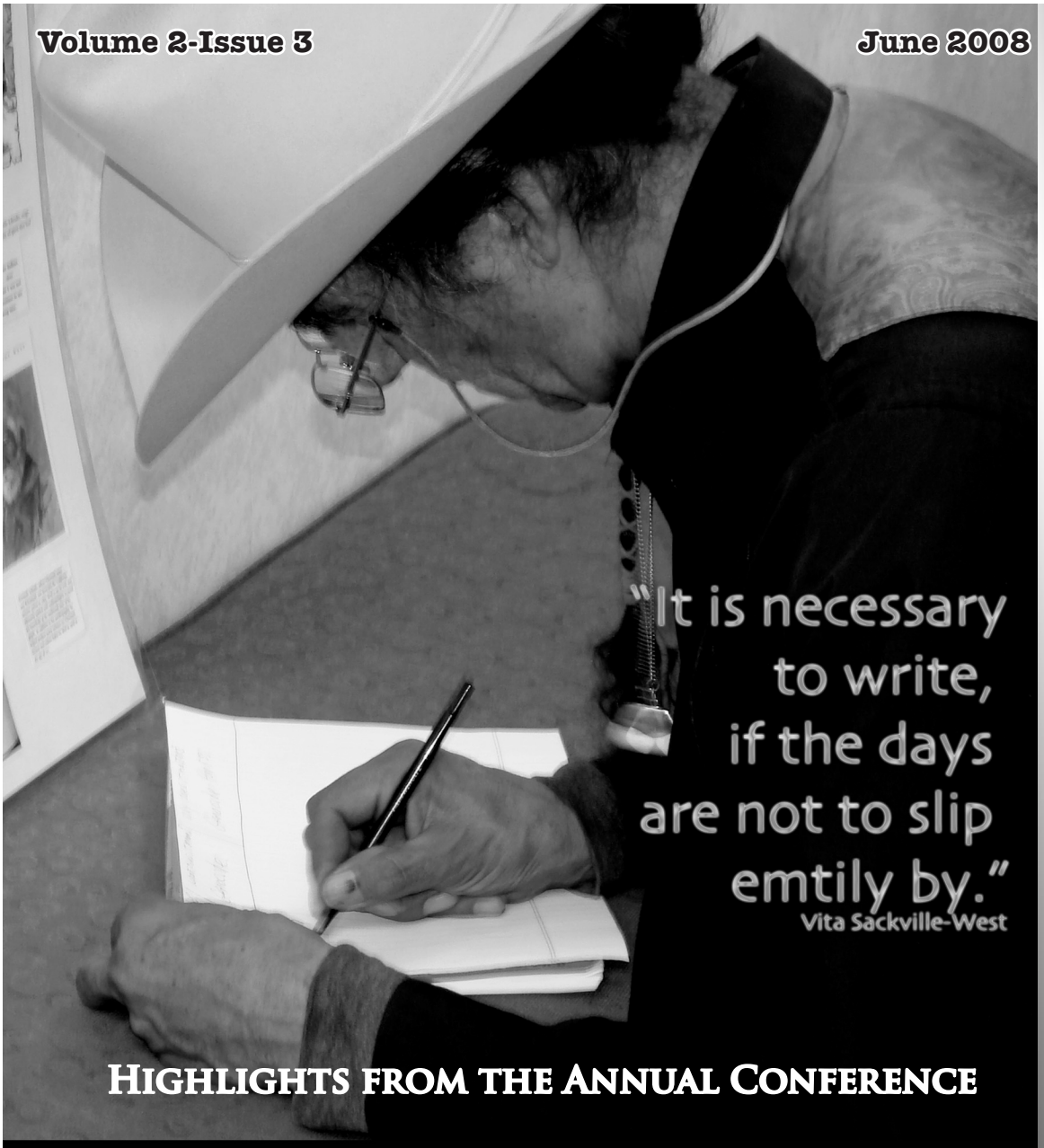
Volume 2-Issue 3 June 2008

JOURNAL
Montana Writing Project



Highlights from the Annual Conference

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Call for Submissions

Our Youngest Writers

Submission Deadline: August 1
Publication Date: September 1

The purpose of the Montana Writing Project is to increase the effectiveness of the teaching and learning of writing in *all* levels of education in Montana. Often though, our programming appeals most directly to middle and upper level teachers whose emphasis is specifically language arts or writing, so naturally those are the teachers we hear from most frequently. Still, some of the most important work in writing is begun in those earliest years where writers are first discovering what writing allows them to do. Teachers of more mature writers use the foundation our elementary teachers build as they help students continue to refine their skills.

So where do you start? How do you get kids excited about writing? How do you begin to develop writing skills? How do you balance helping kids with writing fluency while still introducing aspects like grammar, spelling, and phonics? How are the answers to these questions different for elementary teachers than they might be for secondary ones? What techniques might be applicable to multiple grade levels? What have you learned about turning nonwriters into writers that could be helpful in teaching older students who are also just beginning to develop writing skills?

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

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

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

Fresh Insight: What is happening in education that you feel you must say something about? Use this as a forum to share yor 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 that others may not yet be familiar with.

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

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

Upcoming issue
Place-based Writing
Submission Deadline: November 1
Publication Date: December 1

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.

As much as I enjoy going to the annual Spring conference, each year there is always at least one time slot where I want to attend all of the workshops scheduled. When I'm presenting, it never fails that the session I'm most excited about is scheduled at the same time as my own. Having quality options to choose from for each session is a great problem to have at any conference, but that doesn't make missing out on what all our colleagues have to offer any less disappointing. This issue aims to at least slightly alleviate that problem.

A few written artifacts isn't the same as sitting in on a dynamic, hands-on workshop, but the written highlights can still give us a glimpse into the ideas or processes other teachers have been developing and working through in their own classrooms. Reading through what other teachers are working on always gets me thinking about how similar approaches or projects could work with my own students. Hopefully something in this issue will inspire you to figure out how to make a new idea fit your own classroom or grade level.

Each piece highlighted here is in a slightly different genre. There are excerpts from rationales, workshop handouts, teaching ideas, and bibliographies. In some cases the submissions are a compilation from two or three of these different resources. All are drawn from presentations that included much more than we were able to print, so contact the authors if you find something here that you want to know more about.

This is the first issue on our shifted publication schedule. Though there is never a "slow" time for teachers, hopefully the new deadlines (August 1st, November 1st , February 1st , and May 1st) will fit a little better with school life. This is also our first issue with Eileen Flannigan, our new program assistant, on board. I'm looking forward to having her with us a while, so she and I can get all the logistics of getting this publication out to you on a regular basis ironed out. By the time you are returning to the classroom in the fall we should have the next issue to you, so you can start the year enjoying some of the work from our youngest writers and hearing from their teachers.

My thanks go out to all of the teachers who were willing to let us reprint their work--those included here as well as those whose pieces will be showing up in the forthcoming issues. Enjoy your colleagues' work. Then consider presenting your own at next year's conference.

Christa Umphrey

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excerpt from The Struggle for Respect: The Concept of Participation, and the Role of Civic Literacy

Keynote by Tom Fox

Marco attends CK Price Middle School as a seventh grader in Orland, in Glenn County, California, a "red" county in the blue state of California. It's a town of a little over 6,000, a one-high-school town. The average income of Orland is 12,500 dollars, which doesn't go that far. There are no wealthy people in Orland, though there are certainly some middle, and of late, upper middle class. The only industry is agriculture. Olives, almonds, and walnuts are grown around Orland, and there are several dairies, too. About half of C.K. Price's students are white and economically poor, and the other half are Latino and economically poor. Though it's a rural community, the Latino students are drawn in by gangs, usually different bands of the statewide gang the Norteños.

Marco's English and History teacher is Sue McNally, who along with her colleague Nicole LaGrave are active participants in the Northern California Writing Project. As a part of our project Nicole and Sue devised a year-long classroom inquiry on genre studies. We recognized that genre as a concept had undergone tremendous revision in the last ten years (or more) and that it has been reinvigorated by scholars in rhetoric in such a way that the new theory has the potential to enliven and enrich new K-12 state standards that present writing as a checklist of genres to master.

The inquiry project McNally and LaGrave developed focused on the lowest achieving students in their school. Each teacher kept case studies of six students, kept their work, and examined their progress as the project unfolded. Here is Sue's introduction to Marco:

> Marco is what they call a "reluctant learner." He has proficient skills in the areas of reading and writing, however, Marco has never tested as proficient. He is the youngest of a large Hispanic family. He is a gang member and has had some conflicts around his affiliation. Marco states that his teachers think he is dumb. He does not excel for those teachers.

As a part of their study, Nicole and Sue, in part pressured by outside sources, decided to give a pre- and post- test to a unit they created on the genre of persuasive writing. Both the pre-test and the post-test asked students to argue whether or not war was justified. They could write about Iraq, but they were encouraged use any examples they wished. Below is Marco's pretest:

War is Good

> I think that war is not bad. I think that we need war to solve our differences. I don't like all kinds of war. The kind of war that I don't like terrorist war that war isn't right. Having a war to stop terrorism is the rights. Like the war now the USA is in Irak trying to stop terrorism.
>
> I think that you should like the war is it is to stop the bad.
> The war is good!
> So you should like the the war because it only hurts bad people
> The war is good!
> We gane a lot from war.
> The war is good!
> The war makes rich
> The war is good!
> So you should be for the war because only good can come from it.

There are some strengths to this essay; remember this is a twelve-year-old who not only makes a distinction between kinds of war, but attempts to come to a conclusion about when war is justified. The essay is also reaching for a rhetorical effort, somehow reminiscent of Earth, Wind, and Fire, with the repetition of "The war is good!" In addition, his essay opens, develops, and concludes.

Six weeks later Marco answers the same prompt this way:

Da War

War can be good or bad for the right reasons. It can be for a good reason if it is to help out a country that is being picked on by another. The war can be bad if it is to just take over some else country. I think war is fine if it is for a good reason. It depends what the war is for to know if the war is good.

I think that the war that the U.S. is having with Iraq right now is a bad type of war. It

Tom Fox was CSU Chico's 2000-01 Outstanding Professor and is the author of three books and many articles on the teaching of writing. He served as the Director of the Northern California Writing Project at California State University, Chico from 1988 through 2007. He continues to teach at Chico and work as a national coordinator for the Project Outreach Network of the National Writing Project.

is a bad type of war because I think that we are just after their oil. Oil isn't something that the places should fight about. I don't think that the brave American troops should die just so we could have more oil.

War isn't always bad. War can be good if it is for the right reasons. An example is the Civil War. I think that the Civil War was something to fight for because slavery isn't right. Trying to end slavery is one of the best reasons to fight for. Even though a lot of people from the north died, they ended slavery. That's what mattered more in that time.

War can be good but in most cases it's not. Like during the Holocaust. That was a bad war. The reason for the war was money and power. When all the Jewish people got attacked by the Nazi Army, nobody did anything because everyone was scared. So after a lot of people died, other countries started talking about it. Some countries like the United States began to fight the Nazi Army. So I think wars start out bad, but sometimes end up good again. Like the first part when the Nazis took over the Jews that was the bad part but when the Americans went to help them that was the good part.

A lot of people are like me they're not sure about the war. I think the war can be good and bad but some people say that wars kill a lot of people. To them I say if people are willing to die to make their country better is that a bad thing? To the people that way we should kill all the people in Iraq just to take their oil I say oil isn't something that many brave soldiers should die for. That's why I think that war can be both good and bad.

That's what I think of the way because both sides of it have good arguments. They can both be good. At the same time they can both be bad. So if the war is for a good reason it is OK, but if it for something bad it isn't. That' s how I feel about the war.

It would be easy to criticize the repetition, the lack of commas, and the fused sentences. But remember, this is an English Learner (native Spanish speaker), in the lowest achievement quartile according to standardized tests, first draft writing in 45 minutes. The improvement, to me, is amazing. His argument is nuanced; he could never title this one "War is Good." His argument is much more sophisticated. He acknowledges differing and legitimate points of view, and he mounts evidence in a far more effective way than in the pre-test.

Marco's improvement was matched by nearly every student in Sue and Nicole's classes. This a positive example where students who have been traditionally marginalized from school and society seemed to have excelled at persuasive writing, a task that, according to our state tests and teacher lore, is one of most difficult for students to master. I want to pose this success as a question. What explains Marco's "improvement"? I believe the key is participation.

I'm going to take two approaches to this idea of participation and two different levels of analysis. The first is from the level of the writing—an examination of the way that Sue and Nicole designed their pedagogy to help students learn how and why to persuade in writing. The second is to understand not just the writing, but how their pedagogy supports the development of participation using Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger's ideas from *Situated Learning* and Wenger's *Communities of Practice*. I want to concentrate especially on how these two levels of analysis can help us provide access to students who presently feel shut out of school.

I'll begin with genre studies, an area of research that has become particularly interesting in the last ten years. The most generative strain of genre studies—it's a big field with some differing perspectives—was begun in 1984 with Carolyn Miller's "Genre as Social Action." This was one of those before-its-time articles that no one paid much attention to until the 1990s, when it became a classic. It's a well-titled article; she argues that genre-knowledge is the knowledge that allows us to participate in discourse communities. Rather than using the term "speaker" or "writer," Miller often uses the term "participant" to refer to genre-users. Miller observes:

> Genre refers to a conventional category of discourse based in large-scale typification of rhetorical action; as action, it acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose.
>
> A genre is a rhetorical means for mediating private intentions with social exigence; it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent.

In the following quotation, Miller discusses the implications of new genre theory for education:

> What we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have; we learn that we may eulogize, apologize, recommend one person to another, instruct customers on behalf of a manufacturer, take on an official role, account for progress in achieving goals. We learn to understand better the situations in which we find ourselves and the potentials for failure and success in acting together. As a recurrent, significant action, a genre embodies an aspect of cultural rationality. For the student, genres serve as keys to understanding how to participate in the actions of the community. (165)

Our genre studies group wrestled with this article until we thought that we understood most of it. We also read works by Aviva Freeman, Charles Bazerman, Anis Bawarshi, Brian Paltridge, and others. To get a sense of the comprehensive nature of these studies, here is Charles Bazerman's opening to "The Life of the Genre, the Life of the Classroom": "Genres are not just forms. Genres are forms of life, ways of being. They are frames for social action. They are environments for learning. They are locations within which meaning is constructed" (19).

Nicole and Sue decided to develop a curriculum around the war in Iraq. They chose this topic because of the connection that Miller makes between private intentions and social exigence. I hope that the social exigence is clear. What about the private intentions? Because the patterns of military recruitment and enrollment are unequally focused on people of color and economically poor communities, between 60-70 percent of the students in Sue and Nicole's class had family members serving in Iraq. These families had the strongest need to participate in the national discussion of the war. The genre that Nicole and Sue wanted students to learn is one of the most tested and least well taught genre in K-12 education, the persuasive essay. Here is what they did:

They started by putting together a student reader—about an inch thick binder that had readings on Iraqi history, colonialism, and imperialism. It also had articles on Islam and its diversity. In addition, the student reader had many, many persuasive essays for and against the war in Iraq, including speeches by 12-13 year olds. All of this reading was supported

by class discussion and writing assignments that supported the development of their understanding.

Let me draw a few conclusions before I move on to the next part.

The students began to participate in the genres of persuasion and they did this because:

1. They built up knowledge about their topic. The students could "participate" because they were knowledgeable enough to have an opinion. This is an obvious fact about writing in any genre, but one of the most violated obvious facts in schools. Students write poorly in many different contexts simply because they don't have enough knowledge.
2. The topic of the war provided students with a way to connect their private intentions (the concerns about their family members and friends in Iraq) with social exigence. It made sense to them to enter into what they knew was a topic that was shared with people in the community and the wider culture.
3. The genre of persuasive writing hardly needed to be even assigned. Persuasion was a rational response to the situation that the students found themselves in.
4. The discourse these 12 and 13 year olds were asked to participate in was an adult discourse. Vygotsky defines play as an activity where children "project themselves into the adult activities of their culture and rehearse their future roles and values" (129). In other words, when children play, they play "up" in age. If we want "participation" we need to take advantage of students' desire to participate in worlds that are ahead of them. "Relevance", in other words, does not necessarily mean relevant to their present lives, but may mean relevant to the lives they play up to. In many ways, students in Nicole and Sue's class discourses were more sophisticated than the adult discourse on the war.

One of the characteristics of the post-test (which is evident in Marco's essay but even more apparent in many other students) was that their claim, the students' opening statement about their opinion, became significantly more complex, more nuanced, and more qualified. "War is good" became "it depends."

As Nicole, Sue, and I met during the school year, one of the consistent refrains, one that our scoring rubric didn't capture, was the level of activity and focus in the class. Both teachers were astounded at the intensity of the class focus on the topic. They were on task for six whole weeks! They listened to each other and their teacher. They marveled that the project had life outside of class, in the hallways. At back-to-school night, one parent examined the reader (which was carefully balanced) and said, so this is what is changing our dinner table discussions.

This increased level of participation suggests something more than Marco's participation in persuasion but a larger sense of investment in the class's activity. At this point, I want to dive into the nature of participation to further explain Marco's improvement using Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's work. Lave and Wenger's work studies learning—not literacy learning and not learning in school. They set out as their research goal to study everyday cognition (the title of one of Lave's books). Lave and Etienne examined how butchers learned to be butchers, how loaders of milk trucks knew how many cartons fit into a truck, how midwives learned their trade. In examining these various contexts of successful learning environments in everyday life, they came up with some principles of learning. When someone begins to how to do a new practice, these learners engage in what Lave and Wenger call Legitimate Peripheral Participation.

When Lave and Wenger use the term "participation" they mean participation in a community of practice. The emphasis on "community" and on "practice" is typical of their work in learning theory. Lave and Wenger's work is profoundly social; our activities, our thinking, our learning, and our identities are shaped by the things we do with other people. A community of practice is defined by the activities we carry out together. It is deliberately a fluid term, applying itself to something as narrow as those who carve violins to something as broad as those who engage in national discourse about war. Their work focuses on how people gain access to a community of practice, hence the word "peripheral" in the term *legitimate peripheral participation*. Lave and Wenger argue that far from a negative term, peripherality was a critical stage of learning, and did not imply non-participation. Peripherality, in their use of the word, differed, for instance, from "marginal" with its implications of oppression.

Lave and Wenger describe peripheralilty as follows:

> With regard to "peripherality" there may well be no such simple thing as "central participation" in a community of practice. Peripherality suggests that there are multiple, varied, more–or less–engaged and inclusive ways of being located in the fields of participation defined by a community. Peripheral participation is about being located in the social world. (35-6)

It may be helpful to think of the antonym of peripheral not as "central" but as "irrelevant" or "unrelated" (37). Legitimate is implied by Lave and Wenger's definition of peripheral; that for a person to engage in legitimate peripheral participation they must be mutually acknowledged as a member of a community of practice. Though the learner's role may in fact be peripheral, both the community and the learner understand the learners' identity to be a member.

This brings me to the central word of my talk: participation. In *Communities of Practice,* Wenger defines participation in the following way:

> Finally, as a constituent of meaning, participation is broader than mere engagement in practice . . .. Its effects on [our] experience are not restricted to the specific context of [our] engagement . . .. In this sense, participation goes beyond direct engagement in specific activities with specific people. It places the negotiation of meaning in the context of our forms of membership in various communities. It is a constituent of our identities. As such, participation is not something we turn on and off. (57)

Wenger's use of participation extends doing into identity and marks "participation," through its involvement in a community of practice as a consequential and significant action. What you do becomes part of who you are and defines your place in a community of practice. As one enters into a new community of practice, as one learns to participate, there are reifications of that practice available to use as part of one's learning. Wenger calls the relationship between participation and reification an "interplay".

Fortunately, I can illustrate this relationship easily with examples from writing instruction. Participation is the doing

of writing, the drafting, revision, and editing that we call writing, the action. This participation is rarely part of a community of writers, but a community of something else where writing is one of the practices that constitutes participation. Writing an essay about the war in Iraq, for instance, is participating in the community of citizens. There are reifications all over in writing instruction, some helpful, some not so helpful. A model of persuasive writing written by another teen, such as the models in Nicole and Susan's reader, is a reification. So is this less helpful graphic organizer instruction sheet:

Sentence 1 – Thesis (Topic) Sentence
Sentence 2 – Concrete detail (example to prove/support #1)
Sentence 3 – Commentary (explains why/how the detail proves or clarifies the thesis
Sentence 4 – Commentary (further explains or analyzes CD)
Sentence 5 – Concrete detail (gives a second example to prove/support #1)
Sentence 6 – Commentary (explains why/how #5 relates to #1)
Sentence 7 – Commentary (further explains or analyzes CD)
Sentence 8 – Closing Commentary (summarizes paragraph, restates topic or thesis sentence, and does not introduce new information.)
(Jane Shaffer)

The above structure is fairly unhelpful (though popular) because it provides a level of reification that actually makes meaningful participation more difficult.

On the other hand, if you just asked cold for students to write a persuasive essay, you would get Marco's first essay. That would be a request for participation without any reifications to support him.

So let me circle around again to some conclusions that explain Marco's "improvement." The list from genre studies looked like this:

- Students were knowledgeable
- Students connected private intentions with social exigence
- The genre was a rational response to a situation
- Students were asked to play "up."

From Lave and Wenger, we can add these additional conclusions:

Students were invited into a community of practice as legitimate peripheral participants. That is, the "work" of the persuasive essay approximated the kinds of discourse adults (should) use when deliberating on public matters, matters of social exigence. Thus, even though the students weren't positioned to actually affect the decision-making process of George Bush, they none-the-less were peripheral members of the deliberating public.

Students' arguments assumed a kind of sophistication because of their involvement in a community of practice ... Students, like adults, have a desire for community, somehow knowing that it will sustain them, care for them, provide for them, help them feel competent, encourage them to dream...

The students' arguments assumed a kind of sophistication because of their involvement in a community of practice. It was profoundly social in that they were constantly exchanging viewpoints and ideas with each other; these students were reading a variety of viewpoints by both teens and adults, and they were constantly using these ideas to communicate with each other in and out of the classroom.

Participation in the classroom led to more than just activity. Students were talking at home and with each other beyond the classroom period and walls. Remember when Wenger talked about participation's effects as not being "restricted to the specific context of engagement"? It was true here. This activity offered students identities that they wanted to inhabit, identities that enrich the ones offered by social inequalities and geographic isolation.

Participation was paired thoughtfully with reification. While students read, wrote, and discussed issues of the war in Iraq, teachers skillfully helped them recognize patterns of practice in the reifications of texts, forms of discourse, and directly taught lessons. These reifications did not inhibit practice but led to more sophisticated work.

Students, like adults, have a desire for community, somehow knowing that it will sustain them, care for them, provide for them, help them feel competent, encourage them to dream things that may or may not be possible, know that the dreaming itself is better than the blankness of a future that might await them. Fostering participation in our schools and universities that builds community is a political act. It counters what is currently a terrifying trend. In order to leave no child behind (or at the university the relentless drive to "reduce remediation"), schools, districts, and universities are insisting on tightly scripted curricula. In California, as in much of the rest of the nation, there are now mandated textbooks and mandated curricular programs for high-need students, who are typically English learners, students of color, and the rural poor. While some of these programs may in fact raise test scores temporarily, the damage done to our society is great. The primary role of learning is to reproduce the practices of the community. With a great deal of reification, these practices are reproduced with little innovation or ingenuity. The students will reproduce the status quo. With more participation, the communities will be reproduced with more ingenuity and innovation.

Students who learn through rote curriculum, or even through activities that are unrelated to actual communities, will not enter into the communities as participants in order to change them. The kind of teaching that Nicole and Sue accomplished with their seventh graders is not easy to design nor is it easy to carry out. It will take cross institutional cooperation of progressive English departments, thoughtful K-12 teachers, National Writing Project sites, and ideas like the one that created this conference to really reform education. I know many in education are working hard to minimize the effects of the latest assault. We need to be supporting each other in these efforts, bolstering our resolve, and honing our arts of teaching.

Jake Hansen's workshop "Aligning Pracices with Pedagogy" allowed participants time to reflect on their own grading practices and discuss possible alternatives with the group. See highlights from his presentation on pages 15-17.

Brenda Johnston discusses writer's notebooks in in Lorrie Henrie-Koski's workshop. See Lorrie's writeup on pages 10-14.

Casey Olsen's workshop "Portfolios in the 21st Century: Go Digital" (pictured at left) was a popular choice for teachers interested in how they might integrate a wiki website into their classroom as a way of allowing students to use their technological knowhow for educational purposes and showcase their writing. Casey also shared ideas on how to use a wiki to eliminate the piles of papers that too often overwhelm writing teachers.

Donna Miller's presentation "Writing as Art" (pictured above and at left) gave participants a chance to do some writing of their own, passed on ideas for descriptive writing assignments, and shared artistic techniques — like marblizing paper — that students can use to easily embellish their written work. Read a writeup of Donna's workshop on pages 18-19.

Rural Conference on Writing Education

April 12, 2008

MSU College of Technology in Great Falls

In his workshop "The New Right Brain Indian" Woody Kipp (above) discussed the massive growth of Native writers since 1960 and how right brain/ left brain learning applies to the teaching of Native writing.

Dave Christensen's workshop "Writing with Windows Movie Maker" explored ways students can improve their core competencies as readers and writers by writing with Movie Maker. Below, he works with Claudia Crase.

Eileen Zambro's presentation "Mock Books: Thinking, Reading, and Writing" shared strategies for helping struggling readers to get the gist of book selection, to organize time for reading and to develop the stamina to complete a text. At right and below, participants were able to create their own mock books, a tool that allows students to connect with a book both congnitively and physically.

The MWP Leadership team met the day before the conference to discuss ways to integrate the goals of Project Outreach with broader Montana Writing Project work. Above, Donna Miller, Woody Kipp, Brenda Johnston, and Seena Demmons experience a gallery walk designed by Laurie Smith to spark conversation and allow participants to examine their own ideas and conceptions of Native issues.

Using Writers' Notebooks in Your Classroom

Presented by Lorrie Henrie-Koski

"If a painter needs an easel to play with painting, and a basketball player needs a gym to play with the basketball, then it reasons that writers – especially developing writers – need a place to play with writing." Kelly Gallagher, 2006

Background:

Every writer needs a place of his own to develop a sense of his writer self. A place to remember, a place to plan, a place to dream. A writer's notebook is just that place – a private place where words can wander and ideas can stretch and grow.

Purpose and Description:

A writer's notebook equates to a living, evolving, student-created resource. A collection of information for students' reference, personal lists for writing, notes from mini-lessons, and lots of personal writing will fill the pages. A personal source to revisit time and again, writer's notebooks should be a part of every writer's daily world.

One of the most important aspects of keeping a writer's notebook is building writing fluency. It's been said that only about 10% of what writers write is worth developing, but if writers don't write 100% of the time, they'll never find that golden 10%. Developing as a writer is definitely a relationship between quantity and quality – quantity leads to quality. Students need many opportunities to create works to fill their "writing banks" from which they will later make "withdrawals."

Deposits into a writer's notebook should be of a wide range. Personal narratives, quickwrites, responses to in-class discussions or presentations, reflections, wonderings, poetry (original and borrowed), and observations are just the tip of the iceberg. Once a number of pieces have been created, students then should select one to develop through the revision process. Allowing self-selection builds student self-confidence as well as a sense of ownership in their writing. Students are more likely to put effort into a piece they'd like to share.

Providing students with many opportunities to write helps to develop not only writing skills but also higher level thinking skills. As Gould states in *Four Square Writing in the Content Areas*:

> "In writing, or in preparing to write, students must clarify their thoughts on a topic. They must make sense of what they have read or listened to, and synthesize the information. Writing requires a higher duty of preparation than simply conversing about a subject, because in writing there is an expectation that students use specific content and use a logical organization of ideas. With writing, students may use the material learned to draw conclusions, make inferences, or express opinions, rather than simply reciting facts."

Writer's notebooks can be in almost any format – a paper folder with pages clasped inside, a spiral notebook, a three-ring binder, or a composition book. Buckner recommends considering several aspects of the notebook before deciding what will work best for your students:

- Is it easily portable to take home and bring back to school?
- Does it provide a standard-sized page?
- Is it easily replaceable?
- Is it a size that will be easy for you to collect and read?
- Do you have a plan for where students will put their class notes or handouts?
- Will students be able to personalize the notebook?
- Is it important for students to take pages out and put pages in the notebook? Does your notebook support this?
- Is the notebook easy for all students to manage?

Personalizing a writer's notebook builds a student's sense of identity with the book and the writing it will hold. Original art, photographs, pictures and words

Lorrie Henrie-Koski teaches at Columbus Middle School and is co-director of the Columbus Summer Institute. She can be reached at koskil@columbus.k12.mt.us.

from magazines, and original writing are easy ways to make the notebook the writer's own. Clear contact paper works well to protect the covers thoughout the school year if a cardboard-cover notebook is used. Many three-ring binders have clear cover sheets that allow for personalization on the cover.

Just as all teachers' styles differ, so do options for organizing a writer's notebook. The key is to have a plan to help the students use their notebook as efficiently as possible. Page numbering and a table of contents help students to locate material, regardless of the organization plan. Page flags are also helpful with finding a section quickly. Gallagher suggests the following organization format:

pp. 1-3	Table of Contents
pp. 4-10	What Should I Write?
pp. 10-12	Writing/Literary Terms
pp. 13	Spelling Demons (can be personalized)
pp. 14-40	Craft (notes from mini-lessons, examples of what good writers do)
pp. 41-65	Editing (notes from editing mini-lessons)
pp. 66 +	Writing

Buckner suggests using the book in two parts: one starts at the front and works toward the back, the other starts at the back and works toward the front. The front section is reserved for students' writing, and the back contains mini-lesson notes, handouts, etc. that she has her students tape into their books.

Nancy Atwell seems to prefer a chronological format. Titles of mini-lessons, handouts, and drafts are entered into the table of contents as they occur. Students tape handouts for mini-lessons into the books and draft from front to back.

Once students have their notebooks personalized, getting them started writing is the next step. Keep the writing authentic and personal. Allow choice, and above all, encourage all types of writing – in-class, after school, observations, and random thoughts. Ross Burkhardt's *Writing For Real* and Nancie Atwell's *Lessons that Change Writers* contain many classroom-tested activites that are adaptable for a wide range of ages.

Self-evaluations should be done at mid-year and at the end of the year, allowing students to reflect on their own growth as writers. With accountability a concern in most districts, some teachers give points for effort over time in writers' notebooks, and others record points as entries are added. Other teachers consider writers' notebooks "sacred" and grade only drafts developed from pieces started in the notebooks. Again, this is part of the writers' notebook that needs to meet your and your students' needs.

What Good Writers Do
from "What Good Writers Do – A Teacher's Guide" by Kathleen A. Hoover

1. Good writers create a first draft.

2. Good writers evaluate their writing.

3. Good writers revise their writing.

4. Good writers edit their writing.

5. Good writers share their writing.

6. Good writers read.

7. Good writers practice.

"A writer's notebook is like a ditch – an empty space you dig in your busy life, a space that will fill up with all sorts of fascinating little creatures. If you dig it, they will come. You'll be amazed by what you catch there." Ralph Fletcher

Montana Standards Addressed:

Content Standard 1 — Students write clearly and effectively.
Content Standard 2 — Students apply a range of skills and strategies in the writing process.
Content Standard 3 — Students evaluate and reflect on their growth as writers.
Content Standard 4 — Students write for a variety of purposes and audiences.
Content Standard 5 — Students recognize the structures of various forms and apply these characteristics to their own writing.
Content Standard 6 — Students use the inquiry process, problem-solving strategies, and resources to synthesize and communicate information.

Resources:

Atwell, Nancie. *Lessons that Change Writers*. Heinemann, 2002.

Buckner, Aimee. *Notebook Know-How: Strategies for the Writers Notebook*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2005.

Burkhardt, Ross M. *Writing for Real*. Stenhouse, 2003.

Fletcher, Ralph. *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You.* Harper Trophy, 1996.

Gallagher, Kelly. *Teaching Adolescent Writers*. Stenhouse Publishers, 2006.

Gould, Judith S. and Jay Gould. *Four Square Writing in the Content Areas*. Teaching & Learning Company, 2004.

Type-Written Work Guidelines

Please follow these guidelines for all type-written work unless other specific instructions are given. The steps explain how to format a new document before typing.

All margins must be 1".
change margins by clicking on "File" at top of page toolbar
click on "Page Setup"
click on "Margins" tab if needed
change numbers in right, left, top, and bottom margin boxes to 1"
click OK

All work must be double-spaced.
change spacing by clicking on "Format" at top of page toolbar
click on "Paragraph"
about half-way down the page, you'll see "line spacing"
click on the arrow next to the word to see your choices
change line spacing to double-space
click OK

All work must be 12 pt. font.
Two exceptions:
Comic Sans is not bold at 11 pt.
Titles may be 14 pt.

Use a plain font such as Ariel, Century Gothic, Tahoma, Times New Roman, or 11 pt. Comic Sans.
Do not use a font that is always bold.
Do not use a font that is italic, cursive, or difficult to read.
Do not use a font that is all capitalized.

Vocabulary & Materials

Six+1 Traits of Writing – We will use these terms throughout the year in creating and discussing everything we read and write in this class. Refer to your scoring guide for exact definitions (We'll also discuss each in class). The terms are Ideas and Content, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions, and Presentation.

CP book – Your composition book is a "common place" for you to keep all kinds of writing that you do, so we call it your CP book for short. You are the only person that writes in your CP book.

Reading/Writing Binder – Reading and writing are very closely related, so you'll create one binder to use in both classes. Mark one divider section "Bellringers." Typically, the first brief activity in class is your bellringer. Be sure to keep and date every entry.

Journal – Your journal is one of your composition books in which we'll carry on a written "conversation." I'll always offer a topic and you'll always have the option of writing on the topic or choosing one of your own. When we do journals, you earn 2 points for each line you write in normal-sized penmanship. Most composition books have about 24 lines per page, so if you fill a page, you'll earn 50 points, which is the maximum you can earn for a journal.

Portfolio – Throughout the year, you'll put final drafts into a portfolio we create in class that represents works you'd like to include that show your skills. Drafts may be your best work or even examples of work that demonstrate the writing process to show growth in your writing. Copies of the Poems of the Day that you present are required, as are other items that will be announced at the beginning of each quarter. You may include anything you write as well as any other writer's work as long as you properly cite the author. You'll need to have one piece that you create for one of your other classes each quarter, so keep all the reports and projects that you write!

Down draft – The very first time you put your thoughts down on paper, you create a down draft. You'll usually do down drafts in your CP book.

Writers Workshop – This is class time devoted to developing your written pieces. Everyone will be at different stages: some may be revising in groups or individually, while others may be editing or typing. Everyone's energy must be focused on his or her own work to be productive and to avoid a writing crunch at the end of the quarter. Respect of each other's writing and time (including mine) is essential during Writers Workshop.

Revision group – This is a group of two or three students besides you that will listen to you read what you've written and

will make constructive comments to help you improve your work using the Six+1 Traits of Writing rubrics that are in your scoring guide. Sometimes the group is assigned and sometimes you will choose your own group. You'll receive a separate explanation of revision group expectations.

Revision – When you make major changes to a piece, you revise it. Some examples are when you add more detail, reorganize sentences or paragraphs, combine sentences, or change how many sentences are written.

When you're ready to revise any of your down drafts from your CP book, you'll make revisions on notebook paper in a colored folder in the crate for your class period. Once a revision is complete, put a revision sticker in the upper right-hand corner to show which revision it is (1st revision, 2nd revision, etc.). Some pieces will definitely take two or more revisions. Don't stress – good writing takes time!

Keep all drafts of your work! It's the only way to show your progress and some assignments are graded on having made revisions and being able to show them to me.

T-chart – If you are going to develop a down draft or to revise a piece, you need to share it with a revision group. After reading your piece, complete a T-chart at the end of your draft that looks like this:

+	?
List here the parts of your writing that your group thinks are strong. Be very specific when listing them. Example: "good description", "strong verbs", or "beginning grabs our attention".	List here the parts of your writing that your group thinks you need to check again. Be very specific when listing them. Example: "doesn't grab audience's attention", "needs to flow better", or questions the group has such as "What happened when…." or "It isn't clear what you mean….".

Edited Draft – After the writing is revised to a point where the ideas are clear and well-organized, the sentences flow smoothly, and the words represent you well and are the best for the piece, you will edit. This draft is read only for conventions – spelling, punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure (search for incomplete sentences and run-ons), grammar, and use of paragraphs.

Final Draft – Most work submitted for grading needs to be in final draft form – that means either typed (see requirements for typed work) or neatly handwritten in cursive in blue or black ink. Exceptions are down drafts in your CP book, drafts in progress that you put in your colored folder, bellringers in your reading/writing binder, and journal topics that you write in your journal.

Blue or Black Ink – While this may seem obvious, seventh and eighth graders sometimes have so much on their minds that they forget that red or purple or green or teal or pink are not the same as blue or black. The marks that an editor makes on your paper must be easily visible. ALL colors besides blue or black are reserved for editing ONLY. If final drafts are not typed, they must be written in blue or black ink only.

Show, Don't Tell (or Paint a Picture) – Good writing is specific, and so are good discussions and good explanations for revision. An example of a comment that doesn't show is "The story was good." To show what was good, you'd say something more specific, such as "The story had good description that helped me really picture what was happening" or "The verbs really made it action-packed". My comments on your papers will often look really long because I try to be as specific as I can be in making suggestions for your work.

Scribe Notes – Once a quarter you'll be required to take notes of what happens in class: who presents a Poem of the Day, the title of the poem, what activities or discussions we have, specific notes shared, and homework assigned. This is helpful to all of us, especially people who are absent. Be sure to date and sign your entry so that you get credit for it!

Poem of the Day – Each quarter you'll be required to select, reflect on, and present a poem of your choice to the class. This 75-point assignment gives you practice with your planning, presentation, and reflection skills. The poem you present DOES NOT have to be an original one, though original work is always welcome. Use the Poem of the Day rubric as your guide in preparing your presentation and reflection.

Reflection – Just like your reflection in a mirror gives you a chance to think about what you see, reflecting on your work (or someone else's) gives you a chance to consider how it's put together, what makes it strong, and what may need to be improved. Reflections take time to write; they should include not only your initial response (whether you liked it or not), but also, specifically, why you felt that way. What literary devices were used? How did they affect the writing or your impression of it? How were the 6+1 Traits used to make the piece strong? What do you think the author/poet intended the audience to think or feel after reading the piece?

Good writers use words in interesting ways. Many of those ways have labels such as figurative language or literary devices. When you discuss or reflect on writing such as poetry, you can use these terms to make your thoughts more specific: simile, metaphor, personification, alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, rhythm, repetition, hyperbole, onomatopoeia. Be sure to include which words from the piece create that device. For example, you might say that the alliteration of "big blue balloons burst at the birthday bash" makes reading the lines fun. Terms from the Six+1 Traits of writing may also help you explain strong parts or areas of writing that need attention.

Citation – Every piece that is in your portfolio must have a bibliographic citation. Check pages 230-232 of *Write Source* 2000 for formats. Original work must include your name, the title, and the year you wrote it.

Revision Group Guidelines

•A revision group consists of three or four students. Groups of fewer students don't provide enough ideas, and more students provide lots of ideas, but not necessarily about what needs to be discussed.

•Move away from your work area to share or to revise. Take your chairs to empty spots or tables in the room or pick a place to sit on the floor. Your work area needs to be saved for thinking and working.

•Whoever is speaking uses a 6" voice – remember, that means that only people six inches away from you will hear what you are saying.

•Only one person speaks at a time. The author reads his or her piece without any comments from the group. Group members then take turns telling what they thought the strong points of the piece were. The author records these comments under the + section of a T-Chart that he or she drew after the end of the piece. The discussion continues with each group member then explaining what needs to be improved, using the Six+1 Traits Scoring Guide. The author needs to record these comments under the ? section of the T-Chart. Record all comments word-for-word so when you go back to revise, you'll remember exactly what was strong and what needed to be improved. You won't always revise immediately, so this is a critical detail.

•Remember that the groups' thoughts are important, but as the author, you may decide not to accept a suggestion. Don't argue about suggestions in your revision group; make notes of them and decide during your next step whether to use them. As soon as everyone's work has been discussed, move back to your work tables immediately to begin the next stage of your Writers' Workshop: your first revision in your colored folder, your next revision, typing a draft for editing, or for a final draft.

Writing Class Terms & Definitions

simile – a comparison of two very different objects using the word "like" or "as" (The burglar was as quiet as a mouse.)

explicit metaphor – a comparison of two very different objects, saying one is the other (The girl is a bear in the morning.)

implicit metaphor – an implied comparison where one object represents another (The moon sailed gracefully across the ocean of black.)

personification – descibing an inanimate object with characteristics of a human (The chair groaned when the heavy-weight champion sat in it.)

alliteration – repetition of initial consonant sounds – words don't have to be together (Betty sold blue bunnies for the Easter baskets.)

assonance – repetition of vowel sounds (If I make a cake, I will delay the pay.)

consonance – repetition of consonant sounds in the middle or ends of words (The little green truck sputtered and stopped.)

rhythm – the beat or cadence of a written pieceepetition – repetition of words or phrases, usually done for effect

hyperbole – exaggeration to make a point

onomatopoeia – a sound device where words are used that sound like the sounds they are representing (pop, wham, smack)

Some Thoughts on Grading

Jake Hansen

Grading is a really big deal.

Especially to students. But because it's one of the less inspired parts of our work, teachers don't talk very much about it, at least not constructively. Pat Belanoff calls grading "the dirty thing we have to do in the dark of our own offices." However much we'd like to sweep grades under the rug, they are hugely important to our students, even—perhaps especially—those students who seem not to care about grades at all.

The difference between the way graders and gradees experience grades is hard to overestimate. It's the grader's privilege to think complacently about grading or to assume that a grading practice is effective for students.

Grading—especially grading student writing—causes all kinds of problems.

I'll briefly mention just a few of the most interesting.

It is worth noting that the use of grades in this country originated as a response to increased class sizes that resulted from mandatory school attendance laws. According to historian Liesel O'Hagan, teachers of larger and more diversely populated classes lacked the time to accurately represent student learning and performance through written narrative. Since their inception, grades have been an institutionally and politically mandated means for teachers to communicate more efficiently but less accurately about student performance. Lynn Bloom explains how grades serve as a kind of "institutional shorthand", "an efficient means of reducing complicated information to a simple code that can be interpreted with *alleged unambiguity* by whoever sees the symbols and knows the context—*and many others who know nothing whatever about the context*"(362, italics mine). Of course grades are ambiguous, tremendously so. Alfie Kohn argues that grades are never valid, reliable, or objective, that they offer instead "a subjective rating masquerading as an objective evaluation" ("Grading"). In their necessary lack of precision, then, grades serve to misrepresent student achievement and performance for the convenience of various institutions.

Teachers who put both grades and written feedback on student writing often complain that students pay very much attention to the former and almost no attention to the later. Marcy Bauman offers a fairly convincing explanation as to why this occurs. Bauman argues when students are graded on their writing, the act of writing becomes demonstrative or transactional instead of communicative. "The cycle of write, revise, get a grade, write, revise, get a grade tells students that writers write primarily for the purpose of being evaluated, not for the purpose of conveying information or attitudes about a subject that they care about… [Students learn] that the end point of writing is for the writer to receive varying degrees of disapproval" (162-163). By Bauman's reasoning, the feedback that you spend so much time writing on students' papers is trumped by the D+ or the 5/5 or the check-mark is because students are writing the paper for the check, not to say anything or learn how to say things more effectively. As long as we put grades on student writing, our comments will be an afterthought at best.

Just as individual grades interfere with other kinds of feedback, the practice of grading student writing interferes with other practices that might go on in a writing classroom. It's hard for students to see teachers as a coach and a judge, to sit around a circle as equals and then have one of those "equals" rank all the other "equals" at the end of the term. Jerry Farber puts it this way: "You can tell students anything you want about 'taking responsibility' and 'thinking for yourself'. The grading system you employ—a middle finger extended before them—is always more eloquent still" (136).

The NCTE "Position Statement On Grading Student Writing" is perhaps the most decisive response to the dysfunction of grading writing. Adopted in 1993, the Statement mentions a number of problems with grading student writing and the difficulties that emerge when alternatives to grading are employed. The Statement then resolves "that the National Council of Teachers of English encourage teachers to refrain as much as possible from using grades to evaluate and respond to student writing, using instead such techniques as narrative evaluations, written comments, dialogue journals, and conferences…". I think the word "instead" is important in the NCTE Statement. A dialogue journal that ends in a B- is really

Jake Hansen, pictured here with his son Will, shared his work on the complexities of grading writing at the spring conference. His work was drawn from the profesional paper he completed while finishing his masters degree in English. Jake continues to help students develop their writing at the University of Montana's Writing Center. He'd like to hear your thoughts on grading writing: mrjakehansen@gmail.com.

just a B-, and a graded portfolio that keeps grades off of papers until the end of the term and then gives them a collective C isn't much better than just giving them C's along the way. Attempts to mix-and-match grading and not-grading are just faking it.

Alternatives to Grading Student Writing

There's a strong case to be made for doing away with grades altogether, and there are more and more institutions making this change. But most of the teachers I know are still asked to give students grades on a regular basis, sometimes as often as every week or two. Alternatives to conventional grading systems are harder to find than they should be, but they're out there (See my bibliography below). We need to talk more about alternative grading systems, invent them in ways that meet our individual needs and the needs of our individual classrooms. The idea grading systems are or should be standardized within a building or a district or a state is a dangerous myth.

The goal in setting up an alternative grading system is the alignment of your grading criteria with what you actually value from students in your classes. For me, this means an emphasis on participation. Most of the best teaching I've seen incorporates at least some aspects of process or workshop models, yet those models were undermined when grades were assigned based primarily on finished products. ("Participation" is often a vague ten-percent of a teacher's advertised point spread, but students rarely—if ever—receive any sort of formative or summative feedback in that category.)

Katie Wood Ray and Peter Elbow both argue for a shift toward grading students on participation. Ray explains,

> You see, we have to believe in the work we are asking students to do in our workshops. We have to believe that this work will help the most struggling writers and the most gifted writers to outgrow themselves, if they invest themselves in it. If we have faith in the work we ask students to do, then I believe we can have confidence in assigning grades based primarily on students' investment in this work. (Ray 229)

Elbow also advocates for a shift in what we are evaluating: "The crux is no longer that commodity I've always hated and never trusted: a numerical ranking of the quality of their writing along a single continuum. Instead the crux becomes what I care about most: the concrete behaviors that I most want students to engage in because they produce more learning and help me teach better" ("Ranking" 196).

The logistics of a participation based grading system are a little sticky at first, but I think they're far less sticky than the ridiculous rubric gymnastics I've seen teachers perform or trying to keep track of the differences between an 88% and an 89%.

One Solution: Contract Grading

"Contract grading" (a rather misleading term) usually involves some kind of list of mostly quantitative tasks that a student needs to perform to get a certain grade. Some contracts include more general categories of performance like "keeping up with reading responses" or "contributing to in-class/online discussion". Usually, some qualitative aspect is implied; reading responses that are completely vapid would need to be redone, contributions to discussion that didn't actually contribute anything don't count.

Attaching qualitative judgment to student work is still happening under these systems and the judgment is still coming from on high. But the emphasis is on whether or not a student did a thing instead of how well they did the thing…think credit/no credit instead of pass/fail. I also think the power dynamic is somewhat more honest with contracts, as Peter Elbow explains below:

I like the clarity of contracts. They force us to be concrete and overt about our criteria for grades, where conventional grading permits us to leave things more mysterious and tends to mask the differences of criteria between different teachers. Conventional grading often makes students feel a bit mystified, helpless, and even paranoid about what they will 'get' for the course. Contracts change the power relationship between teacher and students in an interestingly paradoxical way. On the one hand, the contract gives students more control; they can more easily know and choose their grade. On the other hand, the contract makes the power of the teacher more naked—in a way that I think is healthy. Contracts lead us to say more openly what is true but what sometimes gets masked: 'These are my decisions about what you have to do for various grades.' Conventional grading can lead teachers to send, or seem to send, the following message: 'I'm not deciding what counts for good grades; I'm just applying immutable standards or [what amounts to the same thing as far as power is concerned] community standards.' (Taking, 10)

Full Disclosure: I haven't had a chance to try contract grading yet; The Writing Center has thus far managed to avoid grades and grading (Please don't tell anyone about this, we're not sure it would last if the secret got out). I've included one version of the contract that I might use to teach ENEX 101 here at UM Missoula. Any grading criteria should come out of the specific context of the class, but I hope my criteria suggests one direction for alternatives to conventional grading systems.

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EXAMPLE CONTRACT

This semester, I'll be grading you on your ability and willingness to do the following. The grades below reflect my observations and evaluations about how well I think you've been doing in each category.

_____ USE RESEARCH TO INFORM YOUR WRITING:
-Are you learning about new things as you write your papers?
-Could you explain the research that you did for each essay? Does that research take each essay places it couldn't otherwise go?

_____ BE AN ACTIVE AND HELPFUL MEMBER OF YOUR WORKSHOPS:
-Are you prepared with all required work for every workshop?
-Do you give feedback that helps your fellow writers in substantial ways? Are their papers noticeably different as a result of your feedback?
-Do your fellow writers feel respected by you? Do they feel challenged?

_____ CONTRIBUTE TO OUR LARGER CLASS COMMUNITY
-Do you find important things to say (verbally and on-line) in our class discussions? Do you do this in every class session?
-Do you listen to--really listen, i.e. think about-- the important things other people say in those discussions? Do your contributions respond to these other ideas, or do you just wait for your turn to talk?

_____ READ AND RESPOND FOR MEANING
-Are you reading assignments in a way that lets you have things to say about them? Are you sharing those responses with our class (on-line, in discussion, etc.) in timely and effective ways? Do your responses go beyond "It was boring" or "I liked it"?
-After you've read for our class, could you explain the reading thoroughly to someone who hasn't read it?

___ RESPOND TO FEEDBACK AND PRACTICE REVISION
-Do you respond to feedback about your ideas? In class discussions, online, verbally in workshop, in subsequent drafts of your work? From workshop members? From me?
-Do your revisions take feedback (from workshop members, from me) into account?
-Do you revise (as in re-vision) your essays, or do you just correct mistakes and fix problems? Are revised drafts of your essays substantially different than previous versions?

____ CRAFT FOUR MAJOR INQUIRY PROJECTS
-Have you completed all major essays assigned so far to the satisfaction of the instructor?
-Do you understand the four genres those papers explore? Could you describe the genre to a student who hasn't written in it? Do your essays show your understanding of the genre?
-Do you take risks in your writing?

Your grades in these categories add up to a(n) ____ so far in this class. That grade can go up or down quite a bit from here on out. Feel free to talk with me about any grade-related questions or confusion.

Writing as Art

Donna L. Miller

When students publish their work, they learn to value writing in a different way. With student crafted poetry books or with single written pieces transformed into artistic images suitable for framing or gift-giving, students publish and celebrate their creativity. The Month with a Metaphor poetry project allows students to practice descriptive writing skills and teaches them to create simple marbleized backgrounds for embellishing their writing.

I call these short pieces, written snapshots because they capture vivid images of people, places, objects, weather conditions, and details that blend to record descriptive and memorable moments for future pleasure.

Adapting an idea I discovered in Russell Hill's "A Shepherd's Calendar" in his book Snapshot of My Brother (Dale Seymour Publications, 1982), I invite students to create a book of poetry, snapshots that capture each month of the year. When they start to write, I encourage them to do several snapshots, not to stop at one but to do at least five for each month. After all, someone taking pictures with a digital camera wouldn't expect all of the shots to be perfect portraits. Twenty-four photos might all end in deletions except two or three. The others might be ordinary, blurry, or lacking the artistic composition we seek in good art. The same is true of writing, so with a bunch, students can select the quality ones.

I encourage students to avoid inventing their snapshots, to instead write about places or events from their own experiences and memories. I want their writing to be genuine and meaningful, so I tell them to consider capturing a year of their life in review (maybe a senior year scrapbook), a year on the ranch or the job, typical holiday happenings, seasonal celebrations, and monthly rituals in the family's household. This can also be a place-based piece of writing that captures the identity of where you live, where you come from.

Regardless of their thematic choice, the focus with this project is on the months of the year and the changes in nature. Writers select one month at a time and concentrate on seeing and hearing and feeling that one month. The idea is not only to notice the weather but what it does to people, to ask how nature's transformations affect people. The best approach is to sit back and imagine a day in the middle of that month, then to write freely and quickly to capture the film of memories.

I caution students to look beyond a holiday if the month contains one; a month is not known entirely by its holiday, so while the holiday might figure into the snapshot, it shouldn't be the entire focus of the picture.

I often use this lesson to review figurative language and the rhetorical devices of poetry. To stimulate imagery-rich writing, I also offer multiple prompts to students. Poems like "Hockey" (from *Grab Me a Bus. . .and Other Award Winning Poems*) by Scott Blaine, "Autumn" (from *Heroes in Disguise*) by Linda Pastan, "Buttermints" (from *We Are Thunderstorm*) by Amity Gaige, and "Knoxville, Tennessee" (from *Knoxville, Tennessee*) by Nikki Giovanni work great.

Furthermore, we produce lists, where students just "call out" or share imagery connected to a month: January freezes nose hairs, February the days begin to lengthen, March means mud, etc. We even work through the senses: What are the smells, sights, sounds, tastes peculiar to the month?

Before they get typed for the books, all of the poems make the peer editing circuit; we actually sit in a circle, read each other's poems, and provide feedback and ideas for revision. After revision, the poems are read one more time for accuracy and creativity.

Donna brought examples to her workshop so participamts could see what students had done with some of the techniques they were trying.

Above, Merrilyne Lundahl gets some assistance with her marbelized paper from Donna Miller.

Next, students plan to decorate their books to match their themes or to reflect their interests. They use stickers, photographs, paintings, drawings, computer generated images, or other art.

Covers can reflect artistic flair as well. Some students might wish to create a collage of photographs, draw or paint a scene, generate computer graphics, or even marbleize the cover. To learn about the art and history of paper marbling, we visit www.suminagashi.com/history.html for highlights, then we engage in an art mini-lesson.

Art Procedures:

a. Layer about one inch of shaving cream onto a cookie tray or into a low profile box.

b. Level it out with a piece of cardboard or your fingers.

c. Squeeze small, multiple droplets of liquid water based paint directly on top of the shaving cream.

d. Then, with the handle of a small paint brush, a pointed stick, or a slender straw, swirl the paint. Create a design with concentric circles, stripes, half moons, paisley swirls, etc; however, do not push the paint too deeply into the shaving cream.

e. Lay the book cover or paper on top of the design and press down lightly but evenly. Pull the paper off. The shaving cream will appear all smeared.

f. Using a piece of stiff cardboard, a plastic ruler, or a drywall taping knife, scrape off the excess shaving cream in a clean, firm, and even swipe. Like magic, a marbled design remains behind.

For this project, I use Bare Book #1601 ($2.00) and BC16 Clear Adhesive Covers ($1.25). The books have 14 sheets (28 pages) of sturdy white paper, which provide two pages for artistically presenting each of the twelve months, with room for creating a title page, a contents page, a dedication, extra art, or even a thematic introduction or closure. I order books and covers from

Treetop Publishing
P.O. Box 320725
Franklin, WI 53132
Order Toll Free: 800-255-9228
FAX: 888-201-5916
www.barebooks.com

Completed student books are scored on

- Evidence of Revision
- Aesthetics and Creativity (complementary art, headings, eye-catching cover)
- Creative Writing

At the 4th Annual Rural Writing Conference, the "Writing as Art" workshop produced several poems in Quick Write fashion without any revision. Two of these drafts (from Merrilyne Lundahl and Kathleen Thompson) are included at right.

April

Waterfowl,
killdeer and
meadowlarks
have been back
nearly a month—
Shorebirds
just coming in.
Mud, dank and sweet,
nasal epiphanies:
someday I'll make
enough
money to pay taxes.
For now,
Transcendent
Mystery
Community
Beauty
Birds
to whom I pray.

Merrilyne Lundahl

Snow melting,

mud puddles forming

in clearing driveways.

Birds returning,

singing loudly

as we awaken

on crisp,
cool mornings.

Children polish

old bikes

that emerge

from stale smelling
sheds.

Kathleen Thompson

excerpted from **Writing Strategies Through Native Literature**

Dorothea M. Susag

Understanding by Design
Stage 1: Desired Results

(As you use these selections and ideas, you can make the following goals, questions, and understandings specific to each one)

Established Goals:

•Students will know and respond to specific Essential Understandings (particularly #1, #2, #5, #6)

•Students will understand, develop, and practice skills in Communication/ Writing Standards that apply for each selection and activity.

Understandings:

•Picture books, poems, fiction and non-fictional works reveal the very specific cultural, historical, geographical, and personal contexts of authors.

•Literature written by contemporary authors who are Native Americans can support the development of communication arts skills for all students at all levels.

•Literature written by contemporary authors who are Native Americans can help students build their knowledge of the Essential Understandings of Montana Indians.

•An author's own personal, cultural, and personal experience will influence an author's perspective. Consequently, stories and histories told by non-Indians may differ and contradict those told by individuals who have lived the stories.

•The tribal culture heroes are similar between tribes but they also differ significantly in terms of names, gender, physical appearance, stories, etc.

Essential Questions:

•How can each of the selections in this workshop be used to develop various traits of writing skills and modes, as well as writing for various audiences and purposes?

•How can these selections serve as models for students' own writing practices, in terms of any of the following: format and genre, purpose, ideas, organization, word choice and sensory imagery and figures of speech, fluency, voice, conventions?

•What content does each selection exhibit regarding tribal and individual diversity (Essential Understandings #1, #2) and specific federal Indian policies (Essential Understand #5)?

•What can students learn about the biographical background, the cultural and historical context, of each author?

•What is the perspective of the author or speaker? How does the perspective influence meaning?

•What is the tribal culture and landscape portrayed in the selection?

•How can different selections and authors work together to help students understand and think more critically about the influence of culture and history on individuals and communities and about ways people respond to those experienced?

•Who is the culture hero, trickster/transformer, in the story's tribal background?

Dorothea (Dottie) Susag is the author of Roots and Branches: A Resource of Native American Literature, Themes, Lessons, and Bibliographies. *Dottie taught at the secondary and college levels for twenty-five years and now works as a consultant and teacher trainer. She also assists the Office of Public Instruction in their work to meet the goals of Montana's "Indian Education for All" Initiatve. She can be reached at dotsusag@3riversdbs.net.*

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks: What is the evidence of understanding?
Students will be able to: / Students will know:

Stage 3: Learning Plan

Learning Activities and Resource using Poetry, Young Adult Historical Fiction and Fiction, Memoir, and Picture Books

(You can find annotations for most of the following major selections listed below on this website: http://montana.ascd.org" http://montana.ascd.org under Native American Literatures Educational and Historical Resources in the library of Dorothea M. Susag)

Dorris, Michael (Modoc). *Morning Girl*. New York: Hyperion Paperbacks for Children, 1994. 74 pages. ISBN: 1-56282-284-5

Ideas Activity:

Select a specific historical event. Using two to three resources dealing with the culture of the time and people, students can write a technical piece that describes the food, modes of transportation, housing, etc.

Word Choice Activity:

Locate sensory images - sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing. Make up your own with images from the landscape where you live.

Voice Activity:

What distinguishes the boy's voice from the girl's? How might a girl's story and tone differ from a boy's or is there no difference?

Endrezze, Anita (Yaqui). "The Girl Who Loved the Sky". *In Roots and Branches* (28-29) and *At the Helm of Twilight* (5-6) Seattle, WA: Broken Moon Press, 1992. ISBN: 0-913089-26-5

Writing Activity: A R.A.F.T.S. assignment regarding the imagery, tone, and theme (loss, change, and survival) in Endrezze's poem.

Role: You are a counselor in a middle school.

Audience: An eighth grader who has experienced a recent loss of parent or a friend due to divorce or death.

Format: A written dialogue that represents an interview between the counselor and the student that will be kept in a confidential file for the student's benefit.

Topic: Effective ways to work through and respond to the loss.

Strong Verb: Student: Tell what has happened in his/her life. Counselor: Describe/inform/explain ways young people might feel and respond, in such a situation using examples from *The Girl Who Loved the Sky.* Student: Conclude the dialogue with the student's choice of action that would best work for him/her.

Endrezze, Anita (Yaqui). "One Thing, Too Much." *At the Helm of Twilight* (86-87) Seattle, WA: Broken Moon Press, 1992. ISBN: 0-913089-26-5

Prewriting Activity:

Step #1: After reading the poem aloud and discussing the irony, ask students to cluster and create an idea map of each of the following phrases – 5 minutes for each phrase:

I love . . .
I'm afraid of . . .
I've lost . . .
I think I know this about . . .
(Example of one the teacher might suggest for the center of the idea map—Indians in Montana)
I don't know this about myself . . .

Step #2: Students will select one of the ideas produced in each cluster. They will provide a contradiction for each idea and put them both in a sentence that shows how our loving something good too much can hurt us, something that can hurt us so much that we are "like a burning woman calling for more wood".

Step #3: The sentence may be used as a thesis for an essay, a letter to themselves, a poem or a collage with contradictory images under the title: I love, or I'm afraid of, or I've lost, etc.

Writing Activity:

In preparation for writing in response to a particular selection of literature, ask students to do the same clustering activity using the name of a protagonist or antagonist in the center of the idea maps. For example, "Macbeth loves . . . . too much", "Willy Loman loves . . . . too much", "Fast Horse (in Fools Crow) loves . . . . too much".

Erdrich, Louise (Chippewa/German). *The Range Eternal.* Illustrated by Steve Johnson and Lou Fancher. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2002. ISBN: 0-786802-22-0

Expository Writing Activity:

•Define "treasures" - personal, family, community, country - what qualifies?

•Read *The Range Eternal* aloud. Ask what is the thesis? Discuss and make a list of ways the stove serves the family.

•Identify a treasured family object: a sewing machine, a hat, a ring, a saddle, sleigh bells, a cooking pot... anything is possible, but bring it to class if possible.

•Write a one sentence statement about the treasure, after the model about *The Range Eternal*.

•Following that statement, describe the object or artifact: size, weight, materials, who made it, how it was made. Identify and explain its uses or purposes, when and where and by whom. Include a story that centers on the object. Conclude with the value if this object to yourself - it may resemble the opening statement but shouldn't copy it.

Additional Activities:

1. Listen to additional poems about Treasures. Talk about what each poet does with the treasure: "Shoes" by Paul Zarzyski, "The Vacuum" by Howard Nemerov, "A Work of Artifice" by Marge Piercy, "Music Lessons" by Mary Oliver, "Abandoned Farmhouse" by Ted Kooser, "This is a Photograph of Me" by Margaret Atwood, "Mom's Yellow Pole" by Paul Zarzyski, and "Piano" by D.H. Lawrence.
2. An extended essay would include more of the following:
    - •5 senses description
    - •Words people say, dialogue, memories of interactions with the person connected to the object
    - •Deeds, actions, what did people do surrounding the object
    - •What does this item represent about what is important about life?
    - •What is the history of the treasure?
3. Write a poem about the treasure.
4. In considering language as a treasure, explain how this picture book can help us understand the way language loss (particularly through forced loss) and recovery might affect individuals and communities.
5. Research Allotment on specific reservations in Montana. What are the stories people in the communities tell? How did they survive or prevail despite the losses?

Medicine Crow, Joseph (Crow). *Counting Coup: Becoming a Crow Chief on the Reservation and Beyond.* Washington D.C.: National Geographic, 2006. 128 pp. ISBN: 0-7922-5391-4

Expository Writing Activity:

Read page 39-40 in Counting Coup where the old Crow man experiences frustration when the non-Indian store owner in Lodge Grass can't understand Crow. Read aloud from *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder, 32-33, where Laura reacts to Indians for the first time. Discuss the two author's different perspectives. Talk about possible consequences when culture and language differences create barriers to understanding.

R.A.F.T.S. writing assignment:

Role of Writer: An older person who has lived among the Indian people for many years and has heard about her experience and reaction to the Indians.

Audience: Laura, the character, or to the author, although the description of the following writing assignment would differ somewhat.

Format: Letter.

Topic: Based on your experience with the consequences of language and cultural differences (as you have learned through reading Joe Medicine Crow's memoir and the story on pages 29-30 in particular), write a letter to Laura.

Strong Verb: Explain to Laura how you understand her fear when she encountered people she had never met before. Explain how the Indians might have felt, and what they might have thought as they approached her home, for the purpose of helping her better understand and consequently respect these people. Explain how her slapping might have affected how the Indians felt, what they thought, and how they might have acted in the future. Explain how her version of the event might affect both Indians and non-Indians in the future. Suggest ways she might think, speak, and act differently, with more respect, while she still protects herself from situations that might be harmful.

Other Approaches to Teaching:

Connection to Essential Understandings:

#1 – Who are the Crow and other tribes from the region? What is their particular history in the last 150 years? What were their relationships between former enemies?

#2 – Who is Joe Medicine Crow as an individual within this tribal community? How is his personal experience unique?

#3 – What oral histories are revealed in this memoir? Chapter 9, (59-66); Chapter 12 "Little People" (83-94).

#5 – How did Federal Tribal Policies in the 20th Century impact Joe Medicine Crow and others in his community? Boarding School? Absence of wild game?

#6 – How does this story compare and contrast with stories told by non-Native people about the Crows, or about other Indian people as well? Battle of the Little Bighorn, stories of the Crow scouts, Chapter 11 (75-82).

Demonstration of Themes:

Counting Coup reveals all themes as defined and elaborated in *Roots and Branches* (10-35).

1. Remembering the Old Ways: What are the four types of war deeds required for an individual to become a chief? How does Joe Medicine Crow accomplish those deeds during WW II? Chapter 1 (9-12), Chapter 15 (107-117); Plains Indian Traditions, Chapter 3; Games, Chapter 5; Racing, Chapter 7; Ghosts, Chapter 8.

2. Home within Circles: Extended family, names, relationships, influence of his grandfather, listening to stories from elders.

3. Change and Growth: Training by grandfather Yellowtail (14-16); Baptist School (45-47); Public School and peer pressure to not be white, Chapter 10 (71); Strong Medicine Chapter 14 (101-106); College, Chapter 14; Crow Warrior in Germany, Chapter 15.
4. Between Two Worlds: (19, 31-32); specific references throughout the memoir.
5. Personal and Cultural Loss and Survival: Poverty, hunger, disease Chapter 4 (35-36); Return from Germany, Honoring, name change, giveaways, Chapter 16 (123).
Lifeways and Stereotypes: Story about the old Crow man in the store (39-40)– compare with a page from *Little House* or *ChichiHoo*.

Smoker, Mandy (Assiniboine/ Sioux). "Birthright . . for Carl Lithander." ***Another Attempt At Rescue*****. Brooklyn, NY: Hanging Loose Press, 2005. (46). ISBN: 1-931236-51-8**

Writing Activities:
R.A.F.T.S
Write a letter from Carl in response to the speaker in "Birthright." What would Carl remember, question, value?
Research and Expository / Persuasive Writing
Drought in Montana in the last century and its impact on those who live and make their living from the land.
Allotment and the Dawes Act causes and consequences for specific reservations and people in Montana
Homestead Acts causes and consequences
Norwegian Immigration causes and consequences
Creative Writing
Cluster and write a poem about what defines "home" for you.

Wallis, Velma (Athabascan). ***Two Old Women: An Alaska Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival*****. Seattle, WA: Epicenter Press, 1993. 145 pp. ISBN: 0-945397-18-6**

Listening and Writing Summaries
1. Read chapters aloud, asking students to listen without writing. After the reading, ask students to write a 5-minute summary of the chapter.
Summary for Students
Do: Listen, without taking any notes, to a 15-minute reading and write about 2 pages that includes the following:
- one or two sentences that identify the main characters, time, and place;
- brief explanation of the central event(s) and problem of the chapter;
- brief explanation of the major cause and/or consequence of the problem;
- one or two interesting details;
- a final summary sentence of the chapter that might lead into the ideas and events in the next chapter.

Do not:
Alter author's tone or details, include all details; just list names, places, characters, events.

Descriptive Writing:
2. Describe someone you know who is in their 70's or 80's. What does he/she say (include quotes), do (daily activities or interesting behaviors), look like? What difficulties does he/she face every day?
Expository and Narrative Writing:
3. Research a hard time in the life of your community (flood, blizzard, fire, drought) or in your family (disease, death, loss of job, injury). Show what happened (who, what, when, where, how, and why) and then how did you or individuals in the community get past it. Write a narrative about the event.
4. In a paragraph, finish the sentence "When I am lonely, I overcome it by...." and then finish your paragraph by explaining how it works.
Ideas and Organization Traits:
5. R.A.F.T.S. Imagine a character in the story, or imagine a person you will never meet – the leader's wife, a young warrior, another elderly woman or man. Imagine you are that person in place and time, and write a journal from one day and describe what you would see, hear, smell, touch? What would you wish, what would you learn?

MWP is one of 195 sites in the National Writing Project (NWP) network.

State Officers:

Heather E. Bruce, Director
Department of English, University of Montana
heather.bruce@umontana.edu

Donna L. Miller, Co-Director
English Instructor, Chinook High School
Millerd@chinookschools.org

Dave Christensen, Co-Director
5th Grade Teacher, Lolo School
christensens@montana.com

Staff :

Christa Umphrey
Technology Liaison & Publication Editor
montana.writing.project@gmail.com

Eileen Flannigan
Program Assistant
eileen.flannigan@mso.umt.edu

Montana Writing Project
University of Montana, LA 133
Missoula, MT 59812