

PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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AUGUST CONFERENCE FEATURES AUTHOR EVE BUNTING

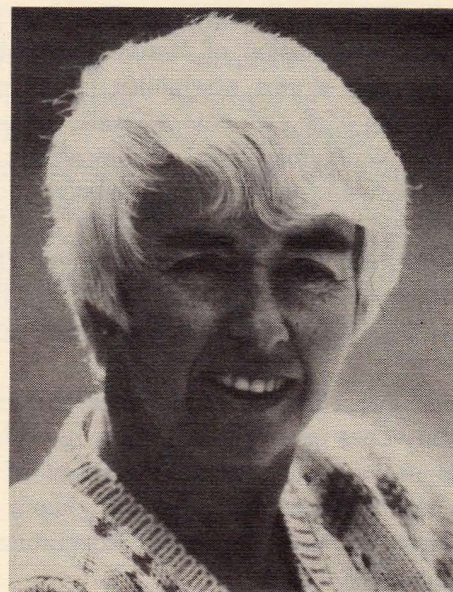
PROGRAM INCLUDES MASAI STORYTELLER AND VISITING SCHOLAR

PAWP's August 9-10 Conference for K-8 teachers is pleased to host three renowned authors as featured presenters: children's author Eve Bunting, storyteller Tololwa Mollé, and educator Marjorie Lipson. Winner of the SCCLCYP Award for Comprehensive Contribution of Lasting Value to the Field of Children's Literature, Bunting is noted for her series of picture books for ages 3-8 as well as her fiction for ages 8-14. Familiar titles are *Red Fox Running*, *Someday a Tree*, *The Day Before Christmas*, *Our Teacher's Having a Baby*, *The Wall*, *Such Nice Kids*, and *Face at the End of the World*. In her conference presentation on "Connecting With Children Through Books," Bunting will recollect her memories of a childhood in Ireland and the boarding school where she first developed her love for reading and writing. As a full-time author, she will share her writing routine and how she stumbles on the ideas that become her books.

Tololwa Marti Mollé is an Arusha Masai who grew up on his grandfather's coffee farm in Tanzania, an hour's drive from Mount Kilimanjaro. After receiving degrees in Literature and Theatre from the University of Dar es Salaam, Mollé went to the University of Alberta (Canada), returned to U. Tanzania to head its theatre department, and then completed his Ph.D. in theatre at Edmonton University, where he now lives. His books include *The Orphan Boy*, an ALA Notable Children's Book in 1992, and *The King and the Tortoise*. His presentation on "The Power of Story" will combine

story-telling with an intensely personal narrative of his development as an author.

The academic conference presenter, Marjorie Lipson of the University of Vermont, is widely known as a reading expert in teaching, evaluation, and remedial reading. She has authored numerous books and articles on these subjects, including "Individualizing within Basal Instruction" and "Encouraging Active Reading and Independence through Teacher-Student Dialogues." Lipson's August presentation is titled "Reading, Writing, and Thinking as Meaningful Enterprise: The Promise of a Literature-based Program."



Eve Bunting

EDITOR'S CORNER: TEACHER AS WRITER

I certainly do one heck of a lot of writing every day as part of my job. I don't enjoy very much of it and none of it is worth preserving on the off chance that I become famous and someone wants to write the definitive biography of me. Maybe *The Unauthorized* paperback?

I don't think I'm unusual in the amount of lackluster writing I'm called upon to do daily; I'm sure every teacher in every school district in every state has the same writing to do. Actually, it occurs to me that I'm insulting all the 'real' authors in the world when I call what I do 'writing.'

I never thought I'd write the Great American Novel anyway, but I certainly won't when all my creative juices are drained away in discipline referrals for students who didn't come to school or class on time, for students who are disruptive in the hallway or in class, for students who are chewing gum in a newly-remodeled, carpeted building after they've been told a dozen times this week not to, for students who...well, you get the idea. What few juices I have left are further drained into homework or classwork assignments for students who are serving in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension or went on vacation for two weeks to hunt elk in Montana. Besides, where would I get assignments a student could do well on his own in a small enclosed room? We don't read two chapters a night and answer the questions at the end of the chapters anymore.

What else do I write? I write lists to myself of things I have to do for home and I write lists of things I have to do for school and I write lists of things I have to do for PAWP and Pennlit. I always remember to start my lists with "write list" so that the minute I'm finished writing the list I can check something off.

I write my version of lesson plans which are thrown off by snow storms, assemblies, rainstorms when we were going for a nature walk, fire drills, uncooperative Xerox machines, announcements, absent students, rescheduled sporting events, suddenly scheduled music practices, noise in the halls, early dismissal for regularly scheduled sporting events, Sports Day, AP tests, and my inability to find the books I so carefully stored away last year so I could find them easily this year.

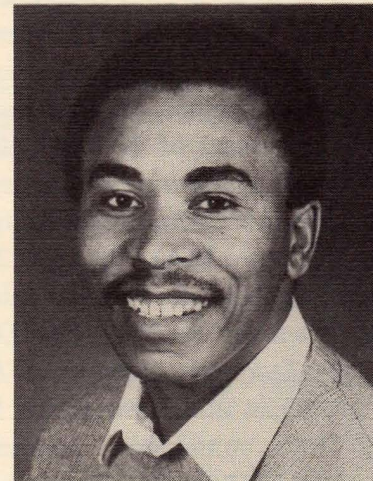
And then there're the notes to students: complimentary ones on work well done, re-explanations of when to use a colon, re-re-explanations of what a conclusion should sound like, questions about missing work, comments on misinterpretations, congratulations on good interpretations.

Of course there are the answers to guidance counselor forms on why Johnny just sat in his seat finishing a make-up test while study hall ended, the four-minute passing time flew by, the next students entered the room and took their seats, I set up a VCR and started the last act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and turned out the lights, and Johnny's Spanish class started and ran for 15 minutes before I took roll and saw Johnny was still there.

Let's not forget the paperwork on designing a tenth grade integrated social studies and English class that will run two periods a day for the entire year.

Did I start by saying I never thought I'd write the Great American Novel? The way my energies are used up not only will I not write the Great American Short Story but I have grave doubts about my writing the Great American Haiku.

MORE AUGUST SPEAKERS



Tololwa Marti Mollel, Masai author of Orphan Boy



Marjorie Lipson, reading expert

STATE FEATURES FOUR PAWP FELLOWS

PA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PRINTS SECOND SET OF TEACHERS' REFLECTIONS

Four of the twelve pieces in the second set of REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING WRITING are authored by our own remarkable PAWPers. Subtitled MORE VOICES OF CHANGE FROM PENNSYLVANIA'S WRITING PROJECTS, this newly published volume is intended to show how teachers' insights and repertoires have grown as a result of their work in our state's National Writing Project sites.

Each piece emphasizes the teaching of writing and/or the use of writing to achieve notable classroom objectives. Distribution throughout Pennsylvania is to the 29 Intermediate Units and the 9 Writing Project sites. To receive a free copy, contact the PAWP office or the PA Framework Coordinator of your county's Intermediate Unit.

Conne Broderick (1984 Fellow) wrote about her elementary learning-disabled students who experienced writing as a process in her classroom but needed editing skills--specifically in spelling--to increase the readability of their stories. Classroom evaluation was the problem addressed by high school teacher Peggy Walsh (1992 Bucks), who recounted her story of learning to not grade each draft produced by a student; instead, she found productive ways to hold revision conferences on ungraded papers with all of her students and thus was able to *read* their work rather than grade it. Christine Cardamone (1984) emphasized ways to show her 6th grade classes' successes as writers and learners through their cumulative writing folders, their high level of interest in writing to their parents, and her frequent reviews of their work on the overhead projector. Beth Cox (1988) showed how she established an unthreatening exercise that overcame her writing students' reluctance to share their work.

In other pieces from the network of PA/NWP sites across the state, we hear how a somewhat dissatisfied veteran of high school English teaching learned to use reader response logs, how a primary teacher learned to "stretch" by adapting lessons from other grade levels, and how another teacher organized her new knowledge of graphic organizers, interviews, journals, free choice writing, and other instructional strategies into a coherent whole. Still other essays describe math logs, letters to the teacher, letters home to parents, and parents' letters back to their children; awareness activities re-focusing bias about the roles of adolescent males and females and related attitudes; non-directed conferences in a high school writing center distinguishing between higher and lower-level concerns;

collaboration and feedback in writing groups; and the use of portfolios in a high school journalism class. The final essay takes us out of an individual classroom and into a voluntary, after-school Writers' Workshop for high school students who are surveyed about their independent commitment to writing as a craft.

The twelve pieces provide a forum for the individual voices of classroom teachers--in other words, reflective professional writing. They are hoped to be readable and useful examples of practically focused, teacher-written reflections and to they lead to experimentation and dissemination of NWP's ideas for effective teaching and learning. PDE is optimistic about the chances for subsequent volumes in coming years, and PAWP hopes that it can continue to make contributions that celebrate the work of good teachers and the power of publication. Congratulations, Beth, Peggy, Conne, and Chris!

Bring the Project to your school this Fall

Courses led by PAWP and PennLit teacher-consultants are waiting for your invitation. Excellent evaluations have been received by Strategies for Teaching Writing (I-II), Strategies for Teaching Literature, Portfolio Assessment, Writing in the Content Areas, Whole Language, Writing Assessment, and other graduate courses and workshops. These courses may be held on-site, after school or Saturdays, and may begin as late as October. In-service programs are also available.

Contact: Mariann Shirk, 610-436-2297.

**THE REAL THING: EDUCATIONAL REFORM
THROUGH THE NATIONAL WRITING
PROJECT**

The lead editorial in the most recent National Writing Project *Quarterly* takes aim at the political philosophy of the school reform movement. Editor Miriam Ylvisaker, a teacher-consultant of the Bay Area Writing Project, is eloquent in deflating the reformists for their failure to recognize teachers' roles and strengths.

Like the light at the end of the tunnel, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, or the multi-million dollar jackpot, an amorphous something called school reform is being trumpeted as the answer to the complex issues of teaching and learning that will confront us in this new century.

Educational reports proliferate. We have the reports that say children cannot write, that say vouchers are the hot ticket, that say partnerships with business will solve funding problems, that say American children spend too little, too much, or the wrong kind of time in the classroom, that say Japanese students, or German students, or Swiss students are better motivated and better educated. And, most recently, we have an international report from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development which takes an analytic look at the teaching of reading, writing, math, and science and points out strengths and weaknesses in five industrial nations. Amazingly, this report characterizes many practices in American schools that are indeed successful and points out that in many ways, American schools are doing as well as those in other countries.

Concurrent with this growth industry of education report-making, we have had twenty-one years of growth in the National Writing Project. Without fanfare or public relations, NWP has changed the lives of 1,150,000 teachers, helped teachers to change their schools and districts, helped to energize many of these teachers to become leaders in education--curriculum developers, principals, school board members and so on.

The remarkable track record of NWP--and, I like to think, PAWP--exists because we reform without advertising it. Our work is with real teachers creating real writing environments for real students, and it does not emanate from educational think tanks led by exorbitantly priced consultants who are professors and deans of education. Because the transactions of NWP sites have this authenticity, they are more solid and provide more direct and measurable outcomes than the

plans of reformers and restructurers. How many planners of reform can say that they have the support of hundreds and thousands of teachers eager to espouse their thinking?



**THE 1994 FELLOWS
PAWP SUMMER INSTITUTE**

Exton Institute

Margaret Barney, Rose Tree Media S.D.
Mark Boeni, Chichester S.D.
Kathryn Breen, Upper Darby S.D.
Christine Burnley, Coatesville S.D.
Troy Czukoski, West Chester S.D.
Christine Dano, Rose Tree Media S.D.
Grace Fatscher, Rose Tree Media S.D.
Susan Fitzgerald, Coatesville S.D.
Ruth Ann Higgins, Don Guanella School
Margaret Kingham, Williamson Free School
Toni Koller, Kutztown S.D.
Mark Linkins, Wallingford-Swarthmore S.D.
Phyllis Maier, Coatesville S.D.
Sherry McVeigh, Tredyffrin-Easttown S.D.
Mary Rachinsky, Villa Maria-Lower School
Mary Reindorp, Wallingford-Swarthmore S.D.
Anthony Rotondo, West Chester S.D.
John Steczak, Rose Tree Media S.D.
Carol Townsend, Rose Tree Media S.D.
Rose Ann Uhrig, Reading S.D.
Rina Vassallo, Springfield S.D.
Donald Vitko, Lancaster S.D.
Katherine White, Rose Tree Media S.D.
David Woods, Rose Tree Media S.D.

Bucks Institute

Erika Allen, Upper Moreland S.D.
Jessie Bachike, Neshaminy S.D.
Bonnie Brown, Hatboro-Horsham S.D.
Mary Grace Buckwalter, Neshaminy S.D.
Lisa Canfield, The Pen Ryn School
Katherine Falso, Cheltenham S.D.
James Gildea, Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Linda Machiewicz, Willingboro S.D.
Elisabeth Muska, The Pen Ryn School
Carol Rohrbach, Springfield Twp S.D.
Valerie Smith, Pennridge S.D.
Mary Tyler Holmes, Council Rock S.D.
Mary Lou Winkeler-Hoffman, Wissahickon S.D.
Donna Wurzbach, Colonial S.D.

PAWPERS AGAIN VISIT WASHINGTON, EXERT IMPRESSIVE INFLUENCE

In what has become an annual ritual, a troupe of PAWP teacher-consultants accompanied Bob Weiss on February 24 to the nation's capital to present senators and representatives with their success stories as teachers of writing. This year's trip was especially grueling for some of the visiting TC's because of icy road conditions (remember the recent winter?). But by all reports, the day was a great success.

The PAWP travellers were Carol Reigh from Berks County, Sue Mowery from Lancaster County, Diane Miernicki from Bucks County, Chuck Baker and Robin Ayres from Montgomery County, and Kathleen Rauch and Rosanna Denney from Delaware County. (Rosanna got recruited only the day before)

Also attending a full day of briefing sessions and meeting with legislators and their aides were members of three other NWP sites in Pennsylvania, including PhilWP. Together, some fifteen Pennsylvania TC's or site directors shared their experiences and their views with our federal representatives, who are among the strongest supporters of NWP in the House and Senate.

As a result of the visit, letters of support for NWP have been forwarded from the Chancellor of the State System of Higher Education and the Secretary of Education. PAWPers hope that the passage of ESEA will gain a five-year authorization for the NWP brand of school reform into the 21st century.

In Washington the TC's learned that the number of Congressional co-sponsors of the NWP authorizing legislation had grown to 105 Representatives and 46 Senators. They learned too that these supporters had inserted NWP into the major Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Some weeks after returning home, PAWP learned that the National Writing Project withstood a fierce challenge to delete all small programs from ESEA. The *Congressional Record* for March 24, 1994 attests to the powerful speech made by Representative Curt Weldon of Delaware County, who rose to defend NWP from the hostile amendment:

The National Writing project is one program that gives us the most bang for the buck....Teachers throughout my district [Delaware and Chester Counties] have participated in this program. Implementing what they learned into the classroom has had a tremendous impact. This impact is not just upon English class, but social studies, and even mathematics....For instance, explaining a mathematics formula in writing can bring about a firmer understanding of that formula in a student's mind....

Most importantly, children recognize the importance of this program. Let me quote some students in Mrs. Rauch's class at Springton Lake Middle School. Michelle Conquest says, "Six months ago I could not write with a simile. Now I receive many compliments for my writing." Eve Bateman says, "I've learned to express myself, use figurative language, and write better endings..." And Jacob Rossiter says, "When I grow up I want to be a famous writer and dedicate it to the best 6th grade writing workshop teacher, Mrs. Rauch. Ever since I've been in her class I've started to enjoy writing."

These children are motivated to improve their writing. Their teachers and the National Writing Project deserve credit for this enthusiasm. The National Writing Project is an excellent small investment from which children and our country reap enormous benefits. I ask my colleagues to continue such projects across the country by voting "no" on the [hostile] amendment.

The amendment to delete the National Writing Project from ESEA was defeated by voice vote. As of this writing, the same provision has to withstand challenge in the Senate, and then to have funds appropriated. It's a long haul, and it certainly teaches the old lesson of "how a bill becomes a law."



TC Diane Miernicki, center, gets hugged by Project Director Bob Weiss and Congressman Jim Greenwood



Sue Mowery, Bob Weiss, and Carol Reigh compare information for their Senators.

MAKING THE TRANSITION

by Sandy McCullough

I knew there was a reason for me to commit to the Institute this summer [1993]. It goes along with my request to transfer to the new elementary school in our district. I was profoundly unhappy with the way I was teaching. I had allowed myself to get comfortable with the packaged approach to teaching third grade: follow the manuals, cover the material, give the standardized tests and make sure you have enough objective measures to justify the grades you assign. This approach conflicts with my personal style and my feeling that each one of my students is unique and gifted in ways they will reveal.

The times I have connected and felt good about my teaching have been those "teachable moments" when I have listened to my instincts and to the kids and gone off on the unbeaten track. With what I have learned and absorbed, I resolve to make some significant progress along the whole language continuum. I am fortunate to work with a woman with instincts similar to mine--I look forward to being able to give back to her (and to others) some of what she has so generously shared with me.

In deciding that I will not teach in the same way as in the past, I must begin to put forth a plan to start out on the right foot on the first day of school--no time to waste, no opportunity to return to old habits.

I have been thinking about why I haven't been more effective in teaching reading and writing. Aside from sometimes feeling intimidated and controlled by colleagues, my problem has been one of organization and lack of routines.

Ken Goodman suggests that a teacher assess her program. Here is my self-assessment:

Strengths

- * Listening carefully to each student
- * Evaluating students' work relative to their own progress
- * Respecting and celebrating each child's differences and special talents
- * Revealing myself to the kids
- * Allowing kids a good deal of ownership; trying not to control the product
- * Conveying a love of literature and reading
- * Giving kids independent reading times each day
- * Decreasing use of workbooks and worksheets

Areas to Work On

- * Maintaining the writing process from pre-write to publishing throughout the year; very weak on pre-writing and publishing
- * Sharing of my own reading and writing and having my students share on a regular basis

- * Writing and reading with the kids; keeping a notebook and dialogue journal
- * Minimizing use of basal; supplementing it with a variety of reading experiences.

I'd like to investigate a way to initiate writing at the beginning of the year. Marjorie Frank offers tips for easing into writing:

1. Get kids talking.
2. Present assignments to invite many responses.
3. The teacher should express herself freely.
4. Start with short pieces of writing.

What I can do before I meet my students that will enhance, not inhibit, our working toward establishing a literate community:

1. I can plan the reading of two stories in Unit 1 of the basal, with reader response activities geared to oral exploration, short writing pieces and brainstorming with the kids for other extensions.
2. I can set up reading and writing folders and begin to organize a system of assessment. This is important!
3. I can put together status of the class sheets for writing and independent reading.
4. I can plan what book to read aloud first and what, if any, transactional activities go along with it.

During the first week of school:

5. I can concentrate on setting the tone for a year of fun and exploration with books, words, sharing and learning.
6. I can tell the kids about myself--family, favorite books and authors, my philosophy of teaching: to grow and learn together, not to look for mistakes or for the one right answer.
7. I can afford the kids lots of opportunities to become comfortable with one another.
8. I can begin to talk about and model how to approach our reading and writing workshops. We can discuss the concept of response groups (maybe some have experienced them) and begin to build up group/class trust and mutual respect. We may also begin our notebooks.

Beyond the first week, I can resolve to be flexible, to "look for children's voices throughout the day," as Donald Graves says, and spend more time planning for the next day, than on grading meaningless worksheets.

This piece is adapted from a longer reflection Sandy McCullough wrote when she was a 1993 Fellow. She teaches third grade in Rose Tree Media S.D.

**TEACHERS' VOICES:
PORTFOLIOS IN THE CLASSROOM**
Mary Ann Smith and Miriam Ylvisaker, eds.

A Review by Mary Lou Kuhns

This collection of thirteen, very readable, essays bursts the bubble that insists "multiple choice bubble tests serve student learning." Kindergarten through twelfth grade teachers from California, North Carolina, Mississippi, Missouri, and Vermont talk about their work with portfolios—describing their first year to over a dozen years of experience with portfolios. They also explain how their definitions of portfolios have evolved or have been revised. Readers get a glimpse into teachers classrooms and the types of collections encouraged to promote student learning. Most of the articles incorporated student work or their comments. As teacher Susan Reed explains, "We are learning to see ourselves through our work."

In the Introduction, co-editor Smith points out, "This is not a book about right answers. It is a book about thinking." The essays narrate how each teacher and each teacher's students have created portfolios. They also record the thinking that such work causes. Smith maintains that portfolios are best when they are "under-invented." No teacher in *Voices* violates this premise.

Instead, the teachers explore purposes: Are these portfolios for the state, our district, our program? Is the purpose to examine a process model? Is the purpose to see mastery of learning? Or is it to chart growth (called the most difficult design)? Clear to this reader was the notion that no portfolio system can do it all, nor should it try. While some purposes may overlap, purposes must not be contradictory. Fern Tavalin stresses this point in discussing the Vermont portfolio writing system.

While Vermont and Mississippi's state systems are mentioned, and one department's work is explained, the focus is on showcase and classroom marking period portfolios. With the exception of John Dorroh's biology portfolio and one other teacher's comments, few wrote on specific details of their grading systems. Bob Tierney, a California biology National Writing Project teacher-consultant and a guest speaker for the Pennsylvania Writing Project, inspired Dorroh's design. The biology portfolio is the only content area discussed at length. Most teachers describe literature and writing portfolios. Common themes heard from the teacher include:

- + never throw anything away,
- + listen to students for design possibilities,
- + reflection is the heart of a portfolio,
- + let students have choices,

+ encourage and then watch student ownership and responsibility and ownership develop with portfolio use.

Some teachers took these attitudes and went about fitting their portfolios into the constraints of their school's requirements; others drove the curriculum because of their discoveries about what is important for students to learn. Teachers claimed success with each approach.

As teachers became more familiar with portfolios, they also became more aware of the negative factor of grading and found portfolios to be an improved method of assessment, but Lois Brandt warns of the danger of portfolios becoming the new "mantra" for teachers, solving all our problems with assessment.

Voices is the first in a newly-resumed National Writing Project publication series that stresses teachers as writers. The glimpses into their classrooms and their commitment to portfolios is evident in this collection where theory is rarely mentioned.

HOW TO ORDER

If you or your school district wants actual portfolio experience and advice, order *Teachers' Voices: Portfolios in the Classroom*, edited by Mary Ann Smith and Miriam Ylvisaker, from the National Writing Project for \$12.50 and \$1.25 shipping and handling. The address is NWP, School of Education, University of California at Berkeley, 615 University Hall, Berkeley, CA 94720. Pre-payment to NWP Corporation by check is required.

NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT LIKES PAWP

In its most recent round of reviews that evaluate all sites of the National Writing Project, PAWP's story emerged a clear success. Our summer institute was called "a well-honed model of the NWP principles" that "breathes life into your vision for improving writing instruction." PAWP in-service programs and credit-bearing courses were praised ("participants rave about the quality") for having "strong teacher participation." Our evaluation studies were also well received for a "balance of anecdotal and quantitative data" that "provides a clear, comprehensive picture of the multiple ways PAWP has had an impact on teachers, students, and school districts." Even the PAWP *Newsletter* was cited for doing "an excellent job of dissemination."

HOW I CAME TO TELL STORIES

by Greg Metzger

I remember sitting in my office skimming over the choices on the in-service day brochure. My options were many: whole language, P.C.R.P.II, stress management. But one of the choices kept reappearing before my eyes, again and again: Storytelling. No matter how long I mused over the descriptions of the other programs, my eyes always seemed drawn back to the part of the brochure which said Storytelling. The thought of signing up for that session both beckoned and repelled me at the same time. Over the years, a few professional storytellers, like wandering troubadours, had made their way into my school for assemblies or residency programs. I recalled how I always enjoyed these skilled tellers as they wove their tales, what might I be asked to do in such a workshop? It would be easy to make a fool of myself. Still the words on the page kept beckoning--Storytelling. As the day for making my final choice drew near, my interest and curiosity won out. I checked the box that was to change my life--if not in a monumental way, at least in some way which I hope has been for the better.

When the in-service day arrived, I had prepared myself mentally to make the best of it, although I did consider ducking out at the last minute and sliding into some other session. With gritted teeth--do storytellers ever grit their teeth for effect?--I drove toward destiny. I was on the road about five minutes when I discovered I had left the day's brochure at home. I thought I remembered that all the sessions were being held in Downingtown High School. As I pulled onto the parking lot, a feeling of uncertainty came over me. After ten minutes of wandering the deserted building, I faced the awful truth that I was indeed in the wrong place. An office secretary who had the day's brochure consulted it and replied, "Oh, that session is being held over at the I.U. in Exton." I detected a "you should have known better" look beneath her smile. How would I ever be able to remember a story if I couldn't even remember where the session was being held?

When I arrived the room was packed. Could this many people really be interested in storytelling? Inconspicuously, I slid into a back seat and tuned into the presentation. Debra, the presenter, was explaining how she had discovered storytelling ten years earlier when she wandered into a tent at the annual county fair in Jonesboro, Tennessee. She had gone there to learn something else--quilting or clog dancing or somethingbut her workshop had been filled. As a second choice, storytelling was what she found. There was an energy and enthusiasm about her presentation that said to me she's really excited about this. After a few other

introductory remarks, Debra said she was going to tell us some stories and that's where the magic began.

First came *The Giving Tree*, one of her favorites. Timelessness crept in. The boy grew into a man before our eyes, and the tree continued to give so unselfishly of all that it had. Characters and concepts took on flesh and bone and lived in my imagination. As the morning progressed, Debra led us through several exercises in which we read some very brief stories and told them to a partner. She told us not to memorize the stories but to see them in our imagination and just tell what we saw. This was hard for me to grasp at first because I had always thought storytellers memorized their tales. Always Debra would bring us back to another tale, and the magic began again. Her tales transported us into other worlds--some funny, some thoughtful--all delightfully entertaining. There was on wonderfully humorous tale of kindly old Granny Jenkins who lived in the hills of Kentucky. She had spent her whole life bent over in a crooked position due to a childhood illness. When Granny passed on and the time came to say farewell to the old woman, there was much disputing among the in-laws as to how best to bury her. No matter which way they tried, Granny would not lay out straight in her coffin. Debra's audience laughed with delight as one in-law after another suggested ways of straightening Granny out. As I listened, I became convinced that anything this much fun to listen to would be even more fun to learn and gift others with.

Some months later, I noticed that Debra was offering a summer workshop in Storytelling at the I.U. Without hesitation, I enrolled. For one week, six hours a day, a group of 17 teachers were immersed in learning the fundamentals of storytelling. We were instructed in how to select good stories to tell and the importance of voice and posture, always there were Debra's stories. There was poor Henry Possum who fell from his mother's back and had to wander in the deep dark forest alone until he found his way home. We met an intrepid and fearless turtle in *The Turtle and the Wolves* who outwitted his adversaries and escaped being eaten. We grew into our understanding of making the story our own and seeing it through the mind's eye.

I felt awkward on Friday of that week when each member of the class had to come forward and tell his or her tale. Nothing makes me feel more vulnerable than standing before an audience with no book or notes and relying entirely on what I carry in my mind.

Rhonda led off with *The Five Chinese Brothers*, her cheeks all puffed out like balloons as she swallowed the sea. Then there was Janice who told us *Small Pig*. How effective were her movements as she shifted this way and that trying to get unstuck from the cement. I did

a rather formal telling of *The Lost Son* and breathed relief when finished, the hit of the day was Joe who finished in the dark with a spine tingling ghost story called *Goat Eyes*. When Joe hit on the jump line, every teacher in the room came screaming off the floor. I think some people were still shaking when we left the room twenty minutes later.

As summer passed on, I couldn't wait to take Storytelling and some of the tales I had heard back to school. September returned, and I had in mind to do some telling and encourage the children to do the same. As I planned the unit, I began to get glimpses of the incredible potential in storytelling as a learning tool. Reading, writing, speaking and listening all packaged in a unique, highly motivational unit. Why hadn't anyone thought of it before? Whole language in its purest sense would abound as the children selected their tales and learned to be tellers. The educational possibilities that Storytelling held seemed truly explosive. Live waves pounding on the shore, the immeasurable benefits of storytelling seemed to sweep over me wave after wave.

After getting all my year's preliminary work out of the way, I went into a fifth grade class for my first run of a three-week Storytelling unit. From beginning to end it was a huge success. Children read and shared many tales in deciding what to tell. They practiced in pairs; rehearsing for the Storytelling Festival we had planned. Writing was frequently used as a tool for investigating the stories from different angles and constructing the personal version of the tale each child would tell, and, in between it all, I had fun pulling the class aside and telling them tales I was working on. I was always rewarded by the absorbing looks of the children as they were held under the spell of the tale. What most amazed me was my ability to begin to tell much longer stories. Some could run up to twenty minutes or longer and the majority of the children were able to stay with me, hanging on each work and turn of the plot.

When the day of our festival arrived, the children were nervous but excited. As anticipation grew, children vied to be first or last depending on their confidence level. As each child came forward to tell his or her tale, I cheered for them in my heart for all the work they had put into their tellings.

There were many surprises during the festival. The boys who were class clowns and the girls with all the right answers told passable stories, but we were used to seeing so much more from them. It was Rebecca--the quiet girl--who enthralled us with her version of *The Three Wishes* and Saul--the little professor and class mascot--who amazed us with his version of *The Paper Crane*. As the last teller finished, I realized that I, with the children's help, had completed a journey. I felt I had

climbed a mountain and received a broader view. I had come to a new place where I had never been before, and it is a place I hope to go back to many times in the future.

A reading teacher at the Kemblesville Elementary School, Avon-Grove School District, Greg Metzger wrote this personal reflection for the summer Strategies for Teaching Writing course at Exton.

WILLY COMES HOME

Judith M. Jester

Todd Strasser, best known for novelizing the movies, *Free Willy* and *Home Alone*, was the guest speaker at the PAWP Annual banquet. After some opening remarks, Strasser presented his theory of writing fiction for young adults. He explained that this style is like a mathematical proof, both very logical and practical.

He asserted that the heart of every story is a controlling and a conflicting idea. The controlling idea is the theme or message of the work. For instance, Strasser said the message of *Home Alone* is "You can do much more than you think you can" while the counter idea is "You can't." Kevin, the young protagonist, attempts to manage on his own for several days, while stomachaches, loneliness, and two burglars try to do him in.

The problems that Kevin and all protagonists like him face are labeled progressive complications by Strasser. From the onset of the story to the conclusion, these complications support the counter idea. They, in fact, attempt to thwart the controlling options the protagonist has grow fewer and fewer. Just when it seems darkest for the hero or heroine, the controlling idea reaches fruition and everyone lives happily ever after. Unless, of course, the story was intended to end pessimistically.

While advocating advancing stories along in baby steps, Strasser also discussed the power of subplots in moving stories along, as well as reminding writers to "show, not tell."

One PAWPer remarked, "It's nice to have an author validate what we've been saying all along."

Judith Jester, a 1993 PAWP fellow, teaches for the Kennett Consolidated School District.

When I'm not writing, I don't think.

E. L. Doctorow

THERE IS AN "I" IN PORTFOLIO

by Elizabeth L. Esris

Here is the fantasy: everyone has left school for the day and I am alone in my classroom. The early evening sun filters through the blinds on the long windows, and I feel more relaxed than I have in some time. I sense that there is meaning to my class; I may have touched a soul or two, and tomorrow actually has some distinct appeal. Suddenly the two file drawers in the front of my room fly open and out dances a chorus line of manila folders. They strut about the room with the faces of my students confidently plastered on their covers. Each face is alive with expression--mischievous, hilarity, wonder, suspicion--a cacophony of personality surrounds me, engulfs me, beguiles me. I stare in wonder at the sight. For a moment in time I have lost control. My attention and my reactions are led by this band of revelers.

It is almost a fantasy and it is almost real. For in my slow moving quest to discover the meaning, the usefulness, and the potential of portfolios, I have witnessed the transformation of a plain manila folder into a lively, personality-laden glimpse into the heart and mind of a child. At times the glimpse is inspiring and rewarding:

I made a promise to do my absolute best all through eight grade...I think I am achieving my goal, keeping the promise. I do think I've become stronger especially in writing (with your help!) But the year's not over and there is still lots of room for growth--I'll keep trying!

(Danielle, eighth grade)

At other times the messages are moving beyond words for what they unintentionally tell about the education of a child:

I have learned I can do better if I give it my best. Yes I have learned that I can read my story out loud and not get laughed at and now take criticism from people and try to make it better.

(Marc, eighth grade)

These reflections are taken from the writing portfolios of my eighth grade students at The Pen Ryn School in Bucks County. They are excerpts from a mid-year self-assessment done by students in my English class. These evaluations were part of the student's portfolios for the 1992-93 academic year. To me, they were milestones in my quest to explore, implement, and understand portfolios.

I know that the field of language arts is alive with articles, books, and how-to-do-it manuals on the topics of portfolios and portfolio assessment. It is my way, however, to develop a cautious intimacy with any teaching tool, for I always feel so acutely aware of the

effect that any "teaching revolution" might have on my students. In my effort to turn the writing folders in the file drawers into more than just keepers of student work, I have, over the past two years, experimented, read articles, and elicited input from students about the nature of a valuable portfolio.

My natural interest in portfolios, coupled with caution, is echoed by Regie Routman in her 1991 work *Invitations* "The concept behind portfolios is a powerful one and can be consistent with whole language teaching as long as it is a cultural process that serves the students and hides the teacher" (330). This sense of being a useful tool for the student, as well as for the teacher, seems to me to be one of the crucial points in the use of portfolios. "There is real danger, especially collection silos-- storage bins filled with data serving no useful purpose"(330). Purpose, purpose, purpose. Purpose must be the key to the use of portfolios.

So in the past two years I have tried to explore the purpose of portfolios in my class. Indeed, these folders have been storage silos and, in some ways, they still are. They have also become active inventories of thought, catalysts for introspection, and works in progress. More than anything, however, they have become a source of "I," a place where the "I" of the child is heard, celebrated, considered, and welcomed. It is a haven for the growth of the child-writer: a place where forms and genres are attempted, place for approximation as well as a final end product. The portfolio, in my class has taken a turn toward purpose.

The purpose, the "I," should not be confused with reams of free-writes and volumes of self-indulgent thought. Rather the "I" is seen in a wide variety of writings which challenge the students many learning needs and prove to the sometimes unsure child that many forms of writing are possible.

I still am not the best writer sometimes I skip a sentence, leave out a few words, or forget paragraphs. But I feel like I'm sticking to the subject I'm writing. I'm thinking before I write. But I still need a lot of improving to extend my brain better. (David, eighth grade)

David, a bright, caring, interested child with only average ability in language arts had a portfolio, by the end of this school year, that was filled with personal narratives, drawings, descriptions, poetry, a research paper on J. Edgar Hoover, commentary on the work of some of his peers and reflections on his own potential progress and style as a writer. Through the use of the portfolio as a reflection of himself, David was able to explore what writing is and can be in his life--both his

academic life and his personal life. David came to see writing as part of his being; it became a tool for learning, thinking, and expressing the "I" that he values.

I believe that portfolios have become valuable to students in my class, but they have a long way to go before they have definite form. (Perhaps they never will have definite form.) Like any topic that is in the process of being researched, the possibilities of what a complete portfolio comprises stretch before me. I am in no hurry to have all the answers at once. I am still exploring, and with the help of my students, I anticipate new directions for the content of portfolios. I hope that they will become an essential part of my students' education and that my students will continue to use the reflective thought they found so helpful in my class when looking at their collected and chosen work. I think they might, for in our many conversations about writing we always link writing to the world as a whole. My students know that it is a tool for life. Likewise, I hope they come to see the accumulation of a body of their own work as something that represents growth, learning, and insight into themselves.

An eighth grade English teacher in the Central Bucks School District, Elizabeth Esris wrote this I-Search as she became a teacher-consultant in the Bucks County Summer Institute.

A TRIBUTE TO JIM GRAY

by Jolene Borgese

Jim Gray, the founder of the National Writing Project, is stepping down as its executive director this September. I struggled with my approach to this article: should it be chatty and personal or "just the facts"? If asked, my students would echo my words and say, "Find your focus and show me your story." So here's my best shot.

A burly guy--almost grumpy--with a friendly twinkle in his eye, holds court wherever he is. He's empowered teachers of all level by bringing them together with college professors to work collaboratively to improve writing instruction for millions of students across the country and to help those teachers find their own writer's voice. Jim's sometimes politically incorrect, for he says what he wants when he wants and gets away with it, much like small children and old people. But he had an idea that has spanned over twenty years and that continues to grow in scope and size with rave reviews. To the National Council Teachers of English, Jim's National Writing Project is "an exemplary national resource," and to the American Association for Higher

Education it is "an outstanding and nationally significant example of how schools and colleges can collaborate to improve American education."

The first time I met Jim was in Philadelphia at a NWP Directors Meeting nearly ten years ago. He was holding court at a cocktail party hosted by PAWP assistant director Martha Menz at her charming center city home. He was pleased by the friendly gestures our writing project provided. I was intimidated by who he was, but he was relaxed and friendly and typified the notion of all of us working towards a common goal (not a top-down kind of guy).

The legend is that early in Jim's career, he had formed a vision of "teachers teaching teachers." He began the Bay Area Writing Project in 1975 when he was a teacher in the teacher education program at UC-Berkeley where he is now a Senior Lecturer. His motive was to help solve the problem of "entering freshmen not being able to write at the level the university required." He had long dreamed of a "partnership between the universities and the schools, where the universities can recognize the expertise of the best classroom teachers." This dream has long been realized, and PAWP is a prime example of classroom teachers working in orchestration with the university on improving writing instruction and students' writing.

I'd like to personally thank Jim for the many opportunities he has provided me and PAWP. Through his efforts and leadership, Jim has touched the professional lives of countless teachers (as of 1993 there are 173 sites: 155 in the USA and 18 sites across the globe) by giving them the opportunities to become better teachers of writing and teachers teaching other teachers. Thank you, Jim, and good luck! You will be missed.

Goldberg, Mark F. "Portrait of James Gray." *Educational Leadership*. November, 1989.

PAWP TO OFFER COURSES IN HARRISBURG

Under a program established by the 14 state-owned universities, PAWP will be offering some of its courses for West Chester University credit in Harrisburg during the coming year. All programs will be held at the Dixon University Center along the Susquehanna River. The program offered on Saturdays in Fall 1994 is Strategies for Teaching Writing I. Subsequent possible offerings are the PA Framework/Writing-Reading Connections course, Computers and Writing, and Writing in the Content Areas. Several PAWPer are excited about this opportunity to travel as presenters, and plans include involving teacher-consultants of the Capital Area Writing Project as well.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

by Grace Flannery

Lesson Background

There can be no worse fate for a book in a College Preparatory classroom than to fall into the category of "classic." The students' interest plummets at the term. My twofold goal involved conveying the themes of *The Red Badge of Courage* as well as having students apply them to the 1990's. The two critical experiences most often seen in this unit, transacting with text and extending reading and writing, were used in combination with the other PA Framework critical experiences throughout the three week unit of 41 minutes a day.

Class Background

The class of 29 students, 25 juniors and four seniors, chose this course because they plan to attend college. Other than that goal, the students' interests and abilities vary. Though none of them had read Crane's novel, four of them fell into the Civil War "buff" category: Mike, Matt, Chad, and Kim. The anticipation level I ranged from "I'll read it if I have to" to "Will we start reading today? I heard it is a good story!"

Transacting with Text

Recognizing the enthusiasm level in the College Prep classroom, I knew I had to capture the students' imaginations. Though my objectives concerned empathizing with the character and recognizing themes, I could not ignore the Civil War setting of the novel. Before distributing the novels, I asked the class specific questions about the Civil War. At this point I found I had four whiz-kids and an equal number of pupils who had no background knowledge of the era. The other 21 fell into the middle of the spectrum of knowledge.

After listening to Jim Mowery present, I took his advice and showed part of the 1950 version of the movie. His advice supported the information in the packet from Charlotte Roede which explained comprehension is dependent on prior knowledge and experience of the reader. If the students who had little prior knowledge of the era were going to glean as much as I planned from the novel, I would need to provide the resources for them to learn. Thus began the transacting with text activities prior to reading the novel.

While watching the Audie Murphy version of the film, Sharon asked why the men were in such odd formations for battle. She knew Persian Gulf warfare strategy, but not the Civil War's. The four Civil War experts explained musketry fire, the lack of guerrilla warfare and the naiveté of the young soldiers. They knew far more than I did and were proud to share it.

Realizing the need for more than rote memorization of the events of the war, I asked one of our

United States history teachers to act as a guest speaker. He described the battle which is fictionalized in *The Red Badge of Courage*. He drew on their knowledge of history and common sense. (The common sense came from the idea that the Union tried to attack the Rebels who were on a hilltop. The North lost!)

Mr. Price, the history teacher, brought the Civil War to life for the class in another way. Copies of letters from one of our colleague's great-great-grandfather's escapades in the war captured the imaginations of the students. The accounts chronicled his travels from one battle to the next, much as the novel does for the protagonist. The students knew what the battle looked like from the film and now they were aware of a non-fictional perspective; they were ready to read.

Conclusion

The students' interest and relationship to the main character grew more using these methods than they had earlier in the year with another American classic novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. The transacting with text activities used allowed for this unit's success. Rather than lecturing about the era or about specific themes before reading the novel, I showed the movie. I had considered that taboo. For the students who had no prior knowledge of the time period, this was invaluable. They could picture the physical hardships Henry endured.

Grace Flannery, a 1992 fellow, teaches in the Souderton Area School District. This piece is a part of a longer implementation project she wrote for a Pennsylvania Framework course.

WRITING IN ROOM 204: MID-YEAR EVALUATION

by Don LaBranche

So after hundreds of hours, dozens of pounds of yellow and white lined paper, 8,000 boxes of M&M's financing three days at overnight camp, weeks of decking the halls with boughs of holly, and nine snow days, what can a Writing Fellow do save scrape off the rust and the dust, drink another cup of de-caf, and take stock of where things lie.

The goal for this second of three articles is to examine the nature of writing in my classroom: how I have been transformed by the Institute, how my expectations have been transformed, and how both of these have transformed the tension between the instruction I give my students and how they receive it and agree to grow as writers and learners. A pretty tall order for a cold January day.

What's running smoothly...

The most success comes from the simplest structure, i.e. the morning free-write journal. I give the

kids a prompt, they write for ten-12 minutes, we share, laugh, question a little bit, say "thank you," go on. "Success" here means very little "do we hafta," lots of "Can we write for another minute?", and loud complaints when time doesn't allow for everyone to share. It means creative imitation of styles and writing risks that got complimented on a previous day.

My writing instruction revolves around different projects, and some of those have done very well. In particular, we worked for a couple of weeks writing list poems on various topics, and using different strategies to set them off. I have to say that the poems we wrote as a class worked much better than when I asked them to work individually. It seems easier for some children to bounce their ideas off the group and come up with one line than to work individually and write 10 or 12 lines.

Another approach that did well was the "Child's Christmas in....." project. We started it right after Thanksgiving with a reading of Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales*. I've done this for several years now, with several different approaches. This year, I noticed that Thomas wrote his memoir with a very strict chronology from Christmas Eve through Christmas night. We did our prewriting by doing an hour by hour accounting of our Christmas/Winter holidays. The children could use one particular holiday, or a compilation of several. (I pointed out that Dylan Thomas probably did just that in his writing.) From there we went into the drafting stage, stressing "sense words" to bring out colors, sounds, smells, etc. We published these stories by copying and illustrating the in 8x11" blank books and sending them home as Christmas presents.

Writing in the content areas has been getting more emphasis this year, particularly in Social Studies. As I'm writing this, we have begun an historical fiction project to cover the period of the Westward Expansion. I have been pleasantly surprised at how the children have taken to the research phase of this project. Daniel Boone, the Alamo, the Mormons in Utah, the Gold Rush, and the Oregon Trail are popular subjects among my students. Following Judy Jester's suggestion, I am doing the work along with the class, and modeling my progress for them. (I am Jacob Magreagor, the blacksmith at Monticello after Mr. J. comes home from Washington.)

Finally, I have been more alert when reading the students' work for the kinds of skill lessons and spelling words that we should be focusing on in class. I have been surprised at how quickly trends in the class become evident when I read their work with an eye for such things. It has made the "conventions" portion of my planning much more purposeful.

...and what could be better.

I wish I could have more control over the "institutional agenda" of the school, such things as fire drills, heat loss, assemblies for fund raisers, chorus practice, etc. I don't, but it's in a teacher's blood to complain about them.

One of the risks inherent in moving to a student-centered writing and literature model of teaching is that the particular personality of a class of children matters a great deal more than one in which I grind out the text book. It takes time to learn the individual needs, the alliances, and the hidden agendas that vie for control in the room. It takes new skills and deeper patience to find ways of making these factors work in favor of learning, rather than letting them get in the way. This isn't easy for me to do. I have to struggle, as most of us do, with issues of control in the classroom, balancing discipline with opening the avenues of authentic learning in the room.

Something else to work on, that relates to the personality of a particular class, is the rate of growth that can be expected from that class. I have found that I have a pre-existing idea about how fast children should move as writers which doesn't measure up to their real skills. I was frustrated a lot, and so were they. Therefore, I have had to learn to adapt my expectations to their abilities. This doesn't mean a "dummying down" of curriculum, but a stretching out of the time to master the ideas being taught. Unfortunately, I have my eye on the clock and the calendar a lot of time so this is an ongoing battle.

I am not happy at all with my record at providing authentic purposes and audiences for the students to write for. Too much of my writing (except the Christmas piece) simply ends up being checked, graded, and slid into their mail cans. I know the connection between purpose, audience, and motivation and will have to work harder at putting those concepts together in my room.

Finally, the biggest stumbling block to writing instruction in Room 204 is the anxiety surrounding grades. The students are bound up with their own worries about report cards, which ties up their ability to be creative and take risks. I am stuck with a report card that demands an English grade, so I have to read everything with an eye to numerical scores, which goes against just about everything we learned last summer concerning holistic evaluation.

Fortunately, the Chichester District is planning a comprehensive K-8 writing program, which will take effect in September of '94, and which will include the beginnings of a portfolio system to evaluate student growth in writing.

Now, if the snow and ice would just go away...

Don LaBranche was a 1993 Exton Summer Institute participant who is writing a series of articles on his experiences in the classroom.

YOUNG WRITERS/YOUNG READERS™

NEW PROGRAM PILOTED AT UPPER MORELAND

PAWP has designed a 30-hour reading-writing youth workshop for recreation/educational enhancement and is running the pilot version this July in the Upper Moreland School District. Called "Young Writers/Young Readers," the program is a carefully planned (and reasonably priced) variation on the highly successful summer Youth Writing Project held on the university campus for the past nine years. The Upper Moreland pilot program will be available only to students in grades 2 through 8 and will be administered by Mary O'Gorman, a 1993 Fellow, with assistance from teacher-consultants Sylvia Pennypacker ('91) and Freda Schopfer ('93).

Support will be sought from area libraries, bookstores, and newspapers to cover the costs of publishing participants' writings, establishing a set of prizes and awards, and creating scholarships for needy students.

After the pilot year, Young Writers/Young Readers will be expanded to a wider range of grades and will be offerable at schools and libraries throughout the five-county region as a summer or school-year program. School districts interested in hosting a YW/YR program should contact Bob Weiss.



ARCHY GETS A PROCESSOR

by Peter Miller

Say boss this
Is quite nice.
I feel as if
I am a true
Free verse poet again.
This new word
Processor allows me
To make capitals
With the caps lock key.
And the keys,
They are so soft,
Which is great
When you get to be
A cockroach my age.
As you can see
I even have some
punctuation.

That bothers me
Is the monitor.
It is difficult for
Me to read it.
If you would be so
Kind as to tilt it
Down for me
When you are done.
And if you could
leave a disk in the
Drive for me, I'll
Just save it instead
Of running the printer
And waking you.
Gratefully yours,
Archy

Peter Miller is a 1994 graduate of Exeter Township School District where he modeled this poem after the work of Don Marquis, whose archie the cockroach was the reincarnation of a vers libre poet. Archie was compelled to climb over the typewriter each night to write his world view of Marquis.

Study Groups Forming

Would you like to join a teachers' study group? Or form one? What is a study group?

PAWP and PENNLIT are sponsoring study groups open to all teachers interested in spending some time together exploring a topic, theme, or selected readings. The groups may be of any manageable size and may meet where and when they wish.

General guidelines. The organizers organize the group and report membership and meeting dates to us. We would like to receive regular short reports and an end -of-school-year report with enough flair that it could possibly be printed in our *Newsletter*. Participants will receive a professional book delivered towards the end of the school year.

All readers of this *Newsletter* are eligible for study group membership. At least one of the organizers must be a PAWP and PENNLIT fellow (except in Fall of their institute year).

Note: the study group experience is not intended as an independent project earning graduate credit; however, one or more participants may want to use the study group to launch or to be part of an independent-study credit-bearing project.

The office may be able to provide small supplies as needed: computer disks, blue books for journals, lined tablets, etc.

Currently planned study groups and contact persons (any other PAWP or PENNLIT fellows are encouraged to make suggestions for coming issues):

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| 1. Discuss current professional books on writing | Jim MacCall |
| 2. Spelling: does it go with a writing or whole language classroom | Jim MacCall |
| 3. Skills and phonics in a whole language classroom | Jim MacCall |
| 4. Doing our own professional writing | Jim MacCall |
| 5. Teachers' own personal writing | Judy Fisher |
| 6. Grant writing | Judy Fisher |
| 7. Re-working a presentation | Judy Fisher |

How to join: call the Project office, indicate your interest group, and leave your name and telephone number.

How to organize a study group of your own: contact the office with your topic/ideas; indicate if you are willing to receive responses. The office will circulate your idea (and ask for responses back to you).

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The purpose of the *Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter* is to link together all teachers of writing in our geographical area of southeastern Pennsylvania. The Newsletter features, but is not limited to, articles that deal with writing and the teaching of writing. We seek manuscripts from all teachers of writing at all grade levels and in all subject areas, and from anyone else interested in writing. All articles and submissions will be considered for publication. Comments, questions, etc., are also welcomed. Please send all communications to Vicki Steinberg, Editor, *Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter*, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383.

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