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Technology and Writing

CONTENTS

The Practice of Teaching

- 4 ♦ "A Rationale for Technology Use in the Classroom" Casey Olsen
- 7 ♦ "Intellectual Nutrition for the Snack Food Junkie" Donna L. Miller
- 10 ♦ "Why Use Technology to Teach English" Michael Umphrey
- 13 ♦ "Wikis and Writing" Christa Umphrey
- 21 ♦ "Science and Technology Deepens Critical Reading and Writing Abilities" Dave Christensen

Teachers as Writers

- 16 ♦ "Autumn Shades " Donna Miller

Fresh Insight

- 3 ♦ "Confessions of s Wannabe Hasbeen TechnoNerd" Dave Christensen
- 17 ♦ "Fear Factor" Wendy Warrren

Announcements & Updates

- 2 ♦ Call for Submissions
- 4 ♦ MEA Sections and Keynote
- 8 ♦ Missoula Summer Institute Photo Essay by Casey Olsen
- 16 ♦ Renew Your Montana Writing Project Membership and Journal Subscription
- 18 ♦ Browning Summer Insititute Photos Essay by Robert & Wendy Warren

Montana Writing Project NWP

Multigenre Writing
Submission Deadline: December 1
Publication Date: January 1

Multigenre writing continues to increase in popularity and teachers are bringing it to younger audiences all the time. Though jumping into multigenre writing can initially seem like throwing yourself (and your students) into chaos, done effectively, multigenre assignments can develop many of the same skills as traditional assignments while accomplishing additional objectives and engaging students usually only interested in creative writing. Many teacher-researchers have advocated bringing into the classroom the multiple genres students see in their homes and in the outside world. Not only does this help strengthen students ability to write in various situations, it also creates a closer link between home and school literacies. In doing multigenre work, students still select topics, ask questions, and conduct in-depth research. They have to synthesize what they learn and present it in their writing. The difference is in how they decide that presentation may look. They have many more options. In his book *Blending Genre, Altering Style* Tim Romano introduced this type of writing saying “A multigenre paper arises from research, experience, and imagination. It is not an uninterrupted , expository monologue nor a seamless narrative nor a collection of poems. A mutigenre paper is composed of many genres and subgenres, each piece making a point of his own, yet connected by theme or topic and sometimes by language, images and content. In addition to many genres a multigenre paper may also contain many voice, into just the author’s. The trick is to make such a paper hang together.” So, what methods have you found that help students with the tricky organizational component of multigenre writing? What assignments work well as multigenre papers? What roadblocks have you encountered as you brought this into your classroom and how have you overcome them? Please consider sharing your teaching ideas, experiences, and resources.

The *Montana Writing Project Journal* welcomes submissions for any of the following areas. Of course there is also always room for quality work that doesn’t fit the categories or the current issue’s theme.

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 a paragraph or two that outline a successful lesson but might also materialize as lengthier pieces that explain a whole unit and give some theoretical background or support for your work.

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

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

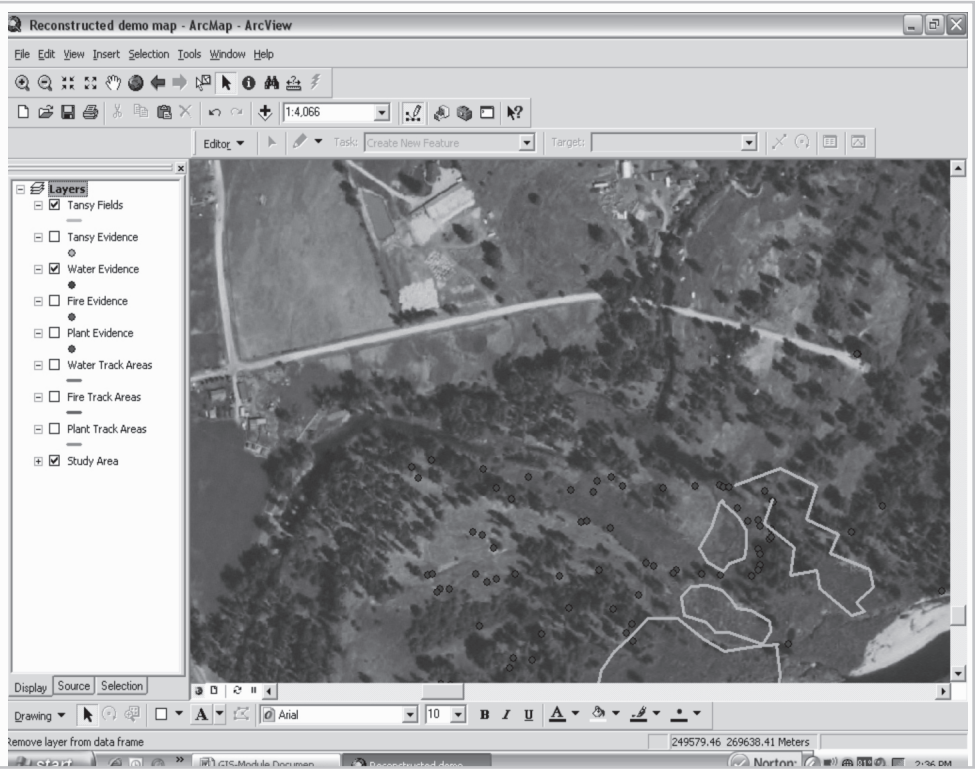
Book reviews: What titles have you found useful when working on writing? Consider reviewing one of your favorite texts to give others an idea of the content and approach they can expect from the author. We’d be especially interested in fairly new releases that others may not yet be familiar with.

Original Photography: Share images from your classroom, professional development, or photos that complement any of your writing submissions. 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.

<i>Upcoming issues</i>	New Teachers
Expository Writing	
Submission Deadline: March 1	Submission Deadline: March 1
Publication Date: April 1	Publication Date: April 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 files.
 - DO NOT imbed image files or diagrams in your text files. Please send them as separate attachments.
 - In general, manuscripts shouldn’t exceed 2,500 words.
 - Please list your name, address, academic affiliation, and e-mail address on your manuscript.



graphs created about the data. So, the map itself is a visual representation, but the multi-media aspect the idea of textured literacy comes into play as students write multi-modally rather than simply with text. The power of using the images, sounds, video, and graphs in combination with the written texts interact to tell a powerful story of tansy infestation at this RNA that could not have happened by using only written text. Given the digital-age and the knowledge-based economy our students will face, “using technologies, using different writing processes, researching in new forums and connecting critical thoughts in visionary new ways” (Snyder 1998) is a highly desirable and essential outcome. Jan Hawkins (1997) points out that “true knowledge understanding develops through exploration, rumination, interpretation, judgment, and the application of information. Thoughtful work on projects and problems requires roaming through complex resources, seeking inspiration, messing around, making missteps and mistakes, and experiencing serendipitous discoveries. This kind of student learning and the in-depth interactions with teachers that it entails requires time. The intelligent use of technology can help to provide that time.”

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The Context

This project provides an opportunity for students to use real-life problem solving skills utilizing spatial data analysis processes and solid scientific inquiry methodology for a constructive purpose. By deliberately working to find a solution to tansy infestation through GIS analysis, students will identify methods to help restore the ecological integrity of the site. Not only will these practices help the site, they will also help adjacent private and public land parcels by decreasing a noxious weed and reintroducing native plants. In addition, fuel reduction in the form of removing tansy biomass will reduce the threat of wildfire onsite as well as on adjacent private land.

This GIS-mapping project utilizes the concept of reference sites, serving as a model for developing goals for restoration and later, for evaluation of the success of the project. The resulting model could be utilized by the Forest Service for other riverine plant communities that share the same problems as the Bitterroot River site. Noxious weeds and undesirable non-native species are shared symptoms along the length of the Bitterroot River corridor and other Montana riverine systems.

Project Background

In fall 2006, students from Mr. Christensen’s fifth grade class at Lolo Middle School split the RNA into four quadrants, collecting data in each quadrant to help determine the level of noxious weed infestation and ultimately inform treatment plans to eradicate tansy populations. GPS tracks were taken around the RNA study area, tansy fields, and monocultures of Canadian thistle, cattails, and canary reed grass. GPS points and/or tracks were collected at each found instance of water, vegetation type, and evidence of burn to create additional data layers for analysis using ArcMap.

This data reinforces and deepens student ability to manipulate ArcGIS, allowing them to generate a more thorough, complete analysis of data layers, assisting them to answer the inquiry question: “What factors contribute to the continued and sustained propagation of tansy?” By identifying factors that impede or enhance the propagation of tansy, students will ultimately provide solutions for restoration of infested areas.

The Process

ArcGIS is a software program that allows for an image to be used as a context for data analysis. Layers of data can be brought in and laid on top of the image so that information can be extracted – causal relationships can be established. For example, to the right is an image of the RNA on which several layers of data were laid.

By looking at the column on the left, you can see the various layers of information. Tansy fields are circled in gold. The little dots are evidence of water. The idea then, in its simplest sense is to look at the relationship between where the tansy fields lie and other data. That other data includes varieties of vegetation, burned areas, and water. In this specific instance it is looking at where water lies in relation to where tansy grows.

Students used an adaptation of Kylene Beers “It Says – I Say,” from her book *When Kids Can’t Read: What Teachers Can Do*, a “visual scaffold that helps students organize their thoughts as they move from considering

<i>Why did Goldilocks break Baby Bear’s Chair?</i>		
Question:		
The Data Layers Say Find information from viewing the data layers that will help you answer the question -the facts	I Say Think about what you know about that information and write it down	And So Combine what the data layers say with what you know to come up with an answer
<i>The story says she sits down on the baby’s chair but she’s no baby .</i>	<i>I say that baby chairs aren’t very big because they’re for babies and she is bigger and weighs more.</i>	<i>And so she is too heavy for it and it breaks.</i>

what’s in the text to connecting that to their prior knowledge” (165).

Students use the chart to make those inferences when analyzing data layers in ArcGIS. An abbreviated chart is shown below. Students rely on the visual data represented rather than the traditional text of words to make inferences about the data. A question always drives each inference

For example, the inquiry question might be “How does the presence of burned trees, snags, branches and stumps effect the growth and spread of tansy?” In order to answer that question, students must make inferences about the relationship between the burns and tansy? So they will “turn on” the tansy information like that seen in the map above as well as all evidence of burn which shows up as areas with lines drawn around that had been burned as well as little dots (flaming orange colour of course) that were brought in from using GPS units that recorded each sighted instance of burn. From that information, students draw inferences about the causal relationship between burn and tansy.

Hence, the reading component is a complex inference making process using visual rather than textual cues. Students are required to look at the visual cues represented by the data marks in relation to other cues and



The images above are from the 2007 Summer Institute in Missoula. They were taken by assistant co-director Casey Olsen.

Confessions of a Wannabe HasbeenTechnonerd

Some years ago I played on a men’s basketball team, sages ranging between 28 and 52, from young and supple to geezer and creaky. At the time I was around 40 and amazed at the vitality of the older guys on the team. Now I am the creaky geezer! Well, only one of us had played ball during high school, hence our team name, the Wannabe Hasbeens. As a rag-tag fugitive team, we didn’t know what we were doing but played anyway. I recently realized that I approach the use of technology the same way.

Everyday I begin my 45-minute 7th and 8th grade classes with a “Ritual Read” and “Writing into the Day.” Writing into the Day in my classroom might run the gamut from listening to a podcast or song, to watching a TeacherTube video or reading a piece of poetry. Students use the day’s text as a catalyst for a 3 minute quickwrite. They might connect personally with the text and tell the story or respond reflectively to the piece. Sometimes a completely creative piece will emerge from the young minds, sparked by something from the text.

Anyway, I was wandering all over the place with my own response to a Writing into the Day that I just happened to work on through all three, morning 7th grade classes, trying to tease out the reasoning behind why I jump in and try things all the time especially when it comes to using technology. I finally wrote my way into the realization that it’s the fact that I do not have to know all the answers before I try something. I do not have to know all the in’s and out’s of how to use a software application. I do not have to know how to fully use a piece of hardware. If that were the case, I would never do anything with technology. And, students have a knack for maneuvering through the muck that holds me back. Thank God for the students!

Over the last five years we have tried on MovieMaker, PowerPoint (not the traditional use but rather a multimodal approach to make a statement), Web Portfolios, ArcGIS mapping, blogging, and Wiki’s. We collected scientific data using PDA’s and GPS’s and presented at Technology Conferences and Watershed Celebrations And, all that was done with my fifth-grade students (I just moved back to 7th and 8th grade after eight years away).

Now I am going to venture into the realm of podcasting. I don’t have a clue what to do, but I bought the microphone. I have the laptop with recording software. Students will provide the stories that need telling. Stories from lived experience, stories about what is right and not right in their worlds. Stories that entertain, make us think, make us cry. To me it’s a no brainer that podcasting will give their voices a wide audience. I don’t quite know what I need to do yet, but I’ll figure it out – with the students’ help of course!

Dave Christennsen

CONNECT WITH THE MONTANA WRITING PROJECT AT MEA
BELGRADE, MONTANA
OCTOBER 18-19, 2007

Thursday Sessions

TIME	ROOM	SECTIONAL TITLE	PRESENTER
8:00-8:50	IS 19	Assessing Writing by Genre	David Christensen
9:00-9:50	IS 19	Journal Writing in the Primary Grades	Nancy Linnell
10:00-10:50	IS 19	Experiencing the Fun of Language	Nancy Linnell
11:00-12:50	IS Resource	Identities and Writing	Heather Bruce
1:00-2:50	IS Resource	Meeting in the Middle: Conferencing	Caroline Simms
2:00-2:50	IS 19	Are you Frustrated with Mandates?	Casey Olsen
2:00-2:50	IS LIB	Adding to the Writer’s Toolbox	Donna Miller

Friday Sessions

8:00-8:50	IS 19	Adding to the Writer’s Toolbox	Donna Miller
9:00-9:50	IS LIB	Infuse IEFA Using Full Circle	Wendy Warren
9:00-9:50	IS 19	The Value of Reflection	Donna Miller
10:00-10:50	107 (Band)	The Power of Language and	Linda Christensen
10:00-11:50	IS LIB	Writing Feature Articles	Wendy Warren
12:00-12:50	IS 18	An Open Conversation with Linda Christensen	
1:00-1:50	IS 19	The Politics of Correcting Student Writing	Linda Christensen
2:00-3:50	IS 19	Montana Writing Project Live!	Heather Bruce

Hospitality Room
Belgrade Intermediate School
Room 18

MWP Keynote Address

Linda Christensen
The Power of Language and the Language of Power

Friday, October 19 10:00 – 10:50 am
High School Band Room



Linda Christensen is a renown teacher of writing. Her career has included teaching high school English and serving as the Language Arts Curriculum Specialist in Portland, Oregon. She is currently an editor of Rethinking Schools and co-director of the Oregon Writing Project at Lewis and Clark College. She is also the author of *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word* and co-editor of *Rethinking School Reform: Views from the Classroom* and *Rethinking Our Classrooms*.

Linda’s articles have appeared in numerous journals and she has given keynote addresses at national and international conferences about her work on literacy and social justice.

perhaps transform literacy practices (Snyder 2001). Jeffrey Wilhelm (2000) wrote that “literacy has always been about using the most powerful cultural tools available to make and communicate meaning. At the present, those tools happen to be multimedia tools that use video, graphics, sound, and traditional text in a hypermedia format. If we or our students don’t know how to critically use these tools to their fullest meaning – constructive potential, then we – and they – are illiterate” (7). The sooner students begin producing multi-modal texts – the craft of inventing, shaping, producing, and delivering text, audio, video, and images purposefully – and making meaning from multi-modal texts, the more empowered they will be to write their world – write critically and personally about issues important to them, write to solve problems and make sense of the world, write to tell stories that should be told.

A definition of twenty-first century literacy offered by the New Media consortium (2005) is “the set of abilities and skills where aural, visual, and digital literacy overlap. These include the ability to understand the power of images and sounds, to recognize and use that power; to manipulate and transform digital media, to distribute them pervasively, and to easily adapt them to new forms” (8). Henry Jenkins, et al. in their occasional paper, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* aptly place digital literacies within the framework of current literacy practices. “New media literacies include the traditional literacy that evolved with print culture as well as the newer forms of literacy within mass and digital media. Much writing about twenty-first century literacies seems to assume that communicating through visual, digital, or audiovisual media will displace reading and writing. Before students can engage with the new participatory culture, they must be able to read and write. Just as the emergence of written language, the emergence of new digital modes of expression changes our relationship to printed texts” (3).

Prevailing best practices for teaching literacy and new technologies will empower students to construct meaning from and with both print and non-print texts (satellite imagery, video, images, audio), critically and personally, situating content learning within a classroom that is student-centered, rich in content, of high quality and engaging to all students.

The Story Continues

I was fortunate enough to meet Julie Schreck, Education Outreach Coordinator for the Bitterroot National Forest a few years ago. She talked about a 40 acre RNA down by the Bitterroot River that would work as an outstanding location for students to do environmental education studies. My confused look when she said RNA was cleared up when Julie explained that RNA is an acronym for Research Natural Area. One of the principle functions of a RNA is to provide reference conditions or benchmarks for management of other Forest Service lands. This particular site happens to butt against the Lee Metcalf Wildlife Preserve and Bitterroot River. However, the ecological integrity of the site has been affected by the introduction of non-native species in the native vegetation communities. The biodiversity characteristics and natural processes have been altered from those found at the site prior to settlement of the Bitterroot Valley.

Now, Jeff Crews is Co-Director of GTech, a grant-funded program at the University of Montana. The program works to bring geo-spatial technologies into the classroom – a much more depth-filled version of the original EOS Education Project. I was blessed to be chosen as a participant for GTech’s one-week summer institute designed to immerse participants in geo-spatial technologies and ultimately elicit a project module incorporating GIS. What follows is an encapsulation of that project as it relates to reading and writing with technology.

The Research Natural Area Background

Poker Joe Demonstration Site (Research Natural Area – RNA) is important to the national RNA program because it captures a major western riverine system in the Rocky Mountains. In the western United States, most land along major riverine systems is under private ownership. The Forest Service acquired this parcel of land from the Bureau of Land Management, and the site is unique compared to the typical vegetation types administered by the Forest Service in this region. Originally recognized for its forest bottomland/marsh vegetation, the RNA, at the time of establishment, was in reasonably intact condition. Although the site is small by RNA standards (40 acres), early RNA evaluations recognized the difficulty in finding wetland sites in western Montana that were large in extent. In addition, the adjoining Lee Metcalf Wildlife Refuge essentially contributed to the effective size of the unit, as the refuge was also expected to be managed to maintain its natural conditions.

The RNA is part of a national network of natural areas that have been established by the U.S. forest Service to provide a representative range of undisturbed sites for research, monitoring, biodiversity protection, and as reference areas for management activities on public lands administered by the USDA Forest Service. Normally, the natural areas will be retained in a virgin or unmodified condition, “. . . except where measures are required to maintain a plant community which the area is intended to represent . . . “ (36 CFR 251.23) – Code of Federal Regulations. This module assists with this provision because of its implications for the Bitterroot River RNA, whose vegetation communities have been highly altered in the past decade by noxious weed infestation.

Science and Technology Deepens Critical Reading and Writing Abilities

Dave Christensen

The Story Begins

Several years ago I was asked to participate in an EOS Education Project (Earth Observing Systems) workshop at the University of Montana. A software program called ArcView that used images taken by satellites and data collected using GPS units for analysis had been developed to solve real-world problems. I remember being simultaneously overwhelmed and blown away by the possibilities and steep learning curve.

A good friend, Jeff Crews, was Co-Director of the EOS Education Project and we met for breakfast every Friday. Needless to say, I had a ready and steady supply of information as well as resources to tap into when using the technology with students. Jeff and I brainstormed an inquiry project that brought together 5th graders and kindergarteners to look at safe ways of getting to school. This was the first of many collaborations over the years which have evolved into meaningful learning opportunities for students involving technology and GIS Geographic Information Systems.

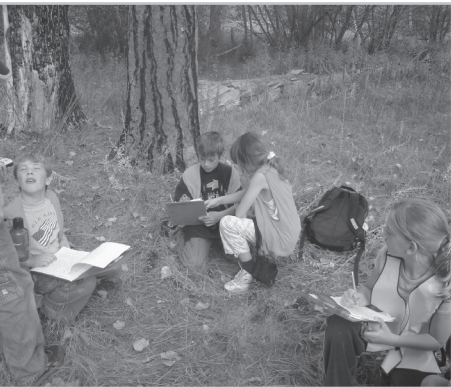
The Rationale

Kathy Yancy, President of NCTE stated in an interview that she was “not a big fan of learning a technology that doesn’t have either some direct potential for transfer into another site or doesn’t have some potential for generalizability.” I agree because everything we do with our teaching must be purposeful with a strong rationale supporting the teaching contexts we create.

The Adolescent Literacy policy research brief produced by The National Council of Teachers of English talks about how adolescents “begin to develop new literacy resources and participate in multiple discourse communities in and out of school” (James 3). Tapping into those literacies, students engage with values that they bring with them into the school and allows teachers to use them to help create meaning. School literacy programs that promote adolescent literacy through research-based teaching practices recognize engaging students with real-world literacy practices and affirming multiple literacies as two of six key concepts necessary for student success (James 4).

Students need to learn to participate actively, productively and ethically in their lives beyond school calling for the intelligent and informed integration of the use of the new information and communication technologies. To move beyond narrowly defined accounts of literacy to ones that capture the complexity of real literacy practices in contemporary society, we must achieve the broader goal of literacy education to produce students who are prepared to contribute actively, critically and responsibly to a changing society.

As Wilhelm (2000) points out, “the foundational competencies of reading, critical interpretation and composing are more important than ever, and the effective ways of teaching these things are more important than ever” (7). Students must be prepared for the learning and literacy challenges that await them they are facing a more comprehensive notion of what it means to be literate. Hence, teachers must take account of the complex ways in which the use of information and communication technologies influence, shape, and



Dave (pictured above) currently teaches middle school Language Arts in Lolo and serves as co-director of the Montana Writing Project. In the top photo, Christensen’s 2006-07 fifth grade class at Lolo Middle School collects data from each of the four quadrants of their Research Natural Area (RNA), to help determine the level of noxious weed infestation. Below is a section of the RNA the students investigated. The area borders the Bitterroot River.



Students in Casey’s classes do some of their writing, reading responses, and discussion on their class blog. (Photographs above and on the cover taken by Casey Olsen.)

A Rationale for Technology Use in the Classroom

Casey Olsen

By the time you read this, it’s a good possibility that MySpace.com could rank among the top twelve countries in the world in terms of population. Wrap your mind around that thought for a moment. According to multiple web sources, as many as 230,000 people join MySpace daily to connect with friends, make new ones, and discuss various aspects of life. It goes without saying that our students live in an entirely different world when it comes to technology in comparison to even students from the previous school year. Although statements like “our students live in a whole new world” are becoming cliché, the influence of technology and the internet is most definitely here to stay.

Still, most public school districts limit the amount of contact students have with fairly recent technological breakthroughs such as email, instant messaging, and social networking websites (MySpace, Facebook, Friendster, etc.). Understandably, districts intend to limit the distraction, danger, and liability these advances could legitimately or perceivably pose. Online predators, identity theft, and the relative ease with which students can even accidentally come into contact with mature and offensive content is enough to make any teacher or administrator cringe, not to mention the potential for students to intentionally abuse their access to available technology. These are real issues that real teachers, administrators, and parents deal with every day issues that can seem overwhelming in a public school setting and, so far, a hassle that the majority of public schools have avoided altogether.

From outside this deafening silence of avoidance, occasional voices spring forth to offer alternative perspectives. In the twentieth-anniversary addition of his book *Writing: Teachers & Children at Work*, Donald Graves notes that every study he has conducted since his original research “... confirmed that we underestimate what students can do.” Later, he goes on to say that “... [w]e teachers need to move around, showing children that we are interested in their texts.” But what exactly is included under this umbrella-title “text” in the 21st century? Just as it has occurred in our past, our notions of “texts” and “compositions” have evolved, but all can still be defined as creations and expressions of language online publications, digital film compositions, and intricate video game storytelling, just to name a few, have flooded our literary world, and all have writing and composition at their core.

Wendy, a twelfth-grade student, offers perhaps the most provocative question arising from all this technological opportunity: “How can you ever realize the positive outcomes (of technology) if you never give us the opportunity to try? You need to trust us.” And perhaps we do. Our students were born immersed in technology, and we, the adults, are “digital immigrants” amongst “digital natives”.

Likewise, the world that these young people inherit will be technologically advanced. Craig Barrett, chairman of the board for Intel Corporation, says that young people today will “be challenged to analyze information, collaborate and communicate their ideas using an ever-changing array of technology.” This message of technology use as a preparation for the future is echoed by Cassie, another twelfth-grade student, when she says that school “is supposed to prepare students for the real world, so why not bring the real world into the classroom?”

The challenge then for the teacher is to find challenging and relevant applications of available technologies for the students but at the same time satisfy administrative and curricular mandates. In an article entitled “Educators Got Game” appearing in the October 2007 issue of *NEA Today*, language arts and literature teacher Brock Dubbels contends that these technologies “are merely tools that help teachers achieve pre-established curricular goals.” That explanation assuages the administrative and curricular end of the spectrum, but what about the students?

Donald Graves writes that “in this rush to test children on ‘intake,’ their sense of self expression is often lost. I have learned that writing

“The secret, perhaps, is to never be complacent... because the evolution never stops. Perhaps only then will we be able to keep our students interested, to keep the classroom relevant, and to keep them writing...”

flourishes when children’s expression is valued in all its forms.” Now in the twenty-first century, technological expression is definitely one of these promising forms. Weblogs or blogs, for instance, allow students to hold online discussions and voice their thoughts on virtually any topic imaginable. According to Jake, a twelfth-grade student, “Blogs make what would be a noisy classroom discussion where only a few would be heard into an organized stack of opinions and viewpoints. We all get to be heard.” Likewise, webpage design and wiki formats allow students to express themselves multi-dimensionally with music, recorded voice, photos, graphics and, best of all, writing.

There is a revolution afoot in classrooms across the nation a technological revolution that is emerging in classroom after classroom and we have plenty of reasons to throw our hats in the ring. We as educators are behind our students in the technological learning curve; but, with an open and investigative mind, we can catch up. The secret, perhaps, is to never be complacent, to continue to venture forth even after we find something technological that works because the evolution never stops. Perhaps only then will we be able to keep our students interested, to keep the classroom relevant, and to keep them writing, and that may be the best reason there is.

Want To Get Started?

One of the best ways to get started with technology in your classroom is to start a classroom blog. Blogger.com is an easy site in terms of where to begin. A class blog can be set up for an unlimited number of students, and you as the teacher can have multiple blog pages (which helps if you teach multiple grade levels). It’s simple to sign up and takes very little time to get the hang of.

Some tips for classroom blogging:

- Be sure to set your blog so that it cannot be viewed on blogger’s directory. This will keep your class from coming into contact with people from the outside.
- If you wish, you can set your blog to “invitation only,” which allows the teacher to restrict the blog’s use to only those students the teacher invites.
- You may want your students to use anonymous display names when they set up their profiles. This way, students can speak their mind freely without the pressures of high and middle school politics. Students can give the teacher a note with their first name and their display name written on it so that the teacher may keep track of who is who.
- Consider posting discussion questions once per week, which allows students time to find access to computers if your district is limited in terms of technology.
- Remember that the blog serves to support classroom activities, so a discussion question from current reading is a great way to get started.
- Current events are also a great discussion topic (“What’s your take on the Michael Vick controversy?”), as are lists (“Name your top 10 favorite movies and explain why,” etc.)
- Students can post their writing on the blog to receive feedback, much like peer-editing.
- Consider creating a poetry corner post, where students can post, share, and receive feedback on their own poetry.
- Remove length requirements from posts, instead ask students to respond once to your question, then at least twice to two of their peers. They may post more if they wish, but students tend to run with this technology regardless of requirements. Simply stress that you want honest and thoughtful responses.
- Join your students in posting in order to model honest and thoughtful response strategies.
- Leave all posts on your blog site throughout the year as documentation of students’ growth. You may restrict responses on old posts at any time you wish.

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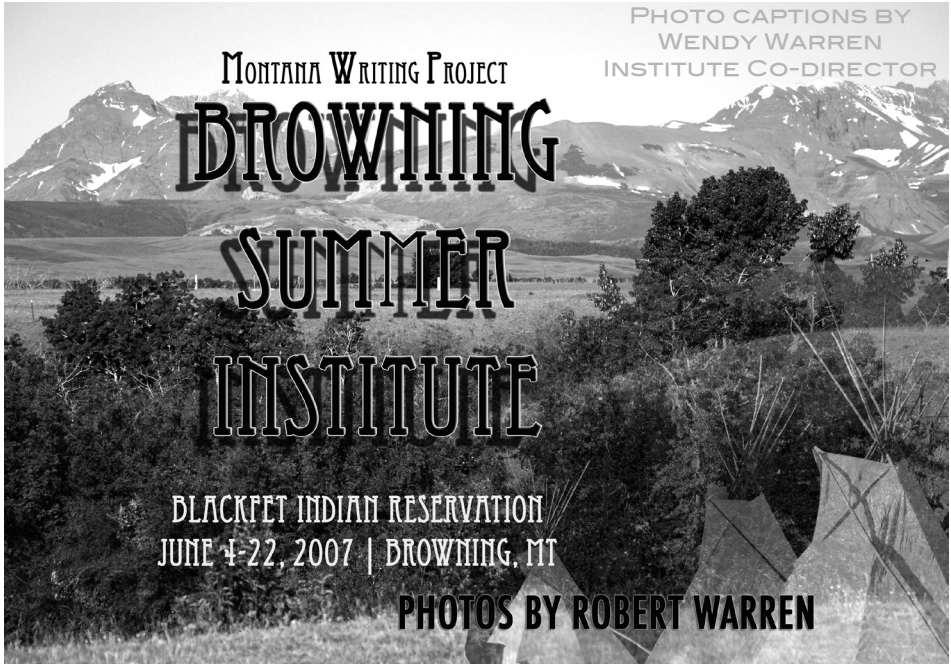
Casey Olsen teaches language arts at Columbus High School in Columbus, Montana. He serves as co-director of the Montana Writing Project Summer Institute-Eastern. Send your comments, questions, and suggestions to Casey Olsen at cougarenglish@gmail.com.



Above, Rusty Tatsey’s niece, Terese, shares a calendar stick with us. In a study she is doing, she is finding the calendar stick to be quite accurate compared to modern equipment that measures weather conditions and the passage of time. The measurements on the stick even accommodate for leap year.



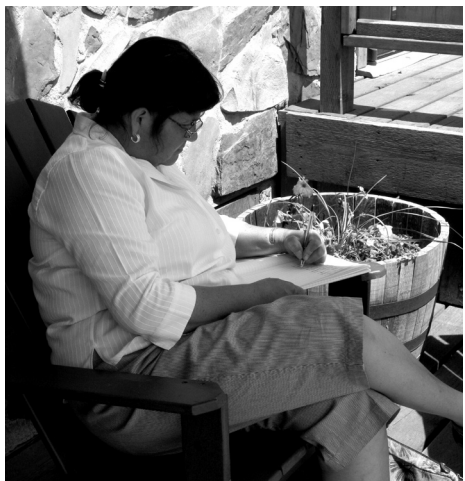
Above, Joe Kipp and Missy Worthy listening to George’s stories.



Below, Rusty Tatsey shares ceremonial objects, explaining the significance of each.

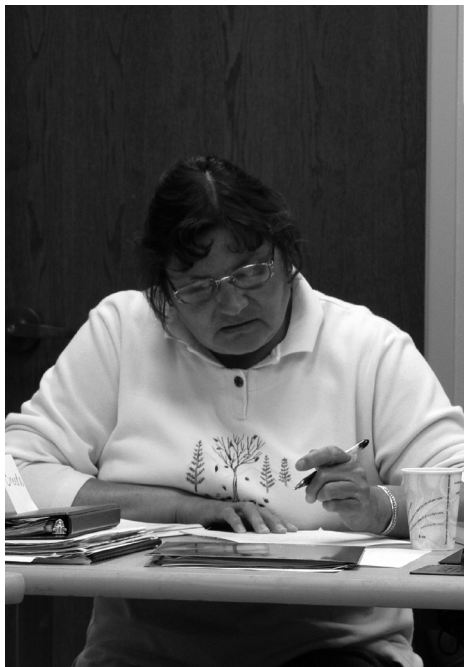


Below, Brenda Johnson on a writing marathon in downtown Browning.



“Think about obstacles and anything that gets in the way of Native children learning. The Blackfeet called themselves the Real people—Niitsitapi. Many of the children do not feel like Real People. How can we teach them to be Real People again?”
--Kathy Kipp,
Institute Co-Director

Below, Brenda Johnson “writes into the day” during the Browning Summer Institute held at Blackfeet Community College.



At left, we joined together in the annual BCC Anthology reading outside the buildings of Blackfeet Community College. We parted ways, feeling proud of the work we had accomplished together.

“It’s bound to be explosive when your children’s minds are at stake.”
Woody Kipp,
Institute Co-Director

Below, Kathy Kipp and Donna Sommerfield, both Browning Public School teachers, work on their writing. In the background is an allotment map of the Blackfeet Reservation at the time of the Dawes Act.



Above, one of the highlights of the Browning Summer Institute has been a two and a half day tipi encampment, held at the ranch of Kathy and Joe Kipp. The group is listening to the stories of George Goodstriker, a Blood elder from Canada. In the background is Joe and Kathy’s son’s painted tipi.



Above, George Goodstriker and Rusty Tatsey, a teacher in Browning Schools, share stories.

“I don’t prompt them to look for certain elements beforehand; I allow the inquiry process to work...They generally notice that effective design helps to organize the information, so as to enhance the reader’s comprehension and to facilitate the eye’s movement or flow. They further recognize that the writing, graphics, and design work together to make the piece resourceful.”

Intellectual Nutrition for the Snack Food Junkie

Donna L. Miller

Something about junk food satisfies and comforts us; we crave the fats, corn syrup solids, or salts they offer and ignore the potentially harmful side effects. But have you ever stopped to read the ingredient list of your favorite snack food? You’d need an advanced degree in chemistry or in nutrition to translate many of those labels. For instance, what is monosodium glutamate, acidophilus, rapeseed, or a medium-chain triglyceride? Perhaps the better questions might be, what are these ingredients doing in my food and what are their effects on my body?

I use this exact scenario to stimulate my students’ curiosity and to begin the process of inquiry in a technical writing project. And with the internet at their fingertips, those answers are within easy reach.

Prior to the day they bring in their favorite snack to peruse its label, I will have made available a variety of technical writing documents. Together we define technical writing and its common purposes, tone, point of view, and style. Then, in small groups with a document in hand, students will discuss what makes the document effective. I don’t prompt them to look for certain elements beforehand; I allow the inquiry process to work.

After their inquiry sessions, students orally report out their findings while I record their observations, which usually fall into three categories: elements of design (headings, font variations, bulleted lists, white space), features of text (clear, concrete, detailed, factual information presented in an objective, formal tone free of opinion and jargon), and use of graphics (color blocks, line art, or pictures to add meaning and aesthetics to the page). They generally notice that effective design helps to organize the information, so as to enhance the reader’s comprehension and to facilitate the eye’s movement or flow. They further recognize that the writing, graphics, and design work together to make the piece resourceful.

With this knowledge about technical writing, students have a model for presenting their own research. I tell them to select one esoteric ingredient from their snack food and to discover what it is, why the product contains that item, and what impact that ingredient might have on the body. Not all students will select a nasty preservative or chemical, since some will choose to research dextrose or niacin, unaware of that ingredient’s identity. As they visit various websites in their research, students will print information, noting the authorial or source details necessary for eventual citation and documentation purposes.

Students will present their findings in a tri-fold informational pamphlet, organizing it for maximum readability. Microsoft Office Publisher, found on most school computer networks, provides templates for simplifying this task. With the Publisher program launched, the student simply selects Publications for Print and then clicks on Brochures. From here, students will choose a template, then insert text and make color, graphics, and design choices.

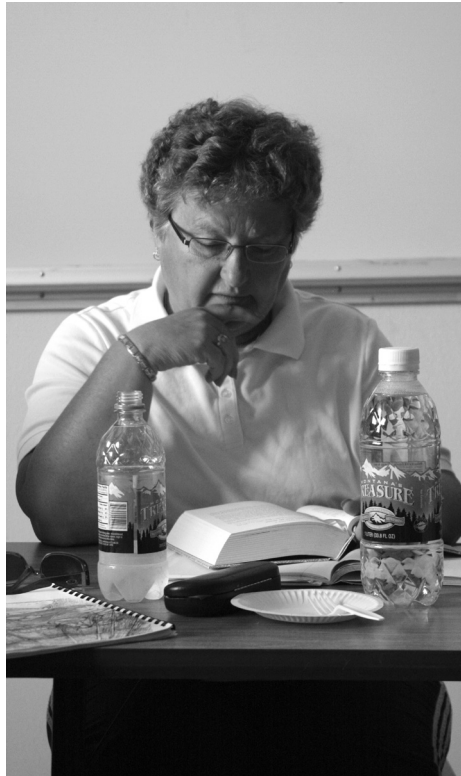
We assemble the finished products in a display, offering intellectual nutrition for other students and providing authentic publication for the writers.

Check out the new and improved Montana Writing Project website!

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

- find background information about the Writing Project
- keep track of upcoming events
- locate resources
- contact officers & staff
- find useful links

At right, Teresa Tekulve listens intently as Christine Gunvaldson reads from a piece she composed during a writing invitation. Summer institute encourages teachers to develop and give time to their own writing over the four week course.



Above, Kathleen Thompson reflects during a morning writing activity at the 2007 Montana Writing Project Summer Institute held in Missoula. The institute took place on campus at the University of Montana and challenged its participants to try new writing strategies they might bring to their classrooms.



At left, Summer Institute participants Nathan Miller, Jennifer Burdette, and Bridget Royce have lunch in the sunshine in between scheduled activities.



Above, Bridget Royce and Meagan Newberry take part in a demonstration of promising classroom practices.

Below, enjoying a moment in the shade, Meagan Newberry and assistant co-director Claudia Crase anticipate a readaround at the final writing marathon. Summer Institute forges deep, supporting connections between teachers of a variety of grade levels and content areas.



Fear Factor

Wendy Warren

Last time I was in Missoula, I was browsing in Rockin' Rudy's and saw a refrigerator magnet with an Eleanor Roosevelt quote: "Do one thing every day that scares you." I smiled and nodded, agreeing with a line that I can now take for a walk—a line that simply would have left me puzzled a few years ago. Lately it seems to have become my life's motto...quite accidentally, but one scary situation has led to another and here I am, living a life that parallels the title of a book a friend recommended: *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. Great title, but too scary to read.

I was in Missoula for a Montana Writing Project Technology Institute. I'm far from a technology wiz; I can word process and do simple layout, and I recently put together my first power point presentations. I consider myself a bit behind the curve. So agreeing to participate in this institute felt a bit, well, scary. People were talking about podcasts and wikis and things I had heard of but knew absolutely nothing about.

What I did know was that my participation in the National Writing Project's E-Anthology had been one of the highlights of my Summer Institute experience, because it provided me with something that wasn't so scary—an anonymous audience for my writing. That's just what I needed as I put pen to paper—okay fingers to keyboard—for the first time in a l-o-n-g time. I pronounced to this national audience that I was searching for my voice; I wondered if anyone out there in cyberspace had seen it. And the gentle responders on that year's "E" did what they do best—helped me see that, like that "man behind the curtain," Oz was there all the time. He wasn't great and powerful yet, but he was there. And that first response, where someone else saw something that was invisible to me, gave me the courage to keep on writing and posting.

Now I'm a responder on the E-Anthology—a member of the "E-Team," hoping to "pay it forward" as I spend a few hours a day during the summer responding to the writing of teachers in NWP Summer Institutes all over the country. In that role, I strive to plant the same seeds of courage that have now taken root in me.

The E-Anthology is a giant blog, although at the time I began using it, I had no idea what a blog even was. Through my experiences there, I have learned the value of having a place to post a piece of writing or to float an idea and get feedback and responses from readers I might not otherwise have had access to. And, in true NWP form, I know that what is valuable for me as a writer will also be of value to my students. But I've been dragging my feet. No teacher in my school district has a blog for their classes. There isn't any kind of district policy for their use—and a strict "no internet" rule has made me even more reluctant to take the time to learn how to begin.

So when I heard that Dave Christensen and Christa Umphrey had received an NWP Technology grant and would be hosting an institute, I felt a nudge. Here was a chance to get support from some people who have been "messing around" in the tech world a lot more than I have. Casey Olsen decided to join us, and all three of them had already created blogs, either for their classrooms or to provide a space for us to have the online conversations that began our institute.

"Here I go again," I thought. "They all know what they're doing, and I'm going to be running to catch up." I was scared, but I wanted to learn.

So I went, and I learned. I watched as Casey, sitting beside me, set up not only a beautiful blog site for his students to use, but then linked that site to a wiki, where each of his students will compile an online portfolio. Yikes. I can't wait to see his high school kids take that to places we can't even imagine.

And in the time it took him to do all of that, I created a simple blog site for my class. For me, that felt like an accomplishment. I can always use my age as an excuse.

I'd like to use the blog to have online conversations with my students, providing the quieter kids a forum for speaking their truths—or at least for getting a word in edgewise. My main goal, however, is to create a "mini E-Anthology," where my students can post their writing and get anonymous responses from their classmates. Perhaps a blog will be the sunlight that sparks the photosynthesis necessary for these young writers to grow.

I don't know whether my district will even allow my students to use the site I created. We were careful to select a site—www.21classes.com--where only students in my classes will be able to log in, and where I can monitor each posting and response before it goes up. I hope that is a high enough level of security that my administration might consider it.

And the jury is still out. But guess what? As behind as I thought I was, I'm a little ahead of the tech people in my district. They haven't given my site their blessing yet, and I'll probably forget how to do everything while I'm waiting for their answer, but it felt good when my building tech person emailed to say, "Great job pushing us into an area that is a little out of our comfort zone." Me. The scared one.

Wendy Z. Warren lives off the grid, sometimes a daunting experience, with her husband, two Samoyeds and two cats in a small cabin on a lake north of Whitefish. She teaches writing to Columbia Falls seventh graders, making each school day somewhat unnerving, and is co-founder of Full Circle Curriculum and Materials, an organization to help teachers implement IEFA--work that can feel intimidating.

Additional Wiki Resources

Wikis in Plain English video
<http://www.commoncraft.com/video-wikis-plain-english>
This brief little four-minute video gives a simple and clear overview of what exactly a wiki is and how it works. Great for introducing the technology to students or even just getting a clearer grasp yourself.

Wide Open Spaces: Wikis, Ready or Not by Brian Lamb
<http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/erm04/erm0452.asp?bhcp=1>
This is a comprehensive explanation of what's going on with wikis. Though the article is from 2004 (ancient in tech years) it is still relevant and informative.

Comprehensive list of wiki sites for those interested in further investigation:
<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiEngines>

Autumn Shades
Donna L. Miller

Nature's display of color doesn't get much better than those offered in autumn
back lit by harvest moons,
their great chromatic symphony celebrating
placid evenings rich with the scent of fallen leaves.

After a shower, I inhale deeply the rain-rinsed air
as I sip Mexican-Spiced Hot Cocoa
while wrapped in Grandma's afghan,
reclining on a forgotten deck chair.

The autumnal transformation begins as a whisper
and grows to an explosion
when Mother Nature slips her barren hips from her green gown,
trading it for one variegated with orange and russet and gold.
Weary but not willing to let go of life,
the trees hunger for energy
and swallow the sun;
coaxing the leaves to shimmer and shine like sequins.
Not to be outdone, some bushes burn with the desire for life,
blazing in crimson hues.
Soon, cool nights will call for fireplace warmth
and coax sweaters from cedar chest hiding.

On such sweater-cool nights,
waft the scent of pumpkin pie baking,
garden mint drying for wintertime tea,
or an orange spice candle burning.
These shades of autumn splash at the shores of my mind,
leaving the watermark of sensual memory.

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Please enclose \$10 for regular membership.
Mail this form and your check to:

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



Above, Patti Bartlett shares a very moving piece about the Vietnam War Memorial Wall that was visiting Fort Missoula during the third writing marathon there. Participants find a supportive audience during readarounds.

Below, using her surroundings as her prompt, Meagan Newberry immerses herself in the Montana Writing Project experience.



MONTANA WRITING PROJECT
SUMMER INSTITUTE

MISSOULA, MONTANA | JUNE 18-JULY 13, 2007

PHOTO ESSAY BY CASEY OLSEN

Below, spending some time with his writer's notebook, Nathan Miller responds to a writing prompt during "Writing Into The Day" activities. Summer Institute is a blend of writing and thoughtful discussion unlike any other professional development experience.



Above, assistant co-director Claudia Crase helps co-director David Christensen with his "early Missoula settler" costume from the 19th century during a writing marathon at Fort Missoula. Participants enjoyed a wide variety of unique and genuine writing opportunities.

Why use Technology to Teach English

Michael Umphrey

I thought about starting this essay by pointing out that many or most kids today are going to work in environments where communications technologies are ubiquitous, and kids who don't use those technologies in school are not being well prepared to work in a world that's already here.

But really, my main reason for using blogs and wikis and podcasts is that it's fun. I use the Internet to find out what I need to know, to stay in touch with people, to liberate my files from a hard drive so I can get to them from anywhere, and to get the work done that makes my life work. What works for me will work for at least some kids probably most.

If I lived in 1860, I would want to catch a train. If I lived in 1910, I would want to use a telephone. Today, I want all my routine multiple choice assessments to be scored and posted to the grade book automatically. I really want that, but unfortunately that doesn't happen.

The obvious ways technology could improve productivity--getting rid of repetitive, mindless tasks--aren't readily incorporated into schools, unless the repetitive, mindless tasks afflict the office, such as tallying attendance. I do take attendance online, though I would prefer that kids swiped bar-coded key chain cards when they came into the classroom. I dislike starting class with a pause, while I enter attendance data by hand. I have better things to do.

Like using technology to teach English. Why do that? Well, why do cowboys sing?

We're here. We have voices. It's our world, too. For a long time the impact of communications technologies on culture tended to be alienating. Sheet music was replaced by vinyl record albums as the main way of distributing music, and this reduced demand for local musicians. Then, as amplifiers got better, recorded music replaced live performances for all sorts of occasions. The number of local bands dwindled. Singing was fading away, though some people didn't notice since Elton John's voice could be heard in every hamlet on the planet.

The same dynamic was at play throughout the culture. Movies, magazines, radio shows, and books all required costly, centralized technologies, so they were created by large corporations rather than by us common folk. A few experts did the performing and all the ways we once entertained ourselves became less common: church plays, quilting bees, dances with local musicians and community socials. A vibrant folk culture was displaced by commercial culture. Fewer cowboys were singing. They were listening to 8-tracks of Waylon and Willie.

But in the last ten years, remarkable things have happened. Anyone can have a recording studio. Anyone can publish his or her writing. Anyone can have movie editing software with many of the capabilities of the big studios. More kids are making music again. But they are not isolated in some basement with hopeless dreams of being discovered. They are burning their own cds and posting their songs on their own websites, where anyone on the planet can download them. They are writing and publishing their own texts on My Space blogs. They are creating their own movies and publishing them on You Tube.

Some of it is pretty good. Unfortunately, more of it is wretched. After all, the major influence on many kids has been a commercial culture that, while it has often made the performances of remarkable talents available to millions, has also been pushing astonishingly toxic productions at young people.

Teachers who are playing heads up ball see this as a huge opportunity. The quality of those My Space blogs matter. They really matter, much more than another essay about *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is not something the world greatly needs. What the world does greatly need is more great private literature. More Powerpoints celebrating important events, such as the first drive in a restored '64 Impala, to be shared with family and friends.

Yes, we should still read Auden, but more for more inspiration, more for models, more like writers read. We should teach students to become people with their own original work to get done.

The generation that is in high school right now is already creating a folk culture and a private literature that is vast. It includes stories, music, movies, diaries, slide shows and all sorts of combinations. Folk cultures are normally more educative than schools as can be read easily in comparisons of demographics and test scores and what this emerging digital culture becomes will have profound implications.

I rather think we, as teachers, will be its allies or it will largely displace us. There are a few good reasons for keeping the mass attendance centers we now use for education, but there are also lots of reasons to leave them. They're protected right now by political arrangements which means they will be vulnerable as students and parents learn what is possible with online learning.

So far, schools don't know what to do about the new communication culture. They're banning cell phones and blocking the Internet and email. That's fine, I suppose, but what they also need to be doing, or at least what teachers of writing and photography and art and music could be doing, is helping kids use the tools so that the art and literature that they are creating is as appropriate and wise and powerful as it can be.

Kids have a lot they should be thinking about. What is appropriate to reveal about oneself in public? Digital information lasts forever. A semi-pornographic photo that seemed funny at the moment can lead to all sorts of problems, now and later. It takes some wisdom to deal with the permanence of this medium. Idle words tossed off as a prank may be read by future employers, future spouses, future adversaries, but also by future grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We are only beginning to consider what this means and how it changes the way we live. The young people need grownups who know what's going on to talk things through as they go.

To a great extent, young people will do what they will do. But we could be helping them with their productions in these new media, teaching them what we know about quality scripts and making our best case for the

opinions.

You also always have the typical issues that come with any sort of technology use. There is a bound to be at least a minimal level of frustration with technological glitches. Some students cannot remember passwords and can't find websites at home. Some schools block all access to any collaborative sites. As with any new tool, there will be bumps getting started. Still, a wiki is so easy to set up and use, if you have a project suited for the medium, your time invested can quickly pay off.

Examples of Educational Wikis

21st Century Literacy

<http://21st-century-literacy.wetpaint.com>

Check out the wiki from MWP's Multimodal Literacies Institute. This is the site created for and continuously being built by, the institute participants.

South African High School Curriculum

The entire national high school curriculum for the country of South Africa is on line in wiki form:

http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/South_African_Curriculum

Wikibooks

http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_page

This project was started on July 10, 2003 with the mission to create a free collection of open-content textbooks that anyone can edit. To date volunteers have written about 24,822 modules in a multitude of textbooks.

High School Online Collaborative Writing

http://schools.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page

This is a collaboration & large, eclectic collection of writing by NYC schools.

Princeton Public Library

<http://booklovers.pbwiki.com/Princeton%20Public%20Library>

Free Resources for Setting up Wikis

PB WIKI

<http://www.pbwiki.com>

This is one of the leading sites and very easy to use , or as they promote it: "As easy as a peanut butter sandwich." There are no ads for educational wikis. and its easy insert videos, pictures, etc. The only disadvantage is that a pbwiki only gives you 10mbs. of storage space.

WIKISPACES

<http://www.wikispaces.com/>

This another large and well-known site that is free for teachers. There is a lot of storage space and quite a few options for customization, but it requires a bit more work to set up the pages. One advantage of this wiki is that will register your whole class if you send them user names and passwords in an email.

SEEDWIKI

www.seedwiki.com

Instead of charging for what you can do on your wiki they charge if you want to restrict what others can do (password a wiki, or only allow certain members to enter, or control the wiki's style or layout...)

WETPAINT

<http://www.wetpaint.com>

Another smooth, easy to use site. It combines elements of wikis, blogs, and social networks. MWP's Multimodal Literacy Institute used this site: **<http://21st-century-literacy.wetpaint.com>**

*There are numerous additional free resources available online. A basic google search will give you even more options to play with if none of these fit your needs.

Each individual page also has a page history where you can see what changes were made, when, and by whom. This makes it as easy as one click to revert to a previous version if someone makes some alterations you don't agree with or that are inappropriate. If you have all your students register and set your preferences so only registered users can access the site, this feature will also allow you to track the kind of input (and amount) individual students are giving. It is a great way to track student work and see who is doing what. You can also easily set up the wiki to email you every time a change is made if you want or need to see exactly what the students have done.

Possible Classroom Uses of Wikis

Group Writing/ Research Projects

Wikis open opportunities for real writing collaboration among students. Anyone working on the wiki project can have access to the same work-in-progress file. (This means no more trading CDs/ disks/ USB drives or trying to access each others' network accounts.) Once someone posts an initial draft of the work, everyone can contribute everything from additional paragraphs of content to simple corrections of spelling or grammar. Students can work on this simultaneously in class or from home when they are absent. My students used online collaboration when creating community timelines. Students had to do research in pairs to prepare for interviews, and each pair of students handled a year in the decade we were covering. As they found information about what happened in their year, they added it to the site. They also added photos and music from their year. Students from other groups also could add to different years if they found good material in the processes of completing their own work. It changed the whole research process when students would watch the whole group's progress unfold in front of them as they worked.

Revision

Wikis are great if you want to work on peer critique. Teachers can use a wiki to collect student work--a sort of digital dropbox. If students post their work you don't have to mess with figuring out how to get multiple paper copies of work. Students just log on to the site and read the pieces they need to comment on or look for whatever specific aspects you direct them to concentrate on. They can just read and post comments at the end, or they can actually alter the text on the screen to add in their comments, questions, or suggestions. Of course the original version is always saved and specific changes are recorded, so no version is ever lost. That page's history link just collects and organizes the growing list of edited versions.

In addition to peer critique, students can also do their own revision online. After reading comments and suggestions posted about their writing, students can rework their text. The history page makes it extremely simple for teachers to see what work students actually did in each revision, because in most sites all changes, additions, or deletions are highlighted in a different font color. This is a helpful feature for any teacher who has ever spent twenty minutes reading through a "new" draft of a student paper only to discover the only revision was the new font for the title and maybe one word choice substitution or an additional comma.

Working in the online environment also provides the opportunity for teachers to link to sites that might help with grammar or usage issues that come up in the student work. Simply pasting a link saves the teacher from repeated explanations of the same rules or problems. I've found students are often more likely to click on a link and read an explanation about a problem area in their writing than they are to go look it up in a hard copy text. Likewise I'm more likely to just past a link rather than rewriting a rule or briefly explaining it over and over again.

Online Textbook/ Resource List

Often the most current and relevant resources you can find for any topic your class or individual students are studying exist online. Using your students as a research team, you can fairly quickly and easily put together a comprehensive collection of resources for any given topic, easily accessible by everyone in the class, easily updated or edited by the teacher. Students can also link or upload others resources they find or create like photos or multimedia presentations. Having a wiki is a great opportunity to personalize your curriculum. It can also be an ongoing, multiyear, resource. The more you add, the more powerful it becomes. Most wikis also give the author of an individual page the control to to lock it from further editing. Then means if you wanted to you could have students to simply access the information previous students collected, but not work on the project themselves.

Getting Started with Wikis

The biggest pro that anyone can edit and add to the contents is what makes wikis collaborative nature so exciting. It is also what makes them tricky to manage. If you leave your wiki open, people can mess with it. It's easy to fix, but there isn't any control over what students (or others) may post. The last thing you need is parents angry about profane or inappropriate content on the class site. Much of this can be controlled by making your wiki private and requiring passwords. Then no posting is anonymous and you limit who sees it. The only drawback to this angle is the additional pain of getting all students registered and remembering passwords, which is often a hassle when many schools ban student email. It also takes away the option of allowing students remain anonymous unless you have them choose pen names which they share only with the teacher. Sometimes this is a great option for classrooms with many students initially hesitant to share their

standards we really care about. For generations, educators have labored toward the goal of bringing young people to basic literacy, giving them the power to encode and decode written language. Today, most adults in America can read a newspaper, decipher a letter from the bank, or send a note to a child away from home. This is no small achievement. But today basic literacy isn't enough.

When publication meant printed books and magazines there was little incentive for most people to commit the time and energy needed to become skillful writers, because opportunities for publishing were limited. No more. An increasing portion of the information available to us will be created not by professionals but by ourselves. The decline of literary reviews in newspapers received a lot of attention last year, and while this caused real dismay, we should not ignore the fact that new forms of reviewing, such as the thousands of user-written reviews on Amazon, are becoming widespread. Manufacturers report that, increasingly, user reviews of their goods and services are driving sales. Apparently, lots of ordinary people are willing to write reviews and provide information. Like cowboys around the campfire, we're getting our culture back. It will be what we make of it.

And it will be a lot more than reviews and reports. The world has always had great private literature--the letter from a father to a son that changed a life, the memoir of a grandmother that inspired generations of descendants, the heartfelt expression of an honest emotion that cemented a friendship--and the quality of life in the digital age will be closely related to the amount and quality of private literature that we create. Most people and most families will maintain an archive of words and images, accumulating through lifetimes.

Lots of kids are already their own publishers, posting whatever they want on My Space. or many families the family photo album has already migrated to the web and has become a primary venue for creative expression. Where once we had occasional images with one-line captions, we now have multimedia libraries. Lots of young people will do most of their reading not in the mass media and not in the library but on the web sites of families and friends. Already, many young people would rather spend an hour watching homemade videos on You Tube than watching commercial television. The range of offerings is dazzling. Some people have their own television shows with episodes posted weekly. Some people make poetry videos featuring clever animation. Many videos are answered by other videos, creating a new form of dialogue. It's not hard to find things more compelling than commercial television, which, by its nature is bland and predictable.

English teachers should be excited by the prospect of a culture of writing consisting of more than a few "stars" and the bestseller lists. We only need a few New York Times bestsellers--two or three every other year or so would satisfy me--but we need as many intelligent and well-crafted Powerpoints celebrating fiftieth anniversaries and movies sent to sons away at war and reflections by young mothers as we can get. We need millions of them.

Whenever possible, school work should be real work. A digital album of a trip told in words and images can be great literature. So can a movie of a family's response to a sudden storm, or a Powerpoint commemorating the death of a grandmother, or a video tribute to a ranch family's relationship to the landscape, or a slideshow giving a personal response to a favorite literary work. Great writers have always known that everyday life is the source of powerful writing. I watched a Powerpoint done by a sophomore girl in Phil Leonardi's class in Corvallis telling the story of a decades old murder in Corvallis, researched in microfilm of old newspapers, that was as compelling as an episode of Unsolved Mysteries. The production values were a little lower, but it was about here. I watched an interview-based movie made by students in Renee Rasmussen's class in Chester about the impact on Joplin of closing their high school in a consolidation move. It was stunningly evocative. It will become a permanent part of the history of that community. It was real work.

This is a good time to recommit to being not primarily consumers of commercial culture but also producers of our own culture, our own literature about the places and lives that we know. And if we do it with our students, we'll find all sorts of intractable problems won't need to be solved. They'll just dissolve. Besides, it's a great adventure.

It's also a necessity. Our new powers bring real risks. We are quickly moving into a world full of simulations and deceptions. It's important that young people develop their personal voices, backed by hard research and made bold by a faith that they have really seen what they have seen, really heard what they have heard, and really felt what they have felt. We need human witness and human voices that we trust. Kids need to hear us talk about trust in the real life situations, because trust is as vital in the information age as petroleum was in the machine age. The Internet moves destructive information as readily as constructive information, and we need a citizenry that understands how vital it is that we are ethical, restrained, attentive and honest. In other words, things are going to be just as they have always been, only more so.

Of course, there are lesser but still important reasons to use technology. One is that high schools seem stuck,

“For generations, educators have labored toward the goal of bringing young people to basic literacy, giving them the power to encode and decode written language. Today, most adults in America can read a newspaper, decipher a letter from the bank, or send a note to a child away from home. This is no small achievement. But today basic literacy isn't enough.”

and anything with potential to unstick them is a source of hope. They are stuck with all sorts of pretenses.

There’s the pretense of “make up.” In high absentee districts--that is, districts with athletic programs--most make up is a pretense. I’m not sure whether the pretense is that the work was made up or that anything was missed. In either case, kids have so many opportunities outside the classroom and parents so little interest in sacrificing such opportunities for any notion of the common good, that no one is going to fix attendance.

Technology has enormous potential to make missing class less disruptive both for students and for teachers. Actually, it’s not potential. Everything we need now exists. Learning how to use it and getting districts to spend the money is another thing. I work on this as much as I have time--being sure assignments are online with downloadable copies of handouts, with links to texts or web quests or videos that cover roughly what was done in. I find it amusing and fulfilling to figure out as much as I can about how it could work with the time and tools I have now, and even small improvement yield pretty good dividends. I can easily print a copy of whatever past or future assignment an office aide wants for the boy who is taking a 10-day surfing vacation in Costa Rica or the girl under house arrest.

I like to think that if something like Hurricane Katrina hits the school and it is physically gone for a few months, my classes at least will still be able to meet online and continue our work.

We use blogs--both individual student blogs and a class blog. A blog is just a website where new pages are created by typing or pasting into a form and then clicking “submit.” It’s quite like sending an email and just as easy.

I can subscribe to individual student blogs using Real Simple Syndication (RSS) and a blog aggregator such as Bloglines or Google Reader. What this means is that I can open my aggregator and a list of all the student blogs will appear. I can tell at a glance if anyone has posted anything since the last time I read them. If I click on a student name, his or her posts will appear in the reading pane. I can add comments. It’s far easier to manage than having assignments emailed home. And it suits me far more than managing papers. Since I can access the blogs from any computer anywhere, I never carry papers home and I never get accused of losing a paper. I have an automatic record of exactly when an assignment was posted. Also, students can turn in work in the evening or on weekends, which solves quite a few problems.

I also use a class blog, where all students post on the same site. I can post a question and ask them all to answer it, or I can simply have them turn in essay assignments by posting them. I can easily ask them to read and comment on other students’ work. I can direct everyone to read an exemplary piece of student writing. I’ve automatically got a copy of everything they’ve written in a digital portfolio.

I put on the class blog’s sidebar a list of links to common writing problems. Beside each link I put a color: red=nonparallel structure; yellow=passive voice; blue=pronoun/antecedent errors, etc. I highlight errors in their writing with the appropriate color. They follow the link, read the explanation, then fix the error and remove my highlighting.

The blog for my class home page is here: <http://www.flatheadreservation.org/index.php/phs>

I also use a class wiki. A wiki is similar to a blog, except that everyone can edit the same page.It’s good for class projects, such as creating an annotated version of a historical text. This is a good way to handle difficult texts that require lots of annotation for difficult words and historic context. Wikis can be given real world uses that give the work more value. For example, students could create a wiki introducing younger students to a history of their town, with different students adding information on different topics.

The advantages of blogs and wikis is that they are very easy to learn and simple to use. No html is needed and the formatting is done by templates that are applied by the program, so the writer needs to think only about writing.

There are many other free tools. Google notebooks allow a student to take notes from websites by simply marking the text, then using a right click to get to a special “copy” command. The program automatically records the url for complete citations. It takes only a couple clicks to create a new notebook for a new topic. One notebook for “Theodore Roosevelt”. A new one for “1912 Election”. When the research is done, the notes can be copied to a word processor or printed out.

Zoho has a full featured word processor that is web-based. A student working on a paper at school can get to the document at home, without email or carrying a disk. The document can also be shared, so others can add comments or edit it.

There are, naturally, quite a few bloggers who blog about education and teaching. Here are some of the more popular ones:

huffenglish.com - <http://www.huffenglish.com/> This is Dana Huff’s blog about English education and technology She's a classroom teacher and she discusses both teaching English and using technology. Her site even features the "Room 303 Blog" where students record their observations on her class.

Stephen's Web - <http://www.downes.ca/> Stephen Downs is a new media and online learning guru who works for the National Research Council in New Brunswick. He gives many presentations on using technology in education, and analyzes how it affects learning and how it can best be used.

edtechpost - <http://edtechpost.ca/wordpress/> Scott Leslie writes reviews and reports on new software and other tools, and he ruminates on what's happening in education and technology

weblogg-ed - <http://weblogg-ed.com/> Will Richardson is the author of *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms* published by Corwin Press. His blog discusses those technologies in the K-12 realm.

Michael Umphrey's new book, The Power of Community-Centered Education: Teaching as a Craft of Place has just been published by Rowman & Littlefield. He teaches at Polson High School. His blog is here: <http://www.montanaheritageproject.org/index.php/MichaelUmphrey>.

Wikis and Writing

Christa Umphrey

Too often when teachers are encouraged (or required or guilty into...) pursuing technology integration, the unfortunate result is that they find themselves scrambling to find ways to add additional components to an already overstuffed curriculum. The technology quickly becomes a distraction from the real work that needs to be accomplished rather than a tool to accomplish that work. Wikis are one simple tool that can easily help students more effectively accomplish work they are already doing. Though wiki technology isn’t as widespread as some other Web 2.0 tools, wiki websites provide some of the most exciting possibilities for developing writing fluency and encouraging collaboration.

So what is a wiki anyway?

A wiki is an online resource which allows all users to add or edit the posted content. Anyone with privileges to access the site can edit pages and post feedback. It allows all site users to communicate with each other regardless of their physical location, and the site keeps a record of all the communication in one place.

“Wiki wiki” means rapidly or quick in the Hawaiian language. The first wiki was created by Ward Cunningham in 1995 who was looking for a fast, easy writing tool that would spur people to publish. A wiki seems to fit that bill. Basically a wiki is a piece of software that lets anyone edit anything on an existing wiki webpage at any time.

Why use a wiki in your classroom?

Like their more well-known cousin the blog, wikis are an important web 2.0 tool. This is the second generation (i.e. 2.0) of the internet. No longer do we need to only read the webpages designed by programers with a firm grasp on the ins and outs of computer code. Now anyone can create and shape the media themselves to share information simply, easily, and for free. Wikis allow writers to interact, develop their voices, and learn from other writers. Wikis put collaboration at the forefront of writing instruction and have the capability to give students a large, interesting, and authentic audience. Wikis stimulate conversations. Quiet kids often thrive and become more involved in class activities and discussions when some of the work is accomplished using wikis.

Many wiki sites also allow you to upload files. If you choose a site with this feature, it makes it easy for you to use the wiki as a sort of digital file cabinet. You can post deadlines or any important documents students need to access, as well as upload their actual assignments. This eliminates the need for students to find you personally to get copies of work they’ve lost or didn’t get because of absences. They can access and download what they need from home (or from school before or after class if they have no home access).

How does a wiki work?

Setting up a wiki is as easy as choosing a name and clicking the “create wiki” button. Once you have done this, you can begin adding pages and creating and editing their content. You can also decide how to regulate access to your site. You can leave it open to the public so anyone can edit it, you can lock it down so that others can see it but only people who have the password can edit the pages, or else you can make it completely private.

Once your site is created, you (or your students) can add as many new pages and categories as you’d like. Once you have some pages with content, everyone can begin commenting and editing. Every page you visit in the wiki has a link, usually at the top, which says “edit page” or something along those lines. If you click on it, you’ll be taken to an editing window where you can alter or add to the contents of the page. To use the large majority of wikis, you don’t need to know any more about technology than you would to edit a Word document.

“When publication meant printed books and magazines there was little incentive for most people to commit the time and energy needed to become skillful writers, because opportunities for publishing were limited. No more. An increasing portion of the information available to us will be created not by professionals but by ourselves. ...we're getting our culture back. It will be what we make of it.”

Michael Umphrey