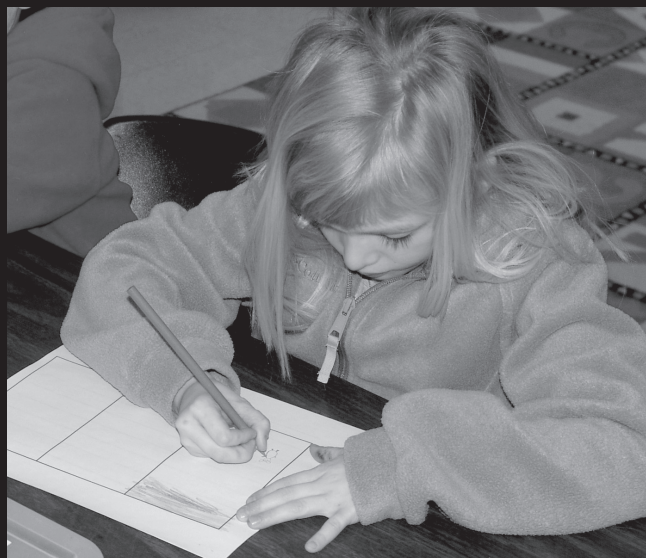
*Savannah thinks about how to proceed with her story as Trevyn asks Micah for some suggestions for his.*



*Jenna adds detail to her "beginning" picture.*



*Azia flips back to her illustrations to figure out what sentence she should write next.*



*Hunter gets to work on her illustrations.*

One of the writing activities that Michelle Dean does with her kindergarten students is beginning, middle, end stories. By the springtime, most students write independently enough to complete one of these stories in their daily block of writing time. Students decide their own topics and Michelle gives them two sheets of paper to complete their work: one paper with lines for writing their stories and another divided into three sections for illustrations. Most of the writers begin with their three illustrations, figuring out how the story starts, the action that happens in the middle and what the ending will be. After they have a picture for each of these story segments, they switch to their lined paper and write a sentence that reflects what is happening in each of their illustrations. The process gives students not only practice in sounding out words and letter formation but also in composition. The scaffolding gives students an organizational framework that allows them to shape their own ideas into a simple story.



## Journal of the Montana Writing Project

*Below, MWP-Columbus participant Joni Meier composes during the "writing into the day" activity (Donna Miller's water-bottle sock invention sits in the foreground).*



*Above, Beth Sandoval and Joni Meier read from Native American literature during the gallery walk.*



*Participants Norma Glock and Brenna Sundby take a moment to compose during a participant demonstration, along with Inverness researcher Becky Collins.*



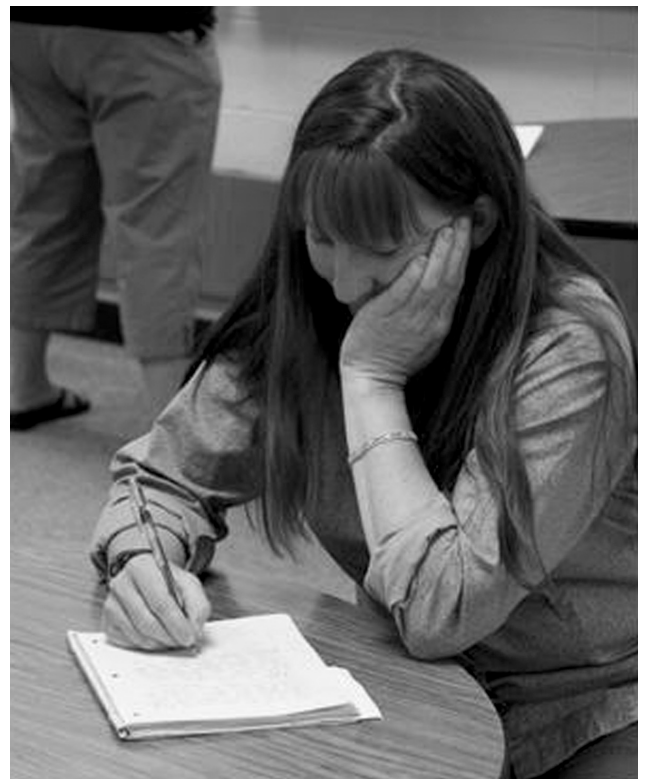
*Above, right-handed Beth Sandoval gets tough to finish the institute after fracturing her wrist.*



*Above, a Friday afternoon social finds institute co-directors Lorrie Henrie-Koski and Brenda Johnston sharing a relaxing discussion.*



*Above, Joni Meier and Beth Sandoval ham it up during the Friday read-around.*



*Above, Shannon Horton finds an opportunity to pay her notebook some attention.*



# COLUMBUS SUMMER INSTITUTE JULY 2008



*Above, Institute Director Donna Miller shares a lighthearted moment with participant Brenna Sundby.*



*Above, 2008 Montana Writing Project—Columbus participants share their writing at the home of co-director Lorrie Henrie-Koski on the first day of the institute.*



*Participant Joni Meier takes in images and literature from the gallery walk.*



*Lorrie Henrie-Koski shares during a read-around as director Donna Miller and participant Brenna Sundby look on.*



*Pam Swain participates in an inquiry demonstration.*

photos & captions  
by institute co-director  
**Casey Olsen**



*Brent Scott pauses to reflect during the gallery walk.*



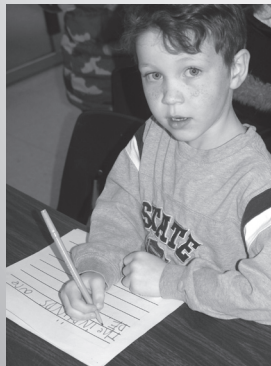
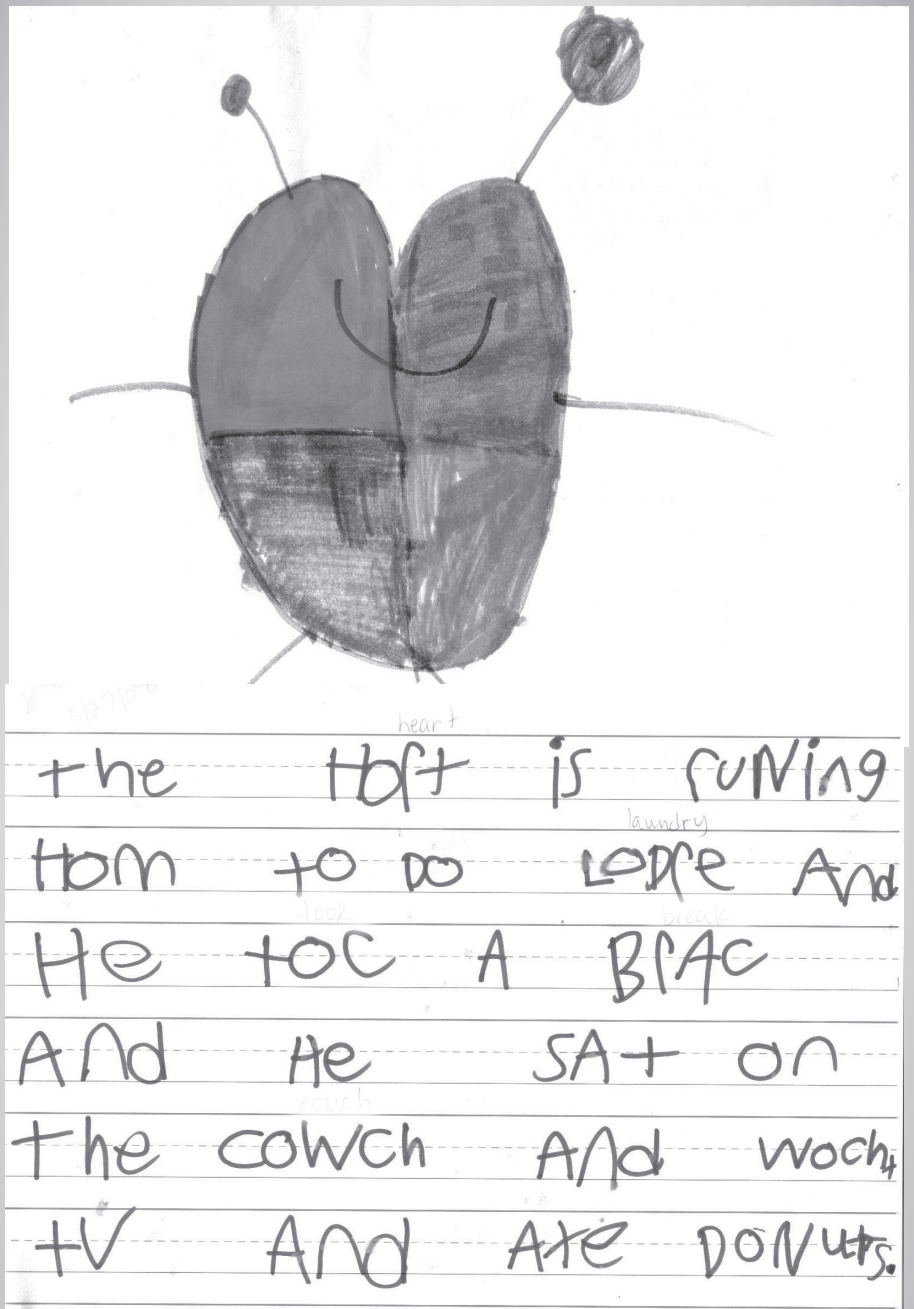
*Relaxing at a Friday social, Brent Scott and Shannon Horton listen to pieces composed by other participants over the course of the week.*



"The Heart"  
Joe Stults  
Kindergarten

"All people—  
and I mean  
scholars,  
researchers,  
and teachers,  
who in any  
place have set  
themselves to  
study children  
seriously--  
have ended up  
by discovering  
not so much  
the limits and  
weaknesses  
of children  
but rather  
their surprising  
and extraordinary  
strengths  
and capabilities  
linked with an  
inexhaustible  
need  
for expression  
and realization."

~Loris Malaguzzi,  
founder of the  
Reggio Emilia schools



Joe had the only story in kindergarten about a heart who took a break from his laundry to have donuts. He continues to write even more creative stories now that he is a first-grader. When he is not writing he loves to swing at recess.

# How to improve the teaching of writing

## Five steps to a better high school writing program

Michael Umphrey

### After the Revolution

We've gone through something of a revolution in teaching writing since the late 1970s, when "the writing process" began to be championed throughout the land. Most state teaching guides now talk about the writing process. Everyone's been trained in it. And yet.

And yet, skillful and vivid writing remains far from the norm among high school students. Indeed, there's been scarcely any measurable improvement in student writing. James D. Williams noted that "over the last 20 years, during which process has been integrated into instruction nationwide, all NAEP reports have shown a gradual decline in writing performance."

Williams was looking at the NAEP 1996 Trends in Writing. We can be thankful that between 1998 and 2003 there *were* slight improvements in the NAEP scores for 4th and 8th graders. Unfortunately, there were no such improvements for 12th graders, and since in Montana scores stayed flat during that time, it appears that our students slipped downward in the national rankings.

It appears that the widespread adoption of process teaching has not led to notable improvement in writing. I don't take this to mean that the approach is wrong. Indeed, as one who has spent countless hours both writing and teaching writing, I am quite sure it is not. Good writing really does require planning and drafting, along with revising and revising and revising.

What the scores suggest to me is not that writing teachers are inept or their methods wrong but that we have not yet made the commitment to teaching writing that is required to make much of a difference. Nothing that schools attempt is more difficult than teaching writing. Writing may be the most intellectually challenging thing many students are asked to learn in school, and teaching writing requires individualized coaching, which is laborious and time-consuming.

Time is the resource that has often been lacking.

If kids do not write a lot and do not get quick and useful feedback as they work, they are not going to get much better, regardless of whether the teaching takes a pedagogical or a process approach. What this means in practice is that if most students are going to learn to write skillfully, the school day needs to include substantial blocks of time for writing, and the writing teachers' work day needs to include substantial blocks of time for coaching student writers.

The College Board created the National Commission on Writing to call attention to the teaching of writing. In its first report to Congress in 2003, the Commission called for a revolution in the teaching of writing. The Commission urged schools to "double the amount of time most students spend writing". Maybe they should have specified a minimum number of minutes, since two times zero still isn't much. In any case, last year's Carnegie Report, *Writing Next*, warned that "American students today are not meeting even basic writing standards".

That failure is of fundamental importance, the report said, because "young people who do not have the ability to transform thoughts, experiences, and ideas into written words are in danger of losing touch with the joy of inquiry, the sense of intellectual curiosity, and the inestimable satisfaction of acquiring wisdom that are the touchstones of humanity". This has implications for civilization itself: "What that means for all of us is that the essential educative transmissions that have been passed along century after century, generation after generation, are in danger of fading away, or even falling silent".

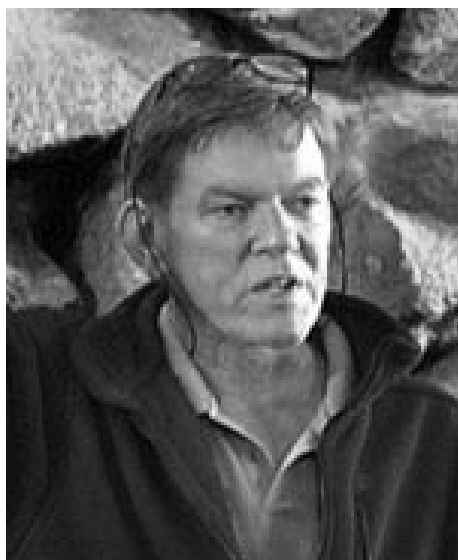
### A Practitioner's View

Based on my experience and as an administrator and a writing teacher, these are five things that I think people in schools could be doing:

**1. Clarify and articulate the vision of why writing matters. Be able to say clearly why it is important. Then say it often.**

Kids do learn what they are taught, and they do believe what they are repeatedly told, if what they are told isn't so foolish that their own experience contradicts it, and if the tellers aren't obvious hypocrites.

I believe writing matters because it's impossible to do large, complex thinking tasks without it. I believe writing matters because without being articulate in



Michael currently teaches high school English in Polson.



language, we are at the mercy of the large bureaucracies that govern modern life. Theodore Dalrymple, in his work as a physician in the London slums, commented on the way the inarticulate are held hostage by the very bureaucracies that were invented to serve them:

In their dealings with authority, they were at a huge disadvantage, a disaster, since so many of them depended upon various public bureaucracies for so many of their needs, from their housing and health care to their income and the education of their children. I would find myself dealing on their behalf with those bureaucracies, which were often simultaneously bullying and incompetent; and what officialdom had claimed for months or even years to be impossible suddenly, on my intervention, became possible within a week. Of course, it was not my mastery of language alone that produced this result; rather, my mastery of language signaled my capacity to make serious trouble for the bureaucrats if they did not do as I asked. I do not think it is a coincidence that the offices of all those bureaucracies were increasingly installing security barriers against the physical attacks on the staff by enraged but inarticulate dependents.

I believe writing matters because I believe every human life matters, and to the extent possible each should create a history of its significant experiences and insights. I believe writing matters because organized society—with its miracles of medical science, of improved production and distribution that make life less painful and more enjoyable, of social linkages that help us find and stay connected to those who are important to us—depends on dense communication, including written communications, at every level. I believe writing matters because I agree with Francis Bacon that “Reading makes a full man, . . . writing an exact man.” All the higher occupations require the sort of analytical exactness that can only be learned through writing.

Oh, and then there’s this:

The bottom-line problem and opportunity remain the same: The correlation between career success and writing proficiency is extremely strong. Government and private sector employers alike have told us that those who can write well will advance in the workplace and those who cannot write well will struggle to be promoted or even retained. (Bob Kerrey, National Writing Commission Chair)

**2. Ensure that all teachers hired can write well. Do not assume any teacher has much writing skill just because he or she has a teaching license. Don’t assume all English teachers can write or teach writing well.**

Require a writing sample created at the interview site at the time of the interview. Make sure a skilled writer is available to evaluate the samples.

**3. Develop the writing skills of teachers already on staff.**

This is challenging. “Drive-by” inservice workshops won’t do it. Further, much of the advice out there about the teaching of writing really has little to do with the foundations of powerful writing, which still include knowledge, grammar, rhetoric, and logic. The first rule of powerful speaking, Cicero taught, was to know your subject. He observed that unless a speaker “grasps and understands what he is talking about, his speech will be worthless”. So it is with writing.

But if you look for help with teaching writing, many of the promotional materials you find might lead you to believe that good writing is mostly a political affair, having to do with empowerment, authenticity, and voice. “Voice” is the somewhat unfortunate word many of today’s “writing experts” use instead of “style.” I prefer “style” because it mystifies less and leads more directly to what is teachable: active voice, specific nouns, vivid verbs, clear and simple sentences.

It would also be refreshing if more of today’s authorities on teaching writing believed that “research”—not just Googling but also interviewing, observing, and experiencing—was thought important enough to be it’s own trait. Also, some mention of truth and accuracy would be bracing.

In any case, having teachers write more is a necessary part of improving their skill at teaching writing. One thing that would make sense would be to have them write regularly about their practice: brief reviews of websites and other materials, introductory comments to units they want to use, reflections on student work, and so on. When I was a high school principal, we had teachers write as part of their in-service training, and we published teachers’ thoughts about using writing in their teaching. I was surprised at the generally high quality of the work we received.

Today, I would think long and hard about ways to use blogging to engage teachers in writing and collaborating about their practice. For one thing, I would design the school website so that each department was posting regularly for the public, for other staff, and for students about topics of interest in that discipline. Teachers would need to be given some time to write, but if they are not given regular time to write and, more important, a reason to write, they are not likely to get much better at it or give it serious thought.

**4. Ensure that student writing is visible.**

Both accountability and standards are best addressed by making the work real and public. Athletic programs provide a model—both accountability and standards grow out of regular games and tournaments. A writing program should also feature regular performances. The best of these, I think, involve writing for real world purposes which provide a natural audience. Having students research and write local history in an obvious example.

Blogging is a new genre of writing that should also have a place in the writing curriculum. What I have in mind is not so much the diary-writing that young people put on their My Space pages, but the focused and regular writing on specialized topics that have emerged everywhere. While journalism continues to decline as a profession, all sorts of businesses are adding bloggers to their payroll, recognizing the advantage of putting a personal voice before the public, along with a constant flow of information and links related to a particular area of expertise, whether that is gardening or automobile racing or software development. For students, the practice of regularly reading online information on a topic that interests them, and then summarizing it, commenting on it, and providing links is an excellent way for them to advance their interests while

doing large amounts of regular reading and writing.

### 5. Ensure that writing teachers have the time.

This is the main thing. A major reason students don't write more is that teachers don't have time to deal effectively with floods of student writing. I suspect that the real reason writing ability declined during twenty years of emphasis on the writing process was simply because all the workshops and exhortations were unaccompanied by any real increase in time to do the work.

All English teachers know the math: If a teacher assigns only fifty students an essay, that often translates into more than fifteen hours of reading and commenting. If those essays are taken through three drafts, you can triple that time. This is time that, for a typical teacher, will be spent after school and on weekends. A good writing conference with a single student can easily take a half hour, though such conferences are much, much more effective than scrawling comments in the margin.

But even those large investments in time aren't enough. Except for teachers of honors classes, much of the writing will contain numerous basic problems, such as unclear pronoun references, which can't be explained simply to students who are not eagerly seeking the skill. At the end of reading a batch of essays laden with problems of basic usage, problems of style, problems of coherence and organization, and problems of general mindlessness, the teacher needs to decide what to do about it all.

Writing comments on papers hasn't been shown to be particularly effective. Even if it were feasible, re-teaching everything that needs to be re-taught tends to be similarly ineffective. Students who have failed to figure out active voice many times before are quite capable of ignoring yet another lesson.

And in any case, there isn't time in class to re-teach everything, though if you add up the errors made in many typical classes, they will include pretty much everything. There have been dozens of suggestions for how to handle what is basically an impossible situation; have the students edit each other's work, have students get their papers read by two or three other people before turning them in to the teacher, teach "mini-lessons" on all those problems that show up in the work. All of these work to a limited degree with a limited number of students, but a good many students continue to write poorly all the way through high school graduation, and then on through college, and not infrequently on through graduate school.

What works best is coaching: reading carefully through a students' paper alongside the student, giving explanations and making helpful changes. To the extent that I have been able to do this, it has worked. I believe a good faith effort to teach every student to write competently would require a writing teacher's load to be no more than three classes a day, with no more than fifteen students in each class. The other three hours a day would be spent reading student writing and holding conferences. Students enrolled in a writing class should be simultaneously enrolled in a computer-equipped study hall, both so they have time each day to write and so they are available for conferences.

Teaching writing to 45 students a day, who were actually writing for an hour each day, would be more than a full-time job. If this were done at least one semester each year for three years during high school, I would expect to see significant gains in the writing ability of a majority of students in such a program.

If this isn't possible, for financial reasons, then I would advocate that such a program be available to those students who freely choose it. It is as impossible to teach a student to write well who hasn't the least desire to learn it as it is to teach good basketball skills to a player who refuses to run at more than three-quarter speed or to pay attention to what is happening on the court.

Though sometimes a talented teacher can motivate a student, this is a difficult and inexact art, and I'm not of the mind that opportunities should be withheld from some students because no one has found a way to persuade all students to strive for them.

But of course, it is possible. American schools have enough money to do nearly anything they want. The problem is merely that they don't have enough money to do everything they want. So they do what matters to them most. Thus far, teaching writing has not been a priority.

James D. Williams. *Preparing to Teach Writing: Research, Theory, and Practice*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: 2003, p. 99.

Check out the Montana Writing Project website:

**<http://www.cas.umt.edu/english/mwp>**

- background information about the Writing Project
- upcoming events
- resources
- registration forms
- contact officers & staff
- Journal archives

# "2007-08 Portfolio"

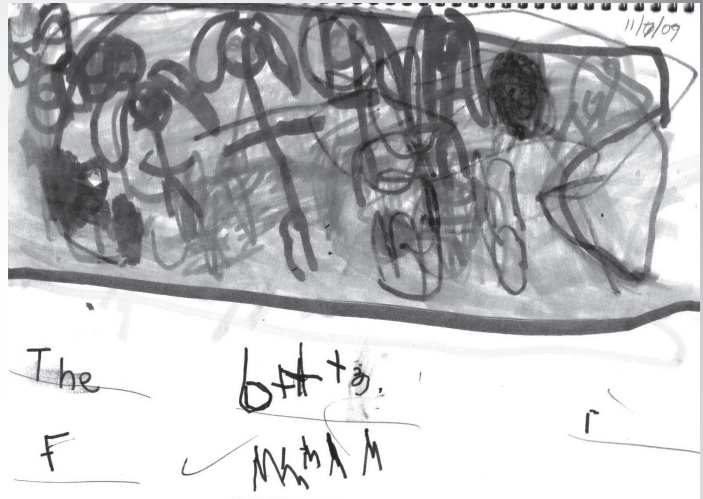
Highlights from a Kindergarten Writing Journal

Aaliyah McCrea

teacher Michelle Dean



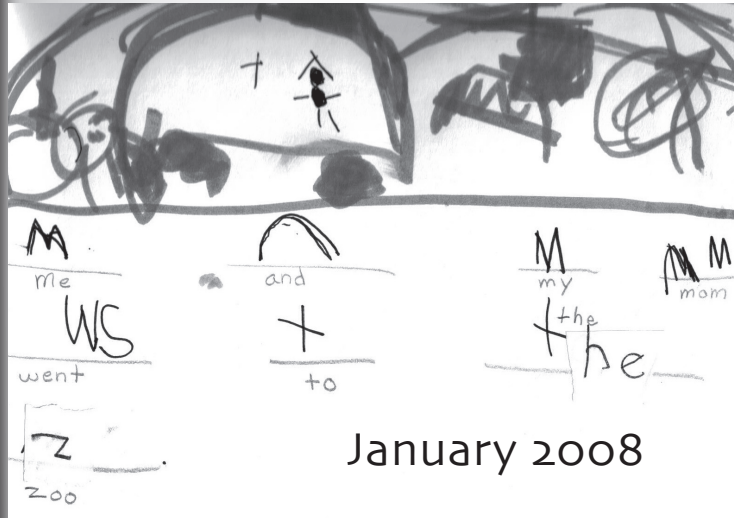
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January 2008



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March 2008



Me and Breeze  
to Hunter. has.  
We Nt

April 2008



Aaliyah's writing continues to become more detailed now that she is a first grader. She loves princesses, and right now she really likes to write stories about them and all her adventures with her friends.



## Book Review

Christa Umphrey

Suggested places in the day to invite kids into book making from Ray & Glover:

- If a child is excited to tell a story about something that happened outside of school, then after the story is shared, suggest she make a book about it.
- After children act out a story in their dramatic play, suggest they make a story into a book while its still fresh in their minds.
- When classroom activities create energy and a buzz of talk around them, suggest children make books about what has happened.
- When it is clear that a child knows a lot about something, suggest making a book to teach others how to do what was just done.
- If you know a perfect audience and occasion for a child's writing, say a grandmother coming to visit or a big brother's birthday, suggest the child make a book for that person or occasion.
- If you haven't seen a child make a book (in a while-or ever), you might simply suggest, "You know, I'd love to see you make a book. I haven't watched you write in a while"

***Already Ready: Nurturing Writers in Preschool and Kindergarten.* By Katie Wood Ray and Matt Glover. Heinemann, 2008. 222 pages. ISBN 13: 978-0-325-01073-1**

*"We operate from a core belief that children do not need to 'get ready' to be readers and writers; instead, we believe they are already readers and writers-- albeit on their own terms-- as they live and learn inside literate communities."*

*Katie Wood Ray & Matt Glover*

Katie Wood Ray and Matt Glover's book *Already Ready: Nurturing Writers in Preschool and Kindergarten*, gives anyone who works with preschool or early elementary children a solid philosophical framework and a handful of practical ideas for building young children's enthusiasm for composition.

Ray and Glover believe that by the time children reach preschool or kindergarten, they are already writers. They don't have much experience, but they're filled with stories to tell and ideas to express - they want to show the world what they know and see. In *Already Ready* Ray and Wood share their approach for nurturing these young writers and helping them become literate students. As their title indicates, the premise of their book is that even preschool children are not too young to begin thinking of themselves as authors.

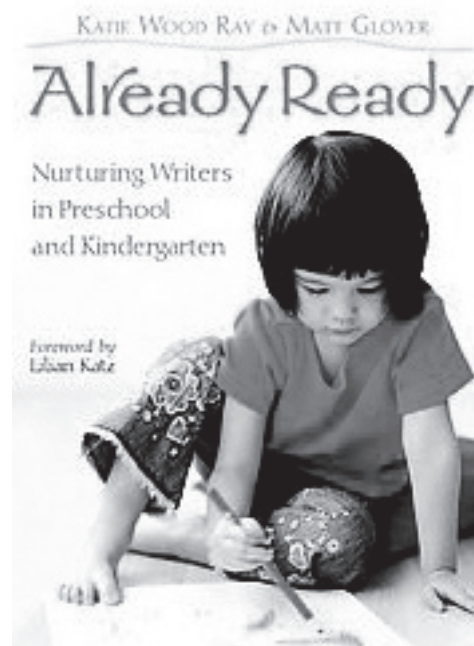
The book is divided into two sections. The first lays out their philosophy about working with young writers; the second section shares some of their promising practices so that readers have a better sense of what the ideas look like in the classroom.

The format of the book is such that each chapter begins by introducing us to a preschool writer and then sharing one of that author's illustrated stories. Then Ray & Glover use that piece (or more accurately, they use the student who created it and the process they went through) to illustrate one of the methods they suggest for encouraging young writers. The result is a text filled with student writing and examples of how you might guide your own students to produce work at a similar level. For teachers just beginning to work with young students the numerous examples help clarify what writers this age are capable. For experienced teachers, it's an interesting opportunity to compare the writing these students are doing with your class's work.

Most of the writing in the book the authors talk about, as well as most of their student examples, are in the picture book genre. They believe this format makes sense for young students for a number of reasons. The books are a familiar kind of writing; chances are this is the type of writing most of the kids read most often. Making picture books also forces the issue of composition. Because of the multiple-page format, students must, even in a very abbreviated way, develop some sort of story. It also helps children read like writers and builds stamina for writing. And of course, it's fun and children like it. There is a social and contagious aspect to book making. Once children see their peers making books, they want to do it, too.

Through the discussion of these issues and the examples, the first section of the text works to illuminate a few of the authors' essential understandings about writing:

1. Young children are like any other writers, just with less experience.
2. Functional writing and compositional writing require different stances, and people with



strong writing identities are comfortable with both.

3. People who make picture books are engaging in a complex thinking about writing as a process.

4. Using writing to compose involves much more than transcription.

5. Composition development is multidimensional.

6. Supporting a child's image of self as writer is critical to his or her overall development

One of the points most heavily emphasized throughout the text, is number four, the authors' belief that teachers should avoid transcribing students' work. I think their emphasis is due to both the widespread acceptance of this technique and the difficulty they sense many teachers would have giving it up. They believe when teachers regularly transcribe young students' writing, the students begin to view the adult's written words as part of his or her process. The unspoken message is that the child "can try to write on his own, but adults are really the ones who know how to write. The message is reinforced by the fact that adults don't usually redo children's illustrations, only their writing" (10). The authors worry about the message this is sending young students. Namely, that if someone who is four wants to write, does what she can and takes it to an adult who writes the words for her, "the message of the action is clear and unequivocal; 'Adults, not children, are the ones who know how to write'" (98). This is the "exact opposite of the message we want to be sending. That they are four and writing just like someone who is four should." If adults write their words down, they are giving young writers the message that they don't know how to write and that they don't have to try.

The authors also suggest that "writing may actually be a better way to lead children's literacy development than reading" and cite Randy Boomer's observation (2006) that "a blank page presents children with an invitation (to make meaning) while reading presents the with an expectation (to figure out someone else's meaning)" (13). For most kids, an invitation is more appealing than an expectation. The authors also have a great "yes, but..." section where they address some of what they assume will be the arguments against eliminating transcription. The arguments they take on include:

- Taking dictation shows children that adults honor their words and find them appropriate enough to record.
- Taking dictation keeps children from getting overly fatigued and frustrated by trying to write themselves.
- Some children know what writing looks like and are frustrated because their writing doesn't look like other writing. Taking dictation helps this frustration.
- Taking dictation helps capture the richness of children's oral language and storytelling in a way that their own writing can't possibly capture.
- Taking dictation helps parents make sense of children's writing.
- Taking dictation shows children how writing goes down on the page--how their spoken words become written words, including letter formation, spelling, word spacing, directionality, punctuation.

As I read through the list, I had to admit that they hit nearly everyone of my concerns, but I agreed with nearly all of their rationales. And yet I still have transcribed work for some of the three-year-olds I work with since reading and agreeing with them. It's harder than I imagined not to capture (in my words) some of the great work the young kids

I work with come up with because of the very reasons listed above, and, I think at least partially, because I don't want to forget their writing. One of my favorite ideas from the book was Ray and Glover's notion that "Teachers of writing don't need to try to make writing simple [...] instead, teachers need to invite children to 'swim' around in all the complexity of writing as a process, and then to help them make sense of that process when they need help making sense of it" (122). This approach to working with younger kids really appeals to me, so reading their book was a good way to get me thinking about how that idea might look in my practice.

Another aspect of the book I appreciated was that Ray and Glover spent a little time reminding us what children at this age do well, which is always relevant when thinking about how to help them improve their skills. They make the distinction between writing development and composition development (where creating a text isn't solely about the words) and point out that even in the adult world a large chunk of writing is multi-modal these days. Children are usually quite comfortable composing multi-modally and the authors suggest we encourage that approach rather than move them away from it as they are able to express more with written words and need to rely less on illustrations. The authors also point out that children who begin to figure out writing also quite naturally go through revision, though initially mostly in their illustrations, in the same ways as more experienced writers. They usually "change something, add something, take something out, move something around, or scrap it all together and start over" (74). This is another area where teachers can build on students' strengths rather than starting from scratch.

Many of the suggestions in the text will not be new to teachers who have experience working with young children: rereading books so kids understand the permanency of authorship and begin to develop familiarity with writers, talking about the decisions authors and illustrators make so that students begin to see the conscious work that goes into crafting a story, or having share time where students get a chance to show each other what they've written as a way to encourage their peers to also begin writing.

Still, even if you already include these practices in your classroom, it's not bad to spend a little time with the book and think once again about why. The text also has a lot of helpful book lists and lists of suggestions. Among them: books to help children understand topic selection, books with stories and books with lists, books that teach people things (one type of book to use when talking about different purposes for books), techniques students might try in their written texts or illustrations, books to improve teachers' knowledge base about writing, and ways to talk about kids' process with them. All these lists are just small components embedded in the text, but they are still useful resources. If you already have some suggested resources in front of you, it's much quicker to find the ones from within that group that will work for your students.

This text's title is a fitting one for the tone and content of the book. Everything the authors share reinforces their belief that "this is not a book about teaching writing, it's about nurturing writers" (xvii). They emphasize that the work is centered around the writers, more than the products of the writing, though they still give you a book filled with examples of children's work. It's a great resource for reminding anyone who works with young children how important it is to help children develop an image of themselves as writers.

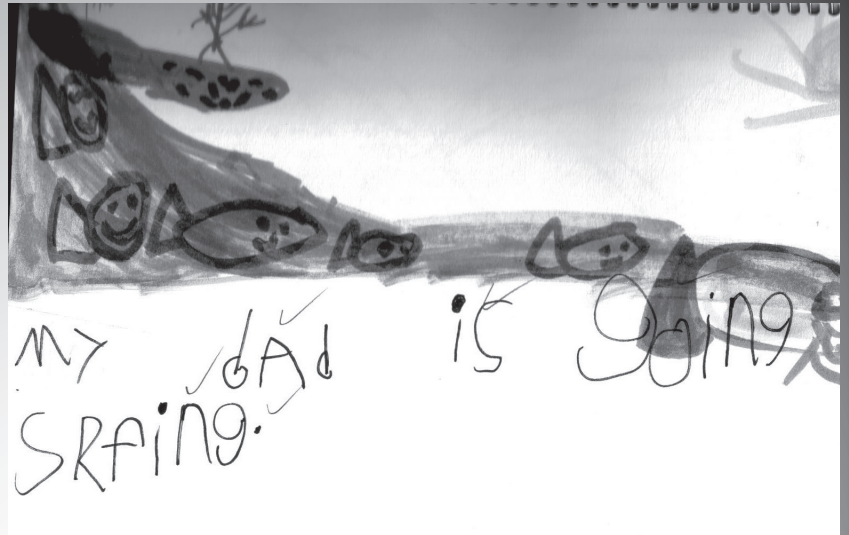


# "2007-08 Portfolio"

Highlights from a Kindergarten Writing Journal  
Trance Bird  
teacher Michelle Dean

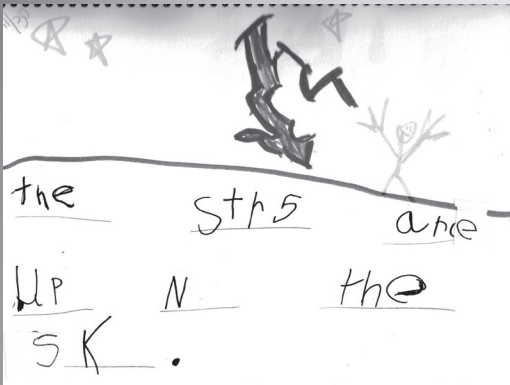


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September 2007



my dad is going  
surfing.

January 2008

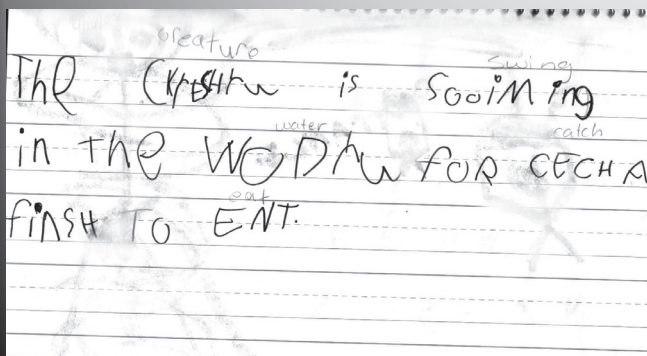
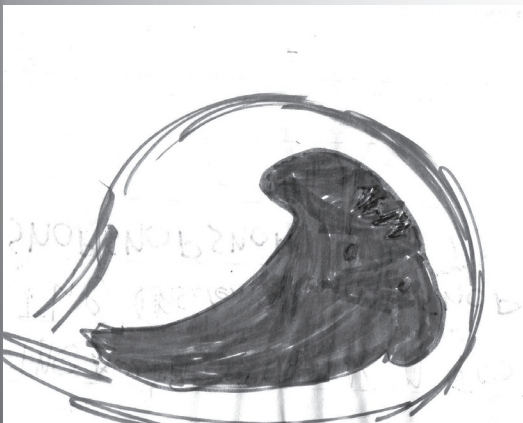
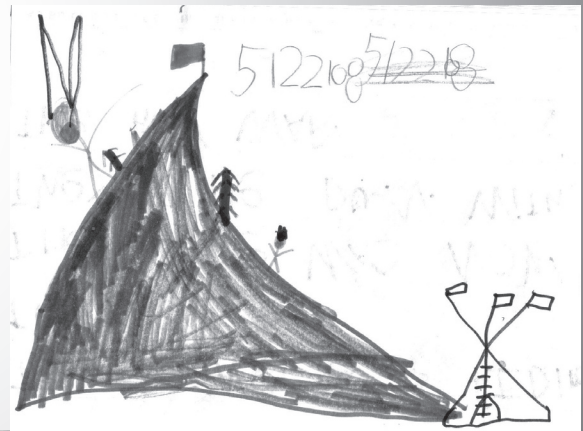


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up N the  
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November 2008



Trance likes playing video games and hanging out with his little sister Addison.



The creature is swimming  
in the water for catch  
fish to eat.

April 2008

The MAN is Waking up The  
mountains  
NOW.  
AND HE WAS TIRED.  
NOW HE WAS HUNGRY  
NOW HE MADE A FIRE  
HE GOT BURN.

May 2008

## Turning to Experience for Inspiration and Instruction

Donna L. Miller

The topic of “how we do school,” what works, what REALLY requires revision, has been itching my brain frequently. For instance, the notion of packaged curriculum, commercialized instruction frightens me. Once implemented, many of these canned programs become the core of a course; others are fads with high turnover rates when teachers realize the binder curriculum with its notion of simplicity is a lie.

School districts would do better to avoid these dangers. They’d also save money, if instead they insisted on a base of pedagogy, research, and anecdotal evidence to verify promising teaching practices when selecting materials or spending professional development dollars.

The current test culture and the encouraged passivity of students reading text books, listening to lengthy lectures, and completing worksheets strangle curiosity. We’d do better to shift our education paradigm from the notion of student as knowledge consumer to that of knowledge producer. By creating a high expectations ethos where students practice critical inquiry, we put the control back in the students’ hands and let their heads do the work that so stimulates teachers—the questions, the inquiry process, the discovery, and the learning. If we have real teachers and real learning situations, we’ll have real students and real results. After all, a teacher’s passion comes from his/her exercising craft.

For instance, like Pablo Neruda, a language arts teacher might have a passionate love affair with words: “It is the words that sing; they soar and descend . . . I bow to them. . . . They glitter like colored stones. . . . I want to fit them all into a poem. . . . Everything exists in the word.” Because I share Neruda’s passion, I resemble another writer, Donald Murray, who said, “I am happiest when I am rubbing two words together to produce an unexpected insight, when I feel the sentence turn under my hand, the paragraph shrink or rise until it breaks in two, the narrative flow towards rapids I can hear but do not yet see” (5). For me, the writing craft is always alive with possibility, with discovery, with learning.

While reading Donald Murray’s book *Crafting a Life in Essay, Story, and Poem* (Boynton/Cook, 1996), I had an epiphany: this is what a writing textbook should look like. Murray’s story belongs to the genre of writer’s craft books; it is a testimony by a writer who takes the reader into his workshop. It is not a school-typical book that focuses on correctness and on scripted exercises. Instead, it focuses on the art, the organic, individual process that allows a story to rise from the page and be heard.

Murray calls us to “explore unspoken and intellectual responses to life” (55) by kicking ourselves free of the excuses that silence us. By showing us both his struggles and his solutions, he inspires us. This text never lectures; it invites the writer in, sharing tips, techniques, and trade secrets:

- Most writing begins with a line . . . that contains a tension that will ignite writing. . . . When I release the tensions within it, I will have a draft (34). The tension will drive the piece forward (49).
- These lines often come from fragments of language deposited in a writer’s notebook, which I call a day book, because when I call it a journal I begin to write pompous blather (20).
- Opening lines tease—and deliver (59).
- Talent depends on abundance, the accumulation of work that is good and bad (61). The rear end is the writing muscle that makes the difference (22), so get your butt in the chair—nulla dies sine linea, never a day without a line (17).
- Story allows us to bring order to experience, to find pattern in events, to discover meaning in confusion (77).
- Beginning writers often deliver too much background too early (87).
- Voice is the magic that is hard to describe but is the most important element in the story, the music that supports and hold the story together (91).
- Write with velocity. The speed of writing concentrates the writer’s vision, freeing the story from preconception and inhibition and freeing the writing from an obsession with premature correctness. Velocity forces the writer to live within the story (97).
- Poetic licenses are no longer issued (103).
- Turn to experienced writers for inspiration and instruction: “I once more



Above, Donna Miller settles in to write.



apprenticed myself to George Orwell" (60).

Besides sharing advice from a multitude of other mentors, Murray also provides a key to reader response groups, suggesting when we read before an audience, we hear differently. Response group members "may be critical, supportive, obsessed with detail, only interested in the overall effect" (124), but they should respect the writer enough to not give just compliments. While all writers require support in readers who identify potential strengths that can be developed, we also need readers willing to take the work seriously, to suggest areas for improvement, since in "rejection," a writer can find opportunity, "not failure but craft" (107).

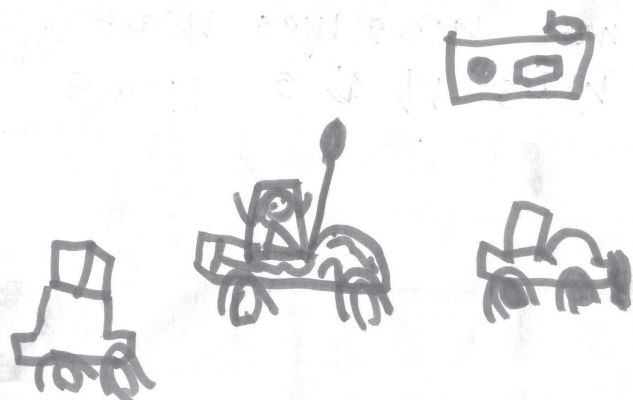
Unfortunately, "in school and on the job, revision has [often] been analogous to punishment. Rewriting is seen only as the solution to failure. But revision lies at the center of the writing process. 'Where else can spilled milk can be turned into ice cream?'" (135). Thus, "attitude controls revision, and the writer should know that failure is necessary, failure is instructive. Only when we fail to say what we imagined we would say do we discover what we should say and how we should say it. We should train ourselves to welcome and make use of instructive failure" (136).

In addition, Murray makes his metacognition visible; he thinks on the paper for us to see. As he instructs, I am beside him wondering, discovering, applying these strategies to my own craft. Through modeling his craft, Murray shows me how to try on the essay, the short story, and the poem. He leads me through the process, not preaching but illustrating. As he explains a technique for fiction scene writing called layering (85), he admits such strategies vary from writer to writer; they're not one size fits all. Through experimentation, each writer will discover his/her own way.

Murray ends his book with an annotated bibliography in which he shares his own library of craft, books he repeatedly returns to in his writing life. He encourages us to build our own such libraries to ensure "a continual flow of books that reveal the craft that must always be studied but can never be learned" (165). Murray's words inspire a writer to believe and to do. Potential writers, whether our students or ourselves, deserve books like this one, a practical manual with the authentic voice of a master.

## "The Concert"

Breeze Clark  
Age 5, Kindergarten



we had FUN  
At the CONCERT  
We had SUM  
music. We had  
CAKE AND ice  
cream. We had to  
lev.

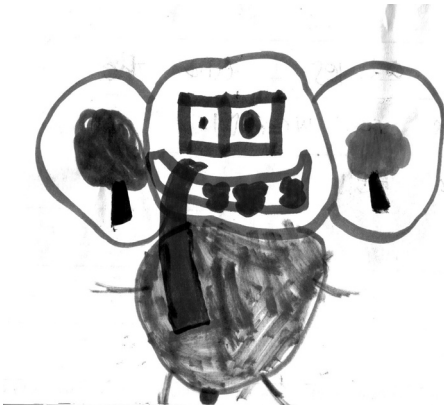
Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz



*When she isn't writing, Breeze enjoys riding her horses and playing with all of her brothers.*

# "The Robot Elephant"

Hunter Eichert  
Age 6, Kindergarten



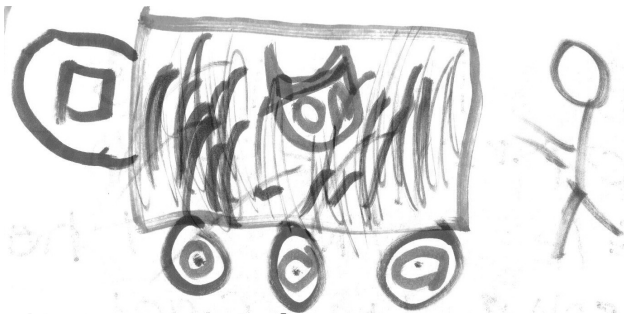
Hunter likes Bratz dolls and writing stories. She also likes to play Rock Band with her dad and sister and she's an excellent drummer.



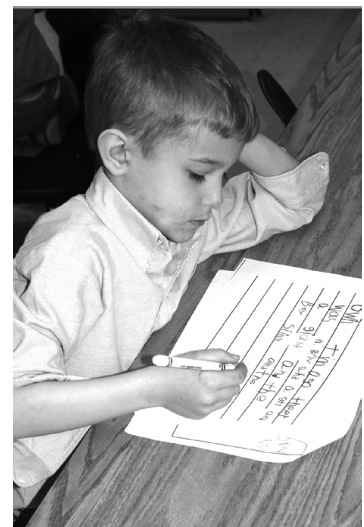
The robot elephant is eating  
peanuts  
dynamite. He chomped on  
The peanuts. He had to go  
to the hospital. He  
was not OK and he was  
not feeling good. So the  
doctor lady helped him.

# "Chasing the Bus"

Walker Murphy  
Age 5, Kindergarten



I was chasing  
the bus. The  
bus did not stop.  
The bus stopped at  
the school. "I got  
to school!" I shouted.  
I was



Walker likes playing with his friends at school and building really tall buildings with Legos.



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