



Western Kentucky University

Writing Project Newsletter

Fall 2010, Volume 13, Issue 2

From the Director's Desk

On this cold, rainy November 5th morning, I'm reminded that fall is quickly moving into winter and that the holiday season will be with us soon. Before I wish you happy holidays, however . . .

You'd have been pleased to be with us last night at the "Taste of the WKU Reading and Writing Projects" at the Knicely Conference Center. Legislator Embry from Grayson, Butler, and Logan counties joined us along with Phyllis Causey from Congressman Brett Guthrie's office. About 40 principals and teachers met together to learn more about the projects through sessions conducted by Audrey Harper, Michele McCloughan, Judy Whitson, and Lori Tatum. Sara Jennings, Mollie Wade, and Laura Houchens worked closely with Jennifer Montgomery, director of the WKU Reading Project, to create a very positive evening. The same group sponsored another successful event in October--the New Teacher Workshop--at South Warren Middle School where Eddy Bushelman is principal.

I hope many of you were able to attend our annual mini-demonstration conference, this year held in conjunction with the Reading Project, on November 13. Fifteen sessions were offered. And I hope you enjoy the session with Tammy Stephens on November 17 at TC Cherry when she helps us think about the new Core Content Standards and our Kentucky

school-wide school writing policy. Another November event: I hope many of you will be going to NCTE in Orlando just before Thanksgiving.

I wanted to call your attention to two spring events: our renewal breakfast at the annual Book Fest conference here in Bowling Green in April and our 25th year celebration in June. A committee is looking into a professional writer as speaker and an open house here on campus at the Faculty House. More information will be forthcoming.

If you're in town on January 18, 2011, Denise Henry, who heads up our Continuity program, has planned an informal open forum at Panera Bread. It will be a time for informal conversation and sharing. More about this later.

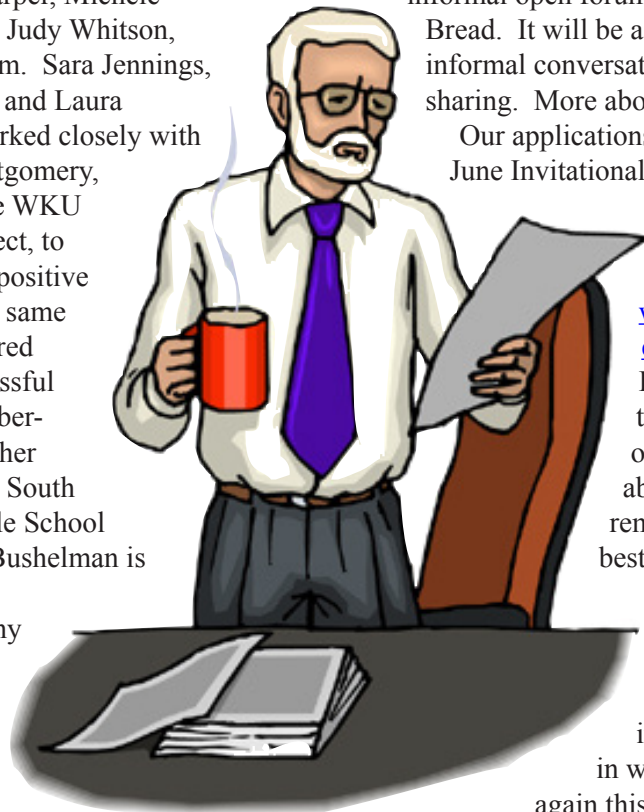
Our applications for the June Invitational Institute 2011 are on line at www.wku.edu/wp.

Please tell teachers in our schools about it. You remain our best recruiters.

And look for notice of an advanced institute in writing

again this summer, probably to be held at the Park Mamouth Hotel.

And now . . . happy holidays from all of us here in the Writing Project to you and your families!



 John

Raising the learning ceiling for our gifted writers

By Leah Clark--Franklin Elementary

We've all had teachers that bored us and teachers that motivated us. We've had teachers that inspired us with an environment that made us strive to become life-long learners, and we've had teachers that simply required us to read the chapters and do the questions at the end. These different teachers affected our attitude toward not only that class but learning in general.

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS!

Are your students nervous about writing for college?
Do they wonder what will be expected of them?
Are they struggling to write college application essays?

WE HAVE ANSWERS!

The WKU Writing Project's
WRITING FOR COLLEGE WORKSHOP
will prepare them for the challenge.

WKU Instructors and WP Fellows Laura Houchens and Mason Broadwell present an interactive workshop offering helpful hints about writing distinguished application essays for scholarships, writing business and cover letters, and surviving a college writing class.

Actual Student Testimony:

"Now I understand how to write a letter!"
"Thanks for showing us what colleges are looking for in their applicants."
"I'm not afraid of college writing any more!"
"I lost 183 lbs using this system!"*

For more information, email
writingproject@wku.edu or
laura.houchens@wku.edu.

*Not a typical case. Actual results may vary.

The law requires classroom teachers to provide services for gifted students. Kentucky Revised Statute 157.200 includes within the definition of "exceptional children" a category of "exceptional students" who are identified as possessing demonstrated or potential ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in five different areas. Two of these areas are creativity and specific academic, which would include reading and all literacy skills. KRS 157.224 commits the state to a comprehensive educational program for its exceptional school-aged children. Furthermore, KRS 157.230 requires all school districts to operate programs for resident exceptional children, primary through grade twelve. Each school shall differentiate, replace, supplement, or modify curricula to facilitate high level attainment of the learning goals established in KRS 158.6451 and to assist students identified and diagnosed as gifted and talented to development their individual interests, needs, and abilities.

Dr. Sylvia Rimm in her book, *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades*, discusses that children with a lack of appropriate challenge and devaluing genuine achievement creates underachievement in a high percentage of gifted students – identified and unidentified. Training of teachers, counselors, and parents in the recognition of symptoms of underachievement and strategies for reversing underachievement could dramatically improve assessment scores and "save" high potential students who disappear into mediocrity.

Gifted students need consistent opportunities to learn at their challenge level – just as all students do. It is inequitable to prevent gifted students from being challenged by trying to apply one level of difficulty for all students in mixed-ability classes. When teachers can provide opportunities for all students, including those who are gifted, to be challenged by rigorous curriculum, there is nothing elitist about the situation. It is a popular belief that gifted students will "get it on their own," but like all students, gifted children need to be serviced to ensure appropriate levels of

...continued on page 13

A writing fix for your classroom

By *Arianne Austin—Ohio County Middle School*

It's black and white spackled, lined pages desiring to be written on, and a possible solution to having students think critically about writing. A writer's notebook is the home of students' ideas, reflections, song lyrics that speak to them, a favorite picture of Nana, and so much more. Such an easy and unassuming tool, but in the hands of trained educators and willing students anything is possible.

The Writing Project introduced me to these notebooks that later transform into personal havens for writers and emerging writers alike. According to Ralph Fletcher, these notebooks unlock the writer within: "A writer's notebook is like a ditch- an empty space you dig in your busy life, a space that will fill up with sorts or fascinating little creatures. If you dig it, they will come. You'll be amazed by what you catch there."

The Basics

Writer's notebooks invite writers both teachers and students to slow down and breathe in the world around them. Perhaps a song on the radio catches your attention, lonely man reading the newspaper, or a young mom battling with her son down the candy aisle at the grocery store. Writing comes from the world around you. A writer's notebook can store those images that could later be used in a story.

For all those skeptics out there, yes, I see you shaking your head saying *it's just a notebook*. I beg to differ. Our lives are busy and our Blackberries are jammed-packed; these memories however large or small they are will be lost forever. We must write it down in our notebook before it slips out of our mind.

Better Test Results

According to the Northern Nevada Writing Project, "journal and writers notebooks better portfolio pieces during writer's workshops." Hold on, are they saying writer's notebook *will* increase portfolio scores? Yes. Writing involves thinking and critical at that. The more critical thinking our students are exposed to the more depth they will response to questions, especially on state assessments.

Possible Topics for Students

- Moving. Did you leave behind a best friend when you moved from your old house?
- Horrible Haircut (or other mortifying experience)
- An artifact (arrowhead, ring, antique, etc). Important objects in our lives often provide excellent material to write about.

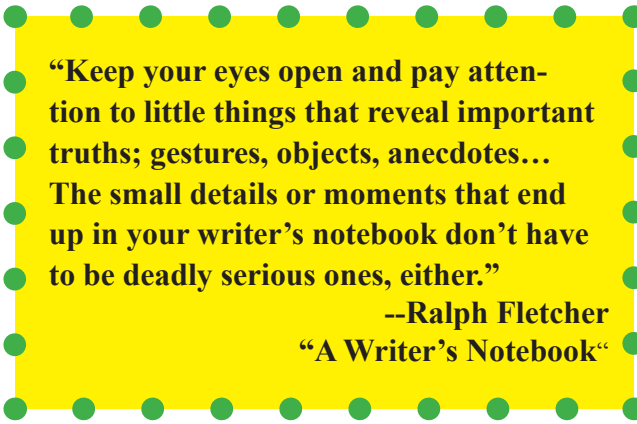
Practical Classroom Uses

Writing strategies should be taught in the midst of the lined paper of the writing journal. In Aimee Buckner's book, *Notebook Know How Strategies for the Writer's Notebook*, she teaches teachers how to maximize the pages of the notebook.

"Three- Word Phrases in Three Minutes" is strategy that can be used whenever you're stuck in your writing. Students select a topic to focus on as they write. For three minutes, they list as many three-word phrases about the topic as they possibly can. The exercise expands the students' word choice and builds fluency because a timed writing requires quick thinking. Buckner also illustrates the fact that this strategy can reach beyond the walls of the English classroom and can shed light on topics such as the American Revolution or volcanoes. Again, writing notebook focuses students to think to develop ideas and structure the facts from their classroom materials.

Another strategy that Buckner showcases is "Genre Switch." Students write about self-selected topic in their notebook. Every couple of minutes the teacher calls out a different genre. Students continue to write but switch their style to match the genre called out. No matter where the student is in the story, they switch their writing sound like a fairy tale, newspaper article, poem, fantasy, or encyclopedia. This could be a non-traditional way to pre or post-asset students when teaching genre characteristics.

In conclusion, writer's notebooks are a method of teaching students to think independently, curing the disease of learned helplessness and mounds of handouts. I believe that these mere notebooks (some would say) are the missing links between teacher sanity and successful students' progress. They are only notebooks... Teachers be brave and let your students astound you.



"Keep your eyes open and pay attention to little things that reveal important truths; gestures, objects, anecdotes... The small details or moments that end up in your writer's notebook don't have to be deadly serious ones, either."

**--Ralph Fletcher
"A Writer's Notebook"**

Affective feed back: From Trash to Treasure

Hey! That's No Garbage!

You have spent hours editing student On-Demands over the weekend, meticulously noting every structural, grammatical, and conventional error. After all, it is your job as the teacher to correct student writing. Proud of yourself for providing such thorough revision, you return your students' assignments. They glance over their bleeding papers and quietly place them inside their unorganized notebooks. Then it happens. On the way out the door, every student conveniently files his or her "much improved" work in the garbage. All of your hard work is crumpled up among used tissues and pencil shavings.

Just what is the problem with kids these days? Are they simply lazy and unmotivated, unthankful for the hours teachers spent editing their papers? Or might it have something to do with the way we go about revising their written work?

As educators we genuinely want our students to grow as writers. In fact, it is our job to help students attain that growth. However, until we begin providing them with effective written feedback and giving them time to revise, our efforts will be useless and our hard work discarded.

Traditional Trashcan Feedback

Some feedback, because of its ineffectiveness, is always going to find itself in the trashcan. Unfortunately, this kind of feedback is probably the type you and I received growing up: picky, puzzling, and vague.

Picky feedback is discouraging. Suppose a student spent hours on a challenging paper only to have it returned covered in red ink. These written comments can bewilder and overwhelm students,



especially the one who already feels his or her writing is unsatisfactory.

Likewise, puzzling abbreviations and codes are also ineffective when it comes to improving student writing. Sure, teachers know the codes: FS, fused sentence; Awk, awkward; WC, word choice. However, these cryptic comments are useless to students who cannot decipher such abbreviations.

Unfortunately, vague comments are no more effective than overly picky feedback. Comments such as "Confusing," "Needs work," and "More," leave students with questions: What needs work? How is this paragraph confusing? Write more about what?

Some feedback, because of its ineffectiveness, will always find itself in the trashcan.

Taking Feedback from Trash to Treasure

On Demand (5 Grade)	KY State Scores			
Scores (B – 8)	3	4	5	6
Inform	10%	34%	19%	20%
Narrate for a Purpose	10%	36%	18%	20%
Persuade	9%	33%	19%	20%

State scores issued by the Kentucky Department of Education show that the majority of 5th grade students in 2009 scored an apprentice on the On Demand portion of the test. 34% of students are writing at an apprentice level.

On Demand (12 Grade)	KY State Scores			
Scores (B – 8)	3	4	5	6
Inform	14%	35%	17%	14%
Narrate for a Purpose	13%	35%	17%	16%
Persuade	13%	36%	17%	14%

Like the 5th grade On-Demand scores (above), the majority of 12th grade students also scored an apprentice on the On Demand portion of the KATS exam. Students must receive effective feedback if they are to achieve mastery, or at least a proficient score.

Currently, the majority of students in Kentucky write on the apprentice level.

Polishing Traditional Feed back

Currently, the majority of students in Kentucky—elementary through high school—write on the apprentice level (see tables). In order for state scores and student writing to improve, we must provide our students with effective feedback. Lucy Calkins, professor at Columbia University and author of *The Art of Teaching Writing*, has this to say about writing effective comments on student work. “We are teaching the writer and not the writing. Our decisions [feedback] must be guided by what might help this writer rather than what might help this writing.” When teachers take this approach to written feedback, student writing will improve and learning will take place.

When providing students with feedback, we need to take on the role of coach rather than editor. Susan Brookhart, author of *How to Provide Students with Effective Feedback*, suggests three elements that must be present in order for feedback to be effective: clarity, specificity, and tone.

Clarity

In order for written comments to be effective, students must understand the feedback information as the teacher intended it. Writing with clarity might require that we use simple vocabulary and sentence structure for some students. Likewise, our feedback must be written legibly. While this seems painfully obvious, it is a common mistake among educators. Sloppy, unreadable writing says to the student, “I didn’t care enough about your paper to take time to write legibly.” Such writing will in no way motivate the student to produce quality pieces.

Specificity

Not too narrow. Not too broad. But just right. Use this as a guideline for determining how specific to be in feedback.

Feedback that is too narrow does not let even one error go unnoticed. When teachers make all the corrections on a student's paper, then the paper becomes theirs and no longer the student's. The teacher has done all the thinking and all the correcting, which is an injustice to the student who seeks the skills to be a better writer.

Feedback that is too broad usually comes in the form of one or two word phrases: confusing, vague, awkward, etc. These unspecific comments are often "vague" and "confusing" to students.

Specificity that is just right gives the student praise and an explanation of what was done well. In addition to praise, feedback that is "just right" must also identify some higher order problems (see graphic) and some possible strategies to correct those errors.

Tone

The final element of effective feedback is tone. Tone refers to the way students "hear" written feedback; the way students perceive our messages can either inspire or discourage.

There is absolutely no place for sarcasm when it comes to written comments. As educators, it is not our job to outwit or outsmart our students. Attempting to do so does no more than belittle our students and turn them off to writing.

Rather than insulting students with "cute" comments, light the way forward for your students. Your tone should convey a message of hope. Show students that there is a way to improve and that you believe they are capable of doing so. Finally, equip them with the tools necessary for success.

Composition People



Hilda begins to think she should have attended that panel on "minimal marking" at last month's conference of writing teachers.

Composition Chronicle: Newsletter for Writing Teachers 8

When revising first drafts, focus on one or two higher order concerns. For instance, did the student follow instructions? Effectively organize? This will avoid burn out on your part and give students the tools to improve their writing.

Conclusion

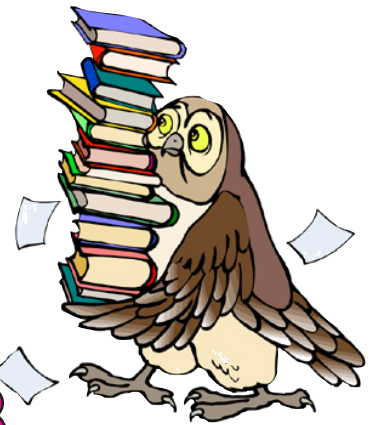
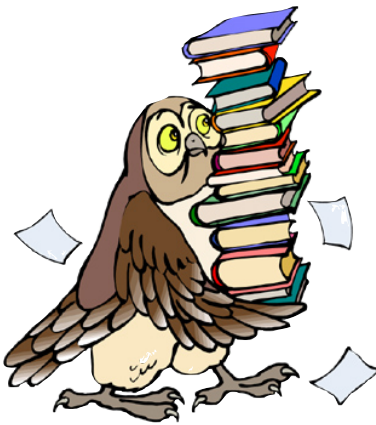
Maybe your feedback found itself in the trash because it was unclear. Or maybe it was too vague, narrow, or condescending. Regardless, feedback has the potential to be a treasure to student writers.

Taking the time to write clear, specific, and kind feedback will communicate to students that you care and have confidence in their abilities to grow as young writers.

When teachers make all the corrections on a student's paper, it becomes their own and not the student's.

SO MANY BOOKS... SO LITTLE TIME!

LEARN USEFUL TECHNIQUES
SHARE GREAT TEACHING IDEAS
DEVELOP FRIENDSHIPS
HAVE A CUP OF COFFEE



Your invitation to join
Writing Project Alumni
once a month at

THE BOOK SHARE CLUB

**Second Tuesday of every month, 7:00 P.M.
Beginning November 9th
Barnes and Noble, Bowling Green**

Make Me A Story: Using Digital Stories, by: Lisa Miller

“When teachers and students first learn about digital stories, they often focus on the bells and whistles: images, music, sound effects, and so on. To Lisa Miller, a good digital story—like any good story--is all about the writing. In “Make Me a Story,” Lisa shows how to use digital stories to lead students through all phases of the writing process, from planning to revising and editing ...”

No registration fee:

** First five participants to respond will receive a free book

Sponsored by the WKU Writing Project

To Register please email Denise Henry:

denisehenry76@yahoo.com

A Modest Digital Proposal

WRITING PROJECT 23

ASHLEY N. GORE

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY



"I think we're in the midst of a literacy revolution the likes of which we haven't seen since Greek civilization."

Andrea Lunsford, professor of writing and rhetoric at Stanford University

Being Literate in the Digital

In the 21st century, students not only have to be literate in reading, writing, speaking and listening but also in digital media observation and creation.

This leads to the question: How do we incorporate digital media in a meaningful way to our curriculum to be sure our students are literate in the 21st century?



First, as educators, we must know how digital literacy is determined. The National Council of Teachers of English defines being literate as

being able to read and write in the way in which a culture communicates and literacy changes as society does. In our 21st century society a literate person must be able to read and write in the technological world.

So if this was true to Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal*, in this *Modest Digital Proposal*, I would tell you, the educator, now must get rid of all your old lessons and what you have always taught in order to revert to all digital media. But, then we would be missing teaching the classics and tried and true content. Plus, the allusion to Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* would be lost to the future generations.

Incorporating digital media in your class does NOT mean that you have to throw away all your lessons and things you love to teach.

As an educator in the 21st century, you have to find ways for your students to not only view digital media but to also create and share as well.

It is looking at the content that you teach now and integrating digital media into your lessons for your students to view and especially create.

DID YOU KNOW?



"The computer in your cell phone today is a million times cheaper and a thousand times more powerful and about a hundred thousand times smaller (than the one computer at MIT in 1965)" -Ray Kurzweil



ARE YOU



READY

TO

SNAP?

Do you need advice from fellow teachers?
Do you need a shoulder to cry on?
Do you need to be heard?

Out of fresh teaching ideas?
Frustrated by overwhelming demands?
Dealing with troubled students?
Making time for difficult parents?
Working with unsupportive co-workers?
Need a light at the end of the tunnel?

Meet monthly with Writing Project Alumni to gain or offer support.
Bring a friend who might benefit from this group.

Beginning January 18, 2011
7:00 P.M.
Panera Bread, Bowling Green

For additional information contact: denisehenry76@yahoo.com

Connecting art and writing in the classroom

By Cassie Lloyd

“All writers write from pictures, either the pictures they make or the ones they hold in their minds.”
-Donald Murray

Many educators, especially at the elementary level, teach art because there isn't a certified art teacher in your school. Classroom teachers are faced with the challenge of needing to meet these needs, with little or no background in art. I'm sure with all of the other responsibilities that classroom teachers have, this seems like just one more thing to add to an already full plate. I believe that the easiest subject to begin integrating visual art is through writing instruction. In this article, I will give researched-based rationale for the necessity of the Visual Arts in writing classrooms, as well as provide you with various strategies and activities that you can use in combination with writing instruction for emergent writers, for writers at the elementary level, and for writers at the secondary level.

Rationale for the Inclusion of Visual Arts in Writing Instruction

Art is essential in helping students to express themselves. It can be a springboard to helping children tell stories and develop narratives. Art is truly an essential component of the curriculum. Students who are involved in the arts are: Four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement, three times more likely to be elected to class office within their schools, four times more likely to participate in a math or science fair, and three times more likely to win an award for school attendance.

Incorporating Art into Writing: Emergent Leveled Writers

Probably the easiest and most necessary level to include art into writing instruction is at the preschool and kindergarten level. Emergent writers are just beginning to learn to tell stories in a sequence succession. As soon as emergent writers grasp storytelling, they begin to utilize visual literacy by drawing their story in a series of pictures describing each phase in the story.

Visual Literacy

Visual literacy is loosely defined as the ability to interpret and make meaning from information presented in the form of any image. Also, visual literacy may refer to a person's ability to convey information in the form of an image. Examples of Visual Literacy include, but are not limited to telling a story using images, graphs, diagrams, charts, maps, photographs, signs and symbols, illustrations. Many teachers help students emerge into narrative by utilizing a Drawing and Writing Book. These are sketchbooks used to convey the student's stories through a series of illustrations. Students will slowly incorporate more text as they begin developing more writing skills. Other examples of ways to incorporate art for emergent writers are by using story stretchers (i.e., sketch-to-stretch), suggested activities in curriculum resource books (i.e., Junior Great Books, Reading Street), open responses, and daily writing prompts.

Incorporation Art into Writing: Elementary Leveled Writers

Although emergent writers create the easiest outlet for connecting writing and visual arts, it is easy to do this with writers of an age. Some ways of doing this with elementary level students are: story stretchers, writing prompts that include the visual arts, reading and creating illustrated picture books, creating overhead silhouettes using "I am From" poem prompts, acrostic poems, autobiography poems, etc., visiting art museums and responding to art works, describing/analyzing/critiquing art works, visual autobiographies, poetic images with poetry, postcards, storyboards, cartoons, filmstrips, etc. In responding to art works, there are many different approaches: students could write creative pieces inspired by the work, they could write a letter from the subject (object or person in the painting) to the observer, or a conversation poem between two people or objects within the painting.

When it comes to combining art and writing, the possibilities are endless. Considering strict district budgets and the scarcity of field trips today, a trip to the art museum may be impractical at your school. A great way to let your students still experience a museum is by doing a virtual tour of a museum or a site like, the Museum of Modern Art: Art Safari <http://www.moma.org/interactives/artsafari/>; this site is an excellent way to incorporate art, writing, critical thinking, and technology.

Connecting art and writing in the classroom

Incorporating Art into Writing: Secondary Leveled Writers

Finding connections between writing and art for secondary students is not only an excellent way to get students interested and excited about writing, but it is also a creative outlet for struggling writers that have difficulty expressing themselves through written words.

Sometimes it is easier for a student to describe something in words after they have created a visual image to convey their message. Any of the elementary activities can easily be utilized at the secondary level with a few accommodations.

Secondary leveled writers can describe works of art at the peer level, of well-known artists, at an art museum, or from a print or copy of an art work. An option for secondary leveled writers might be writing and illustrating a children's book or creating pop-up books. Teachers may even allow students to go to a local elementary school and read-aloud their creations to the younger students. Most secondary writing teachers are familiar with the writer's notebook.

Students are often encouraged to make sketches in their notebooks as an occasional alternative to writing. A great idea for expanding on this would be to allow students to create art journals. Art journals, or visual journals, are blank books, sketchbooks, notebooks, or pretty much anything that can be used as a notebook. What makes these books visual journals is that the author combines journal writing with art making such as creating a collage, drawing, painting, pasting new or old photos, stamping, print-making, and utilizing various other mixed media techniques to create a unique tool for self expression. I think of an art journal as a writer's notebook that expands to cross over to the world of visual arts.

Finding the connections between the visual arts and writing is necessary in the development of more rigorous, effective classrooms and in helping students find ways to understand and express the curriculum. Hopefully, the activities discussed in this article will help ensure that more classrooms utilize the integration of visual arts in the teaching of writing. I challenge all teachers to go back to their classrooms and explore any of these activities with their students.



The screenshot shows a museum interface with a dark red background. On the left is a portrait of Frida Kahlo holding a black monkey. To the right of the portrait are four yellow handprints arranged in a circle. Below the portrait is the caption "Frida Kahlo, *Fulang-Chang and Me*". To the right of the handprints is the text "Why do you suppose the monkey and the woman are together? Where might they be?". At the bottom right are three navigation options: "next question" with a red arrow pointing right, "Art Safari Menu" with a red arrow pointing right, and "Help" with a red arrow pointing right. On the far right, the MOMA logo is written vertically in large red letters, with "The Museum of Modern Art, New York" written in smaller white text to its left.

Frida Kahlo, *Fulang-Chang and Me*

Why do you suppose the monkey and the woman are together? Where might they be?

next question →

Art Safari Menu →

Help →

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

DECLINING WORK ETHIC

By *Debbie Goff*

Many say that once you've completed your first year of teaching the process becomes easier. After embarking on a five year journey, I somewhat disagree with this statement. I have certainly acquired a vast amount of experience in the classroom, and did not find the duties of teaching overwhelming. Instead I found them invigorating, exciting. I have endeavored to reflect upon teaching methods and strategies of the day-to-day tasks during my teaching experience. One of the most puzzling components of my job was why many of the students I have taught have had such a poor work ethic. The mystery remains. I have concluded that if students do not have a strong work ethic upon entering the school, the responsibility to instill this attribute falls upon the shoulders of the educator.

What is work ethic? Webster defines work as effort executed to do or make something. Webster also defines ethic as a system of moral standards. So, one could describe a work ethic as bringing a task to completion using a set of moral standards. What are our moral standards within our particular school setting? Are these standards clearly identified and enforced? What can be done to combat a poor work ethic existing within a school's environment?

I have discussed this issue with other teachers in our school. The consensus is that this is a routine problem that has progressively increased over the past several years. I have pondered several possible reasons for its existence. I have discussed work ethic with students as a group and on individual basis. Among the reasons cited are: my parents don't care as long as I pass, the teachers in elementary school made sure that you would pass, so we didn't do the work, and I've not failed yet. Will implementing programs that encourage a strong work ethic within our school climate be enough to offset this type of thinking?

I believe that the work ethic of students is vital for lifelong success. "Politicians and education bureaucrats can talk all they want about reform, but until the work ethic of U.S. students changes, until they are willing to put in the time and effort to master their subjects, little will change" (Welsh, 2006). As Welsh purports, I too believe that it is time for students to take ownership for their actions at the middle school level.

The University of Tennessee conducted a study on middle school student work ethic and notes that not much research has been done on this issue (Williams, Bush, Park, Malone, Jessup, 2001). I want to improve our society, not stand by and see it jeopardized by laziness and/or a negative attitude. I would like to convey a positive, can-do attitude while modeling a strong work ethic. "Hard work, excellent teaching, and supportive parents – put those factors together and the sky is the limit" (Education World).

This philosophy earned a Texas school national attention for their strong work ethic.

I believe that if other teachers would assist in spreading this message, educators can impact our students positively. Teachers must set higher expectations for completed assignments. Teachers must be on the same page when it comes to consequences. Teachers must hold the students accountable for missing work. A successful outcome will require all educators to combat a lack of work ethic among students.

In an article released by Phi Delta Kappan to offer a parent/educator's response to Alfie Kohn's view of public education, it was noted that upon entering college the class of 2001 were not academically inclined to work hard. The focus of the article centered on sleeping in and missing classes. (Rochester, 1998) This trend has not emerged overnight. We have limited our expectations for students over time despite the rigor and relevance that we are supposed to instill in our content areas. Students are not given enough incentive to perform well in the classroom after all college entrance requirements keep getting more lax. (Welsh, 2006)

The responsibility to instill a strong work ethic remains with the educator. As beautiful as a finished puzzle may become, its value is limited unless someone takes time to painstakingly situate the various pieces together. While boxed in cardboard one can only surmise that the process of successfully completing the puzzle will be difficult or simple. It is time to remove the puzzle from the box, dedicate the time to change, and rise to the challenge before us! With a joint effort, the puzzle pieces will mesh.

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Raising the learning ceiling for our gifted writers

...continued from on page 2

instruction in order to maximize the potential of every child.

According to Susan Winebrenner in her book, "Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom," outstanding writers, "...by the very nature of their sophisticated writing ability, need compacting and differentiation in their writing work." Introducing creative outlets to motivate and inspire these students in the writing classroom can increase their productivity and self-confidence and result in them becoming better writers.

Differentiation is any systematic adjustment of the level, pace, process, and product of the curriculum designed to accommodate the unique needs of individuals or groups of students. Differentiating instruction is necessary to service gifted students in the regular classroom.

Proposal:

- Begin by securing appropriate funding for these students. Since gifted and talented students fall under the umbrella of "exceptional students" in the KRS, then it would be appropriate for school districts to receive funding per identified child just as they do for identified students with special needs.
- In order for this to occur more accurate identification of gifted students must take place within our school districts.
- More accurate identification can only result from more educated teachers and administrators who are supportive of gifted education and are not satisfied with mediocrity.
- Get school systems on board with the different methods for servicing gifted learners such as
 - Acceleration
 - Collaborative teaching
 - Resource services – including pull-out programs
 - Independent study
 - Self-contained classes
 - Cluster grouping
- Differentiate instruction through the use

of learning contracts, daily logs, the "most difficult first" method, and tiered assignments for skill work.

- Introduce creative and motivating activities into the writing classroom that appeal to all avenues of the imagination. Some examples of this would be integrating art, music, film, and different modes of technology.
- Whenever possible, allow students to have choices in their work products to make sure they are creating work that is meaningful to them.

Resources:

Winebrenner, Susan. *Teaching Gifted Kids in the Regular Classroom*. Free Sprit Publishing: Minneapolis, 2001.

Rimm, Sylvia. *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades*. Three Rivers Press: New York, 1995.

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NEWS TIDBIT

Sharyon M. Shartzter, retired Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Assessment from Grayson County School District, is enjoying traveling and spending quality time with family and friends.

Shartzter is also working occasionally sharing information about Camp Invention and Club Invention. These are elementary STEM enrichment programs from the national non-profit Invent Now Kids organization. Learn more about these programs at www.CampInvention.org.

Disaster Capitalism Strikes Again: Merit Pay, Privatization, Killing Tenure, and the Capitalist Drive to Make American Education a Cash Cow

By Jaysun McBride, Greenwood High School

If one were to listen to the media, politicians, school administrators, and entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates, one might be tempted to accept the “collapse” propaganda that suggests the American public education system is failing and that teachers, especially “entrenched” tenured teachers, are to blame. In fact, since the American public generally only hears this disaster rhetoric, such views are now widely held throughout America. This capitalist promulgation of deceptive portrayals of school failures has led the public to accept the closing of numerous schools, the mass firings of teachers within supposedly failing schools, the move toward abolishing tenure and seniority, forced cuts in teacher pay, health care, and incentives, the weakening of the strongest American union system, the move to charter schools, the standardization of assessment models, and the move to yearly contracts and “at will” firings of teachers.

That Americans want to improve the public education system is understandable and commendable. Who wouldn't want to give our children the best opportunities available? Who wouldn't want to prepare future generations to more adequately cope with the many crises that face the nation? Apparently, those who don't want to accomplish these goals are the very persons and organizations who are trying to convince the public that schools are failing--those that don't want to properly allocate or balance funds to achieve what Americans know is so vital to our livelihood as a country--those who want to rape school funds to line their pockets, as was just seen with the Wall Street fiasco.

Is it a coincidence that the clarion call to save our failing schools began with the neoliberal, deregulating former President Clinton and gained its true momentum with his neoconservative deregulating successor the former President Bush. Both presidents followed the lead of former President Reagan in dismantling unions, outsourcing jobs, and decimating the American work force, not to mention the policies they created which led to the Wall Street rip-offs of average Americans and left our states without money to fund our public schools--policies which have brought our economy to near ruin and which have left communities ravaged--policies that are truly to blame for the social and cultural deficits that are seen reflected in our now transient, segregated, unequal, and unstable culture and in test scores of schools across America. Public schools have been one of the last bastions against deregulation, one place where private enterprise has been unable to fully penetrate and plunder, but not for long.

Ever since No Child Left Behind, and now, under President Obama's Race to the Top, public education is no longer safe. It is no longer a place where education is a priority. The pundits of charterization and privatization would have the public believe that teachers are the reason for public school failures. Teachers have become the villains in this educational collapse narrative. The pundits would have the public believe that teachers are undereducated and

underprepared to meet the needs of their students for the Twenty-First Century. They would have the public believe that tenured teachers are overpaid for doing nothing, while their students flounder in the cesspools of failing educational systems.

But is it a coincidence that these supposed failures began to occur at the same time the private corporations began to push for charter schools which rely on student tuition and donations from private foundations for funding? Is it a coincidence that standardized testing models and materials, which are sold to schools by private corporations, usually on no-bid contracts, began to appear at the same time? Is it a coincidence that these tests, tests which have been proven invalid ever since their inception, have shown schools and students failing and is it a coincidence that only the private companies can supply the materials to solve such dilemmas, companies, not of educators, but entrepreneurs? These are not coincidences. They were simply the first steps in the move to dismantle public education, so private enterprise could make more money off of schools than the textbook and school supplies' industry could garner for them.

Now, a second tier of these dismantling initiatives is being promoted. The second tier is to get rid of the tenured teachers who are supposedly weighing down school systems with their “exorbitant” salaries, while they do nothing to teach their students, and to instill merit pay systems. Once again, is it a coincidence that such claims are being made at the same time that states are going broke? Is it a coincidence that teachers with experience are being threatened, supposedly because of their failures, just at the time school systems cannot afford to pay their salaries? Is it a coincidence that this is occurring during the midst of two expensive wars to maintain a natural resource that is destroying our planet? Is it a coincidence that economic recession coincided with a spike in oil prices as a result of the wars and a decrease in oil resources? Is it a coincidence that the real estate market collapsed at the same time suburban owners could no longer afford to drive to their retreats when oil prices spiked? Finally, is it a coincidence that that lack of spending, as a result of the spike in oil prices, caused the unregulated market to flounder to the point of collapse at the same time people could no longer afford to fuel the housing and credit card bubbles which kept the imaginary market afloat?

In other words, a series of market failures, stimulated by “voodoo” economics as a result of oil spikes because of the wars and reduced resources, does not suddenly make tenured teachers bad educators. Just because school systems cannot afford to pay even the meager salaries of these educators, doesn't mean these educators are failing. What it does mean is that broke or faltering financial enterprises and governmental programs believe they can save some cash by abandoning these educators, and they are not concerned about the results to students' educations. What it also means is that these enterprises seek to fill and safeguard

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their coffers by privatizing schools, once again without any concern for the students. We have seen what has happened to the rest of our economy when the market is left unfettered and in control. Is this the model we want to prepare our students for the climate, ecological, infrastructure, food, and economic crises that lie ahead? Do we want corporations to squander school resources for untested and temporary programs, only to abandon them once they have taken all that can be had?

Since I have been teaching, schools have adopted such programs for a few years to get grant money, but this grant money has mostly gone to the programs themselves, to the corporations which supply them, and then, the programs are quickly abandoned and replaced by others. This occurs on a continuous cycle every year. We spend money for systems we don't keep and which, apparently, have not improved our supposedly failing schools. The school systems are poorer for the programs, the corporations are richer, and students haven't gained a thing. Yet, teachers are blamed for the failing schools. Who is to hold these corporations accountable for their failures, or school systems and the government for their short-sightedness and greed? Teachers are an easy scapegoat, but blaming teachers, reducing their pay and security, and firing them has not seemed to solve any of the real systemic problems with education. The educational system is not fixed by these methods because fixing the schools is not the goal. Disrupting and dismantling the school systems is the goal. This goal, by the way, has been successful.

The problems seen currently in public schools, where problems actually do exist, are problems of policy at the highest levels of government. They are the same problems that have a third of our population currently unemployed. They are the same problems which have us on the edge of an energy and food bubble for which we have barely mobilized. They are the same problems which create, not only companies too big to fail, but too big to fight.

The final phase of the corporatist take over of schools is now under way under President Obama's education czar, Arne Duncan, and can be seen in the actions of Michelle Rhee, the CEO of the Washington D.C.'s schools. This final phase is a move to establish a merit pay system linked to standardized tests and in yearly renewal of teacher contracts. Remember, these are the same standardized tests that are constantly being revamped and to which scores are altered by states to better reflect what they desire. In other words, everyone knows these tests are not adequate reflections of student learning, yet they are to be the determining factor in teacher pay and retention.

Aside from the fact that such a system would inevitably pit teachers against one another, force teachers to even further teach in a formulaic and rote manner, keep teachers out of the lowest performing schools, and would do nothing to achieve the kind of critical thinking and depth

of knowledge schools claim they want, merit based pay systems have not been proven effective motivators of teacher or student improvements. Also, the ability to fire teachers at will and removing teachers with tenure only serves to offer authoritarian school models the malleable teachers who will do their bidding, even if this bidding does not enhance student learning. Schools need experienced teachers as educational mentors, but also as mentors for learning how to challenge administrative initiatives and to better deal with student problems and concerns.

The education system is failing, but these failures are not the fault of teachers. Some teachers do fail students, but this is not the factor that is destroying the public education system. What is destroying the public education system is the same problem threat is destroying America, and that problem is greed. Corporations must have failing schools if they are to implement the programs by which they gain their wealth. Students, teachers, and even administrators are shown to be failing, both to sell schools "magic bullet" programs to drive schools to privatize. This initiative has been in place for more than a decade now, and schools, as a whole, have not been shown to make any substantial improvements. Some years school test scores increase a few percentage points, and some years they go in the opposite direction. Some schools that have made huge leaps have fallen back to their original scores. Schools that make leaps of 30 to 70 percentage points in a given year must be considered quite suspect because cultures do not adjust that quickly to any changes. Think of our cultural reluctance or inability to adopt sustainable energy changes or ideas of big or small government that date back to America's inception. Cultures change very slowly, but even this slow change does not account for failures of standardized tests and schools. These failures exist as a result of systemic economic disparities and cultural deficits in a segregated and highly unequal country and as a result of purposeful propaganda by which corporations suck schools dry. We can blame and fire all of our good and highly qualified teachers, but we will not save our schools by doing so. School systems and state governments may save some money in the short term, but the long term price is one from which our country will have a difficult time recovering. If we want to improve our schools, we have to improve our communities and our sense of community. We have to give people real hope of a future, which means real jobs and opportunities and not just slogans. Unfortunately, those days seem to have come and gone for America. The wealthy seem hell bent on getting all they can before the whole country collapses, and that dog-eat-dog model is just the system that is eating our children, our schools, our communities, and our country. Fighting a pretend failure is much easier than fighting the real one, so this year I vow to get on board in fighting the pretend collapse. I hope you will join me by doing all you can to do nothing, as well, and maybe we can just fix nothing together.

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