

Volume 4 - Issue 2
Spring 2010

Teaching Writing in the Era of Testing

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JOURNAL
MONTANA
WRITING
PROJECT

From Our Writers

Submission Deadline: June 1, 2010

Publication Date: Summer 2010

The Montana Writing Project encourages teachers to see themselves, regardless of their grade level or content area focus, as teachers of writing and also as writers themselves. This is our annual issue that asks you to consider sharing some of the pieces you are working on which may or may not relate to your teaching. What genres are you experimenting with? What issues are you sorting out through your writing? Look through your writer's notebook and find something you'd be willing to share. Also, we are interested in the writing work you that are doing with students and welcome you to select one or two of your students' pieces to submit for possible publication. This issue is a celebration of the diverse writers and writing that comprise the Montana Writing Project.

And as always, The Montana Writing Project Journal welcomes submissions for any of the following areas. There is 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 that 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 they 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 jpeg image files with a resolution of at least 1200 by 1800 pixels. 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.

Submission Guidelines:

- Send any submissions to 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.

Remembering Our Humanity

Wendy Warren

Remembering What We Know

Sometimes as I create the path that becomes my life, I am reminded of something I know. Often I didn't even know I knew it, but when the reminder comes, it rings so true it must have been there all along-- part of my life experience or of my very being. One of these thoughts has recently occurred to me: There is nothing standard about being human. Education is a person to person endeavor, or as I like to think of it, a heart to heart form of communication. It is complicated, involving relationships between teachers and students and emotions very much like love. It is impossible to standardize this activity. Simply impossible

One event that dislodged this idea came when Juno Diaz spoke to more English teachers than I've ever seen gathered in one room. Diaz, a Pulitzer Prize winning author, was keynote speaker at the NCTE Convention in Philadelphia. I was ignorant of Diaz's work, but my conference roommate wouldn't miss the talk, and invited me along. She lives in the Virgin Islands. Diaz writes often of his homeland in the Dominican Republic. He is her favorite author. I decided to travel light and leave my writer's notebook in the hotel room. As a result, I now have a program for the General Session agenda with margins so full I have to turn it in circles to read the words I scribbled with a borrowed pen, for fear of losing them.

I've carried an image with me since that November afternoon. Diaz spoke of monsters that live in books and movies. When they pass a mirror, they can't see their own reflection. As Diaz continued, I imagined him as a child, coming to school in America during his grade school years. If we want to create monsters, he said, we simply create conditions where kids can't see themselves reflected in the larger culture. My mind forms a picture of a hall of empty mirrors, and the rage carried by some of my seventh grade students.

Now, as I turn that wrinkled program in my hands, my eyes scanning the words scrawled there, another phrase leaps at me: We [teachers] teach this civilization into existence. No other profession is embedded in the past, present and future simultaneously. The implications of this are so huge they scare me, because I know it to be true. Teaching is so dynamic, so interactive, so human—and the work we do changes the world. It has, it can, and it will.

Rereading Diaz' words, my mind wanders to my students in Columbia Falls, my commitment to Indian Education for All, my most recent attempts to meld social justice into my literacy curriculum, and my recent conversations with elementary teachers who feel increasing pressure to teach reading from a basal series. I think back to my early encounters with Dick and Jane—who got their basal rug yanked out from under them by the Civil Rights movement. After all, who can see themselves in that world?

Diaz spoke of reading as an act that asks us to practice deep compassion. It works the rare magic of putting us into the hearts and minds of other people. Reading touches our humanity. And, as I remember reading the condensed-for-basal stories aloud in the Bluebird reading group, I can't remember experiencing any kind of human connection. We picked those stories to pieces, milking them dry, wringing every possible skill set from them. Diaz refuses to call this reading. To him, reading is something wholly other---reading is art.

In teaching these disconnected skills in a class we name "Reading," we might expect exactly the reaction we get: kids learn to hate reading. But it's not really reading they hate; it's this disconnected way we teach skills apart from any meaningful or relevant content, so it becomes rote memorization--the lowest level of Bloom's taxonomy. Students might not ever get to the reading. Or when they do, it is an excerpted story, selected by someone in a distant place, for every third grader in the land. This passage may not be connected in any way to life as this student knows it or to anything that feels even slightly important.

Brain researchers tell us that humans learn best when that learning touches our emotions—our humanity. Reading is an act of compassion. As teachers, we know this, and yet most often we forget it, or try to ignore it, because today we are supposed to be teaching the skills on page 53, and someone will arrive in our classrooms to make sure that we are. We teach this civilization into existence. Surely, this is an important enough calling to require us to stand up and shout "Enough!" We know what to do. We are in these classrooms with these students



Wendy teaches middle school language arts in Columbia Falls and co-directs the MWP Summer Institute in Browning. She also writes. Check out her and her husband Bob's blog: <http://lifeatbeaverlake.blogspot.com>.

every day. We know when something works and when it doesn't. We see it in the beautiful faces of our students. Why should we teach our children to fill in little bubbles on test forms as if each bubble is a window through which someone outside our classrooms can see what happens within? It just doesn't work that way among humans. If someone wants to see what happens in our classrooms, they simply have to come in, live our days with us, and watch the steady forward progress as children learn skills, as they learn content, and as they practice being human.

With the federal pressure to standardize education, I have considered leaving the profession. A standardized curriculum has not yet reached my classroom, however. I'm one of the lucky ones. And there are things that give me hope. To me, Montana's Indian Education for All law is an acknowledgement of Diaz's words: teachers teach civilization into existence. This law is about democracy and humanity. It asks us to ensure that everyone is reflected in the mirrors of the civilization we continue to create, and for each of us to consider our actions toward our fellow humans. But it panics people. How can we possibly add more to our overstuffed, skills-oriented curricula? Like every state in the country, Montana has created broad standards and benchmarks for each grade level and subject area. Working within school districts, teachers and curriculum directors break these documents down further, so that each benchmark is defined by a list of the skills required to reach it. Further, a method of assessment must accompany each skill, an attempt to measure "mastery." It is a tricky proposition to find ways to add issues of humanity to such documents. Humanity is not easily assessable.

Dr. Tammy Elser took on this challenge when she agreed to write a document commissioned by the Indian Education Office of Montana's OPI called "The Framework: A Practical Guide for Montana Teachers and Administrators Implementing Indian Education for All." Reading this document nudged another truth from the shadows. When people learn skills away from meaningful content—without an immediate, relevant application for those skills, we get the reaction we so often see in our schools—unmotivated, disconnected students. Clearly, educators must find a way to help students learn the academic skills necessary for life in a twenty-first century world, while simultaneously considering the humane interactions required to maintain a democracy.

Dr. Elser suggests using Indian Education for All as an impetus to improve our pedagogy and therefore our schools. In "The Framework," Dr. Elser suggests that as we examine our curricula, we consider skills and content separately. She creates a metaphor to help us visualize a relationship between the two: picture a body of water—a lake or an ocean. Various objects bob around on the surface of this water, with no apparent connection between them. These bobbing objects represent the skills we are asked to teach—the kinds of skills that are often measured by standardized tests. When we look far beneath the surface of the water, that's where we find the "big ideas"—the content that can give these skills meaning. Unless teachers find a way to connect these surface skills to the big ideas far beneath the waves, the skills will soon be forgotten. Dr. Elser suggests that literacy is one of the strong undercurrents operating between these two levels. Through reading and writing, we connect our own stories with the stories of others—creating opportunities to practice the compassion Juno Diaz spoke of. Literacy creates the very connections that link skills to big ideas in what Elser calls "depth of study units." When these

connections are made and the learning is then applied to real world problems, students see a purpose for their learning. Dr. Elser suggests that the IEFA Essential Understandings are in themselves big ideas, linked to vast, rich content, and that when we use literacy as a line to hook skills to such big ideas, we link learning to humanity.

So even though students are required to take standardized tests, and those tests are based on the learning of a given set of skills, perhaps there are ways to consider content on a more local level. For example, literacy classes are skill based. The skills can conceivably be linked to any content. When using a basal reader or a standardized program, the company selects the content that contextualizes the skills, and that content is standardized for use by schools across the country. The content is often also recycled for use over many years—in some cases generations. Dr. Elser suggests that rather than just accepting content selected by a group of people sitting in an office somewhere far away, that the content might be localized, thoughtfully selected by teachers in a given district, making the learning relevant to the lives of students in that time and in that place. In Montana, the Essential Understandings will become a part of that content because what they are essential for is to help us understand contemporary issues in every locality in Montana and around the country. They will help us make learning relevant. That content becomes the way we teach civilization into existence as we take students into the depths of what multicultural educator James Banks calls the levels of transformation and social justice. At these levels, Indian Education for All asks us to think critically, to take on other points of view, to practice compassion, and to seek out ways to change the world.

So this is not an either/or proposition. We don't have to choose whether to teach skills or emphasize content relevant to the continuation of our democracy. In "The Framework," Dr. Elser gives specific suggestions about how teachers might begin the process of finding relevant content for their students, and matching it to the skills required by state standards and benchmarks.

Before I was reminded of any of this, I had already begun to test the notion in my own classroom. My ideas for the content of my unit have been forming for years, but I didn't realize it until Brenda Johnston and I attended NWP's Holocaust Educator Network's Institute, and together we rolled these ideas around for twelve days. My experiences in summer institutes in Browning and my work with NWP's Project Outreach have also helped lead me to this place. The following is a brief explanation of what is growing into a year-long unit in my classroom this year. Keep in mind that it is a work in progress.

From Theory to Practice: Finding Our Humanity

I teach seventh grade Communication Arts in Columbia Falls, Montana. The Language Arts classes in our Jr. High are tracked. The students who are permitted to take Spanish (the students considered to have the highest "ability") are in classes together, and the students in Title 1 Reading and in Special Education Reading classes are grouped in classes together. Students take Literature in a course separate from the broader Communication Arts class that I teach, and most of the Title 1 Reading and Special Education students are integrated into my classes. I never even meet most of the

students who take Spanish.

As often happens, my idea for this unit grew from a feeling of desperation. The particular group of students I teach this year seems to have more than its share of “wounded” children. My last class of the day is the most difficult combination of students I’ve had in years. The racism of some of the students was evident early on, especially around the time of Obama’s speech to schoolchildren. The way my students treated each other and their tendency toward violent solutions to problems clearly indicated that whatever content I chose to embed with the communication skills had to address these issues in some meaningful way.

What began in my mind as a unit or a series of lessons is evolving into a year-long seventh grade curriculum. The parts of this unit are not easy to untangle. They all speak to the same “big ideas”: our similarities and differences as human beings; the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination that sometimes arise because of perceived differences; the choices people make every day about how they treat each other; how people are or can become resilient when faced with what seem to be overwhelming obstacles.

I began the year, as I often do, with the students at the center as all of us created and shared identity posters through which we explored similarities and differences in our lives; we wrote “Where I’m From” poems as extensions of these posters, and then I tried something new. We began talking about stereotypes, identifying examples, and then we applied the notion of stereotypes to ourselves. The students and I brainstormed ways in which people might stereotype us—and we wrote stereotype poems. I wrote a couple of different poems as examples, using various repeating lines and forms for the poems themselves as examples that students might choose to follow. The resulting poems demonstrated that most of them gained a personal understanding of what it means to be stereotyped—and also to stereotype others. These poems attracted a big audience, as they hung in the main hallway of our school through Parent/Teacher Conference days.

Since then we have moved on to conversations around the issues of prejudice, discrimination, racism and social justice. I have used Units from the Anti-Defamation League’s Echoes and Reflections to introduce the Nazi Holocaust as one example of the results of hate. So far, I have focused on the events leading up to the “final solution,” so that we can identify steps on the “pyramid of hate”—how one thing can lead to another. I knew, however, that I had to find ways to link the past with the present in order for them to see the relevance of these topics. So the unit I am creating attempts to interweave a study of the Nazi Holocaust with issues of social injustice and genocide in this country—of Native Americans, slaves, and the Japanese during WW II, to name a few examples. At each stage of our study, I want to be sure we look at the past, the present and into the future—so the students can’t relegate these only as issues that happened “a long time ago—over there,” with no application to their own lives.

At the same time, I need to find ways to keep my students practicing their writing and speaking skills—a challenge, to be sure. We practice “writing to think” as a way of guiding discussion almost daily. They are practicing “showing more than telling” by creating scenes of their own choosing—some students relate these scenes to the course content, some use them as a time to take a breath and write something wholly other. Their writing does not show an adult understanding—of course, these are seventh graders. But their writing and their speaking shows them grappling with issues that seventh graders are rarely asked to address, yet clearly loom large in their lives. We’ve been taking things one step at a time this year as we work our way through, following the general outline I’ve created while staying flexible enough to take advantage of teachable moments as they arise.

We are at the beginning stages of redefining the Language Arts curriculum in my district, so now is a perfect time for us to consider not just the specific writing and speaking skills we want to teach our students, but the content those skills are to be embedded in. In “The Framework,” Tammy Elser suggests we incorporate Indian Education for All by creating inquiry-based, interdisciplinary courses which incorporate higher levels of thinking. At this point, our Language Arts team is considering fiction writing as a major focus of the seventh grade year. With this in mind, a culminating project of the Finding Your Humanity unit will be for students to write a work of fiction, with their choice of sub-genre and age level of their target audience. I will ask students to create a character that breaks a stereotype of some kind, and to try to work the roles of perpetrator, target, bystander and ally into their plot. Linda Christensen, in her book *Teaching with*

**We [teachers]
teach this
civilization into
existence.**

**No other
profession is
embedded in
the past, present
and future
simultaneously.**

**The implications
of this are so
huge they scare
me, because I
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**Teaching is so
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the work we
do changes the
world.**

**It has, it can, and
it will.**

Joy and Justice, provides some wonderful student examples of these roles as they play out in memoirs.

Three other resources I've recently discovered will act as guides for me as we work our way through the writing of fiction: *Writing at Play*, by Mary Adler, *Stirring Up Justice*, by Jessica Singer Early and *Writing Circles*, by Jim Vopat. As my students work through complicating factors in their plot, my hope is that their fiction might give them ways to practice roles they might choose or reject in their own lives. The choices and the consequences might be played out on paper—perhaps preventing missteps in their own lives. Their final products might also be used as teaching tools as they share them with each other and also with younger students.

My students' reactions to the course so far encourage me to keep going. Their writing and their ability to express ideas is improving. They are engaging in critical thinking at a level unusual for seventh graders. They are coming to class armed with examples of stereotypes and prejudice they have witnessed—in the hallways, in classrooms, in the media and in their homes. They are beginning to see that they can make different choices—that they can help determine the environment of the school. They have listed groups of people sometimes dehumanized in our school (a list which horrifies me), and they have come up with some amazing ideas about how they might begin the work to make the school a place safe enough for every person to be who they are. They realize now that the derogatory names they call each other have a history, rooted in racism and religious intolerance. One early student suggestion is that they petition the school board to create a Jr. High class for all students to study these issues. Recently, another student, on his own initiative, took another idea generated in class to the student council. He suggested that Student Council consider putting together an all-school assembly in which issues of name-calling, stereotyping and prejudice are addressed. These are moments when my students show themselves and me that they are capable of moving into those levels of transformation and social justice that Banks suggests we strive for. These are the moments that keep me teaching.

A short list of resources:

Adler, Mary, *Writers at Play*, Heinemann, 2009.

Anti-Defamation League, *Echoes and Reflections: A Multimedia Curriculum on the Holocaust*.

Christensen, Linda, *Teaching for Joy and Justice*, Rethinking Schools, 2009.

Early, Jessica Singer, *Stirring Up Justice*, Heinemann, 2006.

Vopat, Jim, *Writing Circles*, Heinemann, 2009.



Chelsea Lynn Alvares attends Great Falls High School in Great Falls, Montana. Of her writing she explains. "I write out of pure emotion and try to put how I feel into words. My memoir captured the feelings and images that were actually going on in my mind. I love writing because it can say so much more than my words want to otherwise. I find relief and happiness through writing." After high school she would like to pursue writing, possibly through journalism.

Visit the Montana Writing Project online:

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

• all back issues of the MWP Journal are available on our website

Short Autobiography Chelsea Alvari

The small waterfall coming down from the showerhead fell quickly onto my body. The burning water leaving the skin where it touched blotchy and red, as if to leave its mark on me. I slowly open my eyes as water dripped off my eyelashes clouding my vision and causing me to rub my eyes, leaving my fingers stained with black eyeliner and mascara. The dark black make-up intrigued my attention and I stared at it. Seconds later I attempted to wash the black away and off of my hands. I look up from my frustration of scrubbing my fingers so hard and asked myself, “What the hell are you doing here Chelsea?!”

My mind began to overflow with the once forgotten pain that was felt before the decision to come here to this sometimes hell of a house and city. The hot water flooded the bathroom and shower with steam and intense muggy heat. The steam seemed to suffocate my once known happiness and turn my thoughts into flashbacks of past fights and arguments that lead me to this very dead, hurt filled feeling of denial. The constant replay of the words -I chose to come here- played over and over again in my mind like a horror movie. I closed my eyes and let the tears flow off of my face along with the now impure water moderately falling from the showerhead.

The alarmingly random question kept swimming through my mind. I brushed my hands through my hair as if to brush away the hellish question straddling my conscious. The water falling was still striking my skin intensely; I let the water fall over and down my face for what seemed like hours. I slowly pulled my head away from the water and did not bother to wipe away the dripping water to clear my vision. I stood motionless for a few seconds and my vision was smoggy and completely unclear. This was not water I could wipe away from my eyes and be fine. There was salt water burning tears that could not be cured with my black stained fingers. What the hell am I doing here?

I began to struggle with my present consequences of a two milli-second decision that severely changed my life. The shower water had been on so long that it began to become colder and made chills of more fear run up and down my spine. I ignored the cold flowing water and searched my depressed mind to my random earlier question. The thoughts that came to me seemed to be a sea wanting to overthrow me and drown me in its truth and pure clear honesty.

I finally began to realize how cold the water was becoming again... My body began to shiver and you could see the goose bumps rising up from my skin showing me I had waited too long to come back into reality. I quickly turned off the shower and slowly stepped out. I wrapped my sopping hair in a towel, almost as if to keep my thoughts in my head so they would not escape my mind. My shivering body began to calm down and warm up and the question vividly became visible in my mind once again. I sat on the moist floor, wrapped in inviting towels, and I reflected on my past month of my teenage life. I was no longer completely filled with fear, utter depression, and unreal aching pain. My heart felt lifted by a single thought, the single few words that were resting my mind now with ease and certainty. The single thought now embedded itself inside of me and it became the answer that ended my question and despair. An answer that saved me from more indescribable pain in my heart and stomach. My words were slow and filled with certainty and honesty. “I’m changing my life.” I lifted myself up off of the still steaming bathroom floor and wiped away the steam from the large mirror. I stared at my almost friendly reflection and smiled.

Standardization and assessment of teacher and student performance? There is no getting around it. We instruct the way we need to in order to bring students to a proficient level in their writing. It’s not always that bad. Through the process of peer review and teacher feedback, students grow immensely in terms of insightful analysis, self-reflection, and attaining a level in structured writing that prepares them for such at the post-secondary level. Honestly, it holds teachers accountable in teaching writing and thinking. Creative writing is far more fun and interesting, and some teachers were only following that track. Consequently, students suffered in terms of their ability to analyze insightfully and deliberately. Nonetheless, the creative component needs a place, and there isn’t much room in the last years of high school writing, unless teachers make a conscious effort to include it. It is refreshing when we can and it fosters an entirely different working relationship between students, their instructors, their peers, and their attitudes about school.

We begin the year discussing “great beginnings,” focusing on opening lines in famous/popular literature that are attention-getting, memorable, famous lines in themselves. I introduce students to a memoir we will read as a class, but first I assign them to write their own short memoir (referred to in the past as “flash non-fiction” or “short short memoir”). Students are assigned to consider a time in their lives when they were greatly impacted by some event, decision, conflict—they are asked to focus on and recapture a ten second scene, excluding any flashback. Their beginning or opener focuses on the present with some specific imagery to capture time, place, mood, character, some relevant theme. They then provide background details that led up to the impacting moment and follow through with a climatic point, then resolve (sometimes arriving at some epiphany).

Some MWP TCs have recently been working with the idea of sovereignty in writing. This is practiced in the beginning part of the process, allowing students to generate some raw material and ideas. Likewise, editing and revision for a final product involves practice with economy and focus, helping students recognize some necessary details in their subject matter and writing style that communicate what they had intended. The selection above is Chelsea’s work in response to this assignment.

Julie Easton
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Fighting for Reform Donna L. Miller

In this age of twitter and texting, we often reduce our world to sound bytes. The media performs in similar fashion, reducing news to succinct information morsels, frequently succumbing to the temptation to sensationalize or to shock: “A Nation at Risk,” “Failing Schools,” “Education in a State of Crisis,” *Savage Inequalities*. Such titles testify that the rhetoric of crisis

is not news to education. However, social justice activist and education critic Jonathan Kozol shared a more balanced message to a packed audience at Arizona State University in late October. Although education must account for some institutional rotten apples, other classrooms are ripe with reform efforts.

As part of a lecture series sponsored by Canon Leadership, Kozol spoke in the Arizona Ballroom at the Memorial Union building on Tempe’s campus. Having personally heard the inspirational message of Martin Luther King, Jr., Kozol now stands at the nexus of education and justice. Because he recalls how King “perspired with passion as he shared his dream of sitting together in brotherhood,” Kozol appealed to the audience to carry that torch into the ethnically complicated classrooms of today, where we are players in “a game that is rigged from the start” to advantage some and to disadvantage others.

Kozol described savage funding inequalities, ghetto settings where class sizes swell beyond the classroom walls, where trailers house impoverished learners, and where Hispanic, Black, and Native American students “are more isolated intellectually and segregated physically than ever.” To illustrate present conditions in schools, he described “proto-military” style instruction, a perpetual state of anxiety instilled by NCLB and AYP, and children who are viewed as “future economic units, products with value added if you pump the right ideas in”—those ideas being test prep and standard based.

Appealing for basic fair play, he implored us all to think beyond our comfort zones as we take ownership for change, to take the risk of being fired for “curriculum deviation,” to “refuse to treat them [Black, Hispanic, and Native American children] like a different species,” to ask: “Can I be of any use?” Perhaps, with our “sly and mischievous irreverence,” we can “fool the curriculum cops,” who refuse to believe that small class size and individual attention really do matter.

He also reminds us to be suspicious of people who speak with polysyllabled words, those who don’t do but

implement; who don’t use but utilize; those who don’t share “simple ideas expressed simply.” These same people often “use words like sharpened knives wielded with surgical ease.” But at 73 years old, Kozol claims he’s too old to bite his tongue, so he fights back with the likes of Pat Buchanan and other critics who find his ideas repugnant. He gives voice to those living on the margins.

Besides sharing the dire state of educational affairs, Kozol also inspired his audience by paying tribute to teachers. “Teachers are my heroes,” he said. “I always feel safer in a room of teachers, especially those who nurture mystery and mischief in pint-sized people.” He called teaching “the most beautiful profession,” in spite of all the obstacles, and described teachers who use their “delicious sense of humor” to guide students, those who make teaching “lyrical and lovely like a piece of perfect poetry,” those who use “a mixture of trust and love and natural exhilaration to make achievement grow,” and those who listen patiently to the off-topic narratives shared by little people—“who have the Biblical right to subvert lesson plans.” If we practice patience and truly listen, Kozol claims we can uncover the hidden treasure folded in all the ands and buts of a run-on digressive moment to unlock personal motivation for our students’ learning.

Although Kozol’s message honored the sweat-equity work that teachers do, he reminds us that our work is far from done. As we labored to honor what Luis Moll terms students’ “funds of knowledge,” as we nurtured voice in culturally responsive classrooms, and as we attended to access, relevance, and diversity, we were beginning to close the achievement gap for minority students. However, the current standards and test culture of schools has eroded those efforts. If American education is serious about its claims that a democracy cannot exist without an educated public, it must implement change with a closer look at pedagogy that multiplies rather than eliminates power and privilege. Otherwise, schools are little more than sorting centers attached to test-taking factories.



After teaching high school English for a few decades in Chinook, Montana and serving for many years as the assistant co-director of the MWP Summer Institute, Donna Miller is currently in Arizona furthering her own education in a doctoral program and working with preservice teachers.

One District's Story: MWP's Summer Institutes Raise Test Scores

Casey Olsen and Lorrie Henrie-Koski

Casey's Story

I belong to a growing population of teachers who have never taught outside of No Child Left Behind's shadow. I entered Montana's teaching workforce in the fall of 2003, accepting a ninth/tenth grade language-arts position in Columbus. The following spring the state initiated its trial-run of the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System Criterion Reference Test (MontCAS CRT for short), designed to test Montana students' proficiency in regard to Montana content standards. Spring of 2005 brought the first "for-real" version of the CRT. By the end of that second year teaching, I was reconsidering my career choice.

It wasn't the test itself necessarily that was causing me to doubt my place in this profession; all my doubts seemed linked directly or indirectly to educational accountability and how it was being handled on local, state, and national levels. When the scores were lower than expected in 2004 and 2005, even taking into consideration that 2004 was the trial year—I felt the weight on my back, the one that had "If you don't do something to raise these scores, you may not get tenured," stamped all over it. I was eager to do what was expected of me, but didn't know where to begin.

Then the computerized practice tests came, up to four per school year, that really had nothing to do with the content or challenges posed by the Montana CRT because they were based on other states' standards. Additional tests meant additional pressure to perform for my students and for their teacher. Everywhere I turned for answers, I found confusion and empty remedies. The false hope came from seemingly confident voices around me: What these kids need is more grammar; you need to improve their vocabulary, and on and on. But as the 2004 and 2005 school years came and went, my students' abilities to diagram sentences and identify Latin roots did nothing to put a dent in the test scores. I was responsible for the entire ninth- and tenth-grade language arts curriculum, and I felt like a failing teacher.

I didn't choose a career in teaching to test students. I became a teacher to share a love of literacy, literature, and writing. At the end of my second year teaching, though, I wondered if that love could remain my number one priority. I didn't become a teacher to leave any children behind—far, far from it actually. This confusion and hopelessness nearly led me to become a statistic, one of the 50% of beginning teachers who quit the profession in the first five years according to a 2006 National Educators' Association study.

But in the summer of 2005, I attended a Montana Writing Project summer institute on The University of Montana campus in Missoula. The summer institute experience is an inquiry-based professional development opportunity—a professional development opportunity unlike any other. For four long weeks I toiled, asking myself tough questions about my students, my practices, and my identity as a teacher (with colleagues all around me asking the same tough questions). Together, we searched for answers, offered more questions and insights, and we grew as teachers and as people. By the end, those four long weeks had become something that I did not want to end, and truthfully they have not.

Since my summer institute experience in 2005, I have become a student of best literacy practices and a teacher-leader, sharing these strategies at conferences and professional development events across the state of Montana. More importantly in the years that followed my summer institute experience, my students found their voices. They composed. They wrote for the sake of writing and for the personal enjoyment writing practice provided them. And they wrote well. This was the true compensation for those intensive four weeks in Missoula. I finally felt like an effective teacher.

Coincidentally, Lorrie Henrie-Koski, a colleague of mine at Columbus Public Schools, experienced similar apprehension about the preliminary scores from the trial CRT and decided to attend the Missoula institute. Lorrie teaches seventh- and eighth-grade writing classes to all students in those grade levels at Columbus Middle School.



Casey Olsen teaches high school English in Columbus. He has also served as co-director of the Montana Writing Project Summer Institutes in Columbus and Laurel.

Lorrie's Story

My teaching career started in the late 1980s, when the whole language model of instruction crested. Eager to share my love of learning with students, I dived in head-first. My self-contained sixth grade classroom was a successful hub of activity and thinking as the lines separating reading, writing, and content-areas blurred.

After 10 years, I was assigned to teach seventh and eighth-grade language arts. Then, in 2002, our administration split our language arts into separate classes, and I was assigned the writing portion of the curriculum. Gathering sources for what my students should be able to write and how to instruct them became my focus. Toward the end of my first year as “the middle school writing teacher,” my superintendent offered me an opportunity to attend an autumn training in the 6+1 Traits Model of Writing. Anxious to have more than a hit-and-miss approach to writing instruction, I accepted.

Ruth Culham, a former Montana English Teacher of the Year and one of the originators of the six traits concept, instructed my group in the foundation of the traits language, expectations, and scoring. Most impressive, though, was how she used literature to guide us through every part of her three-day presentation. Though Culham didn't use the term, her modeling was my first experience with reading like a writer. It made sense; it felt right.

After working with the traits in my middle school classes for a year and a half, I felt more organized and better able to score writing, but wasn't yet satisfied with my instruction. My students and I now spoke the same language, but I still felt a void. Testing had entered the picture, and suddenly statistics replaced passion in guiding my instruction. I struggled with feeling that I needed to teach to the test when I knew in my heart that a test shouldn't be my ultimate measurement of student success. I mistook my distaste for the emphasis put on testing as “teacher burn-out.” I needed to be revitalized.

Early in 2004, my principal gave me a pamphlet for the Montana Writing Project. I had received a flyer a couple years previously, but didn't think I “qualified” for such an impressive-sounding experience. Two years as an official writing teacher and frustration with my sense of burn-out gave me courage to apply.

My acceptance letter was thrilling, yet intimidating. Four weeks away from home would be an eternity. I had two young children who spent the school year in day care. Shouldn't they have the summer with their mom? I had a husband whose work hours were 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM.. Would it be fair to impose more on his time? The daunting question that had kept me from applying earlier kept nagging me: would I be out of my league? I knew I had to accept the challenge, or “burnout” would soon claim another victim.

The stack of books on the desk that awaited me on my first day of the institute took my breath away. But that was nothing compared to the breathless moments I spent over the course of the next four weeks: moments of overwhelming emotion at the honesty in a peer's writing, moments of exhausted satisfaction from the intensity of my assignments, moments of elation with my own and others' successes.

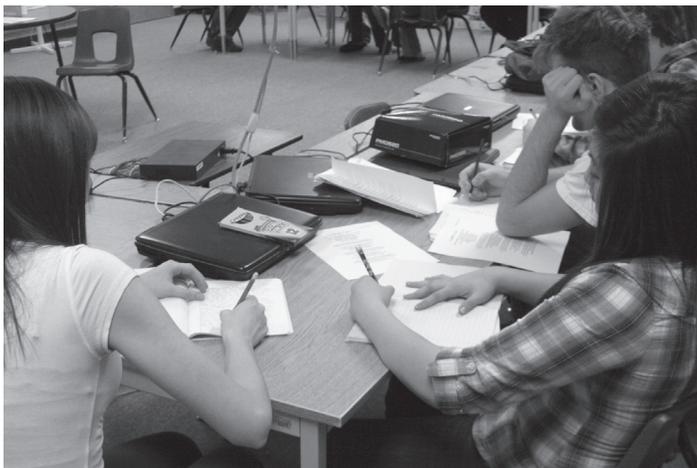
Throughout the institute, our research and implementation of best practices reinforced within me the validity of much that I had intuitively done as a teacher in a self-contained classroom. I now had authorities to quote, demonstrations to share, and research to support the need for those practices in my middle school classroom. I felt alive again as a teacher.

Since my summer institute, best practices, content-area writing, and connecting writing and thinking have guided my instruction. These approaches help my students make connections—to each other, to the world, and, most importantly, to themselves. The dramatic increase in my students' CRT scores with the first test following my summer institute along with the consistency of high scores since then validates the effectiveness my MWP experience has had on my students.

Even more importantly, in my eyes, my experience with MWP has helped me fill not only the void in my own instruction, but also the writing void that other teachers are experiencing. As a teacher-consultant for MWP and a 6+1 Traits



Lorrie Henrie-Koski teaches seventh and eighth-grade language arts at Columbus Middle School. She also co-directed the Columbus Summer Institute.



teacher-trainer, I've had many professional development opportunities to blend the strengths of both models. In sessions I conduct, teachers learn the language of 6+1 Traits as a communication tool, but we go far beyond the rubrics. We practice reading like a writer. We practice writing into the day, quick-writes, and responding to poetry. We practice ways to effectively build writing into content-areas without turning every assignment into a five-paragraph essay. We practice using picture books as springboards for broader thinking and writing.

A participant in a recent session summed up her experience most succinctly. She said she had come to the sessions expecting to learn how to teach her students to write, but, "...after doing some of these writing projects with my kids, I realized it's not something I teach; it's something they do." Interestingly, this concept is mirrored by Nancy Patterson in the Dec. 2009 issue of *Voices from the Middle*: "Critical literacy isn't something we teach to students. It is something that we and our students engage in so that we all can experience what it means to be a literate person in an information-laden culture."

It's this connection between reading, writing, and thinking that has challenged me to offer my students opportunities to challenge themselves to become the readers, writers, and thinkers they deserve to be.

By the Numbers by Casey

Besides the personal and professional benefits of attending an MWP summer institute, we both noticed an abrupt change in our students' performances on the Montana CRT. We weren't teaching to the test; in fact, we were doing the opposite. We were engaging students in writing practice, organizing our classrooms as writing workshops, teaching students to read like writers, and providing opportunities for them to become independent and self-motivated in their literacy.

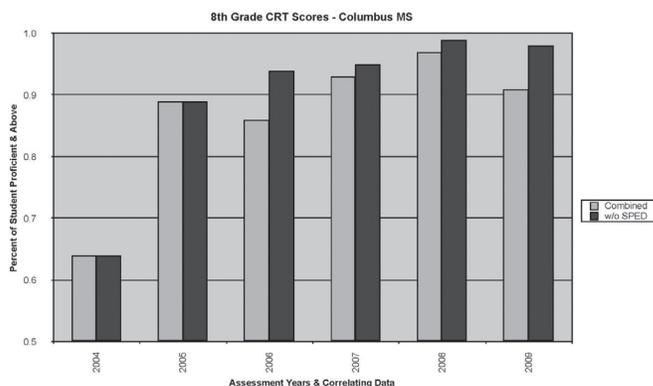
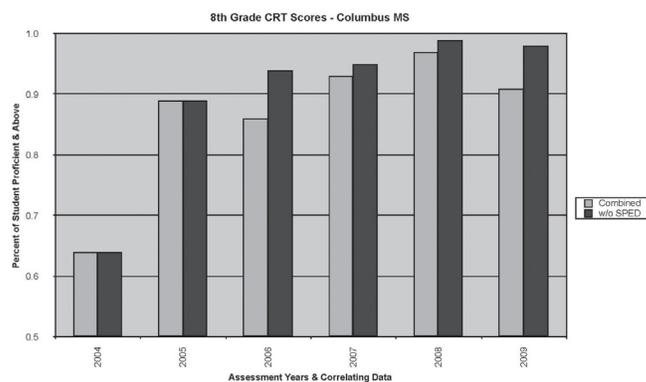
And, we were raising our test scores.

Research by the National Writing Project (NWP) in 2008 compiled the work of nine independent studies, and all of them came to the same conclusion—"In nine independent studies, in every measurable attribute of writing, the improvement of students whose teachers participated in NWP professional development exceeded that of students whose teachers were not participants." These studies represented a vast variety of American culture with studies taking place in rural, urban and suburban areas, and "included students with diverse

economic, language, racial, and ethnic backgrounds." Student writing was assessed in regards to content, structure, stance, sentence fluency, diction, conventions and was also given a holistic score. Every study showed that students who were taught by National Writing Project teacher-consultants scored higher than their peers who were not; moreover, every study showed this to be true in every category. The nine studies showed teacher-consultants have a significant impact in the areas of content, structure and stance.

Columbus Public Schools provides a compelling environment for case-study purposes. While there are an estimated 250 teacher-consultants of the Montana Writing Project currently teaching in the state, Columbus Schools remains unique with two teacher-consultants covering four consecutive grade-levels (seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth). Also, the class sizes in Columbus are small enough, with an average of 50 students per grade level, that every student in a particular grade level has the same teacher for language arts/writing instruction. By comparing scores from the eighth- and tenth-grade students at Columbus Public Schools with scores from those grade levels throughout the state—especially from schools of a similar size—this environment then allows for an interesting study of how Montana students taught by MWP teacher-consultants perform on the state-wide assessment in contrast to their peers.

A review of MontCAS CRT scores over the past five years from both eighth- and tenth-grade levels provided provocative insight. Specifically, Lorrie's eighth-grade students in the 2004 school year scored 64% proficient and above that spring (prior to her Montana Writing Project summer institute experience). This means that 64% of Columbus eighth-graders were at or above the state standards in their performance. After she attended the institute that summer, her 2005 eighth-grade students scored 89%



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proficient and above—a 25% increase over the previous year.

In my first year of teaching, my tenth-grade students scored 68% proficient and above on the 2004 assessment. I was teaching freshmen and sophomores at the time, so the students who took the assessment in 2005 were young people I had taught for two years in a row; they scored 61% proficient and above. That’s when my panic alarms began sounding. After my MWP institute experience in the summer of 2005 though, my 2006 class scored 89% proficient and above. That put my post-institute gain at 24%.

Even more compelling, my sophomore class in 2007 was the same group of students Lorrie taught as eight-graders her first year back from the institute in 2005 (where they had scored 89% proficient and above). They were also my freshmen class my first year post-institute in 2006. This carry-over, a class of students who were taught three consecutive years in a language arts curriculum heavily influenced by MWP strategies, allowed our district to score 97% proficient and above at the tenth-grade level in 2007.

Since those 24% & 25% gains, our scores have maintained a remarkable consistency through the 2009 assessment year. From 2006 through 2009, Lorrie’s eighth-grade classes have scored 94%, 95%, 99% and 98%; and the sophomores during the same period of time have scored 89%, 97%, 96% and 94% (these scores represent non-special-education students). Trends throughout the state show the majority of Montana schools exhibit up and down shifts as much as 15% on an annual basis. But in Columbus, especially over the past three years, we have seen minimal fluctuations. With the average class size in Columbus around 50 students, each student represents an approximate 2% increment of the overall score. With that in mind, scores of 96% and 97% are statistically equal at a Montana Class B school.

The “proficient and above” aspect of the MontCAS CRT is the focus of most districts in the state. It’s the accountability “line in the sand”—the standard that gives Montana administrators sweaty palms each March. But there are other aspects of the assessment results that are equally intriguing. Columbus High School has worked diligently to place roughly

90% or more of special-education eligible students in the traditional classroom. The data from the state-wide testing has shown an interesting correlation with this effort. For instance, one comparable school at the Class B level has averaged 91% proficient and above with non-SPED eligible students at the sophomore level over the past three years, but their scores with all students combined over that same period of time (including students who are special-education eligible) average 77% proficient and above. This means that over a three-year period, this particular school had a 14% gap in performance when they included their special-education students.

Over that same three-year time period, Columbus has averaged 95.7% proficient and above with non-SPED eligible students, and the combined scores with special-education students included averages 92.3% proficient and above. This 3.4% gap has helped Columbus rank number one amongst Montana Class B public schools when sophomores of all sub-categories are combined, even ranking

Comparative Combined Scores - 10th Grade									
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009				
Columbus	61	85	92	93	92				
ACE Schools	60.9	68.8	71.5	77.8	73.4				
Class "B" ACE Schools	57.7	71.8	75.3	73.0	78.2		(including Columbus)		
State				77	77				
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	3-Year Avg	4-Year Avg	5-Year Avg	
Absarokee	89	75	80	82	67	76.3	76.0	78.6	Absarokee
Belfry	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Belfry
Sweetgrass (Big Timber)	67	75	86	86	81	84.3	82.0	79.0	Sweetgrass (Big Timber)
Bridger	69	75	93	61	95	83.0	81.0	78.6	Bridger
Broadview	77	69	94	100	76	90.0	84.8	83.2	Broadview
Columbus	61	85	92	93	92	92.3	90.5	84.6	Columbus
Custer	n/a	n/a	n/a	80	63	n/a	n/a	n/a	Custer
Fromberg	88	n/a	n/a	72	75	n/a	n/a	n/a	Fromberg
Harlowton	n/a	75	72	75	94	80.3	79.0	n/a	Harlowton
Huntley	64	72	85	72	77	78.0	76.5	74.0	Huntley
Joliet	n/a	87	89	n/a	89	n/a	n/a	n/a	Joliet
Judith Gap	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Judith Gap
Lame Deer	n/a	24	27	n/a	18	n/a	n/a	n/a	Lame Deer
Laurel	69	64	71	74	86	77.0	73.8	72.8	Laurel
Lavina	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Lavina
Lodge Grass	8	34	19	22	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Lodge Grass
Melstone	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Melstone
Park City	59	65	83	84	77	81.3	77.3	73.6	Park City
Pryor	15	n/a	5	n/a	35	n/a	n/a	n/a	Pryor
Rapelje	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Rapelje
Red Lodge	74	94	90	85	71	82.0	85.0	82.8	Red Lodge
Reed Point	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Reed Point
Roberts	75	60	92	70	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Roberts
Roundup	68	64	81	77	76	78.0	74.5	73.2	Roundup
Ryegate	n/a	n/a	n/a	100	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Ryegate
Shepherd	71	82	85	89	75	83.0	82.8	80.4	Shepherd
Yellowstone Academy	21	n/a	43	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yellowstone Academy
3-Year Avg									
Columbus	92.3								
Broadview	90								
Sweetgrass (Big Timber)	84.3								
Bridger	83								
Shepherd	83								
Red Lodge	82								
Park City	81.3								
Harlowton	80.3								
Huntley	78								
Roundup	78								
Laurel	77								
Absarokee	76.3								
4-Year Avg									
Columbus	90.5								
Red Lodge	85								
Broadview	84.8								
Shepherd	82.8								
Sweetgrass (Big Timber)	82								
Bridger	81								
Harlowton	79								
Park City	77.3								
Huntley	76.5								
Absarokee	76								
Roundup	74.5								
Laurel	73.8								
5-Year Avg									
Columbus	84.6								
Broadview	83.2								
Red Lodge	82.8								
Shepherd	80.4								
Sweetgrass (Big Timber)	79								
Bridger	78.6								
Absarokee	78.6								
Huntley	74								
Park City	73.6								
Roundup	73.2								
Laurel	72.8								

above nearly every private school of a comparable size in the state. Instruction that uses strategies gleaned from writing project summer institutes has given middle and high school students in Columbus the equivalent of a private reading and writing education in Montana.

The data indicates that teacher-consultants have a positive effect on special-education and Title-I eligible students—the students most likely to score below the proficiency line. Too many score-improving strategies out there focus only on getting a designated group of students over this designated line. But if we step back from the hype and anxiety, we see that the best strategy to tackle student performance and achievement is one that fosters growth in each and every student from where they are when they arrive in our classrooms to where they are when they leave (and beyond). Being an effective teacher for every student is why most of us got in this crazy profession to begin with, but the bureaucracy of it all gets in the way. The National Writing Project helped Lorrie and me get our passion and idealism back.

The data also shows a positive effect at the opposite end of the achievement spectrum. Over the past four years, an average of 61.8% of Columbus tenth-grade classes have scored advanced with all students combined, and the same score raised to 64.7% advanced over the past three years. All Columbus sophomores combined during the past three years have averaged 66% advanced and, during that same period of time, non-SPED students have averaged an impressive 68.7% advanced. Out of over 130 high school districts reporting scores to the Office of Public Instruction, Columbus ranks second in averages of the past three and four years when it comes to advanced scoring, and ranks first among Class B schools during the same time period in this area.

Data from the Montana Office of Public Instruction shows that, since attending Montana Writing Project summer institutes, Columbus Public Schools has:

- experienced a drastic increase in overall performance on the MontCAS CRT reading assessment (25% increase at eighth-level, 24% increase at tenth-grade level post-institute),
- achieved a remarkable consistency in our reading scores since 2005,
- consistently scored above 90% at the middle and high school level with all students combined,
- provided a learning environment where special-education eligible students consistently score proficient, even advanced on the state assessment,
- composed a very real application of individualized instruction, fostering growth in each and every student which has allowed two-thirds of our students to score in the advanced category over the past three years with all students combined—including many Title-I, SPED, and otherwise “at-risk” students.
- scored on par with private schools in the state, even out-performing them in some areas.
- experienced results that support having multiple teacher-consultants placed at a testing grade-level and in consecutive grade-levels.
- experienced results that support having multiple teacher-consultants placed at a testing grade-level and in consecutive grade-levels.

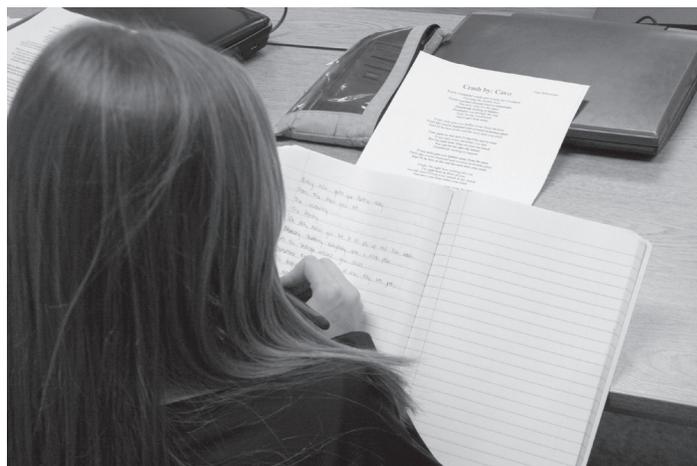
Best Literacy Practices: Strategies That Work by Lorrie

In *Teaching Adolescent Writers*, Kelly Gallagher lists writing wrongs that are taking place in our country. While his entire lists bears investigation, three issues applicable to this discussion are 1) Students are not doing enough writing; 2) Below-grade-level writers are asked to write less than others instead of more than others; and 3) Teachers are doing too much of the work and students are not doing enough work.

An impressive body of research supports practices to right Gallagher’s wrongs -- the practices Casey and I learned in our MWP institutes and utilize daily in our classrooms. In *Best Practice: New Standards for Teaching and Learning in America’s Schools*, Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde offer research-based recommendations on teaching writing, which include the following:

- building student ownership and responsibility for writing based on self-selection of topics, self-identification of goals for improvement, brief teacher-student conferences, and teaching students to review their own progress;
- class time spent on writing whole, original pieces through establishing real purposes for writing;
- instruction in and support for all stages of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing;
- teacher modeling of drafting, revising, and sharing as a fellow author and as demonstration of processes;
- grammar and mechanics instruction in context -- at the editing stage and as needed;
- writing for real audiences, publishing for the class and for wider communities
- creating a supportive setting for shared learning, exchanging student ideas, and collaborative small-group work;
- writing across the curriculum as a tool for learning;
- constructive and efficient evaluation that involves brief informal oral responses as students work; thorough grading of just a few student-selected, polished pieces; focus on a few errors at a time, and cumulative review of growth and self-evaluation and encouragement of risk-taking and self-evaluation.

Providing best practice experiences to students validates them as readers, thinkers, and writers. Daily writing opportunities may be as brief as a three-minute quick-write



or as involved as a class-long writers workshop for revision. Implementing best literacy practices in the classroom doesn't require purchasing a program or devoting additional time to planning. It's the epitome of "teaching smarter, not harder." Math teachers can build writing into their days as easily as language arts teachers can -- the basic requirements are a true desire to be an effective teacher and a willingness to change what isn't effective. As Morgan and Saxton offer in *Asking Better Questions*:

"Effective teaching depends upon recognizing that effective learning takes place when the students are vigorous participants in what's going on. And for effective teaching and learning to occur, teachers must structure their teaching to invite and sustain that active participation. They need to provide experiences that get students thinking and feeling, get the adrenaline flowing, and generate in students a need for expression....Effective teaching requires more than knowing what you are going to teach, why you are teaching it, and to whom you are teaching it. It means recognizing that all students bring their feelings, as well as their minds and bodies, into the classroom."

Since some educators may recoil at the mention of feelings, please keep in mind the spectrum to which this refers -- we all take our feelings everywhere with us. We all need to feel understood, appreciated, and accepted. At times, the deeper side -- the emotional side -- enters our classrooms as well. A recent article in *NEA Today* discusses how writing was used to help students and staff work through tragic

events at schools around the country. We cannot ignore what is happening in our students' lives. Recognizing and valuing each student as an individual builds a sense of community that can be unique to writing classes. It also encourages students to engage in our classes.

Opportunities to write and share personal thoughts through journals, quick-writes, and even blogs build in students reflective critical thinking skills as well as an understanding of the structure of various types of writing. Given an opportunity to respond to a piece on genetic engineering, one student may take a persuasive stance supporting or refuting the need for the practice, while another may create a list of pros and cons to organize his thoughts. Either way, the writer must support an argument. Because there is no "right answer" to such writing opportunities, students learn to become risk-takers in their expression. They also learn that their opinions are valued.

Writing/sharing opportunities also offer teachers insight to student understanding of key concepts (What is the importance of understanding DNA to finding a cure for cancer?), processes (Explain how photosynthesis works.), and skills (Explain how to divide a fraction by another fraction.) Most teachers can relate to the feeling of having a stack of papers in front of them that clearly show the students didn't get the lesson -- that sinking feeling of "losing" a day because re-teaching is required. Often that sense of loss can be avoided by a glance at a student's notebook during class that reveals understanding or need for re-teaching, which can be done on the spot.

William Strong's *Write for Insight: Empowering Content-Area Learning*, Grades 6-12 cites the 2003 National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges report that calls for doubling writing time in U.S. classrooms. "This change alone will do more to improve writing performance than anything else states or local school leaders can do." This idea is attainable through the implementation of writing in content areas where writing is often neglected.

The Commission's report goes on to state: "The research is crystal clear: schools that do well insist that students write every day...." Therein, I believe, lies the secret of Columbus's success.

Ownership: Independent Literacy by Casey

In his book *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Readers*, Sheridan Blau takes over twenty years of writing research and applies the concepts he learned to the reading process. If writing is a process, reading is too.

As a young graduate student teaching college-level freshmen English as a teacher's assistant, Blau noticed that he spent much more time than his students did reading and researching the material he assigned in class. Often he would assign 3-5 poems for his students to read before the next class, and he would frequently find himself disappointed in the amount of dedication and follow-through that students put into these tasks. Frequently, his students wouldn't have read the pieces at all. "The difference between us, I realized (and promptly told them), lay largely if not entirely in our roles and in what we saw ourselves responsible for." Students don't often see themselves as being responsible for



creating some type of meaning from what they read—they have teachers for that. As teachers, we often do much of the meaningful, important work (and learning) for them to help them understand. In doing this, Blau contends, we make them dependent on others for their literacy.

Blau kiddingly (but thoughtfully) says, “as long as teachers are teaching, students are not going to learn because the kind of experience teachers have that enables them to learn what they have to teach is the experience that students need to have, if they are to be the ones who learn. Given the way teaching and learning were conducted in most classrooms, . . . the experience of being taught was merely an experience of witnessing and possibly recording the teacher’s learning, and not an experience of learning for oneself.” I remember spending long hours, late into the night, as a young teacher preparing for the lesson I had scheduled for the following day; night after night after night. Honestly, I admit I avoided texts that I was not familiar with because I didn’t feel I had enough knowledge or time to learn the material prior to the teaching—basically, I only taught books that I had been taught. Blau’s research found these practices at every level of instruction.

At every grade-level and in every content-area, difficult texts exist for the students in any given classroom. Often, when encountering difficult texts, struggling readers internalize their problems with the text as a problem within themselves—they feel they aren’t good enough, not smart enough, not sharp enough to comprehend. When good readers encounter difficult texts, Blau finds that they often re-read the piece again and again and again, needing desperately to glean some meaning from the reading, and subconsciously realizing that the problem is not within themselves—it’s a problem with the text. The text is difficult and must be given added attention in order to comprehend it. These good readers enjoy the struggle, embrace their confusion and find their way out of it by asking questions, coming up with answers, and talking with other readers about their questions and answers. Through practice in the reading workshop, Blau has found that struggling readers can find success and independence by employing the strategies that good readers use.

Also important to the discussion is the role of confusion. Blau’s work has given him insight into the mechanics behind a confused reader: “confusion often represents an advanced state of understanding. That’s to say, the student who is confused is frequently the one who understands enough to see a problem, a problem that less perceptive students have not yet noticed or arrived at.” With this concept in mind, Blau’s findings support the idea that in classrooms where difficult texts are present, the chief function of that class “is not to present literature to students (as conventional teaching guides are likely to advise) in ways that will anticipate and prevent their confusion, but to welcome and even foster among readers the experience of confusion.” Great confusion leads students to great questions; great questions lead students on journeys for great answers, and that is where the learning and literacy sprout from—a fertile ground of confusion.

By applying Blau’s strategies and rationales throughout our educational systems, we do our noble and substantial part in creating independent, literate young human beings who can read, write, question, discuss and learn—and all for their own learning’s sake.

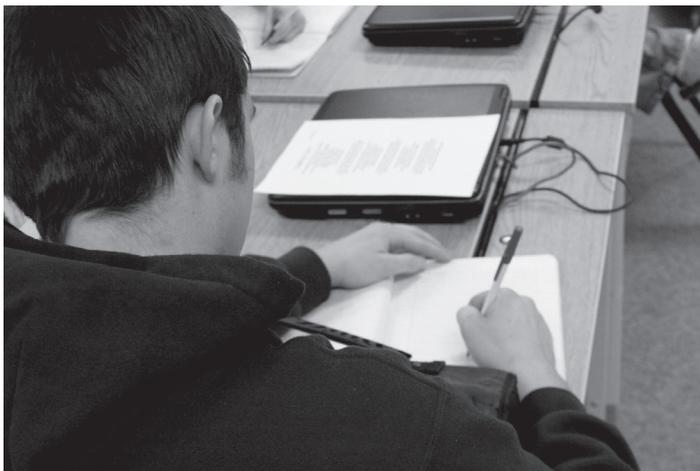


In Reading, Writing, and Rising Up, Linda Christensen relates a story from her own childhood and education where during an open-house event at school, she shared a piece of her writing with her parents. “I remember holding my father’s hand as he read my story hanging on the display wall outside Mrs. Martin’s third-grade classroom on the night of Open House. I remember the sound of change jingling in Dad’s pocket, his laughter as he called my mom over and read out loud the part where I’d named the cow ‘Lena’ after my mother and the chicken ‘Walt’ after my father. It was a moment of sweet joy for me when my two worlds of home and school bumped together in a harmony of reading, writing, and laughter.” Christensen describes an area of writing education that an increasing number of researchers have found the benefit of—students writing about themselves, making personal connections in school writing assignments, intertwining their home lives and school lives and having the value of both respected by their teachers and peers.

My wife, a first grade teacher, tells me on our drive home of conversations she had with her young students that day and the stories they couldn’t wait to tell. She mimics their frantic hand gestures and their sputtering speech as they struggle to get the words out, the urgency to share too much to contain. Tied tightly to our students’ programmed need to acquire language and communicate is their need to communicate something about themselves, to intertwine their identities with the subject matter in the classroom. This frequently happens at the primary grade levels, and slowly but surely it seems to dwindle by the time students reach high school—perhaps due to neglect and disciplinary efforts (“No, you may not tell your story, we need to move on.”).

What we miss out on when we disregard the intricately interwoven needs and programming of our young people is the powerful force that can propel students to be internally-driven readers and writers. By prompting students to write about a time they’ve ever felt discriminated against in preparation for a civil rights chapter in a government/history class, students make powerful connections to your subject-matter prior to the start of their reading, thus sparking engagement in the further lesson to come:

“I want you to think about times you’ve felt discriminated against and I want you to try to come up with a list of between 2 to 5 instances where this occurred—please take a moment now and make that list in your notebook (pause). Now I’d like you to share that list with your neighbor and briefly describe



each instance to them (pause). I'd like you to look at your list again and think about which item on that list you had the most to say about—which one were you the most animated about or fixated on? Think about that for a moment and circle it. Good, now I'd like you to find an open page in your notebook and write about that instance in detail (pause). Now, if you would please, share that piece with your neighbor (pause). Would anyone like to share with the larger group?"

This scenario is adaptable to any grade-level or subject area. Simply consider what you're trying to get across with your content, get students to connect themselves and their stories to it with writing, and reap the benefits of engaged students throughout the lesson. This need to feel connected personally to the subject-matter has been observed in applications throughout the K-12 spectrum, extending into undergraduate studies, graduate studies and beyond.

In my own experimentation with this technique, I've expanded the notion that I can get my students to engage in any topic if I first allow them to make personal connections to it by considering the genre possibilities through which they might try to respond. Often in school, we as teachers choose the genres for student response. This goes against the grain of the real writing world, in that real writers write out of a need to express themselves on a given topic, a purpose, and then personally affix the genre that will allow them to accomplish that purpose. On the other hand, we need students to experience a broad range of genres throughout their education.

To synthesize these two opposing needs, I've turned to Katie Wood Ray and her comprehensive series of books on best practices, specifically geared for the primary grade levels, and yet I've found her strategies apply directly to my high school classroom and the graduate-level summer institutes I lead. In her book *Wondrous Words*, Ray describes a process that allows students to become masters of their own literacy through observation and experimentation. She chooses models of genres and has students practice this process, discussing their findings with those around them. Her process is as follows:

The Five Parts to Reading Like A Writer

1. Notice something about the craft of the text.
2. Talk about it and make a theory about why a writer might use this craft or technique.
3. Give the craft/technique a name.

4. Think of other texts you know. Have you seen this craft before?

5. Try and envision using this crafting in your own writing.

In my interactions with this technique, I've found that it functions as an applicable development of the scientific method, asking students to notice (make observations), talk and make theories (hypotheses), etc. Directly though, it serves as a way for students to explore a given text at a masterful depth, one at which they can begin to break down the construct of a written piece into tangible approaches to duplicate and experiment with form, content, and voice.

Ray's book *Study Driven* takes this approach into the full-parameters of a school year, using this method of reading like a writer as the basis for all classroom pursuits. The results are highly effective at all grade-levels. My learnings and research with these four books have lead me to use Ray's method above to allow students to study writing genres through which their applications of the method result in memoir pieces about themselves and their home lives. Their need to express this personal connection to subject matter propels their need to learn more and more about the possibilities offered them through the various genres we study.

If we create classrooms where students readily, willingly, and confidently take on difficult texts, then foster that confidence, encouraging students to make noticings and create opportunities for them to talk about what they noticed—experiment with what they noticed—then we are creating independent, literate young people. Katie Wood Ray's research is heavily influenced by her work with her primary-grade students, Christensen's with her high school students and Blau's with his college students. Developing independently literate young people is a worthy goal for every teacher in every content-area at every grade level. With those skills our students become the masters of their own destinies.

Tackling the Test: Studying Assessments as a Genre by Casey

Montana Writing Project engages teachers in best literacy practices that, when applied with vigor in classrooms, empower students to be active, independent and self-accountable. In doing so, students become skilled in literate processes, like those mentioned previously in the descriptions of research conducted by Katie Wood Ray and Sheridan Blau. These processes allow students to compose in any genre they encounter through observations and noticings they make while reading that particular genre. Through repeated practice and a comfortable, natural delivery in the teaching, students naturally approach each learning opportunity ready to notice—and ready to be aware.

In my sophomore English classes, we study a variety of genres that include poetry, plays, short stories, research essays, and literary analysis essays. Each genre we interact with is tackled through the same process: we read model pieces from that particular genre (including model pieces created by previous students whom the current students would be familiar with, perhaps conducting multiple readings if it is a particularly difficult text), and students make observations and noticings during those readings, and then they share and discuss with each other what they noticed in regard to the structure and organization of the genre, the writer's

technique, and the length, depth and detail of the piece.

After my students share and discuss their noticings, I have them report back to the larger class what each group found. The points of observation they share become the parameters of the genre we're studying, and I record each point for the students on the board. We've reversed roles—the teacher is taking the notes and the students are teaching—and the bulleted list they create becomes the rubric by which their own experiments into this particular genre are assessed.

As Lorrie and I have said before, this is not a “teach-to-the-test” strategy. But, interestingly enough, tests are a genre too...with a whole slough of sub-genres. Linda Christensen says, “While critical teachers might stand back and say we don't want to have anything to do with tests, we can't just go on with business as usual. The question for anyone who cares about kids is: How do we retain our critical stance on assessments while preparing students for them? Can we ‘teach the tests’ without compromising what we know to be true about teaching and learning?” Teaching to the test mandates come from individuals who either consciously or subliminally view the test as the comprehensive value of each student's education. But there are alternatives to this perspective, and the alternatives are not education without accountability. The Montana Writing Project's summer institute experience offers professional development that brings assessment, content, curriculum and best practices under the larger umbrella of literacy. When students view tests as a genre, they're able to study them, critique them and master them. Testing then is not the focus, but a piece of a larger literate whole.

Christensen, a Language Arts Coordinator and English teacher for Portland (OR) Public Schools, describes her approach to critically analyzing tests as a genre on page 113 of *Reading, Writing and Rising Up*:

“But we did find a way to demystify the tests and use our knowledge to teach others about our outrage. I asked students to analyze each of the verbal sections of the SATs. We examined the instructions, the language, the ‘objectives’ of each section. We looked at how the language and culture of the SATs reflected the world of upper class society. After examining each section and taking the tests a few times, I asked students to construct their own tests using the culture, content and vocabulary of Jefferson High School.”

Christensen's students worked in small groups to write vocabulary questions based on noticings they had made while reviewing released items from the SAT. After collecting their questions together, they called their test the “JAT”—or the “Jefferson Achievement Test”—and her students administered this test to a group of pre-service teachers at a local college. This interaction with future educators allowed the students to become the teachers, demonstrating how tests are often regionally and culturally biased and written from an upper-middle class, Caucasian point of view. Christensen adds, “Asking students to become investigators prior to exam time can help put the tests in a social context, but more than that, it diminishes the size of their opponent.” Critical literacy empowers students, allowing them to feel in control in a testing situation.

The techniques we've discussed here, used throughout the year to decode and demystify genres of literature and ultimately allow students to experiment in those genres themselves, work just as well when applied to the MontCAS

released items, available through the Montana Office of Public Instruction. These files, accessible online, include reading passages, multiple choice questions, constructed-response questions, and scored writing samples from previous years' tests.

In a series of class periods leading up to test day, Lorrie and I distribute portions of the released items and ask our students to read through them like writers, make noticings, and discuss what they notice with their peers. We allow our students to determine what is being expected of them from these questions, what strategies they might employ to be successful, and where they have the freedom to express individual thought in the constructed responses. Then, we prompt them with an example text and question, allowing them to experiment with this genre in the same way they've experimented all year long in other genres. The results, outlined earlier, speak for themselves.

The Bigger Picture by Casey

The results, resources and opportunities Lorrie and I have discussed in this article have shaped our professional lives and benefited our students beyond the MontCAS immeasurably. A legacy study conducted by a team from NWP found that teacher-consultants were also more likely to stay in the teaching field, stating in its conclusion that “NWP appears to provide a lasting infrastructure for improving the teaching of writing and inculcating leadership among teachers. NWP offers those teachers new roles, helps them develop as leaders, and provides an established professional community where they can return for ongoing support, learning, and renewal.” This has definitely been true for me.

The Columbus administration was so pleased with the initial productivity and positive results we experienced that Columbus Public Schools hosted an MWP satellite summer institute in 2008, and we now have six teacher-consultants working within the district. Laurel Public Schools hosted one the following year (giving them eleven teacher-consultants) and has graciously agreed to host again in the summer of 2010, July 12th through the 30th. Browning will also host a summer institute during those dates, and Missoula will host the four-week institute (as it has every year since 1978) from June 14th through July 9th. For information or an application, contact us at mwp@umontana.edu.



The statistics described earlier suggest that empowering students and studying tests as a genre have positive effects on student performance, both individually and across a large group over an extended period of time. They also support earlier research that students of writing project teacher-consultants score higher than students of colleagues who have yet to experience a summer institute.

Problems with the test persist though.

Teaching to the test limits students' experiences and development of inter- and intrapersonal skills, and Linda Christensen's work shows us that tests lose viability if they're not culturally and regionally relevant to the students who are taking them. There is evidence of this in the schools with a majority of their enrollment comprised of Native American students struggling with MontCAS scores in multiple categories. While an effort has been made by Measured Progress to include testing content that is culturally and regionally relevant to Montana, the tribal nations residing in the state are sovereign entities with their own cultures and regional vocabularies. As stated earlier, the majority of standardized tests are written (however unintentionally) from an upper-middle class, Caucasian perspective—and often contain content and questions culturally and regionally relevant to the area or state the test was created in. Just as my rural Montana students would struggle greatly with questions relevant to New England culture—yachts, crew teams, deep-sea fishing, etc.—we cannot expect Native students to succeed with tests they do not find themselves connected to.

The worst part of the situation is that these schools who are not making “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) are being placed on scripted curriculums where teachers lose the ability to incorporate best practices. Critical thinking skills, essential to success in life, are often sacrificed for strategies claiming to offer success on a test. These commercialized scripted curriculums imposed on “failing” schools with the intention of raising scores have the opposite effect and are counter-productive as evidenced by the AYP results available through Montana's Office of Public Instruction. There are great teachers and great young people all across Montana reservations, but the system is working against them. Teachers and students in these schools need more opportunities to read, write and discuss. Montana Writing Project is working to level the playing field through critical literacy.

Want to find the same success for your students? ... Here's how.

Teachers:

- Try the techniques and/or read the texts mentioned in this article,
- Attend a Montana Writing Project professional conference workshop,
- Attend a Montana Writing Project summer institute experience,
- Encourage colleagues to attend an institute with you.

Administrators:

- Support, sponsor and encourage teachers (even multiple teachers) interested in attending a summer institute experience,
- Allow sponsored teachers to make salary-lane changes from their summer institute experience (the results are well worth the investment),
- Contact Montana Writing Project teacher-consultants for professional development in-services at mwp@umontana.edu,
- Encourage book-study groups in your buildings centered around texts mentioned in our bibliography.
- Consider hosting a satellite summer institute on your campus in order to reach an optimal number of teachers—contact MWP to learn how.

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The Bitterroot– Native American Plant Story

an inquiry lesson

Kelley Houle, Columbia Falls High School

Essential Understandings:

#2. There is great diversity among individual American Indians as identity is developed, defined and redefined by entities, organizations and people. a continuum of Indian identity, unique to each individual, ranges from assimilated to traditional. There is no generic American Indian.

#6. History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

Objectives:

- Students will be read the story, “The Bitterroot”, and make connections to its importance to the web of life.
- Students will take part in active discussions, writings and make observations from the story and inquire about their importance to life.
- Students will learn what it takes to sustain life, and that life is a cycle.

Materials:

- “The Bitterroot” story
- Writers notebook
- Native Plant Reference Book
- String or rope
- Index cards

Procedures:

1. Writing into the day.
RED, what does it symbolize or mean to you?
2. Share and discussion of writings.
 - Read students the story “The Bitterroot”.
 - Discuss the following inquiry questions.
 - What is the significance of Red in the story?
 - How is Red similar or different from your writing? Explain
 - In the story the redbird says, “Each year it will always come at this time when no other food can be found.” What is the significance of this sentence?
 - Have students imagine that they are in the Bitterroot Valley and pick one factor that they will role play and write it on an index card.
3. Students will make connections using string or rope between their factor and another factor and explain how it helps them. Factors can be used more than once.
4. Demonstrate what happens when a connection is lost or broken. What effects does this have on the whole valley? Inquiry discussion referencing the story.
5. Life. What does it take to sustain life? Discussion. Point out references to the story.

6. Introduce the terms biotic and abiotic. Discuss their importance to life and reference to the story. Place factors as either being biotic and abiotic. Can you have one without the other?

Biotic – anything that is alive or was once alive
Abiotic – never alive

7. Some Native Americans have a belief that everything they need comes from the Earth, meaning the Earth will take care of them. In your writers notebook reflect on “The Bitterroot” story in relationship to this belief.

8. Sharing and discussing.

Closure – Many lessons can be learned from Native American Stories. In the case of “The Bitterroot” story the web of life is evident.

Annotated Bibliography

Caduto, Michael J. and Bruchac, Joseph. *Keepers of Life. Discovering Plants Through Native American Stories and Earth Activities for Children*, Fulcrum Publishing, 1998.

Keepers of Life is a good book for educators. It has stories specific to plants and the value some Native Americans put on plants. Each story is accompanied by information and activities for the classroom that are easily adaptable to any age level.

Buffalohead, Priscilla. *Plants and Their Uses by the Chippewa Indian People*. Anoka-Hennepin Independent School District No. 11 American Indian Language and Culture Project, 1987.

Plants and Their Uses by the Chippewa Indian People would be a good source for those who are looking specifically for Chippewa plant usage. Each section names the plant, how to identify it and the uses of the plant by the Chippewa. Informative and interesting.

Cajete, Gregory. *A Peoples Ecology. Exploration in Sustainable Living*. Clear Light Publishers, 1999.

A Peoples Ecology, explores the intricacies of sustaining life from the land, including topics such as cultural ecology, diet, agriculture, and the environment. Personal stories, and traditional understandings of sustainable living are discussed as well as thoughts on the future direction of sustainable living.

Caduto, Michael J., and Bruchac, Joseph. *Native American Gardening. Stories, Projects and Recipes for Families*. Fulcrum Publishing, 1996.

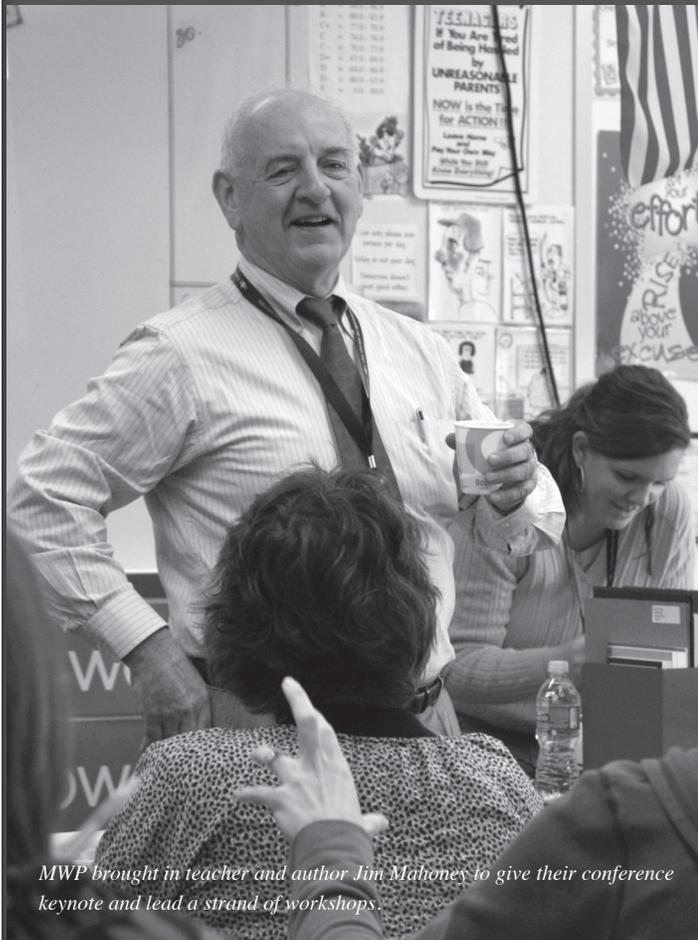
Native American Gardening is another great book for educators. Within each section there are activities, stories, and illustrations that can be used in the classroom. Students can learn how to plan and prepare a garden site and celebrate the harvest, make Native American Garden crafts, and there are recipes that teach how to cook Native American meals.

WRITING PROJECT WORKSHOP STRAND

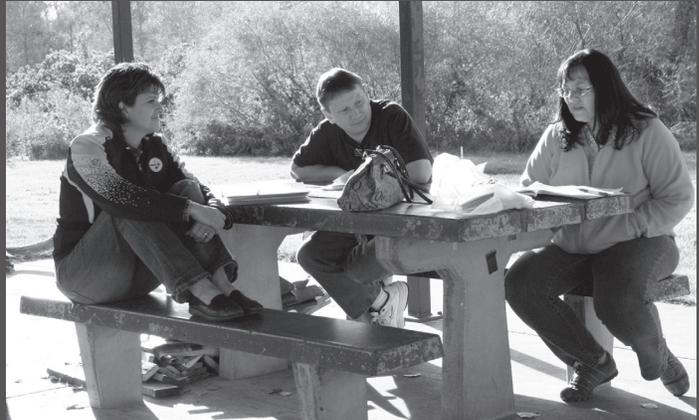
2009 MEA-MFT EDUCATORS' CONFERENCE
OCTOBER 15-16, 2009
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Marcia Beaumont & Merrylyne Lundahl, both MWP TCs, offered a 3-hour workshop "Experience Writing in a Place-Based Setting" that allowed conference participants to get out of the classrooms and do some writing.



MWP brought in teacher and author Jim Mahoney to give their conference keynote and lead a strand of workshops.



Raising Readers who Write and Writers who Read

Kathy Kipp

I made a search for the importance and relationship of reading and writing being taught together. In my experience as a teacher, I see much emphasis on reading with less on writing. In fact, our current reading program in School District 9, which is Success For All, gives writing one out of three days attention. It is called Adventures in Writing. How ironic students get to venture into writing only one of every three days. What does the cutting edge research have to say about this? How will we address this? And do I want to hear anymore excuses about how you can't find the time to squeeze writing into the instructional day?

A few years ago we were two thirds of the way from completing another school year in first grade. I was feeling good about my block of reading students. They were well on their way as independent readers and writers. I was abruptly told that I was to let my students be dispersed to other reading blocks. I would be given some half dozen students that were not making progress for whatever reasons. The teacher to student ratio of their reading block was too large and the students had developed some bad habits. Some of them had poor attendance.

I was quite disappointed to lose my students, although I was up for the challenge. Besides it is my job to help students be successful. The group I was losing had some skills and I was confident they would maintain and grow in their reading and writing. These students were reading for meaning. They could pick up an unfamiliar text, work through it, and independently make sense out of it by using many reading comprehension strategies. I observed them rereading at error and using context by reading past. These students could also write a paragraph independently.

Initially, I was excited and began planning ways to teach the new group of students. After a week or two, I became frustrated, and somewhat angry to see first hand how students can slip through the cracks. For example, these students had been in an average reading block and should have been able to write three to five sentences by third quarter. During Adventures in Writing time, students produced few words. These reluctant students were struggling in an average reading block. I felt so disturbed by the lack of writing skills. I had to backtrack by teaching some basic writing concepts such as sound spelling, spacing words, sentence structure, and sequence and response. I did plenty of instruction by modeling writing as a step by step process. The use of graphic organizers helped to guide their writing. I changed some of the writing prompts to make them meaningful. I followed the program, but also differentiated. I scheduled all components of the reading program and allowed more time for writing each day. As a result my reading students usually made two or more levels of progress each quarter. The light bulb began to flicker on for these students. I could see them take pride in their writing as their skills improved. The students were now writing several sentences, not just a couple words.

I had my work cut out for me. I needed to go where the students were. The challenging work did not bother me, but the thought that we are in the era of success for all education and here are these half dozen students trailing along on the tail of the (No Child Left Behind) cow.

So I asked myself, "How could these students slip through the cracks?"

I feel very strongly about writing and I have good reason. In my formative years of education, there was not much writing instruction. I don't recall any modeling or examples used to teach writing. I was not aware of any Indigenous writers as role models at that time. When I arrived in college English class I felt totally unprepared. However, I was not the only one struggling.

So, on with my search to explain and support my theory and belief that reading and writing go together and that writing needs to be given the proper attention for the sake of our students' education.

My search began by exploring the Internet. First, I found a report. It was a hearing presented to the committee on Education and the Workforce, Testimony of Dr. Joan Mahoney. Aha, I found evidence of reading and writing

Kathy Kipp is an elementary teacher in Browning, Montana. She is also a MWP TC and has co-directed the MWP Summer Institutes and last summer's Advanced Institute on the Blackfeet Reservation.

working together. I read some of the report, then, I printed it out.

The next article I looked at had a major finding from cognitive psychology. This article was titled "What Does Research Say about Reading?" The knowledge base came from studies of good and poor readers and some came from research on expert teachers and from training studies. Finding # 4, reading and writing are integrally related. This states that reading and writing have common characteristics. Also, readers can increase comprehension by writing and reading about how the topic improves writing performance.

I was excited to find proof in my search that readers can be better readers by writing and better writers through reading. I found more support for the teaching of writing on a daily basis. The National Commission on Writing was developed to offer writing as part of the new SAT and through concern that writing is not what it should be within the education, business and policy making communities of the United States. Recent analysis identifies the need for policy to encourage writing time doubled and that writing be taught in all subjects and all grade levels, and that teachers complete a writing theory and practice course. The articles I read and quoted from supported the significance of writing in reading instruction and in all subject areas.

I have also had training in Reading Recovery. Marie Clay, who developed the Reading Recovery intervention program, stated a child who failed to read is often also struggling to write. Often, remedial reading excludes writing because it is seen either as an extension after reading or a different subject. Reading and writing can both contribute to learning about print. A case can be made for the theory that learning to write letters, words and sentences actually helps the child to make the visual discriminations of detail in print that he will use in his reading (Clay, 1982).

Recently, I read an article from, *American Educator*, *A Quarterly Journal of Educational Research and Ideas* titled "Want to Improve Children's Writing? Don't Neglect Their Handwriting" by Steve Graham. This article states that young students struggling with handwriting must pay attention to forming letters and this interferes with the quality of writing as they are unable to focus on generating and organizing ideas. There has also been controversy on which writing script to use. There is evidence, although dated, that the traditional manuscript is easier to learn than cursive writing. Once traditional manuscript is mastered, it can be written as fast as cursive, and is possibly more legible. The use of traditional manuscript in the early grades may actually facilitate reading development due to the fact that the reading material is written in manuscript, not cursive.

I have observed first hand the confusion of traditional manuscript versus D'Nealian writing. I see students confusing letters due to the added tails. Many young writers form a letter, then, remember to tack on a tail. I heard an elementary teacher say, "I think it is a matter of teacher preference." I disagree. I believe it should be what the students need. Isn't that what differentiation and RTI is all about? So, if D'Nealian is confusing students, we as teachers should be doing something about it. I hear talk about automaticity as the current buzz word in education. We don't give our young students a fair chance by confusing them with D'Nealian and then spring cursive on them in second or third grade. Why don't we let them become automatic with the traditional manuscript? Maybe that could be the edge we need in making AYP at third grade level.

They say assessment drives instruction, however, our reading series includes some writing instruction and there is not writing included in the S.F.A. assessment. The S.F.A. assessment is done every eight weeks. If this is true, then we need to add a writing component to our reading assessment. Ultimately, I would like to see our reading and writing aligned with our assessments so that students don't fall through the cracks. We need to raise readers who write and writers who read!

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