

Western Kentucky University



Writing Project Newsletter

Spring 2011, Volume 14, Issue 1

WKU Writing Project Celebrates 25 Years

Spring is here! Project 26 participants have been selected and our Orientation session is days away. What does that mean in terms of the previous 25 years? Why, a celebration--It's time to celebrate our Silver Anniversary on June 20, 2011! Novelist Pat Carr will be with us to begin the festivities, and a reception will follow in the Faculty House. I hope as many of you as possible will be able to come to campus to celebrate with us. Details about the celebration and a list of teachers who are participating in the 2011 Invitational Summer Institute are included within this issue.

Among the good news is some sad: the National Writing Project withheld \$12,000 from each site's funding this year for its own maintenance. And the NWP has been removed as an earmarked entity in the 2011-2012 federal budget. That means your letters, blogs, and phone calls to Washington are going to be essential. More news when it becomes available.

As usual, your Project has been busy planning activities and events for YOU, all of which are on our website:

- April 16: Breakfast at the Bowling Green Bookfest with author Kristen Tubb
- April 30: Putting a Spring in Your Step with Dr Bruce Kesler, Lisa Cary, Erica Cutright and Jordan Wade

- June 7-9: Technology Academy with Terry Elliott and Audrey Harper
- June 20: Celebration of the Project's 25 Years with novelist Pat Carr
- June 21-3: Writing Retreat at Park Mammoth Resort Hotel
- July 11: Rural Social Justice Workshop (bullying, stereotyping, and intolerance) with Sara Jennings and Nicole Jenkins

All this and the June Invitational Summer Institute—you can see that your Project is alive and well, making a difference here in South Central Kentucky.

Inside this issue you'll find details concerning some of the above workshops, professional articles written by some of last summer's ISI teachers, and a list of Project 26 participants. Hope to see you at one of our many events!



--John

WKUUP Book Study Group: Moving forward with technology

By Denise Henry

In the foreword for *Make Me a Story*, by Lisa Miller, Linda Rief states, “After reading this book, I realize I am the person to whom this book is addressed – the teacher who is intimidated by the prospect of incorporating technology into her classroom but is open to the possibilities.” I, too, can relate to these feelings of intimidation but the Writing Project Fellows who participated in the Book Study Group were excited, motivated and willing to turn their students on to Digital Storytelling.

The small band of explorers began the study group in November of 2010 and will continue work on the project into the 2011 – 2012 school year. The ladies braved rain storms, blizzards, cancelations, postponements, illness and time constraints to be a part of this futuristic study. Hours of wonderful discussion and sharing of ideas were enjoyed at Barnes and Noble in Bowling Green while working our way through the book by Lisa Miller.

Although much of the book focuses on the use of technology: I-Movie, music, voice-overs, illustration through pics4learning, Miller never forgets the writer. She is a follower of Donald Graves and a practitioner of the Writing Process. The use of pictures/drawings is to enhance story details, music is to add the emotional layer to a piece and the voice-over is to, yes – add voice. The importance of revision and editing is stressed throughout the book while the need to tap into students’ interest in technology is highlighted.

Members of the Study Group (Michelle McCloughan, TC Cherry; Julie Cox, Logan County; Sherri Pryor, Chandlers; Christine Maxwell, Natcher; Jean Sanders, Hart County; and Denise Henry, WKU

Writing Project) put into practice techniques and strategies from the book. During the March meeting Michelle shared a digital story her fourth/fifth grade students created for Black History Month while Jean shared how she is using the writing to enhance her gifted art classes.

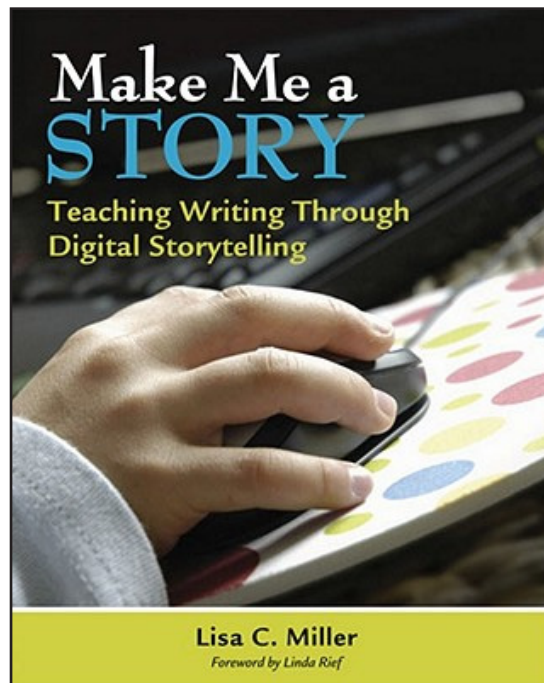
Group members felt helpful tools in the book were the web-site links, the CD with student examples and the scoring rubrics. They also felt Ms. Miller covered all issues step-by-step, including the Writing Process and use of computer programs.

As is the case with most books, what you are getting is the best-of-the-best, the cream of the crop from the author. Everyone agreed that you will need to start slow, maybe with a small group of students, and work your way into all the methods described.

As we worked through the book and began implementing small sections into the classroom, it was discovered that the monster of “time” was rearing its ugly head once again. As students and teachers became familiar with the resources available, it took longer to compose a digital story than it had a “paper” story. Some suggestions

offered as alternatives to classroom time: after school Writing Club, a district-wide Super Saturday Writing Class, gifted pullout, RtI or extended language arts block. Teachers are masters at working around a problem such as this.

The Book Study Group will come back together this fall to share how they have implemented Digital Storytelling in their classrooms. I appreciate the time and dedication these ladies demonstrated during a long, hard winter, and I wish them much success in their endeavors to motivate and inspire Kentucky’s students.



WKU Writing Project Presents...

Rural Social Justice Workshop

**July 11, 2011
8:30-3:30**

Butler County Middle School Library

Cost: \$50

Registration deadline: June 30, 2011

Presenters:

Nicole Jenkins

Sara Jennings

Has your school or district been “keeping mum” about these issues:
--Bullying? Stereotyping? Racial discrimination?
Religious discrimination? Intolerance in general?

Based on their experience studying holocaust education principles, Nicole Jenkins (South Warren Middle School) and Sara Jennings (Morgantown Elementary School) will offer a day-long workshop that will involve participants in activities to counteract such issues. Curriculum materials will be provided that relate the activities to the new Kentucky Core Content Standards, and a Gogledocs group will be established to connect participants in sharing strategies once school begins in the fall. The workshop will carry six hours of professional development credit.

“There were many ways of not burdening one’s conscience, of shunning responsibility, looking away, keeping mum. When the unspeakable truth of the Holocaust then became known at the end of the war, all too many of us claimed that they had not known anything about it or even suspected anything.”

-- Richard von Weizsaecker

WKA Writing Project 25th Celebration

Monday, June 20, 2011

Registration

2:00 – 2:30 Cherry Hall, WKA Campus

Guest Speaker: Pat Carr

2:30 – 3:30

Cherry Hall, WKA Campus

Reception

3:30 – 5:30

Faculty House, WKA Campus

Reunite with Writing Project Fellows and Directors

Share Memories from Your Project

Meet new Project Alumni

Honor the Success of the Project

Register today!

WELCOME PROJECT 25 FELLOWS

Laura Beavers

South Warren Middle School

R. Joy Luna

Bowling Green Junior High

Donna Birch

Ohio County High School

Lisa Midkiff

Hancock County High School

Shannon Latoya Bryant

Dishman McGinnis Elementary

Amy Mooneyhan

Logan County High School

Jessica Carney

Dishman McGinnis Elementary

Rachel Pendleton

Briarwood Elementary

Mark Cooper

Davies County High School

Kyle Peterson

T.C. Cherry Elementary

Natalie Croney

Bowling Green High School

Brandon Poole

Butler County High School

Larry Wayne Decker

Bowling Green High School

Samantha Rowe

Ohio County Middle School

Sara Deel

Hart County High School

Hilary Thompson

Ohio County High School

Bobbi Gilbert

Richardsville Elementary

Lisa Ziemke

Christian County Middle School

Dramatizing: The effective use of drama in the classroom

By Beth Wallace

Drama is an art form that has been an effective means of communication since the beginning of time. It can be incorporated in the educational setting in many forms and across content areas. The National Council of English Teachers lists several benefits of using forms of drama in the classroom to improve many facets of student learning, such as: reading listening, writing and speaking; analytical thinking and responsibility; concentration; self-concept and cooperation; tolerance and diversity; and motivation and creativity.

Drama is an excellent way to give students with special needs an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a format that they are equal with their peers. We all have strengths and gifts; drama provides an opportunity for everyone to share them.

If research indicates that drama is an effective tool to promote student learning on a variety of levels, why don't more educators utilize this valuable tool? Many educators have common misconceptions that using drama takes additional time and work or they have to put on an entire play in order to use drama. Conversely, drama can be incorporated into lesson plans in a variety of ways for little or no money and can be utilized as an effective summative or formative assessment.

We need to follow the example of our modern society: delivering our message in a wide variety of ways, taking into account the diverse learning styles represented in our classrooms, and delivering the content in an effective way so that each student has the opportunity to realize success.

An easy way to incorporate drama is improvisation. Most students have been exposed to improv either

through television or live performances. One example of this technique is to give students a scenario from literature or history and ask them to perform a short improv scene based on that text. If the students can retell the story in their own words, the teacher will have an accurate picture of the students' understanding of the text, more so than if they were simply asked to read the text aloud, or even to answer questions on a quiz. Furthermore, in order to explore character development, students might be asked to perform an improv scene using a specific character, but in a totally

different setting than in the story (i.e. characters from *Romeo and Juliet* at a pep rally at school). If the students have an opportunity to expand their depth of knowledge of the character, making choices about how they would act/react in a given situation, it allows them to make decisions based on their own independent, critical thinking. This type of activity allows for summative and formative assessments to take

place.

Pantomime can be utilized with improvisation or it can be used in other ways, such as reinforcing vocabulary. The class (or individual student) decides on a gesture or pantomime to help them remember the meaning of a vocabulary word. The gestures could be used as a review game of charades. This technique can be highly effective for kinesthetic learners.

Readers Theatre is an easy way to build reading skills, particularly reading fluency. This activity gives students the opportunity to practice reading the same text aloud. As they become more familiar with the text, their confidence will increase. Many educational publishers have Readers Theatre scripts that correspond to stories in the text. It is also an excellent



Dramatizing: The effective use of drama in the classroom

way to teach literary concepts such as plot, main idea, and inference.

“Show Me a Story” is an easy technique for students to demonstrate their higher order thinking skills as well as social interaction through working in cooperative groups. This concept can be effectively incorporated into units on genre. Small groups of students choose a familiar story that they would like to alter. Working together they re-write the story, either from another character’s point of view, changing the setting, time period, ending, or other facet of the story. The “what if” element provides a critical thinking opportunity for the students. Then, each group works together to rewrite the story and perform it in a short skit for the class. Costumes and props do not need to be elaborate for this activity.

Puppets can be a fun and creative way to teach concepts. They are great interaction tools for very young students, and puppets work well for the “Show Me a Story” activity. Sock puppets and stick puppets are very inexpensive to make, and they allow students the opportunity to create their own character.

In Barry Lane’s book *51 Wacky We-Search Projects*, he offers several fun ways to engage students through drama:

1. Parody Performances: take the facts and turn them into informative entertainment (think *Saturday Night Live*).
2. Press Conference: one student is being interviewed, and other students are the reporters who ask questions. The interviewee does not have to be a person; it could be a plant or animal, or even a part of speech or symbol in math.
3. Tour Guide: after your class has completed a unit on a geographic location or historical period, one of the students can act as the “tour guide,” giving details that the class learned during the unit. The tour guide can choose their vehicle (helicopter, boat bus, etc) and fictional name. They can also also make corny jokes during the tour.
4. Talk Show Interview (think *Oprah*): the interview could be with a historic character and there could be more than one guest on the show at a time. It can be funny if the two people are ones that would not have gotten along (i.e. Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis). Incorporating this concept through a “Where Are They Now” concept is also fun.
5. Info-mercial: make an info-mercial for a new product that you create. It should include the unique characteristics of the product, where it can be purchased, the cost of the product and any return policy. While the information would not be in the info-mercial, the students should also determine the cost of production so that they can figure the profit margin based on projected sales. (I.e. Totalitarian Spray wipes out democracy).
6. Job Interview: conduct a job interview with a character or inanimate object. (I.e. Attila the Hun, Napoleon, Christopher Columbus, an adjective or adverb, etc.)
7. Letter of Recommendation: this activity easily incorporates two core content areas. Students write a letter, recommending someone for a specific job. For example, Lewis or Clark recommending Sacagawea as a tour guide.
8. Historical Celebrity Jeopardy: Use the jeopardy game on the computer and have the players be historic figures.
9. To Tell the Truth: Three players all claim to be a historic figure and panelists ask them questions and then decide who is the most convincing.

Conclusion:

Incorporating drama in the classroom has endless possibilities. It can be an easy addition to task rotations, unit reviews, or vocabulary lessons. The activities listed here represent only a few suggestions to utilize this tool; the options are unlimited. Anything that we can do that encourages critical thinking skills and cooperative learning, while the students are highly motivated because they are having fun, represents an activity that is well worth our instructional time.

LET'S DO NOTHING TOGETHER

**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. It has also led to 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 who 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. These policies have brought our economy to near ruin and which have left communities ravaged. These policies 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

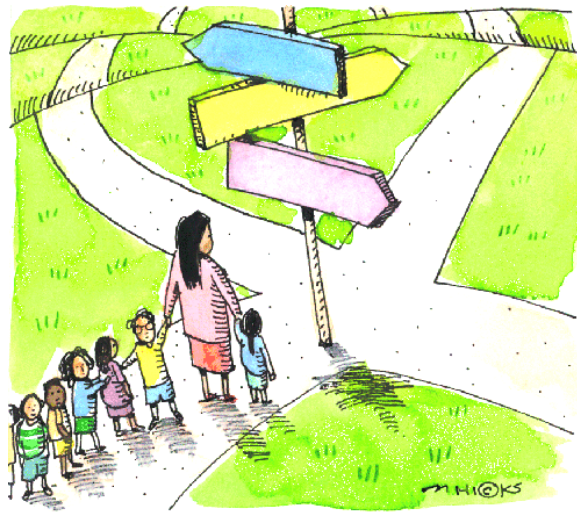
LET'S DO NOTHING TOGETHER

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 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 that, 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

LET'S DO NOTHING TOGETHER

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 that 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.

Motivating and engaging struggling readers and writers

By Kelly Harbison

Red Cross Elementary

We've all seen them: Students who cower in fear or moan and groan at the mere mention of the word "writing." No doubt, motivation and engagement are vital for any learning to occur. Yet how do we motivate those students who so struggle with writing and have at some point in their education given up on the need for this skill?

Some Major Causes for Lack of Motivation

Many students who struggle with writing fall into three major categories. First, you have students who fall into the group of "It's there, but I don't care." These students have strong foundations in literacy and the ability to write is present, yet they are not motivated to write and getting these students to utilize these abilities is like drawing water from a stone. The next type of student falls into the category of "Bored to Tears." These students are not engaged and therefore are not motivated; this type of unmotivated student has less to do with an inability within the student and more to do with the type of writing instruction they have received. Finally, other students fall into the category of the "Cover-ups." These students camouflage inabilities and insecurities they have concerning writing by acting as if they don't care, as if writing is a meaningless activity and one which will be of no value to them at any point in their lives.

What Can We Do to Motivate our Struggling Students to Write?

Once causes for lack of motivation among students are identified, a plan of action for motivating these students and igniting an interest in writing can occur. To motivate struggling writers, three key steps should be followed:

- Building Student Confidence

- Providing Quality Engaging Instruction
- Making Writing an Enjoyable and Personal Experience

Methods for Building Student Confidence

In order for a student to *be* successful in writing, they must *feel* successful. Many times, often unintentionally, educators use reading and writing as forms of punishment. During detention and other consequential times, students with "nothing else

to work on" are often instructed to read or write. What message does this send to students? This meaningless punishment often causes an often enjoyable activity of free reading or writing to be associated with punishment. Particularly with struggling writers, efforts and writing endeavors should be celebrated. Give frequent, early, and positive feedback that supports students' beliefs that they can do well. Difficulty of tasks should also be carefully considered; assignments should be neither too easy nor too hard, and expectations

should be high, but realistic.

Students should be rewarded for their writing successes as well. Research shows that students are more affected by positive feedback and success than by negative reinforcements. Rewarding students intrinsically for writing victories will ensure that you have established a classroom atmosphere that is open and positive. Intrinsic motivation, rather than relying on external factors, ensures that students are confident and view themselves as "real writers."

It seems so simple, but if you really want to know what motivates students, you should ask them! Providing writing interest inventories at the beginning of the school year, asking students to express their feelings and strengths/weaknesses about writing provides teachers with an inside view of what inspires students to write, or in some cases, detest writing. As



Motivating and engaging struggling readers and writers

an added bonus, this pressure-free writing task also provides teachers with an informal assessment of student writing abilities.

Methods for Providing Quality and Engaging Instruction

Ignacio Estrada once stated that “if a child can’t learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn.” If we want to produce lifelong readers and writers, it is vital that we practice engaging and quality writing instruction. Involve technology whenever you can, whether having students create their own personal blogs, publishing pieces online, or utilizing a variety of creative word-processing and digital storytelling programs available.

Students must also witness the teacher modeling good writing behavior as they move through the writing process. When we model various activities in our classrooms, we often make it appear extremely easy to students, yet writing is not always an easy task! Students need to see instructors modeling different stages of the writing process, including seeing them brainstorming, getting stuck and having writer’s block, asking others for feedback, and making (or justifying rationale for not making) changes suggested by others. Share examples of your own writing; if students are going to believe that writing is “worth doing” they should see that you find it’s worth doing too.

Students should also be active participants in writing instruction, and learn best by doing, making, writing, designing, creating, or solving. Don’t tell whenever you can ask and use inquiry whenever possible.

How do you feel about writing? Whatever those feelings include, your students undoubtedly see them. If you are not truly enthusiastic and passionate about writing, your students will not be either.

Methods for Making Writing a Personal and Enjoyable Experience

Many times, students express that they simply “don’t know what to write about.” Tap into memories to evoke thoughts and ideas, and develop writing

experiences around real-life events. This will give writing tasks meaning and make them much more engaging and important to students. Have students take action by writing to local newspapers or representative to voice concerns about topics that truly matter to them.

Create a special time, place, and chair for Author’s Chair. This gives students the opportunity to share victories in writing and receive positive feedback from their peers, which also boosts confidence.

Most importantly, provide choices for your students. Expose them to a wide variety of crafts that good writers use by divulging into a variety of interesting texts. This will ensure that they have a variety of forms, structures, and strategies to use in their own writing and allowing them to choose from a variety of genres will also work to keep intrinsic motivation high.

Writing is a very complex, complicated, wonderful task. By identifying causes for lack of motivation in students, educators can develop individualized plans for motivating students to write by utilizing methods to build confidence, provide engaging instruction, and making writing a personal enjoyable experience. Unfortunately, one universal, cure-all strategy for motivating struggling students does not exist; yet, by getting to know students, their strengths and weaknesses, their interests and frustrations, teachers are in a unique position to mold students into true writers, ones that not only write well on class assignments, but also write for a lifetime for the sheer enjoyment of it. Isn’t that what we are all, as educators, striving to achieve?

Resources

- McPhail, C. (2009, May 10). *Motivating reluctant writers*. Retrieved from http://classroom-activities.suite101.com/article.cfm/motivating_reluctant_writers
- Davis, B. G. (1993). *Motivating students*. Retrieved from <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/motivate.html>
- Payne, R. (1996). *A Framework for understanding poverty*. Highlands, TX: Aha! Process, Inc.
- Twenty-five ways to motivate young authors*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.teachervision.fen.com/teaching-methods/resource/5048.html>

PASS: Positive approach to student success

**By Jordan Wade
Allen County Intermediate Center**

Self contained classrooms are commonly used to service behavior problem students. It is believed that keeping them out of the mainstream classroom is the most beneficial for them and other students. However, it is keeping the student from the same educational opportunity his/her classmates receive. Integration into the mainstream classroom is the most beneficial for the student. One program called PASS is focusing on changing the behavior of the student in order to make integration successful.

PASS (Positive Approach to Student Success) provides behavior education services with emotional and behavioral issues. The primary setting in which these services are provided is the mainstream classroom. PASS is founded on the belief that students benefit behaviorally from educational experiences with their appropriate behaved peers and academically from participation in the general curriculum.

With the ongoing support of a PASS specialist, each student in PASS learns, practices and implements individualized strategies that address targeted behaviors of concern. The program is implemented in four phases: Pre-placement, Orientation, Maintenance and Inclusion, and Aftercare.

Pre-placement incorporates activities prior to PASS placement. A student is evaluated over period of time and less intrusive and/or restrictive interventions are tried. Once the student is deemed eligible for PASS, a team meets and develops a behavior plan with two or three targeted behaviors. These are the behaviors that interfere the most with the student's education. The student's IEP committee will then formally place them in the PASS program.

During orientation the primary focus is on behavior education. Instruction is provided on PASS classroom expectations, the PASS monitoring and reinforcements, and social skills instruction. Orientation is brief and individualized. The PASS specialist works with the student in the PASS classroom, briefly accompanying the student to class to discuss rules and expectations for each classroom.

Inclusion moves the student from the PASS classroom into mainstream settings. Monitoring and coaching of student behavior occurs on a schedule designed to meet the needs of individual students. Reinforcement of behavioral success is a key component of this phase, and social skills instruction/coaching continues. After a period of behavioral success with a PASS personnel providing monitoring, students move on to self-monitoring. Movement by the student through the second and third phases of PASS is not linear. Rather, the level of services students receive is fluid and dependent on their current behavioral needs. Students may, therefore, move from PASS monitoring back to the PASS classroom for a period of Reorientation and/or from PASS monitoring to self-monitoring. Data gathered during monitoring is analyzed and informs the level of student through out these phases.

Aftercare of PASS occurs when a student successfully "graduates" from PASS. They are offered opportunities to serve as PASS sponsors and work with other students currently in Phase two or three.

PASS is a collaborative effort by all key stakeholders in a student's school life. Parents, administrators, the PASS specialist, mainstream teachers, and others partner in their efforts to effectively support behavior change. Working together to improve student's behaviors allows them the opportunity to stay in the mainstream classroom and out of the self contained classrooms.

WKU NWP

NEWS TIDBIT

JoAnna Jones, from Project 18 in 2003, is now the Assistant Principal at Briarwood Elementary in Warren County.

CONGRATULATIONS, JOANNA!

Teamwork in the classroom: Is it good for students?

By Brittany Fisher
Ohio County High School

"I don't want to go and work with her!" says a tenth grade English student. What is wrong with this statement? What kind of picture does this paint for a teacher, a parent, or even another student?

A cooperative teaching or collaborative teaching situation: a student often asks if the "other" teacher will be there today, a student refuses to go with the continual group, a student shuts down after working hard the first semester for a different cooperative group, all students in the class complain about one of the teachers when he/she is absent, teacher routinely picks out selected student who is on a special education case load, morale of the entire classroom is weak. What does this say about this "team" of teachers working together to better the students? Not a lot when students shut down. So, how do you reach them?

Do all cooperative/collaborative classrooms appear this way? The answer is no. The problem is how do we strive to fix this problem, because in all actuality, our students are experiencing a disservice. Our goal as teachers is to provide a welcoming learning environment, and if the above

situation is a daily occurrence, then the students are not receiving the best that can be offered by their teachers.

Cooperative teaching, also known as collaborative teaching, is an interesting concept where a classroom will have a variety of students, including both general and special needs, and two teachers, a general and special education teacher, working at the



same time. These two teachers have the ability to make or break the classroom so to speak. Cooperative teaching has several benefits, but it also has drawbacks; the question is; is it a matter of the team of teachers as to how effective the cooperative teaching can be.

For example, an English teacher works in joint with a special education teacher for two periods a day. During those periods both teachers are actively working on instruction as well as assistance

to the students. Students who are in a positive setting, a cooperative teaching setting where the two teachers work together for the betterment of the students, relish in a number of benefits. According to Suzanne Ripley, these benefits include but are not limited to just the special education students, low achieving students, or the general students: personal confidence, improved social skills, growth in academic success, improvement in peer relations, and even a better understanding and acceptance of others in the classroom.

There are great benefits to cooperative teaching, it can be an asset to all in the classroom, but if and when there is a "team" that does not see eye-to-eye, there becomes a downfall of what potential it could have. How can we solve this issue? The possible solutions to the problem could be to involve an administrator, pair teams according to ability to work together, and/or pair teams with the overlying goal to respect and work for the common goal. All of these seem as if they could be an easy and logical fix to the problem that some cooperative classrooms face; however, it is not always that easy. What is easy is ensuring students have the best situations possible, because that is the common goal.

Childhood Obesity: A growing problem in US schools

By Karen Ballard
Stevenson Elementary

Obesity is spreading through the youth of the United States like a contagious disease. Childhood obesity is not a small problem, and there are no miracle cures.

Some think that taking the soft drinks out of schools is the best solution to promote a healthy lifestyle. Exercise is also an important part of a healthy lifestyle and yet, PE is being taken out of school. We are “Straining the gnat and swallowing the camel.” We are focusing on the small problem and encouraging the

large ones. We can take soft drinks and snacks out of schools, but we can't take them out of the homes.

We cannot and should not go into the children's homes and take the junk food out. We must teach the children to choose to eat better. According to Louise Rafkin of The California Report, one out of five children in the U.S. are overweight and 30% of teens are overweight. Children today are going home and watching TV with little or no

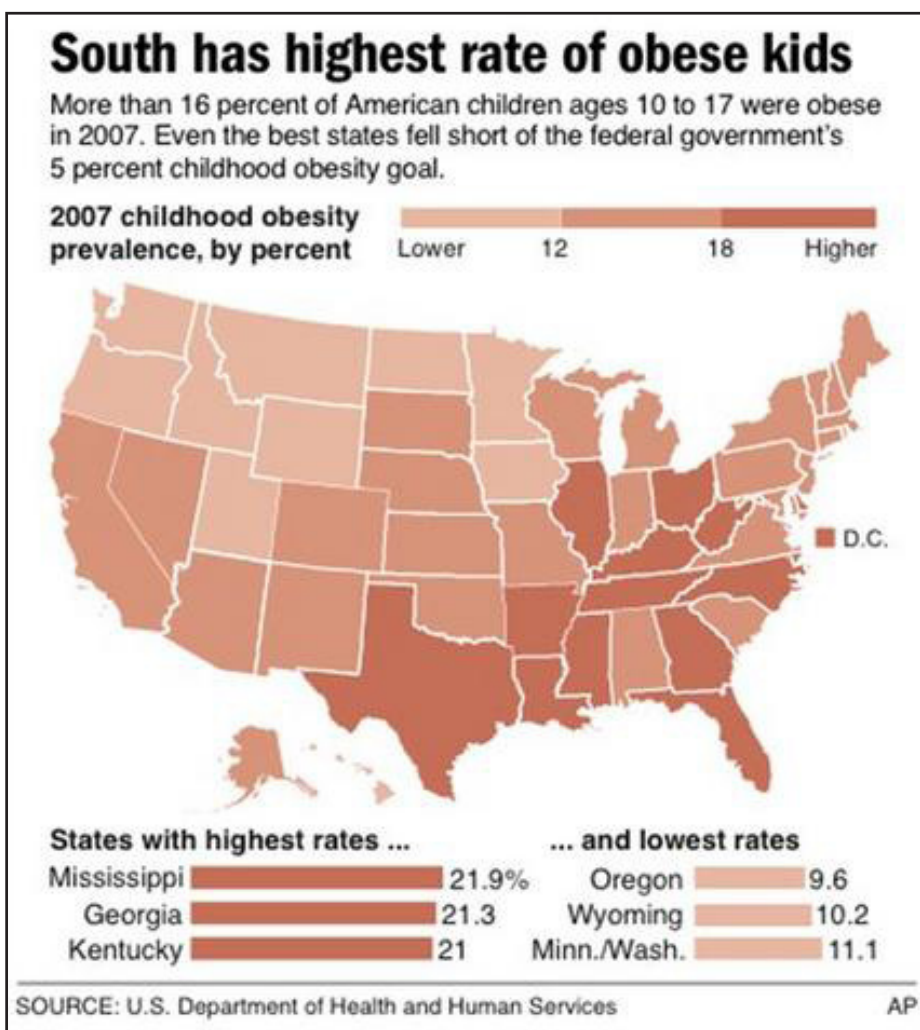
physical activity, and then add in the soft drinks and junk food. So we need to teach a healthy lifestyle. We can start with more P.E. in elementary schools. Some schools have PE once a week but that is no fitness program. It doesn't get much better in middle school

and high school. In high school, students can only take P.E. once or twice. Like the old saying, “We should teach them to fish, instead of giving them a fish.”

Soft drinks are being replaced with diet soft drinks and there is research that says diet drinks are not healthy, especially for small children. Some people are saying that it is better to be a diet-soft-drink-drinking-couch-potato than a regular-soft-drink-drinking-active-person. We have been tricked into the idea that looks are more important than actual wellbeing. Weight is not the only factor in living a healthy life. We should

teach students moderation. Eliminating the soft drinks is not the answer. The choices are out there. We must teach them to make better choices!

There is a balance to everything. You can eat a lot of healthy food, but if you do not exercise, you will not be healthy. Then again, if you exercise everyday and eat all the wrong food, you will still not be healthy. You can even be thin and not be healthy. A healthy life is a balanced one



of eating the correct amount of the correct food and doing the right amount of exercise. By making the junk food the exception rather than the norm and adding a regular exercise, we can start fighting this disease of childhood obesity.

New Additions to the Writing Project Library

***Not a Wasted Breath: Living Fearlessly with Cystic Fibrosis* by LaRecea Tabor Gibbs, a WP fellow**

o The book tells the story of Todd Gibbs, son of LaRecea Tabor Gibbs; and is an inspiring biography which shows that though Todd's life was short, he never wasted a single breath. It is not just a story about living with a fatal disease or waiting for a transplant. This is truly a story about how others perceived Todd, how they were affected by his presence in their lives, and how Todd viewed himself and his existence.

***The Curious Adventures of Sydney & Symon in: Water Wonders* by Peter H. Reynolds and Paul A. Reynolds**

o The siblings explore science and engineering, expressing themselves through writing, art and song. Together, they bring to life the STEAM approach, which aims to introduce the arts to STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) – adding the “A” (Arts) to STEM. STEAM is a way to invite more learners into subject areas that can often times seem intimidating and unapproachable.

***What Works? A Practical Guide for Teacher Research* by Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater & Bonnie S. Sunstein**

o A comprehensive look at what goes into teacher research and what you'll get out of it. Whether you're answering some persistent question about your classroom, thinking about your curriculum, taking a course, or researching for a grant application or National board Certification, Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein have laid out action research as an east-to-understand process.

***FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research* by Bonnie Stone Sunstein & Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater**

o The only ethnographic research textbook designed for undergraduate writing courses. FieldWorking shows students how to actively investigate archives, places, languages, and cultures and how to connect themselves, their ideas, and their writing to the larger world. Through their engagement in the fieldworking process, students become better readers, writers, and researchers.

•If you would like to check these books out, or any other book from the Writing Project library, just let us know, and we will be glad to send them to you.

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 398
BOWLING GREEN, KY
42101

Western Kentucky University
English Department
1 Big Red Way
Bowling Green, KY 42101