

# Writing Project Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2012 Volume 15, Issue 1



## Inside this issue:

"You've Got to Do It... It will Change the Way You Teach."	2
Teaching Skills	3-4
A Modest Proposal Twentieth Century Style	5
Advanced Writing Retreat	6
Welcome, new TCs	7
Book Reviews	8-11
Suggested Reading	12
Position Announcements	13

## Special Points of interest:

- Advanced Writing Retreat
- Welcome, new TCs
- Suggested Reading



## From the Director



**Peggy Otto, Ph.D.**  
Director, WKU Writing Project

On this very hot day in July, I write this column having completed a full year already as your new site director. It's hard to believe that this time last year, I was just moving into my new home in Bowling Green and my new office in Cherry Hall, anticipating my new position at WKU. It has been an exciting year learning the ropes of the position and meeting so many wonderful, talented people who are dedicated to the WKU Writing Project. As your no-longer-new site director, I look toward my second year with much anticipation, keeping in mind the NWP mission of offering the best professional development available.

School will be starting next month, and many of us are already thinking about new ideas and projects for our classes. As we begin the 2012-13 school year, teachers across Kentucky will continue to work on meeting the Common Core Standards with instruction in literacy skills in all content areas. WKU WP is poised to support these efforts. Across our region, teachers are developing lesson plans and units that combine content learning with the reading of rigorous non-fiction texts and writing in argumentative, expository, and narrative modes. Some of you have been attending special workshops on developing LDC modules using the Literacy Design Collaborative's templates. Writing is a key component of LDC modules. This next year, I believe we will have the opportunity to be actively involved in important new discussions about teaching writing and using writing to teach content. As Writing

Project Fellows and teacher consultants, you have the knowledge base to influence those discussions, and it is more important than ever for us to remember our three-part model: writer, teacher of writing, writing instruction leader.

In alignment with these three key principles, during the spring semester 2012, WKU Writing Project offered several professional development activities. Renee Boss from the Kentucky Department of Education led a workshop on preparing students for success on state assessments by designing literacy instruction around the Common Core Standards. In another mini-conference, Lisa Cary, a Fellow from Drakes Creek Middle School, led a half-day workshop on using the LDC template to create a science module that integrates content knowledge and literacy skills. We also enjoyed a breakfast session with Debbie Dadey as part of the Bowling Green Book Fest. Denise Henry led an Advanced Writing Retreat at Rough River State Park on June 13-15 that got sterling reviews from participants. You can read her article on the Retreat in this newsletter. Audrey Harper, Sara Jennings, and Terry Elliott led the Tech Academy June 5-7, in which participants received ipods and instruction for using them in the classroom. This week, July 10-12, our annual ELL Academy will take place at South Warren Middle School. On June 27, we completed our Summer Institute 27 with an exceptional group of teachers, who are introduced in a separate article of the newsletter.

I am happy to report that our site applied for and received a SEED Leadership Grant through the National Writing Project to help support WKU WP programs for the 2012-13 school year. We continue to look for ideas from you for keeping our site vital and innovative. If any of you are interested in serving on the Leadership Team, let me hear from you, as we are currently working on an agenda for our September meeting. I wish you all a productive, rewarding school year. If at any time the Writing Project can assist you, please let us know.

~ Peggy

## "You've Got to Do It....It Will Change the Way You Teach."

**By Samantha Rowe**

At the time my colleague made this plea to me, I was unfamiliar with the Writing Project. In fact, I had never heard of it before. But she spoke with such enthusiasm that I was instantly intrigued. Throughout that school year, as we collaborated in the planning of our language arts classes, I was a firsthand witness to the transformation Mrs. Austin referenced. When I was frustrated with how to plan a writing lesson or a reading skill, she had an idea that would motivate and engage students. Just beginning my second year, I craved the confidence she had as a writing teacher. So, I signed up for Western Kentucky University's Twenty-Sixth Writing Project with the expectation that I too, would undergo a complete makeover as a teacher. And I did.

In case you are unfamiliar with this organization, the National Writing Project focuses the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of our nation's educators (across all contents) to improve writing and learning for all students (nwp.org). According to the project's team of researchers, students taught by project teachers show more improvement holistically than students without project teachers. This was true in every case. Another bonus to the project is that it equips and requires its participants to serve as teaching consultants in their local schools, creating a ripple effect of learning and growth. In order to be successful, however, the program requires the use of directors and resources. About 50.8 percent of these needs were previously met through federal funding that in turn were nearly doubled by university, state, and local school funds, making the

project cost-efficient. Nevertheless, the National Writing Project must distribute this amount to over 200 sites across the United States (nwp.org).

This June, at the Western Kentucky site, the schedule was filled with highly-qualified guest speakers, professional reading, writing time, open-issue forums, participant demonstrations, and much more. We quickly built a community consisting of a variety of grade level teachers, all coming from different schools, backgrounds, and years of experience. Despite the diversity, we all shared one common goal: to become better teachers. Being surrounded by other creative and eager professionals was an opportunity rarely provided in the public school environment where agenda controlled faculty meetings and principal-led Professional Learning Communities consume my limited time. Each participant was willing to share ideas, resources, advice, and opinions. This openness also helped clarify my understanding of the Common Core Standards that English and mathematics teachers are expected to implement this school year with limited assistance or guidance from the state.

A trend among these Common Core Standards is the reference to

technology, and of course the Writing Project did not overlook this. In the past, I had easily incorporated technology into my instruction, but my students were given few opportunities to use technology to demonstrate their own learning. Other than word processing and online grammar games, I was clueless to the options available for student use. That was until all the demonstrations by participants on technology. Now the choices are so extensive I am struggling with which ones to pick! Since we are living in a digital world with students spending up to four hours online a day, technology is a great tool to motivate and engage them in the classroom. The authors of the book *Teaching Writing Using Blogs, Wikis, and other Digital Tools* state that online resources allow us to "deepen our connections and make our learning networks more powerful and real."

Another component of the Project was sharing our own writing. This has opened my eyes to a crucial part of teaching that no professor ever advised me during my undergraduate studies; teachers of writing need to be writers. I know this seems like common sense, but before the Writing Project, I had forgotten about the joy and sense of pride involved in the writing process. Lengthy college research papers and internship requirements temporarily stole my passion. Through the guest speakers and professional reading, I've learned the importance of sharing my own writing process so that students

**"Students can be taught how to write well. I was the one inhibiting them by telling them how to write rather than showing them through more effective teaching practices."**

## "You've Got to Do It..." *Cont'd from page 2*

can develop more confidence and clarity in their writing. In my own frustrations with teaching, I had begun to believe some students were talented writers and some were not. Thankfully, the Writing Project exposed that as a lie. Students *can* be taught how to write well. I was the one inhibiting them by telling them how to write rather than showing them through more effective teaching practices. What a huge difference this revelation will make in my classroom. Yet it dis-

heartens me to wonder how many others may be using less productive methods, too.

With my recently formed confidence in teaching writing, reassurance with the new standards, and a repertoire of technology resources, I can't wait for the new school year. I look forward to sharing my learning and epiphanies with any other teacher willing to listen. Unfortunately, it is in your hands whether this life-changing experi-

ence and rapid growth will happen to other American teachers who desire the same makeover I both wanted and needed. If our nation's teachers are being left behind and not being challenged or supported, how can you expect our nation's students not to get left behind?

Education is not just another expense but an investment in the lives of our nation's students *and* teachers.

## Teaching Skills

By **Natalie Croney**

Sunday, May 1, 2011: President Barak Obama announced that Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan. The United States government had yet to release pictures of bin Laden's corpse.

Monday, May 2, 2011: Several innovative 10<sup>th</sup> grade students had the inside scoop and coincidentally the leaked picture of bin Laden's body. The picture appeared to be real; however, its underground publication would give a cautious observer pause.

Why would seemingly intelligent, engaged, and tech-savvy students fall for anything as foolish as thinking the photograph was real? My students are not stupid, and they are not always lazy. They even have access to the latest information at blinding speeds due to the ever-changing advances in cable technology. In an Informa-

tion Age, why don't they know how to discern what information is good and bad?

The gift of discernment is one of the most important gifts that a teacher can pass to their student. The gift doesn't appear to have many bells and whistles at first; it's like a new cell phone. In the beginning you only know how to make a few calls and send a few texts, but the more you use it, the more you are able to diversify the types of messages you send and even select the most effective mode of sending that message. Same device—different level of usage.

Distributing the gift of discernment comes from teaching a skill set that John Dewey stressed in his theories on education. He "believed that school should teach students how to be problem-

solvers by helping students learn how to think rather than simply learning rote lessons about large amounts of information" ([www.bgsu.edu](http://www.bgsu.edu)). How can students possibly figure out what issues to address the information they are bombarded with unless they are taught critical thinking as a skill set?

Teaching students how to think and question is essential to the responsible progression of a global society. If educated citizens are realistic about its students' roles in the world, they realize that students are the new global construction workers. The paradigms, philosophies, and ideas about pedagogy that they are building at this moment will affect their ability to problem solve in the future. Teaching those builders how to build becomes of paramount importance, and common

## Teaching Skills—*cont'd from page 3*

standards must be developed in order to teach core skills to an entire population. Merely asking students to memorize material for a test is not teaching thinking skills; it is teaching test taking skills. Asking students to follow cookie cutter instructions without ever asking them to tackle complex, new, and relevant questions is not teaching them how to critically think; it is teaching them how to follow directions.

It is not that following directions and knowing how to take a test are not important; these skills simply are not the determining factor to a student's success. If a student knows how to think critically, a student can create the conditions in which he can pass a test and follow the right set of directions. Thinking is first. Thinking is essential.

When school districts receive new standards from their state or commonwealth, turn those standards into a new rule book for specific texts from which one *must* teach, and then select tests whose concepts teachers *must* pound into the heads of students, they are doing a disservice not only to their students but to public education as a whole. Districts must consider the purpose of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) document. On the Common Core State Standards website, it is written that, “[t]he standards...are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global

economy and society” (commonstandards.org). There is no amount of information that students can memorize that will allow them to compete globally, instead. The students need to know how to problem solve. The question becomes, what role do teachers play in facilitating the questioning process?

The CCSS document does not prescribe specific texts or methodologies with which to cover

***There is no amount of information that students can memorize that will allow them to compete globally.***

material, nor does it ask districts to do so. Some districts, in an effort to insure compliance and to make it easier on the teachers to implement mandated standards, suggest that teachers map out every step of the school year. On the surface this seems innocent and even proactive; however, why don't these districts trust individual teachers to implement standards without such a rigid map? A latent effect of setting guidelines that are too rigid is that it enables teachers who refuse to develop themselves professionally. In addition, some teachers become resentful of perfectly good standards because they feel the standards are constraining their ability to teach, and such rigidity often makes it easier for teachers to

commit educational malpractice. This is because they, at the advice of their districts, focus too rigidly on the “what” instead of the “how and why” of the CCSS. Rigid standards inhibit some teachers' ability to think and problem-solve.

When teachers are not stretched in their thinking, how can they possibly stretch students? Consequently, districts should guide, not mandate, various methods of instruction. CCSS simply requires

that educators teach the skill sets necessary to produce a citizenship that can compete globally. The core content standards are a civil document. Citizens elect a leadership not only to protect them in the present but to prepare them for the future and ensure that their children

are prepared for an ever-changing world. The elected officials forecast where government thinks the country is headed. After they forecast where the country is headed, they figure out how the people need to be educated in order to help citizens compete within that growing structure. The core content standards are a means to an end.

Thoughts and questions allow students and teachers to transcend time and space and foster effective innovations. Being taught how to think and question allows students and teachers the opportunity to change the face of families, communities, and eventually posterities.



# A Modest Proposal Twentieth Century Style

**By Mollie Wade**

It is a melancholy object to those who teach in our schools, or matriculate in those same institutions, when they see the shelves of their libraries and classrooms crowded with printed text. These printed tomes exist in all forms: full length books, essays, poetry, articles, and other genre too numerous to mention. These shelves, instead of being put to productive use, are sagging from the weight of information that their readers find unexciting, impossible to interpret or even decode, and often obsolete by the time the process of deciphering them has been completed. It must be admitted that there are those instances where practical uses for these manuscripts have been found. On a particularly stifling afternoon in late May, one innovative basketball coach was observed using his copy of *The Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* as a doorstop. And couldn't we all learn from the bright young co-ed who used her physics text to press the petals of the rose her boyfriend gave her to commemorate their one-week anniversary? It is to be lamented, however, that these sterling examples are rarely followed by the language arts faculties of these institutions. These sadistic individuals continue to insist that those tender souls entrusted to their care be forced to actually remove this material from the shelves and, using only their eyes and brains, ingest the contents in its entirety into their consciousness.

I think it is agreed by all parties that this sadism must stop. Isn't it time someone heard the piteous cry of these ill-used creatures of God and put an end to their suffering? Fortunately we live in an enlightened age, a brave new world where there is not only a treatment, but a cure for this scourge on our innocent youth. It has been found that the pages of this material, when brought into contact with flame, will actually burn to ashes, ashes that occupy a miniscule amount of space in comparison with the vast area these volumes now commandeer. Not only can our shelves be put to better use holding videos, audios, and the devices that produce them, but our students will finally have con-

stantly updated information so vital to an enlightened-age. No longer will they sit in ignorance of The Bachelorette's final choice or be deprived of text messages that detail the latest chapter in the continuing saga of their best friend's search for shoes that will match her prom dress. Let us now be realistic. Some data changes by the hour, by the minute. In one inning a pitcher's earned run average can fluctuate by several percentage points.

I do not claim that this proposal of turning text to ashes is my original idea. One need only look to the insightful era of the Third Reich. While it must be admitted that these forward thinking social leaders were stopped before they completed their noble task of purifying the human race, it can be argued that they would not have accomplished as much as they did, were it not for the burning of books. In this modern age, surely we can succeed where they did not. Indeed with so much at stake, we cannot afford to fail.

Obviously, unless we commence right away to burn the literature already in existence, we will soon run dangerously low on space to house all these words, not just in our schools, but in our homes as well. We may ultimately find that there is not enough room for even one 56 inch TV screen, let alone installing at least three in every home, as common sense would dictate. But space is not my greatest concern. As stated before, my concern is for the citizens of this great nation who are being required to participate in such a painful ritual, just for the sake of gathering information. Let us consider the novel for example. In order to discern the most basic of plots, one must employ his imagination just to visualize what characters look like and the location of events. Often the dialogue is phrased ironically, so one is forced to spend precious time deciding if the characters really mean what they are saying. Contrast this process with the viewing of a motion picture where all of this information is immediately available, and background music sets the mood as well. In fact many of

these experiences can be thoroughly understood without any thinking at all.

Even if one is willing to expend the effort required by reading, there is no guarantee that the reader will be provided with that most basic of human needs, entertainment. There is even a very good chance, especially in the first chapters of a book, which the reader will be confused and unable to predict what will happen next. The sad truth is, there is no way to attach a remote control to a book. If one wants to change his reading material, he has to get up and go to some other location, often in another part of the house, and retrieve another book.

But perhaps the most compelling argument for the immediate and total incineration of all reading material is that reading is silent and solitary. There is no social interaction during the reading process and thus no guarantee that readers will arrive at similar conclusions about what they have read. In fact identical twins have been known to read the same book and have completely different opinions about what was the most amusing part. With technological advancements like laugh tracks, viewers rarely encounter that problem when watching a television program.

I think the advantages of the proposal which I have made are obvious and many, as well as of the highest importance. I would here address arguments of the opposition, if I could think of any, but alas none come to mind. Could anyone doubt the wisdom of that oft quoted homily: "A picture is worth a thousand words." If we had to rely only on a textual description, for instance, we might be left to guess about the precise dimensions of a certain congressman's anatomy; the miracle of the smart phone removes all the guesswork. So let us begin this important work now. The longer we delay, the more ink is spilled on paper, and the more fuel will be required for the fire, precious fuel that might be used to transport X-boxes to a Wal-Mart near you.

# Advanced Writing Retreat

## Rough River State Park

**By Denise Henry**

“My family has long had a tradition of sitting at the kitchen table after supper to tell stories about the old days,” writes Amanda Hervey in her book, [Kentucky A to Z: A Blue grass Travel Memoir](#). The family of writers who attended the Advanced Writing Retreat in June did just that, sat around the kitchen table and talked. We talked about new standards, old problems, heart-breaks, joys and of course – writing. Perhaps we have overused or out-used the phrase, “bonding time,” yet that is what ties folks together and when nine Project Alumni spend three days together bonding is inevitable.

June 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> teachers from Elizabethtown, Franklin-Simpson, Bowling Green City and Daviess Warren, Logan and Allen Counties took advantage of time away from personal and professional obligations to write, write and write. Following large blocks of interrupted writing time we would share our pieces with fellow writers; receiving encouragement and revision tips. Quality educators know that the most effective instruction is given by one who has experienced what they are requiring of their stu-

dents. Thus, when writing teachers write, conference, revise and publish they can better relate to students who are asked to perform the same tasks. One purpose of the Writing Retreat was to provide time for the teacher to be the student and to personally participate in a craft that is neglected

ful, humble, young yet experienced author who has traveled the state collecting stories from Kentuckians. We learned from her that listening to the stories of others can provide the spark one needs to begin telling their own story, as Amanda discovered during her journey.



**Back row:**

**Bonnie Hartley, Nicole Jenkins, Anne Padilla,  
Larissa Haynes, Amy Bellamy**

**Front row:**

**Tim Phelps, Denise Reetzke, Amanda Hervey, Katrina Kunze,  
Denise Henry (photographer)**

during the busy school year.

Another purpose of the retreat is to have conversation with a published author, which we did around the kitchen table. Amanda Hervey joined us on day two at “Cottage Central” to share her experiences while writing the series, “Kentucky A to Z” for *Kentucky Monthly*. She is a delight-

Following Amanda’s visit we returned to our writing with a renewed interest and growing energy. After an evening of professional discussion concerning new state English standards we found time for personal visits, strengthening our bond. The last day of the retreat was spent in the Author’s Gallery, everyone’s favorite slice of the retreat. All writers shared at least one piece of writing in the Gallery where suggestions, comments and encouragements were given for every piece

shared. This is a wonderful opportunity for a writer to learn from professional educators/fellow writers.

As we loaded our vehicles for the trip home we packed away special memories, ideas for improving our writing and stories told around the kitchen table.

# Welcome, new TCS!

Kimberley Bartley	9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade	Monroe County High School
Lauren Coffey	6 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Bluegrass Middle School
Michelle Ewing	7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Drakes Creek Middle School
Lauren Geary	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Ohio County Middle School
Erica Hoagland	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	James E. Bazzell Middle School
Pamela Jarboe	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Franklin Simpson Middle School
Lauren Johnson	5 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Oakland Elementary
Catherine Lehman	K-6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Rich Pond Elementary
Amanda Sherfey	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Monroe County Middle School
Mark Sherfey	7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Celina K-8 School



**Back row:**

**Mark Sherfey, Lauren Coffey, Catherine Lehman, Lauren Geary, Lauren Johnson,  
Pamela Jarboe, Mollie Wade, Michelle McCloughan**

**Front row:**

**Peggy Otto, Amanda Sherfey, Michelle Ewing, Kimberly Bartley, Erica Hoagland,  
Cindy McIntyre, Cassie Bergman**



# Book Reviews

## Practical Skills of Adult ESL Students: A Review of Assessment and Implementation

By Lisa Zeimke

Larrotta, C. (2009). Journaling in an adult ESL literacy program. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, (121), 35-44. doi:10.1002/ace.323

The United States (US) used to be considered the melting pot of the world. Historically, immigrants have had to carry the burden of adapting to the cultures established by the British founding settlers. Children would speak their native languages within the home until they were old enough to attend public school. Children would continue to speak their native language at home with their parents while learning and speaking English in school. Adults would learn English only if they required employment and they would usually limit its use to a need to know basis. They would focus on just the vocabulary and phrases that will get them through the day.

Families continue to immigrate to the US at alarming numbers. Over the years, research and resources have been poured into the public school system to fill the language gaps that the regular classroom cannot address. Several adult education classes are provided in most communities usually through community colleges. Even though communities have tried to keep up with grants and volunteer programs, the system on a whole still has not met the needs of adult ESL students. The pedagogical needs between children and adults complicate educational efforts, and therefore, must be evaluated. The US has

now become a global society, and the burden to educate the adult ESL student has become more important than ever.

Children of adult ESL students have at least 12 years to master English proficiency if entering at the kindergarten level. Adults, on the other hand, struggle to learn the basics in a very short period of time. They must learn to function in an English-speaking culture. They are expected to speak fluid English while they work, shop, and assimilate themselves within the community. While interpreters and public translation signs have been available for certain situations, the demand has outgrown the supply. How can the educational system be improved to meet the practical and immediate, real world needs of current adult ESL students? This article will explore one ESL instructor's practical method to implement and assess writing through journaling.

ESL instructor Clarena Larrotta believes that journaling is an effective way to communicate and evaluate English proficiency at any level. In her intermediate ESL literacy class, she tested 17 students, eleven male and six female. Even though the students were all

Spanish speaking, they all originated from several different countries with unique dialects. The journals created a dialogue between student and teacher, one that would be free from fear and rejection. She conducted this qualitative study over a semester period and followed four steps in its implementation: provided a model, collectively established guidelines, continued guided practice, and conducted final assessment. She modeled the activity by

[ Four steps: ]

- **Provide a model**
- **Collectively establish guidelines**
- **Continued guided practice**
- **Conduct final assessment**

beginning with an introductory letter about herself and asked the students to respond similarly. In her writing, she would model proper word usage and grammar. Each submission would include two new questions to ensure that the student would have sufficient prompts for the activity. The class agreed that respect for fellow classmates would be displayed with appropriate content and the choice to answer or pass. The



## Practical Skills of Adult ESL Students... *Cont'd from page 5*

length of the entries was completely up to the students. This encouraged the decision-making process. In the guided practice, Larrota did not correct the grammar within the journals. She conducted one-on-one conferences with the students to identify the errors. She assessed the progress that each student made over time regarding choices of vocabulary, grammar and length of the entries. She also recorded common errors and designed lessons to address those areas. Larrota discovered in her observations that the students enjoyed working in the journals and were willing to share their thoughts and experiences. Regardless of the proficiency level, each student's English improved by creating an open, written dialogue (Larrota, C. 2009).

The use of journal writing as explored by Clarena Larrota shows how assessment and implementation can be integrated while creating a positive learning environment. Using the journals as a dia-

logue rather than a record of information allows for formative assessment on grammar and vocabulary. Students can be individually assessed according to their level of English literacy. The educator can differentiate instruction without segregating the class, allowing more students to be instructed by one educator. Using Larrota's example, another strategy can be implemented in any freshman English writing class. Daily writing prompts are given to the students that can vary between the different forms of writing. One day the prompt may ask students to express their opinions about a topic in order to practice persuasive writing. Another day students could answer a question that describes a particular event or some other descriptive type writing. After students have made their entries, notebooks are shared with classmates. The students have been informed on the first day of class that this whole classroom activity would be taking place. For students' privacy and optimum hon-

esty, students can be assigned a number rather than writing their name on the notebook. This way, when notebooks are collected by the teacher and redistributed to the class, no one will know whose notebook he/she is reading. The student reads the entry and responds using complete sentences using the PQP (praise, question, polish) method. The notebooks are then collected, each returned to its owner, and the student responds in writing to the reader's response. The teacher periodically collects the notebooks to assess improvement over time.

The community that develops as a result of dialogue activities motivates the students to remain engaged and therefore should improve retention in the program. In addition to more research study, Adult ESL programs require immediate attention and innovative teaching strategies. As a result, adults will be able to function more effectively in the US.

## Why Digital Writing Matters?: A Review

By Amy Mooneyhan

National Writing Project. *Because Digital Writing Matters*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010.

Writing is evolving. How we write, how we revise our writing, how we publish our writing is moving toward a more digital form. We, the teachers and our students, are caught in the middle of a revolution that is full of liberation and uncertainty. Authors of *Because Digital Writing Matters*,

Danielle DeVoss, Elyse Eidman-Aadahl and Troy Hicks, refer to this evolution as the "Digital Revolution," and ready or not, it has arrived and transformed the way we teach and communicate, especially with writing. Research shows that Digital writing enhances students' learning, but

leaves educators struggling to bridge the gap between technology savvy students and technology-impaired teachers. This in effect raises the issues of how to incorporate technology in the classroom and how to find ways to assess the writing. The authors of *Because Digital Writing Matters*

## Why Digital Writing Matters?... *Cont'd from page 6*

explore research and strategies from classrooms across the United States to respond to these persistent issues.

Devoss, Eidman-Aadahl and Hicks remind us in the introduction to their book, “Why Digital Writing Matters,” that it’s important to understand that technology does not replace teaching; it is simply a new way of doing the same things that we as teachers have been teaching forever. Too often, teachers, uncomfortable with their own ability to use technology, stand behind the class or in front of a stack of papers and allow students to “play.” The students appear to be engaged, and the common core standards appear to be fulfilled for the year, but have the students acquired any skills? Computer skills, maybe, but how have we prepared them for life after school? Whether or not students use the exact software provided by our school systems in their workplace is irrelevant. They can still learn workplace worthy skills, such as communication skills, critical thinking skills, and writing skills. *Because Digital Writing Matters* focuses on how digital tools can enhance the learning of all these skills by engaging the students, while they work collaboratively and independently creating networks that are based on real experiences.

The next sections of the book, “The Landscape of Digital Writing and Revising the Writing Process: Learning to Write in a Digital World” explains why digital writing is an important literacy skill for students to acquire, and how we can incorporate these skills into our classroom. It focuses on the challenges of teachers being “digital immigrants,”

meaning we are accustomed to teaching using our old tools, and our students being “digital natives” who have grown up in the digital world. Devoss, Eidman-Aadahl and Hicks suggest two things. First, teachers need to “stop being so disconnected from the technology...learn that there’s new ways of learning,” (25). The new generation of students learns through technology and as one teacher, Beth Wallace, explained, “If students don’t learn the way you teach, then teach the way they learn.” Secondly, teachers need to help students understand that digital writing is a complex process that contains extreme value (25). Whether or not students realize, they write everything through blogs, twitters, text messaging and other technological tools.

These sections also offer a few activities that could be easily integrated into the classroom to provide students with ownership and instant feedback such as digital storytelling, wikis, and digital recording. The authors then propose a detail bulleted list of the following strategies that will make a teacher’s transition into the digital world much easier:

- Provide writers with a wide range of playful, low-stakes opportunities to brainstorm, free write, draft, compose and edit.
- Build online searches, critical

reading and information literacy into classroom routines.

- Create room for students to work both individually and collaboratively with a variety of media to design, develop, publish and present to multiple audiences.
- Invite students to participate in teaching.
- Help students to understand both writing and technology as complex, socially situated and political tools. (59)

In the next section, “Ecologies for Digital Writing,” the authors discuss how to create a digital ecology in the classroom and expand on the following three components that create a healthy ecology: physical space; ethical, legal, and

policy environments; and online environments. A digital ecology, according to these authors is “the excitement of being able to create new projects, follow student interest, and invite them to dream big. It is supported by having appropriate digital tools at the read as part of the classroom environment” (63). As when all organism of different habitats adjust to and manipulate their environments, writers also adapt to and influence their environments through their writing, which is another reason why creating a digital ecology for each classroom is essential for successfully integrating digital writing.

**Students need to be able to justify their choice of digital form in order to enhance critical thinking skills and comprehensive understanding of audience, purpose and organized thought.**

## Why Digital Writing Matters?... *Cont'd from page 7*

In the remaining chapters of the book, Devoss, Eidman-Aadahl and Hicks focus on how we can assess digital writing according to the teaching standards. They begin by guiding the reader through various assessment approaches, such as sixth-grade teacher Kevin Hodgson, “three pronged approach,” which suggest that students use an ongoing discussion about rhetorical choices in digital writing to assess their own work. Students need to be able to justify their choice of digital form in order to enhance critical thinking skills and comprehensive understanding of audience, purpose and organized thought. They also suggest the “response-center approach,” which “focuses on helping students inquire into and analyze audience response” (106). This strategy can assess the students understanding of audience and purpose. If another reader from outside the students’ academic world can respond to their writing appropriately then the students can evaluate whether or not they have achieved their purpose. The authors also provide a two page list of traits and actions that students are expected to engage when writing digitally. Not

surprising, the majority of these traits required for digital writing are the same traits that we expect students to display when writing with pen and paper. The authors explain that many of the assessments teachers have used in the past can be modified into appropriate rubrics for digital writing.

The authors also offer the following model of a strong assessment program to assist in evaluating digital writing:

- Collect extended writing samples over time
- Have students write in multiple genres
- Apply appropriate rubrics
- Address writing across content areas (110)

A strong assessment program allows teachers to assess student’s work throughout the year. This model is particularly useful when assessing e-portfolios. An e-portfolio is a collection of digital writing and will be more commonly created with the new Common Core Standards because e-portfolios make writing easier to store, search, and manage as well

as provide a large collection of students’ writing that is easy to share and revise.

The authors chose to end *Because Digital Writing Matters* with a chapter dedicated to options for professional development on digital writing. Creating a digital world in any classroom will take planning, teacher cooperation, and a reasonable budget. Schools grade wide would benefit from any professional development on digital writing.

This book does not contain all the answers. For example, it does not include alternative activities for teachers who do not often have access to computers; nor does it suggest specific scoring rubrics for assessing the writing, but it is an exemplary guide to help “digital immigrants” or teachers to begin to transform their classrooms to accommodate digital learning. This book provides several activities that will create a smooth transition for incorporating digital writing into everyday instruction without overwhelming the student or the teacher. It even offers several ideas for how to assess the writing, but most importantly the authors

### Model of Strong Assessment Program:

- **Collect extended writing samples over time**
- **Have students write in multiple genres**
- **Apply appropriate rubrics**
- **Address writing across content areas (110)**

# Suggested Reading

If you are like me, you are always looking for new books on how to teach writing. With that in mind, I thought I would share with you the list of books our Summer Institute XXVII participants chose for their reading circles. All of these titles can be found in our Writing Project library.

---

**Gallagher, Kelly.** *Write Like This: Preparing Students for Writing in the Real World (Grades 4-12)*. Portland: Stenhouse, 2011.

Gallagher bases his book on the premise that writers need to read and study good writing. He provides mentor texts, including some he has written himself and has used with his own students to model specific real-world discourses. The following discourse purposes are treated in separate chapters: express and reflect, inform and explain, evaluate and judge, inquire and explore, analyze and interpret, and take a stand/propose a solution. He also includes student writing samples and abundant practical lessons and strategies. As in his other books, Gallagher draws on his experience as a high school English teacher to describe practical approaches for real students.

---

**Gallagher, Chris and Amy Lee.** *Teaching Writing That Matters: Tools and Projects That Motivate Adolescent Writers (Grades 6 and up)*. New York: Scholastic, 2008.

Gallagher and Lee organize their book around three key Writing Studies concepts that they call the building blocks of teaching writing: reflective practice, rhetorical awareness, and a sense of community. They discuss each concept and provide classroom activities for each. The greater part of the book, however, is devoted to presenting three Project Toolboxes based on the kinds of writing all writers do: writing with experience, writing with texts, and writing with research. The Project Toolboxes include sample individual and group projects along with activities and exercises. In addition, the authors provide a writer's process toolbox and a teacher's toolbox. Not only do Gallagher and Lee give teachers tools for teaching writing but throughout the book they encourage reflection on why we teach writing.

---

**Daniels, Harvey and Nancy Steineke.** *Texts and Lessons for Content-Area Reading: With More Than 75 Articles from The New York Times, Rolling Stone, The Washington Post, Car and Driver, Chicago Tribune, and Many Others*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2011.

The Common Core Standards for literacy in the content areas emphasize the reading-writing-content connection. Daniels and Steineke have provided a top-notch resource for using short nonfiction texts to teach reading strategies that align with the CCS. The reproducible texts can easily be bridged with writing assignments that enable students to dig deeper

into the content while practicing argumentative, narrative, and expository writing strategies. Selections are organized thematically with each set built on a sequence of reading strategies that are presented in the opening chapters of the book. This is a highly usable resource with a range of difficulty levels for middle and high school students.

---

**Fletcher, Ralph.** *Live Writing and A Writer's Notebook*. New York: HarperCollins, 1996.

Fletcher's two short volumes on the writing life offer advice for writers of all ages, making them a good choice for both inspiring the teacher as writer and providing her with teaching tools for the classroom. They are classic resources for ideas on how to bring life and energy to anyone's writing. Like all of Fletcher's books, they are highly readable and engaging.

---

*Have you read a book that you would like to recommend to your colleagues? If so, we would love to hear from you. Just send a brief description of the book and why you are recommending it. Include information about grade levels addressed.*

~ Peggy



**Western  
Kentucky  
University**

Writing Project  
Department of English, CH 109  
1906 College Heights Blvd.  
Bowling Green, KY 42101

Phone: 270-745-6587  
Fax: 270-745-6938  
Email:  
writing.project@wku.edu

**We're on the Web!**  
[www.wku.edu/wp](http://www.wku.edu/wp)

# Position Announcements

Denise Henry, one of the pillars of the WKU Writing Project for many years and most recently our Continuity Director, has decided that it is time for her to retire from the position. She will continue on the Leadership Team, however, and we remain grateful for her insight and experience in that venue. Not only has Denise served the WKU Writing Project well, but she has been a state leader, holding important roles in KCTE and bringing her leadership to important KDE initiatives. If you have an interest in serving as Continuity Director, please email me at [peggy.otto@wku.edu](mailto:peggy.otto@wku.edu) to learn more about what the position entails.

Shannon Anderson, our Newsletter Editor, has decided to retire from that position. She has done a tremendous job with the newsletter, and we appreciate the time and talent that she has put into this important Writing Project role. As of this edition, Laura Wagoner, our part-time office assistant at WKU, will take over that role. We encourage you to send your news items, book reviews, and photographs to Laura at [writing.project@wku.edu](mailto:writing.project@wku.edu).

Finally, we have several positions open on the Leadership Team, which meets each fall and spring to reflect on the WKU Writing Project programs and activities and make recommendations for the coming semester. We would like to have every cohort represented on the team. If you would be willing to serve, please let Laura know.



**Author  
Debbie Dadey  
with  
JoJo Jennings  
at Southern  
Kentucky  
Bookfest  
Breakfast on  
Saturday,  
April 21, 2012**



Send information for the next edition of the newsletter to Laura Wagoner: [writing.project@wku.edu](mailto:writing.project@wku.edu)