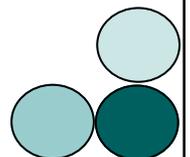
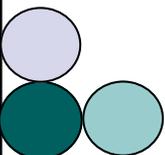


Teacher- Researcher

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Statement of Purpose

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In the Spring of 2012, the Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs received a \$20,000 grant from the National Writing Project for Teacher Leadership. These were funds that came, ultimately, from Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provides funding for the professional development of teachers.

Our site used those funds in a variety of ways, but one of the principal uses was to provide \$500 research mini-grants to all the teachers who attended the 2012 Summer Institute.

In past years, when there was a little more funding from the federal government and from the university, we always budgeted funds to offer mini-grants to teachers. In recent years, Stephanie McKenna, Jon Andersen, Rebecca Pilver, and Hannah Magnan each received mini-grants to fund classroom based research. You can see their end-of-year reports here: <http://cwp.uconn.edu/teachers/minigrants.php>.

One year, Lynda Barrow and Marcy Rudge from Annie Vinton Elementary School in Mansfield combined their grants to start up a publishing center for their students. Their end-of-year report was excellent, and was published in a journal that was a joint effort from the three Connecticut Writing Project sites. You can read it here: <http://cwp.uconn.edu/publications/CWP3%202009%20PWR%20Anthology.pdf>.

The thinking behind these mini-grants was always that our summer research was so limited and we had only just begun to learn. We all had four weeks to research something, and then we were back at school before we knew it and there was little time to go any further. The mini-grants were intended to provide the incentive and the opportunity to extend that nascent research into a full-year project.

So when the Teacher Leadership funds became available to us, we attached mini-grant funding to the Aetna Fellowships, and made year-long research a

requirement. The only provisions were that teachers had to use the funds for their own professional development, they had to submit their research as a proposal to a professional conference or journal, and they had to write up a brief end-of-year report for the CWP.

When we gathered mid-year status reports, we were delighted to see all the great things teachers were doing with their mini-grants. Many bought technology for their classrooms. One built a library of Latina literature. Three registered for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Meeting, two registered for International Reading Association (IRA) affiliated conferences, one registered for the Assembly for Literature on Adolescents of the NCTE (ALAN) meeting, one registered for the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) Conference, and one registered for the National Writing Project (NWP) Urban Sites Network Conference. Two leveraged their grants to receive additional funding from the College Board and EASTCONN Regional Educational Services Center, respectively. Several had their proposals to these conferences accepted.

On the following pages you will find the end-of-year reports from the thirteen 2012 Teacher-Consultants. We hope similar funds will be made available this year, as well.

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Using the Writer's Workshop Model and New Technology in the Classroom

By Elizabeth Amburn, Killingly Memorial School

Introduction

As a participant in the 2012 Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute, I enjoyed four weeks of stimulating discussions and presentations concerning the teaching of writing. As a fourth grade teacher, I have found the teaching of writing particularly challenging, given the wide range in skills and stamina of my students. Before the Summer Institute, I had been grappling with the requirements of the Common Core State Standards and how I could incorporate them into my teaching. As a result of my participation in the Summer Institute, I began to envision a way to use the writing workshop model as a way to address some of the Common Core Writing Standards. The specific standards effectively addressed by using the writing workshop model are cited below.

W.4.5. With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.

W.4.10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, or audiences.

In addition, my experience with writing response groups during the Institute made me want to develop a means by which to provide this kind of experience for my students. I believe that Standard W.4.5. , cited above, also can be addressed in part by the use of writing response groups. However, I was intimidated by the idea of organizing and monitoring the progress of the writing process for over 40 students (I teach writing to two fourth grade classes), and by the prospect of setting up productive writing response groups for fourth graders.

Several of the presentations made during the Institute involved describing how new technologies could be used in the teaching of writing. Using new technologies in the elementary grades presents unique challenges. For

example, while elementary students have impressive skills with a variety of video game controllers, for the most part they lack basic keyboarding skills. Also, my access to computers for my writing classes is minimal. Generally, I am able to provide computers for groups of 2 to 3 students for a limited number of class periods. However, the Common Core State Standards require that students be familiar with using technology in the writing process.

W.4.6. With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of one page in a single setting.

The proposal I developed for the research mini-grant focused on the purchase and use of an iPad and various applications to monitor the writing process and progress of students and to foster writing response groups. During the school year, I also used the iPad to monitor a reading research and writing project in my reading classroom, where they used a variety of sources including the Internet, and they typed their final report. This report describes the variety of uses I developed for the iPad in the writing classroom and also suggests some additional uses for which it could be used in the future.

Writing Workshop

For all process writing done with my two classes, I used the writing workshop model. The first piece that we worked on was a memoir, a genre that has not been formally introduced in the elementary grades prior to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. In order to generate ideas for the piece students brought in self-selected objects that were related to a strong and significant memory or person in their lives. After developing a graphic organizer for each piece, students selected an object and related story to develop into a written memoir.

Funding for the iPad was not received during this first writing project. Because of this, I was provided with a means to measure the management of the writing process and writing workshop as impacted by the iPad.

The monitoring of the memoir project was accomplished by means of a checklist. Students' names were listed and checked as defined elements in the project were completed. While I did keep handwritten notes concerning student work (and gave them a grade for parts of the process), these notes were minimal and disorganized, kept by date, not student, stage of work, areas of concern or student strengths.

This method of keeping checklists to manage the writing process and conferences with students during the writing process is in keeping with standard practice and literature related to both writing and reading conferences. Documentation is readily available related to reading conferences (Allen); the use of this instructional model in writing instruction has also been standard practice for some time (Calkins).

Students worked in groups that did not change for the length of the project. The groups became writing response groups as the writing progressed, and they responded within these groups to each other's work, making revisions and suggestions. I was not able to keep a record of the effect of the impact of this group work on students' work.

In addition to the writing classes, I was able to set up meetings with students in my regular classroom (half of my writing students) with a second grade class whose teacher, Sarah Beth Stonaha, had attended the Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute in a prior year. This class also wrote memoirs using a concrete object as a springboard, and the classes shared their writing experiences during the project and their final stories when they were completed.

The second major writing project was an elaborated description of a pirate. During this project, students were again divided into groups. Again, the project was defined in stages.

There have been many articles and much discussion within the educational community concerning student use of iPads. (See, for example, Quillan). However, furnishing every student with an iPad was not my intention, as my district simply does not have the resources available for the use of iPads on such a scale. In fact, in my school iPads are currently only provided for administrators. Therefore, with the receipt of the mini-grant, I intended to obtain and use an iPad to facilitate the management and documentation of the writing process for my students. With the iPad and the Confer app, an application designed to keep records of conferences with students related to independent reading, I

intended to develop a more streamlined and adaptable method to keep records of conferences with students related to their writing.

The learning process was not without glitches, but I quickly realized that there were many potential benefits. I was eventually able to keep records of all conferences and sort them by date, student, project, type of comment, stage of completion, or group. I recorded my comments as I conferred with students, and they could see how I was monitoring their work. In addition, at the next conference I could quickly and easily refer to the past conferences, insuring accountability and consistency. I learned to use the various record-keeping options provided by this app, as the project proceeded. While the learning curve for me was longer than I would have liked or anticipated, I was able to realize all of these benefits with greater efficiency than the checklists used during the memoir project.

In addition to using the Confer app during the writing process, the note taking function on the iPad was also used to help students verify spelling and create vocabulary lists (since we were all working on pirates, vocabulary choices could be easily shared), as well as to monitor progress.

I continued to use the iPad to monitor progress on the two other main writing projects that we undertook during the school year – an expository writing piece and an opinion piece. By the end of the school year, the iPad was a great help in monitoring the progress of the 42 students I was working with, and I feel that am continuing to develop my skill in using this valuable tool. I also hope to explore other apps that may be easily modified for writing-related projects.

Writing Response Groups

The use of the iPad in encouraging effective writing response groups has also been promising, although I believe I still have to fully develop its potential. Basically, I have been recording some of the response groups as they work and reviewing the recordings to make notes and develop mini-lessons on how they should function. The recording of students while working in groups has an immediate impact on the seriousness with which they approach their task. The challenge is to use the information gathered from the recording in order to guide their development in the writing response group format. This is some-

thing that I hope to explore more fully in the future.

Research Reading and Writing

I also used the iPad to monitor and guide a research reading and writing project that I developed as part of my regular classroom reading instruction. For this project, the class defined a major research topic – whaling – and divided it into smaller subtopics. Students volunteered to research the smaller subtopics according to their own interests, further refining them as the research continued, and then they wrote essays describing what they had learned. Finally, students typed their essays and we compiled them into a booklet about whaling.

This was quite a demanding project to organize and monitor; however, the iPad Confer app was a helpful tool. In addition, some students used the iPad to help with their research, using it when the traditional print sources were insufficient for their purpose and the school's computers were not available. My goal in developing this project was to give students the experience of developing a large topic, much larger than fourth graders would normally undertake, and then defining it in terms of small parts that were much more within their abilities. The success of the project depended on my ability to guide their work.

Future Instructional Goals

While I feel that using the iPad has greatly increased my effectiveness in guiding and monitoring the work of my students, I feel that I have only barely begun to utilize its potential. There are many apps still to explore and many ways to use its capabilities—not only in writing, but in all areas of instruction. In addition, the impact of technology increases when different technologies are used in conjunction. While using a computer with a projector is fairly common in most schools (not, unfortunately, in mine, but in most others), I am pursuing use of the iPad with a projector in order to show students videos of their own work (in group or in oral presentations), and to enhance their learning opportunities through additional software applications.

I believe that obtaining the iPad and using it for project management and as an aid in instruction has enhanced my effectiveness as a teacher. This

project, which I consider both a personal research project and also a professional development project, has also made me more determined to continue to seek out new technologies and techniques that will improve my teaching and the progress of my students. I sincerely thank the Connecticut Writing Project Summer Institute for providing me with the opportunity to learn and grow as a teacher of writing.

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Writing in the 21st Century: The Role of Digital Communities in Student Writing

By Katrina Bafumi, Boston Public Schools (formerly of Berlin High School)

Introduction

After completing the Connecticut Writing Project's 2012 Summer Institute, I became enamored with the possibilities technology offered to support student writing. During the institute, I collaborated with a fellow participant to conduct a workshop on pairing technology with writing instruction to meet the Common Core State Standards for 21st century learning. After completing research into several of these technologies including Google Docs, blogs, RSS feeds, and Social Bookmarking, I realized that the impact technology could have on any stage in the writing process seemed endless. Following the Institute, I engaged in each of these technologies in my classroom, hoping to add personal testimony to my prior research. I worked with the aim of submitting my research and ideas to a conference on the state or national level, knowing that with the help of the Connecticut Writing Project's mini-grant I could cover the costs of the conference and travel.

As my practice with technology in the classroom continued, I found myself particularly intrigued with the possibilities offered in student blogging. Applying the ideas of Troy Hicks in his digital writing workshop, I employed blogging as a central tool in the instruction of two of my electives. From a brainstorming hub to a bank of models for student writing, the blogs were inspiring students to write and further encouraging them by offering the world wide audience for which blogs are most known. Students were unearthing latent passions—from politics to fashion—finding worldwide audiences and gathering feedback from published writers. All of these activities would have been impossible without the extensions offered through blogging. Through blogging, my students saw their writing in a new light; they opened their eyes to the potential impact of their words.

The research report that follows outlines the process that led me to discover the possibilities in student blogging, as well as the procedure for and benefits of blogging that students saw in my classroom. Despite the ostensibly dated nature of the concept of student blogging itself, more research is nevertheless needed that explores the interactive features of writing with blogs, which the copious and rising digital communities provide our students. Focus-

ing on the power of blogs to open up students' writing to new concepts and styles and—perhaps most importantly—to engage them with a worldwide, interactive audience, I hope to find similar interfaces relevant to students in the age of Twitter and Instagram. My grant funds will be applied toward attending the NCTE Annual Convention in 2013 in order to explore new ways of capitalizing on the potential of these student blogging communities. Student blogging may seem like “old-news” to some educators, but as media technologies continue to develop new platforms for connecting, it is an idea certainly worthy of continued exploration.

Background: Beginning my Research

When asked to choose a focus for the Connecticut Writing Project's 2012 Summer Institute, I chose technology tentatively. As a relatively young teacher, I am often assigned the task of finding a way to engage technology in our high school's curriculum based on my age alone. In truth, however, while I consider myself a moderate user of technology in the classroom, I have never been a leader or expert in the field. Technology in the classroom has always held an allure. Smartboards once awed students into temporary silence and Google Docs allowed for convenient monitoring of student work; however, I still saw much of the talk of technology as a passing fad. I still do not consider myself even remotely an expert in educational technology. However, through the support of the CWP, over the last 12 months I have discovered the invaluable potential of 21st century technologies in motivating student writers.

Writing has always been at the center of my classroom. It is a skill I teach in itself, just as much as it is the vehicle through which I most often expect my students to communicate their beliefs. Yet although the value I place on writing is tremendous, the lack of student interest in that writing has always eluded me. Students sit facing blank computer screens—the cursor blinking in mockery, before empty notebooks, void of inspiration, anxiety-ridden, and lifeless. The impediments to students experiencing the joys of writing are no stranger to me. Even my most dedicated students sometimes fall into the category of lost writers. With a dingy classroom novel and writing assignment in front of them, the students covet the talents of a “successful” writer and the joys of a completed essay, yet lack the passion and motivation to even begin. Looking up at me

with exhaustion, they ask, “Why can’t I just be a good writer”? Somehow, these students feel they lack the magical pill that produces good writing. While I know no such pill exists, I’ve also known something was missing from the experience of these students. While the definition of a successful writer is an enigma, there is a certain spark that separates the students who can produce pages at a moment’s notice from the students who so often stare at blank screens. I wondered what I could do to induce a spark in these students’ eyes. Always reflecting on my own experience, I realized that as a writer I am driven by passion. I cannot write unless I have some underlying motivation. Even if initially forced, I always find a way to write with excitement. I wondered, could I introduce the same urgency to my students—and how could technology serve as an aid?

This was how my research began. In the summer of 2012, I dove into research hoping to find a way to motivate students with the tools of technology. Working alongside a fellow CWP teacher consultant whose roots stemmed back to the elementary school classroom, specifically a dual-language English/Spanish program in a local, urban school, I quickly learned the value of our vastly different backgrounds. While I could speak to the realities of a high school English teacher and some of the intricacies of literacy at the secondary level, my partner brought an understanding of not only the primary grades, but also the unique world of ELL education and the perspective of a teacher in a struggling school. It was through the combination of our backgrounds that we realized there was more to research in technology than my personal desire to find a way to motivate my students. Engaging students with technology was becoming a necessity. Definitions of literacy were and still are in flux. As Troy Hicks declares in *The Digital Writing Workshop*, “The term ‘new literacies’ encompasses both the technical stuff of new literacies—knowing particular gadgets, web services, and other technology-based tools—as well as the ethos stuff, or the general mind-set toward a more open and collaborative process of literacy learning” (Knobel and Lankshear, 2006; Lankshear and Knobel, 2006, as cited in Hicks). NCTE itself issued its own definition of 21st century literacy in 2008, stating, “As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies—

from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms—are multiple, dynamic, and malleable.” While the marriage of technology and writing is neither innate nor essential (after all, even JK Rowling still prefers to draft with pen and paper, and she is certainly not alone), we could not ignore the fact that expectations are changing.

Meeting the Common Core State Standards

The greatest influence on our work overall was the onset of new national standards. Across the country, schools were officially adopting the new Common Core State Standards, which call upon all schools to find routes to technology within their budgets. As schools around the country began drafting and revising new curriculum to reflect the Common Core State Standards, they, too, were realizing that technology appears in three of the four CCSS College and Career Readiness (CCR) anchor standards (listed below):

Reading:

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Writing:

6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Speaking & Listening:

2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

It is with this reality before us that the value of our research expanded. With schools around the country struggling to find ways to embed 21st century skills

into their curriculums despite limited technology and budgets, we knew we needed to build off of the Common Core and into the application of technology that could be used to assist student writers in ANY classroom on an extremely limited budget. Our research “Tech on the Cheap: Making the Common Core Work on a Limited Budget” came out of the following essential questions:

How do 21st century digital mediums extend the “traditional” definition of literacy?

How can schools address Common Core technology standards when schools offer limited technology and budgets?

How can new technologies engage students with a new understanding of the writing process?

Guided by the fact that “while most students engage with a variety of media, many students do not have much first-hand experience with multimodal composing,” our research aimed at finding ways to engage students in the writing process through the use of technology (Miller 138).

After learning about various educational technologies, we eventually centered our research on the use of blogs, Google Docs, RSS Feeds, and Social Bookmarking—all free tools that allowed for research, brainstorming, composing, collaboration, and revision—all steps in the writing process. After completing a professional development workshop that introduced these technologies to fellow teachers in the Summer Institute, we found that participant feedback, collected through a pre and post survey, reflected true engagement with the material and excitement over its applicability to classroom use. The next step was truly implementing these technologies in real classrooms, in order to explore the impact they had on student writing. I decided to apply the CWP Research Mini-Grant to engaging in more research into motivating student writers through the use of technology.

Application in the Classroom

As I continued into the 2012-2013 school year, I planned to structure two of my elective courses around the concept of the Digital Writing Workshop first introduced by Troy Hicks and later explored in our research. My two courses,

Journalism and a Writing Center tutor course entitled “Issues and Methods in Writing and Peer Tutoring,” offered the perfect opportunity for students to engage in online reading and multimodal composing. Once again, I was able to return to my personal lingering question—how can I motivate students to write? I hoped to answer this question through my students’ experiences and to share those experiences with a greater audience. In structuring my course as a digital writing workshop, I returned to the work of Paul Allison and his blogging community known as Youth Voices. Paul Allison’s 2009 article details the procedures of blogging in his classroom, and his curriculum inspired me to create a blogging community within my own classroom.

My Journalism elective offered me the first opportunity to structure my digital writing workshops around blogs. To open the year, students created separate accounts with Edublogs. Using Edublogs was a strategic move. Most blogging platforms, including Wordpress and Blogger, were blocked by our school’s web controls. While Edublogs offers the option for teachers to specifically create classroom blogging “communities,” this option is a premium feature, requiring a yearly fee. By opting for individual student accounts I bypassed this fee and furthermore allowed my students the autonomy to create their own blog, a space that felt a bit more independent and individual, separate from “classroom property.” The process of creating the blogging community in our classroom was thus organic and grew out of our own collaborative work among the blogs.

Time was dedicated early in the semester to students designing their blogs. Though students are constantly surrounded by multiple modes (sound, video, graphic images, etc.), students were shockingly unfamiliar with the concept of multimodal composing and the role of visual appeal when writing online. As Troy Hicks reminds us, “Regardless of how digital we think our students are...they do not necessarily possess the capacities that make them critical and creative digital writers....They need to understand the audience and purpose for which they are writing. Moreover, they need to consider the ways in which we can compose with multiple modes and media” (Hicks 127). We therefore opened the year by exploring example blogs, both those I noted as exemplary and as non-examples. Students analyzed each blog noting the features that appealed to them the most and used these ideas to form a class blogging

rubric, which we utilized for the duration of the semester. For example, students noted the value in hyperlinks and the interactive function they serve. In addition, students took note of the way blogs were organized on a page, citing the value in concise presentation formats such as tables or charts, when relevant. In this way, students were aware of the reasoning behind their grades and prepared to meet the expectations they themselves had set.

The next step involved students setting up Google Reader accounts that allowed them to track and monitor self-selected writing. Students turned to “professional” blogs, especially those provided by news outlets such as the *New York Times* and NPR, subscribing to the blogs of interest with their Google Readers. Once a week, students were granted 20 minutes of reading/browsing time to catch up with their blogs of choice. This practice served most often as a form of pre-writing. In a Journalism class, where students are constantly writing, writer’s block is particularly common. Students simply do not know what to write about—and when they write anyway, without first identifying their focus and their unique angle—it shows. While Donald Murray suggests that “prewriting usually takes about 85% of the writer’s time,” the reality remains that few students actually make this time” (Murray 4). Kerry Holmes of the University of Mississippi’s School of Education shares, for example, that [student teachers] “are so eager for their students to begin writing, that the prerequisite thinking that accompanies writing is often glossed over or omitted entirely” (241). I believe that this practice reflects the practice many writing instructors, not only those engaging in their first years of teaching. Nevertheless, the structured blog reading time served as a successful form of pre-writing. In browsing their favorite blogs, students were expected to take note of “seeds” for new stories and inspiration for new styles and formats. After completing the weekly reading, students were provided with a five minute free-writing period with which to record these new ideas. As a result, students always left their reading experience with something new added to an ongoing writer’s notebook of ideas. It is from the ideas collected in this notebook that students often located their best leads.

With ideas in tote, students were ready to post their weekly blogs. Once again, my Journalism class provided the perfect platform for experimenting with open/free-choice blog writing. From week one, students learned of my expectation that each week they complete one blog post on a topic of their choice, written for an audience that would extend far beyond our classroom.

Before even beginning the first blog post of the year, students were given the task and time to design their individual blogs (an assignment no one complained about). Creating their own avatars, backdrops, and “about me” sections allowed students to feel a personal connection to their blog space. This type of identity formation is nothing new for students. By approaching the blog the same way students may approach a modifiable space such as their Facebook profile, “no longer is writing about trying to just please the teacher so as to earn an ‘A.’ It is an act of identity formation, a twenty-first-century skill that students need to have as they represent themselves across a variety of online communities” (Hicks 107). The final step in designing the blogs followed this same theory in the value of presence. Using the Clustrmap software, each student was asked to add a visitor count to their blog. Clustrmaps, in particular, allowed these visits to be displayed on a map of the world, thus highlighting the potential variety in one’s visitors. These maps held initial appeal simply in their form, but once students began writing, and once students’ Clustrmaps began to fill with hits outside of our hometown, student attitudes were transformed. For so much of their careers, my students had been asked to write as if they were composing for some grander, imaginary audience. When instructing students in their first literary analysis essay, for example, I always ask students to imagine they are writing for someone outside of our class, someone who has not read the novel as they have. However, as pure as my intentions may be, students are always aware the farce: ultimately, I am their audience in this typical student-to-teacher writing exchange. However, with blogs, this process takes on an entirely different perspective. As students entered communities such as sports or fashion writing, they found their blogs attracting visitors from around the globe. Even I was surprised by the frequency with which a few particular student blogs collected hits throughout Europe. Now, the audience was real.

Writing for an authentic audience was more than a motivator for students to write; the tangible sense of audience provided by the Clustrmap software encouraged students to reconsider their roles as a writer. “Bloggers are constantly making editorial decisions, and these decisions are more complex than those made when writing for a limited audience because students are regularly selecting content to include or link to, they must learn to find and identify accurate and trustworthy sources of information. Because of a potential audience beyond the classroom, they pay more attention to the editorial

correctness of the post as well" (Richardson 30). The larger students' audiences grew, the more obligation students felt towards providing rich and accurate content. Students became more attuned to the types of graphics and formats used within their posts and focused particularly on the value of hyperlinks to provide their readers with essential background information as they approached the post of the week. Without realizing it, students were mastering the skills of multimodal composition and approaching their writing as all writer's must, with a sense of its potential impact.

In my Journalism class, blogs were an absolute success. However, I remained aware that not every class offers such time and space for students to complete this type of writing. Thus, as I approached semester 2 and a new course, Issues and Methods in Writing and Peer Tutoring, I knew I needed a new format for my digital writing workshop and the role blogs would play. To begin this semester, I followed many of the same steps I had in the previous semester. Students browsed blogs to create a class rubric and spent time arranging their unique blog spaces. Yet, in this course, students did not make the same use of GoogleReader as a step in the pre-writing process. Instead, students were instructed to subscribe to a select number of blogs with relevance to the class content, blogs which I had chosen. (Some of the best examples included the New York Times "Draft" blog, Bedford St. Martin's "Bedford Bits" blog, and Louisville's Writing Center blog, all three of which featured weekly posts focused on writing, tutoring, or both). Each week, students would be assigned to read and respond to one of these blog posts, thus extending our classroom work and reading into the ever-evolving space around us. At first glance, this simple reader-response activity merely moved student responses from printed text to online data, but in reality, the act of interacting with a digital community became much more developed. Each time students responded to a post from one of the aforementioned blogs, a simple step in their assignment would be to hyperlink, within their own blog, back to the original article. In doing so, students created a "trail" of sorts, attracting a wider audience back to their own blogs.

In order to foster the growth of a an online community, an additional component of the blog assignment in this class included expectations for weekly comments that I expected students to make to one another's blog posts each week. Beyond the Clustrmaps, these comments reminded students

of the role of reader interaction. As Will Richardson, educational technology expert reminds us, “Although it may seem that the final step in the process is to finally publish the post to the Weblog, this connective writing genre actually continues past publication. That’s because of the ability of readers to interact with the post...” (30). The role of the blog comments took on greater meaning when those outside of our classroom community began to contribute to the growing “conversations” mounted in the comment sections of particular blog posts. In several instances that truly awed students, the author of the blog posts to which we were responding commented on the reply posts students had created on their own blogs. In this way, students received encouragement, praise, research advice—and in one case, a challenge—from the outside world, including published writers. Students embraced these roles. As Sara Kajder describes in her book detailing the possibilities of blogs, “These varied literacy practices allow students to work in different roles. They are not solely readers and writers...students are working with content that is original, edited, unedited, and recycled. They are artists and commentators, reporters, distributors, etc.” (32). Engaging themselves as part of an online community of writers shifted the perspectives students held of themselves as writers.

Engaging Students in The Research Practice

The success I met using blogs in my classroom was immediately something I knew I wanted to share. Searching for opportunities which would allow me to present my findings, in late fall I stumbled upon the University of Connecticut’s Eighth Annual Freshman English Conference: “Collaboration and Conversation.” The focus on collaboration seemed to offer a fitting extension of my work with blogs in the classroom—especially the impact of the conversations elicited through these blogs. Further embracing the collaborative theme of the conference, I decided to involve my students themselves in the conference proposal. In my position then as the Berlin High School Writing Center director, I was frequently impressed with the work of our student tutors and always searching for ways to further engage them in professional practice. Thus, collaborating with two stellar students who served as dual student directors for our school’s peer-run Writing Center, I submitted a proposal to the Freshman English Conference on the collaborative use of technology in the Writing Center. Our

research and proposal specifically outlined a roundtable discussion that would focus on the value of collaborative brainstorming and the value of such practice early in the writing process, from the perspective of student tutors and three secondary teachers. In putting together our proposal, the students and I engaged in further research on the impact of prewriting and collaborative writing practices. Given the work the students put into their own end of the research, I made a plan to adjust the aims of my grant funds, instead planning to apply the funds to cover the conference registration of the student applicants and two of my colleagues, as well as myself. Unfortunately, our proposal was not accepted. While this reality left me in need of a new research path, it still provided a valuable learning experience for my two student tutors who, for the first time, found themselves part of a professional community, fostering a sense of belonging not unlike that which I was simultaneously trying to create in my classroom's digital blog communities. Though I had temporarily readjusted the aims of my grant funds, this setback actually re-opened the possibility of applying the grant funds to attend NCTE's annual convention in 2013 to continue my research.

Conclusions

The value of an audience is nothing new. Blogging itself is becoming a relic in the world of educational technology. Nevertheless, the value in students finding a community for their writing and the possibilities technology offers in creating that community are outstanding. As I continue my research by attending NCTE's 2013 Annual Convention, I aim to not only gather ideas from presentations, but to collaborate with the presenters. Starting a new position as an English Content Specialist for Boston Public Schools next year should allow me tremendous opportunity to network with professionals interested in adding to the online student writing community I hope to create. By collaborating with my colleagues and engaging new technology and media, I see the impact of my research extending far beyond a single classroom. Without the opportunity to compare my research and practice against others in the professional community, I would be unable to refine my ideas. The CWP's summer mini-grant will al-

low this research to continue and evolve for today's ever-changing digital landscape.

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Linking Reading & Writing: Common Core State Standards

By Michelle Blowers, North College Hill School

Introduction

I had just graduated from the University of Connecticut's Integrated Bachelor/Master's program when I decided to apply for a summer writing program. Being accepted into the Connecticut Writing Project was very exciting, as I hoped to continue my education in effective teaching methods of both reading and writing. Although looking forward to gaining exposure to various techniques in the practice and teaching of literature, I knew that as a new teacher in the workplace it would benefit me greatly to embrace the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). It was my goal to become familiar with the philosophy of the CCSS and how to plan and properly execute meaningful lessons within a classroom utilizing these standards.

Background

Even before beginning the Connecticut Writing Project, I knew that I was planning on moving at the end of the program. This helped with my focus of interest because I did not need to focus on something that was specific to Connecticut and/or a certain grade level. The reason for this was that I did not yet have a teaching position for the 2012-2013 school year—which was both frustrating and nerve wracking! I had decided to move to Cincinnati, OH and was on the constant search for a job. At the end of July, when the program came to an end, I packed up my things and headed west unemployed. Luckily, I was offered a position at a school district shortly after I arrived, but it wasn't as a classroom teacher – they had offered me an educational aide position, which I accepted, grateful to have a full-time job in education.

My reasoning for describing all of this is to explain how I chose to spend my mini-grant funding and its use in the classroom. I needed to invest in something that would be applicable to me in my current status as a newly employed teacher. What was interesting and exciting was that everything was new to me—I was experiencing the trials and tribulations of teaching (not first-year teaching, but nevertheless teaching). Pursuing my particular interest during the summer program, I returned to my focus on incorporating the standards

set out by the Common Core. I chose to put my mini-grant funding towards professional development at a literacy conference: the 2013 National Reading Recovery & K-6 Classroom Literacy Conference. I chose the workshops that would allow me to find specific ways to incorporate approaches of CCSS in the areas of reading and writing.

At the conference, there were four workshops I decided to attend: *The Construction Zone: Building, Expanding, and Transferring Knowledge Through Teacher Scaffolding*, *Meeting the Vocabulary Common Core State Standards*, *The Power of Purposeful Talk*, and *Family Literacy Nights*. What I walked away with from these workshops was an improved understanding of why and how to incorporate the Common Core State Standards with the scaffolding and teaching of literature for our students.

“The Construction Zone: Building, Expanding, and Transferring Knowledge Through Teacher Scaffolding”

The first workshop I attended allowed me to explore scaffolding theory in addition to the concept of transfer. These were concepts that were discussed during the Summer Institute, so I was excited to further investigate this idea. The impression that I took away from this presentation was that as educators, it should be our goal to scaffold lessons (including close reading, mentor texts, etc.) in such a way that the students are constantly integrating the old in with the new material they are facing. The structure and understanding of each and every lesson should be arranged so that reading workshops become fluent. There should be depth built in amongst each mini-lesson that will allow the students to discover and create connections amongst texts to identify relationships, rather than finding just one literary device in each text. This, in turn, reflected the Corresponding College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standard: “Read and comprehend complex literacy and informational texts independently and proficiently.” This was meant to keep the standards high and build rigor for all students with variation in the teacher’s input for each student (how much support and guidance a student needs).

What I found especially useful about this workshop was the discussion of transfer—to not only acknowledge that transfer does not happen randomly, but on the contrary, quite intentionally. I found it useful how Linda Dorn, the

workshop's presenter, went into detail about the necessity of higher level thinking and the difference between near and far transfer, as well as successful and unsuccessful transfers. I began to understand even more when she stated that transfer occurs more likely by design, meaning it is *our* job to plan lessons that incorporate all of leg work (i.e. essential questions, students learning objectives, assessments, etc.) that goes into a student's understanding of such a complex skill. Overall, I left the workshop feeling engaged, motivated, and fully equipped with new resources to explore this topic within my own classroom and grade.

“Meeting the Vocabulary Common Core State Standards”

I chose this particular workshop because I felt that the learning of vocabulary within classrooms (that I had been in) had become static. It seemed as though students were just going through the motions without appearing to grasp any true relevance from the lesson/activity. Not only did Nicole Medina (a primary instructional coach) present her research on a 4-point plan to implement vocabulary instruction in a meaningful manner, but she also identified that vocabulary has both a definitional and contextual place in the classroom. Similarly to the first workshop, the theme of planning intentionally was recognized as a huge part of providing purposeful instruction. In hopes of helping our students achieve mastery in vocabulary, she mentioned that teachers will need to plan intentional routines, make connections, talk (integrating the speaking and listening aspect of the CCSS), provide read-alouds, and practice re-cycling the words by repeating them over and over again. In doing this, we can model for our students the significance of utilizing vocabulary in a natural way.

In terms of the actual instruction of vocabulary, she laid out a 4-part plan that she put together after utilizing works from authors such as Beck, McKeown, Kucan, Graves, and Mazzano. It included a focus on word consciousness (ability to play with words), language experiences, teaching words, and teaching word-learning strategies. I appreciated the first point because I feel strongly that learning should be fun and that children should see that language can be something that they can manipulate in a purposeful way. She discussed teaching techniques such as palindromes, student-build word walls, word games (i.e. Blurt Jr., Balderdash, etc.) for bringing word fun into the classroom. Next, she

talked about language experiences such as reading within texts (read-alouds, guided reading, etc.), then examining the word(s) through discussion and discovery, and lastly, recycling these words when speaking and writing. When it came to teaching the words, this relied heavily on the actual art of teaching our students what to do with words that they “meet” in a text and have absolutely no idea what they mean. She suggested utilizing instructional techniques such as charts, sticky notes, and interactive word walls (connecting prior knowledge with new knowledge), while also making connections across content areas. These are the initial strategies children should learn how to do so they can interact with any text they read. The fourth part of the plan takes step three a bit further and teaches word-learning strategies to help students build on their understanding of the word already. Some examples of this include the following: using context clues, parts of a word (prefixes, suffixes, etc.), textural structures (i.e. glossary), etc. This workshop, like the first one, provided me with great resources, insight, and motivation to determine how to implement vocabulary instruction in a meaningful manner and in correlation with the Common Core State Standards.

“The Power of Purposeful Talk”

My interest in the workshop “The Power of Purposeful Talk” originated from recognition that children talk every day, yet we wonder if they are “literate speakers.” As teachers, we aim to model and teach them about intonation, about how tone can change a scene, or communicate a message through a character’s speech; however, I think this aspect of speech is grossly overlooked in our prepared lessons. After all, talking is foundational in learning. So, naturally, this left me wondering about my own teaching style and future classrooms. I wanted to explore more, especially with the addition of the speaking and listening standards of the Common Core.

The presenter, Maria Nichols, listed Richard Allington’s *Six T’s of Effective Elementary Literacy Instruction*. These included time, text, teach, talk, tasks, and test—which altogether set a teacher with the intent to purposefully plan addressing developmentally-appropriate instruction. She also discussed a dialogic classroom “in which there are lots of open questions and extended exchanges among students. These are not classrooms based on the delivery of

facts” (Johnston). Building upon this idea, she talked about the craft of transitioning from exploratory talk to critical conversations. These conversations, in the setting of the classroom, are to address the CCSS Speaking and Listening Standards of academic discussion in one-on-one, small group, and whole class settings. I found it constructive to explore this aspect of literacy because it does play such a large role in the successfulness of our students in the ‘real world’ and being able to utilize strategies when collaborating with others in any type of setting. This workshop really gave me great insight into not only the problem of NOT including dialogue into the classroom with our students, but also the levels of appropriate discussion and how to teach and facilitate meaningful talk.

Family Literacy Nights

The final workshop I attended was not necessarily a presentation with a focus on the Common Core State Standards; yet, what it offered me instead was a guideline for executing a successful family literacy night. I wanted to know about this because in the district that I work in, parent involvement has been pushed to the side but I feel it should remain front and center. I believe that if we do not have parent support at home, then we are doing all the work ourselves at school; in light of this, I felt that this workshop was a great opportunity for me to gain exposure. These could easily be transformed into a classroom setting allowing individual teachers to incorporate families into the themes and standards being taught within the classroom. Undoubtedly, this would build a bond amongst the teachers, students, and parents allowing for better communication, opportunities for parents to ask questions to their child and their child’s teacher, etc. Frankly, this is an area I feel very strongly about and hope to implement in my 4th grade classroom next year!

Conclusion

It was my goal to use the mini-grant funding to support myself as a new teacher with the Common Core State Standards. I hoped to gain knowledge, resources, and an enhanced understanding of how to best implement best practices and strategies for teaching literacy effectively within my classroom. I

can confidently say that I feel as though this literacy conference provided all of this for me, and then some! I not only appreciated how helpful and insightful the presenters were in their workshops, but I was also impressed by how committed educators from all over Ohio were during the conference. I was so pleased to see fellow teachers, even some who had already been teaching for several decades, come together and discuss the continuous growth of education and how we can improve our own practices to best prepare our students for the “real world.” This funding has given me the professional development I was looking to receive, and I look forward to strategically planning and implementing all that I have learned at the literacy conference.

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Using the Mini-grant for Professional Development

By Christine Briganti, Berlin High School

Introduction and Background

My mind is constantly flooded with musings of what my first year of teaching might be like. After years of shadowing, interning, and student teaching, my dream of standing in front of my own classroom of students is becoming a reality. I have been very fortunate to become involved in a variety of professional development opportunities even before securing my first teaching job. However, I was not exactly sure of what to expect at the start of the Summer Institute; feelings of excitement and anxiousness crept up at the prospect of learning with such experienced and accomplished teachers. But after day one, it became obvious that we were a community of learners, and while I sought to contribute in any way I could, I was also eager to learn as much as I could while building my repertoire of teaching strategies and materials.

Thus, I decided to allocate a portion of the grant money toward building a professional library to continue my learning. Though I have not yet worked with my own group of students, I read through these books with an eye toward instructional strategies I may want to implement in the future. I intend to use these books—many of which were recommended by fellow teacher consultants and cover a range of topics—as resources and inspiration for both my students and myself as a writer.

“Freeing the Writer Within”

I have never considered myself a creative writer. Despite the extensive academic writing I have completed during my time as a student, the thought of creatively expressing original ideas not involving the works of others made me cringe. I found that I often had trouble generating ideas for my creative pieces, and I put too much pressure on myself to sit down and write the world's next great poem. For these reasons, I found our reading of Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* during the Summer Institute to be helpful; her insistence on silencing one's inner editor is something I have struggled with for years. As an extension of her ideas, I decided to purchase *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg, *Writing to be Read* by Ken Macrorie, and *100 Quickwrites* by Linda Rief.

Of the three texts, Macrorie's book was the one that resonated with me the

most. His candid explanations and suggestions invite readers to consider their own writing process, habits, and style, while also providing guidance for how to seek feedback from others. As a compliment to Lamott and other similar works, the first few chapters are dedicated to writing freely: abandoning inhibitions and the rules we are taught about what good writing is. From there, I found several chapters that could be used as the basis for mini-lessons during a Writer's Workshop. It is likely that students would benefit from lessons on how to tighten their writing or be more cognizant of the repetition they do (or do not) want to include. I also found the section on keeping a writer's journal to be especially helpful. After participating in regular response groups and hearing from a variety of writers, I started to keep a journal. I have been jotting down ideas, observations, bits of dialogue, and interesting titles I have encountered, but I know there is still much more I could notice. Macrorie calls these observations "fabulous realities," and he details what these might look like in our lives and how to train ourselves to find them. His comparisons of writing journals also struck me; he refers to a journal as a "treasury," "collector's cabinet," "snapshot album," and "laboratory for experiments," among many other things (159-160). These parallels could be useful for students, too, as a means to help them make sense of this collection of inspiration. Additionally, I enjoyed the chapter dedicated to writing poetry, particularly several of the writing exercises that encourage writers to turn short, concentrated passages into poems. Often when I attempt to write poetry, I find myself bogged down by extra words and unnecessary descriptions, and these tasks challenged me to limit myself to only the essential words that had the greatest impact.

I am also looking forward to sharing some of Rief's freewrite exercises with students. Though these assignments are not as in-depth or developed as formal writing prompts, they build students' confidence and fluency as writers while also exposing them to a variety of stylistic devices and techniques they might want to include in future writing (p. 9). I love the fact that she compiled creative prompts that one can really dive into, but all in a low-risk fashion. I have tried several of these myself, and I have found that the pieces I have created in ten or so minutes have the potential to turn into larger, more polished pieces. Like Lamott, Goldberg, and Macrorie, Rief equips reluctant writers with starting points from which they may take off—and if they do not, they may surely move on to a different piece.

Reading Instruction

After completing my methods courses, there were still a few areas regarding the teaching of reading that I wanted to learn more about. During my AP English classes in high school, we spent a lot of time discussing literary theory, but this was not something that was specifically reviewed in my coursework. For this, I purchased Deborah Appleman's *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents*. Furthermore, my experiences during student teaching continually left me wondering how to make reading more accessible to students who were disengaged in class. I know there are a variety of materials covering this topic, but I decided to investigate a book by Alfred W. Tatum entitled *Reading for their Life: (Re) Building the Textual Lineages of African American Adolescent Males*.

The first thing I wanted to learn from Appleman's text was another way to approach the deconstructionist lens—one that has eluded me for a while. She discusses several of the pieces she uses to introduce students to the lens, including watching the music video for Natalie Umbruglia's "Torn," examining pictures of Michael Jackson, and considering assumptions a viewer might make about the movie *Shrek*, which "questions our usual assumptions about both character and narrative structure" (103). This book also offers a range of activities for students to apply their knowledge of the various critical lenses to texts. I especially liked Activity 9, "Upon Seeing an Orange," which breaks down what each of the critical lenses would ask about an orange. While the questions are very telling of each theory and could serve as a great review, teachers have the freedom to use the questions in variety of ways. Other activities that Appleman highlighted are specific to works such as *The Great Gatsby*, *A Room of One's Own*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *Heart of Darkness*—though they could certainly be adapted for other purposes.

One of the resounding messages in Tatum's text is the following: "The failure of African American adolescent males is not their failure alone, but the failure of educators and parents to help them view academic success as a possibility" (51). Too often teachers place the blame for a lack of learning solely on the students without considering cultural obstacles to academic success. Tatum, like others, advocates for giving students a voice in their learning, and putting forth the effort to choose "enabling texts" that are ac-

cessible and meaningful, rather than relying on stereotypes to do the teaching. “Ultimately, text selection has to be guided by a deeply purposeful understanding of students’ personal, cultural, sexual, communal, national, and international contexts – and a desire to shape these contexts without apology” (83). One thing that I wish Tatum discussed in greater detail is the way one may consider defending a selection of non-canonical texts. Though I understand that there is no easy or straightforward answer, his response is to highlight the “false dichotomy,” pointing out that we “continue to fail *certain* students because we fear how *certain* parents will react” to books selected expressly for African American males (61). Rather, it is necessary to select texts that build consciousness and, thus, self-determination among these students, as they move toward manhood. I feel that the best way for me to introduce such enabling texts at this point in my career, regardless of the population with whom I work, is to use supplemental texts to break up the monotony or potential disengagement that longer works from the canon might elicit.

Teaching Writing Through Models

Kelly Gallagher’s *Write Like This* provides many practical examples of how to teach writing with mentor texts. Gallagher explains the “formula” that makes up the basis of the book: “Teach your students real-world writing purposes, add a teacher who models his or her struggles with the writing process, throw in lots of real-world mentor texts for students to emulate, and give our kids the time necessary to enable them to stretch as writers” (21). At the start, Gallagher is quick to assure readers (and students) of writing’s importance in all walks of life. He even goes as far as to include excerpts from a written test given to prospective police officers. The majority of the book is dedicated to detailing a variety of writing assignments one may use with his or her students, along with samples of Gallagher’s own writing for said assignments. The book is broken down into six different types of writing (“Express and Reflect,” “Inform and Explain,” “Evaluate and Judge,” “Inquire and Explore,” “Analyze and Interpret,” and “Take a Stand/Propose a Solution”). While they are different sections, he acknowledges that in the real world, these types of writing often overlap. Gallagher does an excellent job of walking readers through the process of scaffolding students’ understanding of effective writing and

revision. Much like his text *Deeper Reading, Write Like This* includes assignment ideas ranging from quick in-class writing exercises to longer exercises and those that can be extended into formal papers.

Making Sense of Common Core

Throughout the previous school year, I have seen the book *Pathways to the Common Core* on the desks of many teachers. Though I am fairly familiar with the anchor standards and grade 9 and 10 expectations, I wanted to learn more about how to best align my future instruction with the standards. What I found, however, is that this book is so full of information that it may have been more helpful for me if I were investigating a specific concern rather than taking in all of the information at once. I was also at the disadvantage of beginning my methods classes just as Common Core was cropping up, so many of the comparisons between the old standards and Common Core did not resonate with me as much; in that case, I was thinking back to the instruction I received in secondary school. Nonetheless, I was interested in reading about the de-emphasis on personal writing in favor of analytical, text-based writing. Though a degree of reflection is certainly necessary to establish growth, this section was a reminder of the equally important conversations about repeated images, structure decisions, connotative language, and implicit metaphor, among others (39). I was also curious to explore the section about the Speaking and Listening and Language standards since they seem to be the ones that are least frequently discussed among teachers. One of my professors always stressed the importance of teaching students how to give and receive feedback – something teachers too frequently take for granted. However, the text also brings to light the disagreement that exists about prescribing roles and its potential to stifle organic student discussion. In those situations, I view the guidelines as training wheels. Once students have had practice asking questions and holding productive discussions, they may have more freedom to abandon specific roles.

Writing Centers: A Multi-faceted Lens

For months I had been dying to get my hands on a copy of Richard Kent's *A Guide to Creating Student-Staffed Writing Centers*. During my time

at UConn, I was actively involved with writing centers. I tutored undergraduate and graduate writers at the University Writing Center and presented research at the Northeast Writing Centers Association Conference in 2012. At this time last year, I was also looking forward to my appointment as one of the graduate assistants at our Writing Center, responsible for helping a partner school to establish a center and train their peer tutors. Though I used this book to inform some of my research during the Summer Institute, I was interested in learning more about the behind-the-scenes work and planning that writing center advisors do.

Aside from the pointers on how to staff and train peer tutors and how to organize the center, this book offers suggestions for ways to present the theoretical framework for writing centers to colleagues and administrators. Kent walks readers through the process of pitching the idea to fellow members of the department and determining the information that would be of most interest to the principal, for instance. I also appreciate that this book details the logistics of record keeping, which is something I did not have much exposure to as a tutor. And additionally, Kent describes many potential resources and activities to attract students to participate in writing center events while also creating a collaborative, fun space for students. During my graduate internship this past year at Glastonbury High School's Reading and Writing Center, we hosted a creative writing contest, which attracted even students who were not regular visitors to the Center. For the upcoming school year, I will have the privilege of being one of Berlin High School's Writing Center advisors, and I plan to turn to this book for ideas as we look to expand our services to students and reach out to more teachers.

NCTE Conference

The remainder of the money has been allocated to offset the registration fees for the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention in Boston in November 2013. By attending this conference, I will have the opportunity to network with teachers across the nation while learning more about instructional techniques. This year's theme, "(Re)Inventing the Future of English," invites participants to explore the ways in which teachers juxtapose traditional commitments to teaching the greatest works of literature with newer challeng-

es to incorporate informational texts, participatory media technologies, popular culture, the teaching of research, and oral language development.

Inspiration for Collaboration

Though not part of my grant, my participation in the Summer Institute with teachers of many age groups and content areas also provided inspiration for my Master's Inquiry Project, a research assignment I completed with my fellow graduate intern at Glastonbury High School's Reading and Writing Center. This internship allowed us to interact with and learn from many members of the English department, but we were also interested in learning more about how content area teachers address and teach writing in their classrooms. Soon, we began meeting with two AP Biology teachers who had a particular interest in re-vamping their writing instruction due to recent changes in the AP Biology exam, which requires students to model their writing after articles found in scientific journals; this shift entails more elaborate writing than the lab reports previously taught to students. Over the course of the year, we collaborated with the Biology teachers, along with another English teacher, to not only teach writing to the Biology students but also provide feedback on student writing outside of the classroom during tutorials at the Reading and Writing Center. Below is the abstract from our research report entitled, "Writing as a Literacy: Interdisciplinary Collaboration in English and Science."

Due to the increasing emphasis on the importance of school-wide literacy, teachers across all content areas are expected to play more significant roles in improving their students' writing skills. Students, however, often consider English to be the only class where they are expected to engage with writing. Research suggests that in order to refute this notion, teachers must engage in conversation with colleagues from all subject-areas about how to best foster writing across the curriculum. For this reason, we embarked on a collaborative endeavor with English and Science teachers to learn how to best teach writing outside of English classes. We were also interested in learning about the impact of this collaboration on both teachers and students. Over a period of several months, we de-

signed mini-lessons on the various components of the scientific research paper, which the English teachers presented to AP Biology students. The collaboration also consisted of English and Science teachers meeting to discuss the impact of the collaboration and how to improve upcoming writing assignments. After surveying and interviewing the participants in the collaboration, our findings indicated that the implementation of interdisciplinary writing instruction was positively received by both students and teachers and led to an improvement of student writing as a result of the purposeful instruction and students' altered perception of writing in the science classroom.

Overall, this process was very rewarding. I was able to gain more exposure to writing across the curriculum and working with a greater number of students who may not have been to the Reading and Writing Center otherwise. And not only did the teachers and students learn from this experience, but we as future English teachers also learned a lot about what constitutes good scientific writing and the ways in which it is similar to the writing done in English class.

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Defining and Celebrating Voice in the Classroom

By Shirley Cowles, Sage Park Middle School

Introduction

How do we define voice? Is there a teaching technique or “best practice” that can be developed to encourage emerging young writers’ voices? Can the establishment of a love for creative writing be transferred to successful academic writing? These are three essential questions; my goal for the 2012-2013 school year was to find the answers. As Challenge Resource Teacher (gifted/talented program) at Sage Park Middle School, I have incorporated these three important questions into my long-term goals. I am hoping to continue this work next year, making it a two-year goal for both me as an educator and teacher of writing, as well as for the development of writing interest, skill, and talent in my students, who are in grades seven and eight. As Windsor is one of five pilot districts incorporating and evaluating the new State teacher evaluation program, SEED, it is especially important that this goal be seen as worthy of one that shows results and can be sustained and developed over time.

Beginning with research conducted over the summer with my CWP educational partner, Cynthia Dee, a framework was created and presented around the following components: building a literary zone in one’s classroom; defining the purpose of voice; identifying qualities and elements of voice; developing the personal voice; using technology and voice; finding one’s voice; and recognizing challenges in teaching voice. Experts in the field were investigated, research findings were incorporated, and a plan was set in place to both present our discoveries to our CWP colleagues and begin my personal goal set forth within my own classroom. Linda Rief, Donald Murray, Tom Romano, Katie Wood Ray, Don Graves, Lynn Bloom, Ralph Fletcher, and Anne Lamott are among the writers, authors, and educators that we researched to begin to build our background knowledge around the teaching and development of “voice.”

Voice in the Classroom

Before working with my seventh and eighth grade Challenge students

this year, I created my broad goals, and I made connections between these and the Common Core State Standards, with grade eight students demonstrating an understanding of the six traits of good writing, and seventh grade students improving their use of the revision process in writing. These goals are below:

Overall, students will write routinely over extended periods of time (allowing for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. They will produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. Grade eight students will write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, precise words and phrases, dialogue, and well-structured event sequences to convey experiences and events. Grade seven students will conduct a sustained research project based on focused questions, demonstrating an understanding of the subject matter under investigation. Students will use technology to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with each other.

I have incorporated the following strategies this year, as well: spending time conferencing with each student to build both interest and confidence as writers, to ensure that they are given choice with writing assignments making the writing real and authentic; requiring that students identify one or two traits of good writing to improve, thus showing ownership of their choices and learning; understanding the importance of revision as an essential ingredient in the writing process; using writers' response groups as a means to build confidence as writers through sharing with others and using feedback as a means to strengthen our writing; crafting a variety of pieces of authentic poetry and prose; looking for appropriate publishing sources in which to showcase student writing; and incorporating voice into their writing through mini-lessons around voice development in the writer's craft. In addition, when a writing assignment is given and students begin the process, I am writing right along with them. This was a new strategy for me this year, and one that, I believe, made a marked difference in the outcome of my writing, and students' skill development in the area of constructive criticism and the writing process.

Ongoing research has continued during two professional development days where texts have been read and information gathered all around the topic of “voice” and incorporated into both the classroom as hands on activities, as well as data collection for better understanding and answering the three essential questions initiated. Texts read to date are: *The 9 Rights of Every Writer: A Guide for Teachers*, by Vicki Spandel, *Crafting Authentic Voice* by Tom Romano, and *Pathways to the Common Core* by Lucy Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Christopher Lehman.

Reflecting on data I have collected, assessments of progress I have given, and students’ work that I have assigned, I continue to make sure we work toward the goals I set for the course of the year. I have also created writing surveys, revision strategies, and a philosophical discussion around the question: “Why do we write?” Examples of the assignments I have given or will give are as follows: both short and extended pieces of writing from first to final drafts, humorous writing, six-word memoirs, narrative fiction, quick writes, nonfiction research writing (unsolved mysteries and identifying an individual who dared to be different), identity poems, wordles and fables around the topic of identity, descriptive essay around Paul Fleischman’s “My House of Voices,” artifact bag of “voices” (personifying inanimate objects), re-writing a novel’s lead line and paragraph by borrowing the first line and then making it one’s own, writing about something ordinary, flash fiction, haiku, diamante, and Holocaust-themed paper-bag poetry.

“Osmotic Pressure”

What have I been doing differently this year? I have become a member of my classroom through osmosis. My entire curricular focus has been re-vamped to more deeply include the craft of writing, the writing process, identifying the traits of good writing, developing voice as a writer, and the importance of revision in the writing process. I am now offering students more choice in their writing assignments and am encouraging their journey along the way with both defining and understanding who they are as writers, as I grow to understand who I am as a writer. It has become a truly joint venture and a humbling experience for me as both an educator and writer. Students now see me actively writing with them, following either a mini-lesson on craft, or select-

ing a preferred piece to edit and revise. The response group process has also proved invaluable in both building a classroom of writers, providing encouragement to each writer, and offering a safe and trusting environment in which to set free the inner voice and creativity within. Selected and varied texts are incorporated and included as “mentor texts” from which to exemplify outstanding writing and strong voice. These texts are used as a springboard for analysis of content, process, and product.

Where do I go from here? After discussing award-winning novels with my students and exploring the myriad range of awards given to outstanding “voices,” we determined that stipend monies received will be spent two-fold. The first will be toward the building of a classroom “Voice” Library to include a range of distinct voices for students to learn from, hear, emulate, and practice. Research has been conducted with my library media specialist, as well as account managers at both Follett Educational Services and Barnes & Noble around names and titles appropriate for this purpose. A variety of genres will be included within this collection from children’s illustrated picture books, poetry, young adult novels, and teen reads, presented in the format of CD/audio books narrated in the author’s voice, whenever possible. In addition, collaboration with our library media specialist at Sage Park this year has proved to be an important and significant relationship, as exemplified through a piloted co-teaching experience around nonfiction research; the partnership has also led to the development of resources to enhance my curriculum offerings in the future.

The other portion of the mini-grant will be used toward a teaching artist visit/author’s workshop around the topic of voice development and the revision process as a writer. Peggy Deitz Shea, two-time winner of the Connecticut Books Award, who specializes in multicultural and social justice fiction and non-fiction for young readers, visited my classroom on April 24, 2013. She conducted a half-day writing workshop with my 7th and 8th grade classes. The seventh graders revisited a piece of poetry written in the fall and went through the revision process with Peggy, focusing on developing a stronger piece of writing with more emphasis on specific word choice. The eighth graders wrote a piece of Holocaust poetry based on Peggy’s “In and Out of Context Workshop,” by borrowing a line from an existing related poem. This experience was beneficial for my students by getting to know and work with an authentic published au-

thor and understanding the importance of the revision process through writing. It also confirmed my ability to effectively teach writing, encourage my students to become stronger writers, as well as find validation in the work I am doing within my classroom. Students read their poems to the class and, much to my surprise, many who tended to be quiet and introverted found the inner courage to read their pieces in front of a live audience. This was remarkable, and Peggy commented on not only the words written, but also the confidence behind the voices sharing their work.

Giving Voice to the Future

At last I am moving toward my initial identification from CWP 2012 as “digital immigrant” to a “digital pioneer.” The district of Windsor recently revamped its entire website and design. I looked upon this as an opportunity for me to highlight all the wonderful accolades my students have accomplished over the past five years, showing the public how our program has developed and grown, and most importantly, beginning to use it as a digital writing tool for my students. Working with the district’s Technology Teacher Leader, I presented the idea that I would like to design a blog of sorts for my students to share their writing and comment/critique classmates’ writing in a constructive manner. We piloted an LA8 Challenge “Paper Bag poetry” page, where students were allowed access to EdLine, given an account number, design a profile picture resembling them or their special talents/interests, and download their poetry. The results were remarkable in many ways. As an educator, I find myself stretching my knowledge in this area, and I am excited about building this in the future with other classes next year. I found that once students posted their poetry, they could comment on any other 8th grade Challenge student’s poetry, not just those poems written by kids in their particular class, so our audience broadened. Furthermore, those students who tend to be shy, or less likely to read their writing for various reasons (low self-confidence or self-esteem), now had a platform through which to share their work without the pressure of having to read to an audience or even one other person. My hopes are to expand this initiative next year with LA7 classes when we write our poetry, reflective letters, and/or nonfiction research. I will be referencing Troy Hicks’ *The Digital Writing Workshop*, and purchasing *Teaching Writing Using Blogs, Wikis, and other*

Digital Tools, and Crafting Original Writing: Composing Texts Across Media and Genres, also by Troy Hicks, to use as reference books to guide newly developed curricular ideas.

At the beginning of the school year, I asked my students to define “voice” in their notebooks. We added VOICE to our list of five other traits of good writing, and then wrote our own definition at the bottom of the page. Some students were stuck, so I let them borrow a written definition from “masters” in the field (Fletcher, Murray, Romano, Reif, Graves, Lamott). Last week, we finished up our nonfiction research on an individual who dared to be different, had an informal book talk, and shared titles to recommend for good summer reads, and students signed my whiteboard as an official goodbye for the year. Their exit ticket to me (in lieu of a formal class evaluation) was just one simple request: “Please, in your own words, define voice.” There wasn’t a student who was stuck, who needed thinking time, who struggled with this request. They all responded. I leave you with a few of their responses.

“Voice is the way the author chooses to tell the story. It is voice that gives the story its meaning.” –AMV

“Voice is the way you express yourself through writing; the way your imagination is allowed to be set free through something as simple as pen and paper.” –NP

“Voice is the style or tone of one’s writing. It gives you that recognizable feeling towards the author.” –ID

“Every page, every essay, every story, every book is a different combination of just 26 letters ... It’s how you combine and string together those 26 letters that develops your voice, your unique style.” –GK

“Voice is the flow and ‘sound’ of the author. The attitude and way of speaking.” –EB

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Writing for Your Life: Building a Classroom Environment that Celebrates Student Voices

By Cynthia Dee, East Hartford High School

Introduction

Donald Murray defines “voice” as “the magical heard quality of writing.” Donald Graves maintains that “voice” is “the imprint of ourselves on our writing.” Tom Romano states that one of his college students defined “voice” as “the writer’s DNA.”

In the literary world, “voice” is defined in a multitude of ways. In teaching students about voice, are we limited to a literary definition? We teach students to listen to the voice of the writer. Sometimes it is about the voices in their minds—the questions, thoughts, and ideas. For the student population I work with, voice is about power; it is about having a “seat at the table.” It is about being heard.

This year I challenged myself to help my students find their voices. This was not going to be an easy task. I am not a language arts teacher, but rather a science teacher and a nurse. I teach in a program that prepares students to become health care workers. My time is split between classroom and clinical settings, such as nursing homes and hospitals. The district I work in is urban; most of my students are economically disadvantaged and have significant gaps in reading, writing, and mathematics. My goal was to help my students acquire both the skills and content knowledge to become healthcare workers while simultaneously attempting to close the gaps in reading and writing. Additionally, I wanted them to discover their voices.

Building a Literary Zone

I started with the building of a literary zone. My research partner, Shirley Cowles, and I had spent considerable time examining this last summer as we prepared for our workshop. It also helped that Cowles, a teacher of gifted and talented students, had experience in creating literary zones.

I began with the creation of a small lending library. In *Readicide*, Kelly Gallagher discusses the lack of access to reading materials in impoverished populations. He cites a study conducted by Warrick Elley on reading achieve-

Cynthia Dee

ment. No surprise that there is a strong correlation between time spent reading and reading achievement. Gallagher suggests the idea of creating a book “flood zone” to provide students with immediate access to all types of books. Thus, this year I started to create the “flood zone.” I selected books that related to my content area and considered numerous lists of books that have been compiled to entice reluctant teenage readers. Additionally, I selected books that would resonate with my Latino/a and African American students.

By the end of the year, my small library was taking off. In May, my students and I were watching a condensed version of *The Last Lecture*. None of the students in the class were aware of Randy Pauch and his unique story. They were completely engaged as they watched the video clip. After questions and discussion, I showed them the book. I had several copies in my library, and all were “checked out” for the weekend. This short video clip and immediate access created a wonderful reading opportunity for my students.

The creation of an environment suitable for writing was also accomplished with the assistance of my Department Chair, a former CWP participant. My classroom now has tables and chairs where students can easily collaborate and discuss their ideas and early drafts. The structure facilitates the writing and the peer review process.

The Spoken Voice

Although my research focused on literary voice I wanted my students to have an opportunity to hear the beauty of language, the sound of words, the cadence and tone of a writer reading their work. Audio books, podcasts, Tedx Talks, as well as numerous NPR programs, became an integral part of the class. I wanted my students to hear the voices of academics, storytellers, and politicians, as well as the person next door. As we listened to a portion of *My Beloved World* by Sonia Sotomayor, students could hear her diction, her Latina voice, and, at times, her New York accent. They identified with her passion, her quest to obtain an education, and the numerous barriers that stood in her way.

Journal Writing

Journal Writing has always been a part of my class as a vehicle for reflec-

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tion. After CWP I realized that I could use Journal writing in a multitude of ways. This year, when students wrote in their journals, I did as well. This modeling of the “teacher as writer” was invaluable. Tom Romano, who writes extensively about voice, states that the best writing teachers are those that value writing and make it a part of their lives. My students and I were sharing common experiences at the clinical setting, writing about them and reflecting, together.

Journal writing was not formally graded or corrected. When I read the journal entries, I made comments and asked for clarification. I think this contributed to authenticity of the writing and provided the students with a sense of freedom.

This year, the journal writing also helped students compose longer reflection pieces. Students were provided with some specific criteria for these pieces. Once again these were not corrected; however, students presented their short pieces using the writer’s workshop format. After I explained and modeled this technique, the students embraced it. This format provided them with an opportunity to share their clinical experiences through their writing. They respected the process and provided each other with useful feedback.

Final Reflection Paper

In collaboration with Steve Straight, an English professor at Manchester Community College, I developed a final writing assignment. This assignment focused on the students’ development as a health care worker. In essence it was a story about their personal transformation from novice to licensed practitioner. A detailed rubric was provided for students, along with examples of student work from trusted websites. Students were given time to write and revise. The focus was not solely on the product, but on the process of writing. Many of the students took advantage of the opportunity and continued to edit and revise their work. These students produced writing that clearly demonstrated their personal transformations as health care workers as well as writers. This was something of which we could all be proud.

Next Year...

The library will grow, journaling will continue, and writing and reflecting

Cynthia Dee

will continue to be an integral part of the class. My plans are to incorporate Digital Story Telling and poetry into my classes next year. I have been reading literature about the value of reciting poetry and how it enhances neural connections in the brain. Now that I own a poetry anthology, I can develop ways to incorporate poetry into my classes.

I will continue to collaborate with the talented language arts teachers in my school as well as with former CWP fellows. I also will have the opportunity to attend professional development events with the English department and continue my work with Steve Straight.

At the end of the school year, my students commented on the amount of reading and writing that they did in the class. Some complained about the work but most were proud. They were proud at having passed the state test for nursing assistants, proud of their accomplishments with respect to reading and writing, and perhaps most importantly, they were proud to be part of an environment where their voices were heard and valued.

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Talkin' Loud and Writin' Something: Dialogical Discussions and Process Pedagogy at Prep School

By Ellen Devine, Choate Rosemary Hall

Introduction

In June of 2012, I knew I had a work-filled summer ahead of me. I would spend June and July completing my coursework to earn my masters by participating in the Connecticut Writing Project, and then I would devote August to writing a curriculum development plan for a new English course, entitled "Intensive Expository Writing," which would be launched that fall at my school, Choate Rosemary Hall. What I did not know at the start of that summer was that the research project I would conduct during CWP would provide the theoretical framework and philosophy upon which to build that new course, as well as the means to facilitate and encourage the Choate English department to reflect upon and update its pedagogical approach to writing.

Background: Choate, Ellen, and Intensive Expository Writing

Founded in 1896, Choate Rosemary Hall is a prestigious boarding school with a long history of academic excellence and a tradition of producing famous writers including John Dos Passos and Edward Albee. Choate's English department has played a role in helping to shape many generations of great writers, but members of the current English faculty would be the first to acknowledge that their English classes are predominantly literature based, and that while a great deal of writing is required for the course, there is little instruction in how to write beyond discussion of creating outlines, generating a thesis, concision, and eliminating error. At least half of the essay assignments in a term are analytical essays and emphasis is placed on developing the skills necessary to compose compelling and persuasive literary analyses. Students receive a great deal of feedback in response to completed papers but much less instruction in the process of creating those papers. The pedagogical approach to writing has not changed much in the last fifty years, in part because the dynamic, interesting, and engaged faculty that are teaching in that manner are successful on a number of fronts. At the same time, in the last few years, the department has engaged in discussions about writing pedagogy, how to best

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help our weaker writers, and how to incorporate genres of writing (besides the analytical essay) more thoroughly into our curriculum.

In the winter of 2012, the Choate English department approved a proposal to create a course entitled, Intensive Expository Writing, which was intended to be a supplementary writing course for our weakest writers in the junior and senior years. The creation of Intensive Expository Writing marked a shift in the department's approach to the teaching of writing. Intensive Expository Writing was an early exploration of more thoughtful and direct instruction in composition, and the hope of the entire department was that the type of curriculum created for this course might influence and inform the entire department over time. Katie Levesque, then the English department chair, and I received a curriculum development grant to create the course. Given my study of rhetoric and composition during my graduate work, I was charged with creating the philosophy, theoretical approach, and outline of the course. Katie would ultimately be teaching the class, and so her role that summer was to enhance and supplement the course with readings and prepare herself to teach a new course.

In the summer of 2012, I was at an interesting moment in my own career. I was in my eighth year of teaching and was just finishing my Master's degree. In the previous year, the 2010-2011 academic year, I had taken a leave of absence to attend the University of Connecticut in pursuit of the MA in English. Through my coursework and my teaching of Freshmen English, I encountered the field of rhetoric and composition. I was intrigued and compelled by the study of composition, style, and the pedagogy of writing, but I was also troubled by the ways in which these theories and principles seemed to reject that approach to literature and writing that I had had for the previous seven years of my teaching career, not to mention the approach I had been taught throughout high school and college. While there were ways in which I could see that the Choate English department (and most English departments in private schools) could do better, I was also sure that my colleagues and I were doing something more than simply working with a group of talented and often privileged students. There was great tension between the scholarship that so inspired my graduate work and the common approach to teaching English experience at Choate, and I had not yet found a way to alleviate that tension.

When it came time for me to select a topic for my CWP writing project,

the only project I wanted to tackle was trying to find some way to reconcile what I had studied and learned during graduate school with what I had seen and experienced in eight years of private school teaching. My research project, *Speaking into Writing*, did just that as I explored and considered the significance of dynamic, student-led, dialogical discussion (sometimes referred to as *The Harkness Method* in private schools) as an act of revision and as a crucial component of the writing process as it is taught in many private schools. My project then went on to propose ways in which a dialogical, student-led discussion could be enhanced and enriched by employing some of the approaches to process-oriented writing pedagogy. The project was personally very rewarding, but it also came at an advantageous time since I had an opportunity to create a course that could immediately reap the benefits of this research and serve as a venue for experimentation and exploration.

The creation of the course, *Intensive Expository Writing*, was an important professional and creative experience for me because it allowed me to apply recent and relevant research in an immediate and practical manner within the evolving curriculum of my department. Since I created the course in collaboration with a colleague, and created it with the idea that I would not be the one teaching the course, it was equally valuable for the kind of sharing, discussions and exploration the two of us engaged in as we built the course. The depth and breadth of those discussions and of the course itself were greatly enhanced by my experience at Connecticut Writing Project, but admittedly, the creation of *Intensive Expository Writing* did not require any funds from the mini-grant. Katie and I were both familiar with contemporary writing pedagogy and we were eager and excited to apply what we knew to a new course. As valuable as our experiences, knowledge, and energy were and continue to be, the creation of the course cost nothing.

I used the funds from my mini-grant to do something seemingly small: I purchased quintessential texts on writing pedagogy, rhetoric, composition, and style, in order to create a pedagogy library for the Choate English department. The department had already indicated its willingness to change and grow by approving the creation of a course that was devoted to the writing process, that explored a variety of genres of writing, that provided explicit instruction in composition beyond elimination of error, and that stressed the importance of revision. The next step was to help promote and encourage these concepts in

all our classes by inspiring curiosity, generating discussion and providing the opportunity to learn more.

Creating the Syllabus

When August arrived, and I began working on the syllabus itself, I wanted to make sure that Intensive Expository Writing avoided the pattern many of our other English courses fell into, what Murray describes as "being fully trained in the autopsy" (*Learning by Teaching*). Murray's "autopsy" approach essentially boils down to the activities of a "traditional" English classroom—evaluating literature as product, examining that literature critically, dismantling it bit by bit, and then setting out to create live, new writing on the basis of this finished and dismantled product. Process pedagogy was far from new or revolutionary, but it had not really made its way into my department, so I wanted to be sure that this new course was structured in a fashion that allowed time for the teaching of particular process, as well as time and space for each student to discover her own individual process.

At the same time, I did not want Intensive Expository Writing to become so devoted to pre-writing, writing, and revising in class that there was no time for dialogue and discussion. Such discussions were what made all of our other English classes successful in part because "dialogue imposes itself as the way by which [we] achieve significance as human beings ... this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's 'depositing' ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be 'consumed by the discussants,'" (Friere, 2000). In an ironic, or perhaps expected twist, a school of privilege and elitism was successfully managing to embody a crucial tenant of education as described in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and I certainly did not want to lose that in the name of peer editing.

My goal was to introduce traditional process pedagogy to this course while maintaining dialogical discussion. The difference in this class would be that the dialogical discussion would be framed as an essential part of the writing process rather than a separate activity. "Spoken language represents phenomena as if they were processes [while] written language represent phenomena as if they were products," (Halliday qtd in Elbow, 2012). Building upon this observation, Intensive Expository Writing would present discussion as a process,

which could then extend to the writing process through intentional activities and writing assignments.

The course managed to do this in a number of ways. The readings of the course were structured to introduce students to different types of writing as well as different types of writing skills, which progressed from more personal to more analytical. In the first week of the course students engaged in short writing assignments such as:

Compose a title for an essay or article that immediately captures your reader's attention and curiosity

A précis (this is an activity that emphasizes concision, sentence combining, word selection and syntax)

6 word autobiography

Haiku about the first impressions of Choate, this class, writing (really anything)

As I wrote in the syllabus itself, the reasoning behind these short written assignments was "to have the students approach and consider composition from different angles than simply 'writing an essay.' The point of doing short, quirky exercises is to introduce an element of creativity and inventiveness that can feel absent for many students when writing an essay and also to highlight the points that word choice, diction, syntax are all tools at their disposal and can achieve interesting effects. In other words, writing is not so much about correctness, impressive vocabulary, avoiding the passive voice and conciseness, but about explicit and thoughtful choices made by the individual writer." In order to connect these small exercises to discussion, I recommended that "they should also be the subject of class discussion so that the students can consider and reflect upon the fact that they made a variety of choices in their writing, those choices created effects, and that they have the opportunity to revise and refine those choices through the revision process."

The next three weeks were devoted to observational, reflective, and narrative writing—all genres that a student's own authority, interest, and familiarity could shape significantly. Students read fine examples of these genres and then reviewed those essays, reflected on them, and attempted to compose pieces in the same genre. In the fifth and sixth weeks of the course, the students studied works that built upon the observational and narrative forms but

also involved an element of research and analysis. The seventh, eighth, and ninth weeks then built the act of creating and supporting an argument into the writing, but not through traditional literary analysis. In the final three weeks of the term, students were then encouraged to return to the unique genre of literary analysis writing and try using the skills and insights they had developed in Intensive Expository Writing to revise and improve upon an old paper from their other English classes. Throughout the course, students were introduced to a variety of tools and skills that would help improve the power of their writing, promote the development of an authentic voice and allow them to cultivate intentional style. Topics such as rhetorical devices, genre consideration, mimicking styles, sentence combining, focus on syntax, clarity and concision, the intentional incorporation of cultural vernacular, etc. were all a part of daily dialogical discussion throughout the term, and as a result, also found their way successfully into students' writing.

The final assignment for the term was to compose a critical reflection of their progress as a writer throughout the term. Students were asked to analyze old papers and to cite evidence of their struggles and improvements. As I read through the students' reflections, many of them cited the grammatical and usage errors they used to make and then explained how they understand those rules better now; but what became obvious was the processes that had developed for each student, as he or she described how he or she approaches writing after this course. Students also discussed and described their voice as a writer, something that most Choate students do not acknowledge or perhaps even think about with regards to their own work. The students who completed Intensive Expository Writing were not transformed into fluid, profound, and prolific writers; many of them still struggled to write "well." The difference between these students and the rest of the students at Choate (many of whom also struggle to write in one manner or another) is that they have a process, a set of tools, and a mindset that allows them to see their way through that struggle.

Creating the Library

Once the philosophical approach for Intensive Expository Writing was articulated and the preliminary syllabus was complete, it was time to start thinking about which books would be most useful, interesting and accessible to the rest

of the English department. All of my colleagues are bright, energetic, educated and devoted teachers who are exceptionally thoughtful about how and why they teach. They were and are eager to know more about the subjects I was studying in graduate school and the concepts upon which Katie and I built Intensive Expository Writing, but they are all also exceptionally busy people who struggle to balance the demands of their job and their personal life. Keeping that in mind, I wanted to create a library that would provide a strong introduction to process pedagogy without being too steeped in theory, that offered a variety of approaches and opinions on teaching writing and that gave practical, specific examples to accompany and support their theories. This was a somewhat daunting task, but thanks to the size of my mini-grant, I was able to purchase a large number of texts, which spanned a variety of approaches, theories, and even generations. A few of the authors featured in the library are Ann Lamott, Peter Elbow, Edward Corbett, Don Murray, Robert Connor, and many others.

Where We Go From Here

Intensive Expository Writing ran for two semesters in the 2012-2013 academic year. Thirty students were exposed to the concepts I described throughout this report and went on to be more successful, thoughtful and intentional writers for the remainder of their Choate career. The course will run again this fall, and there will likely be enough interest and demand that it runs for the winter, as well. Another member of our department will be teaching the course in the coming year, so he is now fully acquainting himself with the concepts upon which the course was built, and he consults the department's composition library regularly. This year the library did not see quite as much action from the entire department as I would have hoped for, but as incoming department chair, I intend to build professional development days around composition and process pedagogy to encourage more interest and curiosity in the texts. I will also continue to grow the library based on my own reading as well as on the suggestions of others. Like writing, change is a process, and it is one that can go quite slowly at times, but thanks to the energy and interest of my colleagues as well as the opportunities brought about by the CWP mini-grant, it is a process that is well underway in Choate's English Department.

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Online Writing Feedback via Screencast: An Action Research Project

By Emily Hernberg, New Canaan High School

Introduction

As a Connecticut Writing Project Teacher Consultant (SI-2012) and English teacher at New Canaan High School (NCHS), I received a grant in the amount of \$500 to attend the 2013 National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) Annual Conference, as well as the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the NCTE (ALAN), both of which take place in November 2013. With these funds, I purchased a membership to NCTE and registered for both conferences. Having previously attended both of these conferences, I knew that they would be useful in expanding my professional development, particularly in terms of giving effective feedback during writing conferences.

Because the research I began last summer and continued into the 2012/13 school year was focused on peer and teacher feedback throughout the writing process, the workshops I will attend at the conference will have to do with this subject. Attending these workshops will allow me to expand my understanding, network with other teachers of writing, and bring my new knowledge back to my colleagues at NCHS. I have already begun sharing my action research on feedback with my colleagues during professional development days, and hope to continue to do so through my attendance at NCTE.

The budget breakdown was as follows:

NCTE Membership: \$50

Bought one year of membership

Purchased November 2012, to last until the next year's conference in November 2013.

Gave me online access to all NCTE journals published more than two years prior to purchase. This helped me in my research and allowed me to direct my colleagues toward articles and resources that would benefit them professionally.

NCTE Conference Registration: \$240 (if a member)

Being an NCTE member saved \$75 on registration costs.

ALAN Conference Registration: \$190 (if a member)

Misc Traveling/Hotel/Food: \$20

Research at CWP-SI

The research on which I (and my partner, Ethan Warner) worked for CWP-SI during summer 2012 revolved around feedback: what makes “good” feedback, how to teach students to give feedback, the difference between evaluative and formative feedback, and a compare/contrast of teacher versus peer feedback, and written versus oral feedback. The questions that guided us in our research were prompted by what we believe to be a very common problem: we had found that when we give students written feedback, they often check for their grade first, and then stick the paper in their folders, backpacks, or even the trash, without taking the time to examine why they earned the grade in the first place. The question that I carried into the school year with my action research was this: How can we motivate students to revise?

As we researched this question together, we began to focus more and more on *evaluative* versus *formative* feedback. Evaluative feedback, essentially, is the grade; formative feedback involves asking questions of the writer and is more of a conversation (McGarrell). Multiple researchers and teachers asserted that it was important for the majority of feedback to be formative rather than evaluative (Duijnhouwer; McGarrell).

Formative feedback need not be entirely *written* feedback; Franklin (80) points out that peer and teacher conferences can also provide excellent formative feedback. Indeed, one of the lamentable truths about being an English teacher is a lack of time to give feedback; by giving a *variety* of feedback from multiple sources, this issue can be somewhat mitigated. Beyond that, the more significant and important benefit of writing conferences is that they are, by nature, formative—assuming they are run correctly, of course (Kent 44; Ryan & Zimmerelli 23; Brooks; Sarbo & Moxley 136).

It is this lack of time in my own schedule that first made me look more closely at writing conferencing as a focus for my action-research during the 2012/13 school year. I knew that I needed to give my students more timely and effective feedback without adding substantially to my already hefty grading load.

Narrowing My Focus

Initially, I was most excited at the prospect of focusing my next research on the various structures possible with peer conferencing, and how to guide students toward conferencing effectively. A few weeks after CWP-SI 2012 disbanded, however, I attended EdCampCT, an annual technology-focused educational “unconference.” At EdCampCT, I learned about screen-casting, a technology for creating video tutorials, and I realized that I could use this technology to improve the way that I give feedback. With that, my focus shifted; now, I would experiment with adjusting my own feedback model to be both more helpful and more efficient. After all, how could my students learn to give effective feedback to one-another if my own feedback was lacking or not given in a timely manner? This, I decided, would be a good way to both develop myself professionally and to provide a much-needed model for my students. The dimension of my instructional practice I most wanted to improve was teacher-to-student feedback. In the past, I had found that my students did not utilize my feedback (a combination of written feedback and one-on-one conferencing) to the extent that they needed in order to maximize learning. I knew this to be the case because, when I read my students’ reflections on their writing portfolios the previous year, teacher feedback was inconsistently mentioned as a vehicle for revision and improvement—and there was the aforementioned observed behavior of students looking for the grade and not bothering to examine the detailed feedback I had so painstakingly added to their papers.

In the past, I had always given feedback either on paper copies or through brief, one-on-one conferences with students. This year, I wanted to throw technology into the mix in the hopes that it would be more accessible to my technologically-savvy students and allow me to give feedback more efficiently and effectively. I hoped that screen-casted feedback would allow me to achieve this ends.

New Canaan High School and My Classroom

New Canaan is a wealthy town on Connecticut’s “Gold Coast.” There is one public high school in the town (NCHS), made up of approximately 1,340

students, 90% of whom are white. The school ranks among the top in the state in terms of scores on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) and the Advanced Placement (AP) pass rate. The NCHS Writing Center, an important part of the NCHS academic program, is entirely teacher-run and hosts over 1,200 teacher/student conferences per year, most of which are voluntarily attended by the students (as opposed to being required by their classroom teacher). Despite the inevitability of day-to-day technological glitches, NCHS teachers typically integrate technology as an integral part of the curriculum, and students are therefore familiar with a wide range of technology. A large majority of students bring their own devices into school (smartphones, tablets, laptops), with which they can access a wireless network through the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy.

The course I chose to use for my experiment was my grade ten Language, Literature, and Composition course. This is a “regular level,” required English course. Because the course acts as a catch-all for any and all students who did not make it into the Honors level, the academic and writing ability of my students encompasses a wide range. Last fall, I had two classes within this course: one with 19 students, and one with 17. The experiment was conducted in the beginning of the year, starting in October, just as students began to compose their first formal thesis paper of the year.

The Tools: What is Screen-Casting?

Since New Canaan is a Google district and my students were already familiar with Google Docs, I decided to use that as the sharing platform for rough drafts. Once they shared the drafts with me, I gave formative feedback with an online screen-casting program called Jing. This program allowed me to record myself talking directly to the student about his or her draft as though it were a one-sided writing conference (since this was a video, the student obviously could not respond to my questions or comments in real time). As the student listened to my voice, he or she could watch which passages I was highlighting and pointing to on screen, which gave them a visual reference. The link to the video itself would be attached to their Google Doc, which meant that everything was all in one place.

The Process

I split my students randomly into two groups: one half received the experimental screen-casted feedback, while the other half acted as the control and received paper feedback. I distributed pre- and post-surveys to all students, and also analyzed their growth in performance on the School Writing Rubric, which I used to give a pre-grade during the drafting process and a post-grade once the final draft was due.

Pre-Survey

Before I began this experiment, I distributed a pre-survey to determine whether screen-casted feedback was a worthwhile endeavor. Though I told my students that their responses were NOT anonymous (since I wanted to be able to track individual students), I told them that their honest answers were vital to help me to help them, and that their answers would not be reflected in their grade. My questions included:

In general, how helpful do you find WRITTEN feedback from TEACHERS on your DRAFTS? (Likert Scale: Not at all helpful à Extremely helpful) (Likert Scale)

In general, how helpful do you find ORAL / SPOKEN feedback from TEACHERS on your DRAFTS? (Likert Scale: Not at all helpful à Extremely helpful)

What kind of feedback is most helpful to you? (Peer feedback; Written teacher feedback; Oral/spoken teacher feedback; Other)

Which of these methods of receiving WRITTEN feedback from a teacher is MORE HELPFUL for you? (Comments written on a paper copy; Comments written on a Google Doc; no preference)

What can Ms. Hernberg do (either in or out of class) to better help you with your revision process? (Open answer)

76% of students asserted that they found written teacher feedback on their drafts extremely helpful, and 62% claimed that they always used this feedback. My students found oral/spoken feedback less helpful; only 17% thought oral feedback was extremely helpful, and only 28% always used it. In addition, 16 (55%) of my students found written feedback on a paper copy most helpful, while only 2 (7%) preferred feedback in a Google Doc, and 11 (38%) had no

preference.

Though the results of this section of the pre-survey seemed to discourage screen-casted feedback, the answers to the open-ended question on what I could do to help with the revision process made it clear that the experiment was worth trying. Here are some samples of what students said about how I could help them:

“I personally benefit from oral feedback and I think it would help our class out a lot if we had more oral feedback from the teachers or even peers.”

“It helps me when I get written feedback but also when I can talk about the revisions so I know exactly what you are saying.”

“Although it may take a little longer, having my teacher do both written edits on a paper copy as well as walking me through my errors often is what works best for me. It helps me both edit whatever it is I'm writing as well as helping me learn how I could write in the future.”

“In order to achieve my goals in writing, a method I would suggest to do would be to have my teacher and I meet after school or during a free period for a conference about my revisions or improvements.”

Although many students gave a low score to oral/spoken feedback on the Likert-scaled questions, the open-ended questions revealed that they still valued *conversation* (which, perhaps, is different from direct feedback). This was exactly what I hoped to achieve through screen-casted feedback. I hoped that this new technology would allow me to at least start the conversation and get students thinking, without taking all of the classroom and school-day time that a traditional conference requires. That is, I could *record* a one-sided screen-casted conference at night, email the video to the student, and have them watch it before class the next day. The conversation could continue in real time once the student had time to think about answers to the probing questions I asked in the screen-cast.

Initial Results

The largest challenge I had was in collecting data for the post-survey. Because Hurricane Sandy occurred just before I gave the post-survey, resulting in several days of missed school, so much time had passed between students

using my feedback and completing the survey that the results were extremely unreliable (many students noted that they “couldn’t remember” what they had changed). Therefore, I was forced to throw that data out.

Fortunately, I did have other data: student grades. During the first phase of the experiment, the first time I gave screen-casted feedback, I also gave students a temporary grade and marked approximately where they stood on the School Writing Rubric. Though I generally avoid doing this (it is evaluative feedback!), I have found it helpful for students to understand that they have a lot to revise before their paper is ready, and to keep their parents in the loop. I measured improvement between the first grade and the final grade for both the experimental group and the control group. Improvement in grade over time with traditional paper feedback was +14.8%. Improvement in grade over time with screen-casted feedback was +11.22%. Though these results may seem discouraging, it is important to note that the sample size was small (36), which could very easily skew the percentages.

The most satisfying part of my screencast feedback experiment is that I was able to confirm that students actually *do* use feedback, which is extremely encouraging. Almost all of my students improved their papers after receiving feedback from me, and some students improved by more than 10% of their original grade, regardless of the method of feedback. Since I had never really looked at the data in this way before, that information was truly enlightening.

Another Roadblock...And the Future

As I began to get ready to try screen-casted feedback with my seniors in the spring, I ran into a technological issue that my personal funds would not allow me to surmount: my personal laptop broke. Because of this, I had to put the experiment on hold. Luckily, I received a grant for an iPad from the NCPFA later in the spring, so I will be able to continue the experiment in fall 2013. I have been playing around with a few different apps that could meet my needs, including Explain Everything, Doceri, and Educreations. I have also been considering using TurnItIn, which I would be able to use both on the school monitors and the iPad. I hope to eventually expand my experiment to my senior courses, and will continue to share the results with my colleagues.

What's Next?

As I have thought more and more about what makes effective feedback, I have begun to realize that the method of feedback (online, in person, video, paper) should be catered to the student. If nothing else, my pre-survey reminded me that my students have a diverse set of needs, strengths, and learning styles, all of which need to be addressed. Ultimately, this is the big idea I will be sharing at the NCTE and ALAN conferences.

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Mini-Grant Report

By Sarah G. King, The Masters School

Introduction

At the beginning of the 2012-13 school year, I purchased an iPad with the Connecticut Writing Project mini-grant funds to provide the necessary portable access to Wi-Fi and file storage as I research how schools without writing centers may prepare to create one. The focus of my research is aimed at The Master's School in West Simsbury, CT, where I have been hired as a high school English teacher and K-12 Writing Curriculum Consultant. It is my hope to open a writing center there, if I am able to secure the necessary long-term commitment to funding, staffing, and faculty support. I believe the effort in presenting this proposal to the administrators and faculty at The Master's School is well invested as they value such contributions to the success of students at all grade levels and writing abilities (Harris).

Maryanne Wolf, a child development professor at Tufts University, has inspired my research supporting the creation of writing centers and their importance in secondary schools. Wolf explores the history of reading and writing from its earliest development and how it reveals the capacity for the human brain to process and understand written symbols. In her collection of research, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*, Wolf acknowledges a truth most of us take for granted: human beings are the only species who record their communication for future reading. Since the act and intentionality of writing necessitates its cyclical relationship with reading, frequent reading, then, inspires a higher quality of writing and so the cycle continues indefinitely. Wolf quotes Proust, who credits human literacy as the "fruitful miracle of communication in the midst of solitude" (Wolf 3). Writing centers may, then, be valued as space dedicated to the nourishing and nurturing of this miracle, especially as they encourage the kind of communication that makes us thrive as social creatures, in spite of solitude. When a school commits the space, staffing, time, and funding necessary to run a writing center, it supports a community of writers. It is here that students learn to play with the words that become the documents, essays, memoirs, poems, and stories that preserve our human experience.

2012 CWP Annual Conference for Secondary School Writing Centers

I attended the CWP Conference for Secondary School Writing Centers held at UConn on October 5, 2012, which marked the beginning of my research into the concerns and successes associated with writing centers. I share an overview of the engaging student-oriented conference to establish the CWP's valuable role in providing schools the necessary guidance to create and sustain writing centers. At one time, in the not so distant past, it was unusual for secondary schools and even colleges to have writing centers. Stephen M. North's 1984 article, "The Idea of a Writing Center," is posted on the NCTE website, reminding us of the grim past, when most educators, and even English departments, did not accept writing centers as offering anything more than solutions to remedial editing and grammar problems (North 436). Aware of how lonely and difficult the writing process is for all writers, regardless of experience and talent, North wonders if all the well-intentioned efforts to revolutionize the teaching of writing "have changed very little" (North 434).

North's disappointment with his colleagues at that time represents the voice in the wilderness, that perseverance that has propelled the advocacy for writing centers for almost forty years since the National Writing Project launched its first Summer Institute in 1974. Now, the NWP has more than 200 sites, including three in Connecticut. The CWP at UConn-Storrs, currently under the direction of Dr. Jason Courtmanche, offers professional development for all teachers who seek meaningful writing opportunities. The CWP collaborates with UConn's Creative Writing Program and the Writing Center to support writing at the university as well as serve local school districts by promoting and supporting writing centers. The CWP Annual Conference for Secondary School Writing Centers energizes and inspires both the student and faculty participants as we share the same positive motive for ourselves and our peers: to encourage good writers to become even better ones.

Three schools, Windham High School, Ashford School, and E.O. Smith High School, offered informative student-led presentations about their relatively new writing centers. Later, the conference attendees gathered in smaller break-out groups, where I met English teacher and Writing Center Director, Roberta McGuire, from Saint Paul Catholic High School in Bristol.

Windham High School opened with a student video promoting their peer

-run Writing Center called *The Write Idea*. Please see the impressive WHS Writing Center homepage at the following link: <http://www.windham.k12.ct.us/schools/whs/writingcenter.htm>. With "*Under Pressure*" by David Bowie/Queen playing in the background, the video effectively reached the students and teachers attending the conference, as we can all relate to the pressures of numerous writing assignments and deadlines. The Windham students reported that one of their challenges has been finding new ways to encourage students to use the Writing Center. I am impressed by the creativity and dedication of the Windham students, who commented that one of the most obvious signs of their success as a peer-editing team is the sense of community they have created together in less than two years of operation.

The Ashford School peer editors also pointed out that one of the most satisfying benefits of working in a student-run writing center is knowing that they are helping other students. As middle school students, they value the leadership role and responsibility attached to peer-editing; they know they are developing their own writing skills while encouraging others to write. Carl Nagin, in *Because Writing Matters*, reminds us, "Schools not only need to have students write more; they must also give students a rich and diverse array of writing experiences" (Nagin 13). The Ashford peer editors, who are recognized for their success in the April 2, 2012, issue of the *Hartford Courant*, demonstrate that their leadership provides the kind of "rich experience" Nagin mentions. I admire their confidence as well-trained peers and their ability to communicate the value of writing as a complex process in ways that differ from adult teachers.

E. O. Smith High School, located on the south-east corner of the UConn-Storrs campus, concluded this part of the conference with students demonstrating their role as peer-editors and sharing how they balance their academic responsibilities while keeping the writing center open for several hours both during and after each school day. Included in the conference folder was a timeline of the E.O. Smith Writing Center Creation specifies the process of setting up a writing center from its initial proposal in May 2008 to its opening in March 2009. This timeline is particularly helpful for schools that are in the earliest planning stages as it prioritizes the most urgent steps: to secure space, select and train peer editors, establish a schedule, prepare a budget, and seek funding. This timeline also chronicles the decision making process as Denise Abercrombie and Megan Magner, founders and directors of the E.O. Smith Writing Cen-

ter, shared their attention to detail as they determined to gain support from administrators, faculty, parents, and the greater school community. They demonstrate their commitment to the successful outcome of their plans as they attended professional development opportunities and furthered the discussion of their writing center goals. They also developed a writing center philosophy, which may be viewed at: <http://bawritingcenter.wikispaces.com/file/view/E.O.+Smith+Writing+Center+Philosophy.doc>. The advisors and student editors shared this philosophy in a PowerPoint presentation at a faculty meeting in February 2009, and the student editors followed up by visiting the EOSHS English classes to pitch the use of the writing center for all students. The efforts demonstrated through this ten month process ultimately led to the acceptance, implementation, and opening of the E.O. Smith Writing Center in March 2009.

A Visit to the Saint Paul Catholic High School Writing Center

During the break-out session of the Conference, I met Roberta McGuire, English teacher and Director of the St. Paul Catholic High School Writing Center. She brought five of her high school students from SPCHS to the conference and facilitated the student-led brainstorming session about their experiences as peer editors. They discussed the business aspects of running a well-organized writing center, including the log-in of each student who visits the writing center and the filing system that organizes these visits and records student progress. As a group, we deliberated over the unavoidable editing concerns in the writing process and how to keep such issues as grammar, punctuation, MLA format, and proper citation relevant without reverting back to the misconceptions of Stephen North's colleagues in the 1980s. SPCHS peer editors keep a file of handouts which address the most common editing concerns, such as writing a thesis statement, comma usage, and proper word choice, so that students who visit the SPCHS Writing Center may develop and improve those skills. We also discussed creative ways to market writing centers to encourage their use across the curriculum, whether the writing centers should offer more creative elements through a writing club, and continued training for the peer-editors.

This break-out session at the conference prompted Roberta McGuire's invitation for me to visit SPCHS. On May 17, 2013, I visited her at the St. Paul Writing Center to discuss the process involved in preparing and setting up their writ-

ing center in 2011. SPCHS provides an ideal example as a small suburban faith-based private school, which is a similar demographic to The Master's School. In the two years since it opened, the St. Paul Writing Center has served over fifty students each year, and Roberta has recruited and trained close to twenty peer editors who vary in their long-term commitment to the writing center, depending on their graduation year and other conflicts. Our conversation was beneficial to both of us; it was a pause for reflection for Roberta, and an introduction into the intricacies of writing centers, including the pros and cons of peer editing, for me. We covered a broad range of topics including the basics of set up, which echo the E.O. Smith recommendations. Each school, Roberta noted, has to identify its internal goals and needs, particularly in attempting to avoid scheduling conflicts while dedicating time for writing center hours of operation, student usage, and daily faculty staffing and support. The English teachers at SPCHS share the writing center staffing with one teacher after school each day and Friday, by appointment only. The location of the SPCHS Writing Center allows for scheduled student use during the school day, as the room dedicated to the writing center is adjacent to an English classroom and serves as the office of one of the teachers. The Writing Center is quiet, but it is also visible so that teachers who must resort to multi-tasking during the school day are available to the peer editors, but may also give the peer editor and student writer some space during their tutoring session.

Roberta shared that, while SPCHS has experienced many successes in the past two years, as they move into their third year, she has lingering questions about the effectiveness of peer editing. Some of the surface concerns involve student conflicts and securing the required year-long commitment from peer editors. Other issues are related to the peer editor training process and how to confront an increased volume in international language/ ESOL issues in writing. While she uses peer editing in the classroom and recognizes its purpose in encouraging peer dialogue as a way to improve writing, Roberta wonders if peer editors may not have enough experience to achieve the goals established by the writing center. This, of course, begs the questions, "What is our Writing Center goal? Is it to improve writing across the curriculum? Should it be a teacher-driven writing center? Or should the students carry the weight of responsibility?"

This list of questions prompted our mutual concern for well-intentioned students who are not able to fully commit to their responsibilities as editors. Roberta

struggles with incentives that keep the volunteers willing to share their enthusiasm for writing. When training students, she asks what benefit peer editing gives them and how they imagine sharing their passion for writing with students who may not be willing to invest in the writing process but are only looking for better grades. While training to become peer editors, Roberta's students have made Power Point presentations on grammar and research projects, created films, and trained other students to lead freshmen seminars and workshops. Roberta's dedication to her students and commitment to the success of the Writing Center are evident in her passion to keep the students at the forefront of the action, since that is the goal of a peer-run writing center.

Conclusions and Goals

I am grateful to Roberta McGuire for sharing her experience and offering her time to be available as a contact person through this process. As I move toward Writing Center creation, I look forward to discussing my research and ideas with the faculty at The Master's School. If the schedule allows, I would like to bring some of my students to attend the 2013 CWP Annual Conference for Secondary School Writing Centers at UConn in October. I also hope to begin conversations with each faculty member about the kind of reading and writing they assign and the concerns they may have about their students' abilities in each. These conversations will hopefully lead to improved communication among the faculty in regard to writing and help me establish what goals we should have for our writing center. I also plan to maintain the contacts I have been blessed to make throughout this process. In addition to Roberta, I look forward to staying in touch with Denise Abercrombie, Jason Courtmanche, and several other remarkable Teacher Consultants at UConn-Storrs who invest countless hours supporting educators who value the importance of writing instruction. One of the most positive points supporting the creation of writing centers is when Richard Kent, author of *A Guide to Creating Student-Staffed Writing Centers: Grades 6-12*, assures us that all student writing will improve as the students will inevitably write more and will talk about their writing with someone they ask for help (Kent 7). This is the best kind of investment with the most promising results, and I am grateful to have the funding for the iPad in order to properly research it.

Be sure to check out this list of resources:

- <http://www.cwp.uconn.edu/>
- <http://guest.portaportal.com/wcenters>
- <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/highschoolwritingcenters/sites.google.com/site/hswritingcenters/starting-a-center/making-it-work-at-my-school>
- Literary Lock-in modeled at Windham High School see the article in the May 4, 2013 Norwich Bulletin: <http://www.norwichbulletin.com/news/x2062762886/Windham-High-School-Literary-Lock-In-starts-Friday#axzz2YZVbIP18>

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Technology and the CCSS: On the Cheap

By Helen Martin, North Windham Elementary School

Introduction

In the Fall of 2011 I talked with one of my professors about this program called the “Connecticut Writing Project” and it sounded like a great way to grow professionally in an area that I personally considered myself in some need of development. It turned out the professor was also one of the co-directors of the CWP and invited me to apply in the following spring, and I was grateful that the 20 days of the institute did not overlap with a wedding and honeymoon that was planned for the end of July. Perfect timing! I was informed that there would be a lot of writing, a lot of reading, research, personal development, and an opportunity to continue my learning into the following academic year. The advertisement was correct; in sum, I could not have asked for a more comprehensive professional development exercise to help me teach writing to my students. It was overwhelming and exhilarating all at the same time, and I walked away tremendously more empowered to teach my students than when I had that initial conversation with my professor in the fall nearly two years ago.

The purpose of participating in the CWP was to learn how to teach the art of writing through the lens of being not just the teacher, but the student as well, since we also were creating our own writing pieces parallel to the research component. I decided to examine how writing can be taught and practiced through digital literacies with my research partner, Katrina Bafumi. We understood that this research needed to be pertinent to our everyday needs and student demographic, as we teach different age groups in elementary and high school. As a result of that, we narrowed our research into what creating “digital literacy” could look like in the classroom without needing to consider budget allowances between districts.

Literacy and the CCSS

I learned about what it meant to access literacy as defined learning objectives through the new common core state standards (CCSS) through multimedia. No longer would learning about digital literacy be a debate over hav-

ing a Smartboard, white board, or chalk board define your ability to be “creative” in the classroom in regards to technology. Now, it would be a requirement regardless of district budgets per mandate of state testing of these skills. The CCSS has different standards spanning across the grade levels as to what the students should be mastering in regards to writing using digital technology to communicate. Students need to have keyboarding skills—which, as a teacher in the elementary level, is a matter of building fine motor skills, through typing alongside learning how to read a keyboard and put thought into the written pieces—and it was a new way of creating written work. My research partner and I were able to see how this would impact us at our respective grade levels, and since I taught in Spanish as a part of our dual-language program it was also important to us that these skills could be meaningful for second language learners.

The summer research taught me about how the CCSS would be changing standards in the area of technology, therefore removing it from being an optional piece of the curriculum. I felt more confident that there were extremely thrifty means to access multimodal media to enhance the access of writing through media. My belief in the ability to teach about audience and community through technology became solidified into a part of my educational philosophy. I think it is vital as a tool of the future for our students to know how to express themselves through different writing sources on-line such as blogs, social media, forums, and on-line coursework. We only need to find the ways in which we can facilitate this in the classroom as the teacher, which is where the focus for the year-long research became a creation. Now that we knew about ways to teach writing and response through technology, such as Wikipages and GoogleDocs, it was time to see how we could further develop this within the classroom with our funding through the CWP mini-grant.

Investing in Technology

I was interested in maximizing my funding to make my learning more durable for more than just the one academic year, and the information I learned more easily called upon during colleague collaboration. I also knew that my school was limited in what we could do in regards to having time to explicitly teach all students how to appropriately use technology as our block schedul-

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ing did not allow for much deviance from the program that had been newly purchased for the district. Another factor in helping me focus my learning goals was that I was expecting my second child towards the end of the CWP, and I would be finishing the school year in early March and not returning until the following school year. For me, this meant that I would be limited in my ability to evolve the student piece of my professional development to the depth that I had in my mind, but that I could continue to learn about skills and strategies that I could gradually build into my teaching skill set.

I was pleasantly surprised when an opportunity arose that enabled me to put my learning into practice through another grant with EASTCONN. My partner from my school and I would be participating in a grant with a school from a more rural homogenous Anglo population. They would be paired with our students who represented an interesting mix of a rural-urban Latino population through field trips and on-line communicating through Wikispaces. I could not have been happier about this arrangement, as the other half of the third grade classes was participating in a different grant that involved more art work and theater presentation. Students were taught how to use punctuation, basic functions within the Microsoft Word program, how to use the Internet to access the web site, and common courtesy in respect to being polite and kind when responding to someone else. All of this was to be done using CCSS-type questions in response to books that we were reading with our class. We had six computers in our classroom and a set of laptops that could be signed out to a class, along with desktop computers in a computer lab in the library. This year was the year that technology was also taking more of a priority within our district, as a result of some funding that came about through the state department of education.

Even with all of the new technology in our school, it was still tricky to make it all come together in routine. The teacher would come from EASTCONN and do a presentation, which took some coordination within our building to make sure that the right amount of computers would be available for our classes, but overall, these moments were extremely successful in creating student learning of writing skills with absolutely complete student engagement. The challenge was making the lessons flow when I was teaching by myself, as I was also to teach small reading groups. That was the biggest learning curve for me, and it was one that I do not feel that I have mastered quite yet; but there are

plans next year for me and my partner to create a computer “center” during the reading block to keep students progressing within digital literacies.

Additional Professional Development

The other piece of my continued professional development involved purchasing several textbooks along with the memberships through the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of the Teachers of English (NCTE) to help me better design lesson plans and understand the developmental spectrum of how digital literacy was learned from students at my teaching level. I also was in a district that was participating in a partnership with a consultant group to help with professional development district-wide in the area of reading, and a big focus of this year was on vocabulary instruction. In my classroom this is pertinent, paramount even, for students to develop Spanish on a conversational level as well as an academic level. If the students do not know how to speak properly, then they are limited in how they express themselves through written tasks.

I used what I was learning through my reading in the area of oral language (OL). I created a routine during our OL block that represented every student's need; the students were all organized according to heterogeneous grouping and able to practice repeatedly through multiple exposures to speaking in complete sentences that would transfer into their writing. My partner in our program did the same thing during this time so that the students did not need to spend any extra energy on knowing the routine in their minority language. I noticed that these practices created students more willing to take risks, speaking in Spanish even if it was their second language, and it was complicated for them; this slowly (very slowly) started to trickle into their writing in their reader response journals. Students made sure to write in full and complete sentences. The topic would mainly stay the same, and most students were able to pull out examples of text evidence for support. I was proud of my students for learning that their writing had importance and that they could answer complex thoughts in writing that would compliment what they could communicate via speaking.

The Future

The next goal is to bring the students' writing to a computer as the main source of expression in the classroom. This change will also enable students and teachers to access their writing remotely and to make edits and revisions without too much effort. Teachers can provide feedback and monitor student growth for assessment purposes, and students are able to apply higher order thinking skills along with creative thinking to an audience through the use of technology.

In the beginning of the year I was apprehensive about how much learning I would be able to do through the mini grant funding in the time before I went on maternity leave. I was surprised to see how much learning occurred along with the potential to keep things moving along for next year. I am learning to be more patient, as well; a good educator takes time to develop, and that is okay. My partner and I knew that it would take more than just one year to establish a solid routine, and each year brings another pool of research participants. Before I left in March, students were eager to use the computers during recess, at the end of the school day, and even at home, to access their Wikipages and respond to the students at the other elementary school. Not every student was at the level of using the Wikipage routinely, but especially for those students who had Internet time at home, there was a great enthusiasm to read responses from the other students and write their own. It showed students that their opinions mattered and that someone else would be judging them in their ability to use correct spelling and punctuation (something they loved to poke fun at with the responses read from the partner school).

I know that I have more to do in expanding my resources within technology, but I feel confident that what I have done thus far is a giant advancement from anything that I would have attempted before attending the CWP. It is hard to let go of micromanaging students, when we are taught to micromanage through the top-down management employed in our district; however, once you let students have a bit of freedom after teaching a new skill, it is amazing to see how the students apply and advance their skill sets even further.

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Discovering the USN of the NWP

By Stephen Staysniak, Metropolitan Business Academy

During my four-week Summer Institute in July of 2012, I committed to a drive of at least 90 minutes each way from my home in Norwalk, CT to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences building on the UConn Storrs campus. Though most of my colleagues in my institute cohort cringed at the length of my commute, I found the time useful; all of the reading, writing and talking necessitated constant processing, which I did in the car. I used a lot of my time in the car to consider how to apply what I was learning to the students in my New Haven magnet school classroom and to urban education in general.

One morning, I had a thought connecting Ernest Morrell—the now acting NCTE president, scholar of literacy education in urban schools, and co-author of *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Education*—to something I had read in preparation for that day's work. In between morning sessions during last summer's institute, I Googled Morrell's name, which generated a result on the National Writing Project's site. "How perfect!" I thought. Ernest Morrell and the NWP connect! A few clicks later, I was reading about Morrell's keynote address at the 2011 Conference for the Urban Sites Network (USN) of the National Writing Project. Subsequent breaks in the day and over the next few days, I read more about the mission of the Urban Sites Network and learned about the annual conferences in which TCs from NWP sites in urban areas or TCs who work in urban schools gather to share and learn from one another. It was exciting to learn that each year, TCs from across the country were sharing classroom practices and inquiry projects, like the one I was completing on the ways in which teachers should respond to Automated Essay Scoring on standardized writing assessments. I decided I would try to use my mini-grant money to attend the 2013 USN Conference in Birmingham, Alabama.

Stepping Out from Participant to Contributor

With my Summer Institute drawing to a close in July of 2012, our site director, Jason Courtmanche, again reviewed the ways in which we could spend our mini-grant money. Jason emphasized that this money was to develop ourselves and other teachers as professionals. We had to resist the urge to spend the money on supplies for our classrooms, like high-interest books for students, and

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instead think about how we might use the money to continue the mission of the National Writing Project and become a stronger teacher of other teachers. Jason encouraged those of us planning to use our grants to think about attending a regional or national conference and submit the workshops we developed during the Summer Institute for presentation at the conferences.

Because my inquiry project and workshop had been a lingering headache that summer, I grimaced at Jason's mentioning of our workshops. But after a car-ride home to think about how my workshop on the developing technologies of Automated Essay Scoring might apply to the USN Conference's 2013 focus on the intersection between social justice and the 21st century classroom, I decided there was at least enough of a connection to submit my workshop for review. I left my Summer Institute with a clearly stated intention of attending the 2013 conference and hopefully having my workshop accepted for presentation at the conference. It was not until early 2013, upon checking the USN Conference page that the official submission requirements were made public. With some feedback from Jason on how to wordsmith a 50-word blurb on my workshop, I submitted my workshop for review and eagerly awaited a response.

The Real Work...

A few weeks after I submitted my workshop to the 2013 USN conference for review, I received notification that it was accepted. Elated to have the opportunity of presenting a national conference, I used the mini-grant money at that time to purchase a plane ticket to Birmingham and defray the cost of registering for the conference and paying for one night in the conference hotel. That was the easy part. Knowing that my workshop had been designed for a 90 minute session and that I would have only 60 to deliver the same content at the conference, on top of the fact that my colleague with whom I collaborated on the initial research and development of the workshop had different ideas on what was most important to focus upon in delivering the workshop, there was much revision to be done to have the workshop ready for presentation.

In the weeks leading up to the USN conference, I spent time re-reading research on Automated Essay Scoring that I had found over the summer and finding new and more relevant sources to sharpen the informative nature of my

workshop. This process of revising my workshop led me to new discoveries like NCTE's *Position Statement on Machine Scoring* from early April 2013 as well as a deepened understanding of research I had previously completed. I found that in conversations with colleagues in my building and the curriculum writing team of which I was a part, I was able to speak confidently about ways in which teachers could find accurate and helpful information on how writing will be scored on the computer based assessments of the Common Core being developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and PARCC. These informal conversations helped me further tailor revisions to my workshop and inform colleagues about developments of which they were previously unaware.

As the revisions to my workshop wound down, I began to think about how I would bring back what I would see and hear at the conference from the various speakers and presenters to teachers in my building, district, and my fellow TCs. I became fixated on the idea of capturing the many voices I would hear at this conference in the style of a podcast. Working with a technology teacher in my building who teaches narrative film-making strategies to students, I developed a focus question: "What is the role of social justice in the classroom?" I also developed several strategies to capture voices using an mp3 recorder during my time in Birmingham and a sketch for the ways in which I would capture raw audio at the Conference. I left for my conference attuned to what I was going to say to others and also for how I would listen to the many voices I knew I would hear.

On the Ground in Birmingham

I waited to board my first flight to Birmingham on the morning of April 26 at Newark-Liberty airport and glanced at my phone with incredulity - 4:47 am! Though it was early, the excitement of having a 9 a.m. conference event to attend in Birmingham made my fatigue a mere nuisance, and arriving in Birmingham three hours later, waiting hear world-class journalists discuss the role of social justice in contemporary media and engaging in conversations with teachers from across the country, I felt anything but tired. With all I heard, saw, and learned with an mp3 recorder in hand, my experience in looking for the ways social justice can and should influence education can be best examined through three lenses: local, national, and historical.

Social Justice and Education on a Local Level

In speaking with educators from around the country throughout my two days in Birmingham, the conversations often turned, as they usually do, to our own classrooms and the issues we face with our students on a daily basis. Whatever the break-out session, keynote speaker, or field-event happened to be, most of the educators I spoke with and interviewed processed the experience in the context of their own classrooms. For me, this point was most salient as I listened to Charlayne Hunter-Gault, a journalist who, as a college student, was one of two African-Americans to integrate the University of Georgia, and Rami Khouri, Egyptian-Palestinian journalist covering most recently the democratic uprisings throughout the Middle East, and was distracted by whispers of a growing crowd in the back of the room. Trying to focus on the two speakers, I turned to see a throng of high-school students from Birmingham had entered the ballroom. As their presence was acknowledged by both speakers, I was again reminded that whatever I was learning here in Birmingham, the needs of my students in New Haven remained (and remain) my most immediate and pressing reality.

Social Justice and Education on a National Level

As I contemplated the myriad ways that the lessons I was learning each day applied to my students in New Haven, there were also conversations on a national level that gave me immediate grounds for camaraderie and discussion with the other teachers I met at the conference. Perhaps not surprisingly, the default discussion topic for two teachers from different parts of the country was the effects already being felt from the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and the soon-to-be-implemented computerized assessments. Despite the unique challenges presented by individual students, district mandates, and state-wide initiatives, the ability to have a conversation on a national-level about the content reforms occurring in all of our classrooms was remarkable. Though many teachers at the USN Conference expressed concern over the Common Core and the way the standards will be assessed, I know that many of us valued the ability to connect over the subject of these reforms—even if the connecting was a common expression of anxiety or swap-

ping of a classroom strategy. Whatever reform does to our profession, I was heartened by the solidarity I felt among the diverse group of teachers at the USN Conference.

Social Justice and Education on a Historical Level

The motto for the USN Conference was “One pen can change the world.” The historical significance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s watershed *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* being written fifty years ago in 1963, was constantly referred to by speakers and touched upon by participants in break-out sessions. An unspoken undertone of much of the conference was importance of history in creating a classroom pedagogy that reflects a socially just ideology. Though Birmingham was used most frequently as the example of how a city’s history must be talked about, retold, and reconciled, many participants talked openly about how the history of their own home-cities might inspire a more socially just classroom pedagogy.

In my most anticipated workshop session with *Rethinking Schools* founder, teacher-writer, and activist Linda Christensen, participants engaged in a lesson that Christensen developed for a residency in Tulsa, Oklahoma about the Tulsa race riots in the late spring of 1921. Though engaging in how much we all learned about Tulsa’s history, Christensen implored all of us to look for similar events of social injustice, tension, or triumph in our own cities. Christensen and the conference organizers from the University of Alabama Birmingham’s Red Mountain Writing Project both stressed the importance in using the common story of history to connect teachers and students with the past, our common narrative, in order to make sense of and begin composing the narrative of the present—in which we also inhabit communally.

Moving Forward: Action After Birmingham

Since my return from the USN Conference in Birmingham, there have been many inspired conversations with my colleagues about what I learned and was exposed to over the two days of the conference and how it might inform our work in our school in New Haven. Though the conference was valuable for those conversations alone, there are several action steps on which I am

currently working in order to convert what I have learned at the conference into real change in my professional and classroom practice:

Podcasting: The five-plus hours of audio I captured during my two days at the conference is now being edited and transformed into a approximately ten-minute podcast on the role of social justice in the classroom. The lessons I am learning from creating this podcast and the conversations I am having with colleagues in the technology department in my building are going to apply directly to my creation of a podcast based performance task that I plan to test in the 2013-14 school-year with my students. The podcast experience has also gotten me connected with several colleagues interested in creating a monthly or bi-monthly professional conversation “talk-show” of sorts, based on Language Arts classroom best-practices and innovation in the New Haven Public Schools.

Research: In conversations after my workshop, I connected with several individuals with whom I am now sharing research on my workshop topic of Automated Essay Writing. I also may work more closely with representatives from the National Writing Project’s national office on beginning a national-level conversation about automated essay scoring of writing and its implications in the classroom. These conversations have driven me to continue my research on this topic and to continue developing the workshop I began last summer.

The relationships I forged with individuals at the 2013 Conference have given me the desire to make my participation in the USN Conferences more than a one-shot deal. I am looking forward to re-connecting with people from the 2013 conference in 2014, as well as to continuing to develop myself as a Teacher-Consultant of the NWP so that I can continue to participate and contribute to USN Conferences in the future.

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Teaching Students New Literacies: The Play's the Thing

By Ethan Warner, O. H. Platt High School

Introduction

The original objective of my research was on how the writing process, specifically the act of revision, works when applied to writing or composition for new literacies, such as blogs, websites, etc. My goal was to examine how revision takes place when the writing process requires more than just text. As I began my background research into the topic of digital composition, I noticed something troublesome. Much of the research and educational adjustments done to prepare students to write in new literacies focuses on specific, extent formats like writing for a blog, constructing a prezi, or communicating via Twitter. The problem here, it seemed to me, was that each of these formats had a limited shelf life. According to a survey I conducted, my teenage students, who we casually refer to as the "Facebook generation" consider both Facebook and blogs to be outdated, yet we as teachers view them as cutting edge. If we prepare students to write for specific formats, we will forever be playing catch up. What is more, there is no guarantee that the techniques we provide them for writing on a blog will transfer to writing on whatever format is coming down the pipeline.

Having reached this realization, I determined that the best way to teach my students to write for new literacies was to focus on what all of those literacies demanded of the writer and, *after that*, to examine the writing process. The key difference between these new literacies and what we traditionally think of as writing is that all the new literacies—no matter what specific format—are first, multimodal and second, interactive. It was with these two concepts in mind that my students and I needed to approach the writing process. The technology itself was secondary. Successful writing for a digital age needs to be multimodal in that it must communicate not just through text but through image, sound, and interaction. This is not new: theatre, as a literary form, has communicated this way for millennia.

It was only at this point that I determined how I would actually manage to examine this writing process in action. Rather than have my students create a blog or podcasts as part of their regular assignments, I determined to have them write a play. In writing the play, the students would by necessity experience the entire writing process, from brainstorming to publication; however,

they would create a final piece that was not only textual, but visual, audible, and interactive.

The Multimodal Writing Process

To encourage and facilitate the writing process, the students were given specific guidelines for what their writing process and end product should entail. The students were told that any topic was permissible, providing that it was relevant to contemporary adolescents. To this end, the fifteen students brainstormed as whole group a long list of ideas, which they were then free to choose from. The fifteen students were broken up into three groups of five. These smaller groups served as both peer revisers and collaborators. Each student was responsible for writing a single monologue, and each group was responsible for three scenes, one utilizing all five writers/performers and two utilizing a smaller group of two or three students. Beyond the written text and the performance of what they had written, every student was also responsible for the creation of a visual art piece to accompany and complement the final performance. Additionally, each student was required to either compose or select a musical piece with which to either begin or end the performance of their written piece.

It occurred to me that, given the multimodal nature of what they were writing, simple feedback regarding the written text would not be sufficient to revise what the students had created and fully develop their work. Some technology aid was required. The funds for the mini-grant were used to purchase an iPad to help with the revision process of this performance. My iPad, as well as iPads several of the students had thanks to a separate grant, allowed them to quickly record their rehearsals and readings of their writing. They were then able to review what they created and revise based on that. This addition to the revision process was enormously helpful. Frequently, the students would enjoy and appreciate what they had written when it was on the page; but upon reviewing a performance or reading of it, they would discover that it needed further revision. Additionally, students recorded verbal feedback given to them by either myself or other students, so they could replay it later when rewriting their pieces.

To further the writing process in general, I had the students look at mentor

texts. The primary mentor text used was the play *I am an Emotional Creature*, by Eve Ensler. I chose selections from this work that the students and I read and discussed as a group. Students were able to pull the selections up on their iPads to review while writing their own pieces. Additionally, the students were encouraged to, and did, bring in their own model texts to examine and use as inspiration. These model texts, in keeping with the multimodal nature of the piece, were not limited to traditional literary pieces. Some students brought in poems they selected to share, others brought in music, and still others art pieces. These works were shared with the whole group and discussed regarding the creator's purpose, technique, effectiveness, and emotional impact.

In order to create the visual aspect of the final product the students began by working as a whole group to create two collages, one of images and words that made them feel good, and one of images and words that they viewed as negative. After the creation of those two collages as a group, each student created an individual piece centered on a single emotion, selected at random. While creating the visual piece—a process facilitated by an art therapist who generously volunteered her time—the students were encouraged to incorporate quotes, song lyrics, and images found online as part of their creation. In regards to exploring the revision process, with the visual piece intentional limitations were imposed to facilitate creative problem solving. The students were only given one large piece of paper on which to work. Any mistakes made had to be incorporated into the piece.

While working on the project each student kept a journal that was separate from any of their written pieces. This journal was for reflection on the creative process. To facilitate this, each period of writing and peer revision ended with time for the students to reflect in their journals on that day's progress and experience. These reflections were private, although at the very end of each session, students came together as a whole group and could choose to share what they had written.

As a final product, the students created a one-act play consisting of ten scenes and eight monologues, accompanied by eighteen art pieces. There were additional art pieces because, in order to show our own willingness to take risks, all of the adults involved in the process also created visual art pieces. Between each scene or monologue was a musical interlude (either pre-recorded or performed live by one of the students) chosen by the writers of the

adjacent piece. Additionally, one of the students chose to compose and perform an original guitar composition as his monologue. For the performance of their work a modified black box stage was set up to seat 75 audience members. Effectively staging each scene or monologue became part of the writing process for the students. They rehearsed each of their pieces for the other students working on it, filming their performances using the iPads. They then received feedback and discussed how the staging could best be revised to effectively communicate the message or concept of the scene or monologue.

The interactive portion of the piece came near the end. As a final scene, the students wrote collaboratively a scene called, "Things Teens Wish They Could Say to Their Parents." This scene consisted of a series of statements, both positive and negative, that the students believed either they, or other teens wanted to be able to say to their parents, but for a variety of reasons could not. To accompany this, each of their parents was asked to send in anonymously a brief statement of what they wished they could say to their teen. I took these statements and created a visual piece that accompanied the students' performance. Further interactive elements were established when the students actually performed their piece. Each performance was followed by a talkback session with the audience, where they were able to ask the students questions about both the finished piece and the process of creating it.

Recognizing the need for an authentic audience as part of the writing process, two performances were held on a Friday and then Saturday night. In order to give the production additional purpose, the students chose a charity of meaning to them to benefit from the proceeds of the production. The two performances sold out, raising \$1,500 dollars for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Additional success was found when the students took their performance to the Connecticut Drama Association Festival, where it won multiple awards, including one for Theatrical Excellence, as well as individual acting awards for some of the students participating. They were then invited to perform at the New England Drama Festival. The project also was the Northeast winner of the Bob Costas Grant for the Teaching of Writing from the CollegeBoard. The action research conducted on the writing process as related to multimodal forms of writing through this project was submitted for conference presentation at the National Council of Teachers of English annual meeting and has been accepted.

Obstacles

There were two key obstacles to the revision process as related to this project. The first was due to the personal nature of this writing. The students had to be willing to share remarkably intimate and sensitive writing with each other, and also to take and process feedback, sometimes critical, on that writing. In order to make this possible, we began the process by establishing a "safe place" for the students to work and share. We set up and restated norms related to this, both at the beginning of each workshop meeting and whenever necessary. These norms included how to provide constructive feedback, how to avoid judgmental statements, and how to interact with the writer and their piece. These norms were primarily taken from the research I conducted during the Summer Institute. Perhaps the most important norm established, at least according to the students, was the idea that what happened during the writing and rehearsal process stayed there. This norm allowed the students to take chances and risks with their writing, without fear that this would be shared with other students outside the group. The only caveat to this rule, which I made clear at the beginning of the first rehearsal, was my mandated reporter status.

The second obstacle was the one I was most interested in researching, namely how revision works when creating a multimodal piece. This obstacle was addressed, in part, through the use of technology. The students were able to film their performances and review them after receiving feedback. Using an application called Evernote, they were able to make notes about revision attached directly to the footage of their performance. Additionally, the students were able to try out a variety of audio samplings to accompany their performance, and ask other students for feedback. The process allowed the students to experiment with joining text, image, and sound to the benefit of all three. They were able to revise each of these elements to help complement the other two and enhance the message of the piece. Most important were the questions students had to ask of themselves and one another during the peer review and revision stage. Students needed to have a clear understanding of message and purpose for the piece and then needed to ask of the creator how the image, visuals, or sound supported or enhanced their purpose. This proved to be the most challenging. As is often found in blogs, PowerPoint presentations, websites, and other examples of new literacies, in the early drafts

of the students' pieces, the visuals or audio was secondary to the text. It was either unrelated, or it only reinforced what was already provided by the text. The students in revision had to focus on making sure their performances were enhanced and extended through the use of audio and visual media, otherwise the inclusion of them became purposeless and superfluous. This became the major revision focus when creating their multimodal texts.

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Peer Revision in the Fifth Grade Classroom

By Cyd Weldon, Sweeney Elementary School

Introduction

As a Connecticut Writing Project Teacher Consultant and a fifth grade teacher in Windham Public Schools, I applied for and received a mini-grant of five hundred dollars to support writing instruction in my self-contained classroom at Sweeney Elementary School in Willimantic. With the money from the grant, I purchased a data projector and a document camera. In this paper, I will explain my initial intention for use of this equipment, how those plans needed to be modified within the structure of my school's curriculum, and the many other ways in which this equipment became an integral part of my lessons in other subjects, besides writing.

During the CWP Summer Institute, my research partner and I focused on the role of peer revision within writing workshop. Once I finished the Institute, I began to plan for my first year in a new school, enthusiastically envisioning using the data projector/document camera to model constructive peer revision strategies for my fifth graders to use during their daily writing workshop time. I was also very inspired by last summer's readings and discussions on the use of mentor texts, and I intended to use the equipment to project texts on the screen in my classroom as a way to instruct and guide my students to make connections from "close reading" strategies to their own writing and that of their peers.

Working the Writing Process into the Class Routine: The First Month

During the first month of school, my students and I established what would become a popular and successful daily routine. After they came into the classroom from recess, I turned the lights off, pulled down the white screen in the front of the room, and read aloud a short passage projected onto the screen. I would begin each read-aloud session by asking the students to pay careful attention to the author's use of dialogue, or sensory details, or flashback, etc.—focusing each day on a specific aspect of the author's craft. I would then lead a discussion in which students shared their thoughts on the author's craft, initially prompting statements using the framework of "I liked how the author...in the part of the passage where..."

We followed up this daily read-aloud and discussion with writing workshop

time. While students were free to write about whatever they wanted, they were tasked with trying to incorporate the particular writing strategy we had discussed that day. That half hour of absolute silence quickly became our favorite part of the day. My favorite quote of the entire year came during this time, when a student said to me, “Ms. Weldon, I used to hate to write, but now I love it!”

While my students wrote in their writing notebooks, so did I, likewise focusing on the “assigned author’s craft.” For the first few workshops, I was the one who sat in the “author’s chair” after our silent writing time. I projected the pages from my notebook onto the screen and asked for feedback. It took no prompting at all to get students to focus their comments; their suggestions for revisions were both specific and effective. Using the document camera and data projector, I was able to make my revisions right then and there, modeling how a first draft becomes a “sloppy copy,” crisscrossed with carets, lines, arrows, and asterisks.

Eventually, students were clamoring to share at the end of writing workshop. While the novelty of projecting their notebook page onto the screen may have initially been the motivating factor, students soon became quite adept at giving and receiving constructive criticism. In no time at all, the days of “I liked it” peer responses were replaced by feedback that helped both readers and writers be aware of audience, voice, and craft (I discovered several videos during my research last summer that had actual students the same age as mine engaging in peer revision conferences. Using the data projector and my laptop to share these with students was extremely motivating, as well).

The Second Month: The 5-Paragraph Essay

Sadly, those halcyon days of writing workshop came to a crashing halt after about a month. The demands of the fifth grade curriculum—specifically, the skills that would be tested by the almighty Connecticut Mastery Test—required major adjustments to our daily and weekly schedule. We no longer had the time for our daily writing workshop, or even our much beloved post-recess read-aloud. Even more frustrating, my freedom to allow my students to find the writer within themselves using research-based—and up to that point, highly successful—methods, was gone. I was to focus all writing instruction on

the five-paragraph expository essay. Organization took precedence over content, formula over craft.

My students' enthusiasm for, and love of, writing evaporated. Writing lessons were just that—lessons in how to piece together an expository essay that would earn a “goal” score of four or better. Frequent assessments (prompts) showed how well—or how poorly—my students were gaining the “skill” of scoring that four. To be completely honest, I have to take responsibility (blame?) for the lack of growth shown by students' writing prompt scores. My lack of enthusiasm (dare I say *distaste*) for this method of teaching writing no doubt affected my ability to give my students the level of instruction they needed to meet the state-mandated standards.

The document camera and data projector were necessarily “repurposed” from that point on. They were still in use for writing instruction as we analyzed five-paragraph essays. We also were able to utilize them for editing and grammar lessons, specifically Daily Oral Language work. As the month of March approached, and practically all instruction in all subjects was geared toward CMT preparation, the equipment was put to good use during our daily “CMT Prep” lessons. DRP (cloze) passages were projected for instruction and guided practice in using context clues. Short passages chosen to focus on specific reading comprehension strategies were likewise projected, read together and discussed. Editing and revising skills that would be tested were also part of our daily lessons, so up went examples of the kind of short passages and multiple choice questions that would appear on that part of the CMT.

I would love to report that we were able to resume writing workshop once “CMT Mania” had passed. Unfortunately, my school remained very focused on monthly writing prompts to test the formulaic writing of five-paragraph essays. The fact that the type of essays shifted from expository to persuasive did contribute to a bit more enthusiasm in my classroom at first. However, the structure and narrow approach to “mandated” writing instruction did not change, making the shift back to a workshop approach impossible. Texts that were projected using my equipment were now pre-written persuasive pieces, rather than authentic writing by students.

Repurposed Technology

Cyd Weldon

I was able to find other uses for the data projector as the year progressed. One of the learning centers in my classroom was a six-station computer area. During their time at that center, students could use a variety of interactive learning sites. One of the most popular and useful sites was one called spellingcity.com. This is a paid subscription site into which I entered weekly lists of vocabulary words drawn from reading and writing lessons. Students could then play an assortment of games using those words, practice sentence and paragraph writing, and self-assess their knowledge of definitions. I used my data projector and laptop to introduce and demonstrate new sites and activities as they were incorporated into the computer station. I also used the projector/laptop to play online games with the students—sometimes splitting them up into teams, sometimes as a students vs. teacher challenge.

Another less creative, but still beneficial, use of the projector/laptop was to show videos in class. Our Social Studies lessons toward the end of the year focused on colonization, the Revolutionary War, and Westward Expansion. History Channel videos, among others, served as educational and entertaining supplements to our studies.

Looking Ahead

It is looking likely that I will be teaching either a different grade or perhaps even at a different school next year. I am sure, however, that the data projector and document camera I was fortunate enough to be able to purchase with my mini-grant last summer will continue to be invaluable resources in my classroom for years to come.

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Biographies

Elizabeth Amburn (SI '12) teaches fourth grade at Killingly Memorial School. She has enjoyed implementing many of the writing workshop ideas that resulted from her immersion in the writing process during the Summer Institute in her teaching practice this year!

Katrina M. Bafumi (SI '12) is a 9th grade teacher in Boston. Her teaching often extends beyond classroom hours into the BHS Writing Center and student newspaper, the Redcoat Review. She is a University of Connecticut alumnus and a graduate of the Neag School of Education's IB/M program.

Michelle Blowers (SI '12) has relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio, where she has begun her career in teaching at North College Hill School, after recently graduating from UConn's Neag School of Education IB/M program. She has found a position with a 4th grade team in an urban setting, where opportunities of literacy instruction, as well as her own journaling of the trials and tribulations of her transition into adulthood, have proven plentiful.

Christine Briganti (SI '12) is a recent graduate of UConn's Neag School of Education. She is currently teaching at Berlin High School. She is grateful to have shared her summer with such knowledgeable and supportive individuals, and she looks forward to securing her first teaching position for the upcoming school year.

Shirley Cowles (SI '12) is the Language Arts Challenge Resource Teacher at Sage Park Middle School in Windsor, CT. She has spent nine years watching and observing in the Psychiatry Department at Newington Children's Hospital, seventeen years becoming creative at The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, four years mastering the art of teaching at Irving Robbins Middle School in Farmington, and five years developing a gifted/talented program at Sage Park. Teacher by day and writer by night, she has found her writer's home.

Cynthia Dee (SI '12) was an SI fellow who was not an English teacher but who wanted to become better teacher of writing and a better writer herself. The SI helped her realize that she had a great deal to say about a variety of issues. Sadly, she missed four weeks of tending her garden during the summer; however, this fall she is reaping the rewards.

Ellen Devine (SI '12) is a writer and English teacher at Choate Rosemary Hall, where she has recently been appointed to the Head of the English Department. Thanks to her participation in the CWP Summer Institute, she completed her MA in English at the University of Connecticut this year. Her fiction has been published in Long River Review and her personal essay, "Hot Dog on a String," was published in an anthology of essays titled *My Little Red Book*. Ellen lives in Wallingford, Connecticut with her soon-to-be husband, Michael, and her two golden doodles, Bra(h)n and Poggi.

Emily Hernberg (SI '12) recently completed the Integrated Bachelor's/ Master's (IB/M) program at UConn's Neag School of Education. She currently teaches English at New Canaan High School.

Sarah King (SI '12) is a teacher at The Masters School, in Simsbury, Connecticut. While Sarah continues her graduate studies in English at UConn, she praises the CWP for the opportunity to become a Teacher Consultant and is grateful for the privilege of working with such multi-talented teachers and writers.

Helen Martin (SI '12) is a third grade teacher in the dual-language program at North Windham Elementary School, where she teaches all of the subject areas in Spanish with her English counterpart; together they seek new and innovative ways to create authentic writing experiences in their classrooms. Helen was recently married and her recent pregnancy (with their second child) has provided many comical opportunities for writing her favorite genre, creative non-fiction.

Stephen Staysniak (SI '12) has in taught in New York City, Litchfield County, Bridgeport, and is now happily teaching in an innovative, urban public high school in New Haven. Instructional focus areas in Steve's classroom include motivating reluctant readers, writing for authentic audiences, integrating technology with literacy development, and building collaborative community in the classroom. Steve feels a deep sense of gratitude to the SI 2012 cohort for teaching him that practicing writing makes a better teacher of writing.

Ethan Warner (SI '12) is a high school English teacher at O.H. Platt High School and a graduate of UConn's Neag School of Education. A member of his school's 9th Grade Team, he also directs the theatre program and coaches the debate team. In whatever free time he has, he enjoys comic books and traveling.

Cyd Weldon (SI '12) considers the midlife career change to teaching to be the best—and last—zag in a lengthy history of zigs. Since earning her Master's degree in 1998, she has taught elementary students ranging from first grade to sixth. For the past 7 years, Cyd has taught fifth grade in the Windham area and she has happily transferred to her current position as a fifth-grade teacher at Sweeney Elementary School in Willimantic.