



VOLUME 1 NUMBER 4

PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

JUNE 1981

PROJECT NEWS

Lois Snyder will coordinate a one-week workshop in August for 24 elementary level teachers in the Haverford School District.

Arrangements are being made with the Marple-Newtown School District for five in-service sessions for all of the district's elementary teachers.

The Project's 10-session course is to be announced again in the Fall brochures for the Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery County Intermediate Unit In-Service Education Councils.

Ed Bureau reported at the conclusion of the Project course sponsored by the Chester County Intermediate Unit that participants reacted very favorably to being taught by their peers. He also noted that the presentations with the highest level of response and approval were those that "gave a healthy dosage of theory, offered novel teaching techniques, and illustrated these with sample student writings."

The inservice course offered by the Octorara Area School District for members of its faculty has also been concluded. Responses to a survey on teaching practices show a substantial majority of participants have adopted techniques suggested in the course. Comments were also very positive. "I feel that this course is the most valuable one that I have ever taken, from the standpoint of helping me develop as an English teacher," wrote a high school teacher. Another said, "My enthusiasm for teaching writing is greater than it ever was before." And a primary teacher summed up her feelings by saying, "It is just too bad that I wasted twelve long years trying to be an effective writing teacher and failing to do so every year."

Fellowships to the 1981 Summer Institute have been awarded to teachers in the Avon Grove, Chichester, Coatesville, Exeter, Kennett, Loyalsock, Marple-Newtown, Norristown, Octorara, Owen J. Roberts, Philadelphia, Ridley, Spring-Ford, Upper Darby, Wallingford-Swarthmore, and West Chester School Districts, and St. Joseph's Preparatory and Westtown Schools. Fellowships were also awarded to teachers from Albright College, Marywood College, and Temple University.

FROM AN IN-SERVICE COURSE POSITION PAPER

By Jean Rentz

. . . When my first graders started writing, I used to write the letters of the alphabet on the board. When a child needed a word, I would write it under its respective letter. Lucy Calkins, of the Writing Process Laboratory, insists that when children are writing their first draft, they shouldn't have help with spelling. I tried invented spelling but I didn't have much success with this plan. My students seemed stymied when they didn't have help with spelling certain words.

However, the class and I did make a discovery . . . I tried a compromise. I put slips of paper, called "try" slips, in a box on my desk. Sometimes they can spell correctly if I give them a hint.

Students who can't manage to write their own sentences dictate their stories to the teacher. Gradually these children learn to write their own sentences.

. . . What I have been doing for several years with my first graders has evolved from experience and trial and error. It seemed good, but somehow I felt it wasn't enough, so I decided to take the Pennsylvania Writing Project First Course: Strategies in Teaching Writing in Grades 1-12. The course has proved to be a valuable addition because the children are more interested in writing and the quality of their writing has improved. The course has helped me to be

a better writer and has given me confidence in teaching writing.

When a child has written a story he likes, he may read it to the class during a sharing session. This is how my first graders have become acquainted with response groups. I have found that it is very important that I write too. When I wrote of a weekend trip to North Carolina, I was overwhelmed by the children's questions, so I started rewriting on the specifics.

I emphasize that the first draft should be messy and that it is good to cross off words or parts they don't like. They understand messy drafts even more when I tack my first draft on the bulletin board.

It is important that the child read his story aloud to discover an omission or misspelling or to realize that that wasn't what he really wanted to say. When he is reading aloud, he also realizes the need for punctuation.

When a child decides that his story is ready for publication, I have a conference with him. Fluency and clarity are the most important parts of their writing. We have learned how to cut and paste, to "operate" on our stories.

Publication for their writing is important. They have copies for their own storybooks, and I have a copy for a class booklet or the bulletin board.

I encourage my first graders to find a comfortable place to do their writing. They are free to walk around the room, listen to a friend's story or discuss their story with a friend.

First graders need a regular schedule for writing so they can be mentally prepared and not have it thrust on them at the spur of the moment.

My class has no trouble choosing their own subjects. They seem to have lots of interests, activities, and experiences. It is very important that first graders be given an opportunity to write and work on their writing skills. As Roger McCaig says, "First graders can be taught to express themselves in writing, and the indication is that this early beginning is reinforcing and strengthening learning in the entire language arts program in later years."

Jean Rentz teaches first grade in the Octorara School District.

GRANT NEWS

Under a contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, grants totalling \$4,500 are available for a one-week training program for prospective Project site directors. The training sessions, to be held July 21-24, 1981 at West Chester State College, are intended to expand the numbers of PWP sites throughout the state. Participation is expected from up to 10 persons.

The William Penn Foundation has awarded the Project a second grant. Covering 18 months and totalling \$42,462, the award enables the Project to continue its activities and to provide involvement for the School District of Philadelphia. Support is provided for seven Philadelphia teachers to participate in the 1981 Summer Institute, for in-service and evaluation activities in the Philadelphia schools, and for general Project administration.

The Lukens Steel Foundation has awarded a grant of \$1,400 to the Project to support the involvement of the Coatesville Area School District. Under the grant, two Coatesville teachers are participating in the 1981 Summer Institute.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has awarded two of its seven Title II Adapter-Adopter grants to local school districts to implement the Pennsylvania Writing Project. The Ridley School District and the West Chester Area School District recently received \$5,000 each for in-service sessions led by Project Teacher-Consultants.

STUDENT WRITING

From the classes of Sister Regina Noel (PWP Fellow, 1980-81), Villa Maria Academy, Malvern.

By Judy Hamilton, 9th grade

Mind, why don't you think?
Pen, why won't you write?
Why is the page so bare of ink?
You've closed out the night
And locked in the day,
What are you trying to say?

Tell of the summer fiery hot
You can speak of the sand on the shore.
And yet all you say is a blot —
There has to be more.

By Sheila Timothy, 9th grade

Groundhog, groundhog, short and fat,
Some mistake you for a cat.
Funny and brown
You sit on the ground
Who could have made such a silly
creature as you?

By Mary Beth Smith, 9th grade

Earthworm, where do you come from?
You have no legs, so you can't run.
Is that how we were able
To dissect you on our bio table?
Your setae hold you to the ground
But they didn't work when we came 'round.
So now you're in that great dirt hole
in the sky.
Earthworm, did I see you cry?
My guess is that you couldn't weep
Because you haven't a place to keep
your tears in,
Earthworm.

By Kathy McGarvey, grade 12

It was a blustery, cold October day. The leaves whipped through the strange air, hanging in its frigidness. Suspension

... not only of leaves, but of time, and feelings, and of my person, made the day uniquely distinct, apart even now from the meshed past.

She was sick . . . but not *that* sick, right?

Questions hung with the leaves. Why were we called home? Where is Dad? The clock ticked and my heart kept beat. When the door finally opened, the wind rushed in behind my father, slicing my protective shell of ignorance into a thousand fragments. I knew, perceived the pain that reached out and enveloped my spirit. The words that followed were humbled by their shallowness. They could not convey the message, the true message, that our saddened herald bore. "Operation", "brain tumor", "tomorrow", "Mom", all defied my limited comprehension of reality; a reality that, for fourteen years embraced no true pain, hurt, or fear. I watched the tears of the others and, becoming imprisoned in their grief, summoned my own.

Good-byes are always difficult, painful. Shutting doors doesn't always guarantee that another one will open . . . for you. When darkness had finally blanketed the thick air, the leaves ceased their mocking dance in a farewell to the day. I too, said adieu. My mouth had mumbled the words to my mother . . . the only door open then was the hospital door leading out. I could not stay; she would have to face her fears alone, as would I, or so I thought.

The now still night air ironic in its peacefulness, hit my face, nature's blows were unpredictable. Riding through the streets of our ordinary suburban town, I was struck by the sameness of the world around me. Feelings of indignation swelled within me. Suffering seemed like a tiny, lonely island floating in a sea of troubles. You've only got yourself when you are shipwrecked. The silence in the car seemed to stifle my breathing. Somehow saying nothing spoke of the unbearable truth. By not defining them with words, our thoughts were no less real, less tangible, less frightening. It is an uncomfortable realization that many are only capable of communicating in a way that is deemed useless by profound situations. As hurting human beings our hearts cry out only to be muted by a cowardly voice, insecure with even its most basic instinct.

Retreat to my room, to my thoughts, to my soul, where a shattered spirit, a broken reality lay on the doorstep of my fear. I had not left my childhood; it was taken from me. The words on my imaginative door appeared like a ransom note . . . ENTER. Kidnapped by chance (or was it fate) I was led through the entrance of maturity. I had to cope. At fourteen, I knew fear; and at fourteen, I faced it. Perhaps, that is why at sixteen, seasoned by more good-byes I would utter to my mother, I do not fear. Fear eats away at time. Once time seemed suspended, but now it flies, each moment begging to be appreciated, lest it slip away.

For my seventeenth birthday I asked for a bright green balloon. Green because it symbolizes new life. Spring claims green as its own, as do I. Actually the balloon I am wishing for is a special one. It has no strings attached and neither do I.

When I opened the door that some call 'sensitivity', 'awareness', 'maturity' my spirit and soul were replenished anew. The song, TRY TO REMEMBER tells "without a hurt the heart is hollow." I found on that wind-whipped day, a void of sensitivity I continue to fill.

* * * * *

OPPORTUNITY TO PUBLISH:

A Call for 300 Word Statements in *English Journal*

December 1981 (deadline July 20, 1981)

How I turned a censorship problem into something positive.

January 1982 (deadline August 20, 1981)

How I can test without killing kids, or how I test and teach at the same time.

February 1982 (deadline September 20, 1981)

I tried it and surprise, surprise, it *really* works.

March 1982 (deadline October 20, 1981)

What do I feel about pop grammarians, e.g. William Safire, Edwin Newman, and John Simon?

April 1982 (deadline November 20, 1981)

What is the biggest challenge facing English teachers today?

Submit manuscripts to English Journal, College of Education, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85281.

* * * * *

NEW BOOKS NOW AVAILABLE FROM BOYNTON-COOK PUBLISHERS, INC.

6 Godfrey Road
Upper Montclair, NJ 07043
(201) 744-3791

James Moffett, *Coming on Center: English Education in Evolution.*

A collection of talks and articles written since *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* came out, together with comments linking them with each other and with the author's hopes for English education in the 80's and 90's.

James Moffett, *Active Voice: A Writing Program Across the Curriculum.*

A reworking of the program of writing assignments that many teachers across the country have been using in mimeograph form.

Ann E. Berthoff, *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims.*

Part I is a collection of twelve of the author's talks and articles written over the past six years for real teachers in real classrooms facing real dilemmas in teaching writing and reading. Part II is brief accounts by teachers like Montessori, Tolstoy, Freire, and Jane Addams of how they discovered that learning anything is a matter of making one's own meanings.

Dan Kirby & Tom Liner, *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing.*

A book for teachers by two teachers who have taught writing from middle school through college; a thorough and practical guide that reflects the philosophy and practice of people like Berthoff, Britton, Judy, Macrorie, Moffett, and Murray.

* * * * *

PROJECT FELLOWS 1980

SHARON BELL, Upper Darby School District
JOLENE BORGESE, Ridley School District
ED BUREAU, West Chester Area School District
LOU CAMILLETTI, West Chester Area School District
SISTER REGINA NOEL DUNN, Villa Maria Academy
JOAN FLYNN, West Chester Area School District
DORIS GABEL, Octorara Area School District
JANET GRECO, Upper Dublin School District
PATRICIA GROVES, Octorara Area School District
KATHY HEAD, West Chester Area School District
MERLE HOROWITZ, Upper Darby School District

ANTHONY IRWIN, Chichester School District
RALPH JENKINS, Temple University
EDITH LEFFERTS, Wallingford-Swarthmore School District
MARTHA MENZ, Upper Darby School District
SHARON MOFFETT, Upper Darby School District
FREEMA NICHOLS, Wallingford-Swarthmore School District
CATHY POWELL, Octorara Area School District
LOIS SNYDER, Upper Darby School District
SUZANNE VARHOLA, West Chester Area School District
PATRICIA WACHHOLZ, West Chester Area School District

PROJECT FELLOWS 1981

ALEXIS ANDERSON, Ridley School District
MARTIN BLAIR, S.J., St. Joseph's Prep
ROSEMARY BUCKENDORFF, Exeter School District
TIMOTHY BURKE, Westtown School
MARCIA COLE-QUIGLEY, Marple-Newtown School District
LEONA DRIZIN, Norristown Area School District
SISTER CHRISTELLA DUGGAN, Marywood College
STANLEY DULL, Octorara Area School District
CECILIA EVANS, Philadelphia School District
CRAIG FENIMORE, West Chester Area School District
THERESA FRIDERICHS, Marple-Newtown School District
ALICE FRYE, Loyalsock Township School District
JILL GALLIE, Spring-Ford School District
INEZ HILL, Philadelphia School District
EMILY HOLDEN, Spring-Ford School District
CHRIS KANE, Philadelphia School District
PEG KELLY, Wallingford-Swarthmore School District
DORIS KIRK, Coatesville Area School District
EILEEN LePAGE, Albright College

EILEEN LYNCH, Upper Darby School District
BOB McCANN, West Chester Area School District
CHAD MARTIN, Chichester School District
CYNTHIA MENAN, Upper Darby School District
BARBARA MITCHELL, Philadelphia School District
BARBARA MOSTELLER, Owen J. Roberts School District
ALLIE MULVIHILL, Philadelphia School District
CHERYL NICHOLS, Wallingford-Swarthmore School District
JIM NORTON, Coatesville School District
JOSEPH OLEXY, West Chester Area School District
CAROL POLETTO, Avon Grove School District
CHARLOTTE ROEDE, Marple-Newtown School District
DEBORAH ROSELLE, Kennett Consolidated School District
JANET SMITH, Avon Grove School District
CHRIS SUNDRO, Avon Grove School District
MARK TAYLOR, Wallingford-Swarthmore School District
DAVID WASSERMAN, Philadelphia School District
STEVE ZELNICK, Temple University

REVIEW

by Janet Greco

ON WRITING WELL

by William Zinsser, Harper and Row, 1980

If you've done too much reading about writing in too short a time, if you're sated with Britton and Moffett and Macrorie and Graves, you're probably like me and most Writing Project Fellows. That is why, when I sat down in my cozy chair to read Zinsser's *On Writing Well*, I was surprised. I enjoyed it. Though it does not quite bring the post-Institute relief of a beach book, it practices what he preaches: "humanity, clarity, simplicity, vitality" (p. 131). For us teachers, at last, a jargon-free text on good writing.

The book is a primer of principles for mature beginning writers, a genial relative of Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*, which Zinsser calls "the best book on writing that I know" (p. 38). Sharing the standards of plain English they elucidate, Zinsser aims "to teach good English," and thereby rescue writers who "set down to commit an act of literature" (p. 5) but obscure themselves in turgid prose.

A glance at the chapter headings shows fairly traditional stuff: Simplicity, Clutter, Style, Audience, Usage, Words, Unity, Leads, Endings. What makes reading all this yet again into fun is that we hear not the teacher-preacher, but Zinsser's own voice. We learn by example as well as by precept. Note this advice on paring our prose: "Prune it ruthlessly. Be grateful for everything you can throw away" (p. 18). Having mastered the tools — words, sentences, paragraphs — we "can leave the edges or add elegant finials" (p. 20). Style to Zinsser derives from the confidence to use a precision tool in a daring and personal way. Note his own striking metaphor on the subject: "Trying to add style is like adding a toupee," because we see the wig, not the man (p. 20). Writers must be themselves, relaxed and confident, although telling them to be so is like "telling a man to relax while being prodded for a possible hernia" (p. 21).

Since for Zinsser writing is a transaction between two human beings, it should be a lucid, precise medium which conveys the vitality of the writer: "For ultimately the product that any writer has to sell is not his subject, but

who he is" (p. 5). Any of us who have been fascinated by a brilliant teacher on a dull topic will agree. Zinsser's meaning is conveyed in the same precise diction and usage he espouses. And both the meaning and the man make music to our English-teacher ears. Use the thesaurus, he advises; it is a friend "to nudge the memory" (p. 38). Then refine by consulting the dictionary. Zinsser is conservative in grammar and liberal in accepting new words. Wryly he notes how nouns have a tendency to "verbize": "my train conductor announces that the train won't platform in Darien." Zinsser demonstrates "love of the language's beautiful precision" in a helpful description of how an expert panel arrived at usage decisions for *The American Heritage Dictionary* — for example, "hassle" and "freak" (i.e., jazz freak) are useful newcomers, because "we need them to express what they express" (p. 40). Likewise, "stonewall," and "launder." On the other hand, "prioritize" and "disincentive" are pompous replacements for words which already function well.

In addition to his own examples he provides delightful illustrations from *belles lettres*, which we on the front lines of "compositioning" might use in class. A chapter of "Bits and pieces" contains common-sense explanations of punctuation which would serve most students better than a thousand exercises. For example, his advice on the exclamation point:

Don't use it unless you must to achieve a certain effect. It has a gushy aura — the breathless excitement of a debutante commenting on an event that was exciting only to her: "Daddy says I must have had too much champagne!"

Zinsser's chapters on specific non-fiction tasks are easily adaptable to instruction. We have much to teach from his journalistic advice on the interview, place, sports, humor, and criticism. I particularly liked his models for science and technical writing.

This book works well because we never lose Zinsser the man. His prose is "poetic" enough that we see the old in a new way.

Janet Greco, English Department Head at Upper Dublin High (Ambler), is a 1980 Fellow.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Published bi-monthly during the school year
by the Pennsylvania Writing Project
West Chester State College
West Chester, PA 19380

Director: Robert H. Weiss

Co-Director: Mary K. Winters

Publishing Committee:

Louis Camilletti

Edith Lefferts

Doris Gabel

Joan Flynn

Sr. Regina Noel, IHM

Sponsors:

West Chester State College

Chester County Intermediate Unit

Delaware County Intermediate Unit

Montgomery County Intermediate Unit

The Pennsylvania Writing Project is an affiliate of the National/Bay Area Writing Project. It was created by the sponsors under grants from the William Penn Foundation and the University of California at Berkeley, with the National Endowment for the Humanities.

For additional information on the Pennsylvania Writing Project, contact Robert H. Weiss, Director, The Writing Program, West Chester State College, West Chester, PA 19380. Telephone (215)436-2281.

**West Chester State
College**

**Pennsylvania
Writing Project**

c/o Robert Weiss
West Chester State College
West Chester, PA 19380