

Western Kentucky University

Writing Project Newsletter

FALL 2011, Volume 14, Issue 2



From the Director

These last weeks of the fall semester, as the dropping mercury moves me from shirtsleeves to sweatshirts, I find myself wanting to look in two directions at once. Just as I start to review and re-assess the semester about to come to a close (why, oh why, did I schedule all those papers due the week before exams?), I also start wanting to hatch new plans for the semester to come. Who doesn't look forward to the first days of that new unit or course after Christmas when students return to school shiny, rested, and optimistic? With that same sense of accomplishment and anticipation, as your new Writing Project Director, I'm pleased to take this opportunity to look back over some Writing Project highlights of summer and fall 2011 and to anticipate upcoming events for 2012.

This past June, I was fortunate to arrive on campus in time to participate in the WKU Writing Project's 25th year celebration. What a great time everyone had revisiting the early years and accomplishments of the Project! I enjoyed thumbing through the anthology from my own summer institute, Project XIII, among those on display. Then, too, we got to celebrate our own Hometown Hero, John Hagaman, and his 25-year leadership of the Project!

In early July, Lisa Cary and I, along with about a dozen other leaders and fellows from KWP sites, met in Utah with representatives from sites in New York and Colorado at the launch of the two-year NWP Literacy in the Common Core initiative. Kentucky WP sites are creating, testing, and analyzing Common Core modules to use for professional development. You'll be hearing lots more about this work in the months to come.

On September 17, Beth Wallace, Denise Reetzke, and Lisa Ziemke gave presentations at the KWP conference in Richmond. I hope others of you will consider proposing presentations for this conference next fall. On October 20, our New Teacher Workshop was held at South Warren Middle School. We thank Eddy Bushman, principal at SWMS, for providing the facility. Sara Jennings, Mollie Wade, Cindy McIntyre, Tom Stewart, Audrey Harper, and Laura Houchens led individual sessions. This workshop was planned by Sara Jennings, Mollie Wade, and Laura Houchens with Jennifer Montgomery, director of the WKU Reading Project. The same group also planned the fall mini-demonstration conference, held on November 12. Attendees at the November conference learned strategies and received materials for teaching core-content-based lessons. Also this fall, Denise Henry has been leading a book study group at Barnes & Noble. Six participants are meeting twice monthly to discuss *Can We Skip Lunch and Keep Writing?* by Julie D. Ramsay.

The week before Thanksgiving, I attended the NWP annual directors' meeting in Chicago. Sharon Washington, Linda Friedrich, and Elyse Eidman-Aadahl spoke to the group about the importance of sustaining Writing Project values in our sites as we think of ways to re-invent ourselves in a new economic climate. They emphasized that empowering teachers to empower students through inquiry and writing remains the core NWP vision. I know you all are aware of the transformative power of that vision in your own classrooms! We were encouraged to hear about federal SEED money for which NWP has submitted a grant, with a decision about funding expected in January. In the meantime, plans for carrying out the work of our local site at WKU go forward with support from the state, including the 2012 Summer Institute, although some modifications may be necessary without federal funding.

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Just What I Needed: SUMMER ADVANCED WRITING RETREAT

By Denise Henry

“This has been exactly what I needed,” one participant remarked, referring to the Alumni Summer Retreat. What did this teacher of 20 + years need? “I need alone time to write,” she explained further. Three days in June were dedicated to “alone” writing time as well as small-group conference time. Eight Writing Project Fellows met at Park Mammoth Resort with paper, pencil and a desire to put thoughts in writing. One appealing aspect of the Retreat is the location: secluded area, peaceful surroundings and beautiful nature.

Sitting atop a Kentucky knob and overlooking the farmland of Barren County one can get lost in the sounds of cicadas and crickets, corn and tobacco growing tall or the fact that

you are *not* in the middle of city traffic. Now, I am ready to lose myself in words, thoughts, images: writing.

The first writing prompt presented various types of doorknobs: “What door might this doorknob open?” “Who is opening the door?” Who or what is on the other side of the door?” It doesn’t take much prompting to inspire lovers of writing to fill a page with ideas because they have been starved, deprived of the time to fulfill a passion. Now, free from school and home responsibilities the creative juices flow freely causing smiles and at times tears to appear on faces.

One lady wrote a professional piece while another chose fiction, yet another unlocked emotions from a personal experience, each choosing to spend their time as they most needed. Conference peers offered suggestions, insights and encouragements to continue and continue we did – writing, conferencing, discussing, sharing and growing. We grew as writers which meant we grew as teachers of writing. Ralph Fletcher has reminded us in several of his books and workshops that we can not

effectively teach the craft of writing to others until *we* become craftsmen. This can be accomplished by learning from others, but as true craftsmen we have to practice our craft as well. How can we understand the frustration of writer’s block or the disappointment of limited time our students feel if we are not placed in similar situations? When we open our private thoughts for review by our peers we can understand better the vulnerable state we place our students in when we instruct them to “share with the group” or if we never experience the joy, excitement or self-fulfillment through sharing our writing, how can we instill that in our students? Oh yes, writing workshops and training sessions are needed for our continued growth, but personal writing time can also aid us in reaching our



professional proficiency.

The group of writers, most having been together for at least two summers, have grown close, building a network of friends and colleagues on whom we can rely for help. Discussions were held concerning several relevant and timely topics: new state standards, assessments, the affect of no portfolio assessment, instructional hurdles and much more. Teachers need teachers: those who understand the trials faced without having to set the scene with background information. Building relationships during a retreat is special because of the uninterrupted time given one brick on top of another, becoming stronger with each shared story.

The 2011 Summer Writing Retreat was dedicated to personal writing time, conference groups, timely discussions, laughter, shedding of tears, friendship and of course food, “Exactly what I needed.”





CALLING ALL WRITERS!

**Prepare now to attend the annual
Summer Advanced Writing Retreat.**

When: June 13th – 15th, 2012

Where: Rough River State Park

What: Time for personal writing, and sharing



**Additional information to follow:
Cost, agenda, specifics**

**For questions or comments please contact Denise Henry:
Denisehenry76@yahoo.com**

My Writing History and a Look into the Future

By Amy Yates

Alvaton Elementary School

The new Common Core Standards being adopted and implemented throughout the country are essential to America's standing in the world. When jobs are resourced to other countries due to the fact that Americans are not qualified for the work, there is a problem in the educational system. The Common Core Standards ultimate goal is for every child to be college or career ready when graduating from high school. Teaching with the ways of the past will not work in our ever evolving world.

In my past, personal experience as a writer in American, public schools, writing has taken place for a variety of reasons. Not all of these reasons were authentic, but I did learn from them. According to Harvey Daniels, there are three reasons to teach writing: writing to learn, writing to demonstrate learning, and authentic writing.

During my elementary years, I did a lot of writing to learn or punishment writing. When I was in third grade and I had forgotten to write my name at the top of my spelling test, my teacher told me to write my name twenty-five times, so I would learn not to forget to write it on my papers anymore. I feel that this was my "writing to learn" never to forget my name on the papers that I turned in. Another meaningful "writing to learn" moment was when I was talking in class. After my teacher caught me

talking in class, she told me to write "I will not talk in class" fifty times, so I would learn not to talk during class. Other meaningful "writing to learn" moments of my elementary years were practicing my cursive handwriting (up swoop and all of that), rainbow spelling words (write your spelling words in different colored crayons), and dictionary writing (find your vocabulary word and copy it).



Another type of writing I experienced in elementary school was writing to demonstrate learning (do it or there would be further "writing to learn" otherwise known as punishment writing). I knew that if I did not write my name on my spelling, math, reading test, I would have to do further "writing to learn" assignments. If I made the mistake of not learning from my "I will not talk during class" assignment, I knew that there would be further and longer "writing to learn" punishments. I did do well on my spelling tests, maybe from those entire rainbow spelling word assignments; however, my spelling

skills were not reflected during my writing. They were made up words, most I already knew, that I had to copy in ROY G. BIV. Thank goodness I did all of those "writing to learn" cursive assignments because today I can sign my check with a cursive scrawl.

I thought that I was learning how to write very well, thank you very much, until I made it to high school, US History AP, and then I was expected to form an argument in writing. No one had taught me the skills to write my thoughts and, in turn, pull from other's thoughts and put this onto paper for an argument. I had never heard of writing is talking on paper in words. Writing is communication. All I had ever learned while in elementary school is writing is punishment; writing is copying; writing is handwriting time. I could ace any multiple choice question test. Bam! That was easy; however, when

it came to the writing part of the AP test, I knew the answer, but I did not know how to put it into paper form. I did not possess the skills to do this adequately. So even though I scored well enough on my ACT to obtain credit for English 100, I could not pass the English AP test, due to my poor writing skills.

When I became a junior in high school, all of a sudden we were required to have a finished portfolio or authentic writing. What in the world was a portfolio? I remember my biology teacher scrambling to get us to write a feature article for our "portfolio." I did one on pregnancy. I

My Writing History and a Look into the Future

still remembering my biology teacher laughing and reading my paper when I said that pregnancy lasted for “eight” months. How was I supposed to know how long a person was pregnant? I had never been pregnant before, nor had ever been around anyone who was pregnant. My teachers had never shown me how to research this topic. For a short story, I remember my psychology teacher assigning us to write about a dream we had. I remember liking my story about snakes chasing me and relating in to problems, but not knowing how to end the story, I abruptly ended the story with “Then I woke up.” I remember talking about the poetry elements in other poets, but when I was asked to write a poem, there was not strategy or feedback. My portfolio experience was a checklist. She’s got a poem, story, feature article. . . Yep, she’s done.

Going to college I felt ill prepared for “writing to learn”. Upon entering college I had to learn how to take notes, not fill in the blank worksheets. With “writing to learn,” I

learned it was notes that I had created myself, for myself to learn the material that the professor or book was trying to teach me, the learner. It was not the cookie cutter; fill in the blank, worksheets I was used to in high school. It was not the copy from the board and book note taking that I had become accustomed to in elementary school. I took these notes that I had written, my own way, not a fill in the blank sheet, and I learned the material.

A second thing that I felt ill prepared for was “writing to demonstrate learning” or research papers, essay questions, and short answer questions. I was not able to collect research, summarize that research, and justify an argument or answer a question with proficiency. I could not pull from a variety of sources and create a clear argument for or in favor of a topic. However when I went to college, I learned the hard way. When I got back papers, they bled red. Maybe I didn’t know how to “write to demonstrate” correctly, but at least finally, I had some feedback.

As teachers, teaching in

the 21st century implementing new standards, research is a progression that begins with primary teachers and goes all the way to high school and putting sources in MLA format. According to the new standards, technology should be implemented throughout the curriculum, another big change from the old standards. Our students should be proficient when “writing to demonstrate learning” whether using paper and pencil or a PowerPoint. Writing in the 21st century classroom is not just typing a research paper, it is making a presentation, tweeting on Twitter, and having a discussion on a Wiki. Writing stops the learning and makes them think about what they have heard, read, or learned.

As you can see, there has been and needs to be a major shift in our education standards due to an ever changing world. We, as Americans, need to meet these changes head on, so we do not fall back when it comes to the education of our future.



LOOKING FOR RETIRED TEACHERS! WHERE ARE YOU?

The Writing Project would like to offer activities, studies, opportunities to Project Fellows who have joined the ranks of the retired. We have prepared a Survey of Interest for those interested and we would like to put together an email list for this purpose.

Many addresses on file are no longer valid so we are asking for your help. Please contact Denise Henry with updated information: denisehenry76@yahoo.com.

What Every Relationship Needs: True Communication

By Brandon Poole/ Butler County High School

A problem I have experienced throughout my journey into the world of education is the bombardment of more expectations from teachers. I understand the next generation of society deserves the very best that I, as a teacher, can give. However, the phenomenon of officials and specialists peeking at test scores and taking a snapshot of classrooms from occasional observations and then making decisions leaves me disenchanted. There is an abundance of talking to teachers, but not such much of talking with teachers and listening to their thoughts on matters.

Should I feel that professionals who are so far removed from the real classroom experience are there with a true perspective and are fully capable of dictating practices in my classroom? I cherish feedback from veterans and mentor teachers, but when an outsider (from the classroom) in a suit or pant-suit wanders into a department meeting or faculty meeting spouting numbers and figures or strategies and techniques, I become bitter. This phenomenon is analogous to a retired IBM typewriter technician walking into a board meeting of Web 2.0 executives and telling them how to design word processing for the Internet.

I am not speaking about specific locations, but the stories my colleagues share indicate that teachers are feeling overwhelmed and even slighted when outside forces mandate practices or side-work in their classrooms. Most teachers know about the education cycle: some PhD reinvents the wheel; states and districts buy into this “trend”; implementation falls short because the next “new wheel” invented takes the place of the previous one.

This may sound technical to non-educators, so I shall use another analogy. Imagine: one works at a random software company that continually keeps introducing new computer programs designed to “help” employees achieve goals. However, within a year there is a new program and the previous one is obsolete, useless. There are no commonalities between programs and employees are expected to implement the program immediately and bosses expect no interruption in production, rather they expect “better” results. Repeat the same steps and situation next year.

So, to clarify and restate my issues:

1. People who have had to deal with a lesson being interrupted by misbehavior or technological problems in the last 1-10 years have a generally good idea of the strategies and methods needed to achieve the most student success as possible within their own classroom. *If a person comes*

from any time period before the last ten or so years and has not taught in the classroom and can't remember having to differentiate lessons, incorporate new technology, implement new standards, then it feels as if experience and personal knowledge of students is trumped by conjecture and expired impressions of classroom instruction and the many facets of today's hurdles and issues. This is also a concern when teachers are evaluated. Standard evaluation tools exist, but an evaluator can only perform that high level task with proper information (what teaching is like currently). It also is a concern when mandated practices or programs are implemented without feedback from current educators, therein is an institutional failing.

2. *Following education trends and overwhelming teachers is not effective.*

I hope it is clear that these two issues are essential to one another, because if a decision-maker has not taught in a classroom of students since the world went online, then a breakdown in the educational organism occurs. As a result, leadership perspective is skewed and unrealistic and in the hands of people who can alter and control an educator's individual classroom or an entire district's worth of classrooms.

That perspective then leads to buying into the new educational trends, which are generally created by persons who have not been in a true modern classroom in the past decade.

So, what proposed solution do I have to solve all this? Do I want to kick board members out and have principals sent back to the classroom? No. I want an open dialogue about decision making. Recently, our state performed an online survey about practices in each district. It was nice to be asked for my feedback in an unthreatening manner.

My problem is I love my job and don't want to lose it. Therefore, I often find myself holding on to words I should say, but I don't want to risk termination. There is a fine line to uphold in open debate, trying to analyze or criticize can be interpreted as “insubordination.”

The systems we have in place work to the best extent they can. Open-door policies and decision-making bodies within each building bring with them some of that democratic feel, but there is something missing and I can't begin to propose a specific plan on how to change things. I don't propose more layers of documentation or changing culture in buildings. All I can offer is a suggestion or perhaps a maxim, a principle even: allowing current educators to examine a change and evaluate it before they adopt it is the “best practice.”

No Teacher Left Behind

By Hilary Thompson
Ohio County High School

In many areas of our society today, accountability is being reexamined and given increased public attention. Top CEOs of companies are being scrutinized for how they managed their business. Politicians are being dissected to find indiscretions. Non-profit organizations are searched for mismanagement of funds.

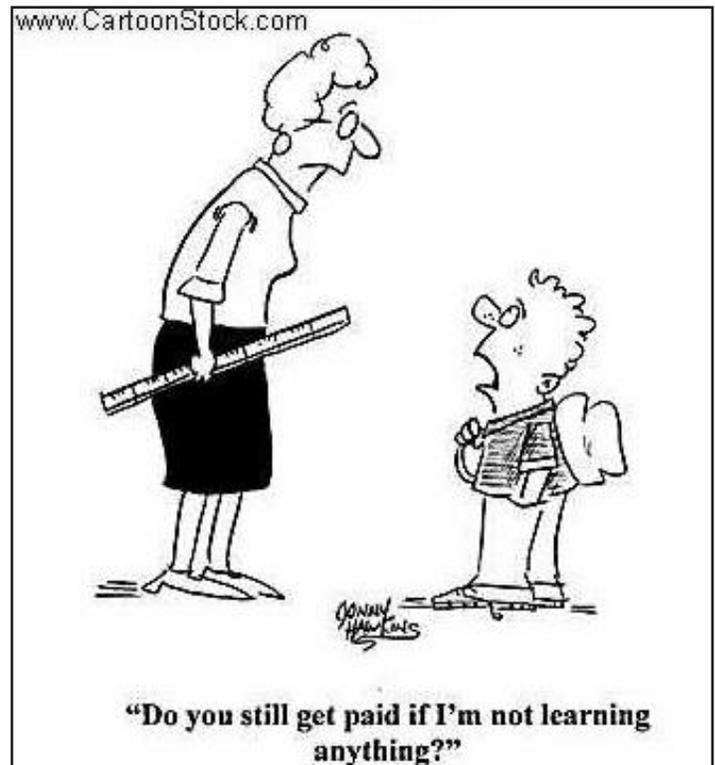
The same is true for the nation's educators. Many teachers have recently been subjected to early, complex forms of teacher accountability models which use many factors, including student scores, to evaluate a teacher's effectiveness. Some districts have fired a whole school's worth of teachers in the interest of holding the education system accountable for producing intelligent, highly-skilled students who are ready for college and career.

Each of us can likely remember a teacher in our lives who has had a great negative impact, or was certainly ineffective. Chances are that teacher affected the lives of hundreds of students over his or her career, and chances are there was nothing done about this. But in reality, out of all the teachers most people have in a lifetime, the number of truly ineffective teachers is low.

It is true that evaluation models need to change to account for this small section of teachers who either cannot or will not change, improve, or grow in their professional lives. But I believe there is another section of teachers who are committed to improving their teaching skills, yet lack resources, knowledge, and skills to do so. These are the teachers I worry about when schools develop evaluation models so complicated that nobody can understand them, let alone contest them. New teachers need more guidance. Struggling teachers need more mentoring. Failing teachers need help from colleagues, administrators, and professionals – not a pink slip.

I propose that teachers identified as ineffective, regardless of evaluation method, should be granted a trial period, perhaps one to two school years, to seek improvement. During this year, they should be mentored by a highly effective teacher and given the support they need to improve, in the form of professional development that is specifically targeted to their problem area. These teachers would be responsible for learning how to better their teaching, but they would also have the appropriate means to fulfill this.

If a teacher is unable or unwilling to improve after this trial period, then further measures should be taken to remove or rehabilitate this teacher. But I believe many teachers will heed the warning, take the opportunity, and improve their teaching. We should not dismiss these teach-



ers, leaving them behind to make the same mistakes in other school districts; we should circle around them and figure out how we can help.



The Unwilling Really do Rob Children

replace pen and paper. What it is meant to do is enhance the writing process. In a typical writing scenario, a student writes and then receives feedback from the teacher and possibly one or two of his or her peers. But by using Google docs, wikis and/or blogs, a student can receive feedback from a wide community of writers. When someone posts on facebook, a blog or sends a text message, that person is acutely aware of the purpose of the communication and the intended audience. Digital writing also helps create purpose and audience awareness. The process of digital writing is not just for English class, however. By using text, images, audio and video, digital writing is truly a cross-curricular writing tool. Additionally, the ways in which students respond through classroom discussion and writing have been adapted for use with blogs, discussion forums, and other virtual worlds (DeVoss, Eidman-Andahl, and Hicks 103).

Digital writing does not come without some questions, however. The biggest one for educators seems to be how to assess this new type of writing product. DeVoss, Eidman-Andahl, and Hicks suggest that these new products

be assessed as teachers have always assessed writing. We should continue to look for audience, purpose, grammar and mechanics. But, we will also look at choice of format, creativity, and technical features. Assessment does not need to be a problem unless educators allow it to be.

In conclusion, digital writing is changing the act of writing. But writing is still the same in many ways. It is a task that still “requires writers to examine rhetorical context and craft messages for the intended audience.” And as we move our students toward being 21st Century Learners and “examine the task within the context of twenty-first-century skills, digital writing tools, and frameworks for approaching multimedia, we can better articulate what is important about digital writing—the immeasurable possibilities for the who, how, and why we compose texts” (DeVoss, Eidman-Andahl, and Hicks 105). It’s up to us to decide if we want to continue twentieth century teaching or move out of our comfort zones and into the twenty-first century way of teaching. We can’t afford to rob our students of all their tomorrows.

ATTENTION WP 25TH CELEBRATION ATTENDEES

Would you like to have your very own copy of the DVD presentation from the day? Prepared by Sylvia Abell, the presentation was not only a tribute to Dr. John Hagaman but also included memories of all 25 Projects.

For only \$10.00 you can own this piece of history, which also includes a CD of 450 pictures from past Writing Projects. All proceeds will go to fund future Writing Project activities.



Make Check payable to: WKU Writing Project

Mail order and payment to:

Writing Project/English Department

1906 College Heights Blvd.

Bowling Green, KY 42101



I'm Stupid in Math: Leveling and Labeling

By R. Joy Luna,
Bowling Green Junior High School

As Ellan walks into Ms. Trepus' third period math class, her stomach begins the bad-day feeling as always. Ms. Trepus is nice to everyone and tries to teach, but there are so many kids who don't care about math in this class. Her classmates brag about how bad they are and she knows they don't care if they get into advanced placement classes in high school or what their GPA will be. "How many of them care about going to college?" she wonders. Last week there was a fight between Brianna and Tina over a boy and Ms. Trepus was hit while trying to pull the girls apart. Finally, she had to run to Mr. Stevens' room to get help. Ellan hid behind the teacher's desk when Tina tried to crawl over her to get at her opponent. "Those two should not be in the same class," Ellan thought. Since the fight there had been more out-bursts and horse-play in class. "I don't even try to understand math anymore," Ellan told her parents at home. "When I walk into the classroom, my mind just shuts down." Ellan misses her friends in the honors science and reading classes. "I hope I get into Spanish in eighth grade and into advanced science and reading too. It is embarrassing to have everyone know that I'm stupid in math, but at least I am good in some subjects," she thought. "What if I were in all the low classes? I think I'd just want to drop out of school."

If Ellan were a seventh grader in England or Germany she

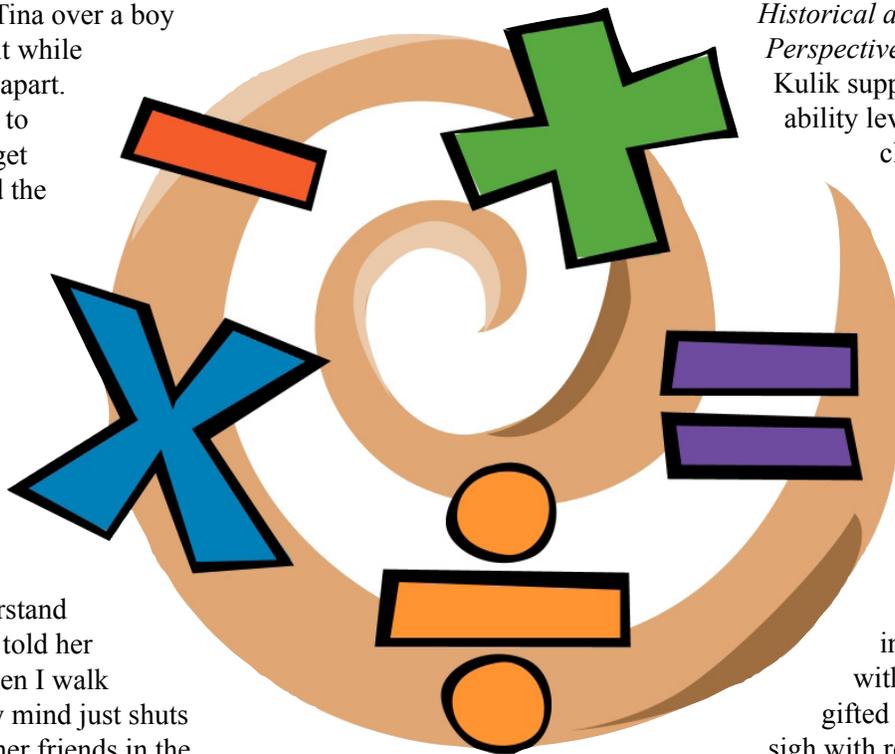
would not be having exactly the same problem. In those countries children are put on an educational tracking plan in which, based on aptitude tests and other instruments, students are placed in either technical or academic programs. This type of placement is illegal in the United States. In the U.S. students may not be put into classes that are all ability grouped. The idea is to avoid scheduling students in all the same level classes. But in reality this does happen. For instance, only the social studies classes at Ellan's school have a mixed ability group make up. What Ellan is

doing is not called tracking. It is legal. But it is just barely legal. We are obeying the letter of the law, but not the spirit. This trend in education is an attempt to reduce the need for differentiation of instruction within the classroom, to let the eagles soar and the turtles tread, and it is thought that this will help our bottom line: High stakes state standardized test scores. Will leveling raise our test scores or bring us closer to the brink of disaster?

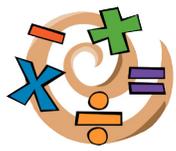
Academic literature seems divided on this point. *An Analysis of the Research on Ability Grouping: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (1997) by James Kulik supports the use of ability leveling in U.S.

classrooms. Success of the practice depends, says the article, on how you do implement it. If you teach each class the same without changing the units to fit the needs of different students, then there can be no gains from ability grouping. For instance a teacher with the academically gifted students may simply sigh with relief that now all the

homework will be turned in and she may continue to use the same lesson plans she has used for the past ten years. The teacher assigned the most challenged students may not see the need for even more engaging plans, but may simply adjust his grading to reflect lower standards. To make measurable gains one must teach very differently to different ability levels. Kulik says that increased



experiencing is homogeneous ability grouping, the scheduling of classes and placement of students in classes with other students of similarly tested abilities. Students who are leveled can in effect be on an irreversible track into the future, and though students are able to move out of one group as their abilities grow, they tend not to. What we're



I'm Stupid in Math: Leveling and Labeling



performance can be seen by every group with differentiated instruction, especially in the gifted classes. (1997, 1).

But Jo Boaler, William and Brown disagree in their paper, *Students': Experiences of Ability Grouping, Disaffection, Polarization and the Construction of Failure* (2007). Jo Boaler, like her fellow authors, is British and has lived in the United States to study our mixed ability grouping classrooms, which she says produce better results than the strictly stratified schools of the United Kingdom. Ability grouping in the U.K. the researchers find, segregates students by class and race. This unfortunate set-up settles into stagnation with no upward mobility. Ana Villegas (1991) says that this is due to the "self fulfilling

prophecy" phenomenon in which humans begin to believe what is said about themselves and then to act out those expectations. She says the ways educators communicate their expectations are often unconscious and not explicit, but in ability grouping, it is pretty hard to miss what your educators think of your ability (Villegas, 3). It does make life easier for teachers who will no longer struggle to differentiate instruction for students in the same classroom, but they may have a more nuanced battle: how to communicate faith in students who are labeled. The cost if they fail will be dear. Since our test scores are low and we face consequences, we are willing to try anything. But we need to make sure that our cure will not kill us.

Ellan will be in Spanish I in

eighth grade and in honors English and science. She will be in many Advanced Placement classes in high school. She will graduate from college. But she has been hurt by a math-idiot label and she has lost a year of valuable instruction. What about the students who are grouped together by label for every class possible in middle school? Will they not live up to the obviously low expectations we have for them? Is our educational system not effectively tracking them as they would be in another country? And it could be argued that we do worse by not even equipping them for technical jobs. It seems that the present trend toward ability grouping is squeaking through legal loop-holes rather than adhering to the spirit of a democratic law in a democratic nation.

WRITING PROJECT CELEBRATES 25 YEARS

By Denise Henry
Continuity Chair

What were you doing twenty-five years ago? Perhaps you were nervous about beginning your teaching career or maybe you were enjoying your high school years. You may be part of the younger age group so you were experiencing elementary school. In 1986 John Hagaman and Gretchen Niva were building the foundation for the Western Kentucky University Writing Project. The National Writing Project had been established for twelve years and the Kentucky Writing Project Network was formed with Western, Eastern, Murray, UK, U of L and NKU affiliates. Western's first Writing Project had twenty participants and was held for four weeks in June on Western's campus. The purpose was to train teachers to be trainers of teachers of writing. In 2011 the Project is still held on WKU's campus in the month of June with the same purpose, making good teachers great.

For the next twenty-five years federal and state funds supported the Project giving 500 + teachers the opportunity to increase their knowledge and skills in the area of Writing Instruction. As is the goal of the WKU Project, the trained teachers returned to their home school districts and trained other teachers in the Writing Process increasing the number of teachers touched by the Project. These teachers then shared their new-found techniques and strategies with hundreds of students. It is rewarding to know that some of the students taught by Project Fellows have now been participants as well, proving that the Writing Project has far reaching influence.

With the passage of the statewide writing program bill in 1985, Kentucky placed more emphasis on writing instruction and Project Fellows were called upon to serve on state committees, boards and assessment teams. They trained teachers across the state on implementation and assessment of the Writing Portfolio.

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WRITING PROJECT CELEBRATES 25 YEARS

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Many alumni became Administrators, Team Leaders, Supervisors, and State Department consultants while others were recognized for their talents by being named Teacher of the Year, KCTE/LA Secondary Teacher of the Year and other accolades.

The writing project continues beyond the summer session, extending to retreats and other events so that Fellows can be informed about current changes in instruction and reconnect with fellow project members. The Outreach Program is another way for alumni to stay-in-touch and to meet teachers who have not yet participated in the Project experience. The Writing Project Leadership Team meets twice a year to aid in planning workshops, retreats, summer projects, web-sites, newsletters, promotion, and reports for the national level.

The efforts started by John and Gretchen twenty-five years ago have been supported by the following co-directors: Sylvia Abel, Bobby Bright, Angela Carter, Mary Dillingham, Gaye Foster, Misti Logsdon, Michele McCloughan, Cindy McIntyre, Donna Vincent, Mollie Wade and Judy Whitson.

On June 20th Project Fellows came together at the Faculty House on Western's campus to celebrate the twenty-five year history of the Project and to honor the one constant throughout the years, Dr. John Hagaman. As guests entered they noticed that decorations on the tables and mantels were memorabilia from past projects. Sara Jennings had collected items which represented the theme of each project with the center piece being the published anthology. Alumni enjoyed reading pieces written during the summer of their project experience and remembering friendships made during a special time in their professional career. Special guest speakers reminisced about events and impressions with a focus on the contributions made by John. Speakers included: John Hagaman, Gretchen Niva, Jody Richards, Dr. David Lee, Molly Wade, Dr. Karen Schneider, Jean Wolph, David LeNoir and Peggy Otto. Sylvia Abell and Gaye Foster introduced the DVD overview of the twenty projects which included a tribute to John. Cindy McIntyre presented John a collection of "Dear John" letters written by friends whose lives have been touched by John's instruction and kindness. Judy Whitson presented him a cash gift from alumni so he could purchase that iPad he needs to occupy his days of retirement. John spoke of the past but also looked forward to the future when he introduced Peggy Otto, the new Project Director.

Alumni enjoyed reconnecting with friends from projects past while looking to the future of the Western Kentucky University Writing Project. Twenty-five years, a quarter of a century – what will be celebrated in 2036? What memories will be shared? Who might be the leaders during the next twenty years? Congratulations WKU Writing Project on the past 25 years and may the next 25 be even bigger and better.



**WKU
Project
fellows
Janet Burk,
Gaye Foster
and
Gretchen Niva.**

**Two
generations
of WKU
Project fellows:
Arlene Skaggs
and daughter
Angie Skaggs
Hughes.**



Letter to the Editor

STUDENTS NEED DAILY ACCESS TO COMPUTERS

Dear WP Newsletter Editor:

Eleven years after the Kentucky General Assembly first tackled the problem of providing equal funding for all public schools, another inequality threatens irreversible harm toward Kentucky students. Across the state, there appears to be no comprehensive or consistent focus on technology funding and student access to technology, particularly at the high school level.

Kentucky high schools can draw upon three major sources for money to pay for computers, laptops, and software for students: federal, state, and local. In fiscal year 2008, for example, Kentucky schools spent about \$140 million on technology, according to a report from the Kentucky Legislative Research Commission's Office of Education Accountability. By far, the largest source for that money was the state: Out of every dollar spent in 2008, an estimated 64 cents came from state funds, 24 cents from federal sources, and 12 cents from local sources.

Schools receive state funding for technology through the Kentucky Education Technology System (KETS). Funds are distributed to districts through "offers of assistance" that have to be matched dollar-for-dollar from local funds from the school districts. If districts lack the local matching funds, they can escrow offers for up to 3 years. As a result of the escrow option, no district has ever turned down an offer of assistance.

But while high schools rely mostly on the state for its technology needs, the state has become derelict in its duty. According to information from the Kentucky Department of Education, Kentucky schools had an "unmet need" totaling \$132 million (approximately \$225 per student) for fiscal year 2010. This \$132 million figure comes from the 2007-2012 KETS Master Plan that the Kentucky Board of Education approved in February of 2007.

"Historically, the annual KETS unmet need for school districts has been underfunded by approximately \$30-50M per year," David Couch, Deputy Commissioner Interim Commissioner of Education, wrote to the KDE in 2009. "Therefore, it is essential to preserve the existing funding sources that are currently in place for the educational technology products and services that are used by all 174 school districts while at the same time identifying other funding to make up that difference."

From one high school to the next, student access to computers and other technology is a mixed bag. While students at Apollo and Daviess County high schools have been provided personal laptops to use at home and school for each of the past six years, for example, students next door at Ohio County High School visit a computer lab once a week in many classes. Some high schools allow access to laptops via "mobile carts" that, while used daily in schools, do not allow students to hone their technology skills at home.

The result, of course, is that students receive varying levels of quality, technology-based instruction depending upon where they go to school. Attend one high school and become a 21st Century learner with knowledge spanning from Microsoft Access to wikis. Attend another and learn to type your English essays each Thursday when your teacher has signed up for the computer lab.

According to the Kentucky Department of Education, there is a computer for every 2.68 students in the state, but this ratio is much too high, especially considering that technology is a major component of new standards.

As long as the need for technology outstrips technology funding, students' learning will suffer. Kentucky lawmakers must make a more concerted effort to see that all of Kentucky's schools have adequate funding to provide all students with daily access to computers.

Sincerely,

Mark Cooper

**Mark Cooper
Daviess County High School**

Literacy Design, NWP, and the Common Core

By Peggy Otto

This semester, I have been attending national, state, and regional workshops on designing literacy lessons for English Language Arts and other content areas. The training at these workshops supports teachers in using the lesson-development tools of LDC, the Literacy Design Collaborative. Along with K-12 teachers from across the region and state, I have been studying the template framework that LDC provides to implement literacy lessons in the core content areas of language arts, science, and social studies. One thing I have noticed at these workshops—with pride and pleasure—is how many of the teachers stepping forward to take on leadership roles in this work are National Writing Project fellows.

Last month in Chicago, I attended my first NWP site director's meeting. While sessions there were inevitably tinged with some anxiety about our recent loss of federal funding, much of the talk time was given over to exploring the core values of Writing Project work that our network is dedicated to sustaining. Fresh from having studied "core content" at LDC meetings, I heard these NWP discussions of "core values" with a new resonance. I couldn't stop trying to visualize the shape of a possible interface of these two conceptual frameworks. What tensions might become apparent; what touch points would emerge? Having obsessed for a few months now about this potential relationship between paradigms, I have come to the conclusion that NWP core values can provide the essential underpinning that keeps LDC work in literacy design pedagogically sound. Now, as more and more teachers become immersed in talk of templates and modules might be a good time to review those core NWP values.

NWP teachers are different from other teachers in the buildings where they work. They plan differently, and they interact with their students differently. In a 2004 article on the power of a network organization, using NWP sites as a model, Alyson White and Nancy Ellis describe a key feature of NWP teaching: "NWP teachers tend to encourage students to make personal choices and to explore their own interests and styles" (141). Can NWP teachers maintain this important core value while still using LDC's menu of templates for module design?

Let's take a look at one of the two basic LDC template tasks:

[Insert essential question] After reading _____ (literature or informational texts), write an

*_____ (essay or substitute) that addresses the question and support your position with evidence from the text(s). **L2** Be sure to acknowledge competing views. **L3** Give examples from past or current events or issues to illustrate and clarify your position.*

This is a text-based writing task that requires students to take a position on an open-ended question and support that position with evidence from texts. Three essential components--reading, critical thinking, and writing--are embedded and interconnected in this and all LDC template tasks. Teachers choose what texts students will read and in what genres they will compose. However, NWP teachers may also seek creative ways to engage students and build student choice into their instructional plans.

Teachers using the NWP approach to literacy design might make available thematically or topically related literature and informational texts, including visual and media texts. They might use reading circles in which students may choose their own texts. They could allow students to "write" in genres of their own choice, including composing digital media. In other words, a teacher can choose to apply the template from a teacher-directed or a student-oriented approach or a blend of both, depending on their professional judgment about the needs of the students and the requirements of the standards.

Templates provide standardized structures within which individual teachers can design learning experiences for students. In that regard, the designing of the prompt and the implementation of instruction are critical points at which a marriage of "core values" and "core content" can be made in NWP classrooms.

As Lester and Onore (1993) remind us, "Changing the gimmicks we use to teach in the classroom without changing the way we think about teaching and learning is insufficient to change our practice" (qtd. in Gray 14).

NWP teachers understand that any teaching tool is only a tool; a tool's value is in the ways teachers and students incorporate it within a context of rich and diverse literacy experiences that take place in the collaborative atmosphere of a community of learners. This kind of teaching is rigorous for both teachers and students, but the reward is that it "fosters critical thinking, and creates motivated and independent learners" (Gray 2). How better to define college and career readiness?

While reviewing the NWP approach to literacy, it is helpful to look at a few other hallmarks of Project teachers'



Literacy Design, NWP, and the Common Core

An Invitation to Teachers

classrooms. Twomey Fosnot's definition of constructivism, I believe, fairly adequately sums up these hallmarks and core NWP values:

[L]earning, in an important way, depends on what we already know; new ideas occur as we adapt and change our old ideas; learning involves inventing ideas rather than mechanically accumulating facts; meaningful learning occurs through rethinking old ideas and coming to new conclusions about new ideas.

... (qtd. in Gray 3)

The kind of classroom where this kind of learning occurs does not ignore content. It does not allow students complete freedom of choice. Rather, it provides literacy experiences for students, where, as Gray summarizes, they "hypothesize, predict, manipulate objects, pose questions, research, investigate, imagine, and invent" (3) with a creative teacher facilitating the process.

As Kentuckians experience this current wave of education reform, NWP teachers have the opportunity to help carve an interface where core content meets core values in creative ways. We know how to collaborate. We know how to share knowledge to build new knowledge. We know the value of collaboration and the impact of a committed community of learners. Every NWP teacher can be a voice in the building for the proven results of the teaching practices we know to be effective even as we remain open to the possibilities of new tools. Each NWP teacher is an important member of this community of learners. Let's commit to supporting each other and sharing our best ideas for marrying core values to core content.

Toward that end, please consider sharing your best lesson strategies and favorite activities by sending them to me at peggy.otto@wku.edu for inclusion in the spring newsletter or posting them to the WKU WP website. Also consider taking advantage of opportunities in 2012 for gathering with your colleagues at our conferences and workshops.

Works Cited

Gray, Audrey. "Constructivist Teaching and Learning." *SSTA Research Centre Report #97-07*. Web. 5 November 2011.

Whyte, Alyson and Nancy Ellis. "The Power of a Network Organization: A Model for School-University Collaboration." *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* 4.2 (2004): 137-151

What better way to keep those literacy skills sharpened than to critically read and write? All project fellows are invited to review one of the newest additions to the WKU Writing Project Library for the spring edition of the newsletter. Interested individuals should contact Laura at the Writing Project office at 745-5710 to check out a review copy and have it mailed to you. Available titles are listed below:

Anderson, Jeff. 10 Things Every Writer Needs to Know. Stenhouse, 2011.

Fecho, Bob. Teaching for the Students: Habits of Heart, Mind, and Practice in the Engaged Classroom. NWP, 2011.

Gallagher, Kelly. Write Like This: Teaching Real-World Writing through Modeling & Mentor Texts. Stenhouse, 2011.

Meier, Daniel R. Teaching Children to Write: Constructing Meaning and Mastering Mechanics. NWP, 2011.

Tovani, Cris. So What Do They Really Know?: Assessment That Informs Teaching and Learning. Stenhouse, 2011.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. and Bruce Novak. Teaching Literacy for Love and Wisdom: Being the BOOK and Being the CHANGE. NWP, 2011.

Zwiers, Jeff and Marie Crawford. Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk That Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings. Stenhouse, 2011.

From the Director

...Continued from front page

Looking ahead, you should be aware of some exciting things in the works for 2012. On January 12, along with the Reading Project, we will host another New Teacher Workshop, this time at T.C. Cherry Elementary, thanks to Kory Twyman, principal. On January 16, the Outreach Committee, led by Laura Houchens, Sara Jennings, Michele McCloughan, Mollie Wade, and Cindy McIntyre, will be hosting the Project's first MLK Day Young Writers Workshop for grades K-6. Flyers have been distributed at elementary schools in Bowling Green and Warren County. We are looking forward to a lively day! February brings the KCTE/LA Conference. I hope to see many of you there. On April 28, we will join the Reading

Project at the annual Book Fest conference in Bowling Green. This will also be the last Saturday meeting of our 2011 Summer Institute. Finally, Denise Henry is planning an advanced writing institute June 13-15 at Rough River State Park. Look for more information about these events on our website. Also look for applications for the June Invitational Institute online at www.wku.edu/wp. Get the word out to teachers at your schools!

Speaking of the website, keep your eye out for some changes we are undergoing this month. During the switch, which is required by the WKU web system, you may experience temporary difficulty accessing some items. Remember that you can reach Laura in the WP office at 745-6587 or me at 745-5710 for information about registering for upcoming workshops

and submitting applications to the summer institute.

As we look forward in the next few weeks to holidays with friends and family, we are grateful, too, for our Writing Project family. Please let us here at the Writing Project office know of your accomplishments and doings so that we can share them through the next newsletter. Happy holidays!

Peggy Otto



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