



PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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THE CURSE OF LITERACY

"If we'd kept them illiterate, they'd honor us and not want to run everything," suggested Miles Myers, National Council of Teachers of English president, as he opened the two day Literature Conference held in June at Exton.

As with much of his talk, Myers managed to be amusing and provocative at the same time. He pointed out that we're currently running education on the old-fashioned factory model where each worker is a 'widget,' only able to do her job. That model fails, however, when information travels fast and things are complicated. Then, workers need to have the ability to help, fix, and/or change.

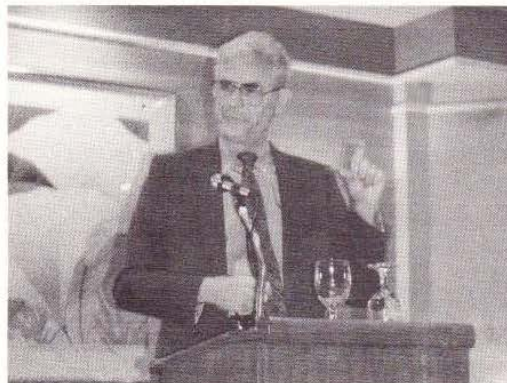
Education is ripe for the current factory model where there are constant staff orientations and meetings to share responsibility for change and even propose change: this sounds like teacher empowerment. But it also sounds like student empowerment as teachers and students work together to make the graduate literate and thinking to face the next century.

A similar change must come in the classroom, Myers believes, as what's read and how it will be interpreted are negotiated. This style fits the spirit of

society but there must be some core agreement for this negotiation to work. Teachers deciding on what's to be read should remember that literature can be used to change people.

Another societal change is the way information is distributed. In the past, an individual could keep everything she needed to know in her head but now there's so much information that machines and other people, often called teams, are needed.

Myers touched on a common complaint of teachers that students want everything delivered, done to them, and, of course, teachers must fight this characteristic.



Using his top-down or bottom-up metaphor, NCTE President Miles Myers describes the future of educational leadership.

EDITOR'S CORNER

Having put together my own literacy portfolio, helped three sets of PA Framework teachers put theirs together, and heard about the useful ways these teachers had incorporated the portfolio into their classrooms, I was looking for a chance to practice what I had preached.

My Communications Skills class, heterogeneous tenth graders who met for one semester to read, write, speak, and listen, was the perfect place. After all, if I planned correctly they would do all four while developing an understanding that they had already used these skills to learn everything they knew. I was also interested in one of the main tenets of the literacy portfolio--honoring the students' literacy in areas teachers don't usually consider.

When the PA Framework participants and I put together our portfolios, we discovered we weren't as narrow as we had thought. The second grade teacher who thought she spent all her 'spare' time reading *Where the Wild Things Are* to her five year old discovered she was also listening to her grandmother finally give up the secrets of her Pennsylvania Dutch style noodle recipe, asking questions, and writing down the resulting information.

The middle school teacher discovered she had learned to use her knitting machine through phoning around for the best deal and the correct place to go for lessons, listening to experienced users, reading the instruction booklet, and making notes to herself as she worked.

Personally, since I'm an Anglophile and have visited England several times, I saw that each time I planned a trip I actually designed an I-Search where I read the latest materials on courses and places to visit, interviewed recent visitors as well as travel agents and course instructors, and kept a notebook of information to help me decide where to go and what to do.

As I made my plans for the sophomores, I wanted them to come to the same realization as the teachers. First, the students brainstormed possible meanings for the words 'literacy' and 'portfolio.' Then I explained their project while tying the two terms together. We started small by simply listing all the areas in which we had expertise. I say 'we' because I wrote my list on the board while the students did entries in their journals. Beside each area we listed the ways we had gained that knowledge: listening to grandpa about fishing, reading snowboarding magazines, talking to friends about the latest CDs and the best portable CD players, writing for more information.

The next assignment was to go home, walk around the house, and see if there were any forgotten areas. During the walk I suggested the students start making a list of items they could actually physically put in a portfolio and bring to school. This might mean getting permission from the folks or, if the item were too large or too expensive, cutting a picture from an ad or bringing the instruction booklet or warranty slip. Before they actually toured their houses and rooms, they brainstormed with me the possibilities and added the following: pictures of themselves with the item or practicing the knowledge (for instance, a photograph of the skier on the slopes), magazines, programs, book jackets, album covers, sheet music, video tapes, and pets. I quickly vetoed the last.

Gradually, by checking their houses and with their parents, through frequent reflective journal entries, by sharing ideas in small groups and large groups, the students eventually arrived at literacy portfolio exhibition day. I directed them to arrange themselves along the outside walls of the room with their items arrayed on desks in front of them. Then we took turns walking around, observing each others' displays, giving compliments, and asking questions. While they admired each others' collections, I visited individual students who told me about the reading, writing, speaking, and listening which had developed the areas of knowledge. Because some students had many areas while one or two students said they had few, I limited the displays to five areas; however, within one area the students could have several items.

Portfolio design was of the students' choice, and so one girl used a three-ring binder with pockets and self-designed dividers, one boy needed a large carrying trunk, several used manila envelopes of one style or another, and a few used their backpacks.

For evaluation I looked at many different things ranging from the simple (did George bring his first item on the assigned day?) to the reflective (what did you learn about yourself from your display?). Most of the students agreed they hadn't realized before that they used reading, writing, listening, and speaking to learn in all their endeavors, even outside of school, and that the skills and strategies for learning were the same in Julius Caesar and soccer.

Aside from honoring their individual literacy and encouraging them to see themselves as able to learn, I also wanted a community feeling in the heterogeneous group. This I got, even from the young man who wouldn't do the project but noted what others brought.

LITERATURE CONFERENCE FACES CENSORSHIP ISSUES

by Mary Lou Kuhns

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Catcher in the Rye, Bell Jar, Death of a Salesman, Native Son, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Sports Illustrated, and stories about magic.

What common trait do the above works share?

- A. I've read all of them
- B. I own all of them
- C. I assign all of them
- D. They've been banned somewhere in the country
- E. They've been banned in the local area

While all of the answers could be correct, answers D and E demonstrate an awareness of censorship issues. Moderator Toni Hutchinson, Language Arts Supervisor of the West Chester Area SD, pointed out, "Any book is subject to censorship, even dictionaries and *Snow White*."

On June 25, a Plenary Panel on Censorship in the 90s opened the second day of the Pennsylvania Literature Project's Conference, "Teaching Literature: Readers, Texts, and Teachers." Participants joining Hutchinson included Robert Egolf, Allentown SD; Lynn Johnson, Philadelphia NAACP; Susan Shenkin, American Civil Liberties Union; and Grace Shope, Pennsylvania School Libraries Association.

By far the biggest issue was the sanitization of the curriculum, or censorship, by avoiding books that educators expect will cause problems. This exists with several popular anthologies which publish to meet the state mandates of California and Texas. It is also in practice with books removed from library shelves and books on required as well as supplemental reading lists. "The problem then becomes not what is included but what is excluded," said Shope. Shenkin discussed legal cases involving censorship, noting that "the few cases that go through the courts have such a chilling effect that pre-selection occurs."

The audience, composed primarily of elementary and secondary school reading and literature teachers, voiced their concern for intellectual freedom and told of the care with which they present and discuss sensitive topics raised in literature. They suggested it was better for students to read many of the censored texts with caring, knowledgeable teachers than in isolation or than to avoid any text that might be offensive to an individual or a group.

No panel or audience member advocated prejudice found in literature, but a difference arose in how to handle that prejudice. Johnson noted

that the NAACP takes offense at material which shows a lack of sensitivity for Afro-American history and accomplishments. She also suggested the key was not to preface works with explanation, but to offer balance. Many teachers hoped that the NAACP would issue a list of books the organization feels promotes positive images.

The panel agreed that schools must respect individual parental concerns, but that a parent can not dictate what other students can read. Many of the local school districts have forms for citizen complaints regarding instructional materials. These forms have several questions in common:

To what in the material do you object?

What do you feel might be the results of experiencing this material?

For what age group would you recommend this material?

What of value is there in this material?

Did you read, screen, or review all of the material? If not, what parts?

Are you aware of the teacher's purpose in using this work?

Are you aware of the judgment of this material by other experts?

What do you believe is the theme of this material?

What would you like your school to do about this material?

In its place, what material of equal quality would you recommend?

Near the end of the session an audience member was heard to say, "Let's assign John Milton's 'Areopagitica' to everyone!"

Mary Lou Kuhns, an English teacher at Tredyffrin Easttown School District and co-director of the 1992 PAWP Summer Institute at Exton, is a 1988 Fellow.



Censorship panelists, from left to right, Lynn Johnson-NAACP, Susan Shenkin-ACLU, Grace Shope-PA School Libraries Assn., Bob Egolf-Allentown SD, Toni Hutchinson-West Chester SD

BETH SHOWS HOW TO PUBLISH

A January letter from Beth Cox ('88), who teaches in the Chichester School District, to Bob Weiss:

You asked me in October to send you the list of articles that I have published to date. Three months later...mission is accomplished. Enclosed is a bibliography of my published writing. Pending is "Research Options" that Andy Fishman said would go into a state journal and an article on MECC's "Show Time" is going to be in the next DC-TUN Newsletter. However, the list of unpublished works is much longer. I have quite a collection now of rejection letters.

My muse is my mother. When I was growing up I never saw her without a book. And she was my first editor. By the age of 16, writing poetry was serious business. I worked on my first novel, an historical romance, when I was 17. But by the time I was 18, I realized that I lacked experience so I put all my writing aside and decided to concentrate on living.

The writing bug bit me again at age 23 when I worked on a fantasy novel, but marriage, a move, and my teaching schedule distracted me until the summer institute in 1988. This intense writing workshop revitalized the writer within me and I haven't stopped writing since.

At the end of the summer institute I didn't know what I wanted to do most...be a PAWP presenter or get a piece of writing published. By 1989 both dreams came true.

I now have a deeper understanding of the impossibility of an "overnight success." On my road towards publishing I have logged endless hours on my computer and my writing books now compete with my teaching books. Along with my *English Journals* and *Journals of Reading* I now subscribe to *The Writer* and *Writer's Digest*. And I don't know which reference book I use the most - *Roger's Thesaurus*, *Webster's Dictionary*, or *Writer's Market*.

I've attended a writer's conference in Cape May where I learned some things about "the business" and an evening workshop on publishing with Gary Provost in Baltimore. And I can't say enough for the power of belonging to a writer's group.

I used to say "I write" instead of "I'm a writer" because I felt I needed the validity of seeing my name in print. But the more I learn about the publishing business, the more I realize that the major difference between a published and unpublished manuscript is often the difference between editors' tastes.

I am a writer because I write. And every time someone reads something that I write, even if it is just a computer printout, I consider it an accomplishment.

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TEACHER-RESEARCHER GRANTS AVAILABLE FROM NCTE

Teacher-Researcher Grants are awarded to Pre-K-14 teachers for classroom-based research on the teaching of English/Language Arts. These grants, which have a limit of \$1,500, are intended to support investigation of research questions that grow out of teachers' classroom experiences and concerns and that are directly relevant to the work of the applicant. They are not intended to support travel to professional meetings, purchase permanent equipment or commercial teaching materials, provide release time, or conduct research done as part of a graduate degree program. Examples of funded studies included the following:

- The Uses of Story Time in a First Grade Classroom
- Teacher-to-Student Writing Conferencing in the Secondary Classroom
- High School Students and the Nation's Literary Magazines: Is There a Meaningful Connection?
- Better than basals: A Teacher-Developed Literature Program
- Children's Use of Punctuation: A Follow-up Study
- Finding the Writer in a Learning Disabled Student Communication and Socialization
- Teacher-Researchers: How Do They Grow?

MY NEW GIRLFRIEND

by Jolene Borgese

Bridget
A Brown Eyed Beauty
Bloomed last April filled with determination and power
In the face of adversity, her boundless strength and will overcame all odds

My new girlfriend
Doesn't know the meaning of peace, quiet, sleep or rest
For she brightens up each room she enters like a full moon on a summer night
And shatters the quiet and solitude like a cool breezy Autumn Day
Spewing toys, sitting up, scooting all about, crawling at top speed, standing up, practicing walking
Getting where and what she wants with a grunt and a point

My new girlfriend
Bridget
the love, the sweetheart of a host of her parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, friends, teachers, playmates
Charming, Beguiling and smiling
Having us fall in love with her over and over again

Defying
I can not
I will not
Weaving and Pushing through the lines of life
Knowing
No mountain too high
No valley too low
No one uncharmed

My brave new girlfriend
Grew Tall and strong in 12 short months
5 new teeth
soft brown curls outline her round cute face
pudgy little toes and fingers
lips pursed for kisses
eyes dancing wide eyed filled with hope and wonder
legs in constant motion; "mouse-a-cize", toes in the mouth

My new girlfriend
Welcome to the Family!
Happy Life!
Happy Birthday!

About the author

"Miss Borgese, you wear too much jewelry," complained Ben Kay, a foreign exchange student from Tasmania, Australia. Silver jewelry is her passion. She usually wears four or five bracelets each day and a unique looking watch along with color coordinated earrings. Without seeing her, one can usually hear her first, either her jewelry banging or her voice booming. Once she passes, her signature scent lingers behind, reminiscent of her presence.

This spring she completed a manuscript on a teaching strategy, entitled "Opening the Door to Open House" and sent it to *English Journal*, an English teacher's bible of sorts. She's eagerly waiting their decision to publish or not.

She loves to shop and travel (especially to the beach). She'll travel to Williamsport, Pennsylvania this summer to instruct a five week course for teachers on the teaching of writing for West Chester University and the Pennsylvania Writing Project. She's thrilled about being an aunt for the first time last spring, hence the inspiration for "My New Girlfriend." Bridget, a 13 month old active little girl, is her brother Tom and sister-in-law Terri's first child.

Miss Borgese drives a red car (sometimes too fast) and teaches with passion and zest.

Jolene Borgese, a 1980 Fellow and Director of the North Central Summer Institute, teaches English in the West Chester School District.

CONTRIBUTORS NEEDED

This newsletter is looking for classroom teacher contributions in several areas. Why not be published and show the kids how it's done?

- The editor is looking for pictures of your kids at work with short descriptions of exactly what the work is.
- The editor is interested in running a column of ideas, how to do them, and an example or two of student work which grew from the assignment or prompt. The work doesn't have to be anything fancy; interesting journal or log entries would be fine.
- The editor wishes to run a column of teacher-written work inspired by assignments which teachers wrote with the students. In other words, if you wrote with the kids, send a brief description of the assignment and your response.

DAN KIRBY PRESENTS "STUDIO MODEL"
AT MARCH PAWPDAY

by Mary Lou Kuhns

Dan Kirby, considered by some the "Johnny Carson" of writing process experts, spoke March 25 on PAWP Day. He started the day at East High School in West Chester and finished in Bucks County with his presentation on revision. Rather than giving a list with cut-and-paste techniques for revision, he challenged teachers with his humor to consider a studio setting so that revision could follow. He firmly believes band-aids on compositions do not significantly improve writing, but dramatic change occurs when working in an environment that encourages student choices and exploration as in the artist-apprentice relationship. He tells his students, "I can tell you a great deal about writing, but you won't understand it until you practice it."

A roundtable discussion after lunch focused on Kirby's new book, *Mind Matters*. In order to consider many of the concepts in his book, teachers were asked to create metaphors that illustrate their own thinking. They were as diverse as gourmet cooking and dancing. Metaphors that illustrated how thinking occurs in the teachers' classrooms included ideas bouncing around like balls in a pinball machine and a car grinding on a cold morning. One teacher talked about being a "bad" shepherd, slowing pushing her students away from her to think independently. Kirby joined in by filling the gaps on attitudes about thinking examined in this new book. Most surprising to him was that intelligence can be taught.

Early in Kirby's book he questions whether we want our students to really think. One of the participants posed the same question: "We all say we want free, independent thinkers in our classrooms. We want to push kids away to find their own answers, to make them discover their own voices and we want them to be interested enough to make their own decisions. Do we? Or do we value 700's on the SATs, 5's on the Advanced Placement exams, straight A's, and Ivy League college admissions?"

As facilitator of the roundtable, I recognized that teachers can be test-driven or thought-driven, but I know which sounds more exciting and powerful to me.

Mary Lou Kuhns, an English teacher at Tredyffrin Easttown School District and co-director of the 1992 PAWP Summer Institute at Exton, is a 1988 Fellow.

"CAMP WRITING WORKSHOP"

a song

(Written to the tune of "Camp Grenada")

by Carol Blair

Hello Lucy, Lucy Calkins
Let me tell you, hear me talking
I had problems, they were many
And my anxious moments added up to plenty.

Writing Workshop wasn't working
Kids weren't daring
Kids weren't caring
It was really quite a mess
And the lines kept getting longer by my desk.

Then I read it, read your book and
It was clearer, what was dearer
Student voices, student choices
Something meaningful
to them should be the focus.

LEAD ME ON, oh Lucy Calkins
SHOW ME HOW, oh Lucy Calkins
Help me see
The questions are all wrong
I need to guide them more along.

Lots of modeling, no more coddling
Lots of showing, keep them going
There are stages, we all go through
On that road to writing stories that are brand new.

Wait a minute, kids are sharing
Asking questions, and are daring
I am coaching, talking less
And there's no one even close to my desk! Yes!

Kids are owning, their own writing
They're conferring, no more worrying
Revising
is still hard, but it
is better
Lucy Calkins, kindly disregard this letter.

Carol Blair, a third grade teacher in the Downingtown Area School District, was inspired by Lucy Calkins' The Art of Teaching Writing. She rewrote Allen Sherman's work for a summer Strategies for Teaching Writing I course.

Style has no fixed laws; it is changed by
the usage of the people, never the same
for any length of time. -Seneca

SUMMER INSTITUTE PARTICIPANTS

PAWP Exton

Allenbach, Anna	Garnet Valley SD
Baker, Charles	Abington SD
Barnes, Florence	Upper Darby SD
Frick, Kathleen	William Penn SD
Halko, Becky	Ridley SD
Heffner, Steven	Conrad Weiser Area SD
Kilpatrick, M. Joan	Upper Moreland SD
McCullough, Sandra	Rose Tree Media SD
Miller, Rebecca	Upper Moreland SD
Pileggi, Joan	Abington SD
Porter, Roberta	Wyomissing Area SD
Quaintance, Jane	Antietam SD
Thomas, Wanda	Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Venuto, Karen	Rose Tree Media SD
Zaffarano, Elizabeth	Villa Maria Acad., private

Hagee, Frances
 Holmes, Maureen
 Jordan, Adrienne
 Kiefer, Janice
 Koller, Patricia
 Krassowski, Audrey
 Lengel, Donna
 Lewis, Susan
 McNamara, Lisa
 Murray, Timothy W.
 Ommert, Maryann
 Powidzki, Susan J.
 Segro, Joseph
 Starr, Elena
 Steinberg, Vicki
 Strickler, Elora A.
 Warmerdam, Nancy
 Yeager, Monica
 Zimmerman, Laurie

Owen J. Roberts SD
 Oxford Area SD
 Garnet Valley SD
 Antietam SD
 Downingtown Area SD
 Exeter Township SD
 Antietam SD
 Antietam SD
 Octorara Area SD
 Garnet Valley SD
 Octorara Area SD
 Upper Moreland SD
 Antietam SD
 Garnet Valley SD
 Exeter Township SD
 Antietam SD
 Ridley SD
 Antietam SD
 E. Lebanon County SD

Bucks County Institute

Derr, Grace	Souderton Area SD
Fitzgerald, Dory	Neshaminy SD
Hagedorn-Cottier, Beth	Neshaminy SD
Hynes, Lillian	Central Bucks SD
Lupini, Darlene	Quakertown Com. SD
Morris-Bauer, Diana	Council Rock SD
Patrizio, Nancy	READS INC.
Rossmann, Stephanie	Central Bucks SD
Shobert, Kathy	Pennridge SD
Walsh, Peggy	Council Rock SD



Penn Lit participants use cookie cutters to retell an ecologically based story.

North Central Institute

Albright, Maureen	Keystone Central SD
Andresen, Susan	Williamsport Area SD
Buckle, Bruce	Montoursville Area SD
Kuryloski, Kathryn	Jersey Shore Area SD
Lehman, Linda	Jersey Shore Area SD
MacKenzie, Christine	Williamsport Area SD
McAndrew, Barbara	Milton Area SD
Pryor, Suzanne	Williamsport Area SD
Rishel, Judy	Keystone Central SD
Roberts, Dianna	Benton Area SD
Smith, Mary Beth	Jersey Shore Area SD
Webster, Holly	Jersey Shore Area SD



Mid Atlantic Retreat - from left to right, Andrea Fishman, Lynn Dorfman, Cynthia Muse, Bob Weiss, Judy Fisher, and Mary Lou Kuhns.

Literature Institute

Baer, Linda	Conrad Weiser Area SD
Bernecker, Theresa	Quakertown Com. SD
Bower, Donna Joleen	Hamburg Area SD
Bronson, Carol	Octorara Area SD
Carnuccio, Deborah	Garnet Valley SD
Finkel, Frances	Radnor Township SD

NOT JUST IN THIRD GRADE

Way too often teachers say the newest skills and strategies--like cooperative learning, think-pair-share, literature based learning--won't work with their particular classes. Ironically, when pushed to name names these teachers will list the top section, the bottom section, the LD class, the math class, the first grade, the eighth grade, the seniors, the vo-tech, etc., advanced placement. Here are some examples from three teachers who refused to use their students that way.

RESTRUCTURING IN EDUCATION

by Marian Garber

During all of the Pennsylvania Framework learnings our restructuring team still had to deal with the parents who did not seem to be as happy as the children. We felt that a Parent Meeting was necessary. This was to include parents who had signed up for the Advisory Board (We did change the name to the Project Developmental Committee). We met every day for at least two weeks to plan the meetings. I suggested that we try some of the things that I had learned and ask each parent to do some of the things we had been doing with the children.

We met with Holly Jobe from the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit. Holly agreed that the parents needed to be involved in the program. Rather than speak to the parents at length we asked Holly to speak for only twenty minutes the night of the meeting.

The team members were very apprehensive on the night of the meeting. How would we handle all of the negative feelings at one time? We had decided that Jeff would speak for five minutes. (I kept everyone on task and on their time limit that night.) Involvement was our key word. After Jeff spoke I had the parents count off and placed them in groups, explaining that this is a simple thing we do in the classroom. My group was to do the same as the other groups. I asked them to introduce themselves and tell their child's name and grade. We hung paper and I asked my group to choose a recorder and a reporter. Using prior knowledge and brainstorming the group needed to answer the question, "What do you already know about the program?" The recorder had to write the answers and the reporter had to do whole group sharing. After hearing the question I could see the puzzlement on their faces - they had come to hear what the program was about! My group started out on a negative tone stating hardly any homework, haven't opened the math book, do nothing, too much free time, etc. It soon began to change as they added cooperative work, thinking skills, research skills, more writing, time-management skills, and many other positive aspects.

Keeping all of the groups on the time limit (we didn't want the parents thinking that the meeting

would take all evening) I asked everyone to come back for the total group activity. Each reporter discussed their group's list and we praised each group for knowing a lot about the program, which meant that they must be communicating with their children.

Holly spoke about the change in education and about restructuring of other schools. This seemed to satisfy the parents.

We again met in our small groups and this time each parent was given paper and asked to write "What I have learned tonight" and "What I am still confused about" I also asked them to work with a partner as they assessed themselves as a parent. As a teacher in the program I was elated at their responses of What I Have Learned Tonight and I wish to share these responses.

That without Alternative education techniques my children will not be prepared for the work force and life decisions that will face them upon graduation. The shifting of our economy and our environment has caused us to become more adaptable and flexible.

Children will mature faster and will learn independently and have more change may be more effective.

I have learned that this is coming from within and this type of change may be more effective.

The move up to intermediate school transitions should be easier than I had expected.

I learned that other schools other than our own are involved in similar programs and have so far shown to be successful. Also interesting were the statistics regarding the amounts of education, job information, career information, etc. by year 2000.

Children are getting learning requirements.

Children are learning cooperation.

Problem solving.

Program is much more wide spread than I thought.

How the education system has changed and the need for adjustment in their future workforce.

I have learned the country needs this change nationwide.

Children will use these skills forever.

Learning will not stop with school because of the amount of change and quantity of information needed to be absorbed to keep up with changes.

Rosemary spoke to the parents about the responses. She very kindly gave the team teachers praises and spoke of accomplishments. I think she knew we needed that! I could not believe the change in the parents as they spoke of the fun that they had and all that they had learned. The next day our janitor asked me what we had done to the parents at the meeting. He said they were all leaving with smiles and laughter!

After sharing the parent meeting with my PCR2 class one of our members, Elaine Armstrong, said she wanted to discuss it with her principal and ended up trying the same things with success!

Our team held a second parent meeting and we asked the Project Development Committee to be the facilitators and it went well!

The motto of our restructuring team is, "You can't change the wind, but you can adjust the sails." I believe this statement clearly tells me about Pennsylvania Framework!

Marian Garber wrote this for a PA Framework Course held in Pottsgrove School District. She works at West Pottsgrove teaching 3-4 grade.

FRENCH AND SUNDAY SCHOOL USES

by Dellawanna Bard

Throughout our lives as both learners and teachers, we have experienced probably hundreds of writing assignments. Though most are quickly forgotten, there are always a few which remain memorable. Two writing projects I have assigned as a teacher have left a lasting impression upon me. In both instances, I learned as much from the assignment as did the students who prepared it for me.

One highly successful assignment centered on Albert Camus' novel *L'Étranger* (rather unfortunately titled *The Stranger* in English). My French IV class had been complaining that the book's protagonist Meursault is too one-dimensional and without substance. Their perception of the character, no doubt heightened by the first-person perspective of the novel, made it difficult for the students to understand or to empathize with Meursault.

To give us a better-rounded perception of the protagonist, we decided to do individual character studies of him, written in French from the vantage point of the peripheral characters of the novel. We literally drew from a hat the names of the other persons in the book. Each student then assumed that persona and wrote a character study of Meursault not only that person's perceptions, but his or her writing style as well. In other words, it was to be immediately apparent from not just content, but also word choice, structure and vocabulary level which character was "speaking." We compiled the finished studies into a portfolio and presented a copy to each of the collaborators.

It was amazing to me how the students threw themselves into this assignment. They produced, individually and collectively, amazing pieces of work. These were, after all, students whose French writings were heretofore rather careless, poorly thought-out but this assignment captured their imaginations, so they labored over every word and thought. From the plaintive tones of the murder victim's sister to the unctuous ramblings of the prison priest, all the peripheral characters came to life while simultaneously giving us insight into Monsieur Meursault.

A second memorable writing assignment took place outside of school per se, in a high school Sunday School class I was teaching several years ago. We had been discussing the various writing styles found in the Bible, and the kids just weren't buying it! To them, writing styles differed very little and had nothing to do with our perceptions of a writer's intent. To help change their minds, I

staged an event one Sunday in which another Sunday School teacher came into the room, ostensibly angry over something I had done to her. She and I exchanged angry words, and the students in the room were absolutely wide-eyed. Later, I explained that they write about it in as many ways as they could imagine. We brainstormed all kinds of "way-out" people who might have witnessed such an incident and began to write. One student wrote from my vantage point, as if I were writing about the altercation in my personal diary. Another wrote as a sportscaster might have, calling out a "blow-by-blow" description of our fight. Still another wrote it up as a Country and Western song, with whining lyrics of a friendship gone sour. A rap song presented yet another musical alternative. One student wrote as a romance writer might, full of flowery descriptive prose detailing the fashions we were wearing at the time and the emotions that flickered across our faces as we shouted. Still another prepared a newscast of our difficulty. Perhaps the funniest rendition, however, came from the child who assumed the role of a tabloid writer--"Sunday School Teacher's Brain Possessed by Alien."

Writing those pieces was imaginative and fun, and reading them aloud to one another helped to prove my point that a writer's vantage point and writing style do indeed influence our perception of what he has written. More importantly, however, I had the opportunity to get to know my students a bit better, to admire their creativity and skills, and to let them experience the fun a writing activity can be. The resultant rise in self-esteem and interest in the class was palpable.

Since that time, I've used a similar technique to lighten the mood in classes and to give our writing activities a needed boost. For example, I might ask the students to write a love poem illustrating grammar rules or a sportscast of a famous event in history. Sometimes writing from an unusual perspective helps to keep material fresh in a student's mind, and it certainly helps to keep me entertained while grading their efforts. A student once made a comment I cherish. He said, "Madame Bard, you give the hardest writing assignments I've ever had, but there's one thing for sure--they're never boring!"

Dellawanna Bard teaches French at the Manheim Township High School. She wrote this for a PA Framework course.

NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT SPONSORSHIP CAMPAIGN

James Gray, Director of the National Writing Project, is inviting all Writing Project participants to become sponsors of the Project. Although the Project now receives Federal funding, sponsorship funds are still necessary to support the following:

- continued publication of **The Quarterly**, a unique journal co-sponsored by the National Writing Project and the Center for the Study of Writing that combines information on the latest research in the field of writing instruction, articles on the teaching of writing by NWP teachers, and reviews of the latest books on teaching writing
- the National Writing Project Mini-Grant Program that provides grants to NWP teachers to support experimental classroom practices
- mini-grants to support NWP classroom teacher research
- administrative costs not allowed by the terms of Federal funding

Individual sponsorships have recently been reduced from \$25 to \$10 and continue as a worthy tax deductible contribution. The National Writing Project is the one agency to which you can contribute which is devoted directly to improving classroom instruction and student learning through a teachers-teaching-teachers program model.

Your sponsorship includes a subscription to **The Quarterly**, which is a \$10 value in itself.

We urge all of you to join the National Writing Project family today. Fill out the slip below and send it with your check payable to **The National Writing Project Corporation**.

Enclosed is my check for \$10 for individual sponsorship of the National Writing Project.

Name _____

Address _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send to **The National Writing Project Corporation, 5627 Tolman Hall, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720**

PAWPDAY SEMINAR SERIES, 1992-93

Tentative Schedule

Saturday Seminars

PAWP's Saturday seminar is a free service of the Pennsylvania Writing Project for teachers and other interested participants. A varied program of presentations and roundtable discussions is led by area teachers on scheduled dates throughout the year. Each PAWPDAY will offer several sessions on two or more of these themes: Writing Assessment, Creative Writing, Writing Across the Curriculum, Whole Language, Teaching Literature, and Teaching Writing. The Saturday seminar series may be taken for university credit. School districts may credit participants for a "flexible" contractual in-service obligation.

All programs will be held on the WCU campus. Information is available from the PAWP office, 201 Carter Drive, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383. The last date to sign up for credit for Fall 1992 is Saturday, September 19, 1992. A revised schedule of program topics will be available in late August. Dates and locations of other PAWP programs will be available then as well.

Donations for coffee and refreshments are collected at the door.

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Dates</u>					
	<u>Sept 19</u>	<u>Oct 17</u>	<u>Nov 14</u>	<u>Jan 9</u>	<u>Feb 27</u>	<u>Apr 24</u>
Writing Assessment	•		•	•		
Creative Writing	•	•	•	•	•	•
Writing Across the Curriculum		•	•		•	
Whole Language		•		•		•
Teaching Literature		•		•	•	
Teaching Writing		•			•	•

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Editor: Vicki Steinberg
Director: Robert H. Weiss
Co-Director: Jolene Borgese Associate Director: Andrea Fishman
Assistant Director: Martha J. Menz Program Coordinator: Mariann Shirk
Secretary and typesetter: Kathleen O'Brien

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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 communication to Vicki Steinberg, Editor, Pennsylvania Writing Project Newsletter, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383.

The Pennsylvania Writing Project (PAWP) is an affiliate of the National Writing Project and a training site for the nationally validated New Jersey Writing Project. PAWP 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.

Pennsylvania Writing Project
201 Carter Drive, Room 105
West Chester University
West Chester, PA 19383

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED