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Submission Guidelines

- Send two copies of each manuscript, typed and double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and references), with one-inch margins (see address on page 42).

  OR

- Submit your manuscript electronically to the co-editors, Ruth Wood (Ruthann.P.Wood@uwrf.edu) and the Anne D'Antonio Stinson (stinsona@mail.uww.edu); a WordPerfect attachment is preferred.
- Provide a statement guaranteeing that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the Guidelines for Nonexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications.
- Follow MLA format throughout.

The name, address, school affiliation, telephone number, and e-mail of the author should appear on the title page only, not on the manuscript. If the manuscript is accepted, the author will need to provide a disk copy of the manuscript in WordPerfect.

Reading & Reading Instruction (Fall 2001)
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Editors' Note

Dear Wisconsin English Journal Readers,

This spring's issue features articles on new ideas for teaching. The first article presents another approach to NCTE's Writing Project, an effort to try a new activity for elementary, middle, and high school students throughout the state. A second article, also presented by Trista Stahman, is another Writing Project at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. This project is about the teaching of creative writing. The students worked on the project, and their teaching. Perhaps this article will give you some insight from what our students have written.

This spring, Anne D'Antonio Stinson, who is graduating in May, will receive her master's degree in English education. Congratulations to her for her hard work and dedication to the field of education.

The Fall 2001 issue includes articles on reading and writing in the classroom. This year, the Literacy and Reading Conference is being held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The theme of the conference is "Teaching Reading in the 21st Century." Please consider making a submission to the conference.

The Spring 2002 issue will focus on new ideas for teaching English. Articles on new ideas for teaching English will be featured. If you have an article you would like to submit, please contact me at ruth.wood@uwrf.edu.

Ruth Wood and Anne D'Antonio Stinson

Editors of Wisconsin English Journal

University of Wisconsin-River Falls

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Editors’ Note

Dear Wisconsin English Journal Readers:

This spring’s issue of the Wisconsin English Journal features what we hope you’ll find to be some very interesting and inspiring success stories from elementary, middle, secondary, and university English/language arts teachers throughout the state. A number of our authors are participants in the Fox Valley Writing Project, an affiliate of the National Writing Project. FVWP writers in this issue are Katie Stahmann, Didi Karinsky, Paula Muehler, Nancy Relien, and Patricia Donaldson. Chris Van Hoof offers “Childhood Memory Exercise,” an activity that she learned while participating in the Central Wisconsin Writing Project at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. “Six Trait Writing” is presented by Trista Smith as a way for Wisconsin teachers to assess students’ performance with regard to the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards. Gary Jones advocates collaborative writing in “The Collaborative Essay as a Group Learning Activity,” and Deborah Kinder discusses the power of listening to students’ narratives. We hope you’ll enjoy their stories and gain inspiration and insight from what our fellow English/language arts teachers have learned from their teaching. Perhaps you’ll even be inspired to send us something you’ve written.

This spring’s issue is also the last issue for our Production Editor, Kim Baus, who is graduating this year with a degree in computer engineering. Congratulations, Kim!

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Fall 2001 issue of the Wisconsin English Journal will feature articles on reading and reading instruction. What do you think? Is there a literacy crisis in this country or is it simply a false crisis created by politicians? Are scores on standardized group assessments the best measure of our children’s literacy or are these tests simply money-makers for test preparers? How do you teach reading? And how do you assess the effectiveness of your instruction? Please consider making a contribution to what promises to be an exciting and thought-provoking issue. Deadline for submissions: September 15, 2001.


Articles on these and related questions may be submitted to Ruth Wood at UW-River Falls, KFA 239, River Falls, WI 54022; fax 715-425-0657. If your article is accepted for publication, you will be asked to submit a disk in Word or WordPerfect along with a final edited hard copy.

Ruth Wood and Anne D’Antonio Stinson, Editors
My Kids Didn’t Write Enough

Katie Stahmann, Saints Peter and Paul School, Kiel

I was talking with a fellow teacher at the end of the school year, telling her that I didn’t think my kids wrote enough this past year. Her response was, “You can’t do everything, and you covered the writing chapters in the English book, right?” She is right, I can’t cover everything, but I knew I could do better. I didn’t go through every single page of those writing chapters, partly because writing was not exciting for my students. Whenever I announced that we were going to start another writing project, my students would groan. It didn’t occur to me that it might be because they did not have ownership of their writing, and that I had not given them the time to discover their voices. In her book, In the Middle: New Understandings about Writing, Reading, and Learning, Nancie Atwell points out that we need to acknowledge that every student has something to say, and that we should expect every student to have ideas for writing (1987).

Writing in my classroom tended to take place in two-week chunks of time, and everyone’s writing looked very similar. We all wrote a narrative or a poem or a letter or something else that I had decided we were going to do at that point in the year. While I still think it is important for students to try different genres, I’ve determined that my methods need some work. In the past, I would start a writing project with an assigned topic, followed by some prewriting; students were to have a rough draft to class within two to three days. Next, we took two days to revise with peers (often this turned into the editing of mechanical errors). If a student asked me to read their paper, I would do so, correcting all the errors I found. Finally, students would be expected to make revisions and hand in the final product two weeks from the day I assigned the project. Looking back at this process, I see that my students were not encouraged to use the ideas that they already had.

Reading Atwell’s book has convinced me that my instincts were correct, but that I need to make some major changes in the way that I teach writing. As a result, I plan on using this book as a guide for implementing a writers workshop in my own classroom. According to Atwell “Our job is to give time and ownership to our students, and then help them know what it is that they want to do” (65). I am excited at the thought of beginning my English class very differently in the upcoming school year.

Converting my English classroom into a Writers Workshop is going to take a great deal of planning on my part. The workshop should include four parts: a mini-lesson, writing workshop proper, status-of-the-class conferencing, and group share meetings. The point of the mini-lesson is to share our personal knowledge of writing. This could include something new I would like to encourage my students to try in their writing.
age my students to try in their own writing or a way to solve a problem area in their writing. It should teach students something that is relevant and sensible to them (Atwell).

Conferenceing is another area that I have struggled with. I always felt that I had to read every word of every students' writing. This is of course not possible and usually resulted in several students never getting any feedback until I returned their paper with a final grade and comments. As Atwell points out, "After-the-fact response comes too late to do a writer much good..." (69). Looking back, I doubt that students ever applied my comments to future writing. One problem is that there was simply too much time between writing projects, and they probably didn't even remember what I had written. In regards to conferenceing, Atwell recommends that you go to each student's desk for just a couple of minutes and help them with what they tell you they need help with.

What an epiphany: I do not have to read every single word that my students write? They can take responsibility for their own writing by selecting an area which they need help with? I do not need to take their writing and revise and edit the entire piece for them? I am hoping that this will help my students take pride in what they write and will also allow time to visit most of my students in a class period, and, if I do not get to them one day, I will definitely get to them the next day.

Every workshop should end with a group share meeting. Atwell recommends that every student should not have to share a piece of their writing at this time. She uses this meeting as a place for students to hear a larger range of perspectives on a piece of writing. It should be each individual student's decision to share, and there should be a legitimate purpose in sharing their writing.

In her book Atwell gives some tips for making conferences successful:

1. Keep conferences short.
2. See as many writers as possible.
3. Make eye contact with the writer.
4. Don't tell the writer what should be in their piece or write on the paper at this time.
5. Go to your students in a zigzag pattern.
6. Build on what writers know and have done.
7. Resist making judgments about their writing (i.e. "Good").
8. Focus on one or two issues in the writing.

I believe that following these steps will enable me to improve my conferences with students, as well as improve the peer conferenceing groups.

In her book Seeking Diversity: Language Arts with Adolescents, Linda Rief recommends that giving the students a genuine purpose helps to make their writing real. She also believes that writing for an audience betters the product. These ideas struck a chord with me. I have always tried to design creative ways for students to do book reports; often I had them do projects of their choice, which often gave rise to fabulous results. One of these projects was to write a
letter to the author of the book that they had read, but the students weren’t required to send these letters. Now I ask myself "Why?" The letters often turned out to be superficial; it should have occurred to me that the reason for this superficiality was that I was the only person who would be reading them; they had no "real" audience. Next year I am going to continue to use letters as a project idea, but with the additional requirement that they be sent to the author. I am anxious to see if the quality will improve, as I anticipate.

Creating a new atmosphere in my English classroom will require a great deal of classroom reorganization as well. As Rief points out, "When students live in confusion about what I want, they too become blind to learning" (2). Steven Zemelman concurs, pointing out that we need to become more conscious and analytical about the environment we create in our classrooms. In my classroom, I need to create an environment in which students feel safe sharing their thoughts and feelings.

"Writers need time regular, frequent chunks of time that they can count on, anticipate, and plan for. When we make time for writing in school, designating it a high-priority activity of the English program, our students will develop the habits of writers—and the compulsions" (Atwell 55). Through my research and self-reflection, I have come to some important conclusions about writing in my classroom: students need to write often, they need to write about what they feel passionate about, and they need the tools to learn how to write well. In the years to come, I want my students to know that, "Today I am going to write about something I care about in Mrs. Stahmann’s class."

References

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Fantasy is the gently nurtured

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Fairy one generation identifying collective is not limited to cold land," and "in beauty and ugliness, Fairy tales are gone from period breaks an evil explains why workshop with fairy tales in it may enjoy ex wide range.

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Mixing Middle Schoolers and Fairy Tales

Didi Karisny, Neenah Joint School District

Fantasy is the most valuable attribute of the human mind and should be diligently nurtured from the earliest childhood.

-Kornei Chukovsky

Welcome to a "land of enchantment" where students are actually enjoying writing! As we zoom in closer you may be a little surprised to discover they are sixth graders engaging in some writers workshop activities. Even more of an enigma: some of the students are reading picture books and seem to be quite fascinated. All of the students appear to be under a magic spell! "What is so intriguing?" you may wonder. The answer is quite simple: Fairy tales!

Fairy tales are stories filled with wonder. They have been passed from one generation to the next for centuries. They can further be classified by identifying common elements or characteristics. These include (but are not limited to) common phrases such as "once upon a time," or "long ago in a far off land," and "lived happily ever after." Characters represent good and evil or beauty and ugliness. Heroes claim prizes, and villains vanish forever or are killed. Fairy tales are magical! Princes have been turned into frogs. Young girls have gone from rags to riches with the wave of a wand. Animals talk. A princess's kiss breaks an evil spell, or children suddenly inherit magical powers. Maybe that explains why those middle schoolers approached their tasks during the writers workshop with such enthusiasm! There are a variety of approaches for using fairy tales in the classroom. I would like to share one of my experiences that you may enjoy exploring further. The curriculum can be adapted to meet the needs of a wide range of abilities.

Once upon a time...Ann Leonard, a sixth grade language arts teacher at Shattuck Middle School in Neenah, Wisconsin, invited me to team up with her for a writers workshop using fairy tales. I was curious about mixing middle schoolers and fairy tales and eagerly accepted. I held the preconceived notion that it would take some fast talking or an extraordinary introduction to get them to buy into that theme. Her goal was to give each of her sixth grade students the opportunity to explore traditional fairy tales and then transform one of their favorite stories. By using existing stories, the students would have a model or pattern to follow. This was especially important for the at-risk or reluctant writer. As we journeyed down the "yellow brick road," the "munchkins" taught us many lessons that guided us in the right direction. Eventually, we reached the "Magical Kingdom" and together with the students found our "hearts' desires." What was important, however, was the journey itself. It took approximately six weeks.

Week One: It all starts when the students get into small groups and read
a collection of traditional fairy tales. That hooks most of them immediately. Many of the students are eager to share and discuss their favorite tale or tales. The room buzzes with excitement. It's contagious! The next day, we list and discuss the elements of a fairy tale. The final activity during the first week is modeling a story map of a traditional fairy tale.

Week Two: During the second week, we learn the concept of "transformations" as it relates to fairy tales. I read sample stories to the whole group. Graphic organizers such as story maps, Venn diagrams, and story frames should be used to compare stories. All the students are able to participate because they are familiar with the tales. Following is a list of ideas and suggestions for transforming a story.

You can...

- Change the style from old-fashioned to modern language.
- Change or add in the details in the plot (Somebody and the Three Blairs).
- Change a few of the main events in the plot (Stephen Kellogg's Chicken Little).
- Keep a few of the main events but change most of the plot (Sleeping Ugly).
- Change the setting (time and place). If the setting is changed, there will probably need to be many more changes in characters and detail (Snow White in New York).
- Change the point of view (The True Story of the Three Little Pigs, told by the wolf).
- Change the characters in the story by:
  - Changing their occupation (The Principal's New Clothes).
  - Changing their gender (Prince Cinders).
  - Reversing their roles in the story (Somebody and the Three Blairs).
- Write a sequel to the original story (The Frog Prince Continued).
- Keep the words of the original story, but change the illustrations (Anthony Browne's Hansel and Gretel).

Week Three: Teaching the elements of an introduction and modeling the writing of a good lead are the main focuses. The students should have previous experience in peer conferencing, but fairy tales put it in a new context. Students should practice the questioning techniques as they are modeled. Sample questions include:

- Is the first sentence a good hook?
- Do you have a clear idea of the problem in the story?
- Do the main characters create a vivid image?
- Can you picture the setting?

Week Four: Students find it challenging to write their text into pages. Surprisingly, the task becomes a positive one.

Week Five: Final copies. Once students have written their own stories the final polish seems to be more satisfying.

Week Six: "Bare books" which students illustrated for themselves. Their work was to delight of everyone present. First graders. These "wee" ones are shown making the most of their effort.

Using fairy tales as an exciting adventure to expand their imagination. It's a great way to I learned from them.

Bettelheim suggests that imagination is a powerful tool. Fairy tales can help children work through their anxieties, so they can stretch their imaginations.
Week Four: The students engage in writing story episodes. Some of the students find it challenging to make the decisions necessary to effectively divide their text into pages. They also confer with group members and plan illustrations. Surprisingly, the task of planning their illustrations to match the chosen text becomes a positive experience in problem solving.

Week Five: The students write conclusions and resolutions and type final copies. Once again peer conferencing is used. This time the focus is on whether or not an ending is satisfying. They practice proofreading and give their stories the final polish. Each student should choose to dedicate their book to someone special.

Week Six: Time for the students to print or glue the fairy tale text into "bare books" which have been purchased. They have the option of drawing and coloring their own illustrations or asking a classmate with more artistic ability to illustrate for them. Once completed, the students have the opportunity to share their stories with peers. That's not the end of the project, however. A week later, to the delight of every sixth grader, they will read their fairy tales to an audience of first graders. The real reward for the students is the enthusiasm they arouse in these "wee" ones and the looks of wonder on their faces. Their wide eyes and big smiles make all of the sixth graders' efforts seem worthwhile. They're so proud of their work!

Using fairy tales with sixth graders in a writers workshop was an exciting adventure for me. As I reflect on what took place during those weeks in the "land of enchantment," I realize that what the students gained was far more than I first imagined. A wise old man once said, "Everything I needed to know in life I learned from fairy tales." Maybe that is another reason why the sixth graders appeared so motivated during the six weeks of the writers workshop. They were finding answers for their insecurities and deep inner struggles that could not be found in their textbooks or other "so-called" children's literature.

Bettelheim (1977) suggests that to enrich a child's life a story must stimulate his imagination and give full recognition to his difficulties while at the same time suggest solutions to his problems. In respect to children's literature—with rare exception—nothing can be as satisfying to a child as a fairy tale.

Fairy tales—satisfying—Yes, that was it! That would be a perfect word to describe how the fairy tale workshop affected the sixth graders. The fairy tale workshop appeared to have been providing sufficient "magic" to keep the students satisfied.

While observing the sixth graders as they revisited and interacted with many of their favorite fairy tales from childhood, I could not help but feel a sense of nostalgia and excitement. My fond memories of fairy tales were recaptured in the looks of delight on their faces, the sound of merriment in their voices, and the eagerness in their manner. It was evident their stories would be written with the great mind of the "Scarecrow," the heart of the "Tin Man," and the courage of the "Lion." I believe (as I look back) the fairy tales liberated them from fears and anxieties, so they could interact with the tales for the pure enjoyment while at the same time stretch their imaginations to the greatest extent. I am also convinced
that the sixth graders were subconsciously being led to the lessons they needed to learn at the time and more importantly were ready to learn—lessons that would help clarify some of the confusion in their complex world. By reading and writing about fairy tales, students could escape from their inner pressures and find relief in the hope that many of the tales offered. Their wishes and dreams could be fulfilled—even if only temporarily.

Cinderella, probably the most famous fairy tale in the world, is the story of several of the sixth graders who chose to transform Cinderella into a story about goodness. She is kind, helpful, giving, caring, humble, and unselfish. Her stepsisters and stepmother are completely evil characters. From this story children learn or are reminded that goodness and selflessness are rewarded and that envy, jealousy, and abuse of children are punished.

Flack (11) states that the Cinderella story offers hope and encouragement. A child (or adult) who is down and out may draw a parallel, "pick himself up from the ashes, dust himself off, and walk (or ride in a magic coach) to success now and happily ever after."

Another parallel of the Cinderella story is sibling rivalry. A child may look at Cinderella and think, "That is me. That is how little they (my siblings) think of me." How many of us (no matter our age) have felt mistreated or out-classed by our brothers, sisters, or friends? How many of us, at one time or another, have felt incompetent when compared to our siblings? And how many of us have dreamed of being rescued by a prince or someone who could rid us of our pain and suffering? I wonder how many sixth graders were attracted to Cinderella because they saw themselves in her character—the mistreated underdog who not only endures and survives the miserable conditions but who is also rescued and lives happily ever after?

All that this experience has brought to the students will not be known at the conclusion of this project. Once internalized, each individual determines their own values. Sometimes it is many years later before we recognize the significant role past events play in our lives. My personal experiences, however, have taught me that mixing fairy tales and sixth graders does have a happy ending.

References
Childhood Memory Exercise

Chris Van Hoof, Marion High School

A writing activity that I have had a great deal of success with has been “The Childhood Memory” activity. I first saw the activity when I was a participant in the Central Wisconsin Writing Project at UW-Stevens Point in the summer of 1998, under the direction of Judy Peplinski. The activity focuses on oral storytelling, using details in writing, and organizing thoughts.

Let me take a moment to put in a commercial for the Writing Project. It is the single most influential factor in shaping how I teach writing after fifteen years of teaching. It has caused me to rethink my writing assignments, making them more relevant and interesting. Student writing has improved tremendously, and students enjoy writing more than ever before. If you have the opportunity to attend a Writing Project, I highly recommend that you find the time; it is well worth it.

Now, back to my original intent which is to describe the Childhood Memory assignment. The activity begins with the premise that we all have memories of our past. Some of those memories are funny, while others may be very painful; some are very vivid, while others have faded over time. Regardless, all students begin with some level of background knowledge on the subject.

I ask the students to arrange their desks in a large circle, and we have storytelling time. Students who are willing to share an experience from their childhood are encouraged to do so. At first students tend to be reluctant, but after one or two stories, everyone wants to talk. I usually allow an entire class period (47 minutes) for this phase of the activity. Students tend to be interested in listening to what the others have to say.

In case no one volunteers, I always have a story of my own to tell. Like many of the students’, mine involves minor sibling torture. For purposes of illustrating a typical example, let me share the following true story: I have five brothers and no sisters. All six of us were born within five years, so we are very close in age. Three of my brothers are older, and two are younger than I. As you can imagine, it was an issue of “survival” for me long before television made the concept popular. My primary weapon of retaliation was tattling. Whenever my parents would leave us home alone, my brothers were bound to do something forbidden, and I always made sure my parents knew about it when they returned. Needless to say, my brothers were not very happy with me, so they plotted their revenge.

On a sunny Saturday afternoon, Mom and Dad left the house for a meeting. They didn’t intend to be gone long, but it was long enough for my evil siblings to carry out their dastardly deed. I didn’t have to wait long to find out what it would be. My brothers tackled me in the living room, and while one knelt on my long hair and held my arms, another one held my legs. The third
one grabbed ice cubes from the freezer and proceeded to hold them on my eyes. This caused an instant headache, and I knew I was in an awful fix. Normally my tormentors would release me as soon as I started to cry, but because the ice cubes were melting, they couldn’t tell that I was crying. After what seemed like forever, they released me and I dashed to my bedroom where I would be safe until Mom and Dad got home.

As soon as my parents walked through the front door, I went and told them everything! So much for curing me of tattling.

After telling such a story, students are prompted to remember similar instances with siblings, personal injuries, and other funny episodes. In no time at all, nearly everyone has something to share. Students really enjoy this part of the activity.

Next, either as an assignment or as an activity in class the next day, I ask students to think of a childhood memory (either one they have already shared or one that they haven’t) and draw a picture telling the story. They are told to include as much detail in the picture as they possibly can.

Then students are paired up and each student is asked to guess his/her partner’s story by looking at the picture. Essentially, they create stories that fit the pictures they see in front of them. After listening to the guess, the artist explains the real story involved. Listeners are encouraged to ask questions and get all the details of the story. Partners then switch guessing and explaining roles.

After all of this prewriting activity, the next step becomes very easy for students. I tell them to write the story they have drawn and now explained verbally. I remind them of their audience, their classmates, and their purpose, to tell a detailed story in a well organized way, and students begin writing the first draft.

Perhaps one of the reasons this activity has been so successful is that students know what to write about by the time we get to that step of the process. No one sits and labors over what to say because they are talking about a subject they have had time to think about and one they know well—themselves.

Of all the writing activities I have done, this continues to be a favorite of mine and my students. It’s like a family reunion where everyone is interested in listening, “Do you remember the time when...?”

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Portfolio of Pro
Paula Mueck

It is the first week of school, and I am anxious as they descend into their desks. Students quickly settle into their seats and are told that today they will be writing a paper telling me what they are called to do. They are turned in their notebooks until the last week. Each student’s last piece of work will have a piece of paper on it, indicating they are to keep it.

The six traits of writing are: ideas and content, words and conventions (mechanics), and the audience. Each trait has been taught, and students are to apply these to their writing.

Teaching the traits of writing, I start with one trait at a time. During the third week of school, Northwest Region teachers introduced the traits. This is the third week of introducing the traits, and I do not focus on them. I have taught the traits of writing, and I do not focus on them.

The last week of the school year, I start with one trait at a time. Each group is assigned a trait. Each group is assigned a trait, and they discuss and maintain the traits of writing along.
Portfolio of Progress

Paula Muchler, Carl Traeger Middle School

It is the first week of school and all the sixth graders in my class are anxious as they descend upon the beginning of their middle school years. I tell them that today they will have their very first writing assignment. I ask them to write a paper telling me about their favorite place. It is quite amazing to see how quickly they jot down their answers to this request and feel success having turned in their first writing assignment. I take this piece of writing and keep it in my file until the last week of school. I will use this piece of writing to compare to each student's last piece of writing of the year. With the two pieces I will measure each student's growth. This year of teaching, measuring the students' growth is of particular interest to me. For the first time I am implementing the teaching of the six traits of writing.

The six traits of writing, plus one model, originated in 1984 in the Beaverton, Oregon, School District. The traits of writing that have been identified are: ideas and content (focus), voice (the heart), sentence fluency (flow of the language), word choice (descriptive writing), organization (internal structure), conventions (mechanical correctness), and the plus one: presentation. These traits of writing have been around for a long time. However, what the teachers in Oregon did was to create a language and a set of rubrics for assessing these traits in students' writing. The rubrics allow teachers to recognize good writing and give students something objective to guide them as they write (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory). Using criteria and assessing their work allows students to learn to evaluate different qualities in their work (Lane).

Teaching the traits of writing is a long, involved process. This past year I taught one trait during the first quarter, two during the second quarter, two during the third quarter and one in the fourth quarter. According to a study done by Northwest Regional Educational Library, students' scores improved on traits in proportion to the amount of time spent on them and the order in which they were introduced (1992-1993). I begin the year with teaching the trait of ideas and content. This is the area my students need the most improvement in. I teach conventions throughout the year since it is the editing part of the process of writing. I do not focus on the rubric for conventions until the other five traits have been taught. This way the focus on content in the students' writing can be maintained.

The last month of school we begin putting together students' portfolios of writing. I start this process by dividing them into six groups and assign each group a trait. Each group compiles what they see as the five most important aspects of their assigned trait. Then we come back together as a class and after much discussion and deliberation, our product is a rubric that includes the six traits of writing along with the process of writing.
The students are now ready to begin their last assignment of the year. I give them a writing prompt and tell them they will be graded on all six of the traits of writing, according to the rubric they generated. This is the only piece of writing that is graded on all six traits. The writing prompt is "Tell me about a place that is special to you." The following is an example of a student's writing. The first piece was written in August when I asked the students to do a piece of writing on their special place. The second piece of writing was done in May, after the teaching of the six traits of writing along with the process of writing:

August:
I like to think about going home at night after a long day of school. Home is special to me because it’s a chance to spend time with my family. When I’m at home I feel like I can do anything I want and I don’t have to be shy. The best thing that home has to offer is a warm bed to fall asleep in every night.

May:
A drop of sweat falls gently from the tip of my nose. I take a deep breath in and exhale as I wind up. I deliver the baseball and it strikes the catcher’s mitt with a satisfying pop as the fans cheer gratefully. I don’t have to imagine my favorite place because I’m already on the pitcher’s mound.

I love pitching because I love baseball and my best position on the field is the mound. I started pitching four years ago and I fell in love immediately. In my book baseball overrides any other sport ever invented.

I also like pitching because when I am up there, I am in control. I like to be a leader and when I pitch, people look at me as if I am the president of the United States. I control the fielders and the batters at the same time.

Finally, pitching is a rush! It’s an exciting explosion of self-confidence and joy! Even when the other team hits my pitches, I’m having fun. Every time I let go of the ball, I’m anxious to see what happens.

Without baseball and pitching, my world would end. I eat, sleep, and breathe baseball. Baseball is America’s favorite pastime and the pitcher’s mound is Ben’s favorite place.

These two pieces of writing will be the first (August piece) and the last (May piece) pieces of writing in Ben’s portfolio.

Next, we talk about the plus one trait, presentation. We are going to take all of their pieces of writing in the order in which they were written and put them into a fantastic looking booklet which, in essence, becomes each student’s portfolio. The students put their pieces of writing in order, design a cover, make a table of contents, and turn it in to me. I then bind their portfolios. Every student’s table of contents will have "My Special Place" as their first piece and as their last piece. I take all their hard work and bind it together, slipping in their first "My
Special Place" of the year. They have not seen this piece of writing since they wrote it in August.

I wish I would have had a video camera in my room as my students' faces showed the shock, amazement, and best of all pride at where they had all journeyed as writers. The six traits of writing brought my students farther than I could have ever imagined. In asking the students how they felt about English this year I received the following responses:

"I am glad we learned the six traits of writing. I can now write great paragraphs!"

"The six traits were probably the thing that taught me the most this whole year!"

"I loved learning the six traits!"

We as teachers can affect student achievement by improving classroom assessment techniques, our skills in using them, and student self-assessment. I found that the six traits gave students confidence in assessing their own writing and each others. I know all my students will keep their portfolios with them forever.

References


Six Trait Writing: Making Sense of the “Miss Alaineus”

Trista Smith, Carl Traeger Middle School

Most language arts teachers feel confident in their ability to recognize good writing. Even as a first-year teacher, I did not find it difficult to separate the wow papers from the where-does-it-begin. However, I soon found out that my ability to recognize good writing did not alone give me strong enough legs to stand on as I teetered on the edge of the accountability vortex. I once might have called the qualities of good student writing mysterious: full of mystery . . . hard to explain or understand. However, having been introduced to Six Trait Writing, I realize that good writing is not miscellaneous: consisting of various kinds of qualities. The features of good writing can be spelled out through the use of with six manageable, student-friendly terms.

What is good writing?

If the teacher cannot define “good writing” then the student cannot be expected to produce it. Assessment guru Richard Stiggins writes: “If my job is to teach students to become better writers, I had better start with a highly refined vision of what good writing looks like and a sense of how to help my students meet that standard” (14). Stiggins calls achievement expectations targets. In order to assess accurately, Stiggins contends, teachers must begin with clear and appropriate teaching targets.

For teachers in the state of Wisconsin, expectations have been outlined in the State Academic Standards. The standards represent a broad spectrum of what language arts students should know and be able to do. However, the performance indicators which further define the Writing Content Standard tend to outline expectations for student learning rather than specific traits that can be easily measured.

I believe most educators, including those involved in writing the state standards, would agree that teachers must take the performance indicators or their district’s standards and manipulate them into targets that meet their particular students’ needs.

Fortunately, I happened across a teaching and assessment method that defines good writing in ways I knew already but was having a hard time putting into simple, student-friendly terms. The phenomenon I’m referring to is called Six Trait Writing developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, NWREL, in Portland, Oregon.

What Is Six Trait Writing?

Six Trait Writing categories:
- Ideas (details, develop
- Organization (internal
- Voice (tone, style, put
- Word Choice (precise
- Sentence Fluency (co
- Conventions (mechar

For Ideas, the task and enhanced by significan
tion targets include writing is compelling and moves p presence of the writer on writing that is driven, live is natural, precise, and vis reader’s mind. Good writing rhythm combined with se accurate and creative use NWREL).

How do I use the Six Trai
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I begin by read
Debra Fraser, author of Sage, misunderstands b
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What Is Six Trait Writing?

Six Trait Writing compiles the characteristics of good writing into six categories:

- Ideas (details, development, focus)
- Organization (internal structure)
- Voice (tone, style, purpose and audience)
- Word Choice (precise language and phrasing)
- Sentence Fluency (correctness, rhythm and cadence)
- Conventions (mechanical correctness)

For Ideas, the target is student writing that is clear, focused, purposeful, and enhanced by significant detail that captures the reader’s interest. Organization targets include writing that has order, presentation, or internal structure that is compelling and moves the reader purposefully through the text. Voice is the presence of the writer on the page, and the target is for the student to create writing that is driven, lively, expressive and engaging. Target-level Word Choice is natural, precise, and vivid. It creates a clear and complete picture in the reader’s mind. Good writing must have Sentence Fluency: an easy flow and rhythm combined with sentence sense and clarity. Lastly, good writing contains accurate and creative use of Conventions to enhance meaning (Vicki Spandel, NWREL).

How do I use the Six Traits in my instruction?

Students should not be expected to exhibit each of these traits in their writing without first being taught what they are and how to identify them. For example, the teacher might choose to work on Word Choice as the focus of his or her first unit of the new semester.

NWREL states, “Word choice is precision in the use of words—wordsmithery. It is the love of language, a passion for words, combined with a skill in choosing words that create just the mood, impression, or word picture the writer wants to instill in the heart and mind of the reader.” Although the definition is clear, I have found that on a Monday morning in February, fifty-seven days from Spring Break, teaching my sophomore students to have a love of language isn’t the easiest task.

I begin by reading them Miss Alaineus: A Vocabulary Disaster, by Debra Fraser, author of On the Day You Were Born. In the book, fifth-grader Sage, misunderstands her teacher’s vocabulary list. Sage returns to school the next day with the following definition in her notebook: “15. Miss Alaineus: the woman on green spaghetti boxes whose hair is the color of uncooked pasta and turns into spaghetti at the ends.” Sage ultimately turns “her vocabulary disaster—an event bringing great misfortune, into a triumph—a true success.” Sage’s comic confusion leads to a discussion among my sophomores of their own favorite children’s books. Invariably, children’s authors Dr. Seuss and Shel Silverstein are mentioned. Why are Where the Sidewalk Ends and The Star-Bellied Sneetches examples of good writing? Wordsmithery!
I then ask students to look at other pieces of writing and search for examples of both good and bad Word Choice. When they find something that they deem as “good,” I have them explain why. I have sometimes used a passage from Alice Walker’s “Never Offer Your Heart to Someone Who Eats Hearts”:

Never offer your heart
to someone who eats hearts
who finds heartmeat:
delicious
but not rare
who sucks the juices
drop by drop
and bloody-chinned
grins
like a God

Then I have students replace words like “heartmeat,” “delicious,” and “God,” and discuss how the image and meaning of the poem changes. One could give groups lists of common nouns and verbs like run, walk, jump, and house. Then ask students to list stronger nouns and verbs that are more vivid and precise. A teacher might show students a painting or photograph and ask them to describe what they see; then have students revise their own and another’s writing with words that create a clearer picture in the reader’s mind. I’ve even asked students to write two paragraphs through the eyes of a young man sitting in McDonald’s. In one scenario, the young man is feeling trapped and upset having just failed his driving test. In the second scenario, he’s passed the test and is elated with his newfound sense of freedom. The students must describe both scenes using sensory details but also word choice that creates the desired tone and sets the right mood.

Let’s say you want to work on Ideas. Ideas, according to NWREL, “are the heart of the message, the main thesis, impression, or storyline of the piece.” A composition strong in this category has originality, clarity, focus, detail and complexity (NWREL).

There are several things teachers can do to encourage students to implement stronger ideas in their writing. The teacher might share with students from Ralph Fletcher’s Ordinary Things: Poems From a Walk in Early Spring:

wind

the calendar says it’s early spring
but the wind pretends not to know

it reaches with bone-cold fingers
inside my coat to rattle my ribs

it swoops down into my mouth

The teacher could of nature in paragraph or pacing samples that describe with: to describe the things in the Write a poem about what your purpose yourself, paint a p about the way that which you live? As Assess the student on whatever piece.

Finally, another group of students two compositions compare and contrast the i As part of their World History Holocaust. Their history on November 9 the demonstration of Nazis destroyed synagogues, and smashing of stores result, the Nazis (Krieger, Neill a

In Voices of the Holocaust

Crystal Night

windows slash
like skin pulley tight frozen w
stone slamming it smashed hh

glass crystal
whole lake of:
a plane crashes into smashed
tea cups, bow glass glass
stuns my tongue, steals my voice

it whispers secrets past my ear a
blur of words too fast too low

The teacher could then have students describe some ordinary elements of nature in paragraph or poem form. Attention should be drawn to student samples that describe with a fresh spin. Another assignment might ask students to describe the things in their lockers or bedroom. Directions could read:

Write a poem about the things in your room. Before you start, decide what your purpose will be. Do you want to show something about yourself, paint a picture of your dreams for the future, say something about the way that you live, or say something about the society in which you live? Provide details that enrich your theme.

Assess the student on whether or not they have woven important ideas into the piece.

Finally, another great way to introduce the concept of “ideas” is to give students two compositions written about the same topic. Then, have students compare and contrast the ideas, and the way they are presented, in each piece.

As part of their World History class, sophomores at my school study the Holocaust. Their history book reads:

On November 9 and 10, 1938, Nazi mobs carried out a “spontaneous” demonstration of anger against the Jews. In 15 terrifying hours, the Nazis destroyed 7,500 Jewish-owned shops and businesses, burned 275 synagogues, and beat Jews on the streets and in their homes. The smashing of storefronts left streets littered with broken glass. As a result, the Nazis called their rampage Kristallnacht, the crystal night.

(Krieger, Neill, and Reynolds)

In Voices of the Holocaust, Lyn Lifshin writes:

Crystal Night

windows slashed
like skin pulled
tight frozen with a
stone slammed thru
it smashed blue

glass crystal a
whole lake of ice
a plane crashes
into smashed
tea cups bowl of
glass glass
shattering in the night something like a mirror walked into they came beat

people up blue jars the glass pilea in an alley calf deep. All night the sound of ice in

the branches poking holes in the roof A warning stained glass from the synagogue slashed

plum peach cherry frosting over in the chill November light an arm torn bleeding

a whole family in shards and this just the beginning

(Schumacher 38)

One might ask students the following questions about each piece:

What's the focus? What little things does one author notice that the other does not? Is the message complete or not? Can you picture what the writer is trying to communicate?

Since the course I teach is also a literature class, I try to coordinate each writing exercise with content from the short story, novel or theme of our unit of study. The more practice the students have, the better their performance on the final unit performance task.

How do I use the Six Traits in my assessment?

My mother, who has been teaching for thirty years, says she wouldn't be as willing to retire if she could find a teaching job without the task of correcting papers! I know what she means, as I sit down on a Sunday afternoon, pile of 140 research papers on my lap, facing a daunting task. Grading student writing is often very time consuming. I make a conscious effort to note the positives in each sample of student writing; however, I rarely know where to stop with my suggestions for improvement. I don’t want my students to be discouraged upon seeing a number of correct noticeable mistakes. Although Trait Writing in my student

Trying to evaluate every assignment is virtually end up discouraged. In Six focus. If developing Word is difficult to ignore the other individually must come first Word Choice, then, when a modern myth or parable, it this category. Most impor each unit of study. Only a have given each trait spec based on all six of the qual

What is proficiency in ear NWREL recomproficiency: 5=strong 4=Although the program im ment at each level for each students in the creation ement becomes an impor involved. Students migh performance exercises, individually or in cooper scale (Skiggins 219).

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References

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seeing a number of corrections and revisions, yet I have a hard time ignoring noticeable mistakes. Although I am just beginning to experiment with using Six Trait Writing in my student assessments, I sense some relief.

Trying to evaluate all of the traits of good writing for every student on every assignment is virtually impossible, and both the student and the teacher end up discouraged. In Six Trait Writing, the important thing is to maintain the focus. If developing Word Choice is the target, then assess this quality alone. It is difficult to ignore the other qualities of good writing, but mastery of each individually must come first. If I should choose to start the year by teaching Word Choice, then, when my students complete their first major piece, an original modern myth or parable, their grade must be based on their level of proficiency in this category. Most importantly, have students assess themselves throughout each unit of study. Only at the end of the semester or year perhaps, after you have given each trait specific attention, try evaluating your students’ writing based on all six of the qualities.

What is proficiency in each category?

NWEL recommends using a five point scoring rubric to assess student proficiency: 5=strong, 4=competent, 3=developing, 2=emerging, 1=not yet. Although the program includes a more detailed description of student achievement at each level for each of the Six Traits, one might consider involving students in the creation of the assessment tool. Stiggins contends that assessment becomes an important part of the learning process when students are involved. Students might be engaged in the actual development of Word Choice performance exercises. They could evaluate each other’s use of Word Choice individually or in cooperative groups, and work as a class to develop the rating scale (Stiggins 219).

Only if students and teachers know how to describe good writing—anything expressed in characters or letters—will they be able to produce it.

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Classroom Management During Writers Workshop

Nancy Relien, Weyauwega Elementary School

I am sitting next to a student at her desk trying to have a conference when suddenly I have three students surrounding me. One says, "I don't know what to do." Another needs me to look at his paper. The last says, "I can't find a partner to peer edit with." Meanwhile two other students are goofing around in the corner. As a beginning teacher, this is what I experience at times during my writers workshops. I teach fourth grade and constantly find myself being distracted by students. It is a challenge to get through a five-minute student conference without being interrupted by another student who needs help or a couple of other students who are off task. Don't get me wrong, there are a lot of things that go well in my writers workshops, but the classroom management could use some work. I need to be able to confer with my students without being consistently interrupted. This is why I chose to do some research on classroom management during the writers workshop.

I began my research by reading How's It Going?: A Practical Guide to Conferring with Student Writers by Carl Anderson. Anderson has a wonderful chapter that caught my eye called "What Are the Other Students Doing?" This is exactly what I wanted to know. Anderson states, "When our students know exactly what to do during workshop, we will be able to give our full attention to conferring." (172). How are students supposed to know exactly what to do?

While reading this chapter, I found some useful information about using mini-lessons. I've done mini-lessons in my classroom before, but they focused only on writing and grammar. Anderson begins every workshop with a ten-minute mini-lesson, which varies from daily procedures to run-on sentences. Some teachers already begin their workshops with these lessons, but they may not be using them to establish their expectations and rules for the writers workshop. At the beginning of the school year, teachers can use this time to slowly teach their students the rules, procedures, and expectations of the writers workshop. After the routine has been established, teachers can use this time to talk about subjects related directly to writing.

Along with the mini-lesson, teachers need to come up with a transition from the mini-lesson to the actual writing time and stick to a predictable routine. The routine might be for students to raise their hand, share their goal for the day, and then return to their seats one by one. If the students have the mini-lesson at their desks, then they should receive a clear signal that the mini-lesson is over. An example would be to say a secret word like "pickles." After the students hear the word they would know to begin their work. I use the word "salami" in my classroom for a daily classroom management technique. When this word is said, everyone must freeze, be quiet, and listen for directions. It works extremely well!

My kids love when I say the they know exactly what to do. As I read more from Kids Doing? I found some shop. These are the ideas for workshop: I circulate around sometimes a gentle reminder navigating around the room bathroom pass so that one or also have a rule that students do have extra pencils for th.

To keep my students writing that school day to complete their piece to the end of the day really needs to give them work so they will work hard. Sometimes I will tell them an extra day to finish.

These are some: It Going? that I would like

1. Set aside the first five or walking during the day before, start pl
2. Have designated areas where they must
3. Clearly communicate
   Again, do this in your beginning of the workshop.
4. Hang a "What We Can"
5. Inform the children of groups, or in the reas
6. Have children share their work

The strategy of creating a chart on the wall with their class work a "pick up" work. This works great and it return there is le this into my writers work. Anderson also they do, even after all disruptive children be
My kids love when I say the word, and they enjoy freezing! The point is that they know exactly what to do whether it is beginning to write or freezing.

As read more from Anderson's chapter called "What Are the Other Kids Doing?" I found some helpful suggestions for a successful writers workshop. These are the ideas from his chapter that I already use during my own workshop: I circulate around the room reminding students that it is work time; sometimes a gentle reminder is all they need. I have designed a simple system of navigating around the room, which allows the classroom to run itself. I have one bathroom pass so that one child at a time may use the bathroom when needed. I also have a rule that students may only sharpen pencils at recess or break, but I do have extra pencils for them to use if needed.

To keep my students accountable, I also set publication dates on major writings that the school district wants us to complete. I tell them that they need to complete their piece today or they must take their writing home as homework. It really works to give them a goal to shoot for. My students don't want homework, so they will work hard to complete their papers during the workshop. Sometimes I will tell them that if they work hard during workshop, I will give them an extra day to finish.

These are some strategies that Anderson suggested in his book How's It Going? that I would like to try in my classroom next year:

1. Set aside the first five or ten minutes as silent writing time. If there is no talking or walking during these first few minutes, students can reread what they wrote the day before, start planning, and begin to write.
2. Have designated areas where children are allowed to speak softly and other areas where they must be quiet.
3. Clearly communicate to your students how the writers workshop will run. Again, do this in your mini-lessons frequently. (This communication is critical in the beginning of the school year!)
4. Hang a "What We Can Do During Writing Time" chart in the classroom.
5. Inform the children of places to go for assistance: another peer, response groups, or in the research center to look at another author's work.
6. Have children share their plan for that day. For example, "Today my goal is to peer edit" (Sharing can be in a large group, with a partner, or in a notebook).

One strategy, which I have never tried directly to the workshop, is creating a chart on the wall with the title "What We Can Do During Writing Time." Anderson states that he often adds mini-lesson topics to the list. In the past, I have made a list of things that my students can do after they are finished with their class work such as read a book, write a poem, or finish other homework. This works great because students know exactly what I expect them to do, and in return there is less goofing around! Now I would like to try implementing this into my writers workshops.

Anderson also mentions a few things he does when problems arise, and they do, even after all this planning. He says sometimes he will simply send disruptive children back to their seats to work; he will also stop class and remind
them that it is difficult for a teacher and a student to conference when it is noisy. If he continues to have a noisy room, he will stop his conferencing and just walk around the room.

After I finished reading How's It Going?, I continued my research and read Conversations: Strategies for Teaching, Learning, and Evaluating, by Regie Routman. Routman says, "When students have a say in how the classroom is organized and managed, they take more responsibility for putting rules and routines into practice ... Any of these routines can become problematic if expectations have not been agreed upon and modeled" (314). Again, through mini-lessons a teacher can accomplish all of this. Routman feels that we should discuss, model, practice, and revisit the following classroom behaviors and routines: entering the room, getting settled, sharpening pencils, leaving the room, collaborating in a small group, whispering, using the bathroom, walking in the hallway, getting materials, and requesting help. One other good suggestion is to have a box somewhere in the classroom for students to leave requests for help or inform the teacher about problems they are having with another student.

After doing my research, I called a colleague of mine who also teaches fourth grade and asked her how she handles classroom management during the writers workshop. She said that the writers workshop takes "Practice, Practice, Practice." She does mini-lessons with her students to teach them particular skills, but not so much for teaching classroom procedures. Two ideas she had for making the workshop run more smooth were having the students put a cup out on their desk if they needed help and having students attach a clothes pin to a board letting the teacher know where he/she is in the writing process. She said that it is very helpful when she has another adult such as an aid or a parent volunteer in the room to help out with the workshop (Wiese).

Now, when I go back to my classroom, I can have a five-minute student conference without being interrupted by students with questions or students who are just off task. My kids will know exactly what it is that I want them to be doing during the workshop, so they won’t need to always come to me for help.

What I learned from my research is how helpful mini-lessons can be to a teacher. Last year I used mini-lessons, but I didn’t incorporate classroom procedures into them. I just expected my class to remember and follow my classroom rules. I did no role-play or go over my expectations for the workshop enough. This is why I started having problems with behavior. I need to spend a lot more time in the beginning of the year modeling, discussing, and role-playing my expectations for the writers workshop and continue doing this as needed. As Anderson states in How's It Going?, "Don’t worry about wasting valuable teaching time discussing subjects that don’t directly address writing. The investment early in the year in spelling out for students how we want the classroom to work lays the foundation for students to become independent writers" (75). Putting this into practice, I can spend more time conferencing with individual students.

From my research, I have also learned some new classroom management strategies that I can try out in my classroom next year. Some of these strategies I already use and some are new to me. I know I really need to invest more time teaching procedures in the understanding of how we be independent writers, a classroom and clearly sp

References
teaching procedures in the beginning of the year so my students have a clear understanding of how our workshops will run. My job is to teach my students to be independent writers, and I will do that by giving them ownership of the classroom and clearly spelling out my expectations.

References

The Fox Valley Writing Project
The Fox Valley Writing Project, an affiliate of the National Writing Project, is a professional program for kindergarten through post-secondary teachers. It is an innovative effort between the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh College of Education and Human Services and area schools. The program is dedicated to improving the quality of writing instruction in elementary and secondary schools. During the past 15 years more than 325 teachers and administrators have attended the Summer Institutes held on the University campus. These graduate fellows are active members in the FVWP network providing teacher leadership in their schools and local districts, fulfilling the National Writing Project model of teachers teaching teachers.

The Fox Valley Writing Project offers an annual four-week Summer Institute and staff development programs throughout the school year. These programs provide opportunities for teachers to grow as writers and as teachers of writing. For more information, visit the FVWP website: www.coehs.wiwa.edu/outreach/fvwp.
Conferencing in the Writers Workshop: Can We Talk?

Patricia Donaldson, Shattuck Middle School

In teacher preparation classes, I was taught that writers workshops are the best way to teach process writing to students. This style of learning allows students to grow as writers while allowing me, the teacher, to be free to wander around the room conferencing with the writers and inspiring them to be the best they can be. If only it was as easy as it had sounded in class!

My recent internship in an eighth grade classroom taught me many things—not the least of which being that I am definitely not perfect. In January, I proved this fact again when I implemented a writers workshop in my language arts classroom. I set out with the best intentions, but my pre-conceived notions of conferencing got in the way of true success for myself and my students. I pulled out my library card and set out in search of some "How to..." books that I hoped would have the recipe for great conferencing.

My reading revealed some fascinating facts. I was surprised to learn that I am not the only educator who misunderstood the point of conferencing. Many teachers believed that in conferencing we are editing our students’ work. What is important to understand is that conferencing is about talking with the student, not evaluating the student’s work. In Writer to Writer: How to Conference Young Authors, it is mentioned that, "just as [writers] learn to talk by talking to someone who responds, typically a parent, they learn to write by writing to someone who responds" (Thompson 21). Also, according to Thompson, there are five main myths that inhibit the success of teacher/writer conferences are intended to promote. I intend to use these same myths to organize my thoughts and the thoughts of other professionals, into a helpful reference for writers workshop conferencing.

Myth Number 1: The way to conference is to sit down with a writer and read the entire piece and then talk about it (Thompson 53).

Okay, admit it, how many of us believe this myth? I know that I was a true believer. I thought I was being thorough with my students because I sat and read every bit of their writing. Carl Anderson, author of How’s it Going?: A Practical Guide to Conferencing with Student Writers refers to this as the "Gate Keeper" syndrome. I was definitely a "Gate Keeper." In fact, I positioned myself in front of the publishing center and would not allow students to pass to the computers until I had read and approved their entire pieces of writing.

We all feel responsible for helping students write the best that they can, but are we helping them develop when we set limits for their learning? When we set up mandatory checkpoints we silently say, "I don't trust you as a writer." This diminishes confidence in young writers. As a result, they stop taking risks—a practice thought by many professionals to be the key to success in writing.

Nancie Atwell suggests "After-the-fact response from: not only hold a teacher’s advice, apply it to a new context, but to comments" (Atwell 220). Is this of our students? Clearly, it is a student throughout each step of information.

Myth Number 2: Teaching a lesson (Thompson 54).

We are all curious at students who are either already single sentence together. It is ourselves as great teachers, meet every student, ever accept this, for sanity’s sake, conferences. We should keep and when or if we need to the.

Actually, it is quite use index cards. At each c our paper this may be the best and will never get back to the rig.

For those of us who make an easy, one-page chart found in this same book by easy to complete, easy to keep includes the name of each s of the week, and a column f to each student I meet with. later in the week, I put a see publish and an "S" means bottom of the page, I leave: lessons.

Now that you are students the choice to conf comfortable "passing" on workshops and feels it pr interruption and to work o like color-coded signs, will can see from a distance p process.

Exactly how you not important. What is im important steps. Keeping
Nancie Atwell suggests that conferencing should occur while the writer is working on a piece and not when he or she is completely finished with a work. "After-the-fact response from a teacher comes too late; it assumes students will not only hold a teacher's advice in their heads until the next writing occasion and apply it to a new context, but that they actually read the teacher's written comments" (Atwell 220). Is our purpose in using workshops to test the memory of our students? Clearly, it is not. Therefore we must practice guiding the student throughout each step in the writing process, while they apply new information.

Myth Number 2: Teachers need to talk to every writer, every day (Thomason 54).

We are all curious about what our students are writing, especially the students who are either already successful or the few that are struggling to put a single sentence together. It is important to realize that although we may view ourselves as great teachers, even the greatest teacher cannot find the time to meet with every student, every day. Tommy Thomason recommends that we accept this, for sanity's sake, and, instead, develop a way to keep track of our conferences. We should keep a record of who we spoke to, what we spoke about, and when or if we need to check back with them. Simple, Right?

Actually, it is quite simple. One way, suggested in Writer to Writer, is to use index cards. At each conference, pull out a new index card. Write the author's name and work title, along with the date on the top line, then take notes on the rest of the card. Later, file the card in that author's file. If you are a well-organized person this may be the best option for you; however, if you're like me, the cards will never get back to the right place and you'll never see them again.

For those of us who struggle with organization, there is help. We can make an easy, one-page chart for the entire class. With the help of information found in this same book by Thomason, I came up with a conference form that is easy to complete, easy to keep track of, and even easier to refer to. My form includes the name of each student in each section, a column for each of the days of the week, and a column for comments. I place a check in the day column next to each student I meet with. If the student would like me to check in with them later in the week, I put a second check in the box. A "P" means they are ready to publish and an "S" means they would like to share in the author's chair. At the bottom of the page, I leave room for notes that will help me create future mini-lessons.

Now that you are tracking conferences, do not forget to allow your students the choice to conference each day. It is important for each writer to feel comfortable "passing" on a conference. Atwell also allows this during her workshops and feels it provides students an opportunity to work without interruption and to work on more risky, personal pieces. Having preset signals, like color-coded signs, will allow your conferencing to run more smoothly. You can see from a distance who needs attention without disrupting the creative process.

Exactly how you design your tracking and your conference signals is not important. What is important is that you find a way to accomplish these two important steps. Keeping track prevents students from "hiding" and helps you
maintain your sanity. Giving the students the choice of whether or not to conference will help build their confidence and risk taking, and encourage skill development.

Myth Number 3: Teachers read student writing in every conference (Thomason 54).

This myth is similar to number one, but there is a difference. Now that we have established that we don't need to read the entire piece, we also need to let go of the idea that a successful conference requires that you read something. Students who are learning to take risks in writing may not be ready to share their most personal or inventive writing until they become comfortable with it. By asking open-ended questions that focus the writers on their work we can guide them without invading their privacy. It is important that the questions we ask to initiate conversation are familiar to the student. Anderson believes that "by using a predictable opening, I'm simply taking advantage of the student's implicit knowledge of the nature of conversation" (29), and the student begins to feel more comfortable in the conference. Eventually, students will feel enough confidence to share their writing in the conference.

Myth Number 4: Students should be conferred with on every piece they write (Thomason 54).

As teachers of writing, we should focus on developing independent, successful writers. Although we may become great conference partners, we may not have taught our students very much. It is important that we use conferencing as a tool instead of a crutch. As growth occurs in our writers, we should encourage independent writing that requires the writers to ask themselves important developmental questions about their work.

When students begin to ask themselves questions about writing they are growing as writers, whether or not they check in at every step. If we follow Atwell's belief that "[students] need teachers who will guide them to the meanings they don't know yet by showing them how to build on what they do know and can do" (Atwell 218), we will move from editing to coaching roles. In response, our students will move from dependent to independent writers.

Myth Number 5: Conferencing is time-consuming because you need to deal with all the problems and errors you see when you read a piece of student writing (Thomason 54).

In my internship, I also discovered that I was not limiting my students just by being the gatekeeper, I was also limiting their learning by correcting everything in their papers during our conference. Not only were few students able to publish during class time, but I had a hard time with classroom management. However, the biggest problem was that my students were not getting any better at writing. Why should they? Mrs. D. would just fix whatever needed correcting in the conference.

Most of the how-to books I read on conferencing suggested planning just five minutes for each conference. Atwell believes this is a manageable time frame to address problems that the writer may be having. She claims that she uses conferences only "to find out where they are and where they need to go next, and to demonstrate all the ways I know to arrive at the new place" (Atwell 222). I have often forgotten to demonstrate how to use skills when I feel the time crunch of conferencing. My goal was to make decisions about their writing and focusing the conference on that need, I can provide thorough feedback.

If writers know that the decision about their writing, they're afraid to share their work with your goal is to guide their writing." Thomason believes that we are more interested in they feel free to take risks in ones that will help student writers.

Still, there is the question we address that in five minute there is more than one coach, of our resources, both human and aids involved. Parents are in confident, use peer conferencing to write conferencing time. Teach them to edit other student work.

In order to promote guiding our students and no violence, we need to be away to convince them that it is not just not need to use a red marker.

Conferencing gives demonstrate in their writing directing it, the writer will benefit from listening and talking as a developing belief in that writer of their academic potential, student has academic potential.

Conferencing is a native of finding a how-to book it is reading has taught me is that conferences more effective specific question you ask, but your students should track your tracking of conferencing is essential. You long as you get the student managed conference will writer to independence at
crunch of conferencing. My usual response was, "You should do this here," not, "These are some things you may want to try." My students never saw how to make decisions about their writing because I didn't have enough time. By focusing the conference on a specific need, and demonstrating the options for that need, I can provide thorough and useful instruction within the five-minute limit.

If writers know that conferencing is predictable and simply a conversation about their writing, they will be encouraged to take risks. They will not be afraid to share their work with you because they will begin to understand that your role is to guide their writing, not cut it to bits or change it into "the teacher's writing." Thomason believes this and claims that, "Only when students know that we are more interested in what they have to say than how they say it, will they feel free to take risks in their writing" (Thomason 21). These risks are the ones that will help student writers grow.

Still, there is the question of the editing that needs to be done. How do we address that in five-minute conferences? Another simple answer: Remember there is more than one coach, or guide, in the room at a time. We need to use all of our resources, both human and text. In the elementary level, get the volunteers and aids involved. Parents are a great help, too. Later, as students feel more confident, use peer conferences and editing sessions to free up more teacher/writer conferencing time. Teaching students how to use their text resources and how to edit other student work makes them more independent and better writers.

In order to promote advancement in writing we need to make sure we are guiding our students and not patrolling them. In these times of in-school violence, we need to be aware of what our students write, but it is also important to convince them that it is safe to write. We are here to guide or coach, and we do not need to use a red marking pen to do it.

Conferencing gives students a voice that they may not yet be able to demonstrate in their writing. If we encourage this voice by responding to and directing it, the writer will become more confident in their written work. Just by listening and talking as a fellow writer, without condescension, we are demonstrating belief in that writer. As Nancie Atwell determined, "To convince students of their academic potential, we have to demonstrate our expectation that every student has academic potential" (80). Presenting an atmosphere of mutual respect during the conference will initiate effective conversation that will result in improved written work from our students.

Conferencing is a skill that is not learned from a textbook. My initial goal of finding a how-to book that would give me all the answers failed. What my reading has taught me is that there are certain steps you can take to make conferences more effective, and these are what you should focus on. The specific question you ask to open each conference may not always be the same, but your students should expect questions about their writing. Also, though your tracking of conferences may be different with each class you teach, some tracking is essential. You may incorporate your own style into the conference, as long as you get the students talking about their writing. A five-minute, well-managed conference will provide the individual instruction that will guide that writer to independence and success.
Collaborative learning course seldom runs smoothly. Typically, I have found that a group of students are motivated to work, but the essays are not edited by the end. The deadline— arbitrary and unrealistic, is set, and everyone is expected to meet it. The students must interpret the prompt and move quickly to the writing. On the spur of the moment, I give feedback and suggestions for improvement. The collaborative essay is full of sound and fury, signifying group learning activity.
The Collaborative Essay as a Group Learning Activity

Gary Jones, Gibraltar High School

Collaborative learning is like true love: it is an ideal we all seek, but its course seldom runs smoothly. Small group discussions of a short story shift abruptly to Saturday night once the teacher is out of earshot; the art project is completed by the over-achiever while the other collaborators paint their nails or share a snowmobile magazine; the panel presentation, that required a week of preparation, lasts just over a minute. In short, all too often a collaborative project is “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” In my experience, I have found the collaborative essay to be an exception. Every time it has been a successful group learning activity.

I have used this project for a number of years with my freshman honors English classes, with my senior Advanced Placement classes, with general senior English classes, and once, with an accelerated learning class of seventh through tenth graders at WCATY (Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth).

I have found that students do best in a collaborative learning environment if the task, the time-line, and the evaluation are all clearly defined before the project begins. Typically, I will identify the work groups, explain the activity, and give suggestions for working efficiently as a team a day or two before the actual impromptu writing. On the day of the essay writing, students are given the topic and move quickly to the writing lab. Their goal: compose, print, and submit a 500-word essay by the end of the class period. Before we meet the next day, I read the essays and choose the top three, which are awarded prizes: packages of candy that the winners are encouraged to share with the class. I neither grade nor edit the essays, but the winners read their work to the class.

A number of factors make this assignment effective. Students are motivated to work; subsequently, there are meaningful conversations within groups regarding interpretation of literature, effective introductions and thesis statements, and practical organizations. The writing lab is electric with the intensity of the focus and concentration of my young writers. It is exciting and inspiring for me when I watch them!

The deadline—a finished product in one class period—might seem arbitrary and unrealistic, especially because the writing process approach to composition does not prepare students for the demands of an impromptu essay assignment, especially the series of high-stakes essays which make up a large part of the English Advanced Placement exam. This activity proves to them that they can write quickly and competently.

Kids find the project enjoyable. It is a focused, educational/social activity and offers competition in almost a quiz-show setting. There is not the usual pressure of grades, but the carrot of a prize. And when the prizes are awarded and everyone is eating candy, the winners feel like winners, but the losers don’t feel like losers.
The teacher is a winner in this activity, too. It requires very little preparation, minimal supervision, and, perhaps best of all, not much time for the evaluation. This is one more way to increase the meaningful writing that students should be doing without burdening the instructor with still more paperwork.

The collaborative essay is not a substitute for a paper thoughtfully prepared by a student over a period of time, but rather a technical demonstration of writing skills that students have acquired in class. It is one more tool that we can use as we help our young scholars to become better writers.

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**Alternative Education Programs Licensure**

Realities within contemporary schools reveal that structures, curriculum, and instruction in schools are not meeting the needs of a significant number of students. Increasingly, educators are looking for alternative methods and programs where students are more likely to be successful. In response, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has designated a specific license endorsement for educators working in these alternative settings or attempting to adapt methods and curriculum within the regular school setting. To assist teachers in recognizing and developing the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to work in these settings, the College of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater is offering a program of study leading to certification and licensing to teach in these alternative settings.

The Alternative Education Programs Licensure program at UW-Whitewater consists of a year-long sequence of five courses for a total of 15 credits. To register or for more information contact the Summer Session Office by phone at (800) 621-5376 or (262) 472-1100 or by email: continued@mail.uww.edu.

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**Writing for Her Life Literacy**

Deborah J. F

When Lori appeared English in the Fall of 1993, I was seeing her in the office of Hill assistant principal during her and the administrator’s patient stories about her from other students didn’t ask about her. I hadn’t had her problems had been resolved.

Lori’s piercing brow was sturdy and strong—she was a Several of her close friends w opportunity for them to catch and I had several minor confi chart in an attempt to make the response to me was just on the expectations.

In spite of this, Lori lengthy stories about her boy expressing confidence that said good decisions. Most students plans, but Lori and a few other comments in the margins of an interested listener. It seems that our most intimate concerns in her writing in her literacy autobiographic and writing from kindergarten “We would be forced to read to read when I wanted to, as entered high school, “it only remember looking from her fi a book she had chosen to re assignments and participate Venice.

I’d always begin an English, which they called ‘capable of understanding a students.

But this year Lori after the Shakespeare open
Writing for Her Life: Engaging Students in Their Literacy

Deborah J. Kinder, University of Wisconsin - Platteville

When Lori appeared on my class list of seniors who had elected Career English in the Fall of 1993, I wondered if she might be difficult. I remembered seeing her in the office of Hill High School (HHS) with her mother and an assistant principal during her sophomore year. They often appeared to be upset, and the administrator's patience seemed to be wearing thin. I had heard no stories about her from other teachers, and because she wasn't in my classes, I didn't ask about her. I hadn't seen much of her during her junior year, so I hoped her problems had been resolved.

Lori's piercing brown eyes were a prominent feature. Her five-one frame was sturdy and strong - she seemed to know who she was and what she wanted. Several of her close friends were in my class, and our class period provided an opportunity for them to catch up on the plans for the day or the weekend. Lori and I had several minor confrontations early in the fall as I shifted the seating chart in an attempt to make these conversations less disruptive for the class. Her response to me was just on the edge of being rude as we negotiated behavior expectations.

In spite of this, Lori immediately began using her weekly journal to tell lengthy stories about her boyfriends. I reacted with brief but positive responses expressing confidence that she knew what was best for her and would make good decisions. Most students in her class wrote about jobs and weekend plans, but Lori and a few others wrote to me as a confidante. My non-judgmental comments in the margins of her notebook offered her the opportunity to write to an interested listener. It seemed odd to me that even while sharing some of her most intimate concerns in her journal, she often acted resistant in class. Lori wrote in her literacy autobiography on August 30 that she "was always reading and writing" from kindergarten until middle school, where it became tedious. "We would be forced to read these dumb boring books... I guess I only wanted to read when I wanted to, not when someone forced it upon me." When she entered high school, "it only got worse" (Lori, 8/30/93). The only book she could remember liking from her first three years of high school was Alive by Piers Read, a book she had chosen to read for extra credit. However, she had completed assignments and participated in discussions of Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice.

I'd always begin with Shakespeare in order to prove that being in Career English, which they called "Tard" (retarded) English, meant that they were capable of understanding and enjoying an author seen as inaccessible by many students.

But this year Lori and her classmates were in for something different after the Shakespeare opening. In July of 1993, I had been invited to participate in
a research group of teachers and professors. I joined a network of innovative and experienced middle and high school teachers for a weekend at South Haven, MI, a resort town on the Lake Michigan shore. David Schaafsma, who had become my friend as well as my advisor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Jay Robinson at The University of Michigan, and Patty Stock at Michigan State University had both been awarded a grant from the Bingham Trust to implement their Write for Your Life (WFYL) project in our classrooms. They proposed that we use a workshop approach to encourage students to write about health issues affecting their lives. The hope was that the writing would lead to inquiry-based curricula and research which might ultimately result in positive changes in the lifestyles which were affecting our students' health and well being.

In the WFYL project, our mission as teachers was to create a curriculum with our students which would allow engaged and reflective literacy to happen in our classrooms. The stories I shared with colleagues from Michigan and Wisconsin in writing workshops, over dinner, on long walks, before falling asleep, and in the car traveling to and from South Haven strengthened my resolve to make this “writing for their lives” work for my students. By the end of the weekend, the group began to dispel the isolation I had felt at HHS.

Our community of teachers and university facilitators met face-to-face five times during the 1993-94 school year: once in Chicago, once in Pittsburgh, and three more weekends in Michigan. Many of the teachers were visited by the nearby professors who were part of the WFYL network. I depended on daily contact with my colleagues through an email list serve, on which messages were distributed to all WFYL teachers and professors. I knew that my teaching soul mates were listening to my stories and that I could learn from their experiences as well.

My Wisconsin Writing Project experience during the month before the South Haven meeting further encouraged my belief that I could use student-centered curriculum. The federally-funded National Writing Project has sites in all fifty states where teachers learn to trust themselves as writers and teachers of writing (http://writingproject.org). Under Schaafsma's guidance, the class provided opportunities to become a writing community immersed in lively conversations about our own writing and about creating supportive classrooms where our student writers could thrive.

I knew that assigning students to write about health issues in my English classroom could be controversial at HHS, but I was counted on support from Schaafsma and from my newly-formed group of colleagues in Michigan and Wisconsin. Knowing that we'd be telling WFYL stories at our meetings and on the list serve network encouraged me to listen for stories to share.

In late October, I told my students about my research and assigned them to write stories about health issues which had affected their lives. I suggested that they write about physical and mental illnesses and accidents which had affected them, their relatives, or their friends. The stories were workshopped in small groups and on the day the first draft was due, I invited students to read theirs aloud to the class. Melissa was a new student who had transferred to HHS at the beginning of her senior year; she was shy and soft spoken. Her group encouraged it, she consented.

Melissa's beautifully cancer and the respect which skill seemed to invite Lori and stories. Ted immediately told hand smoke causing his grand continuing topic of conversational didn't smoke, Lori was very a.

A week after hearing her letter dated November 10, 1993, an answer: she had been a patient during I been her at the office so often.

I did not have soporomore year, my b. first serious boyfriend loved him. Well, I think I realize it wasn't like. I hit an all-t and family. I was no I had buried myself in anyone again for fear. Well, school. My mom would have it school. I was going close to trying it. I was in the bathroom and I had to get the pills out, now. I had to go withing, I was sitting home didn't do much. All I time I was thinking: It's hard for me. Was scared. I wanted my friends... They Well, as in me getting some help. Madison. One night we hardly breathe woke up in a hospital. I learned I was in this hospital. I was severely deprived. Let me tell you who were in there w.
spoken. Her group encouraged her to share her story, and when I offered to read it, she consented.

Melissa’s beautifully written story of her mother’s death from lung cancer and the respect which was earned for both her experience and her writing skill seemed to invite Lori and many other students to share their personal stories. Ted immediately told the class the story of his grandfather’s second-hand smoke causing his grandmother’s death from lung cancer. Smoking was a continuing topic of conversation during the rest of the year, and although she didn’t smoke, Lori was very anxious to help her boyfriend quit smoking.

A week after hearing Melissa’s story, Lori volunteered to read her story dated November 10, 1993, aloud to the class. She had written about the depression she had suffered during her sophomore year. This story explained why I’d seen her in the office so often.

What People Don’t Know

I did not have a typical sophomore year. See, the summer before my sophomore year, my boyfriend of eight months broke up with me. He was my first serious boyfriend, and when he broke up with me, it broke my heart. I loved him. Well, I thought I did. I look back now on the whole situation now, and realize it wasn’t love. It was infatuation.

I hit an all-time low when that happened. I lost all interest in friends and family. I was no longer the happy-go-lucky Lori. It’s like I was dead inside. I had buried myself into my own little world. I never wanted to get that close to anyone again for fear they would leave me, too.

Well, school started, but nothing changed. There would be mornings my mom would have to yell at me, and literally pull me out of bed to go to school. All I wanted was to die. I had even thought about it, and came very close to trying it. I was just so sick of hurting. One day after school, I went in the bathroom and decided to take every kind of pill I could find. Just as I started to get the pills out, my mom came home.

I had to go to counseling to deal with my problem. But that’s just it. What was wrong with me? While everyone was getting excited about Homecoming, I was sitting home crying and feeling miserable. Anyway, the counseling didn’t do much. All I heard was that in time, things would get better. The whole time I was thinking: “The counselor doesn’t know anything, what a joke!”

It’s hard for people to understand what I went through that year... I was scared. I wanted help, but there was no one there. I felt like I was losing my friends... They wanted to help me, they just didn’t know how...

Well, as months went by, and things didn’t improve, my mom looked at getting me some help. She found an in-patient program at a hospital in Madison. One night I had a terrible breakdown. I was crying hysterically. I could hardly breathe. My mom came in and held me. The next thing I knew, I woke up in a hospital.

I learned that my parents drove me to Madison that night. I was to stay in this hospital until I was better. I found out what was wrong with me. I was severely depressed...

Let me tell you, a psychiatric ward is not for crazy people. The people who were in there were suffering from depression, were victims of rape, or were
suffering from some form of physical/sexual abuse. I spent a month in that hospital. The people there were so caring and did so much for me. They helped me become what I am today—a strong and stable person. I will never forget them.

When I got home, I thought everything would be O.K. Boy, was I wrong. No one would talk to me, not even my friends. They had the attitude, "Oh, that could never happen to me." Well, they are so wrong. It can happen to anyone. Plain as day. I did try to tell people why I went away, but they just stared at me with this empty, strange look. I felt unwanted.

Luckily, summer was only a month away... [and... as summer came, some of my friends started to come around...]

As my junior year began, things started to go back to normal, somewhat. The sad thing about the whole thing is that I don't remember much about my sophomore year. All I remember is the depression and the hospital. So, when I said I didn't have a typical sophomore year, it wasn't a joke. (Lori, 11/10/93)

Lori shared this story with her writing group and then decided that it was safe to read it aloud to the class. Some of them who listened attentively had been the friends who had not been supportive during her depression.

Sal Vascellaro and Celia Genishi stress classroom safety which allows student stories to emerge: "Stories, when they can be told in safe places, are their theories, ways of testing what others feel and think" (216).

When Lori finished reading, there was no discussion. Her friend Terri immediately volunteered to read a story about her cousin's suicide which had been shared with very few people. When Terri left in tears, Lori followed to offer comfort. Was this good, students leaving in tears? We were writing and talking about important stories which apparently needed to be told, but what price would we pay for their painful relevance? The WFYL teacher network which had been established in Michigan was as close as my computer, and without the immediate support I received from the list serv, I might not have begun or continued this curriculum. My WFYL colleagues were having similar experiences, but none of our students were complaining about irrelevant writing assignments.

We worried about the teacher/therapist distinction, and we did not hesitate to call on parents, counselors, and administrators when necessary. "The teacher is not, and must not be, a therapist" (Anderson and MacCurdy 284). His twenty-one-year-old student writing about her abusive childhood led Guy Allen to conclude that his role as a teacher was to offer a safe place where students can decide which stories to tell.

Alice Brand, who supports the healing nature of writing with her brain biology research, says:

We make a serious mistake by not helping students to address their psychological lives, to continually humanize themselves... Students make peace with themselves by writing about their experiences; they understand what is happening around them... As central as cognition is, without emotion, memory and learning could not occur. And what is healing if not learning. (Anderson and MacCurdy 217)

Lori wrote almost exclusively about her boyfriends in her journal, so I was surprised when she wrote was so powerful. You never talk to each day... I never would have without your motivation" (Kibler, 1994 following her graduation). She responded, "There's some people—I put downs, you know—story, but I didn't know how dealing with "real life" issue that—your obviously the only one who seems like teacher-student, I think. So a lot of it was you as a friend to help me realize the curriculum. I was seeing an understanding of their stories rather than my own problems. My nurturing role research was conducted...

"I felt comfortable that I have known forever, the people that I wouldn't think of. I just felt like I was part of the summer, the entire classroom community. Several theorists..."

The storytelling self might develop through the possibility for forming which individuals at Genishi 5)

The very act of telling of stories...

Adrienne Rich's and peer relationships:

[My daily life as a student is not the same as it was at the beginning. To me, it is too healthy to try to write a story about the trials and tribulations of trying to write a story."

Lori's class met the class had grown up up and years. There were no stories out to me thus far in my
was surprised when she wrote to me on November 12: “English class yesterday was so powerful. You never know what to expect when you walk in the class each day. . . I never would have been able to tell the story of my depression without your motivation” (Kinder journal 3). In an interview during the summer of 1994 following her graduation, I asked Lori to explain how I had motivated her. She responded, “There’s something about the way you teach, . . . you encourage people—no put downs, you know? . . . Since junior year, I’ve wanted to tell my story, but I didn’t know how to go about doing it.” She agreed with me that dealing with “real life” issues helped her, but insisted, “you’re the only teacher that— you’re obviously the teacher I’ve been closest with, because others— it seems like teacher-student, but now I feel like friends-friends, you know, besides teacher. So a lot of it was you.” Her definition of my teaching role as that of a friend helped me to realize that my teaching style was changing with the WFYL curriculum. I was seeing and treating my students differently, with respect for their stories rather than a maternal concern that I needed to help them fix their problems. My nurturing role was shifting to that of listener and facilitator in the research we were conducting together.

“I felt comfortable in that class,” said Lori, “because it was everybody that I have known forever. And so many people were also open, you know, people that I wouldn’t think would talk about stuff they’ve been through . . . for some reason I just felt like it was OK.” While in class she was giving credit to me, but at the end of the summer after her graduation, she could acknowledge that the entire classroom community had influenced her as well.

Several theorists offer explanations for her experience:

The storytelling self is a social self, who declares and shapes important relationships through the mediating power of words. Thus, in sharing stories, we have the potential for forging new relationships, including local classroom “cultures” in which individuals are interconnected and new “we’s” are formed. (Dyson and Genishi 5)

The very act of telling stories made the classroom a safe culture for the telling of stories. Adrienne Rich suggests that the safety issue goes beyond the teacher and peer relationships:

(My daily life as a teacher confronts me with young men and women who have had language and literature used against them, to keep them in their place, to mystify, to bully, to make them feel powerless. . . . The whole question of trust as a basis for the act of reading or writing has only opened up since we began trying to educate those who have every reason to mistrust literary culture. For young adults trying to write seriously for the first time in their lives, the question “whom can I trust?” must be an underlying boundary to be crossed before real writing can occur. (63-64)

Lori’s class met five days a week for fifty-two minutes, and most of the class had grown up and spent time together in and outside of school for twelve years. There were no students of color, and although five students have come out to me thus far in my teaching career, none of these Career English students
identified themselves as gay or lesbian. On the surface my students were relatively homogeneous, and they had known each other for a long time. Melissa was new, but the oral publication of her story helped her to be accepted into the group. Her trust in her new classmates helped them to realize they could trust themselves. “What they say, to whom, in what context, depending on the energy they/we have for the struggle on a particular day, is the result of conscious and unconscious assessments of the power relations and safety of the situation” (Ellsworth 313). Before speaking and acting in our classroom, my students and I continuously assess relations of power and safety. My responsibility as teacher is to be aware of this dynamic as I invite students to take risks and respect the risks being taken by their classmates.

After listening to volunteer readers, I assigned students to interview and write a story about another person who was dealing with the health issue they had chosen or to write a new health story using ideas they’d heard from their classmates. From stories told by themselves and others, I wanted my students to identify a research question from the narratives. I hoped that by identifying and answering authentic questions, we could reduce the anxiety produced by their health issues, and students could gain the knowledge necessary to take some action to mitigate their effect on their lives. And in the process writing, reading, and researching could become engaging adventures in literacy.

Lori was beginning a relationship with Scott, a boy in our class who was a heavy smoker. I was reading about him in her journal. Her initial research question was, “How can I help someone quit smoking?” (Kinder journal 19-20). In her story of an interview with Scott about quitting smoking, he made it quite clear that it was his decision, and he was not interested in becoming her project. I wondered why she had abandoned her depression story.

The class explored the topics in discussion while we read selections from literature which I hoped would match the questions behind their stories. I hoped to look at published texts as empowering stories rather than inaccessible literature.

As inquiry-based writing has become the centerpiece of my curriculum, I became aware that I had spent most of my teaching career finding books to “teach” to my students by suggesting possible connections between literature and their lives. When we began by writing about their lives, I tried to find literature which would complement the questions they were asking in the stories. It wasn’t easy, and I felt somewhat uncomfortable about allowing writing to replace literature’s center-stage position in my classroom.

Some of the issues which came up in student writing could be related to a book I’ve been “teaching” to senior English classes since it was published in 1980. We had talked about a chapter in which a lesbian was raped in The Women of Brewer Place, but our discussion centered more on the homophobia than on the rape itself. Lori surprised me in mid-January by changing her topic from trying to get Scott to quit smoking to date rape.

On February 7, Lori brought me “When He’s Not a Stranger,” a third person narrative which began by describing Nicki’s first serious relationship with a boy she met during her freshman year. Jason came along to “comfort” Jen after she had left the room. He knew something was wrong. Jen was crying, and he decided to help her. Jen had lived a hard life, and she didn’t say much. Nicki was at the shelter, and she had missed the bus. Jen had been so patient that she fell back, wiped the tears from her face, and kissed her. There we

Nicki followed. He was no longer Je then; he was just a young man. They cried out, “Jason, it’s over.”

The paper goes on to explain the experiences of rape and its aftermath.

Some adv

The immediacy of the rape story, the reason for the denials, and the situation which seems to fit Lo1
a boy she met during her freshman year. She had just broken up with him, when
Jason came along to "comfort" her that night:

After Jen had left, Nicki tried to put on a front, but Jason knew Nicki better than
that. He knew something was up, and when he asked what was wrong, Nicki
broke down again. He put his arm around her and held her while she cried.
When she finally stopped, he asked her if she wanted to go for a walk. She
agreed, feeling like she needed some fresh air anyway.

Jen lived a block away from a park. On the way to the park, they
didn't say much. Nicki thought about Paul, and started to cry again. As they sat
down on a bench at the park, Jason held Nicki again while she cried. He was
being so patient through the whole ordeal, that Nicki gave him a hug. Jason
wiped the tears from her eyes and gave her a kiss. Nicki felt o.k. with it, so she
kissed him back. Jason wanted some more privacy, so he offered to go behind
the shelter. There were some tall trees here, and they wouldn't be disturbed.

Nicki followed Jason behind the trees, and Jason suddenly changed.
He was no longer Jason. He pushed Nicki down on the cold hard ground. He
got on top of her and began kissing her and touching her. Nicki didn't know
what to do. Jason was supposed to be her best friend. She trusted him. She
cried out, "Jason, stop. I don't want to do this."

Jason just looked at her with those cold gray eyes and said, "No."
She, at one time Nicki had told Jason that she wanted him. Jason
brought this to Nicki's attention, and Nicki told Jason that she didn't want it like
that, and she didn't want it then. Jason called her a liar, and began taking off
her pants. Nicki was crying hysterically, but didn't know what to do. She was
scared for her life.

All of a sudden, Nicki felt a sharp pain. She looked down, and saw
that Jason was having sex with her. Only, it wasn't sex. At least, it didn't feel
that way with Paul. With Paul, there was no pain, and there was no force. She
had no idea what was going on. She had no idea she was being raped, and by
her best friend . . .

The paper goes on to discuss Nicki's trauma in the two years following
the rape and ends with this:

Some advice for you is to be careful. Trust people, but only to some
extent. When going on a first date with someone, drive yourself, or go double
with another couple. Whatever you do, don't let yourself be alone with him.
Wait until you get to know him first. If sex isn't the only thing he wants from you,
he'll be O.K. with that. Also, always remember these important facts:
1. Rape can happen to anyone, at anytime, in anyplace. It knows no color, no
race, no age. It can happen to anyone, plain as day.
2. You can never be too careful—enough said.

The immediacy of her language led me to suspect that this was Lori's
story, the reason for the depression her sophomore year. She had not included
herself in the story, but I sensed her presence. Deena Metzger offers an explana-
tion which seems to fit Lori's choice of writing style:
When we write stories in the first person, we have the most direct communication between self, writer, and audience. But in the beginning, it may be easier to tell stories in the third person to overcome self-consciousness or inhibition. Writers who are shy of their intelligence when speaking in their own voices about themselves can use the device of a narrator speaking about someone else to stay close to the material. (58)

The didactic tone at the end suggested that Lori had an audience in mind, although she didn’t read it to the class.

When I praised it, she asked me to show it to another teacher whose Peer Facilitating class had visited HHS English classes just before prom during the previous school year. The peer facilitators’ discussions had begun with a reading of an actual prom date-rape story. Lori hoped her story could be used for a similar presentation. She also asked me to send the story to Michigan State University where a graduate assistant working for WFYI was soliciting submissions for the second publication of student writing. Three stories from our school, including Melissa’s, had appeared in the first edition; Lori hoped to see her story in a future edition.

In my journal for January 16, 1994, I had noted that her journal entries were including more information about her family: “She writes that her parents are in the early stages of a divorce as her mom can’t deal with her dad’s alcoholism any more. She also learned from her brother’s wife that her brother’s drinking is causing him to become abusive” (20). Alcohol was not being discussed in our classroom even though I knew from conversations overheard on Monday mornings that weekend partying centered on consuming a lot of alcohol. It was unusual to find it mentioned in Lori’s journal, but neither she nor her classmates talked about their own use of alcohol. I wondered a little about the absence of alcohol in their health concerns. I noted in my journal that her specific research question was “What causes a person to rape someone and what can a woman do to protect herself?” (25). I had allowed several weeks to write and talk about research topics, because I wanted to be sure students were selecting questions which they really wanted answered in their research. Lori was not the only one to change her mind.

After several postponements, the students’ speeches were finally delivered during the week of February 16. This culminating activity synthesized the research which had emerged to answer the questions we had found in their stories. Lori had collected quite a bit of information to answer her questions. She delivered a dry list of facts about date rape with an intensity which held her audience’s attention. I wondered whether I was the only one in the room who suspected that Lori had been a victim.

In my March 5 journal, I wrote, “When speeches were finished, I mentioned that I wished my freshmen (English classes) could have heard them in order to prevent some of the addictions which the seniors were struggling with, and several students expressed interest in talking to them” (36).

Lori was one of sixteen students who volunteered to speak to my younger students. I suggested that they rehearse these speeches to our classes for practice, and when Lori delivered her speech, her classmates suggested that she needed to make it more interesting for an audience of freshmen.

I took her aside and story she had written about N true. I responded without sure and said that she would be victim, as part of her speech. was “relieved” that I already knew she was ready stories. The boyfrined prob hadn’t been the whole story.

Lori unusual:

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Our conversation o about it with her parents ove still sure that this was what: speech to her senior English she had been raped. She spr Her boyfriend Scott came w smoking habit. He stayed to Since her speech at autobiographical testimony and Jason story were shared versions of stories allow for “Decisions as to which story definition to a life but serve Noddings :)

Lori’s four differ contrary voices, multiple pt complexity” (Schaafsma). I community and the freedom stories as she constructed b from Stock, who credits Mil her classroom:

In his important book persuasively that the populated, even over accented during occasi language, Bakhtin tell another. Or, to put i participate...and invitat utterances. (9-10)
I took her aside and suggested that she add some selections from the story she had written about Nicki. At that point she told me that the story was true. I responded without surprise that I had suspected as much. She paused again and said that she would tell her audience that she had been a date-rape victim, as part of her speech. In our 1994 summer interview, she told me that she was “relieved” that I already knew and hadn’t been shocked by her story.

Now she was ready to fill in some of the spaces in her autobiographical stories. The boyfriend problem mentioned in her first story about depression hadn’t been the whole story. Shoshana Felman probably wouldn’t have found Lori unusual:

Tsunami cannot be simply remembered, it cannot simply be “confessed”; it must be testified to, in a struggle shared between a speaker and a listener to recover something the speaking subject is not—and cannot be— in possession of. Insofar as any feminine existence is in fact a traumatized existence, feminine autobiography cannot be a confession. It can only be a testimony to survival. And like other testimonies to survival, its struggle is to testify at once to life and to death—the dying—the survival has catalyzed. (Felman)

Our conversation occurred on a Friday, and I suggested that she talk about it with her parents over the weekend. On the following Monday, she was still sure that this was what she wanted to do, and later in the week she gave the speech to her senior English class. They were respectful of her revelation that she had been raped. She spoke to my three ninth grade classes on March 18. Her boyfriend Scott came with her and spoke about the addictive power of his smoking habit. He stayed to provide moral support for Lori.

Since her speech contained much more advice than narrative, Lori’s autobiographical testimony could be seen as incomplete. The details of the Nicki and Jason story were shared only with me and a few other teachers. Different versions of stories allow for choices about what will and won’t be included. “Decisions as to which stories will be told and which suppressed not only give definition to a life but serve as a form of power for the writer” (Witherell and Noddings 1).

Lori’s four different stories about her rape are clearly “representing contrary voices, multiple perspectives in a way that can capture each version’s complexity” (Schaafsma). Her growing confidence in the safety of our dialogic community and the freedom of the narrative mode allowed her to try on different stories as she constructed her experience. I have borrowed the term “dialogic” from Stock, who credits Mikhail Bakhtin and Paulo Freire with its relevance for her classroom:

In his important book The Dialogic Imagination, for example, Bakhtin argues persuasively that the language we use when we talk or write to each other is populated, even overpopulated, with meanings—not only historical meanings secured during occasions of present use. If we gloss the texts we make with our language, Bakhtin tells us, we discover in them multiple voices in dialogue with one another. Or, to put it another way: when we speak and write to one another, we participate—and invite others to participate—in dialogue already underway in our utterances. (9-10)
Lori had used two written versions of her story to offer her readers glimpses into the inner dialogues which had been ongoing since she had been raped as a ninth grader. According to Rich:

If the imagination is to transcend and transform experience, it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at the moment. You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is renaming. (43)

In Lori's case, love did indeed become hate, and to use her words, summer became winter during her depression. In her first story, "What People Don't Know," Lori named her depression in an apparently autobiographical story. The story sounded true, but there were still things that her readers wouldn't know as she chose to omit the origin of the illness. Next, she created a fiction about Nicki's rape in "When He's Not a Stranger," another construction of her story. Tim O'Brien has been writing stories for many years—mixing fiction and memoir—about his combat experience in Vietnam. In The Things They Carried, he tells several versions of the same story and reflects on what is "true" in his narratives:

By telling stories, you objectify your experience. You separate it from yourself. You pin down certain truths. You make up others. You start sometimes with an incident that truly happened... and you carry it forward by inventing incidents that did not in fact occur but that nonetheless help to clarify and explain. (179-180)

The first version of Lori's persuasive speech about date rape, which I have not included, contained facts and advice from experts about date rape. In the fourth telling of the story, she combined outside research with her insider's first person narrative for her speech to the ninth graders.

I, too, wrote several versions of Lori's story in my graduate classes until I was finally ready to include the following story which I'd left out because it's messy, and I've only recently begun to understand its importance. I hadn't even written about it in my journal, but I remembered it vividly.

When Lori came to speak to my fourth-hour class on March 18, 1994, she had already presented to a first-hour ninth grade class. Fourth hour was my most outspoken group, and when Lori finished speaking, she invited questions from the class.

Randall: Why does it seem like it's always the guy's fault, too? But, well, most of the time it is, but not always. It's not always the guy's fault.

Lori: (Visibly shaken by the question.) How do you figure?

Randall: It's not like— you sounded like it's one-sided, it's one-dimensional, that it's the guy's fault, he deserves to (unintelligible) in the first place and un--
he should be prosecuted and stuff like that. You know that sometimes it is the
guy’s fault, and sometimes it’s also the girl’s fault.

Lori: How do you figure it’s the lady’s fault?

Randall: The way she acts, the way she might be--

Lori: (interrupting) It doesn’t matter. If she says no, that means no. What part
wouldn’t a man understand? No is no. If she doesn’t want it, the man stops. I
don’t care if she--I don’t care if they’re laying in bed together and he’s got the
condom on ready to go. If she changes her mind and she says no, he’s gotta
listen to her.

(Next there was a question from another student about whether girls could be
prosecuted for statutory rape. Lori answered yes, and I defined the legal term.
Although girls/women have falsely accused men of raping them, my gut feeling
was that Randall was more interested in harassing Lori than in opening a
meaningful conversation about this issue.)

Lori: Another thing, I’m not here to try and scare you guys. I mean, just want
you guys to be educated. If I knew the stuff I do now, there are a lot of
precautions I could have taken. I wouldn’t want to see this happen to you
guys. Listen please, if a woman says no, just listen to her. Rape is something
that will be on your record.

After her speech, Lori and Scott went out in the hall. She was shaking
and close to tears. She was justifiably worried that this harassment might
happen again. I complimented her on her presence of mind in handling the
difficult situation calmly and assertively. I spoke to the class, Randall, and his
father about his rudeness. A couple of months later, Lori told me that he had
apologized to her. He said that he’d been dared by some students who had
heard her speech during first hour. She was very pleased with the apology, and I
complimented him too.

I hadn’t considered that Lori might not be safe in my ninth grade
classrooms. I may have been wrong to assume that all of my students would be
as respectful of her story as her classmates had been. Was I wrong to allow her
to take this risk with ninth grade boys who could be more enticed by dares than
sensitive to others’ feelings? Her courage and her need to tell her rape story as a
prevention lesson kept me from stopping her. We were lucky that this situation
didn’t cause more harm than it did. Eventually, Randall appeared to learn from it
as well.

Rather than feeling vulnerable, Lori was proud of herself for speaking to
the ninth graders.

My daughter is a member of Lori’s graduating class, but she wasn’t a
student in our English class. As far as I know, she has not been raped; if she
were, I would support her decision to write and share her story. Like Lori’s
mother must have, I would have agonized with her during her depression when
she was learning to name her sorrow by telling her story.
In our summer interview, Lori talked about her growth: “Since junior year I’ve wanted to tell my story, but I didn’t know how to go about doing it. .you know, most classes don’t do anything like that, and then, .in your class. we start dealing with real life issues, and here’s my chance to come out.” In our class, she found a “community in which each self both stands out and fits in” (Dyson and Genishi, 237).

Her counselors in the hospital had suggested that she keep a journal, and she had taken their advice. They had also told her that she would eventually be able to tell others about her rape as she recovered and came to name herself as a survivor rather than a victim. In my role as a trusted listener, I had helped. According to Dori Laub:

Hearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other—in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to somebody, to somebody they have been waiting for a long time (Felman and Laub, 70-71).

I wasn’t the first person to hear Lori’s story, but in my role as a teacher, I was closer to the public arena, and our classroom allowed her a larger audience. By speaking in freshman classrooms, she could “help other people” which would be the “only good part that ever came out of this rape” (8/24/94). Through writing and speaking her story, she named herself as a survivor who could prevent other girls from becoming victims of rape.

The confidence she felt in this transformation led her to approach me about a concern with the health curriculum at our high school. In her speech, she had been uncomfortable telling her audience that they would have to wait until their junior or senior year to learn more about date rape in their classes at HHS. When she expressed an interest in having date rape discussed in the required freshman health curriculum, I suggested that she talk to the teachers involved. She began by asking her senior social problems teacher how he felt about this suggestion; she’d been around the high school long enough to know that teachers have proprietary feelings about “their” curricula. He agreed, so she then approached the health teacher who taught both freshman and advanced health. Lori had moved her issue from a personal level into social action by speaking to the entire ninth grade and proposing curriculum changes in three classes:

To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Men are not built in science, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (Freire 76)

Lori’s personal and social activism surpassed my wildest daydreams when I had read Paulo Freire for the first time in 1991. Her achievements could not have been attained had I been focusing on preparing my students to pass a standardized test. I could not have written a lesson plan or designed measurable outcomes to insure her success. I learned from her stories to pay attention to my students as I encourage the I could allow this to happen who listen to my stories at needed for a community of Freire’s praxis, or the integ range of forms for many of and re-tell Lori’s writing, s then feel-good stories. Fro

The act of filling a j alters the writer’s role consciousness and at the world, and in so a self that takes resp MacCurdy, 281)

In our summer int had ever taken, because I have carefully structured t about one thing. I always: the students had a different students’ stories and quest literacy to understand and research by listening to the classroom “a radical space Freire cautioned t us must reinvent his ideas consider as you reinvent a students:

1. Create a class trusting studer each other.
2. Invite students topics for the journals and ti
3. Listen for each answers can p
4. Offer time and questions.
5. Listen for and grow out of th

Note: Permission has been included here.
students as I encourage them to engage in writing their own narrative curriculum. I could allow this to happen because of the network of teachers and professors who listen to my stories about my students. Thus we developed the trust needed for a community of teachers and learners in my WFYL classroom. Freire’s praxis, or the integration of reflection and action, occurred in a wide range of forms for many of my students, but Lori’s dramatic story is the one I tell and re-tell. Lori’s writing, speaking, and advocating for curricular change is more than feel-good stories. From her I learned, as Guy Allen did, that:

The act of filling a page with the meaning the writer chooses to put into the world alters the writer’s relationship to self and world. The writer becomes conscious of consciousness and at once defines and transcends a situation. The writer acts upon the world, and in so doing produces a changed world and a changed self in the world, a self that takes responsibility for deciding what meaning is. (Anderson and MacCurdy, 281)

In our summer interview, Lori said that ours was the “oddest” class she had ever taken, because I didn’t have a “set plan” like most of her teachers who have carefully structured their classes. “You went with the flow.” She was wrong about one thing. I always had a plan for the class, but it was always negotiable if the students had a different agenda. My plan was and will be to listen to my students’ stories and questions, to engage them in the larger story of how to use literacy to understand and shape their lives. My plan is now to conduct my research by listening to their stories and find the resources which will make our classroom “a radical space of possibility” (hooks 12) for all of us.

Freire cautioned that if we follow him, we destroy him. Instead each of us must reinvent his ideas with our students. These guidelines may be helpful to consider as you reinvent an engaging and authentic curriculum with your students:

1. Create a classroom environment which is as safe as possible by trusting students and insisting that they respect themselves and each other.
2. Invite students to write and share stories about their lives. Find topics for these stories by listening for common themes in their journals and their conversations.
3. Listen for each student’s authentic research questions whose answers can provide a sense of agency in students’ lives.
4. Offer time and resources to research and share answers to their questions.
5. Listen for and work with opportunities for social action which may grow out of their research.

Note: Permission has been attained for publishing samples of student writing included here.
References
Lori. Interview, August 24, 1994.
Lori. Interview, July 6, 1996.