



PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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Summer 1980: Retrospect

From June 23 to July 18, the Pennsylvania Writing Project brought together 21 area teachers from grades K-13 to the West Chester State College campus for a four-week Summer Institute. Project Fellows from the Chichester, Octorara, Ridley, Upper Darby, Upper Dublin, Wallingford-Swarthmore, and West Chester Area School districts, as well as Villa Maria Academy and Temple University took part in intensive study and interaction and are now prepared to act as teacher-consultants in in-service programs on teaching writing.

The Pennsylvania Writing Project's Institute and in-service activities closely follow the model of the nationally known Bay Area Writing Project, begun in 1974 at the University of California/Berkeley; the model is based on the assumption that regular classroom teachers, sharing methods and approaches proven effective in their own instructional experience, can influence the improvement of students' writing skills. The national Project now includes 74 sites and 30,000 Fellows.

The Institute balanced theory and practice in a varied set of reading, writing, talking, and listening activities. Participants wound up calling it "unforgettable," "outstanding," "the best intensive learning experience I have ever had," "a pleasure, physically and intellectually," "a great personal benefit," "one of the most valuable experiences of my career." Fellows were involved in extensive reading and writing activities and gave presentations demonstrating successful approaches to the teaching of writing. Daily small group sessions enhanced the personal writing ability of each of the participants, and guest speakers shared current research into writing as a process and into the working of other writing projects.

Susan Sowers (University of New Hampshire) discussed research on writers in the primary grades. Joe Strzepek (University of Virginia) focussed on our image of ourselves as writers and how that affects the way we teach writing. Don McQuade (Queens College, CUNY) discussed the metaphor as a stimulus for composition. Keith Caldwell, from the original Bay Area Writing Project, demonstrated how to make an effective presentation on the writing process. Dixie Goswami (University of Tennessee) raised questions concerning the political implications of literacy, our goals as teachers of writing, and our potential as classroom researchers. Linda Waitkus (Director of the New Jersey Writing Project) brought us back to earth with a sobering reminder that all of our new knowledge may not bear instant fruit.

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Fall and Spring In-service and Other Activities

The Intermediate Units of Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties are providing courses in the teaching of writing at all grade levels and for all subject areas. In these courses, teacher-consultants from the Pennsylvania Writing Project make presentations in which they share a variety of classroom strategies for involving students in the writing process. Participants are eligible for 2 In-Service Education credits or for 2 or 3 graduate credits available through West Chester State College.

Coordinators for the courses are Robert Weiss (West Chester State College), Mary K. Winters (Upper Darby School District), and Janet Greco (Upper Dublin School District). One course began in Delaware County on Tuesday, September 23 and meets weekly; it will be repeated beginning Tuesday, January 20, 1981; a bi-monthly Chester County course in the Octorara School District began Wednesday, November 5; a bi-weekly Montgomery County version will begin on Thursday, January 8, 1981 at the Intermediate Unit Building; and another bi-weekly Chester County course will begin Monday, January 19, 1981.

Pat Wachholz, a teacher from Henderson High School in West Chester, is giving the initial presentation in each of the three counties on "The How's, When's, Where's and Why's of Using Journals in the Classroom."

Project people have been involved in many other activities. On October 18, Suzanne Varhola and Lois Snyder represented the PWP with Bob Weiss at a conference sponsored by the Delaware Valley Writing Council and Drexel University. Bob explained the Project and Suzanne and Lois discussed specific ways of using writing in learning science in the elementary school. A week later, on October 24, Bob Weiss was a featured speaker at the Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of English Conference in Allentown. At roundtable discussions of the Project, he was assisted by Jolene Borgese and Janet Greco. On November 11, the Delaware County Intermediate Unit's in-service program featured 5 Project teachers — Doris Gabel (Octorara), Suzanne Varhola (West Chester), Cathy Powell (Octorara), Pat Wachholz (West Chester), and Janet Greco (Upper Dublin) — in charge of separate workshops. Bob Weiss gave the keynote address on "Writing and Learning."

A series of in-service sessions for the Spring-Ford School District will begin Wednesday, November 19, with Pat Wachholz coordinating the first five sessions.

On December 8, the Lincoln Intermediate Unit's in-

service day program will feature Janet Greco, Sheila Bell, Jolene Borgese, and Bob Weiss. Many more presentations have been given, and discussions held, within participating schools and school districts. ○

Newspapers in Every Class

"Take An Inquirer Journey," a project compiled by Merle Horowitz for the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, will soon be available to schools and teachers. Horowitz, a PWP Fellow from the Upper Darby School District, has developed and assembled a collection of activities for grades K-6 which use the daily newspaper. The sixty to seventy activities span all content areas and can be done by students working independently or in groups.

A primary level activity might involve cutting out the letters of a child's name and pasting them in proper sequence on a line, while an intermediate student might locate and classify the countries, states, cities, etc., that have been found in the paper. Many of the activities can provide the children with the freedom to create projects or write something of their own choice.

For a copy of the booklet or further information contact the Philadelphia *Inquirer*. ○

NEW DIRECTIONS: A POSITION PAPER

Can you picture a blind woman standing in the middle of busy intersection and directing the traffic? She blows her whistle and gestures randomly — stop, go, left turn, right turn, straight ahead — all without knowing where her unseen drivers are or where they are going.

Many times as a teacher of writing, I have pictured myself as that blind traffic director. Where were my students coming from? What writing abilities did they have? Where should they be going? What directions could I give to help them on their way? I waved my arms madly, blew my whistle shrilly and heaved a sigh of relief when another year ended without any major smash-ups. Whether anyone was any closer to his destination was a question I couldn't answer.

I still think of myself as a traffic director, but now I can see. I still wave my arms and blow my whistle, but now to some purpose. I know where my students are coming from or how to find out. I know the routes along which I want to guide them, and I even have some ideas as to how to make those roads smoother and more direct.

How do I view my role as a writing teacher?

I believe that I am a guide not a director. I should help the writer find many ways of expressing himself in writing, not direct or limit him to one mode.

I should provide the safe, secure, private, literate environment that Dixie Goswami speaks of: the students in my classes should have the freedom to write without fear of either ridicule or standards of correctness that inhibit writing.

I should organize my classes in such a way that feedback is quickly available to the writer. If I am not able to do this myself — any many times I won't be — I should provide for response groups of other students.

I should remember that, just as every teacher is a reading teacher, every teacher must be a writing teacher. I must explore ways to make more use of writing in all subjects. This writing — learning-centered — should be more than one-word answers in objective tests.

Imagination and effort on my part will be needed to make these writing activities interesting and productive.

I must discover ways to work for the improvement of skills while remembering that fluency is the primary goal for most of my students. Folders of their work with skills noted on the cover (as per Susan Sowers) may be one way to keep track of each student's needs and progress. Individual assignments in workbooks as problems are undercovered can be another.

At the same time I must be ready to help my students move through the stages of writing development as they show they are ready. When they become fluent, I must guide them to focus more sharply on audience, purpose, mode, etc.

While quantity may not be the chief criterion in judging writing abilities, frequency of writing opportunities is an important factor in the development of fluency. Writing must be a daily activity in some form or subject at the fifth grade level.

I must design the writing assignments in such a way that they catch the imagination and interest of the pupils. Options should be given that offer real choices for personal involvement. But pupils must also be given the assurance that writing they do not wish to share may remain private.

I must be a writer myself. The example of the teacher is the best way to present a positive image of writing. More than that, I believe with Joe Strzpek that "when your image of yourself as a writer expands, you will be a better teacher of writing."

I must continue to expand my knowledge about the writing process. I must learn what research has discovered as it applies to the classroom and what is yet to be explored. I must become familiar with the work of researchers so that I can select what is helpful and discard the ineffective from my own teaching methods.

I must provide opportunities for students to publish, to be read by audiences other than the teacher. Student-made books, bulletin board displays, and letters actually mailed are some ideas that should be explored.

I began by comparing myself to a traffic director. In writing these paragraphs I see how often I refer to myself as a provider. As a teacher of writing in the fifth grade, I must try to provide (a) a writing environment, (b) writing opportunities, (c) responses to student writing, and (d) audiences other than myself. If I have even limited success in meeting these four requirements, I think I will be able to say, "I am a teacher of writing."

Doris Gabel (Octorara School District) ○

The Psychology of Negative Criticism

Entering the classroom from the right, James stepped once again into the familiar pale-blue sepulchre-like square. He, a somewhat reserved young man dedicated to his meager thoughts and dressed in denim cotton, seemed silently reluctant to pursue his course of action for the day. As with most of his classes, James took his station at the rear of the class. Somehow this placed him at a favorable distance from the obnoxious professor who criticized destructively but habitually.

Other students, anxious but frightened at the task of giving their less than adept critique, sank to the depths of their seats. They were hoping that somehow the confident students beside them would make the efforts first.

The professor entered, laying his bookcase beside the podium. Immediately he gave a brief subject of that day's assignment which, by the way, shattered most illusions of a critique well composed. After several students' responses, most customarily brief but some impressively long, James, editing his draft at that moment, was called upon to read aloud his rendition. The assessment read like a gem, in his eyes, the result of pains-taking development, and it finished with the appropriate quote, "And we are here as on a darkling plain, swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, where ignorant armies clash by night."

Silence clouded the room. The professor shouted, as if someone had insulted someone's barrier of intelligence in question form: "The presence of evil, Darwin's theory, the loss of faith, pessimism vs. optimism? Perhaps you should enter some 'new' insight from Bartlett's or Norton's Anthologies to aid in your attempts at functional illiteracy, James!"

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Tony Irvin (Chichester School District) ○

Hilly

Six babes.

Six mothers. (Where are the fathers? Is Whitney watching?)

A big pool for small bodies. Don't swallow us.

Down the steps. Warm, sparkling, chlorine-smelly water covers my toes

creeps up my legs

slowly slipcovers my thighs

climbs my flat belly. (Where is the bulge of six months ago? Are you real, Hilary?)

I hold her too tight, Eyes connect. She knows.

Reluctantly I loosen my mother's grip — only one loosening of a lifetime's worth.

I lower her gently into the liquid.

Blue eyes brighten, searching mine, imploring.

Paprika hair glistens wet.

She gulps as she returns to her original

element — a secret world only we two shared —

She smiles her delicious smile.

Water baby. Swim away, but not too soon.

Catherine Powell (Octorara School District) ○

Research Projects

Four research projects are being implemented by the PWP Fellows in the 1980-81 school year.

Lois Snyder of the Upper Darby School District is investigating the effect of learning-centered writing in her sixth grade science classes. She will meet with a control and experimental group for three 50-minute periods every week. The experimental group will use learning-centered writing regularly as an integral part of their course. Snyder will be testing four hypotheses: (1) learning-centered writing increases learning; (2) learning-centered writing

improves students' perception of what they have learned; (3) learning centered writing improves writing generally; (4) learning-centered writing improves attitudes toward writing.

Martha Menz, also in the Upper Darby School District, will be carrying out similar research in her eleventh-grade American Studies classes. She hopes to determine the effect of learning-centered writing on the students' ability to understand concepts in social studies as well as themes in literature. Using pre- and post-tests, she will compare the concept development and retention of a control and an experimental group. She also will attempt to evaluate student attitudes through informal interviews with the class members.

Joan Flynn of the Hillsdale Elementary School, West Chester, is collecting data to define more clearly the effects of and possibilities for learning-centered writing as a teaching tool for the elementary school teacher. She will be observing the writings of a self-contained 5th grade classroom in the areas of reading, social studies, and health as well as a homogeneously grouped 5th grade math class.

Louis Camilletti, a sixth grade teacher in the West Chester Area School District, is investigating the effects of Pennsylvania Writing Project strategies on pupil attitudes toward the writing process, and their effects on reading comprehension development. Approximately 100 students will be divided into experimental and control groupings. Matching variables will be comprehension scores, as measured by the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, and sex. ○

Project Director

Robert H. Weiss is Site Director for the Pennsylvania Writing Project. A native Pennsylvanian, he was educated in the Philadelphia area, receiving a diploma from Overbrook High School (1956), a B.A. (Hon.) in Creative Writing from the University of Pennsylvania (1960), and both an M.A. in English (1964) and a Ph.D. in English (1969) from Temple University.

Weiss has taught in the Philadelphia public schools, at Temple University, the Philadelphia Museum College of Art, the University of Toledo, and Akiba Academy. He is now Professor of English at West Chester State College.

Weiss's resume' mentions numerous grants, awards, fellowships, publications, papers, talks, consultancies, and honors. He was responsible for initiating the Delaware Valley Writing Council in 1977, and his composition text, *Cases for Composition* (with John P. Field), was published in 1979 by Little, Brown & Co. He is currently doing research on writing and learning and on the way teachers' images of themselves as writers affect their teaching. Further, he serves on the National Board of Consultants of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Presently a resident of Westtown, where he lives with his four-year-old daughter, Molly, Weiss can often be found amid a flurry of papers, communiques, and books in 520 New Main Hall, West Chester State College. ○

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**West Chester State
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c/o Robert Weiss
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